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## Coping in the Transition from Junior to Senior Football

A Case Study of Athlete Perspectives in a Norwegian Top Club

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## Summary

The purpose of this thesis is to further our understanding of the challenges junior football players identify and cope with during the transition to a professional senior contract. Three senior players shared their narrative and the thesis explores and interprets their answers looking for challenges and coping processes. The main research question for the thesis is: *How do junior players experience and cope with challenges presented in the transition from junior football to senior professional football in a Norwegian top-level club?*

The project introduces relevant and specific theory to create a foundation for the method and procedure. The overall findings indicate that the junior players experience different challenges during the three phases of the transition. The challenges on the pitch differ from the challenges within the dressing room to the challenges outside of sport. The players primarily identify challenges related to social inclusion, to football skill and physical aspects, and with mental processes.

Players cope by using internal resources such as football skill or transition-specific knowledge. They find challenge in prioritizing their career over friends who they perceive to be potentially damaging to their dream, and they feel socially distanced on two fronts. At the club, the players feel distanced and excluded by some of the senior members, especially as they progress to the membership-stage of the transition. Luckily, a select few senior players mentor the junior players through the stages. Another form of external coping is the use of coaches in the club and at school. Family are mentioned as supportive, but only play a smaller role as external resources for coping. The players all experience the level of play to be higher, and the physical demands to be tougher in the senior team. They also note that the most important aspects of coping with challenge is found in the tactical and mental dimension of football. In advising youth in the future, they note that it is important to be true to yourself and mentally prepare for discomfort and social challenges. They also note that adjustments outside of football are necessary regarding recovery and nutrition.

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## 1.0 Background and purpose of the thesis

### 1.1 Introduction

Football players from all over the world dream of reaching the peak of professional football. Many hopefuls compete for a select few roster spots in one of the most popular sports in the world. The value of transfers in football highlights football as a global industry (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2004). FIFA reports that approximately 265 million of the world's population play football. Among these, some 113 000 are of professional status, showing a significant ratio of professional players to amateur players. The most substantial portion of professional players registers within the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) with 53% (Kunz, 2007). Many youngsters seem unaffected by these numbers. The players that belong to the apex of the footballing world are now transferred and sold for staggering amounts of money. The total revenue of Real Madrid CF was €750.9m (Deloitte, 2019), which is staggering compared to the €28.7m of Rosenborg BK (RBK, 2019). NFF (2018b) argues that successful periods of playing up can be an essential tool for learning in general, and particularly mastery learning. The topic is also heavily debated in Norwegian media (Rolness, 2014; Gjelsvik 2018) where parents, coaches, and others argue the different positive and negative sides of this tool. In athlete development research, playing up an age group is not a term, but rather a description.

Developing football talent can be of utmost importance in order to achieve long-term economic and sporting success. Academies continuously search for the next Ronaldo, placing importance on talent identification and development (Sæther, 2017), with practice as the foremost facilitator of talent development (Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Römer 1993; Côté, Baker, & Abernethy, 2007). Player development has been a focal point of sports research, with the topics of talent identification and selection processes (Helsen, Starkes, & Van Winckel, 1998; Helsen, van Winckel, & Williams, 2005; Musch & Hay, 1999; Reilly, Williams, Nevill, & Franks, 2000), player development environments (Henriksen, 2010; Larsen, Alfermann, Henriksen, & Christensen, 2013; Pain & Harwood, 2007), the role of significant others on athletes (Adie, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2012; Côté, 1999; Jones, Armour, & Potrac, 2003), and psychological factors for athlete development (Abbott & Collins, 2004; Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002; MacNamara, Button, & Collins, 2010a, 2010b; Toering, Elferink-Gemser, Jordet, Jorna, Pepping, & Visscher, 2011; Toering, Elferink-Gemser, Jordet,

Pepping, & Visscher, 2012), The highlighted topics validate an interest in talent development research in football.

The main aim of this thesis is to investigate how junior level athletes identify and cope with challenges in a successful transition to the senior level in a top-level club in Norway. Vaeyens, Güllich, Warr, & Philippaerts (2009) advocate a holistic approach to the development of player resources concerning sports demands. Becoming a top-level player requires the mastery of multi-faceted demands in football, such as the complexity of the game (Haugaasen, 2015). Youth players need to mature and grow up (Malina, 2010). Sports should be an arena where the development of sport excellence occurs as emergent to personal development rather than a goal in itself (Haugaasen, Toering, & Jordet, 2014). Using a holistic approach to talent development may be beneficial when accounting for the extreme demands in the top level coupled with the slim chance of becoming a professional football player. Coping with various demands in football development may aid both the skill of playing football and the holistic development of the individual.

Academies must ensure successful transitions for their young talent in order to avoid dropout. Football associations around the world are placing higher importance on talent development in the local football clubs (Smokvina, 2012). An increasing emphasis is being placed on the working conditions and economic prerequisites in Norwegian football, leading to a professionalization of the football clubs in Norway (Gammelsæter & Jakobsen, 2008).

Morris, Tod, & Eubank (2017) argue that talent development is a complex phenomenon, and an athlete goes through sampling, specializing, investment or recreational years as highlighted by Côté et al. (2007) before becoming successful. Theoretical perspectives on the talent development process exists in the work of Bloom & Sosniak (1985) and Côté et al. (2007). Talented individuals go through the stages of initiation, development, and perfection (Bloom & Sosniak, 1985). In addition to moving through the stages of talent development, throughout an elite sport career athletes have to survive numerous transitions (Wylleman, Alfermann & Lavalley, 2004; Wylleman, Reints, & De Knop, 2013). Sharf (1997) defines *transition* as an adjustment or event that goes beyond the ongoing changes of everyday life. Transitions can be normative (i.e. predictable), or non-normative (i.e. unpredictable; Wylleman et al., 2004; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2014). Within sport, common normative transitions include the move from youth-to-senior levels and retirement (Wylleman et al., 2004; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2014).

Alfermann & Stambulova (2007) mention specific demands related to training, competition, communication, and lifestyle during transitions between the developmental

phases in which the athlete must cope. The concept of career transitions explains the process between the phases and is, therefore, sound as a background for playing up as a phase on the road to success. The road can be complicated and non-linear with several transitions between phases (Gulbin, Weissensteiner, Oldenziel, & Gagné, 2013; MacNamara et al., 2010b). These points make it attractive to research how playing up has given new experiences in which the athlete must cope and supported the development towards the goal of becoming a football professional while giving a deep understanding of coping with the demands during this phase.

Several studies on transitions in football exist. Finn & McKenna (2010) point out that the junior-to-senior transition may be extremely demanding with both athletic and social sources of strain being challenging. Morris, Tod, & Eubank (2017) note that players feel anxious about the transition to senior sport, and provided various sources of external coping resources. Røynesdal, Toering, & Gustafsson (2018) explored the sociocultural features of a first-team environment perceived to influence a player's development, how players should manage these features, and how coaches operate to assist young players in this transition.

The individual mental processes are essential in the development of professional athletes (Mills, Butt, Maynard, & Harwood, 2012), where the skill of coping with stress, adversity, pressure, new context, and success are central (Holt & Dunn, 2004; Jordet, 2016; MacNamara et al., 2010b; Van Yperen, 2009). Lazarus & Folkman (1984) defines coping as a process which is integral in reacting to stress and emotions.

It is natural that players will encounter transitions as they progress throughout their career (Stambulova, 1994). Successful transitional experiences for an elite-level athlete in football are pivotal in the journey to become a professional athlete. Therefore, understanding defining challenges and coping mechanisms underlying the transition from the junior stage (age 17-19) to the senior stage (age 19+) pose as an interesting avenue of research. The methods and tools utilized to facilitate development can be diverse, and in Norway, a trainee period is often used in all levels of football (Lürssen, 2017; Naustan, 2008; Reppesgård, 2016). Any tool with its inherent benefits and fallacies should be researched to evaluate how the given tool contribute in reaching the goal(s) it was intended for which lays the foundation for researching how junior level players experience their trainee period with the senior team in football.

Existing literature identifies a need for understanding playing up as a tool for player development. Christensen, Laursen, & Sørensen (2011) notes that playing up gives an opportunity of learning from older and more experienced players but highlights the need for further research on the experience that young players have. Other relevant articles argue that



playing up is a skills-based approach to structure challenges on the often named *rocky road to success* (Collins, MacNamara, & McCarthy, 2016a; Collins & Macnamara, 2012). Playing up was mentioned as a possible tool, but it does not show any results regarding player experience and development value, which again signals the need for further research. Collins and MacNamara (2012) argue that challenge is necessary for elite-level performance. A player must use strategy and skill to deal with challenges which in turn develops a resilient athlete (Collins et al., 2016a). Playing up is mentioned but does not share insight on how the player experiences this. The intention is to offer structured challenges for the player, but the article does not reveal how the tool facilitates just that, nor which strategies the athletes can use to meet these structured challenges.

In research, the period of playing up is described as a tool for constructing heightened challenges on the road of development (Collins et al., 2016a; Collins & MacNamara, 2012). The Norwegian Football Federation (NFF) describes this tool as an example of a way to differentiate environments for the athlete, where he will practice and play in a team belonging to an older age group (NFF, 2018b).

The relevant body of research seems to lack a proper term for describing the activity of training and playing up at a higher level than the group a player belongs. In Norwegian, the term is “hospitering,” which is a player development tool to give athletes new challenges for mastery. In the broadest sense, the term means to participate in a new environment in a short or long term to learn from players who are playing at a higher level. The player will not be a permanent member of the environment he is visiting (Fredriksberg, 2018). The research question is: *How do junior players experience and cope with challenges presented in the transition from junior football to senior professional football in a Norwegian top-level club?*

The research question gives direction to investigate psychological and social factors which impact junior players coping and developing when playing up at the professional level. Junior players are aged 16 to 19 in Norway and furthering our knowledge on these topics will be interesting relating to youth biological, cognitive, and psychosocial development in this age span. Several interesting questions arise concerning the practice of playing up in the senior stage, including coping and its facets. Critical parts of player development link with the thesis questions, with a focus on social and psychological factors of importance to learning, mastery, and sense of belonging. The master thesis also wants to highlight what the players identified as missing in the case study club, and how they would advise a newcomer in the present day.

The literature review revealed a significant body of research on the topic of talent development but lacking on the topic of playing up as a topic. Understanding what the player experience in the transition from junior football to senior professional football is interesting, and this has shaped the research questions in this thesis. A successful transition from junior football to senior professional football can lead to a higher number of professional players, which can have a significant impact on football club revenues. The purpose of this master thesis is to gain knowledge of how three players experience playing up in a professional club in Norway, with a focus on coping mechanisms in the framework of Stambulova (1997).

## 2.0 Context background

The following chapter will give an account of important factors for understanding playing up in the football context, including the professional environment on the pitch, off the pitch, social interactions and coping. The purpose is to highlight research needs for this study and argue the social utility of its insights.

### 2.1 The elite football context

Collins and colleagues (2016a) notes a general agreement on the importance of challenge for good development on the athlete pathway. How to use challenge and ideas on how much and when seems less coherent. Literature suggests that the difference between levels of adult achievement relate more to what performers bring to the challenges than what they experience (Collins et al., 2016a). Therefore, it is essential that young athletes can develop psycho-behavioral and coping skills, and have adequate social support, to interpret adversity as a positive growth experience. The importance of preparing athletes for challenges, supporting them through the experience, and then encouraging positive evaluation and reflection is key to a successful outcome (Collins et al., 2016a). Emotions and thoughts appears to be vital in handling the junior-to-senior transition, and understanding the requirements and demands for the transitioning athletes is integral for supporting athletes during this phase. Mills and colleagues (2012) identified several factors perceived to positively or negatively influence player development such as awareness, resilience, and goal-directed attributes.

The individual skill of handling contextual factors is at the center of a complex environment and is decisive in development and learning, such as habituation to new environments, dealing with relationships, regulating load, coping with stress, and dealing with adversity and progress (Jordet, 2016). The demands of a top-level player are extreme, and Collins and colleagues (2016a) argue that athletes must be exposed to challenges for learning during their development.

The relationship between cooperation and competition features as the social life and interaction between players in the football context (Ronglan, 2010). On the one hand, players in the team are dependent on cooperation to perform and develop. On the other hand, the players are competing for a spot in the starting eleven in a game, and they are trying to succeed in the transition to a professional contract. Ronglan (2010) argues that removing the

element of competition will erase the essence of competitive sports, so players must handle this relationship.

## 2.2 The game of football

The footballing skill is by Bergo (2002) defined as appropriate choices and actions to create and exploit game situations in favor of your team. A context must support a players' skill development to perform correct choices and actions in game-like situations with the aim of beating the opponent player and team. To beat an opponent is defined as the match dimension, and is connected to the individual, relational, and structural dimension. How players utilize their football skill will be affected by physical, psychological and social resources (Bergo, 2002; Jordet, 2016; Morgans, Orme, Anderson, & Drust, 2014; Mujika & Castagna, 2016). The various internal and external resources contribute to the level of skill which players have to solve the match dimension and attain excellent performance. The overarching goal of development in the football context is to develop football skill. Besides, the result of participating in sports will include personal development with participation and performance (Côté & Vierimaa, 2014).

The physical, psychological, social and technical resources are reciprocal as the football skill in the football dimension. The national development plan and organization of NFF (2018a) highlights the importance of a holistic approach to player development, which in turn leads to optimal player development.

Changing the developmental environment will pose the challenge of building new relations for a player in a new environment. NFF (2018b) regards this period of playing up as an essential instrument for learning and development because the player will experience a higher level of demand regarding time and space in football with players belonging to a higher level. NFF (2018b) values well-being and support for the player as critical factors for players who are in these new learning environments. The development of expertise in sport is the result of successful interaction of biological, psychological, and sociological constraints. Baker, Horton, Robertson-Wilson, & Wall (2003) supports that player well-being and environmental support are essential for the athlete in development. Success factors of the periods of playing up consists of the athletes' current flow in football development, his maturity, the environment, and the role of his parents.

### 2.3 Coping with challenges in talent development

The transition to senior professional football is challenging and is within a complex context. Understanding the connection between the player and the developmental environment is essential. An individual participates and develops in a context within sociocultural circumstances (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Salmela (1996) claimed that healthy environments can be of great importance for the development of expertise, indicating the importance of healthy development environments. NFF (2018b) pinpoint the football clubs as the most crucial developmental environment for players. Burgess & Naughton (2010) highlight the various elements of the environment with importance to player development through the holistic lens. The many elements make development environments complex and indicate that success in development will rely on functioning cooperation and the relation between the elements.

Understanding and cultivating expert performance stems from the development of talent. A long history of interest across a range of skill domains stems from attempts to determine the relative contribution of genetic and environmental factors to high-level human achievement-work. Practice has the greatest singular influence on skill acquisition, with a positive association between time spent in practice and improvement in proficiency (Côté et al., 2007). Challenge will present itself on the athlete pathway, and it is essential that young athletes have the opportunity to develop psycho-behavioral and coping skills, and have adequate social support, to ensure that adversity is interpreted as a positive growth experience (Collins et al., 2016a). In the psychoanalytic ego psychology model, coping is defined as realistic and flexible thoughts and acts that solve problems and thereby reduce stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). It is a continuous cognitive and behavioral effort to handle specific external or internal demands a player experience as demanding or exceeding the resources of the person. This approach differentiates several processes that athletes use to handle the relationship between person and environment. For example, Menninger (1963) Haan (1969, 1977) and Vaillant (1979) each offer a hierarchy in which coping refers to the highest and most advanced or mature ego processes followed by defenses which refer to neurotic modes of adaption. These modes are also hierarchically arranged. At the bottom, processes that Haan calls fragmentation or ego-failure and Menninger refers to as regressive or psychotic levels of ego functioning (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

### 2.3.1 Coping with elite football

The player must cope with situational elements in a competitive developmental environment, such as the possibility for development leading to a professional contract. Successful athletes have reported that they use positive coping strategies to handle sports- and environmental demands in football (Holt & Dunn, 2004; Van Yperen, 2009). Research by Reeves, Nicholls, & McKenna (2009) show that early adolescents identify making errors, opponents, team performance and family as salient stressors. Middle adolescents identify making errors, team performance, coaches, selection, contracts, social evaluation, and playing at a higher level as prominent stressors. Positive coping strategies belong to a problem-focused version of coping and is similar to solving problems by mobilizing thoughts and behavior in environmental circumstances which are possible to change (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Less successful athletes have been shown to lack these strategies (Holt & Mitchell, 2006), which can indicate emotional forms of coping, such as avoidance, minimalization, distancing, and selective focus (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). What athletes do and do not do in meeting environmental demands start with individual primary assessments of the relationship between person and environment, where secondary assessments of available internal and external resources are crucial for what the athlete can and will do (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). What athletes chose to do based on this relationship can be linked to mental toughness exemplified by thought patterns, resilience, and personal responsibility which are essential characteristics for development (Cook, Crust, Littlewood, Nesti, & Allen-Collinson, 2014).

Players must learn how to cope with various sources of stress if they are to reach professional status (Holt & Dunn, 2004), where the highest reported sources of stress among youth players are making mistakes, opposition, coaches, selection processes, family influence, team performance, social relational worries (Reeves et al., 2009), and media (Hofseth, 2016). It is essential to research the individual player developmental tool of playing up in the social context and how these sides interact (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1999). Henriksen (2010) consider relational elements between players, coaches, parents and significant others in developmental environments as meaningful for development.

Roderick (2006) notes that football players experience uncertainty as members of the professional sports industry. The perception of ‘you are only as good as your last game’ can create an awareness that the next game may be the last. Player contracts and playing time are contingent as players lack long-term security and breed a pervading sense of insecurity. Uncertainty is central to the life of players, as there is no security for the player concerning advancing in a career, nor attainment. It can lead to players developing dramaturgical selves

(Collinson, 2003) as a means by which players may distance their selves from the constraints of occupational prescriptions among team mates and controlling football managers, while continuing to appear to comply with them.

Playing up will include a change between two specific training groups and can be associated with a change in the developmental environment. Feeling safe in an environment is regarded to be decisive for performance and development (Baker et al., 2003), which highlights the importance of relational support from significant persons in the environment around the player (Burgess & Naughton, 2010; Holt & Dunn, 2004). Playing up will contribute to environmental changes for the players, and insight in these changes will be of interest in learning and development. How learning situates in the environment constitutes a social platform for individual player development, and environmental changes mean the attainment of new relations (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Members create meaning, norms, and routines within the frames of a team (Culver & Trudel, 2008; Ronglan, 2010). It adds to an inner justice regarding what is right and wrong in a social community based on a mutual language, history, and routines (Ronglan, 2010). This description of one aspect of a developmental environment makes it attractive to research how the players feel that they belong, how they participate, and how they act in a new environment founded on cooperation and competition.

The surroundings can offer various forms of social support which is favorable for player resilience meeting the challenges, demands, and expectations in the new context (Holt & Dunn, 2004). An essential factor on the road to professional status is the ability to be resilient and subsequent handling of contextual factors (Holt & Mitchell, 2006; Jordet, 2016). It is therefore relevant to research which values environmental change because of playing up has on the experience of social support and what how this contributes to learning and development.

## 2.4 Summary of background

Playing up is viewed as a tool for athlete development in a social context with the aim of skill and mental development through raising the level of challenge on and off the pitch. The literature review indicates a vast body of research in talent development while lacking regarding the tool of playing up. This study argues that the lack of previous research and the need for new knowledge is of importance in the player development context. Gaining new

insights and understanding is of interest for the practical meaning of the context, such as development environment and coping strategies.



### 3.0 Theoretical framework

The chapter will present and give an account of relevant theoretical perspectives. The theoretic framework of this thesis includes the athletic career transition model was used to guide data collection and analysis, and the holistic athletic career model placed a holistic perspective on athletic development. Understanding challenge through a skills-based approach in developing psychological characteristics of developing excellence provides a framework for understanding athlete experiences in the junior to senior transition.

#### 3.1 Transitions

Career development and transitions of athletes has been a topic of research since the 1960s. Wylleman et al. (2004) notes an increase of the quantity and quality of topic-specific research by the end of the 1980s, with several shifts in research focus, theoretical frameworks, and added attention to contextual factors. Initially, athletes describe their experiences through anecdotal evidence. Transitions are now a well-described branch of research. The concept of "transition" is related to a variety of experiences, including individual life span development, occupational planning, educational processes, social support, and the processes of aging and retirement in the past decades (e.g., Erikson, 1963; Adams, Hayes, & Hopson, 1977; Newman, Lohman, Newman, Myers, & Smith, 2000; Cutrona & Russell, 1990; Cummings & Henry, 1961; Kubler, 1969). Schlossberg (1981) associated transition to the occurrence of one or more specific events which brings "a change in assumptions about oneself" for the individual, while Wapner & Craig-Bray (1992) added the experience of social disequilibrium. Sharf (1997) noted that transitions go further than the ongoing changes in everyday life.

Wylleman et al. (2004) notes a growing interest during the 1970s and early 1980s with the introduction of the concept of transition in how athletes coped with the event of retirement from high-level competitive and professional sports (e.g., Haerle, 1975; Mihovilovic, 1968). Since then, the focus of research has changed through several phases: initially, athletes ending their career was a singular event. Researchers reconsidered the termination of the athletic career as a transitional process, and this marked a change in transition research. Implementing a transitional approach to other phases and events occurring during the athletic career resulted in the current holistic, life-span perspective on athletic as well as non-athletic transitions faced by athletes (Wylleman et al., 2004).

Wylleman et al. (2004) remark a shift of focus in the late 1990s from one transition i.e. the career termination, toward a more holistic approach where research views athletic

involvement in a life-span perspective. This shift runs parallel with research from the fields of talent development, deliberate practice, and career development. Early work on talent development included Bloom & Sosniak's (1985) identification of stages where talented humans developed their skillsets within sports and other genres. These stages of talent development in sports included (a) the initiation stage where young athletes are introduced to organized sports and identify as talented athletes. (b) The development stage during which athletes become more dedicated to their sport and where the amount of training and level of specialization increase. (c) The mastery or perfection stage in which athletes reach their highest level of athletic skills and performance. Côté (1999) introduced a theory of deliberate play and practice, where he identified the stages of sampling, specializing, investment, and mastery or performance. These two talent development perspectives links to the transitions faced by athletes, and Stambulova (1994, 2000) later developed a stage model based upon her research on transitions on Russian athletes. Stambulova considered the athletic career as consisting of normative stages and transitions. (a) the beginning of the sports specialization, (b) the transition to intensive training in the chosen sport, (c) the transition to high-achievement sports and adult sports, (d) the transition from amateur sports to professional sports (e) the transition from culmination to the end of the sports career, and (f) the end of the sports career (Wylleman et al., 2004).

Wylleman et al. (2004) points to the shift in perspective used in the conceptualization of the transitions faced by athletes. While researchers originally focused on one normative transition, the focus of interest expanded to a life-span perspective including other life domains relevant to athletes. The life-span perspective has put the spotlight on the role and influence of "non-athletic" transitions which can affect the development of the athletic career, including transitions at psychological, psychosocial, academic, and the vocational level. A second development has stemmed from the shift from a theoretical perspective on career termination to the testing and development of conceptual models specific to the adaptation to career transition. These models include career-termination models (Taylor & Ogilvie, 2001) as well as career-transition models (Stambulova, 1994, 2000). Third, researchers have shifted attention from the identifying causes and consequences of career-ending transition to the identification of specific psychological factors related to the quality of career transitions e.g., athletic identity, transferable skills, transition-related skills (e.g, Brewer, Van Raalte, & Petitpas, 2000; Lavalley, Gordon, & Grove 1997; Lavalley, Nesti, Borkoles, Cockerill, & Edge, 2000; Mayocchi & Hanrahan, 2000; Petitpas, Cornelius, & Brewer, 2001). Wylleman and authors (2004) notes that finally, the focus of interest has shifted from programs created

to develop skills necessary in career termination and the post-career to the evaluation of intervention strategies and career transition programs and services (e.g., Anderson & Morris, 2000; Lavalley, Gorley, Lavalley, & Wylleman, 2001; Perna, Ahlgren, & Zaichkowsky, 1999).

Wylleman et al. (2004) comments that being able to view athletic transitions through a holistic lens has later been noted to be of interest and use (Wylleman, Lavalley, & Alfermann, 1999). Such an approach should take a life-span perspective, spanning both the athletic and post-athletic career. Transitions within other domains were also of interest. Research findings showed a strongly interactive and reciprocal nature of transitions happening in the athletic career and transitions happening in other domains in the life of the athlete e.g., academic, psychosocial, and professional (e.g., Petitpas, Champagne, Chartrand, Danish, & Murphy, 1997; Wylleman, De Knop, Ewing, & Cumming, 2000).

Wylleman et al. (2004) mentions different interventions to show potential in aiding the athlete in different transitions. Several traditional therapeutic approaches, including cognitive restructuring, stress management, and emotional expression, has been recommended as techniques to facilitate post-retirement adjustment among elite athletes (Morris & Summers, 2004; Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). Other intervention strategies include the use of a psychoanalytic approach (Chamalidis, 1995), an information processing approach, mentoring, and an existential psychology approach (Lavalley et al., 2000; Wylleman et al., 1999).

Wylleman et al. (2004) notes account-making to be an interesting avenue for working with athletes in a transitional phase. It is the act of explaining, describing, and emotionally reacting to problematic or influential life events (Grove, Lavalley, Gordon, & Harvey, 1998; Lavalley et al., 1997). Research by Parker (1994) and Wylleman, De Knop, Menkehorst, Theeboom, & Annerel (1993) suggest that account-making is used to confront individual career transition experiences mentally by thinking about it and putting it aside. Cognitively constructing the various components of the transition i.e. its nature, why it happened, how one feels about it, and what it means for the future follows, before coming back again and renewing the analysis. This account is then partially confided to significant others, whose reaction may help or hinder the individual in dealing with career transition experience. The significant others can react with empathy, which aids the athlete in tackling what has happened and deal with it constructively.

Wylleman et al. (2004) mentions the work of Murphy (1995) which suggests that counseling should serve to assist athletes with coping strategies to develop self-identity and to

cope with changes in the available emotional and social support. Moreover, addressing the enhancement of coping skills, and the development of a sense of control. The development of most counseling programs aims at helping the elite amateur athlete, such as a junior soccer team player. These programs generally aim at developing social, educational, and work-related skills in elite athletes. Lifestyle management and the development of transferable skills that can assist individuals in making the transition from life in sport into a post-sport career is of importance (Anderson & Morris, 2000; Lavalley et al., 2001; Wylleman et al., 1999). Content and the target population of these programs may vary: the "Career Transition Program" (CTP) aim at assisting players to deal with retirement from the National Football League. The "Study and Talent Education Program" (STEP) provides information and teaches elite level student-athletes skills to optimize the combination of an academic and athletic career, as well as to initiate a post-academic vocational career successfully (Wylleman et al., 2004). In general, they include values and interest exploration, career awareness and decision-making, CV preparation, interview techniques, job search strategies, career counseling, and the development of generic social and interpersonal skills (Wylleman et al., 2004). Petitpas, Brewer, & Van Raalte (1996) argues that transition programs need to be multidimensional and include enhancement, support, and counseling. Evaluations of these programs showed that a majority of athletes were generally satisfied with the actual services and courses they had attended (Lavalley et al., 2001).

The growing number of publications on the topic of career transitions is not only signifying of an interest within the sports psychology world, but also from other major developments throughout recent decades.

### 3.1.1 Relating playing up to transitional phases

Periods of playing up are related to the concept of transitions because the tool facilitates a series of challenges and potential changes for the developing player. Career transitions concern the transition between developmental phases in a given sport or outside of sport. The transition in itself demands a change in behavior and relations (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007; Schlossberg, 1981). Periods of playing up can be planned by framing the trainee period and presenting this to the athlete, or it can be spontaneous as it is related to normative and non-normative transitions (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). An athlete can, on the one hand, be presented with a period and prepare accordingly. On the other hand, an athlete will experience non-normative periods or practices because a team of a higher level needs an extra player to complete their practice. Mutual factors with periods of playing up and

career transitions are that both short or long-time changes occur on the *rocky road to success*, and these changes challenge the demands and the requirements for development. Christensen, Laursen, & Sørensen (2011) argue that athlete trainee periods can reduce the risk of going through a career transition from junior to senior level because the player already has experienced similar changes in environment at an earlier stage through athlete trainee periods (Fredriksberg, 2018).

The goal of playing up is player development and compares to the domain of education where schools seek to move students to new learning environments to promote growth. The Norwegian Football Federation (NFF) highlights that playing up will not aid in player development if the athlete fail at mastering the football-specific challenges or the social-specific challenges or a combination of the two (NFF, 2018b). The challenges with playing up are multi-faceted, and the tool in itself can work against its purpose if the athlete fails at growing and mastering his new environment (Sæther, 2017). Being able to handle situation-specific changes will in the literature of Stambulova (1997), and Alfermann & Stambulova (2007) demand some degree the process of coping. An athletes' ability to cope with persisting challenges in changing and different environments is vital to long-term development and mastery of skills.

The definition by Lazarus & Folkman (1984) is similar to the definition of career transitions in the understanding that it is process oriented, and includes everything a person does or think, independently of the outcome. Playing up does not necessarily end with its purpose of better development, and is explained with Stambulovas' (1997) model of transitions by a mismatch between situational demands and personal resources, here including the failed process of athlete coping. Symptoms of crisis transitions are suggested through the athletes' thoughts, emotions, and behavior (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007), here including a reduction in self-confidence, emotional distress, more significant amounts of stress, heightened sensitivity for mistakes, and disorientation in the choice of action (Stambulova, 2003). The successful transition is where the athlete adapts to the heightened demands in the new learning environment, capitalizing on his ability to use his resources, both internal and external which facilitates the coping process (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007).

A recent study by Morris, Tod, & Oliver (2016) on the youth to the senior transitional period for soccer players in the UK noted that an overall increase in pressure, expectations, and other demands which accompany the move from the junior to the senior sports associates with enhanced stress and a potential reduction of performance. Players who experience this period may also meet new stressors in which they do not usually see, which can lead to

negative consequences such as burnout. A various set of demands such as the physical, mental, and social may lead to athletes ceasing participation, with only approximately 17% of all athletes in youth sport successfully transitioning into elite sport. Various stakeholders, such as coaches, support staff, and parents, revealed that the determining factors associated with a transitional process is (a) a period of adaptation, which requires (b) a corresponding set of characteristics and resources, which have been (c) developed through several preceding transitions, to become successful senior players. The stakeholders perceived that athletes need to have or develop their knowledge of their sport and the transition process, several personal characteristics, and access to high-quality social support. The authors point out that a case study of organizations during the youth to senior transitional period will help highlight how professional organizations manage the transition and which resources are prominent across the sector. A case study can aid in researching whether a professional sports team apply knowledge related to transitional periods (Morris, Tod, & Oliver, 2016).

Research findings support the importance of coping processes in the situation of playing up claiming that the tool of playing up is a standard for players reaching a professional status versus those athletes dropping out (Sæther, 2017). These findings highlight a need for future research of the process of playing up concerning career transitions.

Christensen et al. (2011) employed Wenger's (1999) understanding of participation in communities of practice, where younger athletes learn from the more experienced athletes. The first phase of the junior football to senior football transition is playing up with the seniors, either through a pre-planned period or on a day-to-day basis, usually stemming from the senior team needing a player to slot in for tactical training. Christensen et al. (2011) pointed to the need for understanding how younger athletes experience playing up and its value to the individual. A study by Røynesdal et al. (2018) showed that coaches within English Premier League football clubs perceive that players generate two higher order categories within transition; (a) fitting in with standards of the first-team environment, and (b) facilitating shared perception of transition across critical stakeholders. These findings argue that young players need to navigate between conforming, adapting to, and breaking with specific features of the first team environment to successfully progress in the youth to senior transition to professional football.

Other articles (Collins et al., 2016a; Collins & MacNamara, 2012) argue that playing up can be a skills-based approach to the structure for planned traumas or challenges along the non-linear axis of development in any activity, with the aim of preparing and teaching younger athletes what resources they can bring to challenges in the future. The articles do not

share any knowledge which gives insight to the individual experience and perceived value of playing up as a tool, therefore highlighting a need for it in future research.

### 3.2 Summary of research needs

An interesting avenue of research to explore within the topic of athletic transitions is to further our understanding of how normative transitions such as a successful transition from junior to senior level links with how talented young athletes copes with challenge. The pressure and expectations are higher in the senior team, and players may also find challenge in coping with new social norms and standards in a senior team. Moreover, players must cope with higher football demands on the pitch. Players can receive help during this period, and playing up is a standard for players who become professionals compared to non-professionals.

## 4.0 Method

### 4.1 Procedure

The club competes in the second level of Norwegian football. Employees within the club is a sports director, a head of youth development, a head of methodology, and coaching staff. The players are mainly professional by contract, with five players on the B-list, which enables them to play for the senior team without having a professional contract.

This study aimed to gain knowledge in how playing up is experienced in the athlete perspective, and how athletes cope with challenges in this transitional period. The procedure is presented, followed by considerations and reflections. The scientific framework is presented in chapter 4.2. The design is a case study of three athletes in a top club in Norway who has successfully transitioned to professional status in the football context, which is explained in chapter 4.2.1. with a description of the qualitative interview in sub-chapter 4.2.2. 4.2.3. covers considerations regarding research credibility, followed by the role of the researcher and contextual knowledge in 4.2.4. Reliability and validity are discussed in 4.2.5. and 4.2.6. The chapter closes with ethical considerations in 4.3.

This study is inspired by cultural praxis of athletes' careers, a recent paradigm in athlete career research (Stambulova & Ryba, 2013a, 2013b, 2014), and especially by the call for context-driven career research and assistance, as noted by Stambulova. (Ekengren, Stambulova, Johnson, & Carlsson, 2018).

*The cultural praxis of athletes' careers has spurred a discussion about how to improve the fit between existing theoretical frameworks and athletes' real career experiences, infused by the contexts they belong. It is evident that any model simplifies reality and provides us with a kind of map that is useful for orientation but does not grasp all the richness of the territory. Therefore, existing career frameworks represent general models that are expected to be contextualized or adapted to particular national or sports contexts, based on the empirical data. (pp. 453-454)*

The birth of this study started with thoughtful work concerning the football context and how players attain professional status. Delving into current research and relevant literature revealed exciting avenues of research, with the phenomenon of playing up in a senior professional team as intriguing. The researcher created a draft of an informational letter and written consent before collecting relevant approvals, with the processing and draft of the semi-structured interviews following relevant approvals. An outline of the project, with relevant theory and a framework for methodological considerations, lead to an approval of the Norwegian Center for Research Data (NSD).



Recruiting subjects were done by contacting the sports director in the club, gaining approval, and then contacting the available subjects. The *subjects* received information regarding the potential *subjects*, research process, and a presentation of written consent. To mitigate the possibility of the subjects feeling that they had to join the study in order to maintain positive appearances with the club, the author inquired about their interest in the project and discussed possible results.

This study employs qualitative interviews for data collection. A week was necessary to collect data, conducting the interviews in a neutral location not connected to the club. A voice recorder was used to secure the data. Interviewing in a neutral location separated the subjects from the club setting, and there were no good options for a location that would secure a private and safe interview environment at the club. All subjects were familiar with the location beforehand, to have them in a familiar setting to ensure safety and privacy. The subjects had the possibility of drinking coffee and water, and the interview had a break where they could loosen up and use the bathroom if necessary. The voice recording was transcribed and analyzed in Norwegian. Interviews took about 90 minutes. By comparison, the longest interview was about 120 minutes, showing an example of subject differences regarding communication skills and personality. Three interviews resulted in 45279 words over 58 pages. A review and modification of the original interviews with the aim of making the language more concise resulted in 32860 words and 47 pages, which served as the document for analysis. All names and other recognizable characteristics are anonymized as part of the transcription-process.

The data was added in xmind to provide an overview of the findings. The quotes were interpreted and organized using MAXQDA, before the relevant quotes were translated to English and then used in the results and the discussion of this thesis. The results and the discussion are presented in a chronological order, following the procedure of the interviews. Considerations regarding the procedure and the method follows.

#### 4.1.1 Selection of subjects

The author communicated voluntary participation in the study both written and orally. The subject samples belong to the same club in Norway, as this case study is interested in understanding the phenomenon of playing up in the associated club and the specific context. Criteria for inclusion is holding a professional contract by the summer of 2018. This criterion was included to benefit from the most recent memories and experiences of playing up in the transition from junior to senior football. Thagaard (2013) notes that qualitative research base

on strategic selection, which are subjects with abilities or qualifications which are deemed strategic compared to the aim of the study. The potential subjects total 12 athletes over the last 6 years, which can provide a fascinating insight into how they experienced the transition. *3 of these 12 possible subjects were selected because they are the most recent athletes to successfully transition and gain a professional contract.* The study, therefore, is based on three senior players, 19 years of age, who have reached professional status in a Norwegian top club. Player 1 is a striker, player 2 is a midfielder, and player 3 is a centre-back.

Selection of the sample of subjects through a purposive sampling method, which is strategic, and attempting to establish a good correspondence between research questions and sampling is necessary (Bryman, 2015). The age segment is also interesting because a select few footballers remain at this stage in development, with the chance of becoming a professional. A successful transition can have enormous implications for both player and club.

These athletes have been a part of the developmental squads in the club in their junior stage. The athletes in question also come from two different academic high schools in the proximity of the club. One is private; the other is public. Studying the athlete environment also adds to a more holistic approach to the transitional period, as the athletes share their experience with how these different environments added to their transitional experience. The specific sampling approach will reflect the research questions, which directs this study (Punch, 2013).

Boys were selected in this study as there are no professional women players considered as strategic in this study. Choice of gender also bases on the principle of selection of subjects and how selection relates to the possibility of conclusions regarding transferability (Thagaard, 2013). Qualitative research projects have too few subjects to statistically generalize, which again is not an aim of these projects. The study chose to limit included genders to only boys, to gain better insight from subjects belonging to the same age and gender in order to strengthen transferability in this project. The interview process and data analysis is time-consuming which would demand vast resources if the chosen subjects are many (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). One can assume that a higher number of experiences from the same gender and age group can lead to transferability to the select few who belong in contexts and situations similar to the included subjects of this study (Thagaard, 2013). This study does not aim to explain the difference between genders regarding playing up, but it could serve as another avenue of research in the future.

#### 4.1.2 Construction of the interview

The study processed semi-structured qualitative interviews with a foundation on main topics. Kvale & Brinkmann (2015) and Thagaard (2013) argued the semi-structured interview as being preferable when topics are chosen beforehand while having the possibility of going off-script as the interview progresses. Flexibility is vital in aiding to secure a natural flow in the interview based on subject prerequisites and the topic of dialogue (Thagaard, 2013). Pre-interview reflections regarded possible variations in the subjects skill of reflection and communication, which in part influenced the decision to use topics in a semi-structured way. This approach has main topics throughout the interview while having the possibility of including other topics that arise during the interview (Thagaard, 2013). Markula & Silk (2011) also note that case studies regarding phenomena will be based on theoretical frameworks because the study has precise thesis questions, which in this study is on coping with a challenge on and off the pitch in a transition of playing up. Open-ended questions e.g., *what was your first experience with the senior players in the dressing room?* allow the subjects the elbow room to detail their experiences, where they can relate those experiences to thoughts and feelings. The study is not sensitive, but individual experiences and topics can be difficult to address or account by the subject, which the interviewer will handle with empathy and care. Open-ended questions can offer more detail on the research subject (Sarantakos, 1998). The interview guide is shaped with recent literature in mind regarding the psychological and physical aspects of coping and transitions.

A basis in the theoretical framework of this thesis, and the author's contextual knowledge about player development, of subjects, and the club-context served to create main topics and the formulation of questions. Some questions are theoretically founded, but aimed to be in a language the subjects would understand and respond naturally. The structure of the interview included the main questions and probes, e.g., *How did you experience demands and level of football in practice with the senior team?* and *who contributed to these demands?* The probes were created in order to nuance the answers and get a hold of the essence of the experiences (appendix 3). Thagaard (2013) expresses the importance of constructing questions in a way which invites the subject to reflect on relevant topics and share a profound commentary. It has been a conscious effort by the researcher. The nature of the interview will also present the opportunity to develop a more trustworthy bond with the subjects, and in so giving a deeper understanding of the experiences of the subjects. The interview guide will be developed and cleared with a research supervisor, with the intent of aiding with structuring the interview while asking topic-specific questions.

The literature on research interviews also highlights the importance of creating trust and a relaxed atmosphere where safety is a critical component (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015; Markula & Silk, 2011; Thagaard, 2013). The notion of safety has served as a backdrop for the shaping of the interview, by asking person-directed and straightforward questions on a players' skill before advancing with more in-depth questions. Probes have been used to help the interviewer show interest in what the subject has shared. Probes are questions, commentary, or physical behavior with the aim of encouraging the subject in sharing further insight on a topic (Markula & Silk, 2011; Thagaard, 2013). The interview guide closed with a retrospective inquiry where the subject shared their arguments on the process of playing up, and what they mean could be done better to facilitate the transition.

Just as athletes should be interested in developing their football skills, the researcher should practice using and refining the interview guide for optimal results (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Thagaard (2013) notes that everyone can conduct an interview, but the quality of the interview is dependent on the qualities of the researcher. The researcher has made steps to optimize the interview guide and the process of conducting an interview. (1) A research supervisor has commented on the content of the interview, and the progress of questions. (2) A presentation of the content to a research group functioned as a commentary on the wording of the questions to refine the language. (3) The study conducted three pilot interviews with persons who have successfully transitioned to professional status in football, in order to understand how to probe for reflections, and practicing the art of asking questions, creating dialogue, and using body language to create a safe environment for the subject. The author refined some language based on the reflections from experiences in the pilot interviews. Thagaard (2013) stresses the importance of conducting pilot interviews for the benefit of experience, and the fact that a researcher can hear his voice when transcribing the interviews. Solid planning and practice are argued to be important by Kvale & Brinkmann (2015). The described measures have led to increased confidence in the interviews, and a more precise interview guide.

#### 4.1.3 Data-collection

Data-collection is conducted during the autumn of 2018, and necessary equipment will be a smartphone with a possibility of recording accounts. The data storage is secure at a password-protected database. The transcription of the interviews are verbatim. The interviews are in Norwegian, and the relevant quotes are translated to English with the purpose of presenting a sounder process for analysis. One of the possible subjects has a personal coach-

athlete relationship to the researcher, which can provide more profound accounts of the subject's transitional period.

Subjects received a presentation with the same interview guide, with the intent of exploring the experiences the subjects had in the transition period at the club.

Making a good impression on the subjects is often vital, but not necessary in this study. The author communicated gratitude for being allowed to get an in-depth look at subjects' experiences, especially because of the authors' connection to the club as a coach. The author did not have a coaching position in the club while they were transitioning.

Subjects were perceiving that the interview had the aim of learning from their real experience with the transition, without any possibility of consequences for the subject at the club. The subjects were the experts, as they had the first-hand experience with a challenging period in their lives which younger players may follow. The author communicated that all quotes would be anonymous, and that its content would not be possible to trace back to the subject in any way.

Creating a safe and confidential relationship between interviewer and subject supports open and thorough answers (Thagaard, 2013). The interviews varied in length and depth and is arguably a result because of personal characteristics rather than the subject-interviewer-relation. As mentioned, a relation outside of the research context already existed. The subjects have enrolled at a local sports high school where the author is employed. A previous work-relationship also exist with one of the three subjects when he was playing youth football.

Reflecting on the possibility of emotional reactions beforehand guided the planning of the interview guide. Some of the answers were emotional, but the subjects told it with confidence, explaining that the tough times were just another possibility for them to overcome and master new challenges. The author tried to maintain a keen and interested body language and facial expressions. The interviewer showed flexibility in using words they used during the interview, e.g., *the lads*. Repeating sentences or words they used ensured a smooth transition on the related topic from question to question, e.g., *you said that...* This technique helped spur the conversation forward without asking specific topic-related questions, creating flow.

All subjects showed a keen interest in the research subject and various topics. They did, however, vary in expressing their experiences, the details of the answers, and how they reflected on various topics. One subject was very concise and to the point with the answers, leading to the shortest interview of the study. The author adhered to the personality of the interviewee, adjusting manner and probing from interview to interview. The author tried to play on the same team with the subject. In hindsight, all interviews had a good flow but

showed differences in the length of the answers and the details they shared. The sharp subject could answer *what are your strong sides as a football player?* with *shots on goal, protecting the ball, and killer mentality*, while the other subjects would use full sentences, connect them, and reflect on various aspects of their game.

Regarding the length of interviews, the subjects all had an ease with over 90 minutes of conversation. The author looked for signals that could reveal that subjects were frustrated or becoming bored, such as fiddling with items, looking away and reshuffling their bodies. To the extent of the author's abilities to read body language, they did not express these feelings. One can speculate that the length of the interview would be significantly shorter if the subjects were younger, less mature, and lacking in reflection skills and communication skills.

The data-collection has followed the theoretical framework and aim of the research. The subjects have shared a large body of data regarding topics of interest. It is a result of proper planning and previous work with literature, the practice of interviews and other preparations. Reflections on flow and depth of the different conversations when hearing the interviews, and later when transcribing. Subjects have used their freedom supported by the semi-structured interview and open-ended questions, but they showed a tendency to understand the questions in the same way. One subject asked for a precision of the questions more often than the two others. The interpretation of the questions was nuanced to coping on and off the pitch, inclusion and exclusion, communication to and from the club, high school, and significant others, goal setting, and advice to future players.

#### 4.1.4 Data storage and analysis

Data is stored in a password-protected harddrive in a closed location. All names are changed to pseudonyms. Analysis within qualitative research is considered to be a continuing process from start to finish, with sudden transitions between data-collection and data-analysis (Markula & Silk, 2011; Thagaard, 2013). Analysis and interpretation start with the first contact in the field (Thagaard, 2013). It is coherent regarding experiences with the interview, especially with subject body language and communication on various topics. Noting observations during the interviews aided in reflection on the content during the stage where the author listened to the audio and later in transcription to ensure a better understanding of the interview and its content.

#### 4.1.5 Transcription

Each interview was manually transcribed, including all possible repetitions, pauses in conversation and breaks in sentences to include all details in the interview. It is critical to be precise in transcription because the conversation should be as detailed as possible for further analysis (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Necessary arrangements were made to be comfortable and have energy during transcription, which can be a slow and meticulous process. It was necessary to rewind all questions in order to be sure of how to interpret the answers. No difficulties arose concerning understanding what was said.

#### 4.1.6 Coding and categorization

The continuous process of analysis has led to coding and categorization of the data material, see figure 1. The analysis can be viewed as a transparent or invisible process for the reader because the systematic analysis consists of the interpretation process (Markula & Silk, 2011). Using a transparent research process has been important in order to share the author's interpretations. The systematic analysis consisted of (1) manually coding data material, (2) using MAXQDA for software-based coding, which Thagaard (2013) notes is to mark sections of text containing concepts vital to interpreting meaning. The text was coded using an inductive approach where the interpretation of meaning was most important. Coding the text with keywords reflected the meaning of the text, e.g., *introduction*, *membership*, *challenge*, and *coping*. The backdrop for such an approach lies in the aim of researching and interpreting player experiences of playing up at the senior level. Subject meanings are adamant in this process and are possible to discern using this strategy.

Categorizing codes has an intent of gathering codes with shared properties (Thagaard, 2013). A topic-centered approach aided in the categorization. Thagaard (2013) argues that a topic-centered approach links with presentations of data with a focus on relevant research topics, e.g., *internal coping and external coping* categorizing this as coping. Categorization has aided in interpreting how subjects construct meaning concerning playing up. Thagaard (2013) argue that a topic-centered approach can become too centered on the pieces, and not the whole. *The results and the discussion will focus on presenting data on a higher level of detail, as the interpretations of the interview reveal that the players experience challenge in a broader sense in various settings such as on the pitch and in the dressing room.* Nuancing a coping process down to a sub-topic may therefore lead to a wrongful interpretation of the results.

It is essential to reflect on the sections of the text and interpret them with the reflections from the interviews. Meaning is created and is visible in a context when the only way to understand meaning is within its context (Føllesdal & Walløe, 2002). The use of a topic-centered approach can investigate the profound and nuanced experiences within playing up as a context. Playing up seems to contain many topics which are interesting and relevant to analyze with this approach. Comparing text in each topic has contributed to reflections concerning nuances in the data.

(Thagaard, 2013) notes that interpreting the data with a foundation in theory is a deductive approach in qualitative analysis. Both inductive and deductive approaches can characterize the process of analysis. Theoretical concepts adhere to meaning in the text. The advantage of theoretical analysis is that it bridges meaning in text and phenomena in other research and literature (Thagaard, 2013). The theoretic analysis created new and broader interpretations of the data. Using both inductive and deductive approaches in the analysis is that new patterns and nuances have created deeper meaning. The combination has contributed to reflection to understand the meaning. The inductive approach connects the metaphor *professional player* with the development of skill. The deductive approach connects a segment containing *professional player* as the development of *identity in skill*. It exemplifies how the analysis builds from an empiric standpoint, and the use of theoretical terms deemed relevant for analysis (Thagaard, 2013).

The analysis aims to use topics which can answer the thesis questions. The process of analysis has contributed to interpretations and reflections explained in the next chapter, compared to the hermeneutic spiral (Krogh, 2003; Markula & Silk, 2011).

The background for the project describes the football context with the use of current research and literature. The primary goal of case studies is to attain rich information on the phenomenon of the study from subjects within the context (Thagaard, 2013). Understanding subject experiences posit a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Stake, 2005). The case study design is viewed as ecological regarding the aim of the thesis and the thesis questions because understanding and insight on behavior and processes are strengths with case studies (Andersen, 2013). The thesis questions are shaping the methodological choices in the project (Markula & Silk, 2011; Thagaard, 2013), which is why the study used open-ended interviews of athletes for data-collection.

A role as a football coach as part of the described context has influenced the choice of thesis questions. A growing curiosity on what athletes' experience in a transition to senior football has impacted the choices concerning this study.



## 4.2 Scientific framework

Qualitative research involves the process of induction, which collects data which is relating to a specific area of study. The researcher establishes concepts and theories based on the data. A qualitative approach was considered more relevant to undertake this research as it allows the researcher to gain meaning in depth based on the experiences of transitional periods from the chosen subjects. The research process involves empirical work committing to collect data which can concur, refute, or contest theories which in turn allows for understanding and clarifying different observations (May, 2011). A case study is well-suited to investigate and provide an understanding of a phenomenon in depth within its real-world context. It is vital to be aware that such an understanding is likely to involve contextual conditions.

Tracy (2010) argued that to ensure high-quality qualitative research, it must be rigorous. In sport and exercise psychology, rigor is as a different marker for producing excellent research through method. When properly applied, methods are techniques which are said to provide rigor (Smith & McGannon, 2017). This study employed member checking to strengthen the trustworthiness of the interpretations of the interviews. Three often used methods to ensure rigor in qualitative research are member checking, inter-rater reliability, and universal criteria.

The foundation of scientific research explains several choices connected to how to attain empiricism in research projects. These are connected, as one choice in one level affect other choices on other levels, such as the research anchor in a scientific paradigm (Busch, 2014). Markula & Silk (2011) understand scientific paradigms as guidelines for how to design and process research based on the worldview of the paradigm. Various paradigms understand the truth in different ways, and what constitutes the given truth has been debated through history (Krogh, 2003). Thomas Kuhn considers scientific paradigms as the norm for what to research, and how to work to solve thesis questions (Chalmers, 2013). Choice of thesis questions will, therefore, link with its paradigm and its guidelines. Markula & Silk (2011) continue by stressing the importance of the worldview of the paradigm, and how researchers understand the world, evaluate knowledge, and how to generate knowledge. Assumptions regarding ontology and epistemology shape the choices of methodological significance (Markula & Silk, 2011).

The thesis rests in social science because of the thesis questions. Social science projects aim to establish knowledge regarding social reality (Johannesen, Christoffersen, & Tufte, 2016). Knowledge is in this project the experiences of athletes during a transition from

junior football to professional football, and their experiences of challenges and how they coped with them. It is related to the constructivist paradigm because the project is seeking subjective meaning and experience to answer the thesis questions (Markula & Silk, 2011). This approach links with humanism and the constructivist paradigm because one can construct knowledge through subject opinions on reality (Markula & Silk, 2011). The study will present a more in-depth knowledge in the phenomenon of playing up in a professional football context in the social world because the subjects share their view on reality in close relation with the researcher which then interpret subjects' ontological perceptions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Markula & Silk, 2011). The close relation between researcher and subject is in principle based on a subject to subject-relationship and is viewed as subjective epistemology (Johannesen et al., 2016; Thagaard, 2013). The chapter will reflect further on this relationship and especially the role of the researcher and his presumptions.

A constructivist foundation directs how to understand playing up in the athlete perspective. In the process of understanding athlete experiences with this development tool, the project will use hermeneutics as a guide within social sciences and the constructivist paradigm. Hermeneutics means the science of interpretation, by understanding what understanding is and how to attain it (Føllesdal & Walløe, 2002). The hermeneutic circle or spiral is essential in forming a base for interpretation and analytical processes in the hermeneutic perspective (Markula & Silk, 2011; Thagaard, 2013). It deals with how to influence understanding and change based on the preconceptions of the researchers, and how new understanding can grow by researching parts of the whole, which again will have impact on how to understand the whole (Føllesdal & Walløe, 2002; Krogh, 2003). The researchers' preconceptions will characterize the analysis because of his thoughts, opinions, and references concerning the phenomenon (Føllesdal & Walløe, 2002; Krogh, 2003). The framework has given this project the possibility of researching the phenomenon of playing up with a methodological approach which is supported by an interpretation of how the athlete experience was playing up.

#### 4.2.1 Case study

Ragin & Becker (1992) explains “casing” as the process which leads to a clarification of what a case represents. A case can be whatever the researcher may define it as, which means that the organizational settings chosen by the researcher to explore research questions can be varied, to systematically evaluate and compare the findings. A case study becomes an opportunity to investigate and attain knowledge about how a case is specific to and

representative of a larger phenomenon (Andersen, 2013). A case study can be the preferred research strategy when asking (1) the how and the why-questions, when the researcher has little control over events, and (3) when the focus is a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context (Yin, 1989). Its strength lies in the understanding and explanation of actions and processes.

The case study design is appropriate to answer descriptive or explanatory questions in research projects with the aim of researching complex social phenomenon (Yin, 2017). The transitional experiences of the subjects can be discussed and compared to other male or female elite level U19 football players and their given experiences.

Yin (1989) defines a case study as an empirical study (1) investigating a contemporary phenomenon (2) within its real-life context; (3) when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not evident, and (4) in which use multiple sources of evidence. The first point applies to simultaneity, where a case is strictly limited to historical studies. Only participatory observation or follow-up research satisfy this demand. A limitation of case studies as such is then too narrow regarding both methodological and practical considerations. Most case studies base on reconstructions of events which is relatively close in time. The deciding factors are access to a multitude of rich data about the given phenomenon and the context surrounding it. The second point adheres to the study of a phenomenon, and how it ties to the higher-level context.

The case study branch of qualitative research will shed light on the thesis questions. Social sciences separate quantitative and qualitative methods based on the purpose of the research (Johannesen et al., 2016). Qualitative research is a sound direction when the study is descriptive and carries much information on a phenomenon or a topic (Markula & Silk, 2011; Thagaard, 2013). Another purpose could be to research several athletes playing up transitioning successfully to the professional level, which would place within quantitative research design. A quantitative approach has its use when the purpose is to collect massive amounts of data for statistical analysis (Thagaard, 2013). Insight and understanding are two characteristics of the qualitative approach (Thagaard, 2013).

Differences exist in the literature concerning how the link between phenomenon and context is to be understood. Yin (1989) argues that the context is a rich and diverse empirical frame which constitutes and interacts with the exploration of a phenomenon. Demarcation is a part of the research process. King, Keohane, & Verba (1994) argues that the identification of analytical dimensions or main variables is foundational to frame the research process. These differences tell us something about the aim of a case study: To orient towards establishing

different explanations, or if they wish; to adhere to or develop theory. These differences in perceptions are closely related to Yin's third criteria, which revolves around the claim that a case study explores a phenomenon that cannot separate from its context. In real life, nothing can separate from context. All description and explanation must make some demarcation of which sides about the context deemed relevant and vital for the analysis. Good foreknowledge makes it possible to draw a line between phenomenon and context. That is the starting point for several types of methods, whether the purpose is to describe, explain, or develop theory. Conceptualization and theory-building represent a form of decontextualization, where the characteristics of a phenomenon or process are defined independently of the specific context as validity links to a particular type of context. The fourth criteria revolve around the use of several sources of data. This criterion is much agreed upon, where a case study not only uses data triangulation but several and different sources of data. Because of this, validity in interpretations and explanations becomes one of the stronger advocates for case studies. Interesting topics of discussion is what constitutes enough data sources, which again links to the question about how to establish data. Almost everyone who utilizes case studies is phenomenologists in some fashion. The participants' experience and subjective reality are necessary to map out for understanding and explanation. Such a perspective deems that data is not something one collects, but a result of social construction where also the researcher and his assumptions and prerequisites play a vital role in the result (Andersen, 2013).

Current research has identified exciting avenues of research regarding the topic of playing up from the athlete perspective. It has resulted in the methodological choices in this study based on Thagaard (2013), who argues that the qualitative approach is advantageous when research is sparse on the topic. The consequence of a qualitative approach is that its findings cannot be generalized in a statistical sense (Laake, Olsen, & Benestad, 2008). The study lacks the possibility for analyzing developmental characteristics and changes over time due to the characteristics of a qualitative study and the timeline of data-collection. Subjects have reflected over their process over time, exemplified by retrospective questions including *change*, *affect*, *development*, and *over time* to mediate this. The result of this approach is a gain of insight into how playing up has changed the players as persons over time. Another weakness of this study is that collection of data stems from a one-time interview. Reading back findings and asking for confirmation on the interpretations has mediated this.

Experiences and assumptions will give a personal insight into the athletes and the interpretation of the context, which can be positive when the aim is to gain further knowledge about subject experiences. A challenge with a personal role within the context is that life-

experiences and assumptions may color the interpretations, and it is essential to be aware of this when analyzing the data. On the positive side, having a relationship with the context and the athletes can yield new answers and a deeper insight during interviews.

#### 4.2.2 Qualitative interview

The interview questions had the aim of supporting dialogue rather than questions and answers. A role as an active individual within the context can influence a stronger sense of safety and trust between the interviewer and the subjects. Self-reflection on how the author view and understand the subjects and the context they are playing in is a way of understanding the big picture and how the subjects play within it. Kvale & Brinkman (2015) notes the importance of gaining the meaning of personal experience in an interview and understanding their experiences of a situation. Semi-structured interviews have the intent of gaining insight into the phenomenon. Markula & Silk (2011) argues that semi-structured interviews are one of the most used interview techniques where the researcher can gain a vibrant picture of the phenomenon. Observation is another technique for data collection, which means to study the phenomenon through the interpretation of subject behaviors and language (Thagaard, 2013). An in-depth interview was more ecological in interpreting how playing up is organized and experienced. Another argument for the ecological impact of the study is that athlete experiences in their perspective can reveal deeper meaning, which is unusual for any coach reading this study, compared to observations which any coach can do at any time in their work. These considerations have led to the qualitative interview as a chosen technique for data collection.

#### 4.2.3 Considerations regarding research credibility

Evaluating the quality of qualitative research differ from quantitative research (Markula & Silk, 2011). The following paragraph will discuss and reflect on important aspects with the thesis to present an evaluation for the reader, such as reliability, validity, and transferability Thagaard, 2013). Credibility is an essential aspect of research involving subject to subject-relationships (Markula & Silk, 2011; Thagaard, 2013). It is important to note that the chapter on research method exists to show that the research is transparent regarding different considerations to make the project credible. Reflecting on the subject to subject-relationship is a characteristic of the research based on the theoretic framework, which makes it essential to reflect on the role of a researcher and the contextual knowledge.

#### 4.2.4 The role of the researcher and contextual knowledge

The close relationship between researcher and subject is a subject-to-subject relationship and is vital to reflect on to create transparency (Johannesen et al., 2016; Markula & Silk, 2011; Thagaard, 2013). Transparency in qualitative research strengthens the credibility of how the study answers the thesis questions (Markula & Silk, 2011; Thagaard, 2013). Being open about the author's relation to the context as an active coach is essential, as one's insights and preconceptions are crucial for the evaluation of the process of interpretation. It is also important to reflect on the proximity to the subjects during data-collection.

A hermeneutic approach to how to understand data will be affected by one's thoughts, meanings, and references regarding the phenomenon (Føllesdal & Walløe, 2002; Krogh, 2003). Context-specific knowledge of football can lead to a fleeting connection between data collection and analysis. Earlier experiences and references can have supported presumptions regarding what the project wanted to examine, which supported the framing of the interview guide. It is an example of a continuous and natural process of interpretation in qualitative research (Thagaard, 2013).

A connection to the context of the club as an employee exist but materialized after the collection of data. The contextual knowledge can be of benefit in interpreting what the subjects say, as we share a relation on a personal level, having worked together in a high school setting. The author has grown up with a keen interest in football, and have worked as a football coach for the past six seasons. Therefore, a shared bond exists with how subjects answer and reflect within the context.

Sharing a personal bond can have a profound impact on the interpretation of data with its advantages and disadvantages. On the plus side, having a basis for understanding the subjects and interpreting what the subjects mean can create a deeper and more clear understanding of the subjects' experiences — being aware of how relationships affect interpretations. If not, biases can lead to a wrongful interpretation that is not reflective of what the subjects mean. To combat this, after transcribing the data, the quotes was modified and then read back to the subjects with the interpretation of what was said, and how the author interpreted the subjects when they said it. In retrospect, small modifications would be made regarding the wording of some questions to aid the subject on main topics without using probes. Thagaard (2013) argue that the context experiences of the researcher can create a foundation where the interpretation and its meaning develop in relation to the researcher's own experience. It is also important to note that unknown topics can go under the radar. A

conscious effort is made to use open-ended questions, listening intently, and probed on subject experiences to mediate this.

The researcher's own experiences of player development, coping with challenge, and football transitions are related to the roles as a coach and as a student. An active career in basketball, where playing up with the seniors as a youth, resulted in a common bond with the subjects. Coaching football players playing up in a team, and the experience of having players transition to the senior level in previous clubs have made an impact on the author's world view. The experiences of playing up have been positive as an athlete and as a coach, and this can affect how to view the player development tool overall. Based on the positive experiences, it is necessary to be aware of one's own biases regarding playing up and be aware of its implications. For example, negative experiences can be interpreted as less harmful compared to the subjects. Reading the interpretations back to the subjects and making a note of its correctness will mediate this.

Markula & Silk (2011) question how neutral a qualitative researcher can be in close relation to the subjects. A higher level of play and economic implications exist in the senior level, and it is likely to assume that junior players must hold a higher standard in a top club senior team compared to a lower-level senior team.

Reflections as a coach on the view on playing up as a tool for player development has yielded several experiences which may color the interpretation of the analysis. Playing up is necessary for the player and for the club. In experience, more players have not made the step compare to those that successfully transition. As a student, the literature on player development and chances of making the first team have revealed the cynicism in elite football considering the actual chance of a junior making it to the first team. Using open-ended questions without implying any bias or subjective thoughts have mediated this.

The topic of playing up has been a topic in several coaching courses and academic classes. Discussing which players who deserve playing up are a weekly activity, and watching their practices with the senior team and their games.

This personal account of the author's experiences, biases, and assumptions regarding playing up with seniors is an attempt at being transparent and honest with the existing world view within the context of football development. Both failed and successful attempts with playing up are experienced, and players making the transition to the professional level. Markula & Silk (2011) notes that knowledge and experience in the field of study not necessarily are negative if the researcher is open about his assumptions and biases and how they influence the research process. Gadamer continues by claiming that humans are not

trapped in one scope of understanding and that our understanding is always growing (Krogh, 2003). Self-awareness and reflection on self-thoughts and behavior have been a staple through the research process. By conducting all the interviews, subject behaviors, interpretations, and contexts have been considered "with the same glasses." The interview process will never be neutral because the researcher carries his scope of the world.

#### 4.2.5 Reliability

Thagaard (2013) argue that reliability links to a critical evaluation of how to conduct research and if the research is trustworthy. Based on the research process, reliability will deviate from quantitative methods which emphasize being able to replicate the study. A qualitative design stand on the subject-to-subject relation, which means that the trustworthiness rates reliability in the process in which the researcher conducts the research and argues for the methodological foundation.

Transparency regarding considerations and choices upholds a trustworthy research process. Transparency in qualitative research is an explicit description of the research strategy and analytical methods, which opens the possibility of evaluating the process (Thagaard, 2013). The considerations in this study are therefore thoroughly explained and argued for, with relevant examples used where deemed necessary. Research descriptions have concerned documentation and reflection of events that have been relevant in the research process.

The written presentation of results and subsequent discussion has impacted the trustworthiness of the research by how the reader can separate primary data and the assumptions of the researcher (Thagaard, 2013). The chapter on results and discussion will combine primary data, interpretations, and discussion based on the context and theoretical terms, and it can be challenging to assess interpretations in the analysis. It has been necessary to be conscious regarding the structure of the text. Quotes will reveal primary data, followed by interpretations made. Thagaard (2013) critiques a topic-centered approach to analysis because the analysis can lose its focus on the whole perspective. Choosing text in bits and comparing subjects is something to question regarding the trustworthiness in how the categorization maintains the whole perspective. Being conscious about where segmented quotes stem from combined with the added interpretations presents the meaning of the whole segment to mediate this. Considering the alternative of using quotes which do not concur with the topic based on the segment of text is less trustworthy to the reader and the subject. The research supervisor has shared input on all chapters and considered the quotes and text. The next chapter will present the reflections regarding the validity of interpretations.



#### 4.2.6 Validity

The previous chapter presented an evaluation of interpretations in the analysis, which is the internal validity of the research. Thagaard (2013) notes that validity concerns the validity of the interpretations the researcher has presented. Presenting the chapter on method is written with a self-reflective voice with the aim of strengthening the transparency of the research project. Transparency is considered by Markula & Silk (2011) and Thagaard (2013) to strengthen research validity. The chapter on research method has been presented in an open way, where the reader can be critical of the considerations made by me, which can strengthen the evaluation of the interpretations in this study. Precise transcription can affect the validity of interpretations because the transcription is a part of the basis for interpretation (Markula & Silk, 2011). Discussing the biases regarding playing up is a strengthens the trustworthiness, which also is considered to strengthen validity because the reader gains insight in the reflections regarding the subject-to-subject relationship in this project (Thagaard, 2013). The organization of the project supports criticizing research findings presented in the study. Critical questions can in example be if assumptions regarding the interpretation are based on data or of bias. Considerations have been presented and can strengthen the validity of the project (Markula & Silk, 2011).

The chapter on method describes the experiences regarding the project, the relation to the subjects and the relation to the context. It is imperative to evaluate the basis of research findings (Thagaard, 2013). Descriptions and reflections regarding proximity to the research process are strengthening the validity of this study. However, it is important to note that the experience with being a researcher and conducting trustworthy research is limited, as this is the first try on writing a thesis paper of this magnitude.

The conscious choice of writing down the reflections from each interview and using these reflections in retrospect can strengthen validness in interpretations and research findings presented in this thesis. The contextual knowledge of the club and personal knowledge of the subjects can give a broader understanding of the context which the subjects are partaking in, and how the subjects experience events within the context. It is possible that the experience with the project and its related context and subjects have strengthened the validity of the interpretations because these experiences have contributed to understanding the situation of the subjects, and how the context works. Føllesdal & Walløe (2002) notes that one must understand meaning based on the context, and understanding meaning in the context from which it stems. Thagaard (2013) continues by arguing that interpretations presented in the thesis must be valid concerning the researched reality.

Markula & Silk (2011) and Thagaard (2013) notes that transferability considers the external validity of research and links with how interpretation in one thesis can be valid in other contexts. Thagaard (2013) continues by noting how transferability can link with recognition.

The interpretations in this study can be valid in different contexts, especially when comparing with other top clubs in Norway and possibly other talent development cultures in the lower levels. The argument for transferability can be relevant when considering recognition of its results. Interpretations which appear can characterize other player development cultures within the context of football based on the composition of topics. Relevant literature shows that playing up is a well-known tool in Norwegian player development, and it is possible to assume that other players can recognize some of the similarities in this study compared to their own experiences. To generalize to other clubs; playing up includes playing on a higher level of skill and a change in environment. The nuances appear in how the players experience playing up, which this thesis will discuss. Therefore, the study will not be representative of experiencing playing in all clubs in Norway, but clubs using playing up as a developmental tool can relate to the findings within this study based on recognition.

Another argument for transferability by Thagaard (2013) is the theoretic analysis which this study has used. Linking theoretical terms to data and interpretations can bridge the study and recent research and literature. It is possible to assume a particular link to different contexts where players experience the same topics because social phenomena tend to touch upon various social contexts. Transitions have been researched in various contexts, from the academic context, in music, and sports development. Coping can relate to different settings in life because individuals meet similar challenges and stress every day, independent of context. Some interpretations in this study can transfer to other settings because the interpretations can be a logical line of reasoning.

#### 4.3 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations regarding research are essential to evaluate if the thesis conducts justifiable and fair research. The following section will describe how the project has taken research ethics into account and share reflections regarding ethical conditions in the research process. The National Committee for Research Ethics (NESH) has defined what proper and fair research is, and this thesis places within its ethical guidelines. NESH (2016)

clarifies the importance of careful ethical conduct regarding individuals and the community. Ethical dilemmas can arise, which again can have consequences for the subjects (Thagaard, 2013). This project has aspired to conduct a fair and justified research process.

Relevant approvals (see appendix 1) by the research supervisor and the Norwegian Center of Research Data AS (NSD) approved the justifiability of the project concerning the protection of privacy. The project was planned in the summer of 2018. Because of a demanding schedule including two jobs, work started early with an outline of theory, method, and reflections regarding the results and the discussion of this thesis. The necessary approvals from NSD did take more time than accounted for but did only minorly affect the research schedule. It can be tempting to choose subjects, adapt interview guides, and produce research regarding a timetable. It can lead to the researcher working in the grey zones of ethical standards. NESH (2016) is unequivocal in its attitude on how research projects containing personal information cannot start before necessary approvals by ethical committees and other relevant parties.

The ethical guidelines proposed by NESH (2016) accompany the research process. The chapter on *regards towards individuals* contains several ethical aspects of qualitative research. Respect towards club and subjects is critical in the research process. A foundation built on respect will aid when interviewing subjects who take time off their day to contribute to this research. The first block in this foundation was the shaping of the informational letter (appendix 2) received by the club and then by the subjects. They conveyed transparent information regarding the research project and its implications. The researcher communicated that partaking in this study was entirely voluntary and independent of their status within the club, and the relationship already shared with the subjects. NESH (2016) notes that voluntary participation is essential in research. Reflection based on independence from club status and said relationship demanded to attempt to see participation in the eyes of the subjects. A player can feel obliged to participate due to the possibility of showing disinterest towards the club. The club was not involved in any way further than the written intent of research.

Regarding the personal relationship I share with the subjects, I concluded that they could feel obliged to join due to how I have tried to help them in their developmental process in a high school context, and with one player in a different club three years prior. Participation was voluntary, and their interest was sparked by explaining the possible insights the research could produce which again could lead to a better understanding of the transition from the junior to the senior stage. An ethical reflection was that the subjects seemed at ease and opened during the three interviews. All subjects shared difficult experiences, and a sense of

trust existed. All three subjects noted that they found the experience to be challenging and continued by sharing the potential of a better transition for players in the future.

One can speculate that the subject answers would not be as open as they were if this relationship did not exist. NESH (2016) describes that voluntary participation is only true without any external pressure or limitations of personal freedom of choice. Highlighting freedom from individuals in the club context who could have opinions regarding the subjects' choice of participation mediated this.

Before the interviews, maintaining confidentiality towards the subjects was in consideration. Confidentiality can link to trustworthiness and veracity towards the participants. The researcher inquired if the subjects had understood the information, whether they had any questions, and asked for comments. They received a spoken reminder regarding the possibility to withdraw from the study, and that they had the option to withdraw from the study at any time during and after the interview without consequences — with a control for the informed consent according to NESH guidelines. Explaining the role of a researcher and the ethical responsibilities regarding confidentiality concluded the information the subjects received before the interview. Information is not shared with any individuals or parties outside of the study; their statements are unrecognizable. A possible dilemma could be that coaches or other interested parties could inquire about the contents of the interviews, especially regarding what the athletes experienced in their day-to-day work in the club. A hierarchy of power exists in the club-coach-athlete relationship, and upholding the integrity of the subjects and the experiences they chose to share is crucial. NESH (2016) describe that sharing information cannot identify the subject. No possible dilemmas arose during the data-collection process, but if that happened, the researcher would have reflected on who would be most important to be loyal and trustworthy too.

The matter of confidentiality is also important to maintain during the production of this thesis. Subjects received examples of the use of quotes. Pseudonyms are generated during the transcription and analysis based on the matter of recognizability. Thagaard (2013) argues that meaning and recognition can be a strain between maintaining confidentiality and the validity of the research. A potential dilemma can arise regarding how much the researcher needs to change to maintain confidentiality and the potential of losing meaning in the results. This thesis has not faced any ethical dilemmas regarding recognizability and confidentiality when reflecting on the interviews and their contents. Discerning the identity of the subjects can be possible seeing that all subjects are from the same club, but steps are taken to ensure that neither club, area, or high school setting is recognizable. The shared experiences of the

players are not possible to recognize, as the challenges, the coping processes, and subject meanings are not detailed and confined within a set time and space.

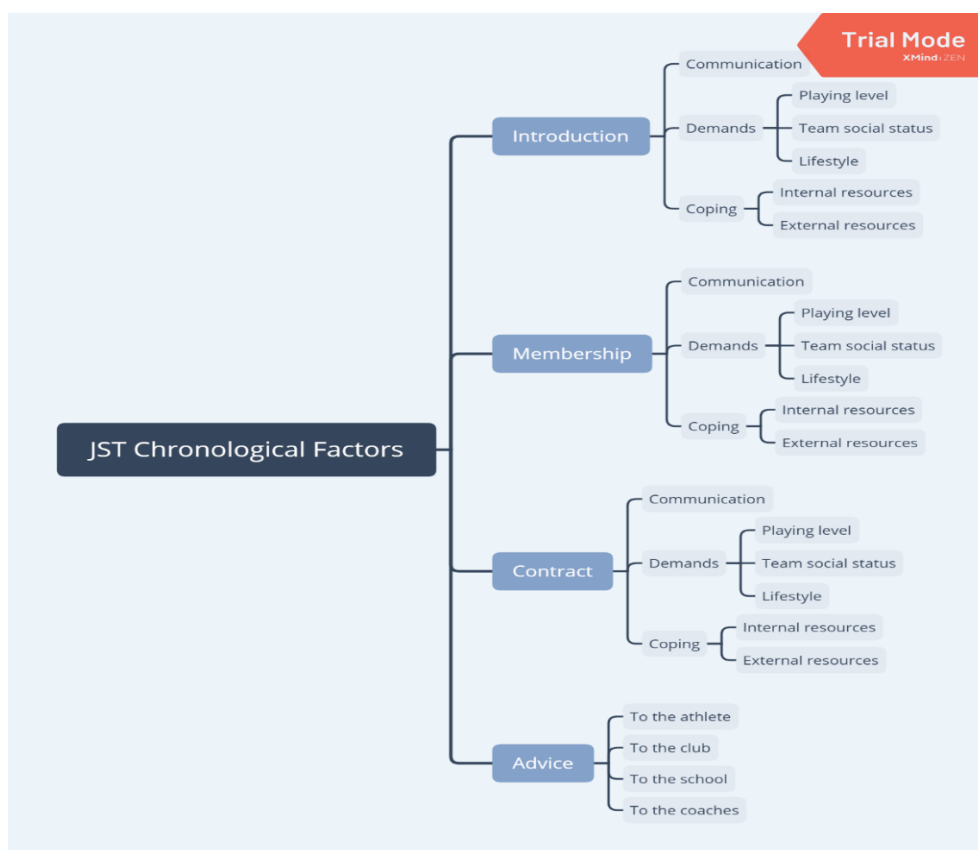
Possible dilemmas regarding the thesis were confirmed by the research supervisor, where he considered the possible utility of the findings. Important considerations were the possibility of subjects revisiting old and challenging experiences, which could affect them in the present. Another consideration was that the subjects could reveal information that would be prudent to share with members of the club or even with professionals within psychology. Other possibilities were that the research would reveal further insight in how playing up presents challenge, how athletes can employ coping skills to overcome a challenge, which can aid in creating a better structure surrounding the junior to senior transition. These opposites explain some of the considerations I have made at the start of the project, and how the researcher must consider both positive and negative experiences. As a finishing point, the subjects received contact information if any questions would arise.

This chapter has presented the considerations which have shaped the framework for the research method used in this study. Considerations on the role as researcher, the interpretations and personal scope of the researcher, and relevant ethical considerations are proceeded to maintain a just research process.

## 5.0 Results and discussion

Understanding how players experience the transition serves as a foundation for discussion in this chapter. The topic links to the thesis question and builds on the subjects' experiences of environmental demands of a phase in the theoretical framework of Stambulova (1997, 2003). The quotes are presented chronologically because the interpretations are rich. Stripping the meaning of a quote into sub-categories can lead to an interpretation which is not complete.

The players experienced three stages in their junior-to-senior transition. The first stage introduces the player to the senior team. The second stage is when the player becomes a member of the group, and the third stage is when they receive a professional contract. The stages are associated with several challenges in the literature of Stambulova (2014). Transitions typically come with a set of specific demands related to several facets of first-team play. The athlete must cope with changes in practice, competitions, communication, and lifestyle to successfully adjust to the transition (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). These changes are evident on the pitch, in the dressing room, in team activities, and away from the club, as exemplified in *figure 1 – Analysis of the Chronological Factors of the Junior-To-Senior Transition*.



## 5.1 Transition

### 5.1.1 Introduction to the senior team

The subjects experienced playing up as an exciting, surreal, and surprising event. In the introduction phase, the players reported several critical areas of challenge such as communication in the transition, new demands on and off the pitch, and several examples of coping. The players interpret the first phase of playing up as a stage where they must adjust to a higher level of play and new social interactions. Playing up is a shift of developmental environment, and the players described new experiences with a heightened skill-level, useful mental processes, and interacting with adults. Demands relating to these impulses are most prominent.

The players in this study noted surprise regarding the first communication in the transition: (P2) "I received a message late, fucking shit. I thought *what the hell?* I was about to eat, and I received it at 8:30 pm, so I went directly home and went to bed." Player 3 shared this experience:

It came as a surprise (...) The week after I had three good sessions, and I got an SMS during class. Completely random (...) The coach said I should come to practice tomorrow. It came out of the blue because I had been on the bench on the reserve team the week before. I did not believe it at that point (P3).

Communication is key in junior-to-senior transition, and the work of Stambulova & Wylleman (2014) shows that communication is a factor in both external resources for coping e.g., significant others or coaches, and internal coping e.g., seeking advice or professional help. A lack of communication may be a source of stress for the athlete. It can be in the form of surprising or hurried, or it can be lacking altogether.

Both players got less than 24 hours of notice before the practice, and they were both taken by surprise. It was their first call-up to the senior team, and in the perspective of the athlete, that may be a source of stress. If the message is received late at night, sleep may be disturbed. Another point to discuss is how the club chooses to communicate with the players affect how the players interpret the professionalism of the club and its coaches. If done correctly, one may assume that the athlete would be notified a week prior, as playing up with the senior team is an essential step in the athlete career.

Introducing a player to a senior team may present higher challenges in the player perspective, which links to the reasoning of NFF (2018) and the literature of Stambulova & Wylleman (2014) relating to demands and what a player may experience. Reaching the goal of playing up with a senior team may be of significant value to the athlete, and therefore spark many thoughts and emotions. Using external resources for coping with the surprise of a call-up to the senior team can be to communicate with significant others or coaches (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2014). The literature and the experiences of the players' links with findings for heightened challenges in player development. The players use *nervous* and *fun*, which in Collins et al. (2016a) can be interpreted as meeting adversity as a possibility for a positive growth experience. Player 3 also notes that he received outside help from his coach in coping with his nervousness.

The three players noted that they communicated with parents, girlfriends, and sports school coaches: (P1) "I told the family right away. I didn't tell my friends, but I made my debut the following weekend, and they immediately got to know of that." Player 2 shared: (P2) "I called my mom and dad first, and then my girlfriend. My parents were in shock, and it was awesome. They advised me to enjoy it and not overthink anything." Player 3 received a call-up during class:

I showed the SMS to my friend, and he was surprised. He congratulated me and probably thought it was cool, but I noticed that he also wanted to get a message like that. We sat in the back of the classroom and talked about it. My coach at school called me in the morning and told me of all my strengths. He probably thought I was nervous, so he told me what I was good at. "Just do this and that, and you'll do fine." It made me feel confident (P3).

The three players reached out to different sources of external help. Player 1 is interpreted as an independent and headstrong individual who expresses that a successful transition is his responsibility. Player 2 sought advice from parents and mediated the stress by preparing to enjoy himself compared to preparing to perform. Player 3 sought advice from his coach at school, which is interesting, as coaches at the club may know more of the situation and the demands. All three players enrolled at the same sports school for three years, and the bond they create with their coaches can be strong. Another aspect of this is that the school



coaches are not in a position of power in the club, which can create a feeling of safety for the players.

The players describe the introduction on the pitch in this way: (P1) "I looked around and saw everyone. It was strange. *I can't be here*, I thought. I was nervous, but it was fine. It was surreal." Player 2 had a different reaction: (P2) "It was very fun. It was cool to get the possibility to play on a level which I had never played on." Player 3 received a helping hand from the coach: (P3) "The coach told me to bring my shoulders down and try to have fun, even though he understood that I was nervous. It gave me a boost; I thought that it wouldn't be a catastrophe if it went bad."

The senior players and coaches contribute to a standard of what is judged as successful within the team. These quotes substantiate the gap in the level of football the junior players' experience. The perceived demands of effort, attention to detail, focus, and football skills may understand the contextual demands through the language and reactions of senior players and coaches, including behavior, attitudes, and feedback.

Player 1 shared: (P1) "The captain mouthed off at me. During the warm-ups and the passing drills. If I hit a soft pass, I got an earful right away." Demands are upheld, as two of the players (P2 and P3) share:

Senior players have given me an earful when I've made mistakes. Many times. I think you learn from that as well (...) If you get 'hit in the face' and manage to carry on, I think you earn respect, and that you learn something about yourself (P2).

The head coach was very good at it. He demanded effort (...) If you hit a bad pass the senior players yelled: come on, sort it out! (...) The established seniors won't dress you down, but they show you where the standard is. You must meet these standards. If not, playing up will be a one-time thing (P3).

The players must cope with these set of demands and transitioning the introduction to the senior team is a matter of survival:

It is boring to say, but it was the physical aspect of football. I was 20 kilos lighter than everyone else, so I was gone if anyone made contact with me (...) It was the physical aspect and the tactical aspect (...) I needed a lot of tactical training (P2).

The quote highlight challenges on the pitch. The level of football with its physical and tactical demands is consistent in showing the players what they must adapt to to successfully transition. The references of a higher tempo are highlighted in the quotes and may aid player development in the development context. The gap in skill may be natural, as the junior players are facing elite-level senior players.

High-performance cultures in professional football have by Roderick (2006) been described as authoritarian, ruthless, and hyper-masculine. Eubank, Nesti, & Cruickshank (2014) add that the culture is conservative and closed and that it is resistant to change and of outsiders. Young players may face individualistic attitudes, aggressive masculine identities, abusive language, ruthless rivalry, and ferocious humor and ridicule as facets in the daily work (Røynesdal et al., 2018).

Members of the senior team may react differently to new members in the introduction to a senior team. While some members may be intrigued or interested in the new members, others may view juniors as a potential threat to their position or status. A top club will consist of professional members who make their living on playing football. Therefore, new members may threaten their livelihood in time.

Some of the players were including and talked with me. Trond Ellingsen especially. He talked to me all the time and was nice. Others were arrogant, and that makes you want to take it easy, stay grounded. I tried to keep calm; I did not want to do anything. I did not talk in the dressing room; I just sat there (P1).

Some of the players I knew from school, so that was okay. Others were "who the hell is this junior?" It is what it is. I didn't expect them to cuddle with me. It was not the first practices that were the worst. The players were nicer. It got worse over time (P2).

I was nervous because I was accustomed to the junior dressing room (...) I think joining the junior dressing room was worse than joining the seniors. They have routine, and they seemed surprised that I introduced myself to all the players (...) I felt welcome. They have been through the same, so they know how it is to join the seniors as a young boy. I got a sense of safety from them, asking me questions, and talking with me before practice (P3).

The players also experience how they are under scrutiny by players and coaches which the players link with social status:

One exercise was particularly challenging. Two strikers facing two centre-backs with the rest of the team watching (...) It was challenging to get ball after ball and try to make a play. You know you must make it. Everyone watches (P1).

Coping with an intensified speed of play, with more substantial technical and tactical demands is vital in the transition to senior team play (Røynesdal et al., 2018). The level of play a footballer presents on the pitch may influence how senior members perceive your social standing, and it is, therefore, important to quickly understand, adjust, and excel on the pitch. Understanding the phenomenon of playing up links with how players perceive the level of football in the senior team and how the level is a significant impulse, including which demands the senior team have with tempo, ball-handling skills, physical skills, tactical understanding, and presence. The players shared: (P1) "It was a high level. The pressure is always on. If I was not on in any of the exercises, everyone was on me. It was not just the players, but the coaches too." Player 2 continued: (P2) "Everything went faster. The players are better on the ball, and it was more difficult to stop players. If you were not 100%, you would be dribbled every time. I had never experienced anything like it." Player 3 noted the physical toll on playing up: (P3) "First off, they were better trained. I was so tired. And when I was tired it was hard to play right with and without the ball, because I was just there. I was too tired to do anything."

The quotes reveal how the subjects assess a demanding environment relating to football skills on the pitch, where both senior players and coaches set a competitive tone. The interpretation of environmental demands such as football skills has contributed to a more in-

depth insight in how subjects experience playing up, and how the phenomenon matches the object of preparing juniors for senior play, placing players outside of their respective comfort zones. Collins et al. (2016a) claim that playing up can be a skills-based approach to optimize challenges in player development environments. Football skill and physical demands are what the players experienced as the most common factors on the pitch. The subjects note that the physical load is higher because of higher intensity and demands in running. Fatigue can be explained with a faster tempo of play and higher physical demands.

The players highlight a need to show their skill set: (P1) "You must show your good sides. You can build your confidence on it, even if you are invisible during the session. Showing a spark can mean that you belong, that you have a voice." Player 2 and 3 continued:

I played with a fuck it-attitude. I just played. I was a junior, and I thought *I don't give a shit, I'll play football*. In some practices, I was good. Other practices I was bad. I was gone. There was no stability (...) I felt I could display my skills. I felt safe with that mindset (P2).

I was accustomed to changing positions. I knew that I had to be humble when joining the senior team and to make the best out of the situation. When I practiced at the right back, I wanted to do things easy and not screw up even if it was a new position (P3).

The quotes reveal that the players have different mindsets in their practices. Player 1 had a focus of showing his skills, however temporarily. He built confidence in playing football by showing sparks of his skillset, rather than trying to hang on. Player 2 had no fear of playing and wanted to show his skills rather than being afraid of showing his weaknesses. Player 3 has a safe approach to playing up. He did not practice in his preferred position in the introduction to the senior team. The competitive element in the senior team environment seems to be encouraged, and therefore, player 3 played safe to maintain his status and cope with the higher level of play.

A comparable study by Røynesdal et al., (2018) reveals that showing any weakness is not perceived very well in this environment. How players should show their skills may be discussed based on their comments. A player given the chance of playing up can be adamant in showing his skills and disregard the possibility of making mistakes. Another possibility is

to play the easy passes, which may lead to a player not showing any particular weaknesses but risking not to have any x-factor a coach needs in a senior team. Understanding which way is appropriate may relate to the skillset of the individual player, and mental skills such as grit, motivation, and self-confidence. The degree of ability to cope with challenges may also influence how a junior player chooses to act and show his abilities, as player 1 shares: (P1) "You have to be gritty. You need to talk about wanting to make mistakes, that you try again, that you shake it off." Player 2 utilized goal-setting:

I had clear goals (...) I managed to always work towards something, and it kept me grounded. I never left the ground. Some days and practices I felt it was awesome, and that I was good, but I never lost that work-ethic. I trained twice a day anyway (P2).

These quotes highlight mental processes which the players deem necessary to cope with the perceived stress of the transitional demands successfully. Morris et al. (2016) also note motivation as an essential factor in an English academy setting. Players are internally motivated to do good in the transition to move up; influenced by their love of improving in football. Acting on this internal motivation to improve is seen in a dedicated work-ethic and wanting to make the best out of the situation. For example, player 1 commented:

I wanted to get better. I watched clips on YouTube, but that didn't help me much. I spoke with Tobias because he was my coach at school. He helped a lot with finishing. I practiced with him through the first and second year. I worked (P1).

Player 2 continues: You start to think about everything you will do better, everything you will do good tomorrow. It's that attitude. You want to practice; you want to get better (P2).

In the introduction to the senior team, the players share different experiences. Player 1 and 2 experienced that some of the senior members were intrigued and including, while others were intimidating and excluding. Player 1 copes by avoiding the spotlight. One can argue that this is an internal coping mechanism (Stambulova, 2003) as the player actively stays grounded and quiet to avoid becoming the focus of attention. He is also interpreted as a quiet type, who is comfortable to sit alone and not add much in social contexts. Player 2 did not

expect the seniors to be welcoming and notes that they were more easygoing at the introduction and that they became more excluding over time. Player 3 noted that joining the junior dressing room was worse and had a positive experience with joining the senior dressing room. Player 3 argues that the seniors have routine and that he experiences that the seniors are including because they have experienced the transition themselves.

How senior players mentor young players are is noteworthy. The players had different experiences of senior player mentoring during the introduction, and it became more prevalent in the member-stage of the transition. All three players mention a senior team member named Oskar as welcoming to them. Having an anchor in a senior dressing room can give a sense of safety and belonging for a youth player, a haven in the storm of competitiveness. Player 2 comments: (P2) "Oskar, the goalkeeper. He always said hi to everyone in the dressing room. When he introduced himself to me, he asked if I was U14 and what I was doing there. He welcomed me in a good way."

Interestingly, player 3 also mentioned Oskar: (P3) "I remember Oskar, the goalkeeper. He talked to me. He seemed very interested, asking about why I had switched position." One player also notes that the sports director value social adaption as a key component of transitioning to the senior team (Røynesdal et al., 2018): (P3) "The sports director has these blocks for a senior team member, and one of them is how you socially fit in with the team."

Making necessary adjustments outside of football is by Stambulova & Wylleman (2014) important, with studies and social aspects proving the most demanding. Possible stressors may be the motivation to transition successfully, to meet the expectations of significant others, and the uncertainty about success in coping. Social support plays a vital role in the transition. In the introduction to the senior team, players commented this:

You need to be serious. Sleep well, good nutrition. Pretty simple things. I've been good at relaxing (...) And I have cut things that could have had a bad influence. Or, I haven't cut things, but I've had friends who you can have bad associations with (...) It is clear that you cut down on that. Try to avoid attention (P1).

The most important was school, and it was very hard. It was probably the most difficult (...) I lagged behind, and I wasn't attending. I had training camps, national camps, and I could be away for almost a month at a time (P2).

You need to be serious. Not only serious on the pitch (...) You need to think that you are a footballer, and that places certain demands on me when I am not at the stadium (...) My friends at home who are not footballers party and drink. You need to be able to not bury oneself even if you don't join that or to join and go home in appropriate time so that you can practice the following day (P3).

Olympiatoppen (2013) suggests that athletes should be a holistic athlete; the 24-hour athlete. Their goal is to create acceptance, understanding, and consequences for the holistic development of elite athletes, which includes sports combined with education, military service, work, and social life with family and friends. The three athletes substantiate this life by exemplifying various transitional challenges which they must cope with. While playing up for a contract, player 1 and 3 mentions proper sleep and rest outside of football. This includes nutrition. They also mention that they have distanced themselves from friends who lead other lives where alcohol and late-night gaming play a significant role. To actively prioritize one's own sports life may have implications on the life outside of sports. Distancing or limiting one's presence with childhood friends may be difficult because a gap might exist in how your friends accept your prioritizations. Maturing into early adulthood also includes social life, where parties, romance, or a lack thereof may create additional stress.

Player 2 also mention education as an outside of sports-barrier. Being able to cope with increasing academic demands while conducting the life of an elite athlete can be demanding, mainly if it includes travelling and competing in other cities or countries. Athlete 2 differs from 1 and 3 as athlete 2 played national team football, and had a higher load in travelling and competing abroad. All players attended a school which has an aim of bridging the academic and sports life for talented young athletes. Ironically, the better you are at football may shrink the allotted time for academics, which is a difficult task to master for both player and student and his respected school staff. Christensen & Sørensen (2009) found that Danish players accept that school is important while also embarking on a semi-professional pathway in football, which is challenging as they are trying to develop and do good on both arenas.

Players experienced several barriers in the introduction to the senior team. Communication from the senior team was sporadic, and often the evening before practice. It surprised the players and gave them little time to prepare. Stambulova & Wylleman (2013) argues that communication factors as a resource for external coping, and good communication can serve as an internal factor for coping as players know what they need to improve and

show on the pitch in this phase. The level of football was notably higher than their previous experience, and they had to cope with tougher physical play and higher physical demand on the pitch. Moreover, the players highlighted technical skills and tactical development as necessary facilitators to adjust to the level of play, which is vital to master argued by Røynesdal et al. (2018). A contributing factor to heightened stress was the demands of senior players and coaches. Collins et al. (2016a) argue that challenge is necessary for development, and a progressive set of challenges can develop internal resources for coping such as resilience. Junior players experienced ridicule and remarks both on and off the field, and they also felt excluded from several senior team members. To cope with this, they employed goal-setting strategies, and where they either aimed to show what they had regardless of success or play safely to properly adjust to the level without revealing weaknesses. The players utilized external resources for coping with senior team coaches, senior player mentoring, and family during this period. Off the pitch, challenges with sleep, restitution, nutrition, school, and social relations were coped with by accepting the lifestyle of an elite athlete, and by distancing themselves from bad influences such as friends who drank alcohol or played video games at night. Their experiences can liken to the experiences of English players and how coaches perceive acceptance of responsibility and self-control to be beneficial to transition success (Finn & McKenna, 2011). The players differ in their mindset on and off the pitch, which is natural as they are individual human beings. Player 1 is independent and believes that he must be responsible for his development. He primarily used internal coping strategies in dealing with transitional challenges. Player 2 had a higher skill set compared to the two others, and that may help to explain why he was more careless in his play on the pitch. He also faced another type of challenge in school, as he experienced lagging in class due to the senior team and national team commitments. Player 3 focused on not showing weakness in play, and actively presented himself as humble in the context of the senior team dressing room. He also used involved coaches in club and school actively to get feedback on how to develop the necessary skills in order to adjust to the tempo of play successfully.

#### 5.1.2 Member of the senior team

The players successfully transitioned the introduction to the senior team. A period of predictable and regular practices followed, where the junior players are established members of the senior team but are not yet offered a professional contract. The time between the introduction to membership status varied for the players: (P1) "I joined the senior team in the winter six months after the introduction. During preseason I was a member." For player 2, the



transition was quicker: (P2) "It came quickly. After the introduction, I practiced as a member right away. The senior team had a lot of injuries. I was in the squad for a game the first week." Player 3 spent the most time in the introduction phase: (P3) "I got the introduction in autumn and became a member the following summer. The following autumn, I practiced two to three times per week (...) They gave me a weekly plan every Monday."

The quotes reveal a variance in the length of the first period of the transition. Player 1 became a member after 6 months. Player 2 became a member three weeks after his first session, while player 3 needed approximately 9 months to be accepted as a member of the senior team.

The players noted that the demands increased as they progressed through the member-phase:

I felt that the demands rose the longer I stayed and the older I got. In the beginning, you got remarks such as "come on" often followed by "you'll do it better next time." If you did something good, you were extremely praised. The demands were set more and more the older you got (P3).

It is possible that some senior members are welcoming in the introduction to create a sense of safety for the junior player. It may be a part of a senior-team culture where the seniors purposefully welcome the juniors in the introduction to the team, and then purposefully test them by placing higher demands on them on and off the pitch to see how they cope. As they progress, they will move closer to becoming a contracted player, and it is natural that juniors must adapt to the new set of standards which are upheld by this group. One aspect of playing up may be to adjust to the playing level without ruining practice. Another is to show stable performance over weeks and months at a time. The senior players may feel more threatened as the junior players move closer to a contract, and it may be explained by seniors feeling that their job security may be threatened over time.

The players were introduced to matches for the senior team during the member-phase. However, the quotes show that the players had different experiences with playing games for the senior team: (P1) "I did not play, but I was on the bench for several games. I did not play." Player 3 shared similar experiences:

No, I have not been in any squads. I was in that one cup game, and no games the following year. It is only in the preseason of this year I have been in the squad after I signed the contract (P3).

Playing matches for the senior team may be a new source of stress for the players, as they must cope with the unknown opposition, and they must perform to win for their team:

I was nervous before the match, very. I was nervous. It was the first game where I felt *damn, you're going to play now*, so I was stressed out and nervous (...) After the game, I felt relieved and had good feelings (P2).

Playing a match may be different from playing up in practice, as the match is the highlight of a footballer's week. Debuting in a senior match may present new challenges for a junior. One facet is that the player must perform in front of club executives, coaches, team players, and opponents. Another facet is that the match means more when accepting that senior professional football is results-driven and that a junior therefore must successfully aid the team in performing to win the game. Players may be more defensive in their approach to a match compared to practice, as the risk of making mistakes is higher in a match compared to practice.

In the team, the players share that they were aware of their social status and how they wanted to present themselves:

I was 16, so I was not good enough, and I knew it, but as I got older, I wanted to get in. I started to believe that I should get in, and that had something to say. I became older and dared to speak with the others (P1).

When I started, I was insecure about myself. I did not want to take a lot of space, and I felt I was far from the level. I wanted to keep a distance. I did not feel that I could come up there and run the show (...) Now that I am older, I have become more ready to take that step. Now I want to do more (P2).

The quotes show how the players adapt their mindset regarding social status in correlation with the time spent in the senior team. The assessment of environmental demands regarding social adaptability and "taking your place" contributes to understanding how a player may show humility and a distance in the introduction, with an apparent demand in actively upholding a status as a member as the transition progresses. Bandura (1977) explains that vicarious experiences and performance outcomes will alter an individual's self-efficacy.

This can lead to a more resilient belief in one's ability, which can explain why the players grew to be more concerned with their social status in the team.

Players also experienced being excluded by senior team players: (P1) "When everyone made fun of you, and everyone is laughing, and you don't understand what they are laughing about. I was very young, so I did not understand much of it." He elaborates: (P1) "I was not confident in myself. I did not know how to handle it, I felt that I was teased, and I did not know what to do." He continues: (P1) "It was sad. A sad feeling. I thought, *what have I done to deserve it?* It's natural." Player 2 agrees:

I felt like an outsider. I was between the groups, the reserve team, and the senior team. I did not feel that I was a part of the gang, but that I started to get a few friends. I never spent time with the senior members, so I felt that I was outside (P2)

Player 2 actively coped by restructuring meaning: (P2) "I got scolded for being small. Some words were harsh. I thought *okay, fine, you're scared that I will take your place?* He continues:

It was a player who was on me constantly, and he was sometimes very harsh. I confronted him, and that was hard. I asked him after practice if he had anything against me, did he have a problem with me? (...) You learn from these things. And you really must get out of your shell and out of the comfort zone. It helped a lot, and now he is one of my better friends (P2).

Adapting to the level of play during the introduction to the senior team may lead to new goals for the players. In the introduction, players have shared different intents regarding their mindset in practice. As members of the senior team, player 3 note a change in mindset: (P3) "You start at the lowest level of mastery you can, and then you start building from that."

"Are they that much faster?" (...) I thought it was like that at present day, and the only one who could change that was myself, and I wanted to reach a level where they feel inferior physically (...) That I am closing them down or pushing them away. It gives an extreme motivation to take off the glove and train strength and tempo. Running. So that they cannot use you like a cone anymore (P3).

In the first sessions, I became defensive in my mindset (...) I knew that I could not run back fast enough because of my tempo compared to the attackers. I became more defensive. I worked with Tobias at school, becoming a more aggressive defender. I become good at this on the senior team because after I while I wanted them to take me on because I knew they would not pass me (P3)

The first week I did things easy, having fun, and adapting to the level (...) After a while, I spoke with the coach and realized that I had done things easy and had a defensive mindset the first five weeks and that I had to begin thinking in different ways. I should not be dribbled, and I should pass forward instead of to the side or backwards. I should have more balls with the ball (P3).

Player 3 shows a mental capacity of self-regulated learning as he reflects over his goals and performance, monitors progress in practice, and evaluates. Research by Toering et al. (2012) notes that the ability to self-regulate learning is vital in developing football skills and is a key mental attribute of players that play at the highest level. Playing up can be too imposing on a youth player because of difficult and taxing challenges for the player. An example can be that a player experiences the challenges within the senior team environment to be so demanding that they cannot cope. A situation where the demands do not match a player's resources can affect the motivation of the player. Over time, a player who is too defensive in his approach to playing up may develop strategies of not making mistakes rather than showing his skillset. Collins & MacNamara (2012) claim that the road of development should not be comfortable, and it is natural to assume that elite senior environments are highly taxing on the individual player. The added mental demands through higher stress should not necessarily be associated with negative growth experiences if the player can cope with environmental demands (Collins & MacNamara, 2012). Moreover, being able to adapt to a playing style which does not reflect unstable highs and lows can be positive for a player, as he may grow to be more comfortable with his skill set and grow confidence in the strengths he has. Self-efficacy is important to start coping processes (Bandura, 1977; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Player 3 also use the school coach to aid him in coping with the football demands of the senior team.

Players can draw on internal resources to successfully cope as a member of a senior team. Player 1 is viewed as an independent individual by the coaching staff and draws upon mental skills to cope with the challenges in the member phase. He employed active goal-

setting strategies: (P1) "At that time, I had decided to get that contract, and I would get it. I had decided that." He continues: (P1) "I did not feel a sense of belonging, but I was almost completely sure that I would manage to get that contract." The statements may also reveal a strong motivation for his goal of becoming a contracted player, which is aided by his gritty nature: (P1) "I handled it well, I felt. If I had not handled it, I do not think I would stay here for so long. It was tough at times, but I got through it." Collins et al. (2016a) note grit as an essential psychological characteristic of facilitating stress and challenge, which is evident in the previous quotes. Player 2 also reveals structured goal-setting skills, coupled with ambition:

I have always hated losing, hated making mistakes, and hating being worse than others. That helped me push myself to not being satisfied with only being a member. The first time I got up I thought that I should be good here too. I think that helped a lot. I never thought *now I am a member, its all good*. I never got that. I instantly wanted to be in the squad. When I got in the squad, I thought, *why am I not playing?* (P2).

Player 3 nuances how his mental skill of refocusing has developed through the transition:

You can stand there and yell at me, but you will not bully me if that's what you think. Then I don't care about what you say. You can see that they get irritated because you block them out and go to the next situation. I would not have dared that at the beginning of playing up, I could have bowed down and given them the satisfaction of bossing over me, but I do not allow them that anymore (P3).

Knowledge is another facet of the internal coping resource (Stambulova et al., 2009). It may aid the players in being comfortable with the present challenges, as they have knowledge in how other athletes have coped in similar transitions, or that the players know of skills or choices that may be beneficiary to transition to a contract successfully. Player 3 comments on knowledge of strength training: (P3) "I learnt a lot about strength training (...) It was heavy then and there, but how much did I get in return? And all the knowledge and what I learnt from it:" Player 2 on knowledge regarding football skills: (P2) "I knew what I had to work on." Knowing specific skills to develop, which may lead to a higher probability of

successfully transitioning can give a player peace of mind during a challenging period. Morris et al. (2016) note that a deficit in psychological characteristics can be a lack of knowledge. Player 1 comments on his perceived lack of knowledge regarding social skills: "I did not know how to tackle it. I felt that I was teased, and I did not know what to do." It appears that the players had sufficient knowledge of what they needed to improve on the field and expanding on knowledge regarding fitness, nutrition, and restitution. Player 1 lacked social skills to cope with the social life within the senior team, and this may be explained by his maturity and age. Later on, player 1 reflects: (P1) "I forgot about everything and played to the best of my ability. I was on. Outside of football, I stayed at a distance. As a member, I included myself more."

How players react to feedback from the environment may change over time. In the introduction, players would create confidence in getting feedback from the senior players and coaches. Over time, however, that may change, and the players may begin to stand by their actions. This may link with the player's confidence and that he grows to want to develop a social standing as a member of the senior team. It is possible that players have stronger confidence in their social status and their skills as they master the practices and adapt to the level, which resonated with performance outcomes in Bandura (1977).

The senior players may be a resource in coping with match play, as player 2 explains: (P1) "They said if you get the chance – enjoy it. Don't stress. There were a few players who were good at talking with me. The players with more routine." Player 2 continues: (P2) "Andreas took... Not care of me, because I felt that I did not need that, but he took me under his wing. I remember I appreciated that, a lot. Fantastic guy." In the context of a match, player 2 shares:

It was very good to have, especially in match squads, because there were no junior players, nobody else. I was all alone. I sat on the bus and was scared to death to take anyone's seat. It was good having someone to talk with (P2)

Player 1 had a different experience: (P1) "You felt that you did not get noticed, and in training too. I thought it was normal, so I lived with it. It has not been bad, but I just sat there. I did not talk to anyone." Player 3 notes: (P3) Several players commented that I never shut up. It was the way they said it, so I just talked and talked." He continues:

Even if the match went terrible for the team, they were considerate because it was my first game, so they talked a lot and gave praise every time I did something. Everything heaped praise. Just to give you self-confidence.

The players explained how supportive senior players are essential in a challenging environment. The analysis revealed that the oldest senior players were the only ones who acknowledged the juniors in the introduction stage of the transition. As members of the team, the relationship with the senior players changed. Player 1 explains: (P1) "I had a lot of fun with Leif, and I got a ride to practice every day, and they cared for me." He continues by nuancing a relationship with a senior striker: (P1) "I talked a lot with Arild, especially the older I've got. He is a player who shows you and tells you that he believes in you (...) He is a striker as well, so he helps me all the time and guides me." Player 2 experienced getting recognition from Arild as well:

It was good to get recognition from the stars in the team. When Arild Gunnensen came over and told me I was good at practice, it was awesome. You got warm; it was powerful (...) Everyone likes that. And it is special to get it from people you look up to. There's nothing better than that (P2).

Player 3 explains how mentoring by older players have significance on the players' social status:

It was meaningful. Then you know you are in the inner circle. Even though it is a serious football team, you become friends as well. You're not one who just sits there without saying a word before leaving (...) You can let your shoulders down because of it because if I am not satisfied with things they do at practice, then I will dare to tell them off (P3).

The players underline the importance of social support in playing up with their experiences of player mentorship. The players interpret that the more experienced senior players are present from the introduction, compared to the others who are generally distanced at the introduction, to become more aggressive and challenging in the member-stage. If an absence of positive social relations between the player and the senior players exist, the players

draw on internal resources such as motivation, refocusing strategies, and knowledge to cope with taxing environmental demands.

Social support serves as an essential facet in developing individual resources for coping in a challenging environment (Holt & Dunn, 2004). The authors also highlight the competency of resilience, which is the ability to use coping strategies to overcome obstacles. The players show a belief in their physical and mental skills in coping with challenges, and it seems that senior player mentorship fortifies their confidence, motivation for success, and coping skills.

Safety is an essential environmental component which may influence performance and development (Baker et al., 2003; Burgess & Naughton, 2010). A sense of safety may be associated with being in the comfort zone. Collins et al. (2016a) argue the importance of challenge for effective development. Experiencing safety in an environment through social support may not stand opposite to the importance of challenge, but rather two components which influence the overall experience during the transition. The players note increasing demands in playing level and in the social life of the dressing room. Living in these demands may pose a high challenge, and it may be positive overall if the players experience support from their environment. Social support may be beneficial to how a junior player approaches challenge and may, therefore, be a favorable component as an external resource in the coping process. Social support can influence how challenge is interpreted to become a positive growth experience (Collins et al., 2016a). Social support and the sense of safety links to how significant others can be an external resource within a context.

The different experiences with coping through external resources may influence if a player successfully transitions to the senior stage. Understanding how players reflect on the relationship between individual and environment can aid in explaining how external resources such as coaches or players either undermine or aid in coping processes with contextual demands.

Interestingly, player 1 notes that he did not experience any social support during match play and rarely during practice. Player 1 does, however, share that he did not need it, and he felt that this transition was his to walk, and it was vital for him to walk it himself, as exemplified by this quote: (P1) "I felt that I did everything on my own to make it. I had almost all responsibility, and nobody helped me." He continues:



It depends on how you have it outside of football too. It probably varies from person to person. Some need to have someone to talk to to feel safe and to perform, and I did not feel that I needed that (P1).

It seems that coaches and club employees play a significant role in social support. The players highlight the role of coaches as external resources for coping. Player 1 comments: (P1) "He made me feel included there." He mentions the coach at school: "Must have been Tobias. I worked with what I was bad at and what he meant I needed to improve to handle the level. I feel that I did it on my own." Player 2 reflects after a match: (P2) "I remember the assistant coach taking me under his arm and smiling and enjoying himself. It was a good vibe." He mentions the coach at school: (P2) At school, I talked a lot with Tobias, especially regarding the tactical aspect. I had to continue. Work. Try to learn as much as possible." Player 3 mentions Karl: (P3) "Karl, the assistant coach in the senior team, spoke more with me than the head coach at that time." He continues:

I think Karl is skillful (...) I was often at his office, and he was very good at showing what was better. One time I had to analyze a game I had played, and I brought 30 clips. When he summoned me to the office, he had 123 clips (P3).

The coaches have an impact in showing demands regarding challenges, and tailor to give social support and to create a safe environment for the players. Social support is a facet which can be interpreted to make the players feel seen in practice, and as a confirmation to being accepted as a member of the senior team through behavior. Coaches also support the players by using their time off the pitch in analysis work and extra training, which in turn can boost confidence in skills and a furthering of the players' knowledge of what to do on the pitch. The quotes nuance that the players use different coaches as external resources. The assistant coaches in the senior team supported players by accepting them into the team and giving them feedback on their progression. The coach at school had an approach of furthering the football knowledge of the players and adjust practices at school, so the players got repetitions on specific skills they needed to improve at the club.

Another external source for coping is family. Player 3 mentions:

Dad sees all the games and practices from time to time. He can get too passionate. He has always been overly critical (...) He has always been good at finding a balance; he

rarely made excuses for me. He read me and supported me when I needed it, but he has always demanded much of me. It prepared me for having demands in the senior team (P3).

Morris et al. (2016) mention that players are put under pressure by parents to perform consistently in senior sport. Parents were also seen as a potential source of strain for children if they try to live their dream through their children (Finn & McKenna, 2011). However, Stambulova (2009) note that parents can be a vital source of social support for athletes. The quote by player 3 shows a father who is invested in the everyday play of his son, and who is critical of the performance of his son. However, the father has rarely excused his son, which player 3 links with his resilience when facing challenges in the senior team.

Interestingly, the players rarely mention family. They briefly surface in questions regarding communication before the introduction to the senior team, and in one instance, when asked about significant others outside of football. The developmental model on transitions faced by athletes by Wylleman & Lavallee (2004) shows that parents play a vital role in the social support of athletes during the initiation and development-stage of athletes aged 6 to 20. As players transition from adolescence to adulthood, partners and coaches become more prominent. It may explain why the players rarely mention family in this study.

Top clubs often employ workers who have a senior responsibility of overall development of players and teams. Eskil is the head of youth development at the club and is mentioned by all players as a supportive person during their transition. Player 2 explains: (P2) "Eskil took care of me in the beginning. During the introduction, I could often sit alone at lunch, and he was good to have around. He was a friend." Player 3 continues:

Eskil, who is the head of youth development. He helped (...) I spoke with him outside of practice too. He always asked about how I felt and what I was doing. He created a relationship founded on trust, and you dare to speak with him about everything, without him telling everyone else. He only passed on the necessary information (...) he watched many of the sessions. He never scolded you, but he gave constructive criticism regarding what I could do better, and I liked that. He helped me outside of the pitch as well (P3).

The sports director can also influence how players cope during the transition. At the club, he actively distances himself to view how junior players cope with not knowing where

they stand every week. Player 2 says: (P2) "I was told after the first season that I would get a contract; the question was at what time (...) I knew I had to work for it too." Player 3 continues:

Of course, Even. He was the one giving me a contract or not. I did not talk to him a lot. I knew that he had faith in me and that they would not have let me train with them for so long without giving me a contract. I reckoned that I would have been told earlier if I should start thinking about other teams. He has always said what he thought I was good at and what I had to continue improving (P3).

The sports director's choice to actively distance himself from the players to create a sense of unknowing can link to the work of Collins et al., (2016a) suggesting that a periodized and progressive set of challenge can offer the best pathway to success. It is a part of the club-strategy for juniors playing up, to see how they cope with the feeling of insecurity regarding their road towards a contract.

The players experience regular communication from the club, which is better compared to what they experienced in the previous phase. It may give the players a better chance of preparing for the sessions and developing over time rather than getting the one-and-off chance of performing with the senior team. The demands rise parallel to the time spent with the senior team, both on and off the pitch, which Røynesdal et al. (2018) argues as natural in the junior-to-senior phenomenon. The players especially underline how the expectations to be more visible in the social setting is more critical as members, but that they experience being excluded from several senior members, and that the ridicule and undermining grow in this phase. Regarding psychological characteristics that may facilitate coping, the players share examples of how they perceive their development, which in the work of Toering et al. (2012) can be understood as self-regulated learning. The players also reveal that they use their knowledge, which Stambulova et al. (2009) notes as a useful source of internal coping. Mentoring by senior players and club employees become more observable in this phase.

### 5.1.3 Contract status in the senior team

An eventful phase as members of the senior team eventually led to contract offers for the junior players. Player 1 received his contract after three years. He says: (P1) "After all the

injuries I started playing up again because I had to join the matches. I was not on the B-list because I was injured, so it was coincidental that I got the contract.” He continues:

It was not part of the plan for me to get it at that time. I came on as a sub in seven games and started one, so I must have got it because they meant I was good enough and needed me in the team (P1).

Player 2 has a different experience: (P2) “I started playing up in June 2016, and I got the contract in February 2017.” Player 3 needed more time: (P3) “Three years, I think. The first time I played up was the second semester of the eleventh grade. I signed the contract just before I finished the thirteenth grade.”

Understanding the perceptions of the players is interesting because it may aid in understanding their behavior before and after receiving the contract. Player 1 says: (P1) “It was a relief. I hoped to get it earlier, but even though I grew older, I thought I would get that contract. I had decided on that.” Player 2 revealed that he did not believe it to be a coincidence, as he had received feedback from the sports director during his member-phase. Player 3 had a different perception:

If I had not gotten the contract, I would have been extremely pissed off because I was ready to get the contract. They had kept me for so long without giving me any feedback. I told them it was time to know if I would get the contract. I was called to the director's office the week after, and I got the contract. The weight fell off my shoulders, and I expected to get it, so it wasn't a shock. I had not understood anything if I had not got it after keeping me for so long (P3).

The players reveal different expectations regarding getting the contract. Player 1 appears to have toned down expectations compared to the other players. This may be influenced by his time spent in transition, his injury history, and his characteristics. Player 1 also shows discipline in the long-term goal of receiving a contract. Player 2 spent a relatively short time in transition (7 months). He also notes a more frequent status update regarding his possibility to receive a contract. He also played more games for the senior team, and it is possible that his status within the team was higher compared to player 1 and 3. Player 3 appears to have spent much of his transition time unknowing of his chances of receiving a

contract. He reveals that he expected to get the contract based on his time spent during the transition. He also actively confronted the sports director, which can be stressful for players.

In the phase between membership and contract status, the players highlight the importance of attaining the level of football:

They did not even know who I was and thought I was just okay. In the beginning, I was not good, but suddenly, I started to show my skills. I started to show that I had something to do at that level. I started taking on players and smashing it in the top corner. I was mostly that. Suddenly I managed to take the level much better than what I had done previously (P1).

Player 2 continues:

I think it was important for me to show that the first six months were no coincidence. I think it was important that I came back in January and showed that I had the level that I was good and even better in training. When I got matches against top-level teams and better teams, I could not be off, that I had something to do at that level too. I am not sure if I would have gotten a contract if I had sucked in those matches (P2).

Player 3 notes:

Stability, I think. That they know what they get from me. That it's not fifty-fifty if you suck or is pretty good. That you can maintain a relatively good level in every practice. Even in bad practices, the lowest level had to be higher (P3).

Being able to perform in practice and matches is vital, as interpreted by the players. Moreover, performing at the senior level every day may be a condition for receiving a contract. During the previous phases, players have shared experiences where they had a good practice or a good game, but they only mention stability in the contract-phase of the transition. It is possible to suspect that coaches and club executives see potential through the highest high of a player and that they need to stabilize the performance to be in a position to receive a contract.

Interestingly, player 1 had several long spells clouded with injury and medical issues. As he explains, when he came on in his second period as a member of the senior team, several

members did not know him, and there had been a change in the coaching staff. For some reason, he suddenly mastered the football level. The continued mastery in earlier phases with the team and mastery of skills may have lead to him being able to return from injury with self-confidence to show his skills and prove that he belongs. He explains: (P1) "I did not change my goals, I was still new (...) I tried to keep doing the same things to impress the coaches. I had to prove I was good enough and continue to impress them." The ability to stick to a plan and hold on to long-term goals may be essential in a long junior-to-senior transition. Player 1 has displayed personal characteristics such as grit and discipline, which may have enabled him to cope with the non-football events of the transition.

Successfully coping with the first phases of the transition has been essential. The players have adjusted to demands both on and off the pitch. The contract may mark an end to the transition period. However, demands in the form of playing time, taking place in the starting eleven, developing skills, and expectations from fans and media can present new stress for the players. Player 1 says he barely changed his goals of staying injury-free and developing his football skills. Player 2 explains:

The most important goal for me was now I want to play. I thought that my goal was to play games. That was the most important. It was very important for me not to be satisfied; I thought a lot about that. Becoming satisfied scared me because there were examples of players in the senior team who had gone the same road as me who had fallen off, who now are far from playing, and I didn't want to go there (P2).

He reveals goal-setting strategies which are adapted through his experience with older players within the team. He notes a fear of satisfaction in attaining the goal of becoming a professional, which may reflect the attitude of Super Champions in the work of Collins, MacNamara, & McCarthy (2016b). Super Champions seem intrinsically driven and stand out in how they perceive progress and administer self-reward. Player 3 notes a similar approach: (P3) "I just had to show that I am not taking the foot off the pedal after getting that contract. It was a secondary goal and not my major goal. That I don't think that I've achieved everything in life."

Spending considerate time with a new team can influence the relationships with the other members, as player 2 describes: (P2) "During training camp, I spent time with Andreas, in spare time as well. We played Playstation, and we ate together. Yeah, a friend." Player 3 elaborates:

Parallel to my development, I felt more and more included. The players started to talk with me and maybe thought that I not only was there to fill a space. He wants to get in and be here permanently. So I felt that the longer the period of playing up lasted, the more people started to ask if I had signed (...) I felt safe because people started to ask *you've signed or what?* And I felt that they started to view me as a member of the senior team (P3).

Attaining a professional contract gave the players status in the hierarchy within the senior team. As previously noted, senior team players changed their perception of the junior players over time. Some assumed a role of mentorship, while others distanced themselves from the juniors, or even displayed demeaning behavior on and off the pitch.

#### 5.1.4 Advice

The players offered their advice on several challenging aspects of the transition. It offers an insight on which challenges that are prominent and how they advise to overcome them.

The players have noted playing level and physical demands the two prominent factors of the junior-to-senior transition. They all summarize that technical skills should be adequate already in the introduction to first team practice: (P1) "It was a high level, but I managed." Player 2 comments: (P2) I think that having the ball and playing out from the back you can deal with. Because I played so much football during that time" and:

It has a lot to with skills with the ball to do, and you need to look like a footballer if you want to play up with the senior team. You can't struggle with the touch. What characterized all the players playing up those years was that they were ballers (P2).

Technical skills are essential regarding the possibility to play up at the club. The players did not, however, deem technical skills as a prominent challenge to cope with. The previous quotes imply that technical skills may enable a player to play up, but that other aspects are more challenging in the senior play.

Overcoming physical play and physical demands through effort and practice are advised. The notion of effort resonates well in the growth mindset of Carol Dweck (2012), where individuals see effort as the path to mastery. Player 3 explains: (P3) "If the effort were

there, the quality would follow (...) I just ran and ran so the coach could see that it was not based on effort (...) After a while the effort becomes a habit.” Retrospectively, he says: (P3) “Yes. I would have been more serious with the strength training from the eleventh grade” and “I think we should have trained more fitness.”

Regarding discipline in the training process and priorities outside of football, the players have shared that they accepted what they deemed as requirements to successfully cope with the transition. They mention nutrition, sleep, distancing themselves from friends they deem as potentially damaging, and avoiding alcohol and late-night gaming: (P1) "Try to avoid all the nonsense. Be as serious as possible." Player 2 elaborates: (P2) It doesn't help to sit at home and drink soda the evening before a senior practice, eating pizza. It doesn't work." Player 3 continues: "I don't need to drink alcohol (...) You have different friends too, so it is necessary to think as a footballer even if you are not on the pitch."

The environment of the first team is challenging, and young players are advised to prepare accordingly: (P1) "If you are not tough enough, then it does not help that others piggyback you. You need to handle it yourself." Player 2 notes the importance of goal-setting: (P2) As a junior player, you need to work so you can go up to the senior team in two years." He continues:

You need to prepare mentally. The physical aspect will follow because you do this in the preseason, so you need to play to the best of your ability and have the courage to show yourself, and even if things go against you then you can't give up because if you give up then you're done (...) If you don't deal with it mentally, then I don't think you will become a footballer."

Player 3 mentions: (P3) "Be humble. Don't be the one who hides." He continues:

It is not to become overconfident if you have reached a goal. That you keep on being as serious as you have always been. You want a better contract (...) So that becomes the motivation; to develop myself as a footballer and get it as a bonus (P3).

The reflections reveal that the athletes are more concerned with the mental preparations compared to the technical and physical preparations. They believe that successfully coping using mental skills will enable a player to develop the necessary technical and physical skills. Holt & Dunn (2004) argue that discipline, commitment, resilience, and



social support are psychosocial competencies, which are associated with success in football. Player 1 and 2 are interpreted to have stronger internal coping resources compared to player 3. In earlier quotes, player 1 and 2 explain that they have held themselves accountable for a successful transition. Player 3 has relied more on the coaching staff at school and senior player mentorship to cope successfully. Interestingly, the two different pathways are also different, considering social skills and the importance they have placed on socially fitting in. Player 1 and 2 have experienced social exclusion and difficulty with fitting in the team, and they have expressed that they 'did not care' with this aspect of the transition. Football skills may aid as a powerful internal resource for coping. To nuance this; Player 1 and 2 were generally assessed to have superior football skills compared to player 3 by club employees. The level of football may run parallel to a descending need for social inclusion. It also reflects on their advice regarding the social challenges in the transition.

Social support can be an external resource for coping with challenge (Holt & Dunn, 2004; Stambulova, 2003) as other individuals may aid a player in coping in the form of Bandura's (1977) verbal persuasion. Player 1 advises: (P1) "You need to be comfortable with the other guys, but it doesn't matter that much." Player 2 elaborates:

I think you should keep a distance, as I did. I felt like it was enough. Even if you are calm in the dressing room, you must show yourself on the pitch, that is the most important. That you are humble off the pitch but tough on it (P2).

Player 3 advises a different approach:

You need to be able to be social, not sit by yourself, not answer in short sentences, and don't hide. You don't need to be the center of attention, but you need the courage to show your personality. Show that you are one the guys can talk with and that you are a person who can contribute socially (P3).

Based on the previous quotes, it is possible to advise that social inclusion and social skills can enable a player to connect with mentors who can serve as a resource for external coping. It does seem, however, that social skills and social inclusion are decisive in a junior-to-senior transition.

The players share views on how they can be assisted during the transition. The club and its employees play a pivotal role in aiding or possibly adding more stress for the players.

Player 1 on advice for coaches: (P1) They should have more patience. I have often felt that I should get a chance, but then I haven't gotten it." He elaborates: (P1) "Lars had faith in me in practice, but matches were a different matter (...) They should dare to be courageous in giving youth players a chance." Player 2 comments on how coaches can aid by sharing a club philosophy: (P2) It is important that you get prepared for attaining your goal when you are a member of the reserve team." He continues: (P2) "It is important that the club employees and coaches do not always think about the next match, but that they prepare you for two years with their approach to practice and matches." Player 2 also notes the importance of the link between club practice and school practice: "I think it is important with a common thread between school and club, (...) that it is a good dialogue between club and school. It's about planning." Player 2 also notes the importance of having other coaches see senior practices:

I would like that coaches other than the senior team coaches had seen more practices than they did. They often asked me how it went, but they can still have a completely different impression of the practice if they see it. I can have the wrong impression (of the practice) (P2).

Player 3 adds:

My coach at school, for example. Or the head of youth development. Of course, I could have been better at seeking them out (...) Some players ask the coach about everything, but I am more of a shy type. I can't be bothered to go over there and ask just for the sake of asking. I think it is good when the coach came and talked with me (P3).

The players also advise the club to communicate more often with the players regarding their progression and possibility of a contract:

They could have talked with me more often (...) I only got to know that I was fighting for a contract, and I didn't hear any more for the next three months. I had no clue about how close I was (P3).

Player 2 elaborates:

A clear dialogue, you need to know where you are on the path at all times. I think that

is very important. Having the situation of not knowing where you are is unfortunate because it creates uncertainty. If the coach thinks you are not good enough, I think you should be made aware, because then something happens with you (P2).

As an attempt to prompting the players to mentor a future junior player experiencing the junior-to-senior transition, they said:

I would say that you need to practice. It's about practicing a lot. That you must want it. You must practice in the right way with quality because, in my situation, I think the reason for my long injuries is because I've practiced too much, and not had enough alternative training and enough guidance. (The key is) when you manage to limit the load so you can practice enough while avoiding injury (P1).

Player 2 shares:

I want him to be himself. Because I was, and I know you must. Because if you're not, then it will end. You need to be the person you are both on and off the pitch. You need to limit certain things. As I said, if you think you are the best, then that isn't the smartest to boast in the dressing room. It applies to all levels, but especially as a junior player because you will probably experience a lot of adversity that can be hard to deal with as a youth coming into a senior team. But on the field, be just the player you are. You can be as cocky as you want to. Just have fun. You have played football a hundred times before, just do it (P2).

Player 3 concludes:

Skills and the physical you get for free during practice. You can see what you are bad at, and if you are bad at something, then you practice. Mentally it is not so easy, and they do not know what is going through your head. You need to do the extra things outside the pitch. To be serious outside the pitch. You will not get everything on a silver platter. You get that on the pitch, but the job outside you have to do on your own. Eating right, sleeping enough. Deal with adversity, because it will be hard. You won't know what is happening and you will not be the best during practices as you probably are in the junior team. It is to deal with not being the best.

#### 5.1.5 Conclusion, limitations, and future directions

Norwegian football is tiny compared to the powerhouses of Spain and England, and successful player development is, therefore, crucial. The main aim of this study has been to understand how three players experienced playing up to a professional contract in a top-level club in Norway, with a focus on the perceived challenges and sources of coping.

The findings indicate that the senior environment is demanding both on and off the pitch, with higher stress stemming from higher environmental demands from coaches, senior players, and the club. They have also noted that personal beliefs and goals may create more stress because they want to succeed. By playing up, a new and challenging world is unveiled for the players. It may aid the players in becoming more resilient, as they strengthen their motivation, their self-efficacy and their coping strategies. They also mature, and become more aware of their social standing and how to present themselves in a new group.

In meeting the high demands of senior football, the players utilize internal and external resources for coping with challenge. Football skill, such as technical ability, tactical knowledge, and physical capabilities are fundamental skills for successfully adapting to a higher level. The players also note mental strategies such as refocusing, management of emotions, and goal-setting as essential in coping with stress during the transition in a productive manner. How an individual responds to higher demands and challenge may be a decisive factor in adapting to new levels in football and being resilient in handling the demands of becoming a professional footballer.

Adapting on and off the pitch also requires social skills. Suddenly belonging to a group of grown men can be intimidating. Being seen by the older players and included is an essential factor for strengthening the players' sense of safety. However, players have experienced feeling excluded by the seniors and being victims of harsh feedback and degrading language. They all note that they believe this to be normal and a rite of passage within the transition. The relationship the players develop with the environment is reliant on the personal characteristics of the player.

The players experienced different social trajectories during their transition. The process of social inclusion and acceptance as a member grows on the pitch, in the dressing room, and during team meetings and training camps. Being acknowledged by senior members or coaches can strengthen self-confidence and a sense of safety for the junior player. The players cope by trying various social strategies such as distancing themselves or actively speaking up in the dressing room. Successful strategies are experienced first-hand and are individual. Social acceptance grows over time, and personal investment and sense of safety

and acknowledgment with it. Changing a developmental environment can bring on additional stress as players must understand the social rules of the team, and they must learn how to show their personality in this environment over time. An additional challenge is that the closer the players are to attaining a contract, the more aggressive behavior they may experience as some senior players might fear for their position in the team and their job as a professional footballer.

The chapter on research method discusses potential limitations in this study. With only three subjects, the interpretations are limited in terms of generalization. The findings are rich, with plentiful data regarding the phenomenon within this case study. A way of strengthening the validity would be to use other researchers to triangulate the interpretations and the findings. After considering the contextual knowledge of the author, the decision to utilize a personal understanding and world view of the subjects was chosen in an attempt to gain deeper knowledge.

Bridging theoretical findings with practical work is often a daunting task. Wylleman et al. (2004) continue to highlight the need for researchers to provide ways in which practitioners can apply research findings in their related work with athletes. Existing transition models provide sports psychologists with a theoretical framework to situate the developmental, interactive, and interdependent nature of transitions and stages athletes face. It remains crucial that the demands of the given stages and transitions link to the resources available to athletes and their surroundings, which can be a deciding factor in a successful transition. In this way, professionals working with athletes could assist them in structuring optimal transition experiences throughout their sports career. Assisting athletes includes the possibility to take a new look at the phenomenon of dropout in youth sports from a transitional perspective, and thus formulate concrete interventions for talented young athletes contemplating quitting sport e.g., Lavalley & Andersen (2000).

Second, sports psychologists can use a developmental, transitional model with roots in a life-span approach to work with athletes in transition. For example, more attention goes towards how talented young athletes receive assistance in successfully transiting from junior to senior level by situating it in the context of non-athletic transitions occurring in the same period e.g., the transition from adolescence to young adulthood (Wylleman, 2002). Sports career transition programs also need to be evaluated on their user-friendliness and applicability across a range of different athletes and sports. Evaluative research by Lavalley et al. (2001) has demonstrated that career transition programs need to include several key points to be successful e.g., group-specific targeting and promoting, emphasis on the education of

athletes of the need for long-term planning, diversification of career transition services. Examining the effectiveness of the functionality provided by these programs in terms of outcomes or changing behavior can yield exciting results for athletes and coaches alike. Deepening our understanding on how best to aid the personal development and performance of athletes through the utilization of effective sports career transition services and intertwining this with accountability can make the athlete more resilient in a critical career transition. Lavallee et al. (2001) continue by suggesting the inclusion of experts in career transition programs, which are also significant to the athlete's successful coping with career transition. A team can include experts in the fields of sports medicine, sports physiotherapy, financial management, human resource, and personnel management (Wylleman et al., 1999).

Future research may include similar clubs to gain more knowledge on a similar phenomenon. In this study, the players express significant challenge with assimilating to the social norms and rules of the senior team, which could be an enlightening avenue of future research.

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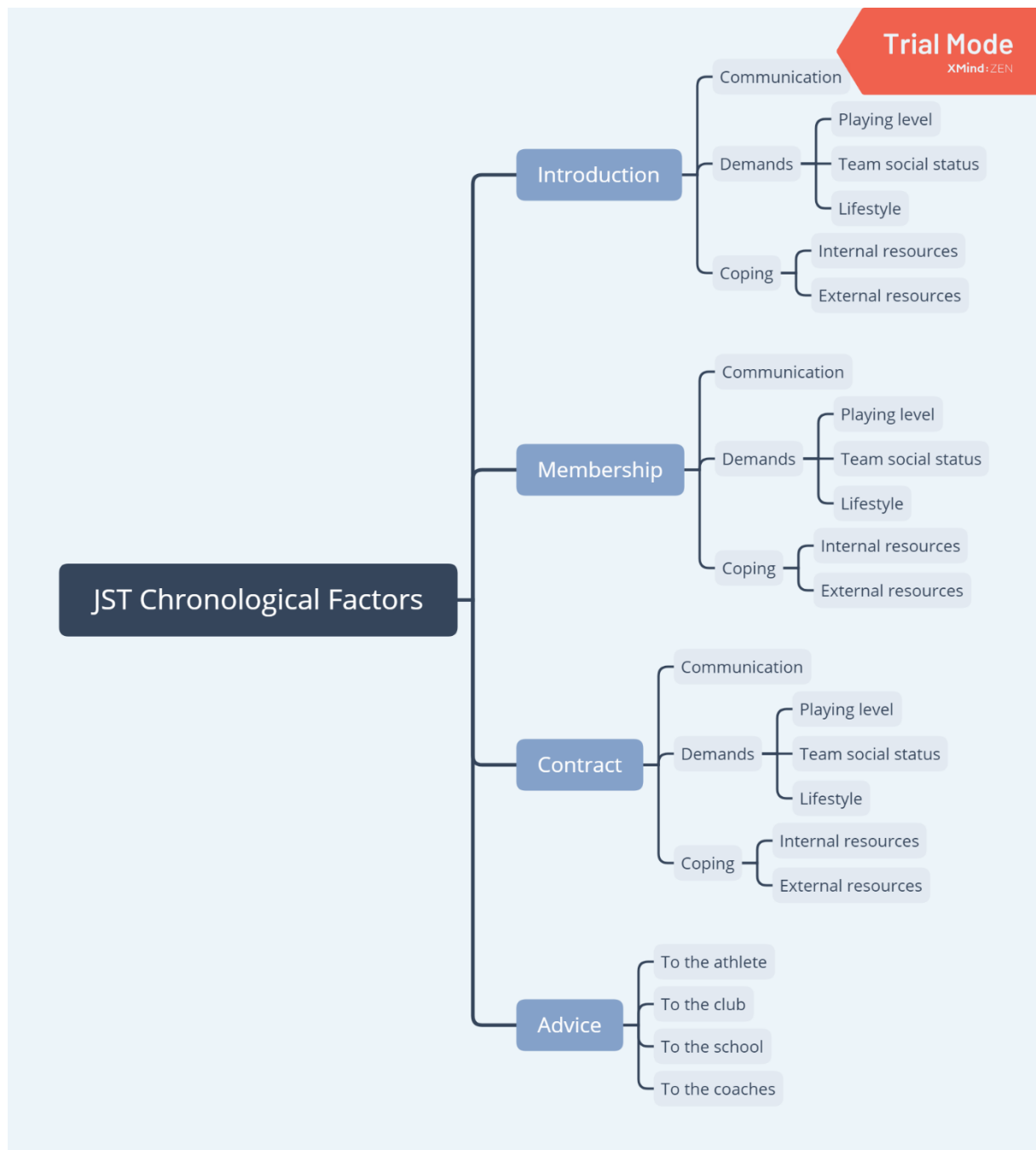
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## 7.0 Figures

Figure 1 – Analysis of the Chronological Factors of the Junior-To-Senior Transition



## 8.0 Appendixes

### Appendix 1 – Approval from NSD

Meldeskjema for behandling av personopplysninger

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#### NSD sin vurdering

##### Prosjekttittel

Spillerens erfaringer om overgangen fra juniorfotball til proffotballstatus

##### Referansenummer

868730

##### Registrert

28.09.2018 av Mathias Åker Solstad - mathiasas@student.nih.no

##### Behandlingsansvarlig institusjon

Norges idrettshøgskole / Seksjon for coaching og psykologi

##### Prosjektansvarlig (vitenskapelig ansatt/veileder eller stipendiat)

Mathias Haugaasen, mathias.haugaasen@nih.no, tlf: 23262437

##### Type prosjekt

Studentprosjekt, masterstudium

##### Kontaktinformasjon, student

Mathias Åker Solstad, mathias.solstad@hotmail.com, tlf: 97757396

##### Prosjektperiode

01.09.2018 - 30.06.2019

##### Status

11.12.2018 - Vurdert

#### Vurdering (1)

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##### 11.12.2018 - Vurdert

Det er vår vurdering at behandlingen av personopplysninger i prosjektet vil være i samsvar med personvernlovgivningen så fremt den gjennomføres i tråd med det som er dokumentert i meldeskjemaet med vedlegg den 11.12.18, samt i meldingsdialogen mellom innmelder og NSD. Behandlingen kan starte.

##### MELD ENDRINGER

Dersom behandlingen av personopplysninger endrer seg, kan det være nødvendig å melde dette til NSD ved å oppdatere meldeskjemaet. På våre nettsider informerer vi om hvilke endringer som må meldes. Vent på svar før endringer gjennomføres.

## TYPE OPPLYSNINGER OG VARIGHET

Prosjektet vil behandle alminnelige kategorier av personopplysninger frem til 30.06.19.

## LOVLIG GRUNNLAG

Prosjektet vil innhente samtykke fra de registrerte til behandlingen av personopplysninger. Vår vurdering er at prosjektet legger opp til et samtykke i samsvar med kravene i art. 4 og 7, ved at det er en frivillig, spesifikk, informert og utvetydig bekreftelse som kan dokumenteres og som den registrerte kan trekke tilbake. Lovlig grunnlag for behandlingen vil dermed være den registrertes samtykke, jf. personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 bokstav a.

Det vil i tillegg kunne fremkomme enkelte opplysninger om tredjepersoner ved at det registreres opplysninger om andre spillere, andre i samme fotballklubb eller øvrige relasjoner. Opplysningene vil være av lite omfang og ikke sensitive, og behandlingen er nødvendig for å oppnå prosjektets vitenskapelige formål ettersom prosjektet handler om hvordan juniorspilleren opplever konteksten til A-laget på banen, i garderoben, og utenfor banen. Vi vurderer at samfunnets interesse i at behandlingen finner sted klart overstiger ulempen for den enkelte.

Lovlig grunnlag for behandlingen av opplysninger om tredjepersoner vil være allmenn interesse, jf. personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 e.

## PERSONVERNPRINSIPPER

NSD finner at den planlagte behandlingen av personopplysninger vil følge prinsippene i personvernforordningen om:

- lovlighet, rettferdighet og åpenhet (art. 5.1 a), ved at de registrerte får tilfredsstillende informasjon om og samtykker til behandlingen.
- formålsbegrensning (art. 5.1 b), ved at personopplysninger samles inn for spesifikke, uttrykkelig angitte og berettigede formål, og ikke behandles til nye, uforenlige formål.
- dataminimering (art. 5.1 c), ved at det kun behandles opplysninger som er adekvate, relevante og nødvendige for formålet med prosjektet.
- lagringsbegrensning (art. 5.1 e), ved at personopplysningene ikke lagres lenger enn nødvendig for å oppfylle formålet.

## DE REGISTRERTES RETTIGHETER

De registrerte vil ha følgende rettigheter i prosjektet: rett til åpenhet (art. 12), informasjon (art. 13), innsyn (art. 15), retting (art. 16), sletting (art. 17), begrensning (art. 18), underretning (art. 19) og dataportabilitet (art. 20). Rettighetene etter art. 15–20 gjelder så lenge den registrerte er mulig å identifisere i datamaterialet. NSD vurderer at informasjonen om behandlingen som de registrerte vil motta oppfyller lovens krav til form og innhold, jf. art. 12.1 og art. 13.

Når det gjelder tredjepersoner, vurderer vi at det kan unntas fra retten til informasjon jf. personvernforordningen 14 nr. 5 bokstav b, ettersom det vil kreve en uforholdsmessig stor innsats sett opp mot nytten de registrerte vil ha av å informeres. Videre at ulempen for tredjepersoner er lav, ettersom det ikke skal registreres direkte identifiserende personopplysninger om personene, og de aktuelle tredjepersonene ikke skal være i fokus under intervjuene, og at ingen personer vil være identifiserbare i publikasjonen.

Det bemerkes at tredjepersonene fortsatt har øvrige rettigheter, det vil si rett til innsyn (art. 15) retting (art. 16), sletting (art. 17), begrensning (art. 18), underretning (art. 19) og protest (art. 21). Rettighetene etter art. 15–21 gjelder så lenge den registrerte er mulig å identifisere i datamaterialet.

Vi minner om at hvis en registrert tar kontakt om sine rettigheter, har behandlingsansvarlig institusjon plikt til å svare innen en måned.



FØLG DIN INSTITUSJONS RETNINGSLINJER

NSD legger til grunn at behandlingen oppfyller kravene i personvernforordningen om riktighet (art. 5.1 d), integritet og konfidensialitet (art. 5.1. f) og sikkerhet (art. 32).

For å forsikre dere om at kravene oppfylles, må dere følge interne retningslinjer og/eller rådføre dere med behandlingsansvarlig institusjon.

OPPFØLGING AV PROSJEKTET

NSD vil følge opp behandlingen ved planlagt avslutning for å avklare om behandlingen av personopplysningene er avsluttet.

Lykke til med prosjektet!

Kontaktperson hos NSD: Silje Fjelberg Opsvik  
Tlf. Personverntjenester: 55 58 21 17 (tast 1)

### **Vil du delta i forskningsprosjektet**

#### ***”spillerens erfaringer om overgangen fra juniorfotball til seniorfotball”?***

Dette er et spørsmål til deg om å delta i et forskningsprosjekt hvor formålet er å undersøke hvilke erfaringer du har gjort deg i overgangen fra juniorfotball til seniorfotball. I dette skrivet gir vi deg informasjon om målene for prosjektet og hva deltakelse vil innebære for deg.

#### **Formål**

Formålet med mastergradsprosjektet mitt er å undersøke hvilke erfaringer spillere gjør seg i overgangen fra juniorfotball til seniorfotball i en toppfotballklubb. Gjennom ett intervju ønsker jeg å høre om dine erfaringer i din overgang fra juniorfotball til seniorfotball, med et spesielt fokus på hvordan du opplevde å bli en del av seniorlaget, hvilke erfaringer du gjorde deg, og hvilke råd du har for spillere som befinner seg i en liknende situasjon.

#### **Hvem er ansvarlig for forskningsprosjektet?**

Norges Idrettshøgskole er ansvarlig for prosjektet.

#### **Hvorfor får du spørsmål om å delta?**

Grunnen til at jeg tar kontakt med akkurat deg er fordi du nylig har signert en proffkontrakt med en toppfotballklubb som du også var medlem av i minst ett år som juniorspiller. Du har en unik erfaring som ikke mange får oppleve, og det er derfor interessant å se hva vi kan lære av dine erfaringer. Dine kontaktopplysninger har jeg fått ved å spørre utviklingsansvarlig i klubben din.

#### **Hva innebærer det for deg å delta?**

For å delta i studien vil vi først avtale en tid og et sted som passer deg. Når vi møtes vil vi ha en samtale i form av et intervju, hvor jeg vil spørre deg om ditt navn, alder, og posisjon på fotballbanen. Deretter vil vi snakke om din første erfaring med A-laget som hospitant, og veien din fra juniorfotball til du fikk proffkontrakt med klubben din. Dette intervjuet vil ta ca en time. Jeg vil bruke en lydopptaker for å hjelpe meg med å registrere og huske alt som blir

sagt. Etter at samtalen loggføres vil du bli tilsendt denne på din private epost. Jeg vil deretter ta kontakt via telefon, hvor vi går gjennom det som ble sagt, slik at jeg sikrer at jeg forstod det du sa på riktig måte.

### **Det er frivillig å delta**

Det er frivillig å delta i prosjektet. Hvis du velger å delta, kan du når som helst trekke samtykke tilbake uten å oppgi noen grunn. Alle opplysninger om deg vil da bli anonymisert. Det vil ikke ha noen negative konsekvenser for deg hvis du ikke vil delta eller senere velger å trekke deg.

Dine svar og erfaringer vil ikke påvirke din status i klubben eller i laget.

### **Ditt personvern – hvordan vi oppbevarer og bruker dine opplysninger**

Vi vil bare bruke opplysningene om deg til formålene vi har fortalt om i dette skrivet. Vi behandler opplysningene konfidensielt og i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

- Mastergradstudent Mathias Åker Solstad og veilder Mathias Haugaasen vil ha tilgang til dine data. Vi er begge tilknyttet Norges Idrettshøgskole.
- Navnet og kontaktopplysningene dine vil jeg erstatte med en kode som lagres på en egen navneliste adskilt fra øvrige data. Datamaterialet lagres innlåst og kryptert etter innsamling, slik at all data er anonym og sikret. Mathias Åker Solstad samler inn data, bearbeider denne, og lagrer data. Hele prosessen skjer under veiledning av Mathias Haugaasen.

### **Hva skjer med opplysningene dine når vi avslutter forskningsprosjektet?**

Prosjektet skal etter planen avsluttes 30. juni 2019. Etter prosjektslutt vil dataene dine lagres sikkert på en innlåst og kryptert harddisk.

### **Dine rettigheter**

Så lenge du kan identifiseres i datamaterialet, har du rett til:

- innsyn i hvilke personopplysninger som er registrert om deg,
- å få rettet personopplysninger om deg,
- få slettet personopplysninger om deg,
- få utlevert en kopi av dine personopplysninger (dataportabilitet), og
- å sende klage til personvernombudet eller Datatilsynet om behandlingen av dine personopplysninger.

### **Hva gir oss rett til å behandle personopplysninger om deg?**

Vi behandler opplysninger om deg basert på ditt samtykke.

På oppdrag fra Norges Idrettshøgskole har NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS vurdert at behandlingen av personopplysninger i dette prosjektet er i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

### Hvor kan jeg finne ut mer?

Hvis du har spørsmål til studien, eller ønsker å benytte deg av dine rettigheter, ta kontakt med:

- Norges Idrettshøgskole ved Mathias Haugaasen. Epost ([mathias.haugaasen@nih.no](mailto:mathias.haugaasen@nih.no)) eller telefon: 23 26 24 37
- Vårt personvernombud: Karine Justad ved Norges Idrettshøgskole
- NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS, på epost ([personvernombudet@nsd.no](mailto:personvernombudet@nsd.no)) eller telefon: 55 58 21 17.

Med vennlig hilsen

Mathias Haugaasen  
Prosjektansvarlig  
(Forsker/veileder)

Mathias Åker Solstad  
Student

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### Samtykkeerklæring

Jeg har mottatt og forstått informasjon om prosjektet «Spillerens erfaringer om overgangen fra juniorfotball til proffotballstatus» og har fått anledning til å stille spørsmål. Jeg samtykker til:

- ☐ å delta i intervju
- ☐ at mine personopplysninger lagres etter prosjektslutt, i fem år (år 2024) grunnet mulig tilgang til forskningsdata hvis de skal brukes i videre forskning

Jeg samtykker til at mine opplysninger behandles frem til prosjektet er avsluttet, ca. 25. mai 2019

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(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)

-----  
Mathias Åker Solstad

## Appendix 3 – Interview guide

### Intervjuguide v3

1) er et spørsmål

(a) er mulige oppfølgingsspørsmål

i) er mulige dypdykk etter eksempler eller beskrivelser

- I tillegg vil prober bli anvendt underveis i intervjuet for å skape flyt og dypere meningsinnhold

### Kontekstbeskrivelse

1) Hvor gammel er du?

(a) Hvilket nivå spiller du på nå?

(b) Hvilken posisjon spiller du på banen?

(c) Hva er dine sterke sider som fotballspiller?

i) Ferdigheter

ii) Mentale ferdigheter

(d) Hva er dine svake sider som fotballspiller?

i) Ferdigheter

ii) Mentale ferdigheter

2) Hva husker du fra din første økt med A-laget?

(a) Var treningen planlagt, eller kom den overraskende?

(b) Hva opplevde du på trening?

i) Har du en situasjon som beskriver nettopp dette?

(c) På hvilken måte opplevde du...?

(d) Hvordan opplevde du å komme inn i en gruppe med eldre spillere?

i) Kan du fortelle om hvordan du føler du ble tatt i mot?

ii) Har du en situasjon som beskriver nettopp dette?

3) Hva er det første du husker fra A-garderoben?

(a) Hva gjorde du?

(b) Hvordan opplevde du...?

(c) Hvem husker du?

i) Har du et eksempel som gjorde inntrykk på deg?

4) Kan du fortelle hva du tenkte utenfor fotballen da du først hospiterte med A-laget?

(a) Hva gjorde du?

- (b) Hvem fortalte du om treningen?
- (c) Hvis snakk om råd: hvem spurte du?
- (d) Hvis snakk om råd: hva spurte du om?

Coping og copingstrategier i hele overgangen til en A-kontrakt: tilpasning – regelmessighet – kontrakt

- 5) Hva husker du fra din første hospiteringsperiode på A-laget?
  - (a) Var det fast hospitering, eller kom treningene overraskende på deg?
  - (b) Hvorfor tror du at de i klubben valgte deg?
    - i) Hvis rolle: hvordan opplevde du å være en rollespiller?
  - (c) Hvordan opplevde du krav og nivået på treningene med A-laget?
    - i) Hvordan husker du nivået på fotballen?
    - ii) Hvilke krav opplevde du som store? – Hva opplevde du som vanskelig på treningene?
    - iii) Hvem bidro til å sette kravene?
    - iv) Hva husker du som spesielt med nivået? På hvilken måte...?
- 6) Hvordan vurderer du ditt eget nivå på den tiden i forhold til nivået du hospiterte opp til?
  - i) Var det spillsituasjoner hvor du følte du mestret nivået?
  - ii) Hvilke situasjoner?
  - iii) Hva tenker du er grunnen(e) til at du mestret disse spillsituasjonene?
  - iv) Hva gjorde det med deg?
  - (d) Er det spillsituasjoner hvor du følte nivået ditt ikke strakk til?
    - i) Hvilke spillsituasjoner?
    - ii) Hva tenker du er grunnen(e) til at du mestret disse spillsituasjonene?
    - iii) Hva gjorde det med deg?
    - iv) Hva tenkte du om deg selv når du føler at du ikke mestret nivået?
    - v) Hvordan reagerer du når du ikke mestrer?
    - vi) Kan du utdype videre?
    - vii) Hva gjør du da?
    - viii) Har du noen strategier du bruker for å håndtere slike situasjoner?
  - (e) Hva gjorde du for å mestre nivået på treningene?
    - i) Hva anser du som viktige ferdigheter eller egenskaper for å ta nivået?

- ii) På hvilken måte opplever du dette som viktig?
  - iii) Hva med tekniske ferdigheter?
  - iv) Hva med taktiske ferdigheter?
  - v) Hva med fysiske ferdigheter?
  - vi) Hva med mentale ferdigheter?
- 7) Hva prioriterte du på trening i din første periode som hospitant på A-laget?
- i) Hvordan prioriterte du...?
  - ii) Hvorfor prioriterte du...?
- (f) Hva kjente du på da du var med i ferdighetsøvelser?
- i) Har du en situasjon som beskriver nettopp dette?
  - ii) Hvordan hjelp (ferdigheter)...?
  - iii) Hvordan hjelp (mentale ferdigheter)...?
- (g) Hva kjente du på da du var med i spilløvelser?
- i) Har du en situasjon som beskriver nettopp dette?
  - ii) Hvordan hjelp (ferdigheter)...?
  - iii) Hvordan hjelp (mentale ferdigheter)...?
- 8) Var du med i treningskamper? Hvis ja:
- (h) Fikk du spille i din foretrukne posisjon?
- (i) Hvordan opplevde du at de som var på A-laget snakket med deg før kamp?
- i) Har du en situasjon som beskriver nettopp dette?
- (j) Hvordan opplevde du at de som var på A-laget snakket til deg under kamp?
- ii) Har du en situasjon som beskriver nettopp dette?
- (k) Hvordan opplevde du at de som var på A-laget snakket til deg etter kamp?
- iii) Har du en situasjon som beskriver nettopp dette?
- (l) Hvordan hjelp (ferdigheter)...?
- (m) Hvordan hjelp (mentale ferdigheter)...?
- 9) Hva kjente du på da du satt i garderoben?
- i) Har du en situasjon som beskriver akkurat dette?
  - ii) Hvordan hjelp (sosiale ferdigheter)...?
- (a) Hvordan tok A-lagsspillerne deg i mot?
- i) Har du en situasjon som beskriver akkurat dette?
- (b) Husker du noe fra garderoben som var annerledes fra juniorgarderoben?
- i) Hvordan gjorde dette inntrykk på deg?
  - ii) Hva tenker du er grunnene til det?



10) Er det noen i miljøet rundt deg som hadde betydning for deg i tilvenningen til A-lagsfotball?

- (a) På hvilken måte har de hatt betydning for deg?
  - i) Kan du utdype det videre?
- (b) Hospiterte du sammen med noen fra ditt eget kull? Hvis ja, hvilken betydning hadde det for deg?
- (c) Er det noe annet du husker som spesielt viktig for å tilvenne seg det å være en del av A-laget?
- (d) Hadde du noen rundt deg som bidro positivt?
- (e) Hvilke råd fikk du?
- (f) Hadde disse støttespillerne liknende erfaringer fra eget liv?
  - i) Hvordan bidro disse rådene til situasjonen du var i?
- (g) Opplevde du at noe manglet?
- (h) Kunne de gjort noe annerledes?

11) Hvordan så du på det å gjøre feil i din første hospiteringsperiode?

- (a) Hva gjorde det med deg?
- (b) Hva var din reaksjon på feil under hospiteringstreningene?
- (c) Hvordan taklet du det?

12) Hvordan opplevde du at de rundt deg reagerte på feil?

- (a) Påvirket det deg i noen grad?
  - i) På hvilken måte?
- (b) Hvordan taklet du det?

--- pause ---

13) Hvordan opplevde du tilhørighet til A-laget?

- (a) I hvor stor grad følte du deg inkludert av de andre spillerne i gruppen i den første tiden?
- (b) På hvilken måte følte du/følte du ikke inkludering?
- (c) Hva tenker du var grunnene til det?
- (d) Hva gjorde det med deg?
- (e) Er det noen personer du følte bidro ekstra for at du skulle bli inkludert?
- (f) Hvilken betydning hadde det på deg?
- (g) Hvilken rolle hadde treneren for din inkludering?

- 14) Er det viktig for deg med sosiale relasjoner til de du trente med?
- (a) På hvilken måte er det viktig for deg?
  - (b) Gjaldt det på treningene med A-laget?
  - (c) Har du opplevd utfordrende/vanskelige sosiale øyeblikk i den førsteperioden på A-laget?
    - i) På hvilken måte var det vanskelig?
    - ii) Hva kjente du på?
    - iii) Hvordan reagerte du?
  - (d) Har du opplevd gode sosiale øyeblikk i den første perioden på A-laget?
    - i) Har du et eksempel?
    - ii) På hvilken måte opplevdes det som positivt?
    - iii) Hva kjente du på?
- 15) Hva føler du at du bidro på A-laget?
- (a) På hvilken måte bidro du?
    - i) Kan du gi et eksempel på dette?
  - (b) Er det noen situasjoner du deltok mer aktivt i enn andre?
    - i) Kan du gi et eksempel på dette?
    - ii) Hva tenker du er grunnen(e) til at du deltok mer aktivt i akkurat disse situasjonene?
  - (c) Er det noen situasjoner du trakk deg mer tilbake?
    - i) Kan du gi et eksempel på dette?
    - ii) Hva tenker du er grunnen(e) til at du trakk deg mer tilbake i akkurat disse situasjonene?
- 16) Hvordan ønsket du å fremstå på A-laget?
- (a) Prøvde du å styre hvilke inntrykk du gav av deg selv da du var med A-laget i starten?
    - i) Kan du gi et eksempel på dette?
    - ii) På hvilken måte prøvde du å styre hvordan du fremstod?
    - iii) Hva tenker du er grunnen(e) til det?
  - (b) Er dette noe du tenkte mye på?
    - iv) Når?
  - (c) Er det noe som har endret seg over tid?
    - v) På hvilken måte?
    - vi) Hva tenker du er grunnen(e) til det?

Utvikling over tid i de ulike fasene: innpass – tilpasning - vedlikehold

17) Din første periode på A-laget ble gjerne fulgt av enten en fast hospiteringsperiode eller eventuelt en kontrakt. Hvor lang tid tok det fra du hospiterte for første gang til du hospiterte fast?

(a) ... og til du fikk A-kontrakt?

18) De første inntrykkene dine på A-laget måtte du behandle for å få fortsette å hospitere. Synes du det var tilfeldig eller ikke tilfeldig at du fikk fortsette?

(a) Hvorfor det?

(b) Hva tror du var viktigst å mestre på banen for å fortsette å få muligheten til å hospitere?

i) Hvorfor akkurat dette?

ii) Hvordan mestret du dette?

iii) Kan du gi et eksempel på dette?

(c) Hva tror du var viktigst å mestre i garderoben for å fortsette å få muligheten til å hospitere?

iv) Hvorfor akkurat dette?

v) Hvordan mestret du dette?

vi) Kan du gi et eksempel på dette?

(d) Hva tror du var viktigst å mestre utenfor klubb for å fortsette å få muligheten til å hospitere?

vii) Hvorfor akkurat dette?

viii) Hvordan mestret du dette?

ix) Kan du gi et eksempel på dette?

(e) Hvem var dine sterkeste støttespillere på laget gjennom denne perioden?

i) Hvordan støttet de deg? Eks...

(f) Hvem var dine sterkeste støttespillere i klubben gjennom denne perioden?

ii) Hvordan støttet de deg? Eks...

(g) Hvem var dine sterkeste støttespillere utenfor klubb og lag gjennom denne perioden?

iii) Hvordan støttet de deg? Eks...

19) Etter en periode fikk du kontrakt med klubben din. Synes du det var forventet eller kom det som en overraskelse?

(a) Hva kjente du på når du fikk kontrakten?

- (b) Hva tenkte du at var viktigst for din egen del når du ble tatt opp som en fast A-lagsspiller med kontrakt på fotballbanen?
- i) I garderoben?
  - ii) Utenfor klubb?
- (c) Endret målsetningene dine seg fra du kom inn på A-laget, til du hospiterte fast, til du fikk kontrakt?
- i) I så fall hvordan?
  - ii) Hva var dine sterkeste sider gjennom hele hospiteringsperioden?
  - iii) Hvordan brukte du de for å utvikle deg på et nytt nivå?
- (d) Var det noe du burde gjort annerledes hvis du gikk gjennom dette en gang til?
- i) Hva da?
  - ii) Hvorfor akkurat dette?
- (e) Er det noe du skulle ønske du fikk mer hjelp med i overgangen?
- i) Hva da?
  - ii) Hvorfor akkurat dette?
  - iii) Hvem mener du kunne hjulpet deg med dette?
- (f) Hva kunne vært bedre i overgangen fra junior til seniorfotball?
- i) Hva da?
  - ii) Hvorfor akkurat dette?
  - iii) Hvem mener du burde hjulpet deg med dette?
  - iv) Fra klubbansatte?
  - v) Fra toppidrettslinje?
  - vi) Fra trenere?
  - vii) Fra medspillere?
- (g) Hvis du skulle gitt råd til de som befinner seg i samme situasjon, hva hadde du sagt da?
- i) Hvorfor akkurat disse rådene?
  - ii) På fotballbanen
  - iii) I garderoben
  - iv) Utenfor klubb

