
THE CONTRIBUTION OF PROFESSIONAL COACH FOR EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ADJUSTMENT OF SOCCER PLAYER

O CONTRIBUTO DO TREINADOR PROFISSIONAL PARA A REGULAÇÃO PSICOLÓGICA E EMOCIONAL DO FUTEBOLISTA

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RESUMO

Foi objetivo da investigação explorar a percepção dos treinadores profissionais de futebol sobre o seu contributo para a regulação psicológica e emocional dos futebolistas. Trata-se de um estudo qualitativo e os dados foram obtidos através da realização de entrevistas semi-estruturadas com 10 treinadores profissionais de futebol. A análise hierárquica descendente do *corpus* identificou quatro classes organizadas em dois temas. Ao tema 1 (o treinador e o futebolista perante as exigências competitivas) correspondeu as classes 1 (o perfil do treinador de futebol) e 4 (o futebolista em competição), e ao tema 2 (o treinador e a dimensão psicológica do futebolista), a classe 2 (a dimensão psicológica do futebolista) e 3 (a relação treinador-futebolista). Os resultados permitiram perceber que os treinadores valorizam a dimensão psicológica do futebolista, mas que revelam um domínio pouco consistente das estratégias para regulação psicológica e emocional dos futebolistas.

Palavras-chave: Relação treinador-futebolista. Regulação psicológica e emocional. Futebol.

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to explore the perception of professional soccer coaches about their contribution to the psychological and emotional player's adjustment. It is a qualitative study and dates were obtained by semi-structured interviews conducted with ten professional soccer coaches. A descendent hierarchical corpus identified four classes organized into two themes. Theme 1 (the coach and soccer player toward competition demands) corresponds to class 1 (soccer coach profile) and 2 (soccer player in competition), and theme 2 (the coach and player psychological dimension), class 3 (player psychological dimension) and 4 (relationship coach-player). Results allowed us to understand that coaches appreciate the player psychological dimension, but they reveal a fragile domain on regular mastery of strategies for player's psychological and emotional regulation.

Keywords: Relationship coach-player. Psychological and emotional regulation. Soccer.

Introduction

During the last decades, we are witnessing a widespread attempt to understand the sport performance expertise, and despite the diversity of studies, there are still doubts about this concept¹. Clarifying on the elite athlete definition can take into account measures of gold standard², which define an association between individual capabilities and results. In the case of collective sports this association becomes more complex and ambiguous because there are a lot of variables involved.

The psychological profile of sport's performance has been associated with high levels of motivation, commitment and discipline, concentration and attentional focus, leadership, self-confidence and self-concept, self-regulation skills and emotional control, mental visualization strategies and goal definition, mental resilience or strategies of planification and simulation^{3,4,5}. The athlete resilience has also been related with the expertise performance⁶, which promotes the emergence of numerous psychological skills.

Bloom⁷ was pioneer on professional careers of young talent research (eg, musicians, athletes, scientists and artists), highlighting the importance of certain people (influential and decisive) in their careers. We refer here to "significant others" as is family, coaches, teachers, friends and other agents, that play an important role in the course of athletes by providing social, emotional and/or instrumental support. The relevance of social support to expertise development in successful athletes of both genders is well illustrated in recent studies with successful athletes of different sports^{4,6}.

Besides the relevance of positive social support from significant others, some studies refer to cohesion and team coordination, collective efficacy, respect and effective communication between coach and athletes as the "road to excellence"^{9,10}.

The coach motivates and establishes the right conditions of learning, and it is one of the most important individuals to athlete's outcome. The effectiveness of his intervention depends on the experience, evaluation of resources, knowledge of sport's modality and the relationship with the athlete. Among the different types of relationships that occur in the sports environment, perhaps the coach-athlete relationship is the most important.

If the coach can promote a motivational climate of mastery, defocusing himself of organizational pressure related to the negotiation of contracts, salaries and results pressure, he gets a reduction of stressful experience and an increase of players adaptive behaviors¹³. For this adaptability greatly contribute the mechanisms of psychological and emotional regulation, considered essential to obtain excellent performances.

The scientific production related with soccer has revealed a reduced use of samples from professional environment. Professional soccer has a set of requirements and characteristics that distinguish it in relation to the youth and amateur contexts. In order to increase knowledge about the performance of professional soccer coach, with a sports psychology point of view, it was decided to examine the perception of professional coaches on their contribution to the players psychological and emotional regulation.

Methods

Participants

The main requirement for the selection of the sample subjects placed the coach's profile in a maximum demand and sports performance level. For this, we used the convenience sampling technique, and for data saturation, we selected ten professional senior soccer coaches of different nationalities (Brazil, Portugal and Argentina), belonging to professional clubs/national teams from different countries (Brazil, Portugal, Turkey and Argentina). The coaches of the sample, all male, were aged between 31 and 57 years (mean = 40.8 ± 7.54), an experience as professional soccer player between 0 and 16 years (mean = 12.2 ± 5.20). They had between 1 and 19 years of professional experience.

Data Collection procedures

Once contacted and informed about the nature and procedures of the study, and guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity of data resulting from the interview, all coaches accepted to participate in the study. The interviews were conducted in person, in a quiet room, in one hour sessions. The interviews were recorded using a digital audio recorder. Nine interviews were conducted in Portuguese language and one in Spanish. This content was later translated to Portuguese language by a specialist.

As methodological instrument, was used a semi-structured interview with 12 open questions, divided into three themes: (1) the beginning of professional practice as coach; (2) psychological dimension in soccer; and (3) emotional dimension associated with sport

performance. The choice of open questions intended to obtain more personal and specific answers about the coaches knowledge and behavior regarding soccer's psychological and emotional dimensions.

Data Analysis procedures

The content of the interviews were fully transcribed and the *corpus*' thematic analysis was performed using the *Alceste 4.9* program, which allows an hierarchical downward classification of text units. This classification was built through the similarity between the common vocabulary from each unit and permitted the identification of specific vocabulary to each thematic unit. The *corpus* consists in 4945 different lexical forms, which occur 43150 times throughout the text.

The reduction of words to their source form was based on *Alceste's* portuguese dictionary. This mechanism reduced the *corpus* to 15.584 analyzable words, with 24.078 occurrences and a frequency greater than 3, which corresponds to 39.29% of the initial *corpus*. The analysis conducted to the identification of 1011 context units (UCEs), reduced by the descendent hierarchical analysis to 584 UCEs (57.76%). The UCEs were distributed by two themes which divided into four classes. The themes and classes content was analysed through the words that are specific to them (exclusive) and that are significantly associated with them ($X^2 \geq 3,84$, $gl = 1$, $P < .05$).

Results

The descendent hierarchical analysis produced two themes and respective classes. The names of the classes were assigned depending on the vocabulary and content associated with each class (Figure 1). This assignment is representative, and pretends to classify generically the obtained classes. The theme 1 corresponds to class 1 (23% of ECUs) and class 2 (10% of ECUs). The theme 2 it is constituted by the class 3 (41% of ECUs) and class 4 (26% of ECUs).

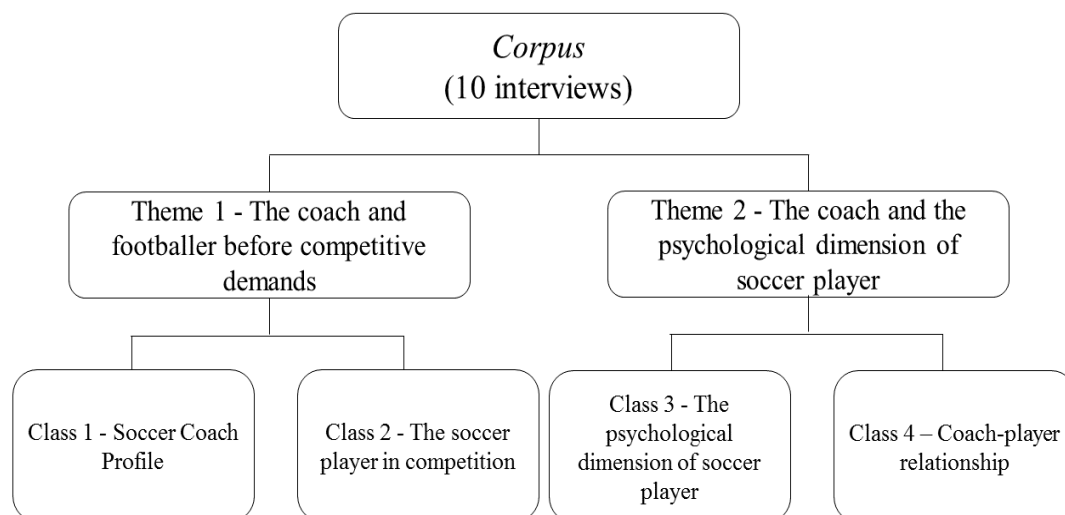


Figure 1. Hierarchical representation of themes and classes.

Source: The authors.

Theme 1 - The coach and footballer before competitive demands

Theme 1 encompasses classes 1 and 2 (33.57% of ECUs) and highlights the competitive requirements related to the functions associated with the coach and soccer player.

Contributes to theme 1 and its respective classes, only south american coaches (two Brazilians and one Argentine) .

Class 1 - Soccer Coach Profile

An analysis of the specific vocabulary of class 1 reveals a constancy of related words with the coach learning process to perform in his functions, and the importance of their human and social skills. The existence of some geographic references (Brazil, Club Atlético Lanús [Argentina], Mexico, brazilian player) indicates a cultural dimension associated with the performance of the coach's functions. The following excerpts were quoted by *Alceste* as the most representative of class 1.

No way. You observe the tactical part and you will see that Inter is a more organized team than us, you will see , but not for long ($X^2 = 25$).

[Não tem como. Você observa a parte tática e você vai ver que o Inter é um time mais organizado que nós, você vai ver, mas não muito tempo ($X^2 = 25$)]

So, it is more profitable for the club all those things. And further that Brazil is a country that exports a lot of players . So, he has to have a good formation, and if not he goes out there and fails ($X^2 = 24$).

[Então rende mais para o clube, todas essas coisas. E ainda mais o Brasil que é um país que exporta muito jogador. Então tem que ter uma formação boa, senão ele vai lá fora e fracassa ($X^2 = 24$)]

I need to win. So it's one of the things here that I day-to - day as you said in our routine we are trying to modify . The intellectual side of the player, the physical side of the player is very important information as a man, because here in Brazil and everywhere in the world the player comes to the poor family times and then suddenly get famous ($X^2 = 24$).

[Preciso de ganhar. Então é uma das coisas aqui que eu no dia-a-dia como você falou na rotina nossa a gente está tentando modificar. O lado intelectual do jogador, o lado físico do jogador que é muito importante, as informações como homem, porque aqui no Brasil e em todos os lugares do mundo o jogador vem às vezes de família pobre e aí de repente ficar famoso ($X^2 = 24$)]

Has to create sessions, must observe methods, must search information from outside the country, see videos, see all of things to create something different, otherwise it's a very hard routine because you are here, all day here ($X^2 = 22$).

[Então tem que criar treino, tem que observar métodos, tem que ter informação de gente de fora do país, ver vídeo, ver tudo de coisas para você criar alguma coisa diferente, senão é uma rotina muito dura porque você está aqui, todo o dia aqui ($X^2 = 22$)]

You know, in Brazil the debate about soccer is reduced, insignificant discussion about tactic and day-to-day work. Little discussion about that. It is one thing i like to do ($X^2 = 20$).

[Sabe, no Brasil se discutem muito pouco as coisas do futebol, muito pouco da parte tática, muito pouco do trabalho do dia-a-dia. Não se discute muito isso. Então uma coisa que eu gosto de fazer ($X^2 = 20$)]

Today there is a lot of information. That information is fundamental for us and for the players who come to the Santos. For some time that at Santos, we have not bad player related to indiscipline ($X^2 = 20$).

[Hoje as informações são muitas. Então isso para a gente é fundamental, para o jogador que vem no Santos. Então aí há algum tempo aqui no Santos a gente não tem jogador ruim assim nesse tipo, disciplinado ($X^2 = 20$)]

Class 2 - The soccer player in competition

The analysis of the vocabulary of class 2, highlights the contribution of specific psychological profile (moral, credibility, personality, effort, command) and game culture (tactical support, team, actions, structured) for competitive performance. It also appears that there is a schok between the European soccer school (Netherlands, Europe, Futebol Clube Barcelona) and the Brazilian soccer school (brazilian championship, São Paulo Futebol Clube, Santos Futebol Clube, brazilian). We present the extracts that *Alceste* quoted as the most representative of class 2.

Extremely tactical. Ronaldinho did not have space to catch the ball. But when this happens, there is a monstrous loss of improvisation and technical quality. The mass media press. There is a process there, so i say, the right thing would be the brazilians to forget, the brazilian school say forget Europe, forget compression ($X^2 = 55$). [Extremamente tático. O Ronaldinho não teve um espaço para pegar. Mas quando isso acontece, existe uma perda monstruosa da improvisação, da qualidade técnica. A imprensa cai. Tem um processo aí, por isso que eu digo, o certo seria os brasileiros esquecermos, a escola brasileira dizer esquece a europa, esquece a compactação ($X^2 = 55$)]

He apologized, sorry, but the fans insulted me. Cruzeiro had no rhythm. But we missed the opportunity. We lost the game because the technical part was greatly influenced by his low self-esteem ($X^2 = 42$).

[Pedi desculpa, desculpa, mas os adeptos xingaram-me. O Cruzeiro não tinha ritmo. Mas nós perdemos a oportunidade. Perdemos o jogo porque a parte técnica foi extremamente influenciada pela baixa autoestima dele ($X^2 = 42$)]

For me, moral is the player support. Even when he act calmly in the tactical chaos, if it is moralized, he solves more problems than tactical support. Now if you have a moralized player and tactical support, you have a team. Today i have a moralized team, without tactical support ($X^2 = 42$).

[O suporte do jogador é para mim a moral. Por mais calmo que ele esteja no caos tático, se ele tiver moralizado, ele resolve mais problemas que o suporte tático. Agora se você tiver o jogador moralizado e o suporte tático, você tem uma equipa. Eu tenho hoje a equipa moralizada, não tem o suporte tático ($X^2 = 42$).]

When I say organized , I speak of a team with guidelines, psychological preparation, with morality, which lends credibility who commands, responsive, comes and goes. This is a structured team ($X^2 = 42$).

[Quando eu falo organizado, eu falo de uma equipa com orientações, com preparo psicológico, com moral, com credibilidade com quem está comandado, que responde, ida e volta. Isso é uma equipa estruturada ($X^2 = 42$).]

Here in Brazil the influence is much greater. It's much more militant. It is more pronounced that in european. The european ranges only, the brazilian has to form. Because he was more requested, he was educated to be the best, he was educated to be a new Zico, new Pelé, new Romário, he leaves home ($X^2 = 41$).

[Aqui no Brasil a influência é muito maior. É muito mais militante. É mais marcante que no europeu. O europeu varia só, o brasileiro tem que se formar. Porque ele foi solicitado muito mais, ele foi educado de que ele teria que ser o melhor, ele foi educado porque o novo Zico, o novo Pelé, o novo Romário, ele sai de casa ($X^2 = 41$)]

You take a decisive game, takes a Flamengo Vasco, decisive to us. It was a tactical game, it seems Europe. Because increased concentration levels. Because the player is frightened. And you note , this is Europe. But he was not like that last week, but it

was a decisive game, a very tactical game, you speak it is Europe, but lasts fifteen days ($X^2 = 37$).

[Você pega um jogo decisivo, pega um Flamengo Vasco decisivo nosso. Foi um jogo tático, que parece Europa. Porque aumentam os níveis de concentração. Porque o jogador está amedrontado. Aí você vê, mas isso aí é Europa. Mas ele não estava assim na semana passada, mas era um jogo decisivo, um jogo extremamente tático, você fala é europa, mas dura quinze dias ($X^2 = 37$)]

Do not forget the social problem we have here in Brazil. This has influence. You have *favela* player, intelligent, without instruction and extremely intelligent, very intelligent, out and in it, the player has no education, that player will help you, has personality to help you, if he is playing in Europe ($X^2 = 33$).

[Não esqueça do problema social que nós temos aqui no Brasil. Isso tem influência. Você tem jogador da favela, inteligente, sem instrução e extremamente inteligente, inteligentíssimo, fora e nele próprio, o jogador não tem instrução, esse jogador vai-te ajudar, tem personalidade para te ajudar, se for jogar na Europa ($X^2 = 33$)]

Theme 2 - The coach and the psychological dimension of soccer player

The theme 2 divides into classes 3 and 4 (66.43 % of UCEs) and evidences the coach's role in relation with player, with the holistic player development purpose and the achievement of individual and collective goals. The answers from theme 2 were given by 7 portuguese coaches from sample.

Class 3 - The psychological dimension of soccer player

The discrimination of the most representative words of class 3 reveals a set of concepts associated with players psycho-emotional dimension (emotions, emotional component, alert, character, dream, responsibility) and it is possible to see verb conjugation that relegate to concrete actions of coach (say, explain, give up, extract, manage, demonstrate, think, remove, transmit, duty, identify, lead, reach, achieve). Next, we present the most representative expressions from class 3 disclosed by *Alceste*.

I am in a high position in the club hierarchy, and for us players, know how to manage it all and all these emotions is tricky. I think that the competence of a coach really is, and we can get more than the player, we identify the character of each one that is very important, we are all different ($X^2 = 20$).

[Tenho um posto um bocado maior dentro de um grupo de trabalho, e para nós jogadores, saber gerir isso tudo e essas emoções todas é complicado. Penso que a competência de um treinador realmente é isso, e nós conseguirmos mais que o jogador, identificarmos o caráter de cada um que é muito importante, somos todos diferentes ($X^2 = 20$)]

In my opinion there will be theoretical ways to get there, of course. But for me, practice teaches us a lot, that is, how do we manage often as we live an experience and the second experience that will live, what we learn from the first, that for us, for me is relevant ($X^2 = 20$).

[E isso na minha opinião haverá formas teóricas para lá chegar, como é evidente que sim. Mas para mim depois a prática ensina-nos muito, ou seja, como é que nós gerimos muitas vezes como é que vivemos uma experiência e a segunda experiência que vamos viver, do que é que recolhemos da primeira, isso para nós, para mim é que é fundamental ($X^2 = 20$).]

This is my opinion, and honestly i have very careful with that. At the management training unit, i do not know if in the next five years i will do the same. The own coaching experience will tell me. But right now i'm thirty-four, even in the

preparation of the training unit, because I think it is a very important issue ($X^2 = 18$)

[Esta é a minha opinião, e eu sinceramente tenho muito cuidado com isso. Na própria gestão da unidade de treino, não sei se daqui a cinco anos vou fazer da mesma forma. A própria experiência de treinador vai-me dizer. Mas eu neste momento tenho trinta e quatro anos, mesmo na elaboração da unidade de treino, porque acho que é uma questão muito importante ($X^2 = 18$).]

It is my responsibility not give up on anyone. If i do not get to it in a way, i will try another way. And it's complicated, it's very complicated because we were players too and we know also, we have the advantage that we work our dream ($X^2 = 17$). [Mas é da minha competência não desistir de ninguém. Se não chegar a ele duma forma tentar chegar de outra forma. E é complicado, é muito complicado, porque nós fomos jogadores também e nós sabemos também, temos essa vantagem que nós trabalhamos o nosso sonho ($X^2 = 17$).]

Really try to prevent and take account all this situation, i think it's important to have program within the microcycle. At the same level, some people say it is good to have start lineup and alternative team. Maybe they struggle more to try to have a reference, to try to reach a better position ($X^2 = 17$).

[Tentar realmente já prevenir e ter em conta toda essa situação, que eu acho que é importante haver programação até dentro do microciclo. No mesmo patamar, há quem diga que é bom haver a equipa suplente e a equipa titular. Se calhar esforçame mais um pouco para tentar terem uma referência, para tentar alcançarem a posição mais acima ($X^2 = 17$).]

I think that a good coach is one who does not give up to trying to do well, because sometimes we make mistakes. Be aware of that, and just like players, be aware that we do not always make right, to be able to identify it immediately, and never give up trying to do better ($X^2 = 17$).

[Penso que esse é um bom treinador que é o que não desiste de tentar fazer bem, porque nós não vamos fazer sempre bem. Ter a consciência disso tal e qual como os jogadores, mas ter a consciência de que não vamos fazer sempre bem, mas imediatamente conseguimos identificar isso, e nunca desistir de tentar fazer melhor ($X^2 = 17$).]

I think that game organization is fundamental. There is no one that survives or live well without a good organization, that is, without organization is too complicated to things go well ($X^2 = 15$).

[Eu acho que a parte da organização do jogo é fundamental. Já não há ninguém que sobreviva ou que viva bem sem uma questão fora da organização, ou seja, sem organização é muito complicado que ande bem ($X^2 = 15$).]

Class 4 – Coach-player relationship

Class 4 brought together a set of words that shows the coach's role in conducting the training process and trying to achieve objectives (difficulties, collective, behavior, transcendence, objectives, coaching staff, microcycle, recovery, a game, exercises), highlighting the relationship with the player (relationship, need, intervention, management, demanding, replacement) and based on a set of psychological concepts (capable, determined, calm, confidence, motivations). We describe the most important expressions of class 4.

That injection of moral they need and comfort to feel my confidence in them so that they can return to what we need. When they are motivated, when they are acting well, everything is normal and the less we do, the levitation at the momento leads them to be comfortable ($X^2 = 28$).

[Aquele injeção de moral que eles necessitam e do conforto de sentirem a minha confiança necessária neles para que eles possam regressar àquilo que nós necessitamos. Quando eles estão motivados, quando as coisas lhes estão a sair bem, tudo isso é normal e quanto menos nós fizermos, a própria levitação do momento leva-os a estar confortáveis ($X^2 = 28$)]

And these weeks, we are talking about the game to the end-of-week, allow within the microcycle achieve moments of correction, achieve correction training units, and then following preparation units for the next game ($X^2 = 27$).

[E essas semanas, estamos a falar do jogo ao fim-de-semana, permitem dentro do microciclo conseguir momentos de correção, conseguir unidades de treino de correção, e depois unidades seguintes de preparação para o próximo jogo ($X^2 = 27$)]

In relation to what is the need of the moment, what is the need for team in relation to you. And I always give various examples along the career ($X^2 = 27$).

[Em relação àquilo que é a necessidade do momento, aquilo que é a própria necessidade da equipa em relação a ti. E eu dou variados exemplos sempre ao longo da carreira ($X^2 = 27$)]

That individual and collective performances are completely different. I give a more concrete example. Last week, we were playing for the Portugal Cup with Leixões and start the game to dominate, we feel very comfortable, we feel increasingly confident, we feel that our team was in a rising state of mind ($X^2 = 24$).

[Que os desempenhos individuais e coletivos sejam completamente distintos. Eu dou um exemplo mais concreto. Na semana passada, nós fomos jogar para a taça de Portugal com o Leixões e entramos no jogo a dominar, sentimo-nos muito confortáveis, sentimo-nos cada vez mais confiantes, sentimos que a nossa equipa em termos anímicos estava em ascendente ($X^2 = 24$)]

Behind me they give help and support to all that communication goal we want to give, or the comfort we want to have, or the motivation that we want to give them ($X^2 = 23$).

[E eles também por trás estarem a apoiar-me e ali a suportar-me tudo aquilo que é o objetivo da comunicação que nos queremos dar, ou do conforto que nós queremos ter, ou da motivação que nós lhes queremos dar ($X^2 = 23$)]

Many times our own race, our own behavior leads them to have. Now, the game itself often told them that sometimes their incapacity to do certain things leads them to close in on itself, to retract ($X^2 = 23$).

[Muitas das vezes a nossa própria raça, o nosso próprio comportamento leva-os a ter. Agora, o próprio jogo muitas das vezes dita-lhes que em determinados momentos a incapacidade de fazer determinadas coisas leva-os a eles próprios fecharem-se, de se retraírem ($X^2 = 23$)]

Discussion

The specific vocabulary in each theme unit divided the interviewed coaches in two major groups. In turn, each group correspond to a theme. Theme 1 – the coach and soccer player before the competitive requirements – encompasses the answers of three South American coaches and is oriented to the coach's and player's characteristics in a professional context and competitive demand. Theme 2 – the coach and the psychological dimension of player – collected the answers given by seven portuguese coaches and highlighted the psychological dimension of player and coach role for the psychological and emotional regulation of the first one. The thematic separation between coaches nationalities and different cultural backgrounds may reflect a differentiation of their concerns and acting modes. Since

the main objective of the research was to understand the coach's role in the psychological and emotional regulation player soccer, it was decided not to study social and cultural issues associated with the theme. The discussion focussed around the themes and classes revealed, and the main goal was the interaction between coach and soccer player, in training as in game.

Football coach profile

The set of most representative words and phrases of this class shows coaches committed to enhance sports performance, but also to contribute to the integral and human development of their players. In last decades, professional soccer has become increasingly demanding and competitive, and the player soccer formation must take into account that involvement. It follows that the soccer coach's profile should be more embracing, going beyond the strictly technical issues. For Hanin¹⁴, the coach must have skills: (a) of instruction; (b) leadership, communication and management; and (c) emotional self-regulation to deal with different situations.

During the performance of his duties, the coach is under different pressures and social constraints, with situational, ideological, cultural and ethical nature, and it appears that the human dimension of the coaching process still remains, poorly understood¹⁵. The sports training science has been developed by a bio-científic guideline¹⁶, representing a technical and unproblematic operationalization, in which coaches are mere technocrats involved in the transmission of knowledge¹⁷. In our study, the coaches showed a concern to provide players with knowledge and information, from realities where soccer is more developed. This expansion of specific knowledge contributes to develop autonomy and discipline of the players, and also to break the routine. So, Cushion and Jones¹⁸ consider that the player-coach socialization, in a way of bottom-up acting and more on a player focused approach, improves the capacity of coaches to solve the players' problems. The aim of this new paradigm foresees the coach as an expert that acts with an automatic level acquired through learning situations, reflection and practice, allowing him to develop a working memory useful to solve specific problems¹⁹.

Another aspect emphasized by the coaches was related to the attrition caused by the constant problem solving, and the need to find strategies that allow them to act in an appropriate psychological and emotional state. To Stebbings et al.²⁰, a coach who shows enough positive emotions and internal energy, is more apt to give to his players opportunities for them to recall information, make decisions and take responsibility. On the other hand, coaches who experience a psychological discomfort in the performance of their sports functions, deplete their internal energy and negative emotions could make them more critical, directive and punitive.

In a study with elite soccer coaches, Levy et al.²¹ found that they use, preferably, several coping strategies to attenuate stressors (communication, preparation, planning, social support and self-talk). In our study there was a an inconsistent tendency for the use of communication, preparation and planning as coping strategies.

The soccer player in competition

The answers clustered in class 2 were given by only one coach, from Brazil, and he was player in Brazil and Europe. A content analysis allows us to see an impact on the differentiation between brazilian and european players in relation to psychological and tactical dimensions. In a more concrete way, competitive difficulties were identified as a result of incapacity to maintain the quality of technical skills under certain tactics and psychological demands. According to Hanin and Hanina²², one of the most common problems that athletes face is the competitive irregularity and unpredictability in the most important events,

especially due to unexpected technical difficulties. According to these authors, the athlete's performance depends of his experiences and also their anthropological, physical and psychological resources. The sport psychology has been giving an increasing importance to the individual opinion of players during competition, which takes on different meanings even if the experienced events are similar. According to Folkman et al.²³, this variation and interpretive unpredictability can be explained by the different implications that stressful contexts have for the welfare of the practitioners. Understanding the player's emotional responses in the different competitive moments can help the coach to define emotion regulation strategies. Some of the most representative phrases of this class indicates that the collective performance of a team depends on the combination of psychological preparation and tactics, and failures at this level compromise performance.

The comprehension of emotions should consider the idiosyncratic content and intensity of physical symptoms related to emotions²⁴. The growth intensity of the functional-pleasant emotions is associated with increased performance; inversely, increased intensity of dysfunctional emotions are linearly associated with the deterioration of the performance. Events such as an opponent cheating, referee's errors, good performance of the opponent and distraction with spectators are considered by players as competitive stressors²⁵.

The performance of the professional soccer player in face of competition demands depends on a certain mental toughness, which according to Thelwell, Weston and Greenlees²⁶, is characterized by a psychological functioning that help him to face opponents with many sportive resources. Professional soccer players analysed by these authors exhibited a psychological functioning mode with the following attributes: (a) self confidence to success all the times; (b) ability to respond positively; (c) ability to keep calm before during pressure moments; (d) ability to ignore distractions and maintain attention; (e) want the ball and always be involved in the game; (f) to keep out of trouble; (g) emotional control during performance; (h) have knowledge of what prejudice the opponent; (i) control extra-game aspects; (j) appreciate the pressure inherent to the game.

The most relevant expressions of this class indicate that, in general, the Brazilian player has a personality adjusted for professional soccer, but shows a certain psychological and emotional imbalance when he is confronted with situations difficult to solve. It also mentions that coaches and players must be more concerned with the psychological preparation, which will improve the tactical aspects of the game and consequently maintain a higher competitive regularity.

The psychological dimension of the soccer player

The responses of the coaches construed an attempt to define a psychological profile of the soccer player for elite performance and the strategies used for that purpose. The understanding by the coach of personality and dreams from each player must be considered to define the strategies for psychological adjustment. Coaches consider that it is important in the performance of their duties, to be aware of their mistakes and seek a perfected performance.

Youth elite soccer players that experienced a training environment oriented to their development, with different possibilities of choice and decision-making, with no controller feedback, who felt trust and respect for their perspectives, experienced greater satisfaction of psychological needs²⁷. The need for greater understanding of excellence in sport performance has revealed in recent decades, a wide range of social, contextual, personal or personality¹ studies. In sports with high contextual interference, urgency and decisional accuracy as soccer, perceptual-cognitive skills emerge in association with top performances. Some authors^{28,29} conclude based on the cognitive superiority revealed by experts that memory,

perception and anticipation, are involved in sport excellence, and that mental routines allow to stabilize the emotional level necessary to perform on a particular task.

Emotions influence self-efficacy and attentional style, which in turn influence information processing, decision making and action³⁰. But the causal link between emotions and action is bidirectional, and for coaches, current training methodologies are based upon psychological/emotional control, and psychological/emotional/tactical domain of the game.

There is a growing consensus in the sport psychology over the importance of the individual zone of optimal functioning which predicts individual performance based on evaluation of the effects of mixed emotions interactions (optimal and dysfunctional) instead of separated effects of isolated emotions³¹. Elite athletes exhibit a higher intensity of functional-positive emotions, which may be explained by the ability to produce the optimum amount of energy needed to regulate the action directed towards a goal³². Despite all this, moderate levels of functional-negative emotions can act in a facilitative way³³. Due to unpredictability of sports' context, the psychological responses may be more or less predictable, which complexifies the coach's task of psychological adjustment. However, the coaches in our sample, consider as obligations to meet the individual needs of the players and to never give up on helping them to achieve their best performance. Even if the emotional regulation of their players requires a high degree of complexity, coaches admit that they should help players to manage their emotions.

The player-coach relationship

The quality of coach intervention in the training depends on the social and cultural context, personal experiences, personal philosophy and professional practice³⁴. Their decisions can be based both on social and personal needs³⁵. The influence of the coach's behavior on self-perception, motivation and athlete's performance is mediated in part by the player's evaluation about coach's behavior³⁶. The most representative phrases from this class puts emphasis on the importance of a way of acting that attend the player's needs, and it allows to increase their confidence and motivation. For such a thing, the coach should avoid behaviors that trigger feelings of injustice. Typically, the different treatment given to players is, in part, the result of making expectations, which in turn encourages athletes to adopt certain behaviors that are consistent with the initial judgement¹¹. In collective sports, the perception of justice and the need's satisfaction by the coach, allows the athlete to access relevant information, which will increase the identification of athletes with the team, improve the quality of decision making and interpersonal relationship³⁷.

Regardless of the coach's belief about the necessity to support the autonomy of the players, the research has shown that when the immediate context press a coach for the result, tends to take more controlling behaviors that deplete psychological resources, which takes the coach to ignore the inner experiences, thoughts and feelings of their athletes³⁸. The interviewed coaches highlighted the role of assistant coaches with respect to how they help them cope with the stress and isolation that sports environment promotes. The stress resulting from training and competition is one of the biggest problems that athletes and coaches face, and despite the existence of numerous psychological factors that mitigate the potential negative effect of stressors⁶, they are unable to do it in total or always. However, coaches can be a kind of problem solvers by using informational support³⁹.

The training quality is crucial to improve performance, and tasks with an appropriate level of difficulty, informative feedback, and opportunities for repetition and error correction, are described as leading to a greater progress⁴⁰. To get more coach informative feedback than desired may have a positive impact on the athletes, as result of feeling that their coaches are investing more time in them, observing techniques and tactical skills⁴¹. Understanding and

comprehending real behavior in sports context obtained through reflective practice, will allow the coach to mold certain behaviors as praise, feedback, questioning and silence, with a positive impact on athlete's learning⁴². Regardless of the chosen strategies, the coaches states that it is important the use of contact time with the players to correct mistakes and prepare for the next game. In any case, the quality of information provided by the coach is crucial to develop strategies that help the player to face the problems and improve performance.

Conclusion

The research showed that it is crucial that the coach contributes to the integral development of the player, namely to the intellectual and physical dimensions. In a specific way, and concerning the brazilian player, it is referred a certain inability to combine technical skills and creativity, in face of the tactical and psychological problems that competition places. Instead of the "europeanization" of the brazilian soccer player, a tactical development is suggested to potentiate their already none strenghts, which is the ability to improvise and its creativity. The allusion to a kind of brazilian soccer player personality refers to a confident, focused, style of play, based on a game organization (tactic) that does not strangle creativity.

With regards to the second theme – the coach and the psychological dimension of soccer player – the opinions of coaches highlight the need of awareness over the player's personality and needs, so that is possible to achieve a better emotional regulation and game organization. The interaction between coach and player is nuclear to correct errors and prepare for the next competition, and also to assist players in the psychological and emotional regulation.

A distribuição das unidades de contexto pelas quatro classes revela uma valorização diferenciada e hierarquizada temática, que pode significar que os treinadores: (a) reconhecem e atribuem um papel importante à dimensão psicológica do futebolista e a relacionam com o rendimento desportivo; (b) estão conscientes da importância que a relação treinador-desportista e o perfil de treinador têm para o futebolista e seu sucesso desportivo; (c) conhecem e compreendem a atuação do futebolista durante a competição. Contudo, o desequilíbrio na distribuição das UCEs por classe, pode querer dizer que apesar de o treinador estar formalmente habilitado para o desempenho das suas funções, e de admitir a importância da dimensão psicológica para o rendimento desportivo, não demonstra em contexto de treino/competição um domínio consistente das estratégias de regulação psicológica-emocional dos jogadores. The distribution of the context units by the four classes reveals a differentiated and hierarchical appreciation of themes, which could mean that the coaches: (a) recognize and attribute an important role to the soccer player psychological dimension and relate it with the sport performance; (b) are aware of the importance of the coach-athlete relationship and the coach's profile to the soccer player and his sport success; (c) coaches know and understand the role of the soccer player during the competition. However, the imbalance in the distribution of ECUs per class, could suggest that despite the coach be formally authorized to perform his duties, and regardless of the coach admitting the importance of the psychological dimension to the sport performance, they are unable to demonstrate in training/competition context a consistent mastery of the strategies of player's psychological-emotional regulation.

A better coach-athlete relationship requires a methodological, conceptual and ethical clarification, based upon diversified approaches that reflects a more general, systematic and criative research framework⁴³. The production of knowledge supported by social sciences, using different methodologies, including interpretive-qualitative methods and mixed designs, may help the coach to decipher the best way for his interventions and to enhance the performance of their soccer players.

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Recebido em 14/04/15.

Revisado em 25/09/15.

Aceito em 26/10/15.

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