

School of Human Kinetics | Faculty of Health Sciences

University of Ottawa

EXECUTIVE MASTERS IN SPORTS ORGANISATION MANAGEMENT



MEMOS XXV

2022-2023

**“The Implementation of Fiji Football Association’s Strategy on
Talent Development.”**

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to everyone who has contributed to the successful completion of my Executive Masters in Sports Organisation Management thesis project. This journey has been filled with challenges, growth, and remarkable experiences, and I am truly grateful for the support and assistance I have received along the way.

First and foremost, I want to thank God for granting me the strength, perseverance, and opportunities that have allowed me to pursue this educational endeavour.

I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and Fiji Association of Sports and National Olympic Committee (FASANOC) for providing me with the incredible opportunity to be a part of this program. I am immensely grateful to Olympic Solidarity for awarding the scholarship and the financial support from FASANOC that has made this endeavor financially viable. Your support has been invaluable, allowing me to focus on my studies and fully engage in the program.

I would also like to express my deepest gratitude to my employer, the Fiji Football Association, especially the President Mr. Rajesh Patel and Chief Executive Officer Mr. Mohammed Yusuf, for their full support, including financial. Your belief in my abilities and dedication to my professional growth is truly inspiring and have made a significant difference in my educational journey.

To all the interviewees who generously shared their insights and expertise, as well as my mentors Mr. Talemwaqa and Mr. Halitesh Datt, I am incredibly grateful for your valuable input. Your perspectives have enriched my project and broadened my understanding of sports organization management. A special appreciation to the Fiji FA Technical Director, Mr. Timo Jankowski, for his continued support and belief in my project since its inception, being a dedicated mentor and championing my project.

I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to my esteemed tutor, Professor Alain Ferrand, for his firm guidance, mentorship, and support throughout this journey. Your expertise, patience, and dedication have been instrumental in shaping the outcome of my project.

My sincere appreciation to my work colleagues who generously stepped in to assist me during my absence while I was traveling for my studies and working on my thesis.

I am forever indebted to my loving wife, Mrs. Monisha Naidu Kumar, for her unwavering support, encouragement, and motivation. Your belief in me, countless sacrifices, and understanding have been my constant source of strength. Thank you for standing by my side throughout this challenging endeavor.

Last but not least, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my parents and parents-in-law for their unconditional love and blessings. Your constant encouragement and belief in my abilities have been instrumental in my personal and professional growth.

To all those who have contributed to my Executive Masters in Sports Organisation Management thesis project, directly or indirectly, your support has made a profound impact on my journey. I am truly humbled and grateful for all that you have done. Thank you.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Overview

The Fiji Football Association (FFA) is the national body of football in Fiji. It is a member of Oceania Football Confederations (OFC) and became a member of the Federation International de Football Association (FIFA) in 1968. FFA has member strengths of over 30,000 youth and over 30,000 adults; inclusive of students, men and women members through 20 affiliated members from around the country. The Secondary and Primary Schools' Football Associations are also affiliated to FFA who run their own age-group competitions, including the annual competition namely Fiji Primary and Fiji Secondary Schools Inter-District Championship.

Organised football in Fiji started as far back as 1922 from a very humble beginning; FFA today enjoys a very large following which includes Fijians living overseas countries of New Zealand, Australia, Canada and United States of America. Football in Fiji, like all over the world, is the most popular multiracial sports. FFA became a properly constituted body in 1938.

For the past 85 years, the FFA has been organizing football competitions at different levels for both youths and adults (equal competitions for men and women) at district, regional and national levels. Fiji Football Association has also been taking part in all FIFA's International competitions as well as the regional competitions organized by the OFC.

The FFA has 2 fully fledged football academies in Ba (Western Division of Fiji) and Suva (the headquarters in the Central) and the construction of a third academy in Labasa (the other island of Fiji, Vanua Levu) which is already under operation with just minor finishing work left to be done.

Over the years, FFA has spread its wings and organised many events directly related to the development, promotion and growth of its popular sports and progress of football activities in the country. In addition to the activities, on local front, the FFA has always endeavoured to take part in all OFC/FIFA organised competitions within the region.

Looking at the current situation at FFA (until September 2022), there is very small to almost no fundament of talent identification and hence, the golden age was totally missed out. There was no talent identification in place, lack of cooperation with schools and no talent training programs in place.

How can Fiji improve its FIFA rankings? Why is Fiji not able to produce players who can play in professional leagues despite having so many talented players around? These are some of the many questions that arises in the minds of many as far as professional footballers in Fiji is concerned. There are many underlying factors that needs to be considered which is a reason for our players not being able to reach the overseas market. Talent development plays a major part in all aspects of football.

One of the most favorable things is the fact that FFA has a new strategic plan 2021-2026 that was developed considering the FIFA World Cup 2026. The plan has been outlined with clear vision, mission, values, strategic pillars, strategic goals, strategic priorities and long-term objectives. This helps FFA to track the organization's progress towards achieving the set targets. Without strategic plan, it is impossible to know where you are heading to. Only with a strategic plan it is possible to install processes and that is why in the FFA Football Development Curriculum titled 'Totolo Futupolo', it also starts with the strategic planning which is the Technical Masterplan and the Pyramid are the most important ways of thinking where the big picture and the process is defined which will guide the organization.

1.2. The Research Question and Objectives

Hence, the issue that my project will focus on is the implementation of Fiji Football Association's strategy on talent development. The main research question for this study therefore is how to implement the Fiji Football Association's talent development strategies? The sub-questions related to this question are; what is the suitable process to implement? which stakeholders to involve? what roles they must play? what obstacles and countermeasures?

Upon successful completion and implementation of this project, the entire football community will benefit. Girls and boys from a young age all the way up to improved national

teams. This will also make the fans enjoy more and even more parents will send their kids to the football programmes. A very good example is the Fiji U-19 national team that qualified for the FIFA U-20 World Cup 2023, the foundation was the new rule for the premier league that the technical department recommended where every team must have a U-19 player on the pitch at all times. That is also a good example why a strategic plan is important as this will impact the outcome on the pitch much more than most people think.

1.3. Structure

Finally, looking at the structure of my project, it will be featured in three sections which includes the literature review as the first, qualitative method research as the second section which will be done via internal analysis to assess FFA's capabilities and resources, questionnaires for targeted people like FIFA experts and the government, interviewing potential partners like clubs, parents, players and sponsors. The final part of my project will be the recommendations and action plan.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

Talent development has long been recognized as a crucial aspect of fostering sustainable success in the world of sports. In recent years, numerous football associations and governing bodies have prioritized the implementation of effective strategies to identify, nurture, and maximize the potential of young athletes. The Fiji Football Association (FFA) is no exception, as it seeks to enhance its talent development initiatives to propel Fiji's football landscape to new heights. This literature review aims to critically examine existing research, theories, and practices related to talent development in football, with a specific focus on the main research topic which is the implementation of Fiji Football Association's talent development strategies. By synthesizing relevant literature, this review intends to provide valuable insights and recommendations to enhance the efficacy of talent development programs within the FFA and contribute to the broader discourse on optimizing football talent development strategies.

2.2. Talent development

The strength of any building is heavily dependent on how solid the foundation has been laid, and to have a strong foundation, you need the right mixture. Likewise, the results of the national team reflect back on how well the players have been developed and nurtured. Talent development is the most important phase of the player pathway for any footballer. It all depends on how well the coaches are able to deliver in the best possible way ensuring that the grassroots objective is to win the hearts of the children and make them love the sport first before the talent identification process take place. Getting that done would see the interest among the kids grow and this would push them beyond their limits in order to excel. Eventually, the ultimate objective of the talent development should be to create national team players.

Talent identification, including the selection from the grassroots development programmes is highly based on the ability of qualified coaches and talent identifiers in anticipation of the

future sporting success to be based on current youth performances. An issue with talent identification and development programmes is the assumption that the factors which contribute to successful senior performance can be generalized and measured within an adolescent group to predict future senior ability (Deprez et al., 2015; Vaeyens, Lenoir, Williams, & Philippaerts, 2008).

History has also shown that whenever a smaller football nation qualified for a World Cup the big pool of the players qualified for a U17 and U20 World Cup as well. This strategy is even more crucial for Fiji because of the geographic isolation. We need these high-level games and the pressure situation during a World Cup and this will also only be possible with a strong talent development structure where we can filter out the most talented golden age players. The need to invest in this area is crucial as this is the most effective way to ensure the nation start to dominate in the future. Once Fiji, in this case, start breeding the upcoming players in a professional way, this will ensure they have more players playing professionally which will in turn increase the level and effectiveness of the National Teams.

According to a study untitled "Talent identification and selection in elite youth football: An Australian context" (O'Connor et al., 2016), the football talent development pathway within Australia involves youth players from 11 years old being identified and selected for elite age-related regional (i.e. state regions) teams. It was noted that these players usually have two to three training sessions per week before getting to compete at an annual national championship from the age of 13 years. This gives a platform for the talent identifiers to thoroughly monitor the players over subsequent years from this U13 age-related championships. Following the Under 15 years national championships, a limited number of scholarships (approximately 22) are then offered for a prestigious residential elite national talent development programme. Acceptance into this programme is seen as one of the final stages in a player's development to a professional level, with players regularly competing against international teams with the goal to qualify and compete at the youth football World Cup. Most players who receive a scholarship and complete the two-year programme go on to sign contracts with professional football clubs (O'Connor et al., 2016).

Looking at the talent development pathway in Australia, it seems highly effective especially after looking at their recent performance in the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022. The Socceroos, who is ranked 38 on the world rankings (at the time this review was written), registered two historical victories in Qatar beating 30th ranked Tunisia and 10th ranked Denmark before going down to the 3rd ranked Argentina in a tough Round 16 battle. It was also noted that a lot of fresh faces were named in the squad to make a team with a new generation of players that came through the development programmes in Australia. Even the most experienced captain, Mathew Ryan, followed the development pathway which led to his success at the international stage. These players just do not become elite and professionals overnight. They go through a lot of age-specific development phases before getting nurtured to feature for senior teams and youth national teams (and the senior national teams) where the players attract the football scouts for a possible professional contract to make a living for themselves. Hence, a lot of sacrifices, hard work, determination and important decision makings are required in order to achieve ultimate success.

In Fiji, prior to 2021, the youngest age-specific national league competitions were only till U16. There has not been anything like how Australia has been operating in regards to the talent development leagues. There were no age-specific development programmes until the FFA recruited a new expatriate on the role of the Technical Director in 2021 and since then, there have already been a vast change from how the development programmes used to run and the current age-specific clinics in place. The international governing body of football, FIFA, has empathized on the importance giving every talent a chance and this has seen FFA's initiative to reach out to the maximum number of raw talents nationwide and get a bigger pool for talent identification. The FFA has also received a major sponsorship boost that is solely for the purpose of talent development and the new league is called McDonald's Talent Development League categorized for U-9, U-11, U-13 and U-15.

In October 2022, Fiji got chosen as only 1 of 8 FIFA Member Associations (MA) in the world for a pilot project of the so-called FIFA Talent Development Scheme (TDS) because of the newly developed long-term concept for Talent Development in Fiji. One of the over-arching aims of the FIFA TDS is to give every talent a chance, as a group of experts around former

Arsenal London Coach Arsene Wenger who is now the Global Head of Football Development found out that the biggest gap in most of the MAs who are in the lower rankings are not good enough in Talent Identification and Talent Development and that is why in 2022, the FIFA TDS was launched with the aim to make football worldwide competitive (FIFA, Fiji's new approach to talent development 2022).

Furthermore, according to Votteler & Höner (2013, pp. 433–442), “the German Football Association was identified for running what is most likely the world’s largest sport-specific Talent Identification and Development (TID) programme. In the U-12 category about 3.8% (5000 competence center players and 800 youth elite academy players) of nearly 150,000 eligible players are selected for the German TID programme. In the U-12 to U-15 one-year age categories, approximately 14,000 players nationwide are promoted with one additional training session per week at 366 regional competence centers, primarily to improve their motor skills.” This was undoubtedly evident at the 2014 FIFA World Cup as they had an unbeaten reign in Brazil winning the most prestigious title after beating likes of France (in the quarter final) and Argentina (in the final) and also recording a historic 7-1 victory over the hosts in the semifinal.

There are a lot of factors that can help a person achieve the goal of becoming professionals and also that help cost a person from reaching his/her goals. One of the major influential factors is the environment which includes a number of aspects like “socioeconomic status, sporting policy, support from parents, family, siblings or peers, coaches and staff, and training/development programs” (Gesbert et al., 2021, p.2). “It is common that athletes in the transition from junior to senior elite level experience high demands in the environment, which can result in dropouts or athletes not reaching their full potential. It is however found that supportive environments can help athletes in this transition” (Henriksen, 2010, p.192). While the footballers sweat day and night to reach skilled performance, research has shown that such environmental factors have a significant impact on elite performance. Why is Fiji not able to produce players who can play in professional leagues despite having so many talented players around are a question that arises in the minds of many as far as professional footballers in Fiji is concerned. There are many underlying factors that needs to be

considered which is a reason for the players in Fiji not being able to reach the overseas market. It makes one wonder whether it is the players who are their own reasons for this or is it the coaches and the Federation that needs to accelerate in this process.

Support from the parents is the first major aspect that is targeted because that is where (family) the raw talents are coming from. The grassroots or talent identification programmes should be run in such a way that it is able to convince the parents to send their children for talent development programmes should they be selected by the coaches. The coach education is fundamental for the player development. Good coaches produce good players. In Europe, countries like Iceland, Denmark, Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden, Norway have very good coach education programmes and many high educated coaches (Pro-license). They benefit from that, and they have the necessary number of coaches to take care of the talent development.

The talent identification programmes are essential for all countries, especially for the smaller countries. If you are a small country, you have to find every talent in your country to be able to compete with bigger countries. If you take Denmark as an example, they are number 10 in the world. There are 5 million people in Denmark, but they find every talent. Iceland with 350,000 people is 62 in the world, they find every talent.

Hence, the FFA's talent development strategy incorporates one of FIFA's overarching aims which is to give every talent a chance. All in all, talent development is classified as a worthy investment for every member association and if implement successfully in Fiji, Fiji would become dominant in the region in years to come and have a chance to go to World Cups, also for club sides, football would outnumber rugby as sport number one in Fiji, have a robust talent development programme in place for Fiji that will eventually put Fiji on the global stage in football, have a targeted and yet stratified Junior Academy to Senior Academy Pathway from local Communities to Semi Professional (attached to schools and Clubs) to Regional Academy Centres to National Academy run professionally, Fijian players in few years to start playing in the top division football around the world (local players getting exposed to overseas market) which would see players earning far better than what they think

football can bring and allows capacity building and finally the ultimate goal to qualify for the World Cups and Olympics by being the number one team from the Oceania region.

2.3. Building a national talent development strategy

Constructing and implementing a national talent development strategy for the FFA requires a well-structured and inclusive approach involving key stakeholders at both local and national levels. The strategy should begin with a comprehensive assessment of the current football landscape in Fiji, including an analysis of existing talent identification systems, infrastructure, resources, and player pathways. This assessment will inform the formulation of clear goals, objectives, and performance indicators for the talent development strategy. It is essential to foster collaboration and partnerships with local clubs, academies, schools, and other football organizations, as well as government bodies, to create a unified and coordinated approach. Implementing collaborative strategies may involve establishing development centers, organizing talent identification camps, providing coach education programs, and offering player support services. It is equally important to create a healthy working environment which has a vast impact while carrying out the set strategies.

According to Larsen, C. H., Alfermann, D., Henriksen, K., & Christensen, M. K. (2013) who wrote on the characteristics of a successful environment for the talent development in a Danish soccer club, the environment was centered around the relationship between players and a staff of coaches, assistants, and managers that helped the players to focus on: A holistic lifestyle, handling dual careers (sport and school), developing the ability to work hard, and being self-aware and responsible for their own training. Regular monitoring and evaluation should be integrated to ensure the strategy's effectiveness, allowing for adjustments and improvements as needed. By involving key stakeholders and implementing collaborative strategies, the FFA can foster a robust talent development system that nurtures the potential of young footballers in Fiji and elevates the nation's footballing standards.

2.4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the implementation of the talent development strategies for FFA requires a comprehensive and collaborative approach. By conducting a thorough assessment of the current football landscape, setting clear goals, and engaging key stakeholders at local and

national levels, the FFA can lay a solid foundation for talent development. Collaborative strategies, such as establishing development centers, organizing talent identification camps, and providing coach education programs, are crucial for identifying and nurturing young talent. Creating a supportive and holistic environment, focusing on players' well-being, dual careers, hard work, and self-awareness, is vital for their growth. Regular monitoring and evaluation will ensure the strategy's effectiveness, facilitating necessary adjustments and improvements. By involving key stakeholders and implementing collaborative strategies, the FFA can elevate Fiji's footballing standards and create a pathway for young players to excel, ultimately aiming to compete at the highest international level and solidify football as a dominant sport in the country.

3. METHODOLOGY / DATA COLLECTION STRATEGIES

The implementation of Fiji Football Association's strategy on Talent Development is the overall guiding principle that was chosen as the title of this project. Further breaking it down to set the path going forward with the project, the research question that we would like to answer is "How to implement Fiji Football Association's strategy on Talent Development?"

It will be a qualitative method research strategy focusing on the current situation in Fiji and its operational strategies as far as talent development programmes are concerned. It is also important to know the efficiency of the current development programmes, its strengths and weaknesses, what should be done, who should do what and the resources needed.

The following are the three major strategies I will be using to collect data:

1. Semi-structured interviews – this will be for the targeted people like experts internally, from the world governing body FIFA, regional body Oceania Football Confederation (OFC), New Zealand Football which is the most successful Member Association in our region, government ministry (possibly the Ministry of Education), the major sponsor of talent development as well as Fiji's lone professional footballer, Roy Krishna.
2. Focus group – this will be done for the selected parents from all the different zones of Fiji to have different views.

Furthermore, football experts are the best persons from who I can grab maximum information as they would be able to answer both specific and general questions. Based on their experience, the table 1 below shows some of the questions I would be asking:

Table 1: Questions and its relevance

Questions	Relevance
1. Could you please express your views on the Talent	To gather insights and perspectives from the experts who have prior experience with talent development processes. Their views can provide

Development process, based on your experiences.	valuable information on what has worked well in other contexts, what challenges they faced, and what improvements can be made.
2. How to implement the talent development program?	To identify the specific steps and actions required to put the talent development program into practice in Fiji. It helps in understanding the practical aspects of the implementation process and the strategies that need to be employed.
3. What do you recommend?	This question allows the interviewees to offer their recommendations and suggestions based on their expertise and understanding. Their inputs can lead to potential improvements or adjustments in the talent development strategy.
4. Who are the stakeholders to involved?	Identifying the relevant stakeholders is crucial to ensure that all relevant parties are engaged and committed to the talent development initiative. This question helps in recognizing key individuals, organizations, or entities that need to be involved in the process.
5. What role should they play?	Understanding the roles of different stakeholders is essential to establish clear responsibilities and contributions. Each stakeholder's involvement and contribution can differ, and this question helps in clarifying their specific roles.
6. What are the resources needed and who should provide them?	Implementing the talent development program would definitely require various resources, such as financial, human, infrastructure, and equipment. Knowing what resources are needed and who should be responsible for providing them ensures proper planning and allocation of resources.

7. What are the obstacles that could be faced?	Identifying potential obstacles and challenges beforehand helps in preparing for them and developing contingency plans. It allows for a more realistic approach to implementation and minimizes unexpected disruptions.
8. How to overcome those obstacles?	This question aims to explore potential solutions and strategies to overcome the identified obstacles. It provides a proactive approach to addressing challenges that may arise during the implementation of the talent development program in Fiji.
9. What are the key success factors? The KPIs. Do you think this can be implemented in Fiji?	Understanding the key success factors and defining Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) is essential for evaluating the effectiveness and impact of the talent development program. Additionally, considering the feasibility of implementation in Fiji is vital to assess whether the strategy aligns with the country's specific context, resources, and capabilities.

These questions collectively help in comprehensively analyzing the talent development strategy and its implementation. They provide valuable insights, recommendations, and considerations necessary to successfully execute the Fiji Football Association's strategy on talent development.

The football experts and relevant stakeholders to be interviewed are listed in the table 2:

Table 2: Football experts and relevant stakeholders to be interviewed

Experts	Relevant Stakeholders
1. FIFA Technical Consultant to Oceania Region, Mr. Tony Readings	1. Fiji FA President, Mr. Rajesh Patel
2. FIFA Talent Coach, Mr. Daniel Cooke	2. Fiji FA Chief Executive Officer / General Secretary, Mr. Mohammed Yusuf
3. New Zealand Football Technical Director, Mr. Andrew Boyens	3. Fiji FA Technical Director, Mr. Timo Jankowski
	4. Fiji FA Head of Talent Development, Mr. Sunil Kumar
	5. Sponsor – McDonald’s Fiji Managing Director, Mr. Marc McElrath
	6. Fiji’s only Professional Footballer, Mr. Roy Krishna
	7. District President
	8. Parents (Focus group)

A qualitative thematic analysis will be used to identify the components to be considered for the implementation of Fiji Football Association’s strategy.

A thematic analysis strives to identify patterns of themes in the interview data. One of the advantages of thematic analysis is that it’s a flexible method which we can use both for explorative studies, where you don’t have a clear idea of what patterns you are searching for, as well as for more deductive studies, where you know exactly what you are interested in.

4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The project's issue focus on the implementation of the Fiji Football Association's strategy on talent development. By analyzing the current state of talent development in Fiji and identifying areas for improvement, this will provide a roadmap for successful implementation of the strategy. The analysis will involve the findings from the data collection, evaluation, and benchmarking against best practices to ensure effective talent development in Fiji's football ecosystem.

The qualitative thematic analysis performed after the expert's interviews drives us to identify 8 areas.

4.1. Talent Development and its importance

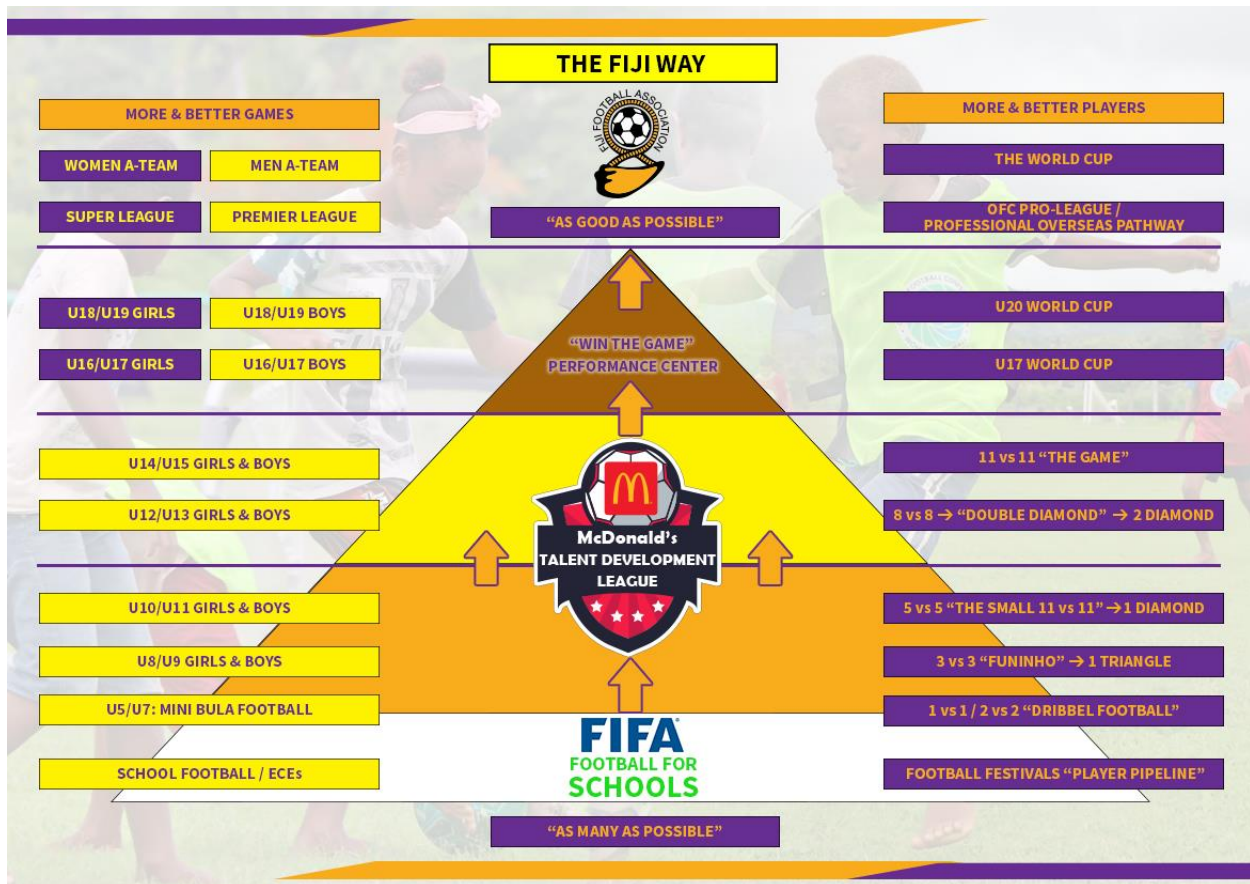
Talent development is crucial for players who aspire to play at a higher level and be the best they can be. It provides support and environments for players to succeed and achieve their goals. The talent development process plays a vital role in shaping the future of the sport of football. By identifying, nurturing, and developing young players, the clubs as well as the national teams can ensure a continuous supply of talented footballers who can contribute to the game at the highest level.

According to the experts interviewed, the talent development process is multifaceted and dependent on various factors such as technical, tactical, physical, and psychological abilities. They emphasize that a player's personal love and desire to play the sport are crucial. The experts say that *"this journey starts at a young age and within all of this, the most important factor is that the player has a personal love and desire to play football"* (New Zealand Football Technical Director, 07 April 2023). The interviewees described the talent development process in Fiji as being at the ground level as of now. They acknowledged the presence of raw talent and expressed optimism about implementing competitive opportunities, such as the McDonald's Talent Development League, to develop and nurture that talent.

They believe that by reaching out to every child interested in playing football and providing them with appropriate teaching and education, they can have a significant impact on the future national teams.

4.2. Implementation of Fiji FA's Talent Development Model

The Fiji FA Technical Director emphasized the importance of building a strong foundation for talent development as illustrated in the model below. This model was designed by Mr. Jankowski in the Fijian-specific way, hence named “The Fiji Way”.



The McDonald's Talent Development League for U-9, U-11, U-13, and U-15 is highlighted as a significant pillar of the talent development model. He proposes signing an agreement with the government (Ministry of Education) to introduce the FIFA Football for Schools program in at least twenty schools initially, with plans to increase the number of schools each year.

He also suggests expanding the talent development model to include the Just Play program, focusing on early childhood education centers and attracting younger players before they come in contact with rugby.

Similar sentiments were echoed by the FIFA Talent Coach, Daniel Cooke, as he emphasizes the importance of a broad base of players at the grassroots level, providing opportunities for

as many children as possible to participate. They mention the need for the best coaches to guide talented players in the youth leagues and also highlights the significance of effectively transitioning players into competitive environments, whether within Fiji or internationally.

The FIFA Consultant to Oceania Region said implementing talent development in Fiji requires addressing geographical challenges and providing access to programs *“because the country is split over several islands, and it’s hard for people to access talent development programs which then makes it hard for the Fiji FA to identify the players with the most potential and the most talent in the country as well”* (FIFA Consultant to Oceania Region, 28 May 2023). One approach is taking programs to different districts and empowering local communities to deliver their own programs while identifying and gathering the most talented players for more centralized programs.

According to the Fiji FA President, Rajesh Patel, implementing the talent development process in Fiji requires a dynamic approach involving various stakeholders, infrastructure, and resources. As the leader of this organization, he negotiated with McDonald’s Fiji and they are now on board with Fiji FA specifically for the grassroots and talent development.

Providing a general response, the Fiji FA General Secretary recommends that every member association should have a separate team within the technical department dedicated to talent identification and development. This suggests a structured approach to talent development throughout the country.

4.3. Process Management

4.3.1. Roles: The Technical Director plays a leadership role in setting up the strategy for talent development and working with key stakeholders. Identifying and involving the right people who can guide and implement the different projects across various age categories is crucial. The primary responsibility of the Head of Talent Development is to oversee and identify talented players throughout Fiji with the presence of three regional development heads who are responsible for specific regions and assist in organizing training and managing teams in competitions. These regional heads also provide feedback on talents identified.

4.3.2. Managing the process: The Technical Director explained the hierarchical structure within the technical department, where regional coordinators report to development officers, who, in turn, report to the Head of Talent Development. Regular communication and reporting are facilitated through tools like Viber chats, video clips, and pictures to monitor the implementation of the program.

4.4. Stakeholders and their roles

Several stakeholders have been identified as crucial for talent development in Fiji. Below is the analysis of the stakeholders mentioned and their roles in the process:

4.4.1. Players and their families: They are considered primary stakeholders by the experts. Engaging and communicating with them is important to understand their aspirations, provide information about development programs, and gain their support.

4.4.2. Coaches and Technical Staff: According to the interviewees, they play a vital role in player development. Ongoing training, professional development opportunities, and collaboration should be provided to enhance their knowledge and skills. The regional development officers equally play a key role in implementing the set strategies in all districts.

4.4.3. Schools and Community Clubs: These serve as platforms for player identification and development. Collaborating with them to establish talent identification programs, coaching clinics, and youth competitions is essential.

4.4.4. Professional Clubs and Academies (overseas) and Local District Associations: Partnerships with professional clubs and academies provide opportunities for young players to progress. Talent pathways, exchange programs, and trial opportunities can be established.

4.4.5. Sponsors and Corporate Partners: Seeking sponsorship and partnership opportunities from businesses invested in sports development can provide resources and funding. Promoting their involvement through branding and acknowledgment is important.

- 4.4.6. Media and Community:** Engaging the media to raise awareness about talent development programs and involving the local community through outreach programs and events can contribute to success.
- 4.4.7. Government and National Sporting Organizations:** Engaging the government (Ministry of Youth and Sports and Ministry of Education), Fiji Sports Commission, and the Fiji Association of Sports and National Olympic Committee (FASANOC), national sporting organizations, and regional sporting organizations is crucial. They can provide support, resources, and collaborate on policy development. Alignment with national development plans, accessing resources, and organizing competitions can be facilitated through their support.
- 4.4.8. Fiji FA Board and Technical Department:** The Board, President, General Secretary, Technical department, Competitions, Marketing, Finance, Referees department within Fiji FA have responsibilities for talent development. They provide leadership, design programs, ensure competitions meet player needs, raise awareness, secure funding, and support coach and referee development.
- 4.4.9. FIFA and Oceania Football Confederation (OFC):** These international governing bodies support talent development through funding, expertise, and development schemes.

Hence, engaging and collaborating with these stakeholders through effective communication, partnerships, and involvement in decision-making processes is vital for successful talent development in Fiji.

4.5. Resources

Funding is identified as the most critical resource, but the interviewees also emphasize the importance of having the right people involved. In Fiji's current context, McDonald's sponsorship and the employment of skilled individuals are seen as valuable resources.

The interviewees suggest that various stakeholders should contribute to the resources, ensuring stability and avoiding dependency on a single stakeholder. McDonald's Fiji, FIFA,

OFC, the Fiji FA Board, and other mentioned stakeholders are seen as potential contributors to create a sustainable environment for the project.

4.6. Obstacles/Risks

The survey results demonstrate the following obstacles and challenges that could be faced while implementing the talent development process in Fiji:

- 4.6.1. Aligning everyone to a shared vision:** According to the New Zealand Football Technical Director, *“the biggest obstacle we face is aligning everyone to a shared vision. Often in the talent space, there is competition rather than collaboration”*. This obstacle emphasizes the importance of clear understanding and effective communication among stakeholders regarding their roles and responsibilities in the talent development process.
- 4.6.2. Quality assurance and consistency:** Ensuring the best possible approach for talent development and maintaining consistency in quality assurance is considered a critical challenge, according to the FIFA Talent Coach, Daniel Cooke. The interviewee specifically mentions the importance of every interaction and contact the player has been of high quality. He highlighted the need for robust processes, involvement of FIFA and OFC, and the responsibility of the Federation and its staff in providing the best environment for talent development.
- 4.6.3. Limited infrastructure:** The limited availability of training facilities, playing fields, and stadiums is identified as an obstacle in Fiji. This has been emphasized by all interviewees. This limitation can impact access to quality training and hinder the development of talent. The McDonald's Talent Development League, involving a large number of teams, further stresses the need for adequate infrastructure.
- 4.6.4. Competition from other sports:** In Fiji, competition from traditional sports poses a challenge to football development. Engaging communities and families who have different sporting preferences and encouraging their support and participation in football becomes crucial.

- 4.6.5. Socio-economic factors:** Socio-economic factors, such as poverty and limited resources in some communities, can affect access to football training, equipment, and support services. These factors create barriers for aspiring players, requiring targeted efforts to overcome them.
- 4.6.6. Geographical challenges:** The geographic spread of the country is mentioned as a challenge. This spread can create logistical difficulties, impacting the coordination and development of players across different regions. Similarly, one of the interviewees identifies logistics, particularly in traveling to remote areas, as a major obstacle.
- 4.6.7. Lack of quality infrastructure:** Along with limited infrastructure, the lack of quality infrastructure and pitches is identified as a common issue. Developing players requires suitable facilities, and the absence of good quality infrastructure hinders progress.
- 4.6.8. Understanding of high performance:** The interviewee emphasizes the challenge of grasping and understanding what true high performance looks like, particularly in an isolated region like Oceania. This lack of knowledge can affect the setting of standards and the quality of coaching programs and initiatives.
- 4.6.9. Standard of coaching:** Improving the overall standard of coaching is mentioned as an important challenge. While acknowledging the presence of good coaches in the country, raising the standard across the board is necessary to support player development and improve the national team's success on the world stage.
- 4.6.10. Development opportunities for young players:** Ensuring adequate development opportunities for young players at the grassroots level is recognized as a challenge. While the introduction of the McDonald's Leagues has addressed this to some extent, there is still a need for more programs and opportunities across the country.

4.7. Countermeasures

The interviewees provided insights into the countermeasures or solutions proposed to overcome the identified obstacles and risks in implementing the talent development process.

4.7.1. Meaningful engagement with stakeholders: To address the obstacle of aligning everyone to a shared vision mentioned above, the interviewee emphasizes the importance of meaningful engagement with key stakeholders and said that *“they need to feel heard in the discussion and feel like they’ve been part of developing the plan or the vision for Talent Development”* (New Zealand Football Technical Director, 07 April 2023).

4.7.2. Establishing taskforces and criteria: The FIFA Talent Coach mentions the creation of a taskforce involving Fiji FA, Fiji Talent Team, FIFA, and OFC to define key criteria for creating the best talent development environments. This includes addressing off-the-field aspects like living conditions, nutrition, and education, as well as on-field aspects such as equipment, kit, session planning, and competition. The taskforce aims to establish expected quality standards for each level within the talent development pyramid.

4.7.3. Comprehensive approach and collaboration: Overcoming the identified obstacles requires a comprehensive and collaborative approach involving all key stakeholders. The experts suggest addressing infrastructure gaps, securing funding, raising awareness, providing training opportunities, and creating inclusive pathways. This approach aims to build a strong football talent development system by addressing various challenges holistically.

4.7.4. Logical thinking and proactive measures: The interviewees emphasize the importance of logical thinking and proactive measures to overcome challenges. They mention adapting to limitations like the absence of floodlights and organizing games accordingly. Additionally, in coach education, ensuring coaches are aware of the football development curriculum is mentioned as a way to address challenges. The Fiji FA Technical Director highlights the importance of being proactive and having a plan in place to respond to risks and challenges effectively.

4.7.5. Robust plan and prioritization: Developing a robust plan based on ecosystem analysis and SWOT analysis is highlighted as an important step. By identifying challenges and risks, a plan can be developed to address them and mitigate their impact. Prioritization of areas that require immediate attention is emphasized, considering the resources and support available. By prioritizing and focusing on the most significant challenges, momentum can be gained and progress can be made in talent development.

4.8. Importance of Patience

Most of the interviewees emphasize the need for patience in the talent development process. Patience is crucial in talent development, as it is a long-term process. Results may not be immediate, and it is important for people to understand and have patience to see the desired outcomes in the future. They mention the importance of developing robust processes, committing to them, and allowing time for the desired outcomes to manifest. One of the interviewees view impatience as a risk in talent development and emphasizes the need for awareness and understanding among all stakeholders.

The Fiji FA Technical Director uses a metaphor of cooking a traditional Fijian meal, Lovo, to convey the importance of allowing sufficient time for the development process.

4.9. Parents' Opinion

To gather valuable insights and opinions from one of the major stakeholders, parents, regarding the talent development initiative in Fiji, a focus group strategy was employed where parents could openly share their thoughts and experiences. This allowed for a deeper understanding of the parents' perspectives, capturing a diverse range of opinions and generating rich qualitative data.

4.9.1. View on the talent development program: The parents expressed a positive view of the talent development program. They describe it as a great initiative for developing talent within young players with the program's value in identifying talent at an early age and commends the approach of starting to groom players from a young age. They showed enthusiasm and support for the

talent development program, recognizing its potential benefits for nurturing and harnessing talent within the younger generation.

4.9.2. Benefits for children: The parents identified several benefits for children participating in the talent development program. One of the parents mentioned that *“this helps children develop not only footballing skills, but overall life skills through sports”* (Parent, 13 April 2023). They emphasize that participating in the program allows children to develop friendships and learn from their peers, which contributes to their cognitive growth. They highlight the holistic approach of the talent development program, recognizing that it offers more than just footballing development but also encompasses important social and cognitive aspects.

4.9.3. Issues faced with balancing studies and sports: The interviewees address the potential issues faced by children in balancing their studies and sports commitments. They identify the pressure to choose between the two as a common challenge. However, the parents emphasize that there should not be a need to choose between studies and sports, as both can coexist and support each other. They highlight the importance of finding a balance and recognizing that engagement in sports can positively impact academic performance, and vice versa.

4.9.4. Roles of Schools, Clubs, and Fiji FA: The parents expressed the need for ongoing commitment and emphasized the program's sustainability over time. They call for schools and clubs to actively support and promote the initiative, indicating that their involvement is crucial for its success. They also mentioned the collaborative effort required from schools, clubs, and the governing body (Fiji FA) to ensure the program's continued implementation and effectiveness. Hence, the parents focused on the need for collective support and long-term dedication from schools, clubs, and the Fiji FA to sustain and maximize the benefits of the talent development program.

4.9.5. Roles of Families: The interviewees emphasize the importance of being present for their children during their participation in the program and consistently showing support. They imply that their involvement and

encouragement as parents or family members can have a positive impact on the children's experience and development within the program. They suggest that actively attending matches, providing encouragement, and demonstrating support are key ways in which parents and families can contribute to the success of the program.

4.9.6. Risks and Countermeasures: The parents identified two potential risks involved in the talent development program: injuries and disheartenment. They said that these risks can have negative effects on the participants. To overcome these risks, they suggest having a system in place to support the children. While the answer does not provide specific details about the countermeasures, it implies the importance of implementing measures to prevent injuries and address any emotional or motivational challenges that may arise. They highlight the need for a comprehensive support system that considers both the physical and psychological well-being of the participants.

4.10. McDonald's Fiji - Major Sponsor of Fiji Football Association's inaugural Talent Development League

The Fiji Football Association is thrilled to have McDonald's Fiji coming on to as the major sponsor of the inaugural talent development league in Fiji. The company has shown pure interest in supporting the Fiji FA's initiative of grassroots level or the talent development program nationwide. According to the Managing Director of McDonald's Fiji;

4.10.1. Partnership with FFA: McDonald's partnered with the Fiji FA (Fiji Football Association) because they believe soccer has a promising future in Fiji. The reasons for partnering include the inclusivity of both boys and girls in the sport, the limited existing development program for grassroots football, the abundance of talent in Fiji, Fiji FA's organization and adherence to the FIFA standards, and the importance of accountability and transparency in sponsorships.

4.10.2. Expectations: McDonald's Fiji expects branding, visibility, and consumer engagement, demonstrating their commitment to youth, fitness, and talent development.

4.10.3. Activation and Promotion of the Sponsorship: They intend to leverage press, digital and traditional media, giveaways, and other means to promote the sponsorship. They aim to showcase McDonald's as a company that gives back to the community and cares about youth talent development.

4.10.4. Role in the Talent Development Process: McDonald's sees itself as a long-term facilitator in the talent development process. They aim to contribute to talent identification across the country and support the development of children for a future in sports, including potential opportunities overseas.

4.10.5. Major Risk and Countermeasures: According to the Managing Director, *“the main risk is the success of the program and the possibility of a bigger sponsor coming in at the end and taking over the sponsorship”*. The countermeasure suggested is to establish a long-term agreement and maintain regular communication to ensure the satisfaction of both parties involved.

4.11. Analysis from Fiji's lone professional footballer

Since its establishment in 1938, the Fiji Football Association (Fiji FA) has had a relatively limited record in producing professional footballers. In fact, to this day, only one professional footballer has emerged from Fiji's shores. To gain insight into the current status of football in Fiji and gather thoughts on talent development, an interview was conducted with this notable player.

The lone professional footballer from Fiji has achieved remarkable success both domestically and internationally. With an illustrious career spanning over a decade, he has become a symbol of hope and inspiration for aspiring footballers in Fiji. The interview aimed to delve into his experiences, shed light on the challenges faced by footballers in Fiji, and explore potential pathways for talent development.

4.11.1. Talent Development (TD) and its importance: When asked about his views on the Talent Development (TD) and its importance, Krishna highlighted the significance of TD in shaping athletes and maximizing their potential. The structured TD programs can provide systematic training, expert guidance, and access to modern techniques and resources that accelerate a player's growth

and increase their chances of success. He shared his own unique experience of not having gone through a typical TD process. Relying on passion, determination, and countless hours of playing with friends to develop skills was his way. However, this unstructured approach fostered creativity, adaptability, and a deep love for the sport. He also emphasizes the importance of instincts, learning from mistakes, and observing more experienced players. While he succeeded without a formal TD process, Krishna acknowledged the advantages it provides. Structured TD programs offer formal training, specialized coaching, and competitive environments that can complement raw talent and passion. They can accelerate development, provide exposure to higher-level competitions, and potentially lead to international recognition. The components of TD programs, including technical training (ball control, passing, shooting, etc.), tactical concepts, positioning, team play, and decision-making abilities. The importance of mental and psychological aspects, such as resilience, discipline, focus, and handling pressure. Physical development, including strength, speed, agility, and endurance, was also noted as his sentiments.

4.11.2. Issues faced while building his career: After noting that he did not have the pleasure of going through a structured talent development process and yet becoming a professional footballer eventually, he was asked on the issues faced in his journey of reaching the highest level.

- a. Absence of formal training and specialized coaching:** He highlights the major challenge of not having access to formal training and specialized coaching during his formative years. This absence hindered his ability to develop skills and technique to their fullest potential.
- b. Limited access to resources and facilities:** The interviewee notes the disadvantage of not having the same opportunities as their teammates in the professional clubs who went through talent development programs. They lacked access to state-of-the-art training facilities, equipment, and resources that are often provided in structured programs to enhance player development.

- c. **Limited exposure to competitive environments:** Without a structured talent development program, the interviewee had limited exposure to competitive environments. The lack of regular competitive matches against strong opponents affected his ability to test and refine his skills, adapt to different game situations, and gain valuable experience.
- d. **Missed opportunities for growth and exposure:** He mentioned that not going through a traditional talent development process resulted in missed opportunities for growth and exposure. He lacked the same level of visibility, access to higher-level competitions, scouts, and international recognition that structured programs often provide.
- e. **Self-learning and lack of mentorship:** Due to the absence of formal coaching, he had to rely on self-learning through observations and trial-and-error. The lack of mentorship and guidance from experienced coaches deprived him of valuable insights and specific feedback to accelerate his development.
- f. **Potential skill gaps and technical deficiencies:** Without structured training, he admits the possibility of having skill gaps and technical deficiencies in his game. The absence of systematic coaching may have resulted in missed opportunities to refine certain aspects of his technique or develop specialized skills emphasized in talent development programs.

4.11.3. Strategies to overcome issues: The below showcases his response to the strategies and approaches he adopted to overcome the challenges faced during his development phase as a professional footballer.

- a. **Self-motivation and determination:** He relied heavily on self-motivation and determination to push forward. He had a strong internal drive to succeed in football and was committed to putting in the necessary effort and hard work to improve his skills and reach ultimate goals.
- b. **Actively seeking opportunities to improve:** Despite the lack of formal training, he actively sought out opportunities to improve his game. He played as much as possible, seeking matches against more experienced players to challenge himself and learn from their expertise. His dedication

and improvement caught the attention of senior teams, who eventually requested him to join.

- c. **Learning from seasoned players:** In the absence of specialized coaching, he made the most of every chance to learn from more seasoned players. He observed games at Subrail Park in Labasa (Fiji) and carefully studied the strategies, field movements, positioning, and tactical choices of senior players. Additionally, he utilized FIFA video games as a tool to learn tactics and techniques that he could apply on the field.
- d. **Developing creativity and adaptability:** The absence of structured coaching allowed the interviewee to develop creativity and adaptability in his playing style. He learned to rely on his instincts, experiment with different approaches, and take risks on the field. This freedom fostered a unique playing style that became one of his strengths.
- e. **Mindset of continuous self-development:** He adopted a mindset of continuous self-development. Despite limited access to formal football education in Fiji, he actively sought out resources such as books, videos, and online tutorials to expand his knowledge and understanding of the game. He remained open to learning new techniques, tactics, and strategies to enhance performance.
- f. **Making the most of opportunities:** Despite limited exposure to competitive environments, he made the most of the opportunities that came his way. He approached each game as a chance to showcase his skills and make an impact, giving his best and remaining focused. He recognized that each performance could potentially lead to more opportunities.
- g. **Mental resilience:** Mental resilience played a crucial role in overcoming challenges. He learned to handle setbacks and disappointments, staying resilient while facing hardship. He developed mental strength, bounced back from failures, learned from mistakes, and maintained a positive mindset throughout his journey. He also received support and encouragement from his father, who motivated him to face challenges head-on and grow into a more independent and resilient individual.

4.11.4. Roles that Fiji FA can play: He was further asked to highlight on the roles that the Fiji FA can play in the talent development process within the country.

- a. Improving youth development programs:** He said the Fiji FA can enhance its age-specific structured youth development programs nationwide. By providing organized training, coaching, and competition opportunities through local clubs, schools, and communities, young athletes can access resources for their development. The inclusion of virtual coaching clinics can address physical access challenges and provide remote players with valuable guidance.
- b. Establishing youth academies and development centers:** The Fiji FA can establish youth academies and development centers connected to local clubs or professional teams abroad. These training grounds can serve as talent hotspots, offering specialized coaching, modern facilities, and tools to improve player development.
- c. Collaborating with Schools and Community Clubs:** Collaborating with schools and community clubs, along with district support, can help the Fiji FA identify and nurture young talents. By initiating grassroots initiatives and talent identification programs, opportunities for young players from various districts can be ensured. This collaboration would provide guidance from experienced coaches and players in different regions.
- d. Organizing regular youth competitions:** The Fiji FA can organize more regular youth competitions at various age levels. These competitions serve as valuable platforms for young players to gain game experience and test their skills against strong opponents. They also act as talent identification avenues for higher-level programs and national squads.
- e. Training and development programs for coaches:** The Fiji FA can focus on training and development programs for local coaches to improve the quality of coaching across all levels. By investing in coach education, the Fiji FA can enhance the effectiveness of guidance provided to young players, positively impacting the TD process.

- f. Creating clear player development pathways:** Establishing clear pathways for young players to progress from grassroots levels to professional football abroad is essential. By outlining the necessary steps, opportunities, and requirements, the Fiji FA can guide young talents towards professional ranks and maximize their potential.
- g. Establishing partnerships and exchange programs:** The Fiji FA can establish partnerships and exchange programs with international football associations, clubs, and organizations, such as Wellington Phoenix FC. These collaborations offer young players exposure to diverse football cultures, training methodologies, and competition environments, broadening their prospects and enhancing their development.

4.11.5. Can it be implemented in Fiji: Finally, he gave a positive outlook on the feasibility of implementing effective talent development strategies in Fiji. He emphasized the need for collaboration, grassroots development, government support, and international partnerships. By leveraging Fiji's football culture, untapped talent pool, and existing passion for the sport, Fiji FA can create a sustainable and inclusive talent development system.

4.12. Impact on National Teams

The interviewees expressed the view that the proposed talent development strategy, which includes opportunities for more children to play, creating environments for teenage players, and providing guidance from top-level coaching, can have a significant impact on Fiji's national teams in international events. They said that “in the long run it can really change the landscape of football for Fiji at the international level”. Their perspective aligns with the recommendation of building a comprehensive talent development strategy that focuses on grassroots programs, talent identification, coaching education, and player pathways. The emphasis on nurturing players from a young age and providing them with the necessary support and guidance is crucial for developing high-caliber players who can contribute to the national teams' success in international competitions.

4.13. Feasibility of Implementing the Talent Development strategies

All experts interviewed believe that with the guidance of the Technical Director, support from key stakeholders within and outside Fiji FA, and a willingness to adapt and update the talent development model, it can be implemented successfully. They emphasized the importance of remaining open to changes based on the needs of the players and increasing national team competitiveness.

Conclusion on Key Findings

The interviews that were conducted produced invaluable insights. The key findings highlighted the significance of talent development as the foundation of Fiji's football future, along with a comprehensive understanding of Fiji FA's Talent Development Model, emphasizing the importance of effective process management. The roles of stakeholders were clarified, while the need for adequate resources and the identification of potential obstacles with their corresponding countermeasures were emphasized. The interviews also highlighted the importance of patience in nurturing talent and explored the positive impact on Fiji's national teams. Moreover, the feasibility of implementing the talent development strategies was assessed, drawing from diverse perspectives, including parents' opinions, insights from McDonald's Fiji as a major sponsor, and the analysis from Fiji's lone professional footballer. These findings provide a solid foundation for Fiji Football Association to fine-tune and successfully implement their talent development strategy for a thriving football landscape in the country.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

To effectively implement and enhance the talent development strategy of the Fiji Football Association (Fiji FA), it is recommended to focus on basically how to implement the national talent development strategy that has been defined. During the last two decades, the German talent strategy program has been very successful and the Germans achieved this success in collaboration with numerous organizations (Pouyandekia & Memar, 2020). This strategy should be constructed and implemented with a well-structured and inclusive approach, involving key stakeholders at both local and national levels. The following recommendations outline the key steps to be taken:

- **Establish clear goals and objectives:** Establish clear and measurable goals and objectives for the talent development strategy. These goals should be aligned with the FFA's vision and long-term aspirations for football in Fiji. They should address areas such as talent identification, player development pathways, coaching education, and infrastructure development.
- **Collaboration and partnerships:** To ensure the success of the talent development strategy, foster collaboration and partnerships with local clubs, academies, schools, and other football organizations. Engage government bodies and relevant stakeholders to create a unified and coordinated approach. Collaborative strategies could include establishing development centers, organizing talent identification camps, and providing coach education programs.
- **Implement player support services:** Provide comprehensive player support services to ensure the holistic development of young footballers. These services should focus on areas such as education, nutrition, mental well-being, and career guidance. Creating a healthy and supportive environment for young players will enhance their overall development and increase their chances of success.
- **Monitor and evaluate:** Implement a robust monitoring and evaluation system to assess the effectiveness of the talent development strategy. Regularly review and analyze data to track progress towards goals and objectives. This will allow for

adjustments and improvements to be made as needed, ensuring the strategy remains responsive to the evolving needs of players and the football landscape in Fiji.

By implementing these recommendations and building a national talent development strategy, the FFA can create a thriving talent development system that nurtures the potential of young footballers in Fiji. This strategic approach, combined with collaboration and monitoring, will elevate the standards of football in the country and contribute to the long-term success of Fijian football at both domestic and international levels.

Hence, this project work has made a significant contribution to addressing the research question of "how to implement the Fiji Football Association's talent development strategies?" Through extensive research and analysis, we have devised a comprehensive and structured process for implementing the strategies. We have identified key stakeholders, including football clubs, coaches, players, parents, sports authorities, and local communities, and defined their respective roles in the implementation. Additionally, we have highlighted potential obstacles and proposed practical countermeasures to address these issues effectively. While our recommendations hold great potential for success, the risks and difficulties involved in implementation necessitate careful planning, strong leadership, continuous stakeholder engagement, and a commitment to overcoming challenges to ensure the strategies' ultimate effectiveness and impact.

Talent Identification and Development 2023-2026

The following pages will present a comprehensive plan aimed at providing every talent in Fiji with the opportunity to maximize their potential. This strategic blueprint encompasses four primary focus areas, each designed to align with our main objective. Within these areas, we will outline the specific strategies, tactics, and key performance indicators to measure our progress effectively. Additionally, we have mapped out a year-by-year plan, with a greater number of tasks in the initial year, gradually narrowing down as we approach our ultimate goals nearing 2026. The document concludes with a detailed activity plan for year 1, outlining tactics, deadlines, responsible individuals, result indicators, stakeholder engagement, and the allocated budget and sources.

5.1. STRATEGIC FOCUS AREA

TALENT IDENTIFICATION (ID) AND DEVELOPMENT 2023-2026

OBJECTIVE: Give every talent in Fiji the opportunity to maximize their potential

Strategy - WHAT	
Optimise Talent ID & Development and audit the first elite programme	
Tactics - HOW	Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Securing the FIFA Talent Coach as a Key Figure • Create a Fiji Talent ID and Development Team that will setup structures for the full coverage of the country • Transition plan until the start of the residential Elite Academy programme • Fine tune the Fiji talent ID processes and implement them in order to find the most talented girls and boys countrywide in all age groups • Find the best possible talents that will become the first Residential Academy players in February 2024 • Supporting clubs with talent identification and training • Invest in scouting overseas players 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successfully applying for the FIFA Talent Coach programme in 2023 and 2024 • Quarterly meetings with the Fiji Talent ID Team • All 10 Regional Development Coordinators have setup a scouting structure in their districts to identify talented girls and boys • Number and quality of players identified through the Fiji talent ID processes into the Elite Academy • Identify the best players for the U15 national team that will play in the OFC U15 Tournament

Strategy - WHAT	
"As good as possible" - Find every talent from the Golden Age	
Tactics - HOW	Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setup the Fiji Talent ID and Development Team • High Performance study visit with the Fiji Talent ID and Development Team and share knowledge with the coaches involved in talent development • Develop a structured plan for systematically developing talent at clubs • Define the Fijian specific talent ID criteria • Prepare and implement a standard Talent ID procedure • Use the "Fun" and "Skill" centres programmes of the 3 Regional Academies and the 12 regional talent centres as a strong starting base • Educate the clubs to identify and train the talents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of talent ID events in the country • Number of covered players • Number of scouting reports • Number of identified players • 1 x workshop per year for all in talent ID & development scouts with focus on the relative age effect
Strategy - WHAT	
Gender Equality - Women's talent development pathway	
Tactics - HOW	Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a mixed talent development league (U9/U11/U13/U15) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of girls playing and training in the U9/U11/U13/U15 talent development leagues

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance the newly introduced Fiji FA Talent ID systems with increased specificity for girls • Share knowledge and resources and setup close interaction between women's and men's technical and national team staff • Work in close collaboration with the OFC and FIFA Women's Football Departments • Establish and extend female only competitions and development opportunities to provide choice to players 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish the first women's development league in Taveuni • Establish a 7th team in the highest women's league • Launch the OFC "This is how we football programme" in two locations • Increase the number of female players each year by 250 players
Strategy - WHAT	
"As much as possible" - Using the school structure as the provider for an increased player pool	
Tactics - HOW	Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School Football Development Manager who will oversee the national strategy specific in schools • Develop close relationships and support with school head teachers and teachers in charge of the school football development programmes • Close contact and regular meetings with the Presidents of the Fiji primary and secondary school bodies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School Football Development Manager appointed • Number of schools participating in the FIFA Football for Schools programme • Target number of 20 schools participating in the FIFA Football for Schools programme in the first year and then double the number every year • Each of the three regional football development centers and each of the 10 RDOs having at least one school football

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement the FIFA Football for School programme • Schools form clusters to participate in talent development leagues • Use school resources for the U9/U11/U13/U15 leagues • Supporting school football with regular training visits, Talent ID events and help in preparation for the school football competitions 	<p>visit per week which adds up to a total of 500 school football visits per year</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 official meeting with the Fiji primary & secondary school football Presidents
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5.2. ROAD MAP

TALENT IDENTIFICATION (ID) AND DEVELOPMENT 2023-2026

STRATEGIC FOCUS AREA	YEAR 1 2023	YEAR 2 2024	YEAR 3 2025	YEAR 4 2026
TALENT ID & DEVELOPMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successfully apply for the FIFA Talent Coach Programme • Setup regular workshops with the Fiji Talent ID and Development Team • Having clear, objective and Fijian specific talent ID criteria in place • Design and test of the best possible Talent ID events that can be reproduced that are able to deliver objective results • “Fun” (U9/U11) and “Skill” (U13/U15) centres in place in the 3 Regional Academies • 12 Regional Talent Centres (U9 to U15) • Identify the best players for the U15 national team that will play in the OFC U15 Tournament • High Performance study visit with the Fiji Talent ID and Development Team • Setup the structure and processes for the first full-time residential Academy in 2024 • Find the best players (2008/2009/2010) that will become the first intake into the full-time Academy • Launch the FIFA Football for School programme within 20 schools • School Football Development Manager appointed • Implement and test Talent ID processes for U16 Girls/Boys and U19 girls at 9 different Talent ID events • Launch the OFC “This is how we football programme” in Lautoka and Nadogo • Start the women’s development league in Taveuni 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successfully re-apply for the FIFA Talent Coach programme • Add additional staff to deliver the increased football development programmes with quality and to guarantee that talent ID & development staff can focus on their roles • Long-term school football development Strategy in place and shared and agreed with the primary and secondary school football association • Start the residential elite academy with full quality assurance processes in place • Increase the FIFA Football for School programme from 20 to 40 schools • Close cooperation and workshops with Fiji Sports Commission Development Officers to deliver football development programmes in the country • 15 Regional Talent Centres (U9-U15) • Having 2500 female players 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase FIFA Football for School programme from 40 to 80 schools • 18 Regional Talent Centres (U9-U15) • Girls’ only talent development league U9/U11/U13/U15 • Having 2750 female players 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase FIFA Football for Schools programme from 80 to 160 schools • 21 Regional Talent Centres (U9-U15) • Having 3000 female players

5.3. ACTION PLAN - YEAR 1

Strategy	Tactics	Deadline	Person(s) Responsible	Result Indicator	Stakeholder Engagement	Budget and Source
Optimise Talent ID & Development and audit the first elite programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a Fiji Talent ID and Development Team that will setup structures for full coverage of the country and that will fine tune the Fiji talent ID processes • Implement talent ID processes in order to find the most talented girls and boys countrywide in all age groups with the aim to start the first elite Residential Academy programme in February 2024 	31 st December 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • President • General Secretary • High Performance Director • Head of Talent Development • Technical Director 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setup quarterly meetings with the Fiji Talent ID Team • All 10 Regional Development Coordinators have setup a scouting structure in their districts to identify talented girls and boys • Number and quality of players identified using the Fiji talent ID processes into the Elite academy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FIFA RTC • FIFA Talent Coach • FIFA TDS • OFC High Performance 	\$120k USD FIFA TDS Fiji FA
Strategy	Tactics	Deadline	Person(s) Responsible	Result Indicator	Stakeholder Engagement	Budget and Source

“As good as possible” - Find every Talent from the Golden Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a structured plan for systematic talent development and define the Fijian specific talent ID criteria • Prepare and implement a standard Talent ID procedure 	31 st December 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • President • General Secretary • High Performance Director • Head of Talent Development • Technical Director 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of talent ID events in the country, • % of covered players • Number of scouting reports • Number of identified players 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FIFA RTC • FIFA Talent Coach • FIFA TDS • OFC High Performance 	\$30k USD FIFA TDS Fiji FA
Strategy	Tactics	Deadline	Person(s) Responsible	Result Indicator	Stakeholder Engagement	Budget and Source
Gender equality - Women's talent development pathway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a mixed talent development league (U9/U11/U13/U15) • Establish and extend female only competitions and development opportunities to provide choice to players 	31 December 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • President • General Secretary • Head of Women's Development • Head of Talent Development • Technical Director 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum 4 girls playing and training in the U9/U11/U13/U15 talent development league • Establish the first women's development league in Taveuni • Establish a 7th team in the highest women league 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FIFA Women Football Experts • OFC Women Department 	\$40k USD FIFA Women's Development Programme OFC Women Football Grant “This is How We Football” programme

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch the OFC “This is how we football programme” in Nadogo & Lautoka 		
Strategy	Tactics	Deadline	Person(s) Responsible	Result Indicator	Stakeholder Engagement	Budget and Source
<p>“As much as possible” - Using the school structure as the provider for an increased player pool</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop close relationships with school football key people • Implement the FIFA Football for Schools programme • Use school resources for football talent ID and development 	31 st December 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • President • General Secretary • Technical Director • Head of Football Development • Regional Development Coordinators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target number of 20 schools participating in the FIFA Football for Schools programme in 2023 • Each of the three regional football development centers and each of the 10 RDOs having at least one school football visit per week 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FIFA Football for Schools Programme • FIFA RTC • Ministry of Education • Fiji National Sports Commission • Fiji Primary and Secondary School Football Presidents 	<p>\$80k USD</p> <p>FIFA Football for Schools Programme</p> <p>Fiji FA</p>

We have reached the conclusion of this project. Through a thorough planning, execution, and rigorous analysis, this project has produced valuable insights and outcomes that hold the potential to reshape the landscape of football talent in Fiji. However, this is merely the initial phase of our mission. To maximize the impact of our efforts, it is imperative to embark on the crucial steps of effectively communicating the results to all stakeholders and initiating their active involvement. By engaging coaches, players, administrators, and the broader community, we can strengthen a collective commitment towards the sustained implementation of the strategy. This entails transparent dissemination of findings, hosting collaborative workshops, and creating a platform for ongoing dialogue. In doing so, we solidify the foundation for the strategy's success and pave the way for a brighter future for football development in Fiji.

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7. ABSTRACT

The Fiji Football Association's (FFA) technical department has a vision of finding the best talents in Fiji and nurturing them in becoming world-class people and footballers, qualifying for world cups at all levels with an inspiring Fijian flair. To achieve this, the FFA needs to effectively implement its strategies on talent development. This thesis project examines the implementation and investigates how the FFA's talent development strategies can be effectively implemented, addressing processes, stakeholder involvement, roles, obstacles, and countermeasures. The project follows a structured approach, including a literature review, qualitative research incorporating internal analysis, questionnaires, interviews with potential partners, and benchmarking with Fiji Rugby's successful talent development approach. The final section provides recommendations which is building a national talent development strategy with clear objectives, strategic focus areas, road map and an action plan to enhance talent development within the FFA.

Key words: Talent Development, Talent Identification, Collaborative Partnership.

Abstrait

Le département technique de la Fidji Football Association (FFA) a pour vision de trouver les meilleurs talents aux Fidji et de les encourager à devenir des personnes et des footballeurs de classe mondiale, se qualifiant pour les coupes du monde à tous les niveaux avec un flair fidjien inspirant. Pour y parvenir, la FFA doit mettre en œuvre efficacement ses stratégies de développement des talents. Ce projet de thèse examine la mise en œuvre et étudie comment les stratégies de développement des talents de la FFA peuvent être mises en œuvre efficacement, en abordant les processus, l'implication des parties prenantes, les rôles, les obstacles et les contre-mesures. Le projet suit une approche structurée, comprenant une revue de la littérature, une recherche qualitative intégrant une analyse interne, des questionnaires, des entretiens avec des partenaires potentiels et une analyse comparative avec l'approche réussie de développement des talents de Fiji Rugby. La dernière section fournit des recommandations qui élaborent une stratégie nationale de développement des talents avec des objectifs clairs, des domaines d'intervention stratégiques, une feuille de route et un plan d'action pour améliorer le développement des talents au sein de la FFA.

Mots-clés : Développement des Talents, Identification des Talents, Partenariat Collaboratif.

8. APPENDICES

Interview Transcript of the FIFA Consultant to the Oceania Region,

Mr. Tony Readings

1. *Based on your experiences, express your views on the talent development process and its importance.*

I think talent development is very important to cater for those players that have aspirations to play at a higher level, aspirations to become the best players they can be and if their goal and they're wise to maybe play for the national teams or even just to be the best player that they can. We provide support and environments that enable them to be successful within that talent development system. I think it's really important that some players will just play for enjoyment, some players just play with their friends or for health reasons and I think that's one of the benefits for those players that have aspirations to either play at a high level or to be the best player they can.

2. *How can it be implemented in Fiji?*

Talent Development in any country so for us, Fiji as an example, it needs to be tailored to the unique context and situation that's in the country. For Fiji, there's a lot of opportunities because there's a lot of naturally physically gifted people in the country and so there's some good opportunities, we can take their people that are passionate for sport. I think at the same time, there's some challenges that we need to address if talent development is going to be successful within Fiji. One will be the geographical challenges because this country is split over several islands, and it's hard for people to access talent development programs which then makes it hard for the Fiji FA to identify the players with the most potential and the most talent in the country as well. So I think designing a way that addresses those geographical challenges is very important will be one and I think to do that, there's two ways; one is that we take programs to the different districts in the country and provide the people on the ground there with education, the resources and equipment to deliver their own

programs, in alignment with Fiji FA and then for the most talented players gathering those together into a more centralized type of programs so we can really optimize their development. So, I think yeah, lots of other challenges, but I think the key is giving people access to the talent development programs and also they have been able to identify the best players within those programs.

3. *Having known about Fiji, and your close connection with our technical team, what do you recommend for Fiji?*

I would recommend that a long-term plan and long-term goals are put in place. I think, looking at the situation, say before the talent development scheme came on board there wasn't many talent programs in place, there wasn't much access for people to put players in the district access programs, there wasn't a high level of coaching capability for other countries as well. I think a long-term plan to gradually and progressively increase the capability of the coaches throughout the country, and gradually and progressively as well increase the number of talent programs that we have throughout the whole of the whole of Fiji. So, trying to do it too fast will then not enable coaches to be upskilled and for the programs to be implemented and monitored and quality assured to the required level. At the same time, if we don't have a plan in place, and we don't gradually do it, then we're not going to be able to reach all of the players that we need to, so I would say a robust plan that outlines how we're going to increase talent development programs and identification opportunities in the country but doing it has speed that the country is ready for to make sure that the programs and opportunities that are put in place are done to the necessary standard.

4. *Who are the stakeholders you think should be involved and how to actually engage them?*

I think within Fiji FA, all departments have a responsibility for talent development. Obviously, we've got the board or the people that make the decisions, The President, the General Secretary providing that senior leadership, the technical department obviously plays a huge role because they're the department that will be designing and implementing and monitoring and adapting the programs, but also the other

departments within the organization. So for example, the competitions department to ensure that the competitions are adhering to the needs of the players and making sure that players are playing regular quality football, marketing would be important to make sure that we are raising awareness of the programs to potentially bringing in some sponsorship for example, finance department to make sure the programs are funded, that there's good finance plans in place so that the programs are sustainable, refereeing to make sure that referees are educated on how to support player development as well and coach development and so on. I think it's a real joint approach within Fiji FA that whole organization works with one team and cohesively to support talent development. From an external perspective, some key stakeholders will be the government, so to get government support for national talent development initiatives will be important within Fiji specifically the schools are very important because at present there's not many football development or talent development activities taking place to the younger players and the players are at school every day and taking on the sport, so I think it's important that they are a key partner as well. I think get sponsors on board I think is important so we can keep raising the profile of talent development and the best time the programs and the development programs will cost money. It's important to do that and then I would say other key partners are FIFA for the support they provide first by the talent development scheme, and then also Oceania Football Confederation (OFC) because ultimately the body that supports football development in our region. I would say that would be the biggest stakeholders that would be involved in talent development and I think that whole ecosystem working cohesively is really important. Aligning people internally is important and to work together and then also, communicating and then aligning stakeholders externally is very important so they understand why we're doing what we're doing, and what we're actually doing so they can see how they can support and the part that they can play.

5. What obstacles do you think could be faced here in Fiji, while actually implementing this talent development programs?

Geographical as I mentioned, country being spread, that is definitely a challenge. I think the lack of quality infrastructure and pitches in the country is an issue because to develop players, we need to have facilities to do that and ideally good quality facilities. So yes, lack of infrastructure and pitches. I think also just the level of knowledge of what true high performance is, is a challenge in our part of the world we are isolated from a lot of developed football countries in the world, say, Europe, for example. Sometimes it's hard to really grasp and know what high performance looks and feels like. I think that can often lead in our region to maybe standards not being satisfied as they need to be set because we don't truly understand what high performance is. I think having a true understanding of high performance so we know what they're, what it should look like and what the end goal is when we are developing programs and initiatives, I think it's very important. Also, educating people on that throughout the country, raising the standard of coaching will be very important. If we do it to support players that are going to help the national team be successful on the world stage in the future, and the overall standard of coaching we need to improve that obviously some good coaches in the country for raising the overall standard will be important. Another key challenge that comes to mind is making sure that there's good development opportunities for players at the younger ages. In the past in Fiji, there has been a lack of programs at grassroots and development level and also competitions. That's been somewhat addressed with the McDonald's Leagues, but we need more, more opportunities and we need those opportunities to happen in more parts of the country as well. There will be some of the bigger challenges that I think we need to address as part of the whole talent development ecosystem.

6. *What would be the solutions to overcome these obstacles?*

I think I've mentioned before having a plan in place that has been very robustly developed that takes into account the ecosystem analysis that FIFA did, as taken into account for a SWOT analysis of the current situation so we can really identify what are those challenges, what are the risks, because then we can put a plan in place to address those challenges and then mitigate against those risks as well. I think that would be really important because and then within that really prioritizing where are

the areas we need to focus on because there'll be a lot of challenges like we've discussed already, but if we, if we try and fix all of them, then it would be quite difficult, so we need to have a look of what are the priority areas we need to address. Once we have done that as part of the plan, then we can really look to maximize the resources support on offer. So from FIFA for example, from OFC, already Fiji FA dedicate funds to talent development, that we can make sure that we're putting our energy in terms of people and we're putting our resources in the right places that are going to have the biggest impact on talent development in Fiji, but prioritizing those to make sure that we gained some momentum at the start, we addressed the biggest challenges and then as part of that longer term plan addressing all the challenges that take place.

7. The Talent Development is a long-term process and you cannot see the fruits just overnight. How important do you think is for the people to have patience in them in order to see the results in the future?

Yeah, I think it's critically important that there is a level of patience from everybody impacts on talent development. We know that talent development takes a long time if it's done properly, and it's done sustainably to really reap the rewards and there's lots of examples of that from around the world or where countries that are now producing on the world stages because their investments that happened many years ago, 10, 15 to 20 years ago. We know it takes time. I think particularly for football, you know for some sports, if they're just focused more on physical outcomes, you can develop athletes quicker but with football to become the best because you need to start planning at a young age. You need to train regularly. You need to train in the best environment with the best coaches, with the best players often, and there's no shortcut for that. You can't start the game at a late age. You can't just let players just not train often doesn't mean they always have to be in formal environments, but it is a process that you can't shortcut with football. You can optimize it but you can't shortcut it. At the same time, there are some short-term wins that you can take but I think those short-term wins have to be more around the processes than the outcomes. So, for example, short term win is setting up a league in the country with more kids playing football, short-term win might be saying that talent development programs or

short-term win could be developing a set number of coaches to A-License or B-License level. There are process goals along the way that we're achieving and celebrating, but the actual fruits of our labor will come often after our time. It's really important that we are patient because development does take time. If we do achieve, we do try and strike a short-term success, we may get some but it's not going to be sustainable. So, what we are after is more sustainable success and to achieve that does require a level of patience.

8. *Do you think it can be implemented in Fiji?*

Yes, I think it can definitely be implemented anywhere in the world better talent development can be implemented anywhere. It's actually not difficult, it's simple but not easy would be the way I put. We need to make sure that we are given every talent a chance like the talent development scheme talks about and that's making sure that all players have access to quality training program, quality coaches in quality environments. Is that not difficult to do? You can train coaches, we can do those things but what it does take is it takes a commitment from the Member Association, it takes a commitment from the Fiji Football Association to lead that and obviously we've talked already about the external stakeholders that are also important, but the leadership does need to come from the Fiji Football Association and it needs to have a strong robust, long term talent development plan that is fully committed to and fully resourced and if along the way, there's some road bumps, which is on the plan, that there's a bravery to stick to that plan and believe in that plan and adapt it and learn and improve it. So, I think we have a robust, longer-term plan that's fully committed to. I fully believe that any country including Fiji in the world can improve talent development, and then move a lot closer to achieving their potential. It's simple but not easy because it requires a lot from a lot of people, but what I do believe is there's more resources and support than ever before for Fiji FA to achieve it from both FIFA and OFC and other external parties as well. It's never been a better opportunity for Fiji to enhance its development.

Interview Transcript of the Technical Director of Fiji Football Association,

Mr. Timo Jankowski

Timo Jankowski – Fiji FA Technical Director

1. *How could we implement the Football talent development model in Fiji?*

The most important is that there is a saying which is the higher you want to build a pyramid, which is important for Talent Development, the bigger you have to build the foundation. So, talent development starts with a big fundament where we were working a lot over the last two years. One big pillar is the new McDonald's League for U-9, U-11, U13 and U-15, because that is the golden age and that part was not existing in Fiji before. We need to work on the next phase to build even a bigger foundation and we need to sign an agreement with the government to bring the FIFA Football for School program where we need to start with at least twenty schools in 2023 and then double the numbers each year. So, within the next three to five years, we will target a few hundred primary schools all over Fiji which will then deliver even brighter base of players for the McDonald's Talent Development League and then the next step after that or within that step would also be the Just Play program where we can build a strategy that they focus more on the early childhood education centers. We can start even with younger age, get even more players in and the big advantage is also that rugby who is doing a good work in schools, but they are not in the Early Childhood Education (ECE) centers. So, we hope when we go with our Just Play team, we focus on the ECEs that can make the younger ones fall in love quickly of a football before they get in touch with rugby.

2. *Which role you in your position as the Technical Director should play?*

As the Technical Director, it's like you are leading the strategy, so it's about setting up the strategy with the key stakeholders and identifying the right people who are able to guide and lead the process who can implement all the different projects of different age categories which in itself have a huge project. So, you need to be very important that you get good people in the project.

3. *Who should be involved and what roles they should play?*

Since they are like different stakeholders that are key for the whole process, so the first and the most important is the Fiji FA Board who can agree to make a big commitment to us in the development which is the starting base. Then in implementing the strategy and other important stakeholders are FIFA not only with the funding but also lifting the expertise that they are already giving us. We also have Oceania Football Confederation (OFC) as a major stakeholder. Probably the most important stakeholder is the players and the parents. So, we have to create a very good product which is like a positive nice football experience in order to have the most important stakeholder which is the players and their parents that they buy and invest themselves into this project.

4. *Resources play a very key role for any project. What resources you think are compulsory for this Talent Development project?*

We have to be honest; the most important resource is the funding and without finances, this is not possible. But I think equally important, especially here in Fiji, is the people. We saw a lot of time in football where people put a lot of money in a club, but they do not have the right strategy. They do not have the right people so the money also does not have a big impact. We also had McDonald's sponsoring for the grassroots football which is a major plus point which can also assist in employing some very good people. If that goes together hand in hand, then there can be some success. It's also very important that everyone needs to be patient because youth development will not happen overnight. It is about setting up the right strategy, finding the right people, and then having trust in the process in order to have a long-term sustainable result.

5. *Who should provide these resources?*

I think the more it comes from the different stakeholders, the more stable the whole process would be because in that way you are not dependent on one key stakeholder. So yeah, of course we have the McDonald's who is showing the big commitment but

then also we have the support of FIFA and obviously all the stakeholders I mentioned, I think we could set up a very sustainable environment to guarantee that this project will not die out in a few years. So that it is a project that will be implemented and will be there for future football forever.

6. *How this program should be managed?*

I think that it's the same that we have with the development pyramid for the players. We set up our own pyramids within the technical department for different areas. For example, we employed the 10 regional coordinators so we want to be present in the districts. They need to have specific knowledge in each district and then different regional coordinators in the pyramid report to a development officer and the development officers send report to one of the three heads of football development in the western, northern and southern division. They will then report to the Head of Talent Development and the good thing is that he is right next to my office, so basically, we can update each other on a daily basis.

7. *When you talk about the 10 regional coordinators, how will they be monitored? How do you think they are implementing whatever is coming from your office?*

We would outline their job description in such way and try to work with the KPIs so that they should reach like a certain number of trainings per week using our development curriculum. We need to set up viber chats which I think is quite easy and a very productive structure where we connect not only with the head of development but also with the districts and reporting is more or less like videos and pictures because I think with pictures and videos you cannot fake and it's much better than a written report. A lot of times we really see on a daily basis and get a lot of pictures and video clips that the programs are happening because the magic happens on the pitch.

8. What are the main risks you anticipate?

I think that I wouldn't call it risk, it's just the environment but we analyze this in a SWOT analysis in very detailed such as we have things like cyclone season here in Fiji, we sometimes have problem with the transport system, sometimes maybe do not get the best pitches as we do not have the floodlights. So, we have just tried with a good SWOT analysis to anticipate these factors and find the best Fijian-specific product for talent development.

9. You had earlier mentioned about people not having enough patience and not sticking to the process but instead focusing on quick results. Do you see that as a risk?

Yes, it is a risk but I think the same thing like we have identified this as well and we are trying to create awareness, for example in every presentation I do about youth/talent development, I always finish with one slide which explains about the traditional Fijian meal, Lovo which is cooked on the hot stones, because it's a very good metaphor because when I came here to Fiji with my family in the first week like they prepared lovo lunch but then I saw they already started working on it at six o'clock in the morning and then I was wondering what they were doing? You need to have very good natural ingredients which are our natural talented players. But the meal takes long to be prepared that it really tastes good and if you do not allow the required cooking time, you won't get the best taste. So, I always try to take this metaphor, but everyone laughs a little bit so maybe it sticks in the mind. You have to make everyone aware that patience is key in a good process for player development.

10. What are the countermeasures for the risks?

We have to think logically. For example, we don't have floodlights so of course then we have to play the games at a certain time. We have problems with traveling so we try

to have one venue where we can play a lot of games. Also in coach education, the coach should know about the football development curriculum to already make the next area of coaches aware of the patient what is needed for youth development. As I said with our analysis, we try to identify the areas and now trying to work proactively on it instead of waiting until the risk happens. For some things, it can happen like you cannot do anything against the cyclone season but the people are aware of it and we try to have a plan B on the table that we are ready when it happens and that we can react in a very good and positive way.

11. What is your view on FIFA's motto of 'give every talent a chance'?

To be honest, that really inspires me. I think that maybe the slogan becomes one of the key drivers because since I'm here in Fiji, I have already visited more than 100 schools and I really must say even in the smallest village, there's a talent everywhere like a natural movement talent. So yes, I think that we will work to give opportunity for all these natural talents we have here in Fiji.

Interview Transcript of the FIFA Talent Coach,

Mr. Daniel Cooke

- 1. *Based on your experiences, could you please express your views on the talent development process here in Fiji?***

I think the talent development process in Fiji is at the ground level. You know, there's some great visions for what talent development in Fiji can be. So, we know the talent is there but it's very raw at the moment and now there are plans to implement some excellent competitive opportunities. With the development of the McDonald's leagues in combination with the youth leagues that we have at the older levels, and then the transition to senior football, so the vision for the pathway is really nice. Let's see how the vision turns out in in reality.

- 2. *How do you think this talent development model can be implemented in Fiji?***

I would say like it shows in the model the base of the pyramid is very broad. So, we really want like to use the language that Timo (Timo Jankowski – Fiji FA Technical Director) has there as well as many as possible. The broader the playing pool, the richer the playing pool as well for talent to be selected later on for youth leagues for domestically or for national teams to play internationally for us as well. I think at the base level, it's really important that as many children as possible get the opportunity to play boys and girls at the next stage. When we start going into the Youth League then it becomes really important around bringing the better players together and helping them to be guided by the best coaches possible as well which obviously links into some of the work that the Head of Coach Education in Fiji is doing to develop coach education but I think that next step of that pyramid is when we talk about 'as good as possible' is bringing the best players together and having them guided by the best coaches. Then if we think about the next level of the pyramid when we get towards the pointy part is how we then effectively transition those players into the top competitive environments, whether that be within Fiji or overseas or through the national teams as well.

3. Who are the stakeholders to involved and how to engage them?

So the stakeholders if we think about the player at the center, and then we really think about how the environment influences the player so the people that make up that environment, family at the very close level, and we're not when I say family, and I'm learning this in Fiji is I don't just mean blood relatives, but the people that are very, very close to the whole life and the lived experience of the player are really important. We have then the education system so who are the teachers that are influencing the players experience as well. Then we have role models that they may have from their communities. So, we know Roy Krishna (Fiji's lone professional player) is a prime example from Fiji. Players will look to him he has the professional contract which is many of their dreams and the role models are really important. These are at a very, very close level to the player. We then have the religious side of Fiji as well for the religious communities and the beliefs and values that are instilled in the player and then around them are very important and have an influence on how the talent is growing through Fiji. Obviously, we've mentioned Roy as a role model. Role model could be outside of football as well so we talk a lot here about the Fijian sevens and how they were the first ever gold medalist for Fiji, no one before then. That's a role model in development that they achieved something that nobody else had ever achieved before. For the future of Fiji, how can the players think about achieving something that nobody has achieved before? Now if we look at the stakeholders in the football system, we can look if we start at the higher level, you can think about the board so the President, Vice Presidents and the board around there with the CEO, with the Technical Director (TD) and how they're leading the organization and providing the structures for the talent to grow through and providing the resource to get it there. Infrastructure, it could be the finance that needs, the equipment that needs there. Ultimately that resource will be delivered by the board. At a very specialist level for football, we need to think about the TD and his role. So how he has created this model and for us to see how the talent will grow through is really, really important. The TD needs to be involved and then if we move down then we can look at the Heads of Talent Development who is already really influential in this and how he can be involved in shaping these environments that the talents are involved in guiding them. Then you

think about the regional level and how they're very closely linked with what goes on in their areas. There are a lot of stakeholders and they are in different ways. Whether it be outside of football, whether it be in football in the Federation, from the top all the way through to the community level, they are the ones that come to the top of my head around who are the important stakeholders. What I would say is, there's a lot of them and they do or influence the talent as they are and as they can be in lots of different ways.

4. *Based on your experiences, what obstacles do you think you will face in Fiji?*

I feel a really important one for Fiji is quality assurance. If we say okay, this is what our talent development model looks like, this is how it can look like in reality, but then how do we ensure that is the best possible approach for the players? So that could be in the National Academy? It could be with the national teams, it could be for the McDonald's League, but it's making sure it is not just a one off, it's how do I make sure every contact that the player has is as good as possible. So that quality assurance and the consistency of that quality assurance I think is critical in Fiji and as a challenge not just to Fiji but Oceania as a region and that's where I feel the stakeholders, so I missed before I should probably mention that was FIFA and OFC (Oceania Football Confederation) as well and as a guide to guide in that area, but ultimately it will come down to the Federation and the staff, how robust they are around assuring that the talent gets the best environment to develop with them. So that quality assurance I think is not necessarily a barrier but a challenge in Fiji that I think will tell whether the talent gets the best opportunity to develop or whether it doesn't.

5. *What solutions do you think to overcome this obstacle?*

We are working through some of these at the moment with Fiji FA and also the Fiji Talent Team, FIFA and OFC. We are alongside Timo and so we talk about creating a taskforce so that can actually come up with some key criterias around what these best environments look like and some minimum requirements. So that can be to do with off-the-field things like living conditions, the nutrition, the hydration, the welfare of the player, the education, and it can also be to do with the on-field. What equipment

do we have available? What kit do we have available? How are we planning the sessions? How are we providing the best competition available for the players as well? I feel that the taskforce can create this level of expected quality for each environment that we are talking about within the pyramid at the grassroots, at the McDonald's League level, at the Academy level and at the national team level. We will also do it at the end in reality as well. How did it go? We were supposed to have X number of meals or we were supposed to have X amount of water. How did we actually get it? Yes, so great. That gets the tick as well. So that could be an approach that we are already looking to take as well.

6. *How important do you think it is for the stakeholders who are eagerly waiting for the results already to have patience?*

If we want the best fruits, we got to grow them ourselves is a saying from lots of famous coaches around the world. So yes, patience is essential. Need to develop robust processes, like some of the things we have already talked about, commit to them and trust them and only over time will that process bear fruit in terms of the quality of player that is coming out from the talent development models and environments. But also then, like every country wants is in results in outcomes, but if we always think about the result only then the systems can chop and change in too much and then that doesn't actually allow for the talent to really reveal its true potential. So, patience, we need to make sure our planning is robust at the beginning. We commit to it and that commitment to that process over time, requires patience to then reveal what everybody wants in the long run and we need to understand that all those stakeholders that we have spoken about, are brought into the idea of patience as well.

7. *Do you think this would be the best way to have an impact on our national teams playing at international events, nurturing the players in the right way so that we feed the best players to the national team?*

I feel that, as per my understanding, before the McDonald's league there's been a little opportunity for players to play through the Federation. They're normally in schools and that can be for a very short period of time. So first off, this opportunity for more children to play is critical. That is where so much learning can happen from really young ages, they fall in love with the game, they fall in love with the ball and then they start to develop their skills this way. And then yes, we start to create environments as they get into the teenage years or the golden age as the technical director refers to a lot where now we are really taking the best players from that base of the pyramid and giving them guidance from the best coaching possible. That is new in Fiji. We are just starting to think about those visions and implement them through ideas like the McDonald's league and some of the national academies that are being spoken about more recently as well. In the long run can really change the landscape of football for Fiji at the international level.

8. *Finally, do you think this talent development model can be implemented in Fiji?*

So my knowledge of Fiji is a big question with a lot of weight to it. My knowledge of Fiji is very limited still as I have only been here for a few months. But my gut feel is with the support of what with the guidance of Timo and with the appropriate support from the key stakeholders that we have spoken about already within the Federation and outside of the Federation, then this model is a great starting point to provide a talent development pathway for Fiji that can increase the national team competitiveness. I say a starting point because I always believe in models that we should plan; we should then do them but as we are going, we review them and we update and create a new version of the model that best fits from the learnings that we gather as well. So yes, the model was a great starting point. However, we must always remain humble enough to remain open to changing it as well to best meet the needs of the people that we are here to support, ultimately increasing national team competitiveness.