



# Research on the Development of Non-professional Road of Chinese Youth Football Players

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**Abstract.** The development level of young football players' reserve talents is an important standard for determining a country's level of football development. China's young football players have faced fierce competition in recent years due to the country's large population base. A large number of athletes have been forced to start thinking about developing non-professional paths because they will be weeded out of the game.

Based on this situation, this paper will primarily begin with past research data on the development of youth's non-professional road, and then combine the existing talent training system of youth soccer players in China to show the current situation of the development of youth soccer players' non-professional road in China under this system, and then analyze the reasons why the development of youth soccer players' non-professional road has not been taken seriously, and finally draw conclusions. Finally, based on the foregoing reasons, as well as China's unique youth soccer talent training system, this paper will make reasonable policy recommendations to ensure the development of youth soccer players' non-professional paths.

**Keywords:** youth football players · non-professional road · education

## 1 Introduction

China has issued a number of related policies in recent years in order to improve Chinese football's international competitiveness. For example, in 2015, the General Office of the State Council issued the "China Football Reform and Development Plan," which clarified that the main goals are to improve the environment and atmosphere of football development, increase the number of youth football population, and improve the national team's international competitiveness [1]. According to statistics, the number of registered football players in China increased from 7,961 to 84,422 between 2004 and 2017 [2]. However, as the football population grows, young athletes in China face stiff competition. Statistics show that only 3–5% of young athletes in China go on to become professional players [3]. At the same time, because a large number of youth training clubs are too utilitarian and eager to develop professional football talents, they overlook the development of other non-professional ways for youth football players,

such as cultural education, comprehensive quality, life skills, and so on. A large number of youth football players who were eliminated by fierce competition face the dilemma of non-professional development [4]. However, at the moment, no attention has been drawn to research on the non-professional way of youth football players in China, which complicates the future development of a large number of youth football players and is not conducive to the sustainable development of youth sports. This paper investigates the non-professional development of juvenile football players in the hope of providing a reference for the non-professional development of juvenile football players and the development of sports in China.

## **2 Literature Review**

Since the turn of the century, Chinese football clubs' international performances have deteriorated, and the development of young players' reserve talents has garnered considerable attention. Many academic studies on the development of young players' reserve talents exist. It is primarily reflected in the following two aspects of the research content:

### **2.1 Research on the Current Situation of Reserve Talents of Young Athletes in China**

By analyzing the registered number of Chinese youth football players, Fan Hailong [7] discovered that there was a severe shortage of reserve talents in Chinese professional football clubs [5]. According to Li Yanfei and Zhao Chunyan (2021), the number of football players who finally chose the path of professionalism was very small, and the vast majority of football players could only face the second option of non-professionalism [6].

### **2.2 Research on the Education of Reserve Talents and the Non-professional Way Out for Young Athletes in China**

Yan Zhongjie [9], for example, discussed the main factors influencing the development of reserve talent in professional football clubs, as well as countermeasures from the perspectives of professionalism and non-professionalism [7]. Sun Huaqing [10] examines the factors that influence the reserve of China's football reserve talents in terms of the contradiction between learning and training as well as the success rate of talent training [8].

Li Guangyun and Wang Yongquan (2004) examined the training mode of China's football reserve talents, concluding that, on the one hand, professional clubs place too much emphasis on team achievements and too little emphasis on the development of young football talents; on the other hand, there is a situation of poor football development in ordinary schools [9]. Wang Jianxi [12] discovered that training institutions did not pay enough attention to cultural quality education, caring education, and ideological and moral education of reserve talents, resulting in a lack of comprehensive quality and difficulty in secondary job selection [10]. According to Mao Zhenming and Ding Tiancui (2021), the "separation of sports and education" affected the overall development of professional and cultural courses for young athletes, as well as their employment after retirement [11].

### 2.3 Analysis of Existing Circumstance

In China, reserve football talent is trained in a typical “pyramid” fashion. Many young football players are at the bottom of the pyramid and are eliminated during the selection process. Finally, only a select few can become professional football players and join top-tier professional football clubs.

In China, the overall cultural quality level of young athletes is low. A questionnaire survey of 15–17-year-old young football players in traditional football schools in Chongqing Lifan, for example, reveals that the majority have not completed the nine-year compulsory education [12]. In 2015, Wang Dengfeng, director of the Ministry of Education’s Department of Sports, Health, and Arts and vice chairman of the Chinese Football Association, stated that while universities and sports colleges recruit at least 2,000 special football students each year, due to the large population base of young athletes, most young athletes can only be admitted by lowering their college entrance examination scores [13]. Despite their special football skills, many players are unable to meet the admission requirements of universities or sports institutes due to their low level of education and culture. This also puts young football players who did not pursue a career path at a disadvantage in the massive employment competition because they missed out on the opportunity for higher education, which hinders the development of the non-professional path.

## 3 Cause Analysis

### 3.1 The Imbalance Between Professional Education and Comprehensive Cultural Quality Education of Young Football Players

#### 3.1.1 Clubs Excessively Pursue Professional Achievements and Ignore the Traditional Idea of Cultural Quality Education

The main goal of the club’s competent leaders and coaches is to raise the team’s professional level, send more high-level professional athletes to professional teams and national teams, and gain professional advantages in competition. Although the club’s business philosophy has improved its professional level, it has resulted in unequal opportunities for professional training and cultural quality education for many young football players. The club’s traditional management concept is not conducive to the long-term development of young football players on the non-professional path.

#### 3.1.2 The Unreasonable Setting of Football Players’ Quality Education and Professional Training Time

The football player training system in China primarily employs a centralized and unified management system of sports teams, with the goal of better improving the football level of football players within the professional system. The system employs a “teacher-to-the-door” approach to learning, and football players can complete the dual tasks of football training and cultural study within the team. Huang Songhe (2021) discovered through research that most young soccer players train for approximately 1,500 min per week, whereas the average weekly training time for soccer players of the same age in

Europe is approximately 336 min. However, an examination of soccer players' daily learning time revealed that 77.5% spend only 2–3 hr per day studying cultural lessons [14]. According to the survey, most football players devote a lot of energy and time to football training but very little time and energy to cultural lessons. The conflict between study and training in this system results in a large number of young football players not getting enough study time and thus not reaching the same educational level as their peers, putting them at a disadvantage in future competition.

### **3.1.3 There is a Shortage of Young Football Players' Education Teachers, and Their Level Cannot Be Guaranteed**

Many clubs lack professional culture teachers, and some even stop hiring them, leaving young football players unable to engage in cultural studies and thus missing out on opportunities to improve their cultural level. At the same time, the quality of teaching cannot be guaranteed because cultural teachers are of mixed quality.

## **3.2 The Defects of the National System for Young Football Players to Enter a Higher School**

Our country has increased the number of athletes admitted to universities and sports professional colleges in recent years. However, there are some flaws in the relevant policies at the moment

### **3.2.1 The Number of Young Football Players Who Can Enter Colleges and Universities is Small**

Despite the fact that universities and sports colleges in China have increased the number of admissions of sports talents, the increased number of admissions of football talents is insufficient to meet the huge demand for young football players. Every year, approximately 2,000 football majors are enrolled in universities and sports colleges across the country, but there are tens of thousands of registered young football players in our country. Young football players face not only internal but also external competition from other high school students.

### **3.2.2 A Large Number of Football Players Can't Enter Colleges and Universities Through Cultural Examinations**

Most colleges and sports schools cannot directly admit athletes through sports tests, and most students and football players must still enter the school via the college entrance examination. However, most young football players devote a lot of energy to training and football and have no time to study cultural courses, so they don't get perfect scores in college entrance exams. Despite passing the college football professional test, the majority of young football players are unable to pass the college entrance examination in order to meet the university's final admission requirements.

## **4 Policy Advice**

### **4.1 Solve the Imbalance Between Professional Education and Comprehensive Cultural Quality Education of Young Football Players**

#### **4.1.1 Reverse the Traditional View of “Achievement First” and Pay Attention to Both Professional Education and Comprehensive Quality Education**

First and foremost, the sports department promotes the transformation of football club managers' ideas and establishes the concept that achieving club performance is based on a double harvest of professional education and comprehensive quality education for young athletes. On the one hand, it allows players with high professional quality to fully exploit their advantages and transport professionals; on the other hand, it allows players who are unable to take the road of professionalism to win with comprehensive quality, providing a guarantee for the future non-professional road.

#### **4.1.2 Balance the Professional Training and Cultural Education Structure of Young Athletes, and Build a Dynamically Adjusted Talent Selection Mechanism**

Based on the characteristics that young football players with different competitive levels will have different development trends in the future, we should implement differentiated educational resource allocation and strengthen professional training for young football players who can enter the professional arena; for young football players who are difficult to enter the professional football road in the future, comprehensive cultural education should be implemented. It is suggested that a dynamically adjusted talent selection mechanism should be established, that young players should be divided into different groups based on their professional ability and cultural level, that professional training and cultural education courses should be set up for each group, and that the groups should be adjusted over time. To devote more time and resources to comprehensive quality education for young players who are unable to pursue a career path, and to improve their competitive advantage through non-professional development.

#### **4.1.3 The Club Strengthens the Improvement of Teachers' Level**

Football clubs increase the number of teachers for comprehensive quality education, improve the basic cultural level and quality education level of more young football players, and ensure their future non-professional development in order to meet the needs of a large number of young football players for good quality education. The club's dynamically adjusted talent training mechanism classifies and trains players from various groups, and assessment objectives are developed. Teachers who have excelled in cultural and educational achievements are given spiritual and material rewards, and the club establishes a virtuous circle system of professional education and comprehensive cultural education.

## 4.2 Establish a Flexible System for Young Football Players to Enter a Higher School

1. Increase the proportion of non-professional young football players enrolled in higher vocational education institutions appropriately. The proportion distribution of sports talents recruited by universities and sports institutes should favor non-professional athletes.
2. Appropriately reduce the examination difficulty for non-professional players. Non-professional players who have received professional training but have no chance of pursuing professionalization should be given special examination questions that are less difficult than those given to nine-year-old candidates in order to increase the chances of non-professional young football players receiving higher education.

## 5 Conclusions

In conclusion, youth football players in China now have faced severe challenges in their non-professional development path: Firstly, athletic clubs prioritize training over players' quality and literal education. Chinese youth football players receive far more training time than those in European clubs. Meanwhile, they receive fewer hours of study and even have no teachers in clubs in some cases. Secondly, due to the large number base of the population in China, youth football players have to not only compete with other players but also with plenty of high school students for opportunities to attend college. Regarding these difficulties, some policies are recommended to solve the imbalance between training and comprehensive cultural quality education and to establish a flexible system for more players to receive college-level education.

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