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REVIEW OF ELITE MANAGEMENT IN FOOTBALL TEAMS FROM THE STANDPOINT OF NARRATIVE RESEARCH (RELYING ON MAINTENANCE OF ELITE PLAYERS)

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ABSTRACT

It would definitely to be claimed that in recent years human capital is one of the most important competitive advantages. In fact, organizations that can keep up and grow the best forces, capture the best of their abilities, will have a great competitive advantage over other competitors. Many studies have been conducted on elite management, and various organizations have implemented different ways to attract, retain, and train forces. Currently, sport, and especially football, is considered one of the country's economic enterprises, whose income has been over 810 billion Rials in the one-year period (end of July of 2016 to the end of July 2017). As a result, the vacancy of elite management studies in such an organization is very evident. In this research, the soccer team has been considered as an organization, and elite players have been considered human capital of the team. The problems that elite players create for themselves and/or teams in which they are members are generally the most outcry for the club, and examples of this are visible both in recent years and in previous years. In this paper, using the method of narrative study, which is considered as one of the qualitative approaches, we consider the maintenance process and the reasons for the growth and decline of elite football players. Then the definitions are summarized and using the four-stage method of narrative studies, to analyze the results.

Keywords: Elite Management, Soccer, Elite Soccer Players, Narrative Research.

INTRODUCTION

Sport stars, by practicing in sport clubs, can play role in achieving higher ranks and positions, as well as boosting the club brand and sponsors (in the case of positive behavior and performance). In this regard, today's professional sport clubs pay special attention to training. Clubs have been investigating more and more extensive on this area, and this has become one of the ways to increase the income of sport clubs. The connection and cooperation of sport stars with clubs can bring their reputation and credit to the sport clubs' sponsors as well, and increase the sponsors' sell and profit. Thus the more athlete and sport stars participate in a club, the club is more potential and has more power to attract the bigger and stronger sponsors.

In the present study, elite management in sports teams will be addressed, and the goal is to answer the questions to examine the ups and downs of the life of talented athletes in sports space. It also examines how these athletes can be transformed into the sport stars, and how their talent can be maintained. Another important issue in studying the elite players or high-

level players is to look at their growth and decline. Therefore, the course of this cycle will be of a great importance which will be discussed in this study. In this process, it is essential to answer questions such as the nature of the talent and its definition, as well as the definition of talent in human resource management, and in sports.

The research methodology is based on the 4 steps of the narrative research. The first step is to select a narrator; so the target society will be selected according to the achieved talent criteria. Then the narrators will be collected, and based on the 3-layer analytical model, we will go deep into the concepts of each narrative, and in the fourth stage, the researcher recount her/his narrative of the story.

METHODOLOGY

A narrative research is a kind of research that involves a group of methods. Narration can be considered as both a research method and an examined phenomenon. The term “narrative” is derived from the infinitive “to narrate”, and it means telling a story in detailed description. In the narrative research method, the researcher collects the biography of individuals, and narrates the stories of their life (Conelly and Cladinin, 1990). This research method, unlike the other ones, focuses more on the individuals. The narrator researcher, in fact, is a narrator of a story which is a summary of the stories of those individuals involved in the process (responders). In recent years, interest in the science of complexity in organized studies has grown steadily due to an increase in unexpected changes in the environment. Traditional patterns which are based on independent variables, linear causal relationship and balance states are not able to cover such changes (Souna Bayramzade, Ali Rezaeian, Hamid Reza Farokhzade, Meysam Rajabi Nohoji, 2017). Complexity patterns by assumptions like mutual communications and non-linearity, have attracted the attention of organization and management researchers to tackle this variable environment (Agar, M. 2005). One of the major complexity which has been considered recently, and ignored by old methods, is the complexity caused by the different behavior of a responder toward a particular event, and the effect of that behavior on future events. Methods which have systematic approach on processes, and reflect the effects of feedback on initial operations (like dynamic system method), have attempted to some extent, to overcome this problem. The method which has been chosen for this article (narrative research method) is also trying to answer these complexities as well. What distinguishes the present method from others is to pay attention to the narrative and its effect during a period of time. It also reduces the formality of the positivism method, and lessen directing the responder by attempting to narrate, instead of the module questionnaires. The researcher can also use his/her other papers during the interview, and set the narration according to the theme of the interview and her/his interpretation. Although there have been criticism in this regards (as well as other methods), its advantages and strength points have led many scholars to choose this method for their studies, and currently, this popularity caused in dedicating a section to articles and studies which have been done through this method, by the “National Research Conference” in the United States (John W Creswell, 2013).

The methodology used in this research is the problem-oriented narrative study which has four stages. This approach has been fully developed in a paper entitled “proving a framework for



narrative studies in management studies to deal with complex issues (Bayramzadeh et al., 2017)”, the four steps of this method are: “choosing responders, review of narrations, the 3-layer model for the analysis of the narration, and finally narrating the subject under discussion. To further describe this technique, some parts of the mentioned source will be present.

“The problem-oriented narrative study is based on the discovery of responders’ formation. That is the discovery of the hidden part of responders’ existence; those who carry the narrative that created the status of the study. However, they themselves may not be aware of this narrative. They may even mistreat the very current situation that is created by themselves, and oppose it.

Narrative studies investigate the phenomenon in their historical, temporal, and spatial context, since, the purpose of understanding a certain condition and looking for solution to improve it, is prior to the purpose of discovering the universal rules. The first step in the narrative study is to understand the conscience, and to phenomenologically describe the responders’ shared universe.

As previously stated, this method is a four-stage one which helps the researcher to deepen her/his understanding of the complex situation and increase his/her narrative power. As already mentioned, the researcher is looking for exploring responders’ mind and speeches through a phenomenal view. Thus, at the beginning, the researcher will seek to discover and capture the important and valuable responders’ experience. In the next step, by the use of the three-layer pattern, exploration in the responders’ formation leads to another stage in which the deep, hidden and semi-hidden layers are discovered. In the final step, the researcher takes the role of analyst narrator, and expresses the blind spots and contradictions of the situation with a critical and creative pint of view.”

In order to implement the above-said method, it is necessary to select the responders in the first step. According to the current issue, which is reviewing the elite football players’ life, statistical population has been selected among players in Super League, and those who are members of the national team. In order to understand more about the subject and various dimensions of the narrations, the narration of the three world-wide elite football players (Lionel Messi, Cristiano Ronaldo, and Cesc Fabregas) has also been collected using library research and available sources. In this kind of research 5 to 10 interviewees are sufficient for collecting the result, but in this this research, 6 people were interviewed directly, and over 15 interviews were conducted from libraries.

A rich archive of interviews, films and articles published in newspapers and websites are available. After selecting the responders and collecting the narrations, the three-layer analysis model has been used to understand the key points of each interview. The first level, or the obvious procedure implies those responders’ actions which can be seen. The first layer is basically how the underlying concepts are provided. Like an iceberg, the first layer is much less important than the underlying layers. In fact, decisions are made in the underlying layers, and the first layer is just how these decisions are expressed.

The second layer, or the semi-obvious layer is the layer between the responders’ thinking system and their playing process. Actually, social concepts, institutional rules, and individual



training are in this layer. These written and unwritten rules in this middle layer that cause the action forming out of basic assumption.

The third layer, or the hidden layer implies the notions biases and basic assumptions of the individuals. In fact, in order to analyze the individuals' behavior properly, achieving to this layer is needed.

After passing this stage, it is time for researcher to express her/his narrative of the subject. The researcher, by the use of his/her sophisticates and creative vision, connects the angels that each responder has never noticed individually, and provides a comprehensive narrative of the subject. In addition, the researcher is far from the bias due to the lack of direct involvement in the problem, so she/he can judge more logically and estimate unbiasedly.

The narrative research validity is another issue that should be mention. His scholars, for not using formulas and validation models. This method is not able in its content to use these methods, and the differences in experienced meaning by individuals, the stories they tell about these experiences, and the relationship between the text of the stories and the interpretations of those texts cannot be formulated through mathematical models. In contrast of this group of people who consider only numerical and statistical criteria for the validity of a credible research, a group of other thinkers and researchers in narrative studies also believe that the social sciences, if viewed in the same way as the former, will never be able to seek exploring and developing knowledge about the areas of human territory. This territory includes the experiences of individuals about the meaning of events and activities of their lives. Discovering these events requires a development of a new approach to the findings validity. The result of this thought will be achieved by returning to the early believes of ancient Greek about validity. The belief is that the validity of the knowledge provided by researcher should be judged by the readers of the research. These are readers who would judge the accuracy of the results of the researcher's work based on the reasons and evidences provided by her/him. The credit that the readers would give to this narrative study is the result of the sound and reasonable evidence-based reasons provided by the narrative study researcher (Polkinghorn DE, 2007).

Riessman (Riessman, C. K. 2008) points out the issue of validation in narrative research as one the issues researchers and students are facing. In his opinion, various paradigms in the field of human science require an appropriate validation method according to their own thought. In a narrative research, these are readers who judge the accuracy of the result of the researcher work, based on the evidence provided by him/her (Polkinghorn DE, 2007).

In this study, interviews of more than 10 elite football players who have had more than 1000 minutes of playing in Super League, or national players who are not currently playing in the national league but in other reliable leagues, are sumerized.in he first stage, according to the mentioned criteria, the responders were selected, and an open interview was conducted. It should be noted that in this research method, the interview focuses more on encouraging interviewees to express their stories, and this is the researcher's skill to push the responder to tell the story related to the subject of research, and avoid unnecessary content as much as possible. Some of the players who have been studied, are listed in the coding table below.



Table 1: players coding

The name of the player	Club teams	Playing time (min)	Study group
Interviewee 1	Peykan, Damash, Saba Qom, Tehran Naft, Masjed Soleiman Naft	10440	Group 1
Interviewee 2	Saba Qom, Pikan, Hormozgan Aluminum	12600	Group 1
Interviewee 3	Yazd Tarbiat, Kowsar Lorestan, Nassaji, Hormozgan Aluminum, Saba Qom, Persepolis, Esteghlal Khoozestan	14940	Group 1
Interviewee 4	Sepahan, Saba, Persepolis, Al Masimer, Tractor, Pars-e Jonoubi	27260	Group 2
Interviewee 4	Vahdat, Naft, Perspolis	13050	Group 2
Interviewee 5	Bahman, Eseghlal, Rapid Wien Austria, Al Ain, Al-Wasl, Al-Ahly, Al-Nasr, Al-Gharafa	23850	Group 2
Interviewee 6	Rubin Kazan, Rostov	12330	Group 2
Interviewee 7	Damash, NEC, Alchemar, Brighton	21120	Group 2
Interviewee 8	Arsenal, Barcelona, Chelsea	50320	Group 3
Interviewee 9	Barcelona	52680	Group 3
Interviewee 10	Sporting, Manchester United, Real Madrid, Juventus	63990	Group 3

In the second stage, the stories are aggregated and structured to find the depth of the subject based on the 3-layer analysis. This step is also determined by using tables which provided interviewees' opinion in term of specified codes for researcher. You can see an example of these tables later below.

Here are some examples of interviews with players which are summarized in the mentioned tables:

“I think it’s because of behaviors. Because I’m both patient and tolerant. It helped me to make further progress. Patient, effort and good behavior are needed so you won’t be too disturbed. For example, in our field, you are allowed to play one day, and you are not allowed in the other. The day you are allowed is okay, but when you are not, you shouldn’t be disturbed. You wait for the next chance so you can succeed.” (group 1)

“I always try to ignore unnecessary details, and play well in the football field, and live a professional life.” (group 2)

“I have never leaved professional sport, even when I was injured. And I continued my professional life within the club framework.” (group 3)

Table 2: Summarized Interviews sample

The name of the studied player	Effective factor on growth and prosperity	Slippage and obstacles to the growth of sport stars	How to get to the professional levels
Interviewee 1	Correctly exercising	Unprofessional life like disorder sleep and exercise	Attending reliable basic clubs
Interviewee 2	Too much passion	Physical weakness	Attending professional football schools
Interviewee 3	Starting from the basic teams	Lack of professional thinking an physical weakness	The effective presence of talent finders in schools and basic teams



Interviewee 4	Too much passion	Strong family opposition against professional sport	Shining in the lower League matches
Interviewee 5	Starting from the basic teams	Unprofessional life and lack of ordered exercise	Shining in the matches and scoring in leagues
Interviewee 6	Practice correctly	Misusing the virtual network	Shining in the basic teams under the supervision of good coaches
Interviewee 7	Practice correctly	Misusing the virtual network	Shining in the basic teams under the supervision of good coaches
Interviewee 8	Others' encouragement and motivation	Unprofessional training and Misusing the virtual network	Shining in school games and local ground matches
Interviewee 9	Attending to high-level football schools	Disordered personal life and exercise	Experienced coaches who allowed the player to play
Interviewee 10	Attending to high-level football schools	Disordered personal life and exercise	Experienced coaches who allowed the player to play
Interviewee 11	Attending to high-level football schools	Disordered personal life and exercise	Experienced coaches who allowed the player to play

FINDINGS

Professor Leonard Nadeller talked about the item “human resource development”, for the first time, in American Education Association Conference in 1989. He describes this term in his book of 1970: “human resource development is a set of organized actions which are performed in a specific time frame, and are designed to change behavior”. Unlike what the world’s best football players states, the elite football player of the country, have been always suffered from the lack of specific programs for their growth and prosperity. The social condition is such that the lack of stability in management, has always led to the lack of codified programs to train an elite player. Every so often, the presence of a knowledgeable and caring coaches cause players to take advantages of a good training program in a short period of time, but generally, the lack of comprehensive program for the growth of players is crystal clear. Although in recent years, due to the developing communication and increasing public knowledge, some families and clubs have taken steps to improve this process, most of the players who have been in the first level in the country, have been suffering from the lack of developed programs. The achievement of new technologies has made the talented ones more likely to go to advanced countries in football industry, but it has not yet produced a significant effect on improving the quality of codified and long-term programs. In the life of a sport star in the team, several factors play role. The talent of a football elite, if not cared, could result in players decline, because the lack of professional thinking make player to compare her/his ability to others, so that become overconfident. This would lead to their decline due to the disordered and unprincipled training. There were many talented players who left the football cycle too soon because of the absence of the professional thinking, and disordered and discontinuous training. In addition, so many others could not overcome the difficulties of progress in professional football due to the lack of fighting spirit, and absence of the support from the managers, coaches, families and friends. economic factors have always been effective



in the growth of players, and when the occupational and financial future of a teenage football player is not guaranteed, the focus on achieving goals would be minimized. At the moment, first-level football players are also coping with the concerns caused by injuries because of the absence of professional and appropriate insurance, and in this situation, the uncertainty of the future path has caused many problems for the sport elite. Another trouble-causing issue in the developing process of talented players is to be financially untrained, and not to have economic advisors alongside them. A football player's professional money-earning course is a 10 to 20-year period, and generally the beginning of this period is in the young ages of the athlete. This income, with the lack of financial education and without the presence of advisors, generally provides the player's decline factors. The last issue which is currently widespread in the decline of a professional player is the incorrect use of social networks. This can indirectly and through several different ways cause problems for players. At the same time, it can have positive effect. Social networks do as media for players and they can communicate with their fans through it. So those rumors that are the result of indirect contact will not find a chance to going around. This media, in some cases, would cause creating fan pages for players, and also can lead to out-of-the-field incoming for player, as well as introducing him/her to the other teams. It is obvious that an elite and popular player can be a money maker for the team as well. These networks have brought many profits to many people in other fields, and professional football players are no exception to this. But being untrained, players misuse this media, and this would lead to lose the focus, to create peripheral problems and to many other issues that would effect the players' sleep, concentration and ordered training.

DISCUSSION AND RESULT

Different factors can affect the sports stars' growth and decline. According to interviews, some other factors can be named as effective ones on sport stars' growth and decline.

One factor which most interviewees mentioned as a growth factor is ordered effort and diligence. Elite players refer to ordered and professional training, diligence and effort as the keys in developing in a sport field. Another factor that interviewees considered effective on the progress speed is the connection with managers and coaches. Based on the collected data, athletes refer to axial relationship as a factor of rapid progress which sometimes cause fast growth in unqualified peoples; so it is a kind of losing talented people.

Expansion of social virtual networks and media is another factor that has developed a lot in recent years, and have had a significant impact on the growth or decline of sports stars. According to collected data, media has both positive and negative effect on players. Media and virtual networks cause the player to be seen and become popular. It also make it easy for the athletes' fans to interact with them directly, and follow their activities directly without intermediaries. But inaccurate use of virtual network, uncontrolled activities, and spending a lot of time on it distances athletes from the main sporting space and make them many periphery problems. Therefore, as stated by the interviewees, virtual networks have its own advantages and disadvantages that need to be manage correctly.

Serving the military is another factor that some people mentioned in the interviews. According to them, this factor could negatively impact their growth because of the duration that they



have to be deployed for military services. For this reason, many talented athletes leave professional sport, become expose to decline, and become forgotten in the sports world.

Extremely high income. Alongside with lack of proper social education is also one of the most significant parameters effective on players' decline. Many interviewees and coaches have pointed out that since most football players have grown in middle and lower middle economic classes, social education is needed to prevent peripheral problems and perform correct and professional behavior.

Also regular attending in training, maintaining physical fitness and mental health, and professional behavior such as sleeping properly and avoiding smoking are factors that keep athletes in high levels.

Regarding to the preservation of talented athletes in sports team, it should also be noted that this is closely related to the formation of talents within the sports teams and is considered to be a later stage.

According to interviewees and data collected from the library, maintaining and retaining talented people in Iranian football teams is usually random and not carried out according to a specific plan. This is also largely based on the policies of the sports clubs.

According to the interviewees, the policies of some clubs are based on income, which is why they usually seek to sell talented people and sport stars to bigger clubs, after training them. In some other clubs, this process has not even been accompanied by a long-term earning strategy. It means that the club has raised the player, but due to the lack of interest of the coach in her/his playing type, and his/her behavior, the club easily loses the talented one whose they have been trying spending money to raise. Other clubs have different approaches on this issue, and their goal is to raise and invest on sport stars and talented ones, and to grow and train them so they can play in adult major competitions. They are always trying to recruit other players from other clubs as well. In recent years, the right to grow law has made significant contribution to maintain sport clubs and to prevent them from loss. The law is intended to encourage the clubs to raise players, and its implementation will make the clubs pay more attention to raisin young players. The presence of coaches and talent finders in basic teams is also one the important factors for the discovery, preservation and maintenance of the sports stars and talents. So in some cases, if the stars do not play a role in the mind of the coach of the team, it will be difficult to keep them in the team. Therefore, the players preservation will cause their decline and it will also incapacitate the club.

A professional view on sport, training and behavior is also an important factor in maintaining players. So that, sport stars who do not have professional point of view, and cause peripheral problems for the club, will face difficulty in staying in the team. Behavior is also one of the factors that in some cases persuade managers and coaches of a team to keep a player in the club.

Commitment to the signed contract between the player and the club, continuous effort, and maintaining physical fitness, and adherence to the ethics, and avoid peripheral problems are another responsibilities of the players, which have direct effect on keeping them in the club. On the other hand, and according to interviewees, the clubs also have to carry out some tasks like paying the payments on time, professional dealing with players contract and meritocracy in order to keep their elite and talented players.



Additionally, at the end of this point, it should also be noted that the ways of keeping a player in a team are different based on their age. For example, clubs tend to have long-term contract with young players, while annual and short-term contracts are preferred for older players. Thus age is an influencing factor in the process of keeping the sports and talented ones in the team.

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