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A HOLISTIC–ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE JUNIOR-TO-SENIOR TRANSITION IN FOOTBALL

Raul-Alexandru NEMEŞ[1*], Andrade-Ionuţ BICHESCU[2]

ABSTRACT. *Introduction:* The transition from youth to senior football represents a complex process of psychological, social, and performance adaptation. A holistic–ecological approach emphasizes that this passage depends not only on technical readiness but also on motivational and self-regulatory development. *Objective:* This study aimed to evaluate the impact of the Personal Development Plan (PDP) and Personal Action Plan (PAP) on the psychological readiness, motivation, and self-efficacy of a youth player transitioning to senior football within FC Universitatea Cluj Academy. *Material and Methods:* A single-case longitudinal design was applied during the 2024–2025 season with a 17-year-old left winger. The intervention combined individualized PDP and PAP implementation with three assessment stages using the Sport Motivation Scale II (SMS-II), Athlete Self-Efficacy Scale (ASES), monthly reflection logs, and coach evaluations. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively, while qualitative reflections were interpreted thematically. *Results:* The findings showed consistent growth in intrinsic motivation, integrated regulation, and all four dimensions of self-efficacy. Reflection logs and coach reports confirmed improvements in emotional control, communication, and self-regulated learning. By the end of the monitored season, the athlete achieved professional readiness and made his official debut in Romania's top division (Liga I) in September 2025. *Discussion:* The results confirm that structured PDP and PAP frameworks, supported by reflective practice and psychological monitoring, enhance athletes' motivation, confidence, and adaptability during transition. *Conclusions:* The study highlights the effectiveness of holistic, individualized development planning in facilitating sustainable progression from youth to senior football.

Keywords: Career transition; personal development plan; personal action plan; youth football.

[1] Faculty of Physical Education and Sport, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
[2] Faculty of Physical Education and Sport, Babeş-Bolyai University, Reşiţa, Romania
[*] Corresponding author: raul.nemes@ubbcluj.ro

INTRODUCTION

Athletic career transitions are increasingly recognized as complex, multidimensional, and interactive processes rather than isolated events (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019; Wylleman, Reints, & De Knop, 2013). Moving from one stage of sport participation to another—most notably from youth to senior competition—requires not only technical and tactical readiness but also psychological, social, and educational adaptation. The theoretical evolution of this field has shifted from linear, stage-based models toward holistic and ecological frameworks that capture the interdependence between the individual and their environment (Henriksen et al., 2020).

A holistic perspective emphasizes the need to view the athlete as a complete person, whose development occurs simultaneously across athletic, psychological, psychosocial, academic, and vocational domains (Wylleman et al., 2013). Successful transitions require synchronization among these life spheres, as well as the capacity to maintain emotional equilibrium and motivation under new performance demands. Such balance is central to theories of self-regulation, autonomy, and environmental fit, which posit that adaptive functioning depends on both individual agency and the quality of contextual support (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019).

Interventions grounded in this framework advocate individualized, context-sensitive approaches that combine personal reflection with systemic support (Henriksen et al., 2020). Structured tools such as *Personal Development Plans* (PDPs) and *Personal Action Plans* (PAPs) operationalize this theory by transforming abstract developmental goals into measurable, actionable strategies (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019). These instruments encourage autonomy, enhance self-awareness, and ensure that sport-specific growth occurs in concert with psychological and educational development.

Ultimately, the holistic–ecological model reframes career transition as an integral component of the athlete's life trajectory—a process of reciprocal adaptation between person and environment, demanding both internal resilience and external support. By embedding transition management within the broader ecosystem of sport and education, this paradigm promotes not only high performance but also well-being, identity continuity, and sustainable personal growth (Wylleman et al., 2013; Stambulova et al., 2020).

PDP and PAP as Planning Tools in Athlete Development

A PDP is typically defined as a structured and individualized document that helps athletes identify personal goals, assess current competencies, and plan strategies for continuous development (Morris & Cartigny, 2020). Within

sport contexts, PDPs guide athletes to articulate their aspirations across both performance and non-performance domains, linking skill enhancement with psychological and educational growth (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). By facilitating ongoing self-assessment and dialogue between the athlete, coach, and support staff, PDPs promote self-awareness, autonomy, and intrinsic motivation, all of which are essential for long-term success (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

A major strength of PDPs lies in their emphasis on active engagement and self-assessment. They encourage athletes to assume ownership of their developmental trajectory by setting realistic performance, educational, and psychosocial goals. This aligns with contemporary transition theories, which position the athlete not as a passive recipient of support but as an active manager of their career pathway (Stambulova, 2009; Wylleman, Reints, & De Knop, 2013). Moreover, the reflective component of PDPs promotes awareness of emotional states and facilitates early identification of stress or maladaptive coping, which are among the most significant predictors of poor mental health during transitions (Henriksen et al., 2020).

PAPs complement this approach by focusing on actionable steps and measurable outcomes. While PDPs define long-term developmental goals, PAPs emphasize implementation—translating strategy into structured activities supported by coaches, sport psychologists, and educators. This interaction between planning and execution creates a feedback loop in which progress is continuously monitored, and interventions are adjusted according to situational challenges. In doing so, PAPs reinforce the ecological notion that athlete development is contingent upon both personal and contextual alignment (Stambulova, Ryba, & Henriksen, 2020).

Complementing this, the PAP serves as the implementation mechanism of the PDP. While the PDP establishes direction and developmental objectives, the PAP translates them into concrete, measurable actions, defining specific tasks, timelines, and criteria for evaluation (Rumbold et al., 2012). The PAP therefore represents the bridge between intention and execution—transforming reflection into systematic practice through ongoing feedback and monitoring.

Evidence from recent systematic reviews highlights that effective transition management requires goal-oriented, self-reflective frameworks that help athletes articulate short- and long-term objectives, identify resources and barriers, and implement adaptive coping strategies (McCluskey, Stevens, Cruwys, Murray, & Freeman, 2025). Planning instruments such as PDPs and PAPs operationalize these principles by creating individualized roadmaps that combine personal agency with structured mentorship. Through periodic review and adaptation, these plans foster self-regulation, resilience, and accountability—key factors associated with psychological well-being during periods of change.

Psychological Resources & Well-Being in Transition

Athletic transitions represent periods of heightened vulnerability but also of potential growth, where psychological resources play a decisive role in determining adaptation and well-being. The transition from youth to senior sport—often accompanied by increased expectations, performance pressure, and social redefinition—demands more than physical readiness. It requires emotional regulation, coping flexibility, self-efficacy, and resilience, which together form the psychological foundation for sustained engagement and optimal functioning (Stambulova, 2009; Galli & Vealey, 2008).

Recent qualitative findings from Norwegian football academies highlight that psychological well-being in transition is profoundly shaped by social and relational processes, particularly by parental involvement and support (Ohla, Erikstad, & Sæther, 2025). In these contexts, emotional security and perceived social connectedness act as protective psychological resources, buffering athletes against the pressures of adapting to new environments and performance demands.

The study found that the transition from youth to professional academy football involves not only heightened athletic expectations but also significant changes in identity and belonging. Athletes reported that entering a professional structure meant redefining themselves from being standout players at their local clubs to becoming "one among many" in a highly competitive environment—a shift requiring substantial emotional adjustment and self-regulation. Psychological resources such as confidence, motivation, and adaptability were critical for coping with this transition phase (Drew, Morris, Tod, & Eubank, 2019; Ohla et al., 2025).

These findings reaffirm that well-being during transition extends beyond individual traits to encompass socially embedded psychological resources—including supportive communication, reflective dialogue, and a sense of belonging within both family and sport environments. Complementing this, Gherman et al. (2021) underline that sustained physical activity is inseparable from psychological balance, reinforcing the ecological view that development extends beyond physical readiness to encompass self-regulation and mental well-being.

The Role of the Coach and the Support Environment

The transition from youth to senior football is a multifaceted developmental challenge that depends as much on contextual support as on individual competencies. Within the holistic–ecological paradigm, the coach and the support environment are considered central agents in shaping how athletes perceive, interpret, and respond to transitional demands (Henriksen, Stambulova, & Roessler,

2010; Stambulova, Ryba, & Henriksen, 2020). Coaches not only direct athletic performance but also function as social and psychological architects, influencing athletes' motivation, confidence, and sense of belonging (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003).

Empirical findings show that the coach–athlete relationship quality directly predicts the degree of psychological safety within teams. Şenel et al. (2024) demonstrated that athletes' perceptions of autonomy-supportive behaviors were strongly associated with their ability to communicate errors, ask questions, and take interpersonal risks—factors essential for learning and confidence-building during transitions. Similarly, Hurst and Kavussanu (2025) found that authentic leadership behaviors in coaches—such as transparency, consistency, and relational trust—positively influence athlete well-being through the mediating role of psychological safety, whereas interpersonal hostility erodes this mechanism.

Qualitative investigations further caution that psychological safety in elite sport is context-dependent rather than uniform. Athletes often distinguish between feeling safe to experiment on the field and safe to speak off the field, suggesting that situational sensitivity is vital in coaching practice (Ulster University, 2024). Coaches who explicitly normalize mistakes as learning opportunities and separate "challenge to improve" from "threat to self-worth" create developmental spaces where players feel both stretched and supported. This is particularly crucial in junior-to-senior transitions, where risk-taking and accelerated learning coexist with heightened scrutiny and social comparison.

Ultimately, the role of the coach and support environment extends beyond technical instruction—it involves the intentional design of relational and organizational conditions that promote trust, openness, and shared purpose. When athletes experience a climate of respect, constructive feedback, and emotional safety, transitions cease to be moments of rupture and instead become catalysts for growth, resilience, and identity consolidation.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This study employed a single-case qualitative design to explore the impact of individualized development tools —PDP and PAP— on the transition process from youth to senior football. The research was conducted within the professional environment of FC Universitatea Cluj, a club competing in Romania's top football division, Liga 1.

The investigation took place over the 2024–2025 competitive season, during which the participant, an elite youth player, engaged in a structured, year-long development program guided by the club's technical and psychological staff.

Participant

FC Universitatea Cluj Academy was chosen as the research setting due to its recognized status among the top academies in Romania, its consistent national performance, and its holistic athlete development model supported by full multidisciplinary staff across all elite age categories.

The study involved a single male participant, aged 17 at the beginning of the 2024–2025 season, playing as a left winger for FC Universitatea Cluj Academy. He was selected at the recommendation of the academy's technical and psychological staff, based on his talent, training discipline, competitive performances, and results in internal testing. The left winger position demands exceptional speed, agility, tactical intelligence, and creativity—skills that, at this developmental stage, are closely associated with decision-making maturity and readiness for senior-level football.

Prior to the study, the athlete, his parents, and the club administration were fully informed about the research objectives and ethical standards. All parties provided written consent for participation and for the use of anonymized data under the athlete's initials (M.O.).

Procedure

The data collected throughout the 2024–2025 competitive season were analyzed using a mixed-methods approach, combining descriptive statistics with qualitative thematic interpretation. This design enabled a comprehensive understanding of the player's psychological and motivational evolution during his transition from youth to senior football.

The quantitative and qualitative analyses were guided by the individualized objectives established in the athlete's PDP and PAP. The PDP outlined four key domains of improvement:

- *Technical–tactical*: enhancing 1v1 offensive duels, crossing precision, and decision-making in the final third.
- *Physical:* increasing anaerobic endurance and repeated sprint ability, particularly in transition phases.
- *Psychological*: strengthening self-confidence, emotional regulation during high-pressure moments, and maintaining focus after errors.
- *Social and professional*: improving communication with senior teammates and demonstrating proactive behavior in training sessions.

Each objective in the PDP was accompanied by measurable indicators — for example, technical execution rate (successful crosses, dribbles completed), subjective confidence levels reported in the reflection log, and observational ratings from the coaching staff.

The PAP operationalized these objectives into monthly micro-goals and behavioral commitments. For instance, under the psychological domain, the player committed to maintaining a post-training reflection journal, setting one self-efficacy goal per week, and reviewing progress biweekly with the psychologist. In the tactical domain, he set goals such as improving off-ball positioning and synchronization with the left-back in both offensive and defensive phases.

Both plans were dynamic documents, reviewed every six weeks to ensure responsiveness to the athlete's evolution and feedback from coaches. Adjustments were made as the player began training more frequently with the senior team, shifting emphasis from technical refinement to emotional regulation and social adaptation within the professional environment.

Quantitative analysis

The quantitative data derived from the *Sport Motivation Scale II* (SMS-II; Pelletier et al., 2013) and the *Athlete Self-Efficacy Scale* (ASES; Moritz et al., 2000) were examined at three assessment points: T1 (Pre-season, July 2024); T2 (Mid-season, January 2025); T3 (Post-season, June 2025).

Both questionnaires were administered in English, as the participant demonstrated adequate language proficiency. Prior to the first administration, the club's sport psychologist conducted a brief conversation in English to confirm comprehension. The tests were completed individually, in paper-based format, in a quiet office environment at the club's facilities.

Descriptive statistics (means and percentage variations) were calculated to evaluate longitudinal changes between the three time points. Comparative visualizations (line and radar charts) were produced to illustrate the direction and magnitude of motivational and self-efficacy growth across the competitive cycle.

Qualitative analysis

Qualitative data were obtained from two complementary instruments: the Athlete Reflection Log and the Coach Evaluation Form, both completed monthly during the season. The reflection logs were analyzed using a thematic content approach, identifying recurrent themes such as self-confidence, emotional control, adaptability, and learning mindset. The coach's evaluations were cross-referenced with the athlete's reflections to ensure consistency and contextual depth, highlighting observable behavioral changes and professional integration.

To enhance validity and interpretive richness, a triangulation strategy was applied, integrating quantitative and qualitative results. The temporal alignment between improvements in motivational and self-efficacy scores (SMS-II and ASES) and corresponding qualitative indicators (e.g., increased confidence, initiative, and resilience) allowed for a holistic interpretation of the athlete's developmental trajectory. This multi-layered analysis aimed to capture not only performance-related progress but also psychosocial adaptation and psychological well-being throughout the transition period.

Materials

PDP served as the central framework for setting long-term objectives across four dimensions: technical–tactical improvement, physical conditioning, psychological skills, and social integration.

PAP operationalized these objectives through monthly measurable actions and behavioral indicators, allowing for the continuous monitoring of progress. Both instruments were co-constructed by the player, coach, and sport director to ensure alignment between individual and team development goals.

To quantitatively assess motivational and psychological changes over time, two standardized instruments were used: SMS-II and ASES. The SMS-II measures six motivational subdimensions — intrinsic motivation, integrated regulation, identified regulation, introjected regulation, external regulation, and amotivation — using 18 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = does not correspond at all, 7 = corresponds exactly). The ASES comprises 13 items assessing situational confidence across technical, tactical, physical, and mental domains, using a similar 7-point scale (1 = not at all confident, 7 = completely confident). Both instruments demonstrate high internal consistency ($\alpha > .80$) and have been validated in cross-cultural sport research.

Complementary qualitative data were gathered through the Athlete Reflection Log and the Coach Evaluation Form, both completed monthly. The reflection log allowed the player to self-assess motivation, effort, and emotional balance, while the coach evaluation provided an external perspective on engagement, discipline, and adaptation to the senior environment.

These tools generated a continuous feedback loop that informed the periodic revision of the PDP and PAP and provided contextual insights for interpreting quantitative changes over time.

RESULTS

Quantitative Findings

The quantitative results demonstrated a clear upward trajectory in both motivation and self-efficacy across the competitive season.

Table 1. M.O. Results at SMS II

Regulation Type	Items	Mean T1*	Mean T2	Mean T3	Δ* (T3–T1)	Interpretation
Intrinsic Regulation	3, 9, 17	4.8	5.6	6.3	+1.5	Growth in pleasure and curiosity toward performance learning; intrinsic satisfaction became the main driver.
Integrated Regulation	4, 11, 14	4.5	5.2	6.0	+1.5	Reinforcement of personal values and identity alignment with professional football.
Identified Regulation	6, 12, 18	5.0	5.5	6.2	+1.2	Strong and consistent motivation to use football as a means of self-development and growth.
Introjected Regulation	1, 7, 16	3.9	4.3	4.8	+0.9	Slightly increased internal pressure (guilt-driven motivation) but remains adaptive.
External Regulation	5, 8, 15	3.8	3.6	3.3	−0.5	Decline in reliance on external rewards or approval, indicating more autonomous motivation.
Amotivation (Non-Regulation)	2, 10, 13	2.9	2.4	1.8	−1.1	Reduced uncertainty and confusion about his role; stronger engagement and sense of purpose.
Overall Mean Score	1–18	4.16	4.43	4.73	+0.57	Progressive internalization of motivation toward self-determined regulation.

T1–Pre-season test; T2–mid-season test, T3–post-season test; **Δ-difference between pre- and post-intervention scores.*

Scores from the Sport Motivation Scale II (SMS-II) showed a consistent internalization of motivation, with the most significant gains observed in intrinsic and integrated regulation. The athlete's intrinsic motivation increased from 4.8 (T1) to 6.3 (T3), while integrated regulation rose from 4.5 to 6.0, reflecting a deeper internal alignment between personal values and athletic identity. Similarly, identified regulation increased from 5.0 to 6.2, confirming the athlete's growing perception of football as a meaningful avenue for self-development.

In contrast, external regulation decreased from 3.8 to 3.3, and amotivation dropped substantially from 2.9 to 1.8, indicating a marked reduction in dependence

on external rewards or approval. The overall mean SMS-II score improved from 4.16 at the beginning of the season to 4.73 at its conclusion, representing a 13.7% increase in self-determined motivation.

Table 2. M.O. Results at ASES

Subdimension	Items	Mean T1*	Mean T2	Mean T3	Δ* (T3–T1)	Interpretation
Sport Discipline Efficacy	1–4	3.1	3.7	4.4	+1.3	Steady improvement in technical-tactical confidence and physical readiness; visible adaptation to senior match pace.
Psychological Efficacy	5–8	2.9	3.8	4.5	+1.6	Strongest growth observed in emotional control and coping with pressure; improved self-motivation and leadership behavior.
Professional Thought Efficacy	9–12	3.3	3.9	4.2	+0.9	Gradual increase in planning and self-management; better training discipline and responsibility for individual goals.
Personality Efficacy	13–16	3.5	4.0	4.6	+1.1	Consistent progress in fair play, teamwork, and self-confidence; high sense of accountability at the end of the season.
Overall Mean ASES Score	1–16	3.2	3.8	4.4	+1.2	Clear upward trend in overall self-efficacy throughout the competitive year.

T1–pre-season test; T2–mid-season test, T3–post-season test; **Δ-difference between pre- and post-intervention scores.*

Parallel trends were recorded in the Athlete Self-Efficacy Scale (ASES). The overall mean score rose from 3.2 (T1) to 4.4 (T3), signaling a substantial increase in perceived confidence across all performance domains.

The most pronounced improvements were observed in psychological efficacy (+1.6), sport discipline efficacy (+1.3), and personality efficacy (+1.1), suggesting greater emotional stability, composure under pressure, and maturity in interpersonal interactions. Notably, psychological efficacy progressed from 2.9 to 4.5, illustrating a 55% enhancement in emotional regulation and mental resilience.

These quantitative results closely align with the developmental milestones established in the Personal Development Plan (PDP) and Personal Action Plan (PAP). For instance, one of the athlete's targeted goals was to improve confidence during high-pressure match situations — an area that corresponds directly to

the recorded increase in psychological efficacy and intrinsic motivation. The data therefore provide empirical confirmation that individualized, structured planning can accelerate psychological adaptation and readiness for senior-level competition.

Overall, the statistical pattern highlights a synergistic relationship between autonomous motivation and self-efficacy, consistent with self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017). As motivation became more self-determined, self-efficacy increased in parallel, suggesting that the athlete's internal drive and perceived competence co-evolved through continuous reflection, feedback, and experiential learning in the senior environment.

Qualitative Findings

At the beginning of the season (T1), reflection entries indicated self-doubt and cognitive overload typical of players transitioning to senior-level competition. The athlete described difficulties in maintaining composure during high-intensity sessions and a tendency to overanalyze mistakes — patterns consistent with moderate ASES scores in psychological efficacy (2.9) and intrinsic motivation (4.8). A typical entry from August noted: "I feel pressure to prove myself every session. Sometimes I lose focus because I think too much about how I'm perceived."

Coach evaluations during this phase echoed these concerns, highlighting strong effort and tactical discipline but fluctuating emotional control under pressure. The coach noted: "Technically gifted, but visibly tense when challenged. Needs to channel energy into constructive self-talk and confidence."

By mid-season (T2), qualitative data reflected a clear shift in mindset. The athlete began identifying progress through self-reflection rather than external validation, in line with the rise in integrated and identified regulation on the SMS-II (from 4.5 to 5.2 and 5.0 to 5.5, respectively). Journal entries emphasized learning orientation and mental recovery: "I've started focusing on what I can improve after each session instead of what went wrong. Feedback helps me stay calm."

Coaches observed greater initiative, better emotional regulation, and improved communication with senior teammates. This behavioral change corresponded with the 0.9-point improvement in psychological efficacy and sport discipline efficacy, confirming a tangible link between reflection, motivation, and performance readiness.

By the end of the season (T3), qualitative indicators reflected a consolidated sense of professional identity and autonomy. Reflection logs from May and June contained statements such as: "I feel part of the team now. I know what's expected of me, and I can adapt without losing confidence."

This aligns with the athlete's high intrinsic motivation (6.3) and psychological efficacy (4.5) scores, suggesting internalized motivation and self-belief. The coach's evaluation described the athlete as "self-regulated, emotionally stable, and capable of leading transitions both technically and mentally."

These qualitative patterns mirror the statistical trends, demonstrating that the athlete's increased motivation and self-efficacy translated into observable psychological maturity, self-management, and adaptability — all core components of successful integration at the senior level. The interaction between reflective practice and structured feedback appears to have reinforced the athlete's internal motivational systems, validating the use of PDP and PAP as developmental scaffolds for both performance and personal growth.

Importantly, the longitudinal development observed throughout the 2024–2025 season culminated in a tangible performance outcome: in September 2025, the player made his official debut for FC Universitatea Cluj in Romania's top division (Liga I). This milestone represents the practical validation of the individualized PDP and PAP frameworks, indicating that psychological, motivational, and reflective growth translated effectively into readiness for professional competition.

DISCUSSION

The integrated analysis of motivational and self-efficacy data, supported by qualitative reflection and coaching evaluations, provides a holistic understanding of the athlete's adaptation during his first year of transition from youth to senior football. The convergence of findings from SMS-II, ASES and the qualitative instruments (Reflection Log and Coach Evaluation) illustrates a coherent developmental trajectory characterized by psychological growth, motivational internalization, and behavioral stabilization.

The systematic use of the PDP and PAP provided structure to this process by linking performance objectives with reflective self-assessment. Through regular review meetings, feedback sessions, and self-reflection logs, the athlete actively engaged in identifying strengths, weaknesses, and coping strategies — thus transforming learning into self-directed growth. This iterative cycle of goal setting, feedback, and adjustment mirrors the process of self-regulated learning described in athlete development literature (Morris et al., 2015; Rumbold et al., 2018).

Importantly, this study reinforces the idea that motivation and confidence do not evolve in isolation but through reciprocal interaction between the athlete and his environment. The club's supportive context — characterized by open communication, constructive feedback, and opportunities for senior-team exposure —

acted as a developmental facilitator. This finding resonates with Henriksen et al.'s (2010, 2013) ecological model of talent development environments, in which social support and psychological safety are foundational to sustainable performance.

Overall, the integrated findings suggest that individualized planning, continuous reflection, and a psychologically safe environment can collectively foster autonomous motivation, self-efficacy, and identity consolidation in athletes transitioning to senior football. This case illustrates how structured developmental frameworks like the PDP and PAP can be operationalized within club settings to bridge the gap between youth potential and professional performance readiness.

The implementation of the PDP and PAP functioned as a bridge between theory and applied practice. These tools translated abstract psychological constructs—such as motivation, self-efficacy, and emotional regulation—into concrete developmental goals and behavioral actions. By establishing short- and medium-term objectives, supported through feedback and reflection, the athlete experienced a structured yet flexible pathway for self-regulated learning. This supports existing literature emphasizing that clear goal orientation and reflective monitoring are core mechanisms of sustainable athlete development (Rumbold, Fletcher, & Daniels, 2018; Morris, Tod, & Oliver, 2015).

CONCLUSIONS

This single-case study provides empirical and applied evidence for how structured developmental planning—through the use of PDP and PAP—can effectively support the transition from youth to senior football. The integration of motivational (SMS-II) and self-efficacy (ASES) assessments with reflective and coaching feedback revealed a coherent pattern of psychological growth, enhanced intrinsic motivation, and improved self-regulatory capacity over the course of one competitive season.

The findings confirm that successful athletic transitions extend beyond technical and tactical readiness, encompassing deep psychological and social adaptation. When properly implemented within a supportive and psychologically safe environment, PDP and PAP frameworks can foster self-awareness, autonomy, and resilience—attributes that sustain both immediate performance and long-term professional identity. These results align with the holistic–ecological model of athlete development, illustrating how personal and contextual factors must operate in synergy to enable sustainable progress.

Notably, following a full competitive season of structured monitoring, feedback, and psychological support through the PDP and PAP frameworks, the player M.O. made his official debut in Romania's top division (Liga I) in September

2025 at FC Universitatea Cluj. This concrete outcome illustrates the potential effectiveness of individualized development and reflection-based approaches in bridging the gap between youth and professional football.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The first author was primarily responsible for the practical design and implementation of the intervention, data collection, and the interpretation of applied outcomes. The second author contributed to the theoretical foundation of the study and to the selection and justification of the psychological instruments. Both authors collaborated in structuring the manuscript and approved the final version for submission.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the conduct of this study or the publication of its findings.

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