

# The sports commitment in football players and its relationship with the coach performance: A systematic review

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## ABSTRACT

The objective of the article was to relate the sports commitment of the football players together with the performance of the coach to test the relationship that both have with the sporting success of the football players. The PRISMA methodology was used. The Web of Science, Scopus, Academic Search Ultimate, Eric, Medline and Sport Discuss databases were used, with no time limit. The PICO strategy was used to screen articles. Finally, a total of 8 articles were included in the review. The importance between the commitment and the interpersonal style of the coach was demonstrated, which includes aspects in relation to his way of working globally, which we call performance. An increase in the level of commitment was also observed as the performance of the coach improved, especially the motivational climate that this produces in the players. For this reason, it is necessary to take care of these aspects in coaches when they work with potential sports talent.

**Keywords:** Soccer; Soccer player; Coach's interpersonal style; Self-determination; Commitment; Motivation; Sports talent.

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## INTRODUCTION

It is a well-studied fact that, to become a sports talent, natural abilities must be honed into skills (Gagné, 2015). This process requires hours and hours of practice of the sport, in a continuous, systematic (Ericsson, 2014) and quality way (Macnamara et al., 2016), called *deliberate practice*. The final result is an experienced person (Durand-Bush and Salmela, 2007) denoting time, work, proper mentoring and technical supervision, coupled with the athlete's determination to reach the top and the know-how necessary to get there (Ruiz and Sanchez, 1997, p. 236).

The complicity of combining all these elements in a good talent development process is highlighted in the Renzulli three-ring model (1978), establishing three essential traits that determine high capacity (HC). Firstly, *above-average intelligence*, referring both to more general aptitudes (e. g. verbal, numerical or spatial reasoning, or memory management), and to specific areas of human performance (e. g. chemistry, ballet, music composition or experimental design). This trait refers to above-average ability rather than exceptional ability or to the top 5% of the population in accordance with a series of studies that have provided evidence of the lack of a clear link between academic aptitude and professional achievement (Renzulli and Gaesser, 2015). Secondly, *commitment with the task*. These individuals usually show great curiosity for various subjects, forcing them to establish selection criteria for schoolwork. One trait that they display in this sense is perseverance, willpower or determination. In short, sufficient motivation to persist in the development and deepening of the task. Finally, *creativity*, featured by divergent thinking. Subjects who possess high levels of creativity have a great ability to come up with new and original ideas.

In light to this model's effectiveness in the educational world, there has been an attempt in recent years to transfer its talent identification and development processes to the sports world (Prieto-Ayuso, Pastor-Vicedo, & Contreras-Jordán, 2017), evaluating the high capacities of athletes in each discipline, their creativity and commitment. This study focuses on the latter trait, commitment, due mainly to its observed importance in the process of talent development among young athletes (Murillo et al., 2018; Pulido et al., 2018; Sousa et al., 2007), for whom it acts *as fuel in the development process, ensuring the investment, in terms of time and effort, is effective* (Gagné, 2015, p. 26). It is important to differentiate the three dimensions of this concept, i. e. *cognitive commitment*, referring to the use of effective and customised strategies in learning and self-regulation (Reeve, 2012); *affective commitment*, which consists of the emotional bond and identification of the player with the coaches and the club, as well as their attitudes towards it and its agents (Lara et al., 2018; Tomás et al., 2016); and, finally, *behavioural commitment*, which takes into account the explicit participation in the proposed activities, such as attendance or participation in tasks (Lara et al., 2018; Tomás et al., 2016). To these three dimensions we could add a fourth one, of particular relevance when it comes to HC individuals, known as *agentic commitment* (Reeve & Tseng, 2011), which is the way in which players intentionally and proactively customise and otherwise enrich the content to be learned and the conditions in which learning takes place, as a way of improving the learning climate (Bandura, 2006).

Moreover, the athlete's level of commitment can fluctuate up and down in line with a number of factors. One such factor is coach performance, whereby "*performance*" is understood as *the exercise of the obligations inherent to a profession, position or office* (Dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy, 2020), which constitutes a fundamental element in sporting achievement (Vergara et al., 2018). In football environments, the coach's performance and the influence they have on football players' commitment has been studied through suitably-designed tasks adapted to the players (Cardoso et al., 2019; Castellano et al., 2016; Clemente et al., 2018; González-Villora et al., 2017; Gutiérrez et al., 2010), the passion shown by coaches in training (Carpentier et al., 2014), the optimisation of football players' basic psychological needs (BPN) (Pulido et al., 2017), the

inter-personal style used by the coach (Curran et al., 2016), and the creation of instruments designed to measure this variable (Ballester et al., 2021).

These previous studies have shown the influence of good coach performance (task design, passion towards training, inter-personal style) on player commitment. However, to date no research has attempted to clarify exactly what these studies are and what object of study each of them pursued. Doing so would make it possible, on the one hand, to organise and classify the studies in question, and, on the other hand, to obtain the effect size (ES) in relation to the magnitude of the change an intervention programme produced in the studies. Finally, doing so would expand knowledge about football players' sports commitment, opening future lines of research in this field. Therefore, in light of the above, the objective of this research was to conduct a systematic review (SR) of the studies relating to sports commitment among young football players and coach performance, highlighting lines of investigation for further research in the field.

## METHODS

### Search limits

The guidelines established in the guide Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (Moher et al., 2009) were followed for this SR. A search was carried out in the following databases: Web of Science, Scopus and EBSCO (Academic Search Ultimate, Eric, Medline, Sport Discuss) applying no time limit. These databases were selected because they have the necessary characteristics to house the type of studies that were of interest to our research and are also of sufficient scientific relevance to give validity to the results, thus forming an appropriate basis to analyse the construct of the problem being studied. The articles contained in these databases were also published in journals indexed in the Journal Citation Report (JCR) or the Scimago Journal Rank (SJR). The search strategy used for each database is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Search strategy for each database.

Database	Search strategy
Web of Science (n = 123)	(soccer OR soccer) AND (youth OR young OR "young soccerer" OR elite OR professional OR competition) AND (style OR "controlling style" OR "coach style" OR "coach interpersonal style" OR method) AND (commitment OR commitment OR "sport* commitment" OR self-Determination OR motivation) AND (talent* OR expert* OR experience OR performance OR drop OR drop-out OR quit)
Scopus (n = 286)	(soccer OR soccer) AND (youth OR young OR elite OR professional OR competition) AND ("controlling style" OR "coach style" OR "interpersonal style") AND (commitment OR commitment OR self-Determination OR motivation) AND (talent* OR expert* OR experience OR performance OR drop OR drop-out OR quit)
EBSCO (Academic Search Ultimate, Eric, Medline, Sport Discuss) (n = 339)	(soccer OR soccer) AND (youth OR young OR elite OR professional OR competition) AND ("controlling style" OR "coach style" OR "interpersonal style") AND (commitment OR commitment OR self-Determination OR motivation) AND (talent* OR expert* OR experience OR performance OR drop OR drop-out OR quit)

### Selection criteria

The inclusion criteria for articles followed the PICO strategy: a) studies that focused on a single sport, football; b) written in English or Spanish; c) at an elite or highly competitive level; d) ages between early adolescence (11 to <16 years) and late adolescence (16 to <21 years) as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) categorisation (Cohen et al., 2014); e) whose object of study focused on sport commitment; f) that linked sports commitment to coach performance.

Three levels of exclusion were established for screening. Firstly, duplicate items were removed. Secondly, articles were removed based on their title and abstract. And thirdly, the full text of the selected articles was read before removing those that did not meet the inclusion criteria. Figure 1 shows the flowchart.

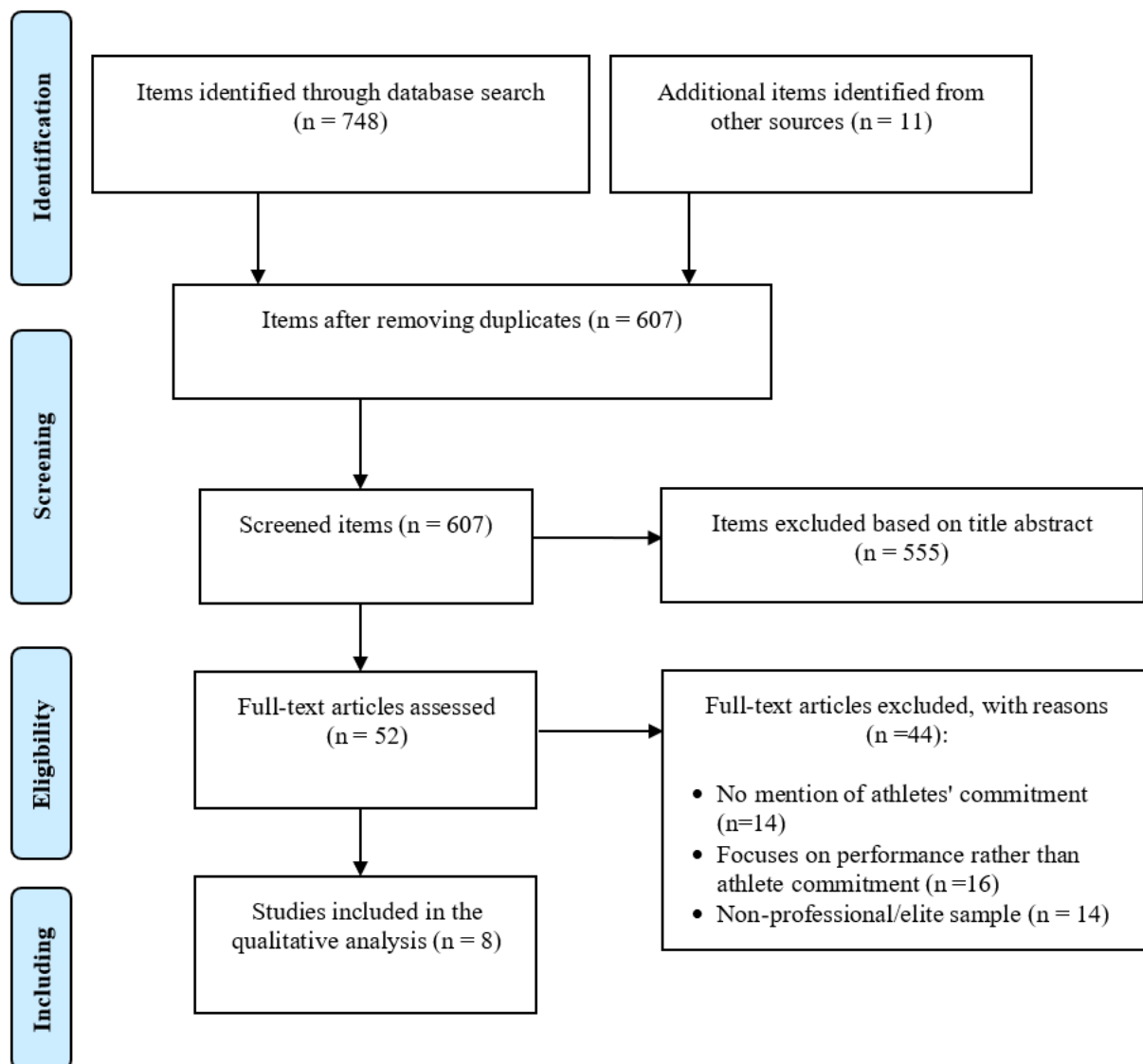


Figure 1. Flowchart.

After identification and application of the first level of inclusion, 607 articles were selected as potential studies. 555 were then discarded at the second level of inclusion. After reading the full text of the remaining 52 articles, eight were selected to form the final sample.

Table 2. Summary of the studies included in the systematic review.

Authors	Objective of the study	Design	Sample	Variables	Measuring instruments	Results/conclusions
Sousa et al. (2007)	To analyse the influence of a customised advice programme for coaches (PAPE) on sports commitment, fun and alternatives to involvement, and to verify the drop-out rate in each of the teams and its relationship with sports commitment.	Intervention programme	62 players at the start (AVG = 15.42; SD = 0.30) and 50 at the end (AVG = 15.54; SD = 0.30).  4 coaches aged 25 to 33	Sports commitment Sports drop-out Sports climate Fun Coaching style	Sports commitment Questionnaire (SCQ)	The results show that all players remain committed at the end of the season, after the intervention programme, even if they have less fun.
Torregrosa et al. (2008)	To examine the role of coaches' communication styles and of the motivational climate created by the coach as regards young football players' enjoyment and commitment.	Cross-sectional	415 top-level junior football players aged 14 to 16 (AVG = 15.19; SD = 0.67).	Motivational climate Coach behaviours Sports	Perceived Motivational Climate Questionnaire (PMCSQ-2)  Perception questionnaire on the coach's behaviours in training and competition situations (CBAS-CPBS).  Sports commitment Questionnaire (SCQ)	The motivational climate and the coaches' communication style go a long way to determining player commitment.
Curran et al. (2015)	The study's aim was to examine the relationship between motivational climate and athlete's commitment.	Cross-sectional	260 football players aged 11 to 16 (AVG = 13.53; SD = 1.27)	Motivational climate Sports commitment	Perceived Motivational Climate in Sport Questionnaire-2 (PMCSQ-2)  Athlete Commitment Questionnaire (AEQ)	All dimensions of commitment were predicted by a good motivational climate. The cognitive aspects of commitment were positively predicted by a performance climate. The results suggest that a good motivational climate is more likely to increase the football players' commitment.
Curran et al. (2016)	Analysing the coach's motivational styles as a source to predict athletes' commitment and disaffection in sports.	Longitudinal	252 participants from youth sports (AVG = 12.98; SD = 1.84)	Sports commitment Satisfaction of psychological needs Frustration of psychological needs Autonomy Interpersonal control	Commitment Versus Disaffection with Learning Scale (EVDLS)  Basic Need Satisfaction in Sport Scale (BNSSS)  Psychological Need Thwarting Scale (PNTS)  Perceived Autonomy Support Scale for Exercise Settings (PASSSES)  Controlling Coach Behaviours Scale (CCBS)	The results showed associations between the coaches' motivational styles and players' commitment. In addition, a positive reciprocal association was found between psychological need satisfaction and commitment. Thus, there was evidence of increased commitment among athletes whose psychological needs are met.

Marholz et al. (2016)	To examine the role played by the coach in competitive sports, analysing the motivational climate created in the team and its relationship with player commitment.	Cross-sectional	929 football players aged 10 to 14 (AVG = 12.2; SD = 1.3)	Interpersonal style Sport commitment	Motivational Climate Scale for Youth Sports (MCSYS) Sports commitment Questionnaire (SCQ)	The results obtained indicate a positive relationship between perceived motivational climate and commitment to the game. Developing a commitment to a particular sport is essential for adherence and to avoid dropping-out of the sports activity.
Pulido et al. (2017)	To assess the effects of an intervention programme developed with football coaches, based on the promotion of strategies to satisfy athletes' basic psychological.	Intervention programme	109 football players (AVG = 13.78; SD = 1.38) 8 coaches (AVG = 32.5; SD = 14.34)	Interpersonal style Meeting basic psychological needs Frustration of basic psychological needs Motivation Sport commitment	Coaches Interpersonal Style-Questionnaire (CIS-Q) Basic Psychological Needs in Exercise Scale (BPNES) Psychological Needs Thwarting Scale (PNTS) Sport Motivation Questionnaire (SMQ) Sports Commitment Questionnaire (SCQ)	The results showed that, after receiving the intervention programme, commitment and motivation increased among the experimental group while levels of needs frustration and low self-determination decreased.
Pulido et al. (2018)	The aim of this study was to assess the impact on young football players' commitment of perceived need for support/frustration, satisfaction/frustration of basic psychological needs, and motivation	Cross-sectional	430 football players aged 12 to 18 (AVG = 14.21; SD = 1.67)	Coach's interpersonal style Meeting basic psychological needs Frustration of basic psychological needs Motivation Sports commitment	Coach's Interpersonal Style-Questionnaire (CIS-Q) Basic Needs Satisfaction in Exercise Scale (BPNES) Psychological Needs Thwarting Scale (PNTS) Sport Motivation Questionnaire (SMQ) Sports Commitment Questionnaire (SCQ)	A supportive style by the coach was positively correlated with the satisfaction of players' needs, which, in turn, positively predicts intrinsic motivation, which also in turn positively predicts sports commitment. On the other hand, a frustrating style by the coach positively predicted frustration of needs, which positively predicted demotivation and sports commitment.
De Muyneck et al. (2020)	To examine links between coaching style, parental behaviour and football player motivation and commitment.	Cross-sectional	255 football players aged 10 to 20 (AVG = 13.72; SD = 1.97) 23 coaches	Coaching style Motivation Sports commitment	Interpersonal Questionnaire (IBQ) Behavioural Regulation in Sport Questionnaire (BRSQ) Commitment Versus Disaffection with Learning Scale (EVDLS) Metacognitive Strategies Questionnaire (MSQ) Agentic Commitment Scale	Need-supportive styles on the part of the coach and parents are positively associated with motivation and commitment. Styles that frustrate basic needs are positively correlated with demotivation. These findings attest to the importance of distinguishing between need-supportive and need-frustrating styles to promote greater motivation and commitment in football players.

The Mendeley Reference Manager (version 1803) was used to save and screen the articles from the databases. The article screening process was carried out simultaneously by two study co-authors, with meetings being held once the second and third level of inclusion had been completed to share the included articles and discuss discrepancies.

## RESULTS

After completing the screening process, eight articles meeting all the inclusion criteria were obtained from the databases consulted (Web of Science, Scopus, Academic Search Ultimate, Eric, Medline, Sport Discuss). They all shared the aim of assessing whether good coach performance was positively related to his football players' sports commitment. Table 2 shows the studies included in the SR in greater detail.

The results were then described and compared based on the research objectives, design, sample sizes and measurement instruments.

### ***With regard to the study objectives***

Sports commitment was studied in relation to the influence exerted on it by the good or bad coach performance. In this sense, coach performance was mostly examined through the motivational climate it generated in the players (De Muyneck et al., 2020; Curran et al., 2015, 2016; Marholz et al., 2016; Pulido et al., 2018; Torregrosa et al., 2008), followed by coaching style (De Muyneck et al., 2020; Torregrosa et al., 2008). In addition, the objectives of some other works included the relationship between sports commitment and coach-generated enjoyment (Sousa et al., 2007), coach commitment (Sousa et al., 2007) and the satisfaction of players' basic psychological needs (Pulido et al., 2017, 2018).

### ***With regard to study designs***

Of the eight articles included in the SR, cross-sectional studies were the most prominent type of design, being used in five cases (Torregrosa et al., 2008; Curran et al., 2015; Marholz et al., 2016; Pulido et al., 2018; De Muyneck et al., 2020). Two studies conducted an intervention programme (Sousa et al., 2007; Pulido et al., 2017). In this regard, Sousa et al. (2007) conducted a programme to observe, analyse and intervene in each coach's behavioural needs with a duration of between 20 and 22 weeks. While Pulido et al. (2017), more recently, applied a 12-hour intervention programme to see how coaching style impacts player motivation, setting pre-intervention and post-intervention as data collection moments. Finally, the study by Curran et al. (2016) was conducted longitudinally, measuring the sports commitment and coaching style variables in three specific moments of a sports season.

### ***With regard to the nature and size of the samples***

The average sample size in the studies included in the SR was 339 football player participants. Three studies exceed that average number of participants (Marholz et al., 2016; Pulido et al., 2018; Torregrosa et al., 2008), with the study by Marholz et al. (2016) having the largest number of participants (929 football players). The remaining studies included in the SR involved a lower number of participants than the overall average. Specifically, the study by Sousa et al. (2007) included the fewest participants (62 players).

In addition to players as sample participants, three studies included football coaches (De Muyneck et al., 2020; Pulido et al., 2017; Sousa et al., 2007), with an average sample size, with regard to coach participants, of 11.6.

**With regard to the variables studied**

As can be deduced from the paragraph above relating to the objectives of the studies included in the SR, the researchers measured a very diverse range of variables dealing with coach performance. Among them, the most studied were coaching style (De Muynck et al., 2020; Curran et al., 2016; Marholz et al., 2016; Pulido et al., 2017, 2018; Sousa et al., 2007; Torregrosa et al., 2008) and motivational climate (De Muynck et al., 2020; Curran et al., 2015; Pulido et al., 2017, 2018; Sousa et al., 2007; Torregrosa et al., 2008). In addition to these variables, satisfaction of players' basic psychological needs (Curran et al., 2016; Pulido et al., 2017, 2018), enjoyment (Sousa et al., 2007) and sports drop-out (Sousa et al., 2007) were among the other variables used to study coach performance in relation to sports commitment.

**With regard to the measuring instruments used**

As can be seen in Table 2, the measuring instruments used in the studies were also very diverse, with no single instrument common to most of the studies. Four different instruments were used to measure sport commitment in the eight studies in the SR, including the so-called *Sports commitment Questionnaire* (SCQ) (Sousa et al., 2007; Marholz et al., 2016; Pulido et al., 2017, 2018; Torregrosa et al., 2007), *Agentic Commitment Scale* (De Muynck et al., 2020), *Athlete Commitment Questionnaire* (AEQ) (Curran et al., 2015) and *Commitment Versus Disaffection with Learning Scale* (EVDLS) (Curran et al., 2016; De Muynck et al., 2020).

The instruments used in these eight studies to measure the variables referring to coach performance were also very diverse. Coaching style, for example, was measured with the instruments *Coaching Behaviours Perception Questionnaire in Training and Competition Situation* (CBAS-CPBS) (Torregrosa et al., 2008), *Perceived Autonomy Support Scale for Exercise Settings* (PASSES) (Curran et al., 2016), *Controlling Coach Behaviours Scale* (CCBS) (Curran et al., 2016), *Coaches Interpersonal Style-Questionnaire* (CIS-Q) (Pulido et al., 2017, 2018), *Interpersonal Behaviours Questionnaire* (IBQ) (De Muynck et al., 2020) and *Behavioural Regulation in Sport Questionnaire* (BRSQ) (De Muynck et al., 2020).

The motivational climate generated by the coach was measured through the *Perception of Motivational Climate Questionnaire* (PMCSQ-2) (Curran et al., 2015; Torregrosa et al., 2008), the *Motivational Climate Scale for Youth Sports* (MCSYS) instrument (Marholz et al., 2016) and the so-called *Sport Motivation Questionnaire* (SMQ) (Pulido et al., 2017, 2018).

Basic psychological needs were measured with the *Basic Need Satisfaction in Sport Scale* (BNSSS) (Curran et al., 2016), *Basic Psychological Needs in Exercise Scale* (BPNES) (Pulido et al., 2017, 2018) and *Psychological Needs Thwarting Scale* (PNTS) (Curran et al., 2016; Pulido et al., 2017, 2018). Finally, De Muynck et al. (2020) used the *Metacognitive Strategies Questionnaire* (MSQ) instrument to measure the meta-cognitive strategies of football players.

**DISCUSSION**

The aim of this work was to conduct a review of studies that focus on the relationship between football player commitment and coach performance. To achieve this objective, an SR was performed using the PRISMA methodology (Moher et al., 2009), internationally accepted for this type of study. The most outstanding results are discussed in this section.

The first result that deserves discussion is the date of publication of the studies. As can be seen in the inclusion criteria set out in the methodology section of this article, no time limit applied to their inclusion.



However, the oldest article that met all the inclusion criteria was published by Sousa et al. (2007) at the end of the first decade of the 2000s. This data leads us to consider the salience of this line of research (football players' commitment and coach performance), in which work has been increasing quantitatively in the last decade. Of the eight articles included, seven were published between 2015 and 2020. The rise of this line of research may be derived from the findings from the educational world, where it has been widely demonstrated that, to be viewed as highly able students, not only is it necessary to have above-average intellectual capacity and creativity, but also to demonstrate commitment to the task (Renzulli & Gaesser, 2015). *The Nomination Scale for Identifying Football Players* instrument (Prieto-Ayuso et al., 2017) is a sample of the attempts in recent years to transfer the findings from education to sport. In short, the obvious finding that commitment is an essential aspect in the development process of talented football players (Prieto and Ramírez, 2021) may have motivated the flourishing of this line of research in recent years, where studies have tried to ascertain the key aspects of coach performance that most favour commitment among players.

On the other hand, coach performance is a very broad concept which has been studied in relation to several variables. The variable that received most attention was motivation or motivational climate, starting with the first work published by Sousa et al. (2007) and up to and including the most recent study in this line of research, published by DeMuynck et al. (2020). However, other variables also help define good or bad football coach performance, including the style used by the coach, whether controlling or autonomous (Marholz et al., 2016), the satisfaction of basic psychological needs (Pulido et al., 2017), or the fun inspired in the player (Sousa et al., 2007). Coaching style seems to be the variable most studied by researchers in this field, showing that a style supporting players' autonomy favours the motivational climate for players, while a controlling coaching style harms players' commitment and the motivational climate (Cantú-Berrueto et al., 2016). In this regard, other studies showed that adequate training of the coach and the passion with which they conduct training sessions also seem to increase sports commitment among players (Azpillaga et al., 2012; Carpentier and Mageau, 2014). The player's context, therefore, is of vital importance to their talent development process (Pazo et al., 2012). Moreover, these results alert us to the importance of the training of the agents in charge of young football players' teaching and learning process.

The heterogeneity present in the variables associated with coach performance is also particularly pertinent as regards the instruments used in each study. There is no consensus on the instrument that should be used to measure these variables. One example is the measurement of sport commitment itself. Some authors use an instrument called SCQ (Sousa et al., 2007; Marholz et al., 2016; Pulido et al., 2017, 2018; Torregrosa et al., 2007) to measure this variable. Others use the *Agentic Commitment Scale* (De Muynck et al., 2020), the EVDLS (Curran et al., 2016; De Muynck et al., 2020), or finally, the AEQ (Curran et al., 2015). This heterogeneity in the variables, together with the scarcity of research proposals (only two studies carried out a longitudinal intervention programme), make it impossible to conduct a meta-analysis, as outlined by Moher et al. (2009) and Sánchez-Meca (2010) in their work on how to conduct systematic reviews and meta-analyses. Furthermore, the heterogeneity present in the instruments used across the eight studies in the SR limits our ability to calculate the ES, which would have enabled us to estimate the magnitude of change in outcome after an experimental intervention (Kelley & Preacher, 2012).

Finally, below we set out future lines of research that may be useful to researchers intending to continue advancing knowledge in this field. Firstly, there is a clear lack of intervention proposals and longitudinal studies. Of all the articles included in this SR, only two papers were designed as intervention proposals (Curran et al., 2016; Sousa et al., 2007). For this reason, studies are needed to measure the relationship between football players' sports commitment and coach performance over the course of a season or several seasons, in order to ascertain the evolution of this relationship over time. Secondly, there is evident

heterogeneity in the assessment instruments used in the eight articles included in the SR. For this reason, further unification of measurement instruments in relation to coach performance is required. Finally, given that the result obtained in all the studies was a positive relationship between the football player's sports commitment and coach performance, intervention programmes are required that focus attention on improving coach performance in order to increase the player's sport commitment.

## CONCLUSION

Once the whole SR process was conducted, we concluded, firstly, that there has been an increase in publications linking sports commitment to coach performance over the last five years. Secondly, after analysing the studies included in the SR, we can draw conclusions on the importance of that link between these two variables, with increasing levels of commitment as coach performance improves, especially as regards the motivational climate that the coach produces in players. For this reason, it is critical that all those working in the training of young football players be aware of this link in order to increase their players' sports commitment, as this variable is a fundamental aspect of the process of developing sports talent.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Raúl Notario-Alonso: Designed the analysis; collected the data; analysis tools; performed the analysis; wrote the paper. Alejandro Prieto-Ayuso: Designed the analysis; collected the data; performed the analysis; wrote the paper. Andrés García-Notario: Designed the study; wrote the paper. Onofre Ricardo Contreras-Jordán: Designed the study; analysis tools; wrote the paper; supervise.

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## DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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