

LEARNING & PERFORMANCE ENVIRONMENT

Article by; Mirelle Van Rijbroek - Strategy, Talent ID & Player Development Utah Royals FC

Talent can be developed in the right environment is a reminder we underestimate: a player never ever develops alone. A player develops in & with her environment.

There is a clear relationship between what we see in performance, potential, & the context that shaped it: coaching, training design, competition, culture, support, & lifestyle. Talent development is not a straight line; it is continuous interaction over time.

When we talk about talent, we are rarely only answering, "How good is she today?" We are trying to understand why she performs as she does & which behaviors suggest what she might become with the right time, structure, & support. That is why the starting point must always be football.

Football is a game of communication, decisions, & execution under pressure, across key moments. Football talent is the potential to consistently solve the game's problems by perceiving the right cues, making effective decisions, & executing actions at the required speed & detail, while showing a strong capacity to learn & adapt. This keeps "talent" where it belongs: in the game, expressed through repeatable behaviors, not one-off moments.

At its core, the "right environment" protects & accelerates learning. It gives players game-like experiences with the right challenge, variation, & feedback that leads to action. It creates clarity on what good looks like, & safety to try, fail, & try again. Coaches who challenge players to take responsibility tend to guide more players to the top than coaches who take every decision & leave no space to think, choose to, and adjust.

This is why talent identification & development cannot be separated. If we identify potential without conditions to grow it, we don't develop talent, we label it. Talent ID is long-term: not who looks best today, but who can become exceptional tomorrow. A decisive factor is learning ability, the willingness & capacity to improve, reflect, seek feedback, & follow it up with behavior. Players with strong self-regulation rise because they drive the process from the inside.

The environment shapes this. It can build confidence, initiative, & adaptability, or create fear, dependency, & stagnation. Without structure, we fill gaps with assumptions. With structure, we ask better questions: is the player struggling because of role demands, team style, lack of repetition, low challenge, limited support, or because she is still learning? Context doesn't excuse performance, it explains it. Explanation allows us to coach, not judge.

The six components of an optimal learning & performance environment:

The best player, best coach, best program, Learning & performance-oriented culture, High performance environment, Performance lifestyle

Ultimately, the goal is simple: to do right by the player. Talent is not fixed, not a verdict; it is a pathway. The primary task of a club is to design an environment that gives players the best chance to learn, adapt, & grow into who they can become in football, & in life.

