



# Bachelor's thesis

**IDR600 Sport Management**

**How strong Athletic Identity effects Norwegian footballers during the early stages of professional career?**

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## **Preface**

This thesis is my final project for completion of the Bachelor Degree in Sports Management at the Molde University Collage. I would like to thank everyone I have met here for my three years that filled me with great memories.

A special thanks to my supervisor, Birnir Egilsson that guided me and for all the help with this task.

However, most deserving thank you goes out to my family for the support throughout my 3 years in Molde and at Molde University Collage.

## **Summary**

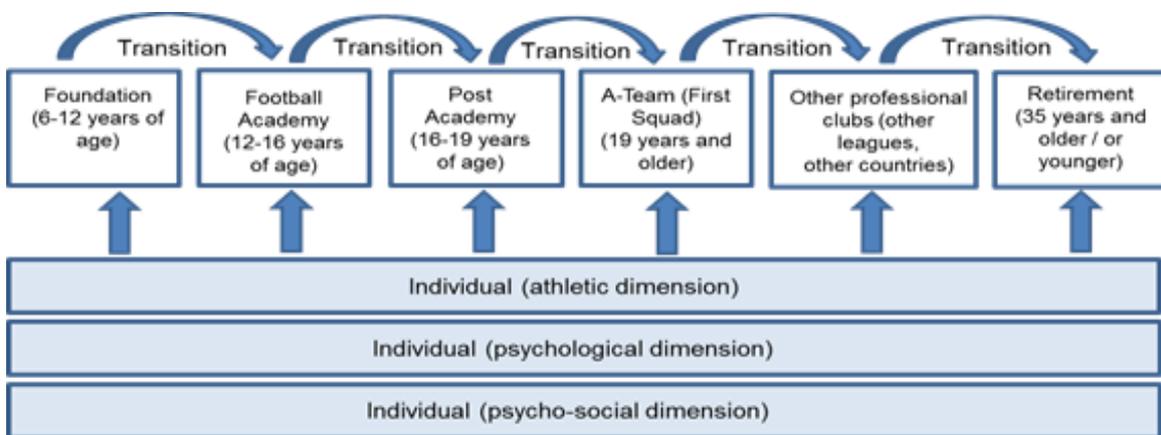
The experience of four footballers that have played for a longer period in Norway on the highest level were examined in relation to the Norwegian Eliteseries. The purpose of the study was to explore the how the strong athletic identity affects them early in their career. The key factors were their athletic identity and how their self-concept and self-esteem affects their psychosocial emotions and what kind of challenges they can meet. The theoretical framework were based on Erik Erikson psychosocial development model of eight phases were we mainly look at the stage 5 of the “Identity problems and Role Confusions”.

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## 1.0 Introduction

Football is a simple game, where millions of kids and youngsters dreaming of become a professional football player. To become a professional football entails a journey of different stages associated with hard work within a highly competitive environment that put various individual challenges on the footballer. According to Egilsson and Dolles (2017: 178) a football player goes through six transitions stages throughout the career and at each stage the player faces challenges of three individual dimensions: athletic, psychological and psychosocial factors.



**Figure 1 “Framework for Research” Birnir Egilsson, Harald Dolles 2017 “From Heroes to Zeroes”**

From the first kick and from their first training they will go slowly into an environment in addition, start to develop their own identity and athletic identity (AI). It is in the “Foundation Stage” According to Dolles, Egilsson (2017) where the athlete starts to create and develop their AI and identity. As the individual grows, develops and gets closer to the first team, the culture in the professional world it is getting harder and more brutal. The environment and involvement for football players is described not just as their activity but as something, they are. According to McGillivray and McIntosh (2006), a young player stated, “Any time I had to think, I was just thinking about football”. Identity is the question of “who am I” and relates to the persons beliefs, qualities that makes the person and their self-identity. The notion of self-identity is one of many factors that have been central to the athletic process. The identity formations have been usually associated with the period of adolescence, but it has been mention that biggest part of the identity exploration takes

place during emerging adulthood or the collegiate years. (Arnett, 2000). According to Erikson the identity development of an individual's distinct personality, through stages of life which a person is recognized or known. (Erikson, 1968).

In the sport domain, Self-Identity is referred to as AI (AI) and is defined as: "*The Degree to which and individual identifies with the athlete role*" (Brewer, Van Raalte & Linder 1993). The AI is the athlete's role where his values thoughts, sensations and goals that he relate to his sport, how to behave, act, speak etc. in a club.

Two psychological terms that are related to quite similar and are commonly used are Self-Concept and Self-Esteem. Self-Concept tells us something about how the individual look at himself and how they evaluate their competence. Therefore, to be aware of yourself it is to have a concept about themselves. If we look at the attitude athletes has to themselves, therefore your attitude toward yourself is called Self-Esteem, and refers to the extent to which the athlete like to accept or approve themselves, or how they look at their value. As AI starts to form and footballers believe they know whom they are, and believes to know how things works but has not really settled still, is called Identity Foreclosure and can be described as one of the young people's experience in the process to finding a sense of themselves. At this stage, adolescence may adopt different traits and qualities from the individual's society and people around such as friends, family etc

Nowadays, many young footballers choose to go to bigger "professional" clubs at an early age if they are good enough. They go from "to be the best" in their mother-club where the environment is safe and known, then moving to a big club where everything is different and you become just one of many good players. It is at the mother-club where they develop much of their AI before them moving to a bigger club. Many of them fail because if their strong AI and identity foreclosure because they do not know how to accept and adapt the circumstances. Not only that but how to accept and adapt adversity and prosperity through their adolescence period

## **1.1 Background**

The subject I have chosen to explore is something that many struggles with but it is hard to see on athletes and talk about. I have played football throughout my life and am still playing football now in the Norwegian 3 division. My transition experience from the foundation stage, through the academy phase into the first squad in a top tier Norwegian football was not as expected. The dream was to be a professional footballer and enjoy the possible benefits. However, the same thing happens to majority of others footballers happened. Suddenly, there was no room for me anymore in the squad. It hit me hard and I wondered what I could have done differently. At a certain point, I decided to stop playing semi-pro and decided to study. Suddenly my identity changed as, I become a student and I realized that I have a new identity. I was something more than just a footballer. The first months were difficult, I had to adjust myself and the football environment and the football person I was were not there anymore. It was so though, that I decided to start playing again just so I felt like myself again.

A big number of talents in football often have problems during the adolescence and through there early pro career. We often see good youngsters make a transition to a big club where the academy is there place to develop to become a first team player. Some players make it but most players disappear of the radar. A huge problem for many of the young football players in professionalization phase/Post academy (16-19 years) is that they do not know always who they are and at the same time, they have to adapt their new environment and the clubs culture. It's a huge topic and extremely difficult to understand if you have not been through it as a youngster all the smallest factors can mislead and give the athlete problems that he do not expect.

## **1.2 RQ – Limitations and Clarifications**

From this backdrop, I am interested in exploring “How strong AI is effects footballers during the early stages of professional football career in the Norwegian first division”. Further, we will look at the players perspective through this analyse.

## **2.0 Theoretical Framework**

As a mean to answer the research question, I will focus on three main concepts: AI, the notion of self-concept and the notion of self-esteem through the theoretical lens of Erikson psychosocial development theory. The theoretical framework presented here is the theoretical structure of my research study. Here I will introduce and describe the theory that explains why research problem under study exists. These theories are formulated to explain, predict, and understand phenomena and, in many cases, to challenge and extend existing knowledge within the limits of critical bounding assumptions

### **2.1 Outline**

The purpose of this study is to investigate if young professional footballers understand how they can manage strong identity problems related to their transition from the Post-Academy stage into the First Team. The neo psychoanalytic according to Freud is the persons development through series of different stages where each characterized by a certain internal psychological conflict. Jon Bowlby (1983) and Erik Erikson (1973) have modernized the conceptual approaches by Freud about the social/emotional and self/personality development(e.g., Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall 1978; Bowlby 1969/1982).

## 2.2 Eriksons psychosocial development theory

Erikson divided the social development in eight phases where the individual meets different kind of challenges. Each phase looks at how people decides to deal with the challenges that gives the importance to further social development. If a person experiences a psychosocial crisis, it has either a positive or negative outcome for personality development. Erikson explains that most of us humans are in daily contact with other people from birth until we die, and this forms us as individuals. We learn to function in society together and have to behave. The ideas by Erikson were highly influenced by Freud`s theory (1923) regarding the structure and topography of personality. Freud emphasized the conflict between the id and the superego while Erikson emphasized the role of culture, society and the conflicts that can take the place within the ego itself. According to Erikson, the individual develops the ego as it successfully resolves crises that are natural in social life. It involves establishing a sense of trust in people, developing a sense of identity in the society and what social group they are a part of, and help the next generation prepare for the time that comes (Erikson 1989) Erikson also suggest that we as humans distinguishes between two types of socialisation, primary and secondary. Primary socialisation that takes place early in life with people that stands you near, usually our family. Secondary socialization that takes place outside of the home, such as school, friend, media, sports teams etc. It is within the latter, secondary socialization where we fine the AI of footballers.

Since the focus of this research is on young footballer`s professional, career Post-Academy stage five of Erikson is central, which he refers to as “Identity Problems and Role Confusions” and is highly related to the period of adolescence. We will also stop by “Intimacy vs. Isolation”, stage six that occurs young adulthood from age around 18-20 and goes all the way up to 40.

### **2.2.1 Identity problems and Role Confusions**

According to Erikson, the stage of identity problems and role confusions is the shift from childhood to adulthood, the turning point of human development where the individual goes through identity crises and try to find out who he or she is. It is here where the “person has come to be” that meets “the persons society expects one to become”. During this stage, adolescents search for a sense of self and personal identity, through an intense exploration of personal values, beliefs, and goals. Individuals often experience conflict of interest, and they must be resolved in a good way in order to be confident in their own values and their identity. If you as a human fail to resolve these conflicts you will continue to have problems and be confused in relation to your own values and who you are. For example, if a footballer that has a good period on and off the pitch and meets a problem that could possible stop his form. The player will need to figure out how to meet and solve his problem to maintain that form he had. If the footballer does not find out how to figure it out it can just become a bigger problem that can stop him from develop him as a human and influence his performance on the field.

In the period of adolescent we human start to discover and answer the easy but difficult question about “who am I”, “what will I become?”, “how can I become what I want” etc. The period of identity problems and role confusions is usually the same period as the adolescent’s period. Adolescents is one of the most rapid phases of human development . In this period of life, the specific health and developmental needs and rights are central. It is here were you as a human and an athlete develop skills and knowledge. In addition, it is in this period where you should learn to manage emotions and relationships, and acquire attributes and abilities that is important factors for enjoying and develop through the adolescent years and build a strong fundament before entering the adult life. This development happens in conjunction with the environment of the footballer.

Within the football environment, you do not have good time, but you often have to grab that chance even if you ready or not. This gives you less time to adapt and emotions starts to swing. Imagine, two of the first team players have been injured and both play at the same place. Next choice is a young footballer in the academy/first team that regular plays for second team or youth team that will get his chance. People will have expectations for

their team to do well and the youngster have maybe just one chance to show that he is the person to deserve to play.

### **2.2.2 Athletic Identity**

The concepts of Identity (Erikson, 1950) and AI (Brewer et al. 1993) both have notions of having a clear sense of self-definition. Self-definition can be explained as being able to know who you are and what your purpose is in life. An example of self-definition for a football player will be to know what he`s strengths is and what he is capable to do on the field. It is not only on the field but on also how to achieve result on the field and reach the level that is required. One of the factors that is central through the transition process for a footballer is called self-identity. Self-identity is not something that is just given; it is the result of continuities of the athlete`s individual action system. In sports, word Self-identity is referred to as “AI”. According to (Brewer, Van Raalte &Linder, 1993), AI is the degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role and looks to other for acknowledgement of that role. The individual can develop through learning, experience, confidence and social interactions during the career in football. The person`s identity have been viewed as central to how the individual`s psychological development (Maslow 1962). Maslow believed that a strong, clear sense of self would allow an individual to pursue what he perceives as the universal human tendency to strive growth, autonomy, and the excellence of self-actualization (Maslow, 1962). Explained in a world-of football, it means that a footballer with strong confidence and a clear sense of himself. He or she will have strengths in how to train and behave to improve as a footballer. As explain before many youngsters will have situations that will arise and is how you deal with them that will decide your path.

A broad definition explains that AI is a social role (Pearlin, 1983, by Rus, 1993) or a professional self-image (astle, 1986 by Rus, 1993). And further on it in that case the athletes characterisation of oneself as an athlete is significantly influenced by family members, coaches, friends and media (Heyman, 1987, by Rus, 1993) However, as a self-concept, your AI can define how an individual look and evaluates their competence or their worth. How an athlete feel the amount of worth and competence on their self-concept may influence their self-esteem, affect and motivation (Brewer et al 1993).

Sports psychology research on AI emerged around the 1990s. The earlier researches were focused on personality rather than identity. According to Allen, Greenlees and Jones (2013), this line of research was declined in sport psychology in the beginning of 1990s, and researchers started to shift interest more specific issues, such as hardiness, optimism and mental toughness. Personality returned to research agenda in the 2010s (Allen et al., 2013), but the decline in this tradition in the 1990s gave room to others including the AI. Brewer, Van Raalte and Linder (1993) were the first to look and since then, researchers have conceptualized and systematically studied AI.

Benefits that can come for having a strong AI leads often to a strong sense of self and the awareness of who you are and are called silent self-identity. It can also give you increased self-confidence, self-discipline and make the social interactions more positive. This can make the athletes more engaged in trainings and their behaviour than those who place less value on the athletic component of self-identity (Brewer et al., 1993). Some other results have indicated that a strong AI can affect positive in performance. However, it might also force an athlete to neglect other aspects of life in order to fill the athlete role (Brewer et al., 1993). What it means is that an athlete can push away other aspects in the social life to live as an athlete. It can often make problems for the athletes without even thinking about it. It is because the athlete is so focused on the athlete-role and identity and will just think about the football. Studies (such as Green et al., 2001) have shown that athletes with strong AI often experience bigger problems to adjusting into transitions and need more time to adjust their social and emotional changes. Other potential risks are the emotional difficulties dealing with an injury. Having problems adjusting after end of their career, and alternated career or educational options that they have not considered if youngster do not make it as professionals

### **2.2.2.1 Self-Concept**

As children move through early childhood to adulthood their sense of self becomes increasingly complex but reflects changes in their cognitive and social development” (Hunter, 2003) The term, self-concept can be described as how someone thinks about himself or herself, evaluates or perceives themselves. Baumeister (1999) explains the self-concept definition as: “The individual’s belief about himself or herself, including the person’s attributes and who and what the self is”

To understand this theory we will have to explain the history of the development of the self-concept theory. The earliest milestone in the self-concept theory is from Rene Descartes, who proposed that a person’s existence depended on how he perceives so. Another psychologist named Sigmund Freud proposed theories is about human’s internal mental process. It is many theories about self-concept and how they work, but they all have in common the way a person looks at himself. Self-concept has been looked as hierarchical, multidimensional, and constructed of a variety of roles, characteristics, competencies or “sub-selves” (Shavelson, Hubner & Staton, 1976). Further on Shavelson et al. (1976) describes that self-concept as individuals, self-perceptions of their experience with the environment people stay. In a football club, the athlete often have a picture in his mind of how he wants the manager, team-mates and fans to look at him. Many talents meet often problems with their strong identity and have difficulties to handle them through the career. Especially at a young age where they lack of experience. It is all from their own playtime to how they adapt to the new settings and the professionalism. If they have problems to fit in, they often think about their social role. This is called the ideal –self, and is explained as the person who we would like to be. It is our ambitions and goals and how they change in life. The AI is central of self-concept in most individual. It has been pointed that self-concept has an important role in social perception, which is the process we form impressions of others. The self-concept differs from self-esteem in that self-concept involves people’s assessment of their real selves, while they develop self-esteem throughout comparisons between their actual ideal selves (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991)

### **2.2.2.2 Self-Esteem**

The self-esteem is viewed as the one of the most significant elements of mental well-being. The psychologist William James who is referred to as the creator of self-esteem movement and given his “elementary endowment of human nature” cited in Leary et.al.,1995 p 518). Self-Esteem can be divided in 2 parts. With high self-esteem related to many positive life regulating skills and low-self-esteem correlated to aggression, depression and even poor school achievement, drug and alcohol abuse etc. ( Diener, 1984; Mecca, Smelser, & Vasconcellos, 1989 as cited in Crocker & Wolfe, 2001).

The self-esteem is more about your attitude toward yourself. It refers to the extent to which the athlete like to accept or approve ourselves or how we look at ours value about ourselves. Through our life, we experience different situations, feedbacks and all the small things that happens around you in the environment. Therefore, self-esteem can involve either a positive or a negative view of ourselves. High self-esteem feels good, whereas low self-esteem does not (Scheff, Retzinger, & Ryan, 1989 as cited in Leary et al.,1995).

If we look at athletes with “High self-esteem” were the athletes have a positive view of themselves, can lead to: One of the positive views will give confidence in abilities and skills they master. If a footballer know his strengths, he will more likely play on them and play better. Another one is the Self-acceptance, and that is where the athlete accept how the situation is right know. This could have been if a player is out of form and it results to be sitting on bench. The player must to accept how the situation is and work harder to turn his form again. Another important factor is about is mentality, that the footballer do not worry about what other think.

If we look at the athletes, low self-esteem it is about denying of who you as an athlete are or being blind to what you want. This occurs when an athlete or individual have a negative view of him. This can lead to lack of confidence and confidence is one of the most central factors that players performing on a high level. As the quote from Stan Smith says: “Experience tells you what to do; confidence allows you to do it”. Another issue is that an athlete trying to be someone else, this can mislead you and give you problems. Worrying about what other thinks, this is central when it comes to your confidence and can make

young football talents be afraid and have problems to reach the level they know they can and others expect. Pessimism, that means you look at the negative things in life. All these come of having lack of confidence, and just small difficulties can make a big issue.

## 2.3 The professional football environment

The culture within the professional football, and some of the factors there that affects the individual. “Culture is for a group what the personal character is for an individual” – Edgar Schein.

Jones (2010) defines organisational culture as “The shared set of values and norms that controls organisational members ‘interactions with each other and with people outside the organisation” (p 179).

A study from Ogbonna and Harris (2015) shows issues as control, lack of togetherness, tension between individual players needs and clubs requirement. The environment and involvement for the football players described not just as their activity but as something, they are. According to McGillivray and McIntosh (2006) a young Scottish player said, “Any time I had to think, I was just thinking about football”. To breathe, live and eat football can inhibit a player’s ability to perform and make the best of the talent and have problems to cope of critical problems to handle later in life.

As a footballer in a club, you have many institutional norms you will have to relate yourself to. As a football player, you do not have much to say you just have do as the coaches tells. It is brutal, where only the strongest and best “survive” in the academy or in the team. It is about discipline, traditions, superiority etc...

Trevor Brooking says that before in the days you were on your own, and had to make decisions for our-self, today you have people that does this for you.

*“When I was a player we made our own decisions, players don’t make decisions for themselves now. Clubs hire people to do everything for them. If you don’t make decision for yourself off the pitch, you won’t make them on the pitch”*

## **3.0 Methodology**

The purpose of this study is to find out how young footballers in Norway manage strong identity problems during their early professional career. The methods through this thesis will be outlined in this chapter.

Jacobsen (2005), 24 defines “method as a means of collecting empirical data from reality” while Leedy and Ormrod (2005,3) write that research “is a systematic process for collecting, analysing and interpret information to increase understanding of a phenomena (managing strong AI). The problem is that there is a fundamental disagreement about what reality, or truth is. How can we know something about reality and how we should gather information to get possible approach reality? In this context, the concepts of reality truth and knowledge can be exchanged with ontology (how does the world really look?), Epistemology (how can we know something about reality?) In addition, method (how should we collect data about reality?) (Jacobsen, 2013). This study is purely a deductive, I made an interview questions with the aim of getting insight into the phenomenon.

### **3.1 Research Design/Approach**

Qualitative research seeks to acquire nuanced descriptions of a particular phenomenon (Jakobsen 2013). A qualitative method can be seen as a reaction to the use of the natural science method to study social phenomena. To get a real understanding, we should learn how people interpret social reality. We can do that by letting them speak in their own words. Open interviews have been drawn as one of the ideals. Through such an open approach, people learn how human beings construct reality, and bring forth all the variations and shades that lie in different interpretations. Qualitative methods often emphasize closeness as an important element in gaining understanding of other people's perception of reality. This study is purely qualitative and adopts a phenomenological approach.

According to Tony Merry (2002), Phenomenology can be told as the way we experience the world determines how we respond and is based on our own unique mixture of needs, history and expectations. A phenomenological approach will be utilize to examine the

experience of young athletes that are playing professional or was professional earlier in Norway. The phenomenological approach is based on the athletes experience under their circumstances at the time. The goal of qualitative phenomenological research is to describe “A lived experience” of a phenomenon. Giorgi & Giorgi (2003) explains the phenomenological qualitative research as dealing with experience and meanings “to capture as closely as possible the way in which the phenomenon is experienced within the context in which the experience takes place”. Since this a qualitative analysis of narrative data, methods to analyse the data must be others from more traditional or quantitative methods for research. The focus will be on the athletes and his meaning of experience, behaviour, etc...

Phenomenology is characterized as a “movement”. This dynamic philosophy have several parallel factors that are related but not same. However, they have a common point of departure and agree on the fundamental phenomenological task. According to Spiegelberg (1979) the descriptive investigation of the phenomena, both objective and subjective, in their fullest breadth and depth.

Nowadays, phenomenology has developed to become one of the main currents in modern philosophy. It represent a rupture with an epistemological dualism and is the concerned with the study of consciousness. Phenomenology tries to unite philosophy science and lifeworld and attaches importance to rich the contextualized descriptions, based on experience. As explained above the reason why I will use the phenomenological approach is to get their experience as it is now and to see and feel how the participants react.

### **3.1.1 Semi-Structured Interview**

As a mean to gather data on the phenomenon I conducted a qualitative semi-structures interviews. According to Sparkes and Smith (2014), semi-structured interviews are a conversation with a purpose. The benefits of such a collection method are the freedom of the informants to express opinions, ideas, feelings and attitudes. This collection method can be criticized if informants retain experiences and reflections (Sparkes and Smith 2014). This may occur if there is a barrier between researcher and informant. Semi-

structured interviews may be more difficult to analyse than, for example, structured interviews that are more categorical and less flexible (Sparkes and Smith 2014).

With the aim of conducting good interviews, I used an Interview guide. Sparkes and Smith (2014) write that an interview guide is guiding, in terms of layout, type and follow-up questions, which are indirectly conveyed during the interview itself. Such guiding points may, for example, be that the questions must address the subject being investigated, in addition to being open. “Do you think your coach didn’t like you”? Questions like this should be avoided because the informant can answer it with one word. A question like “Why did you have difficulties under the manager” is an open question where the informant can speak broadly. According to Smith and Sparkes (2014), the questions must be designed in such a way that they are perceived as inviting and intelligent, as well as reducing the use of academic terminology and difficult expressions in order not to confuse the informant. In the first minutes of the interview, Smith and Sparkes (2014) suggest that the first questions should be addressed to the informant's background and cause "ice cracking", as well as sensitive questions placed in the middle or towards the end of the interview.

### **3.1.2 Participants**

The purpose of the phenomenological research is to describe the fundamental structure of an experience and not statistical characteristics of athletes in a group under a study. The participants was thoroughly selected by me after I did some research with my supervisor. The interview objects have in common that all were good from the age of 13 and were looked as big talents. They have all played under 15 and at least to u 18 in international team and they have games in the highest league in Norway. Two of them are still playing while two had problems with their psychosocial characteristics and quit playing football from the age of 21-25. They all grew up playing from their childhood and one of them have experienced one of the biggest academies in the football world and history. The propose of this thesis is to explain and present how to they managed to control their strongly AI during the time at same age through the adolescence and look at two of them that did not manage to maintain to stay on the same level.

Athlete A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 24 years old and playing in Allsvenskan (First league in Sweden) and been playing in Norway.</li> <li>• Have been schooled and trained in one of the biggest and most known academies in the world</li> <li>• Have played for the all the under nationals team in different ages and have some caps for the first team</li> </ul>
Athlete B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 26 years and retired</li> <li>• Came up through one of the biggest club in Norway</li> <li>• Have played for under nationals from u 15 to u 21</li> <li>• Had several transitions before retiring</li> </ul>
Athlete C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 18 years and playing in a one of the biggest clubs in Norway</li> <li>• Plays for Norway u 18-19</li> <li>• Got to the highest league at age of 16 from another club from the lower divisions</li> </ul>
Athlete D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 27 and plays in the Norwegian second and third division</li> <li>• Was one of the most promising talents in Norway in his days</li> <li>• Have games from under 15 to 19 for Norway</li> <li>• Played regularly for the first team in Norway's highest league</li> </ul>

Table 1.

### 3.1.3 Interview Strategy

Phenomenological interviews are different from other types of research interviews in central ways. Most of the interviews-based research is to present the same questions in a chronological order to have control around the interview. Phenomenological interviews are open, unstructured and made to have a conversation or discourse investigating the experience of interest. (Creswell, p 129-313. 2007)

The interviews were done as semi-structured interviews where the interviewer and participant had a conversation as the interviewer follows an interview guide. The interview guide contained a list of questions and topics in specific order. The interview guide was made to capture participant's experience of their post-academy period and their identity under the period, factors that are related to the psychological, psychosocial, environment during their adolescent.

## 4.0 Findings and Discussion

Before we get into results, and look at how to manage strong athletic issues for the players who makes a transition from first team or further it is important to understand the problems they can face during their adolescences and into young adulthood. The sport environment under professional circumstances it is important to know that your who day, month, year and years will be fulfilled with expectations, stress and other athletes that want to do it better then you will have an impact on you as an person and athlete. The table will show/present the key findings for these four athletes and further on will be discussed in the findings and result.

	Athletic Identity		Challenges
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Self-Concept</li> <li>- Self-Esteeme</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Environment</li> <li>- Psychosocial</li> </ul>
Footballer A	<p>Rounded AI, have been in different countries and experiences different situations and environments.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Self-Concept, Footballer but family first.</p>		<p>Came into a challenging environment from a young age.</p> <p>Professional Environment</p> <p>-----</p> <p>“I will say my athletic identity is quit rounded, I have experienced a lot and it has made me who I am”</p>
Footballer B	<p>Strong AI, while playing Rounded as he retired</p> <p>-----</p>		<p>While playing made transition from youth to first team.</p> <p>-----</p>

	Self-Concept – High at the time of professional time ----- Self-Esteem – High		“I thought that I wanted it bad enough but then, but didn’t know that at the time”
Footballer C	Strong AI ----- Self-Concept – Footballer ----- Self-Esteem – High		Professional Environment  “I want to be best, also to have a good life, with just playing football and get money”
Footballer D	Strong AI ----- Self-Concept – Described himself as a footballer during the first period of playing in the highest league ----- Self-Esteem – High		Trapped down, but still in a semi-professional environment. ----- “The bio and psycho-social affected my career at a point, bad performance made me vulnerable”

#### 4.1 Findings Athletic Identity

Identity is the question about who you are and AI is the degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role and looks to others for acknowledgement of that role (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder 1993). All of the athletes had a connection to football as they were born. They even had a parent or a brother that was playing football or even the culture in their environment were highly connected to that sport.

Footballer A:

*“It was kind of the culture in the neighbourhood, and the most popular sport worldwide, everyone was playing it and in the beginning I was just following the stream”*

Footballer S:

*“I was only because of my brother at the start, then I realized after a period I was quit good and keep on playing”*

Footballer C

*“Since I was born with a dad that played professional in England I guess I was my path to go when I was young, I always had a ball within my feet as long as I can remember”*

Footballer D:

*“I started because of my father was interested I football and introduced me into this sport, in a team in Oslo when I was around 5 years old, Then later it was my external motivation to score goals as I was a striker and win football games. Also to get recognition by the people and fans an others”*

It tell us that their identity starts to form from an age that they are not even concisions. They just follow or are given directions to go and will have a big opportunity to like it as they set them-self into it. A broad definition explains that AI is a social role (Pearlin, 1983, by Rus, 1993) or a professional self-image (astle, 1986 by Rus, 1993). Further, on it in that case family members, coaches, friends and media (Heyman, 1987, by Rus, 1993) significantly influence the athlete’s characterisation of oneself as an athlete.

All of them were looking at themselves as athletes in a young age as their reputation got better and people started to hear about them. Some of the key factor that made them feel like athlete were about the competitions got more serious and the transitions to play with older boys.

Footballer D:

*“As long as I can remember I always looked at myself as a footballer, but when I really thought about it was about the age of 12.”*

Further, on he describes that that all the choices and decisions was for the best of football and how to develop and become better.

*“I was just thinking and evaluating those choices that could affect and develop my presentations in the sport; I was busy to make decisions that could give me the best development and form”*

Some of it went beyond the social life as he explains

*“I realized that I only focused on football and the football-life took over the social life, it was first of all the social life then others thing I had to look away at to develop and progress as I wanted”*

Studies (such as Green et al., 2001) have shown that athletes with strong AI often experience bigger problems to adjusting into transitions and need more time to adjust their social and emotional changes.

The period for adolescent is the time were we humans starting to discover who we are and why we are what we are. It is in the period of identity problems and role confusions usually the same period as the adolescence period. What makes the footballer get a stronger connection to football and their athletic identity to change or form stronger?

One player stated:

*“Soon as the culture and environment started to be tougher and more competitive and the feeling about that you know you have to preform I understand that it was something for me at the period. At the start, I wanted to get respect by the older players and had to behave differently in the start. I just wanted them to accept me and give me the respect I had on the youth team” (Footballer C)*

#### **4.1.1 Findings Self-Concept**

Later these year psychologist have pointed out that the role of self-concept plays an important role in their social perception. We are all social beings who behaviour is formed to some extent by the roles we play. It can be roles as athlete, son, father or something else

that not only help other to recognize us but also help us to know what is expected to us in different situations. In this case their self-image as their behave and their role as athlete.

For the Footballer D he explains the self-image as (...) it was linked up to the performance on the pitch and how he performed. Further on he says that the reason why the performance varied much was because he was often unsure.

*“I was actually were unsure and made my performance swing a lot, and it made me vulnerable on and of the pitch, I wasn’t balanced and the performance affected ma a lot, many that have that spirit to preform are often good to have other things to do in life”*

It is important to divide football from personal life, but many of the footballers with big talent have problems to see that during the adolescents it is important to know themselves and mature. However, in football you do not have time, if you are thrown in the game you have to preform and nothing else. If not your out, and this makes the athletes to often only focus on the sport and wants to get that affliction

For the Footballer B about being best like the others gave him a reinforced self-image in the environment and made challenges for him later.

*“I knew that I was the best and good at what I was doing, but when it came challenges were I wasn’t best I realized had to work harder. It was then I had problems to adapt and needed more time fit in to the first team, but still on paper I was the best youngest player they had”*

Footballer C tells that he looks at his self-concept, as someone that wants to get better and achieve success and describes himself as an athlete and his self-beliefs is to achieve success with the football and be better than his father:

*“I look myself as one that wants to get better, wants to achieve big things even though am young and one that wants to get challenged in my sport”*

#### 4.1.2 Findings Self-Esteem

On these finding we will look on how the self-esteem can affect the athletic identity in the adolescence on different types of ways. It often occurs when an individual succeeds, is praised or experience trust or love from another and is lowered by failure, harsh criticism and rejection.

Footballer A says that:

*“It is actually I have thought about lately. For me it is when am in good routine, when I train bit extra for myself, and be sharp and ready for games. That will be when am most motivated”*

The football players tells often that they are motivated and confident, this occurs after a period of good achieves or performance in the sport. As same for the younger players, that takes the step up to the next level. The players that are good in young age can often understand that they are good in something and flow within the steam.

Footballer C :

*“As I came up to the first them I got motivated, especially when I got positive feedbacks from the coaches. When they tell me am good made me confident and motivated but as it comes to the feedback I regret that I took them to me that much”*

He explains that the it was important for him to get that feedback but however he should have not focused on that much as he did.

*“As I got compliments and got safer I started to relax more, I though since I was best in all of the under ages teams that it will be good, after a time I realized that I had find a balance between the positive and negative feedback”*

For ordinary people success can be to have family, friends and happy people around. For the professional footballers with a strong love and connection for the football makes them put everything behind then the game they love, football.

One Footballer stated that (...) success is when I perform on the pitch and score goals (Footballer D). He tells us indirectly that football for him is number one priority that makes him feel good also known as high self-esteem

As it comes to their high self-esteem they are talking about performance and how important it is for them to perform as an individual.

About this one player stated that:

*“Once against Start in Kristiansand I got told that I will be in the first 11. I remember I build myself up to this game – this was the first game after the summer vacation. I got subbed off after the first half and we were losing 1-0. We still won the game 4-1 but I could not celebrate and for me my outcome of the play just took overhand. I remember I was on the bus after the game and disponded.”*

As mention the AI can affect athletes differently, some react positive other can have a more negative reaction (Brewer et al., 1993)

## 5.0 Conclusions and Implications

When an athlete participates in training and games, they are reinforcing their athletic identity (Heird & Steinfeldt, 2013). In a sense, the more an athlete engages in sport activities the stronger their athletic identity becomes. It the same at the start of their journey, when they take the ball out to play alone they will amplify they feeling and get a connection to football.

The self-consept and self-esteem effects AI as emotions and some need more time to adapt or even to understand who they are so they can develop as a human and become a better footballer. It is important for the footballer to get know himself to make the development and passion he needs to make it and go on.

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## 7.0 Appendix

### Appendix 1 - Interviewguide

#### Opening Questions

The opening questions are to be related to the athlete`s and get to know their background. The reason why I will use these questions is to start the interview is to build a connection to the whole process and to take the participants through their starting point of their career.

Strong AI, Special different from others – I give a fuck about other, I just do it on my own and now it will be good at the end.

1. How did you get into the sport? (Identity) What age did u get into the sport (football)?
2. What was your motivation?
3. When did you decide to become pro?

After the first opening questions, questions will then be presented to the athletes so they can reflect about their identity, self-concept, and self-esteem and identity foreclosure (if they still are unsure about their identity).

#### AI – Key Questions

1. When did see yourself as an athlete?  
Could you explain, do you have any examples
2. What factors have affected your career?
3. Which things made you feel like an athlete?
4. How has your AI changed/evolved throughout your development -to now?
5. Have you experienced situations where you had to change your identity?
6. Did you maintain to keep the same athletic identity to now? Why?

#### Role Models?

#### Self-Concept

1. How is your self-image in the sports environment?
2. Is it sometimes difficult to interact with others?
3. Can you tell me about your ability to meet basic needs?
4. Can you describe yourself with five different words?

#### Self-Esteem

1. When do you feel motivated and confident? Why?
2. Do you often focus on things that you cannot do something with?
3. What gives you success in life?

Can you describe the situations where you have felt high/low self-esteem?