

00:00:09.650 --> 00:00:19.190  
INTERVIEWER  
So the first question is do you feel the rating of the Academy you are currently working within influences your understanding and application of bio banding?

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Interviewee  
So I don't have a great understanding of what bio banding is but I know it's a concept which seems to be doing particularly well and we've dabbled in it here previously. We've had a training session on a Saturday morning which was bio banded and I couldn't see the logic of it, really, if it's one session per week and the medical team couldn't really provide a strong argument on it, it was a bit vague and I just see the advantage of being disadvantaged rather than everyone being more equal. I don't necessarily think that's healthy for development.

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INTERVIEWER  
Yeah and just again do you feel like your role or your colleagues role influences your understanding and motivation or lack of motivation to employ bio banding?

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Interviewee  
OK. Yeah, I'd also say that when you're running an Academy program it's really important, I think, to to go all in on something or not at all and not knowing enough about bio banding to see that as something we go all in on and It's just not at my level of knowledge and it's like so yeah, it's ignorance on my part. But like I say I'm aware of, you know we're not ignorant to the fact of, say, peak height velocity, so we know certain players will be going through growth spurts. We're not ignorant to 4th quartile versus first quartile, you know, percentages and recruitment, but on success, 4th quartile pulls through. And that's why I think that almost I get almost strengthens my own argument which is the disadvantaged ones, need to be disadvantaged so that they actually learn the skills to come through.

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INTERVIEWER  
Yeah, so since you are a category 3 academy. Do you feel this could have anything to do with the lack of understanding of bio banding or ability to employ bio banding?

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Interviewee  
No, and I think there tends to be an assumption. Look I've worked at cat 3 I've worked at cat 1 in a private programme with nike, I've worked at first team level. I'm not prepared to be a cat 3 or cat 2 or cat 1 labelled person. The category status is just regarding resources. It's not around our knowledge, so yeah, if you have more staff and if you have more players, you might have more opportunity to play around with things. It doesn't necessarily mean that it's as tight as maybe we can be a cat 3 where there is a you know a high degree of accountability and you know I know every single one of our 75 players in our program which may or may or may not be a good thing, I don't know.

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INTERVIEWER  
Yeah, do you feel like maybe you are more reluctant to it because of your understanding? And how do you feel that other staff within your Academy you know feel towards bio bonding. And is it perhaps this negative notion because of a lack of understanding of what bio banding is?

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Interviewee  
Well, I don't know if It's a lack of understanding. Like I said I think disadvantage is a really healthy

thing for so maybe my understanding is wrong, bio banding is about putting players together regardless of actual age more and their physical development age. So you're levelling off one of the key criteria, so I would sooner a player have to think quicker because physically he couldn't cope then just the game gets dumbed down to his level because then everyone physically equal. So that's my understanding of bio banding and maybe that's a narrow understanding. And but yeah, listen within our program with. For example, we'll play xxxx u17's in a friendly on Sunday, but we'll make a judgement call on that, some u18 will play in there because of the technical demand of that game and the physical demands like then we may place a cup of under 15's up that are really talented. And physically we feel there might be there. And technically they might be there so. And you know, we probably look at it, there's something called a limbi model that we look at, which is around in an ideal world, a certain percentage of players games are at stretch a certain percent are at ease, comfort, and then you know probably the majority are at about the appropriate level for them in the appropriate stretch, so you know sometimes they'll be syncing, and sometimes it be too easy, you know, and I think that is how we try to do it in a more intuitive, subjective way.

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INTERVIEWER

Yeah, that also like kind of feeds into my next question, which is what different practice would you like to apply rather than bio banding? Or would you prefer to stick to those traditional methods? Maybe go a bit further into the limbi approach you just covered briefly

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Interviewee

Well again I get fed a lot of information so yeah, a good friend of mine works, you know, very high level of player development. He introduced that to me and xxxx used it at xxxx with their games program. So you have maybe the global effect of the games program but within each team you know they'll be lads that are comfortable lads that are being stretched you know with their individual battles in there so that's how I tend to view it. I prefer like we don't have enough players to fulfill our games program any weekend, so we're always either having to place smaller sides or play players up or down or across however we describe it. Uhm, I prefer matches to be graded but for me an under 10s like we're going to go to Tottenham and play their u9s and u10s this weekend. That's an u9 u10s Tottenham level that's probably a nine and a half 10s for us against their names, and it's possibly an 11s against their 10s, you know, but we've got some very good nines who probably be able to go toe to toe with Tottenham, but our 10s are probably no better than our 9s. And this causes me a lot of problems with parents who just perceive it as a team and they can't understand why a player is going up or down or why they're not playing equivalent age groups, you know so. And I've got parents evening tonight, so I'm gonna get a bit of a kicking on why players are playing in various age groups, you know. But we believe in that as a cat 3 a big push is to not further saturate a flooded market already if that makes sense so like I think I spoke to a cat 2 club the other day. They got 28 scholars, you know and they probably got 15 under nines and 20 under 10s and it's just like there are too many players already. That unless we hit we lucky while we were trying to get the right watermark or benchmark for what an Academy player is for, xxxx and that might be different to xxxx, who would probably take more players 'cause more happy just to follow traditional model. So we're making life a little bit more difficult for ourselves, but I think at the end of it you have less player release and it's whenever you release a player it's hard you know, so I'd sooner than you know, have less of them conversations. All be it's a lot more painful on the journey 'cause we all know that not many players will get there.

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INTERVIEWER

Yeah, and I suppose it does just fall down to each teams individual philosophy's and how they want to work around the releasing of players 'cause like it is known that professional clubs will put their time into one athlete they know is likely to make it opposed to five athletes who may make it. Whereas now

I'm seeing the flip side of you saying you'd rather see 10 athletes maybe make it opposed to just pushing all your time into one athlete so it is interesting to see the different kind of philosophies of clubs and how this is feeding into bio banding or the prevention of bio banding. But yeah, so the next question is based on a couple of statements which was in the surveys. So the first statements which you strongly agreed and agreed with was to what extent do believe that differences in maturation status impact the development of physical characteristics? And so could you please just go a little further into why you did agree with these statements?

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Interviewee

Yeah ok so that that just sounds to me like if there is a difference in physical maturation then there will be differences in people's development rates. We were just discussing this the other day that Xxxx historically, would recruit technical players and what we find is that actually under pressure they're not technically that great, but because the physical competency of them was quite unathletic the game was at a lower level, so it looked like it was a technical game. As soon as you played against an opposition that had some physical attributes, or as soon as the game moved from small sided to 11 v 11 on a bigger pitch. These players were heavily exposed and You know when I when I arrived here 2 1/2 years ago as I was just bewildered about the difference to results and the results reflect the competency of our players. And results reflect whether their good at scoring goals and stopping gaps ultimately. But that's all part of the game and we teach players that on a weekly daily basis the skills required are to either score, stop or create so, but we were sending teams down to Fulham and getting beat 12/13 - 0 and not really acknowledging the emotional connection and that frustration would put on our players and parents. And it's you know xxxx prided itself almost on being alternative and different but I was like guys we're just gonna get to 16 and we're gonna release all these kids. You know this is not a grassroots program, this is an elite Academy or should be considered an elite Academy. You know, I'd just come from working at xxxx and the quality of play there I had adjusted to that so you're not even aware of what else is out there so And we moved to a more athletic type player, and it does tend to be an early maturer, but not always so what we tend to go after is super strength now again I think cat 3 football Will tend to produce more gritty, determined players that have got athleticism as a core quality, hopefully some competitive spirit, and the ones that we've had that are very good at that we've sold to other clubs a defender and a midfielder and actually one was an attacker but he was very and we won't run a development squad. So basically, by the time they get to 2nd year scholar, they're gonna need to train with the first team So knowing all these things We've started recruiting more athletic athletes I guess and that may mean at u9s they are a little bit more mature physically but not always because it also got, you know starting the u9s, I think is a very unique group and It's the only group in our whole program. I feel there's the competitive ones. There's a couple of technical ones and there's some athletic ones now. What they'll do if the training is correct that the snap and the crackle and Intensity of training Means that the technical ones have to be quicker with their thought process, because the physical ones are getting after him The physical ones have to be better because they're not technically confident enough and the competitive ones enable the team to win to further cement good learning practices. So you know probably if anybody wanted to ask us about what's representative of your Academy philosophy. It's our u9s every other age group I have a problem with, you know, to some degree, and that's not to say we don't have good players in there, but it's probably generally less athletic, Technically OK, but not great and lacking resilience because they're just so used to getting beat they just have an indifference to competitiveness.

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INTERVIEWER

So do you feel its almost working better for the u9s because as you say you've come and changed the philosophy and outlook of how the club will recruit players and what not or is it just maybe not working for the older teams for a different reason?

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Interviewee

I think it's A couple of things we could just have been lucky this year on recruitment Having said that, the spotlight was heavily on the recruitment of the u8s coming into u9s this year. The previous year was a lock down, so we probably took what was already there without having massive focus on it the year before that I've just joined so I hadn't really invested time in it, so and Isn't that they're not, uh look the u13s is a reasonably decent group out there, you know, but In terms of yeah, i had a light bulb moment When we're looking at our older age groups and thinking how we keep, we kept trying to find better under 14 under 15's it was too late there already elsewhere. But as you may know in in an Academy football it's everyone fighting as hard as they can at u8s to get them into u9s, so we just gave ourselves the best possible chance, build the best possible connections we could and didn't get every player that we wanted but got the next best. If you know what I mean, and I've got some good ones that we wanted as well. So, I think yeah, recruitment Was heavily shaped by You know the experiences of them Players playing against some very good academies and then having a bit of competitive spirit. I keep come back to competitive. cause it you know it. It's not only physical, it's that Learnability some of the guys you know If they're competitive and they get beat or they don't win their one on one duel You see them learning quite quickly. You know how to adapt whereas like I say as they get older the more time they spend in the Academy, I think the more they've become Just in different, and unwilling to fight so they don't learn.

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INTERVIEWER

Essentially, the ideal athlete is the player who is able to be physical, but then adapt to those technical players around them and what and so on. So I understand where you're coming from with your philosophy and why you would want to do that as it is working for your club and the way you want to be going forward

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Interviewee

Yeah.

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INTERVIEWER

So the next statement you disagreed with is to what extent do you believe that maturity related differences in physical development characteristics impact our ability to accurately assess the competence of a child?

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Interviewee

Yeah, I think because When we are discussing a player We will factor in the maturity we will factor in physical capacity you know, we will factor in The number of years they've actually been in an Academy program we will factor in their family background. You know that's why I like running a small program We don't know everything about the lads because of course They are and their families are sometimes sensitive to showing weakness. But the more we know, the more we can make a measured evaluation So I don't think we get it right all the time But I think probably I've got Been around the game, a real long time of 30 years in various roles so I trust my immediate Evaluation, but will always engage with other members of staff to get A broader knowledge and sometimes A Staff member will just look at one particular variable through lack of experience and I think that that's the game changer and it just isn't. You know it's such a wonderful industry football for guesstimating where players are going to land and end up. And you know Yeah, not many staff have a multidisciplinary view of it, but what you're trying to do is get everybody in the room that you feel has the competence to make a fair evaluation and then go from there like I'll give you an example. We got a under 18 scholar Who come from grassroots

football so he'd never had Professional training as such or been in a professional environment before but around the first team and was a little bit loose of his time keeping and stuff because he's just wired differently, Unbelievable athlete But the first team wouldn't give a professional contract because of his behaviours, but we backed him and believe in him, so we gave him a another year with us to further develop him. And is that a good example? I don't know, but it's just like we are backing him from a, I guess he's only had two years in a professional Academy But another player we've got who has been around the first team and was at Aston Villa as a kid who joined us at u16 he knows the game, he knows the behaviors, he knows what's required. He knows what the first team manager is looking for, but probably doesn't have the talent of the other lad, and so you know, the first manager doesn't have time to reflect and to worry about this this player and you know level of experience, that's my role as a developer to sometimes push back a little bit. So, I guess we try to do that across the age groups. Well I think it's easier here because the good ones punch you in the face, they're obvious, The not so good ones Are probably going to end up at best another cat three. At worst going to grassroots football so you don't get the same pressure around. You know we took Matty Sorinola from Fulham at u16 because Fulham had Sessegnon playing above him but Matty goes on to our first team to do quite well and Fulham might say well oh that's bad because you know we should have kept Matty but actually if they kept Matty he would have never had the opportunity and never would have had a career. So, it's you know, I think it's unfair sometimes too see it as a failure of an Academy if a player doesn't make it where they are But I also think we've got an advantage that It's a lot easier to see the ones that are going to have careers within our database I guess.

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INTERVIEWER

No, I get you like I was coming into this interview with you know the idea that it was all going to be completely negative towards bio banding but sitting here and listening to it to your reasoning behind not doing it is eye opening. For me sitting here as a player, I'd be much more inclined to go to a cat 3 Academy such as yourselves knowing the philosophy and notion that you have with players opposed to go into a cat 1 Academy who want that 1, 2 or 3 best players who they're going to stick with.

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Interviewee

Yeah, listen we ultimately do pivot around the stronger players. We do need to do that but I guess what we've tried to do is reduce the quality gap by having less players you know, and that there is always the wrestling match of it. You want everyone to feel they've got a chance. But you also know that not everyone will get there Uh, and it's just running with the numbers that yeah look it was unfortunate on the weekend our under 14 through a couple of instances, late injuries or whatever else they were the team that suffered, so I only ended up having nine players so they had to borrow a couple of under 12 'cause the elevens were playing away so and I'm now getting it in the neck from parents right saying you know why is there younger players in the team so, I say, well, my u14s, they got beat 5 - 2 so not great experience. But the u14s who were helping the under 12. Did they help the u12? Did they show leadership? Did they work harder? Did they try to protect them under 12 and how did them u12 respond? Did they step up? Did they compete? Did they show little glimpse of quality and I had a really nice email from one of the parents from under 12 saying like the coach was fantastic, gave great feedback, but they've had a great day. The majority under 14 had a terrible day and so I think it's really hard, You've got a lot of ego in football. As you know, and the kids they're gonna go back to school and tell their mates they beat by xxxx, whoever it was .The parents are gonna be going to work how did little Johnny get on at the weekend aw you never guess what they only had nine players they got beat, you know... So we're in a real difficult slot where the club as a whole is just doing a lot of work ... so the owner is a very creative, innovative guy, you know, and he's always looking after us. He's from a musical background, thinking and doing things differently to be creative to, you know. But you know, football is so traditional, so like you know, everyone looks the same. Everyone talks the same. Their behaviours are all the same. Pretty much. We all played the same type of game to create a point of

difference is really hard, you know, and that's what we know how I'm trying to position us is you know, really specialise in player development.

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INTERVIEWER

Yeah no, it's great and I feel like we could talk about this all day but we'll just jump onto the next set of questions because I'm just curious of so the next questions are based on the barriers of bio banding and the first question is what do you feel has prevented you from implementing the bio banding process?

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Interviewee

Again, that would be my perception of it, and maybe I've viewed it a bit 1 dimensionally? I think however you do it, you're still gonna have someone at the start of something and someone at the end of that continuum. So whether you go like, from born birth dates and January the 1st of December 31st. If it was on physical maturation and then you still have u9s and still have u10s, so you know whatever you do there's an area that creates some players more advantaged and some more disadvantage. We discussed probably we just prefer we've got our 75 players with us and yes, they're in their age groups, but we move them around relative to where we feel there needs are on a weekly basis, in a very intuitive way, and that might be factored by who's available, the opposition ... the strength of the opposition. What game formats we're doing? It's 7 v 7 five 5V5. So I think we need to be far more fluid than having maybe naively or out of ignorance that 1 dimensional approach.

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INTERVIEWER

Ok and its fine if any of your answers you know seem to be repeated but the next question is do you feel there are any problems or weaknesses linked to using bio banding in an academy setting?

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Interviewee

Yeah, as I said, I guess you know, so I feel it probably either reduces the disadvantages that sometimes you need to have a challenge and develop or it just shifts the disadvantage to a different sphere i.e you know, January to December or you know, early matures or later matures depending on how wide your continuum is.

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INTERVIEWER

Yeah so the next questions are now based on the multidisciplinary application of bio banding and what do you feel is the most effective strategies when assessing players based on the four components of physical, technical, tactical and psycho-social?

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Interviewee

I did a lot of work with Nike. When the EPPP come along around standardized testing. We used this thing called a spark rating and spoke to a lot of academies and evaluated physical performance. It was pretty basic, it was a field test, a jump, a sprint, a agility test and it was a endurance test. It runs through that definitely the more athletic tended to be the better players so quite objective but I think quite helpful for physical testing. Then they've done some other stuff that would be around the peak height velocity as long as it's a reliable measure or you know again shaping your knowledge. Now we tend to use that more when we get into the meat of player release and you know, is there a lot more left in a locker of this lad you know? Have we missed something is he actually a U13 and we're talking about him as a U14 U15? So that's probably the two measures. If they're unathletic and Fully mature we're not going to retain them for very long you know, that's probably where we've come, so yeah, that's quite an objective one. So tactical, I'm not mad on the knowledge of tactical players. I think yes about taking on

information on the pitch we run of quite a simple syllabus Uh, not necessarily based on a particular shape, but based on, you know, the philosophy that most clubs would do. Such as you know, build from the back, create overloads in certain areas, trust, create one v ones higher up the pitch by inviting the team onto you. When we press, offer a first pass and go after each shot outside don't let them come inside you, you know, squeeze the pitch, etc. 'cause I'd sooner get to, you know, once they understand tactical elements which they should already know if they have been with use for a while because it is pretty basic stuff. Then we look at the more core competencies 'cause I think you know if they're gonna have a career they're gonna have to learn different tactical information. Having played myself I know, its hard enough just surviving on a pitch sometimes, if you overloaded with too many tactics. Players are not great seeing a tactics board, and you know, I often hear coaches saying to players what shape are the opposition playing? But I don't think players would or should necessarily know that unless say maybe your striker could know he's up against 3 defenders. But otherwise football is a very fluid game so I think its not something you should be asking your team to focus on really. We do it if we look at as in this kid he keeps showing inside and we're forcing him to go outside because yeah, clearly there's something wrong there, but that's about a limit on tactics. So we wouldn't necessarily fail someone on tactical elements. On technical, we would look at core competency as we've got 7 core skills that we look at ball receiving, ball manipulation, dribbling, three touch with balance, passing I can't remember them all now, there's a heading element in there as well. So just about the core competencies so you know if you throw them in with the first team they can receive the ball, they can play a soft pass, they can play a firm pass, they can pay off the outside of their foot etc. So that's where I'd sooner our coaches are investing in time rather than baffling players with too much tactical stuff. And the last one psycho-social. Again, that's quite an interesting one for us, we look at body language, how they react to setbacks, how they conduct themselves with each other. Actually we've just had a really nice message from xxxx who did a psychology workshop here with our under 15 and 16 saying what great body language they had, how open they was, you know, we are lucky we've got a very open, warm environment I feel so the ones again who don't tend to engage with that we move them on because although its individual to the player development journey. They're a collective unit and team is really important. Team philosophy is so important for our first team manager that you have to acknowledge that. But yeah if a lads having a wobbly time or you know we might start understanding whether other elements come into it such as ADHD or other learning difficulties they may have or recent family crises you know we of course have a bit more compassion and try to encourage the staff always to measure up why say a lad could have been late as he's Muslim and has been praying and just sometimes it is out of your hands to fix the issue. There just needs to be a courtesy between athletes and players so everyone has the correct understanding of why things may be slightly different for one athlete to another creating that two-way relationship and ensuring we don't make assumptions based on their biases. So the psycho-social is very important, we try to have a very warm player led-supported environment. Like I say tonight I have meetings with parents and yes I may take a kicking from them but then at least they have that opportunity to vent and I have to provide solutions around that so.

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INTERVIEWER

Yeah, and then since some of the things you're being covering leads to the club being fluid for the athletes and the individuals, is there anything which you see as being a staple part to the player development?

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Interviewee

We haven't got this right, but I feel that the one of the core concepts should be reflection and player reflection. So again, if it's clear how we're trying to play, when the player watches a game back or thinks about the game or is reflecting on their performance they can do it about their performance, not about some tactical innovation the coach bamboozle them with. So you know I was a very late developer myself and dreamt a lot about playing football, play football a lot and think about and visualise playing

at Upton Park for West Ham United and scoring a goal. But when I did start to play at a better level I would always revisit instances that had happened in games, seeing what did or didn't work, what I could have done differently. And then I started to watch it back when video analysis came along and this is when I starting to realise it often wasn't as bad as I originally thought. So I'm a huge fan of learning, as in self-learning. I've got some disagreements at the minute because we don't have a goalkeeper coach in the academy and when I speak to the parents of the goalkeepers they're like John, he's never going to be goalkeeper if you don't have a goalkeeping coach. OK, but you know, I say well I've also played in a time when there wasn't goalkeeping coaches and the goalkeepers were still quite good. What they did was they looked at the goal and then it work out their positioning and then they think about how hard the shot was coming, how far away they needed to be whether they should dive and catch it or push it away. Goalkeeping is so logical sometimes coaches can confuse 'cause they will impose things that actually is not in the best interest for that particular player so. Yep, that scenario that again in the society we now have where we are expected to think on behalf of everybody and do an awful lot of stuff for people, and EPPP will decide that you've got to have this sports scientist that's telling you to eat healthfully. I've trained with XXXX, who's an unbelievable Olympic athlete, he won decathlons and gold medals. His diet was horrendous, it was Coca Cola, Bacon sandwiches, chocolate, he didn't touch alcohol, but everything else he said xxxx I train harder than anybody in the world so I'm going to eat what I want to eat. So, I'm not suggesting that's the right way, but there is it too much dictatorial information given or expected from parents. You know come on guys just have a bit of more of an independent thought process than that. But don't get me wrong, I think it's there's merit in the science but that marginal gain might just be so marginal, that it comes at such a cost in other areas like your general happiness. I just want to have a Big Mac, then go and have one you know what I mean? You've earnt it for crying out loud, everyday would be a different story but yeah we often get parents who want us to almost parent there kids for them and tell them to do stuff but I don't want to be in that position because I think its false.

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INTERVIEWER

And that's a great answer again so thank you. And we've covered the multidisciplinary questions but the last few questions we've got are based around the summaries of your survey. So the first question is what is it about bio banding which makes you think it does not enhance assessment within the physical, technical, tactical and psycho-social characteristics?

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Interviewee

If I said I don't think it does then that would be incorrect and unfair, because I'd say of course it's one factor across a number of broader factors. So if I did say that then I take it back 'cause of course, in a more intuitive way we maybe have used some aspects of bio banding. But I would say it's not the game changer where we need to build a whole coaching philosophy and recruitment strategy around bio banding is probably where I was coming from with that question.

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INTERVIEWER

Oh yeah, that's fine it can be difficult to get across what you mean exactly on surveys but the next question is why do you think athletes should be not introduced to bio banding?

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Interviewee

So as we discussed because I think not at all times, but it needs to be more interactive than just bio banding. Like I just agree the limbi model is a good one for players to have diversity of experience and successes. But also to experience significant challenge for their development. But to be honest I'm quite keen on other clubs do go down that route because I think it will maybe help us position ourselves



differently. Having said that if a lot of other clubs are doing bio banding I know the parents would be on me saying why are we not doing it too etc. But it's you know trying to position ourselves as incorporating aspects of that but not being exclusive to it.

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INTERVIEWER

Yeah that's great again and so we are on to the final question of the interview and it is what about the survey made you less likely to implement bio banding?

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Interviewee

Well, the survey itself wouldn't, but what I would probably ask of you is to maybe provoke some more knowledge from our end around why we should you know and areas that are maybe a bit crude. If I just mentioned birth dates or Quartiles or peak height velocity there may be other areas that I'm not aware of that bio banding can help influence as well.