

PhD Opportunity

Analysis of the effective development of women's football players (Goalkeepers or outfield players) using LTAD as a framework

Supervisory team

Director of Studies:

Dr Julia West

Supervisors:

Dr Paul Blakey

Dr John Francis

Research Group: [Human Performance Research Group](#)

The PhD Opportunity

The women's game is becoming more prominent and attracting more funding due to previous successes and low risk investment, an increase in revenue of 590% between 2011 and 2019 (Clarkson et al. 2023). Sanders (2024) reported that although funding and structure has hugely increased for the women's game (WPLL and Barclays £45 million deal over 3 years), various opportunities to access further funding, player development and medical research are closed to the women's game. Women's football does not currently have access to the Professional Game Board (PGA) even though the Premier League sits on the board of WPLL. To this end both the financial focus and the player talent identification focus of the women's game is thought to be on quick recruitment of home talent or foreign recruitment strategies to maintain standards of play and develop fan engagement and experience.

The Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) model has its critics, however, the phases of development to train and then to play/ compete seem appropriate for developing robust future players (Perreault and Gonzalez 2021). An increase in awareness of injuries has been well documented with lower limb injuries being more prevalent in the women's game and ACL injuries contributing to 28% total game time lost through injury (Horan et al. 2023). Many researchers (Horan et al. 2023; Lopez-Valenciano et al. 2021; Sprouse et al. 2024) suspect that training age may play a key role here. If this is the case, then early training and development of the young female player is crucial. Academies and staff are often focused on technical development of the player and whilst facilities, timings of training necessitate this also the limited coaching staff with little help behind the scenes to run specific S & C plus fitness testing sessions are a factor across the women's game (McQuilliam et al. 2023). Many of the top clubs also run a high profile men's team, and due to the lucrative nature of men's professional and premier league performance, they often receive the

first and most intense focus from the support staff in and around the club. Facilities and software are earmarked for the men's and boys academies development sometimes to the detriment of the women's teams (McQuilliam et al. 2023). If this is the case, what can coaches do to help enhance training age of their youth players to help fully prepare them for top level competition and longevity in the women's game.

References

Clarkson, B., Plumley, D., Philippou, C., Wilson, R. and Webb, T. (2023) Money troubles and problems ahead? The financial health of professional women's football clubs in England. *Sport, Business and Management: An International Journal*. 13 (5), 563-581. <https://doi.org/10.1108/SBM-10-2022-0088>

Horan, D., Kelly, S., Hagglund, M., Blake, C., Roe, M. and Delahunt, E. (2023) Players', head coaches', and medical personnels' knowledge, understandings and perceptions of injuries and injury prevention in elite-level women's football in Ireland. *Sports Medicine – Open*. 9 (64), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40798-023-00603-6>

Lopez-Valenciano, A., Raya-Gonzalez, J., Garcia-Gomez, J.A., Aparicio-Sarmiento, A., Sainz de Baranda, P., De Ste Croix, M. and Ayala, F. (2021) Injury profile in women's football: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Sports Medicine*. 51, 423-442. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40279-020-01401-w>

McQuilliam, S.J., Clark, D.R., Erskine, R.M. and Brownlee, T.E. (2023) Physical testing and strength and conditioning practices differ between coaches working in academy and first team soccer. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*. 18 (4), 1045-1055. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17479541231155108>

Perreault, M.E. and Gonzalez, S.P. (2021) Generalize over specialize: Examining the long-term athlete development model to optimize youth athlete development. *Strategies*. 34 (3), 11-15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08924562.2021.1896914>

Sprouse, B., Alty, J., Kemp, S., Cowie, C., Mehta, R., Tang, A., Morris, J., Cooper, S. and Varley, I. (2024) The Football Association injury and illness surveillance study: The incidence, burden and severity of injuries and illness in men's and women's international football. *Sports Medicine*. 54, 213-232. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40279-020-01411-8>

Application Process

To begin the application process please go to:

<https://www.worc.ac.uk/research/research-degrees/applying-for-a-phd/>.

The Interview

All successful applicants will be offered an interview with the proposed Supervisory Team. You will be contacted by a member of the Doctoral School Team to find a suitable date. Interviews can be conducted in person or over Microsoft Teams.

Funding your PhD

For information about Doctoral Loans please visit: <https://www.worc.ac.uk/study/fees-and-finance/doctoral-loans.aspx>

During your PhD you can access the Research Conference Support Scheme to support the costs of presenting your research at an external conference.

Research at the University of Worcester

Research is central to the University's mission to make a difference in everything that we do. We are committed to delivering excellent research which extends the boundaries of human knowledge, but which also improves people's lives by enabling better health outcomes, improving food security, developing environmentally sustainable solutions for crop production and socially sustainable solutions to our ageing population, enhancing public knowledge and understanding of the past and present.

The University hence focuses its research around five high-level challenges facing society, locally, nationally and globally:

- [Human Health and Wellbeing](#)
- [Sustainable Futures](#)
- [Digital Innovation](#)
- [Culture, Identity and Social Exclusion](#)
- [Professional Education](#)

The success of our research is reflected in our continuous improvement in external research assessment processes. In the most recent Research Excellence Framework, REF 2021, the University saw a near 50% increase in the scale of its research and 12% increase in quality, building on its performance in REF 2014 when it was the UK's most improved university in terms of Research Power, a combination of scale and quality.

Research Degrees at Worcester

Our research students are central to our overall mission for research. They are working at the cutting edge of their disciplines and driving forward the quality of our research whilst enriching our research culture. We are looking to increase our research student numbers as a strategic imperative.

Our commitment to our students is reflected in the results of the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2023 in which we ranked 3rd for overall research student satisfaction nationally. Key to our success in this area is the Doctoral School, a focal point for all our research students.

It provides:

- day-to-day support for our students, both administrative and practical, through our dedicated team.
- a Research Student Study Space with both PCs and laptop docking stations.
- a comprehensive Researcher Development Programme for students and their supervisors.
- a programme of student-led conferences and seminars.

Widening Participation

As part of its mission statement the University is committed to widening participation for its higher degrees. Although most candidates will have an undergraduate and/or a Masters degree, the University is happy to accept applications from candidates with relevant professional qualifications and work related experience.

For further information or an informal discussion on this project, please contact Dr Julia West j.west@worc.ac.uk

