

## PROFILE OF AN IDEAL FOOTBALL SCOUT: PERSPECTIVES OF HEADS OF SCOUTING

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**Abstract:** *Scouting is becoming increasingly popular as a way of entering the world of professional games. The aim of the research was to provide aspiring scouts with information on which qualities are needed to succeed in the profession. A survey was conducted, with participants being heads of scouting from high-profile football clubs, national associations, and scouting agencies. The questions pertained to the experience, knowledge, soft skills, and abilities that scouting department leaders look for in their candidates. Game understanding, attention to detail, authentic formation of opinion, clear and confident reporting and knowing club philosophy emerged as essential qualities necessary for success in contemporary football scouting.*

**Key words:** *football, scouting, recruitment, career management, bias*

### 1. Introduction

Increasing numbers of football enthusiasts aspire to become professionally involved in the game. Within this context, the role of the scout has gained popularity, as—unlike coaching—it often does not require formal qualifications. Furthermore, the expansion of video-based scouting has enabled remote work, making the profession more accessible than ever before. Consequently, competition for scouting positions has intensified, with hundreds of applicants sometimes competing for a single vacancy.

Despite this growing interest, recruitment practices for football personnel, including scouts, remain largely underexplored. Earlier research on

scouting has primarily focused on the observation, evaluation, and selection of players [8-9]. In contrast, the processes through which scouts themselves are recruited and selected have received limited scholarly attention.

A small number of studies provide insight into this issue. For example, Griffiths and Bloyce, as well as Parnell et al. [2], [6], examined how individuals become aware of and ultimately secure employment as scouts or sporting directors. Their findings highlight the critical importance of professional networks, personal contacts, and social relationships.

Despite these findings, limited research has examined the criteria heads of scouting use in staff recruitment. As Parnell et al. [6] saw, “few empirical

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studies have been extended to the executive level, researching football leaders on the recruitment of staff." Accordingly, the present study investigates the profile of the ideal scout as perceived by department managers.

## 2. Objectives

The purpose of the research was to indicate to aspiring scouts the direction in which to educate and develop themselves to increase their chances of succeeding. By success, it is meant being recruited by a club for a paid scouting position.

The examination was based on the following research question: What knowledge, skills, experience, and qualities are necessary for a scout to succeed in modern football?

## 3. Material and Methods

With the goal of answering the research question, an online survey was conducted.

The questionnaire contained ten multiple-choice questions. They were divided into three groups according to topic: 1) Observing and reporting, 2) Skills, knowledge, and assets, and 3) Attitudes – miscellaneous. The last group of questions applied in the original research is excluded from further analysis in this article.

To be eligible for participation, one had to: (a) be an active or former head of scouting, (b) work on individual player evaluation, and (c) work within football.

Forty-five responses ( $n = 45$ ) were gathered between 30 September 2024 and 11 March 2025. Most participants ( $n = 40$ ) worked in clubs, while the remainder ( $n = 5$ ) led scouting departments in national associations or private scouting

and player agencies.

Statistical analyses were performed using Microsoft Excel (Microsoft Corp., Redmond, WA, USA). Responses to categorical questions (1-5) were analyzed using frequency distributions. For the differently formatted item (6), mean values were calculated.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. (Un)biased observation

Opinions of others ( $n = 26.7\%$ ) were highlighted as the primary source of unconscious bias in player evaluations (Figure 1). Scouts often learn colleagues', coaches', or even supporters' views before observing a player, which can influence their judgment [10]. Application of critical thinking is essential for producing an authentic evaluation and mitigating the so-called validity effect [7].

The second most common factor was first impressions ( $n = 20.0\%$ ). Rapid judgments are natural but should serve only as preliminary hypotheses, dependent on the player's subsequent actions [5].

Other evaluation-skewing factors included action outcomes ( $n = 13.3\%$ ) and obvious movements ( $n = 13.3\%$ ). For example, a pass may appear correct because it reached its target, even though the decision was suboptimal [1]. Similarly, goals or assists can overshadow less noticeable contributions, such as off-the-ball movements [11]. Greater game insight may help prevent misinterpreting and overlooking player actions and, ultimately, lead to more reliable reports.

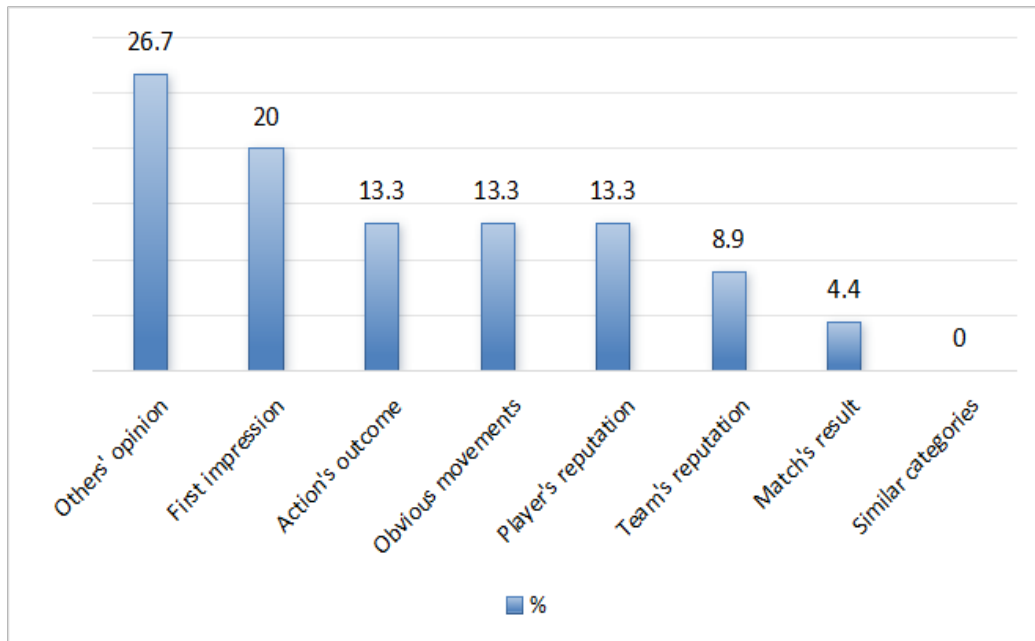


Fig. 1. Factors contributing to unconsciously biased evaluation

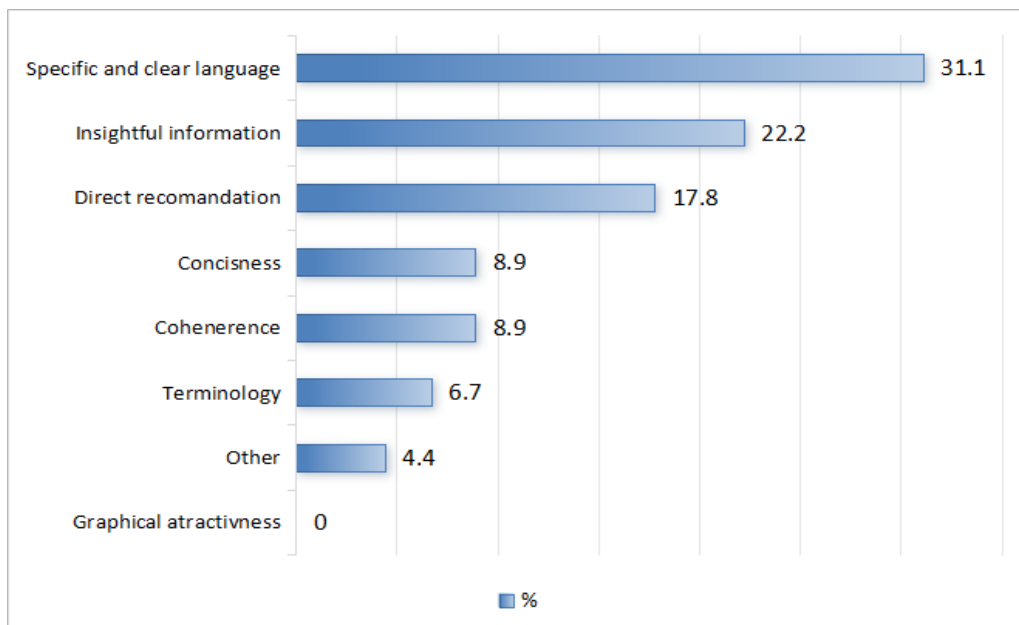


Fig. 2. Key aspects of a scouting report

#### 4.2. Scouting report

Specific and clear language is a defining characteristic of a high-quality scouting report (Figure 2). This requires that the situations through which a player's qualities are assessed are described and presented in a concrete and precise manner. Scouts should avoid vague descriptions and instead clearly identify the situations from which their impressions of a player's qualities arise. In this context, specific and clear language appears to be less related to the use of technical terminology and more to the ability to support and link impressions and evaluations to concrete match situations.

Insightful information (n = 22.2%) and a direct recommendation (n = 17.8%) are also highly valued components of a scouting report. After reading a report, the head of scouting typically expects to be closer to forming a clear understanding of a player's qualities and potential and, consequently, closer to determining the club's course of action with other management members. Therefore, scouts should aim to provide a clearly articulated, confident opinion.

#### 4.3. Knowledge

The most important knowledge a scout must possess, as shown in Figure 3, is an understanding of tactical, technical, and physical requirements for each position in modern football (n = 40.0%). Such knowledge is essential for predicting a player's adaptation to higher levels of competition within the same role or the ability to perform in other positions. In practice, general positional demands are combined with the club's playing philosophy (n = 17.8%). Because clubs

have different styles of play, a player may be suitable for one club but not for another.

Familiarity with a specific league is also highly valued by heads of scouting (n = 13.3%). This knowledge allows scouts to evaluate players both reliably and efficiently, often building on prior experience. However, deep expertise in a league, while making a scout an area specialist, can also carry the risk of opinions being unconsciously influenced by commonly accepted views and lacking fresh perspective.

#### 4.4. Soft Skills

Attention to detail, as shown in Figure 4, was identified as the most important soft skill. This finding likely applies to all aspects of a scout's work, but primarily to observation. Details such as a player's warm-up, communication, and even appearance may be highly valuable in forming a comprehensive and reliable assessment of an individual's quality [4].

It is considered a positive indicator if a scout, when questioned or challenged, defends his or her initial evaluation of a player (n = 17.8%). Revisions of one's opinion may occur during subsequent discussions or when a final recommendation is requested. As previously noted, heads of scouting prefer direct recommendations in reports rather than vague or non-committal evaluations (Figure 2). Overall, this suggests that confidence in one's assessment is highly valued within the scouting process.

Critical thinking (n = 13.3%) was also identified as a highly important soft skill. This finding is consistent with the previously recognized risk of accepting prevailing or common opinions (Figure 1).

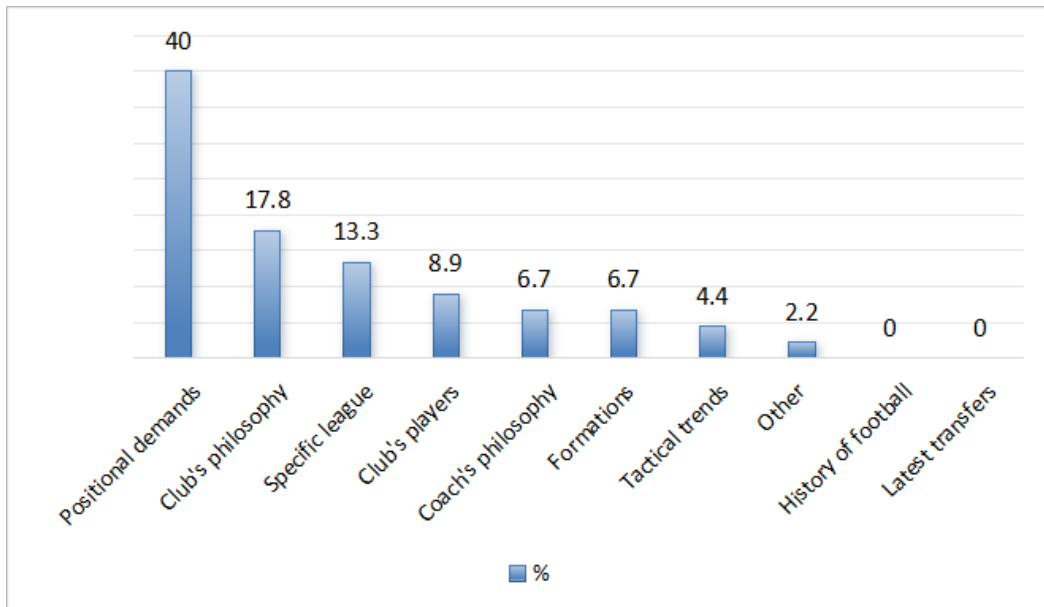


Fig. 3. Most important specific knowledge for a scout

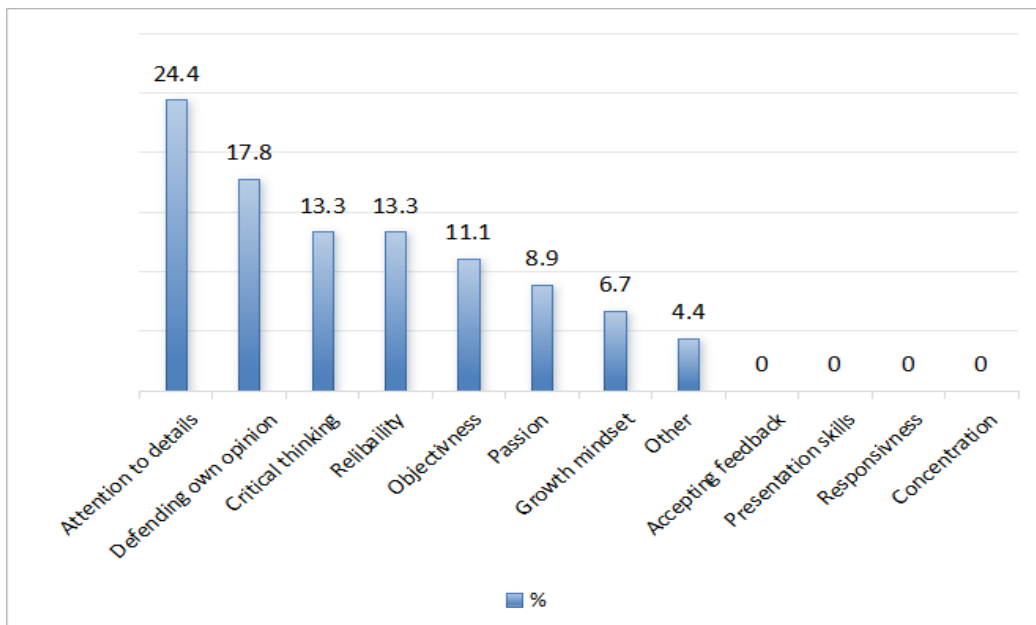


Fig. 4. Most valued soft skill among heads of scouting

#### 4.5. Experience

The findings suggest that prior experience as a video analyst facilitates the most seamless transition, adaptation, and transfer of skills into a scouting role (Figure 5). This is likely due to scouting becoming increasingly dependent on watching game videos rather than attending live matches [3].

The coaching role was the second most frequently selected option. It is, however, somewhat unexpected that coaching experience — frequently grouped with scouting in academic literature due to their shared focus on player assessment — ranked notably below video analyst experience: 24.4% compared to 32.1% [8]. Nonetheless, the prominence of both roles suggests that an optimal preparatory background for scouting may combine a coach's tactical insight and experiential intuition with a video analyst's technological proficiency and structured analytical approach.

As some respondents noted, there is no single "ideal" preceding role for becoming a scout. Practical examples demonstrate that even candidates without prior football experience can successfully transition into scouting. However, such individuals must possess a strong analytical orientation, and the core competencies identified throughout this study, such as game understanding.

#### 4.6. Assets

Game understanding has been recognized as the most asset a scout might possess (mean = 8.2). This is not surprising, as an understanding of football is a core quality that underpins every evaluation, whether collective or

individual. It implies that a scout must be able to interpret events on the field, including their causes, consequences, and possible alternatives.

What draws attention is the stark contrast between the importance that heads of scouting assign to working experience compared to formal education (Figure 6). Scouting experience was rated second among ten options, with a mean score of 6.9. In contrast, the three educational qualifications (a sports science degree, a coaching license, and a scouting course) were placed last, penultimate, and fourth from last, respectively.

Club philosophy, particularly regarding playing style and transfer strategy, was identified as the third most highly valued asset, with a mean score of 6.8. This is the second instance in which club philosophy has ranked highly, having previously been recognized as an important factor (Fig. 3).

#### 5. Conclusions

This study aimed to identify the qualities that heads of scouting departments prioritize when recruiting football scouts. The findings indicate that scouts are primarily valued for qualities such as (a) game understanding, (b) authentic opinion, (c) clear expressing, (d) confident reporting, (e) familiarity with positional demands, (f) familiarity with the club philosophy, (g) attention to detail, and (h) scouting experience.

Theoretically, these findings address a gap in research on football staff recruitment, providing insight specifically into scout recruitment. Practically, they offer guidance for multiple stakeholders: aspiring and experienced scouts can focus on targeted professional development,

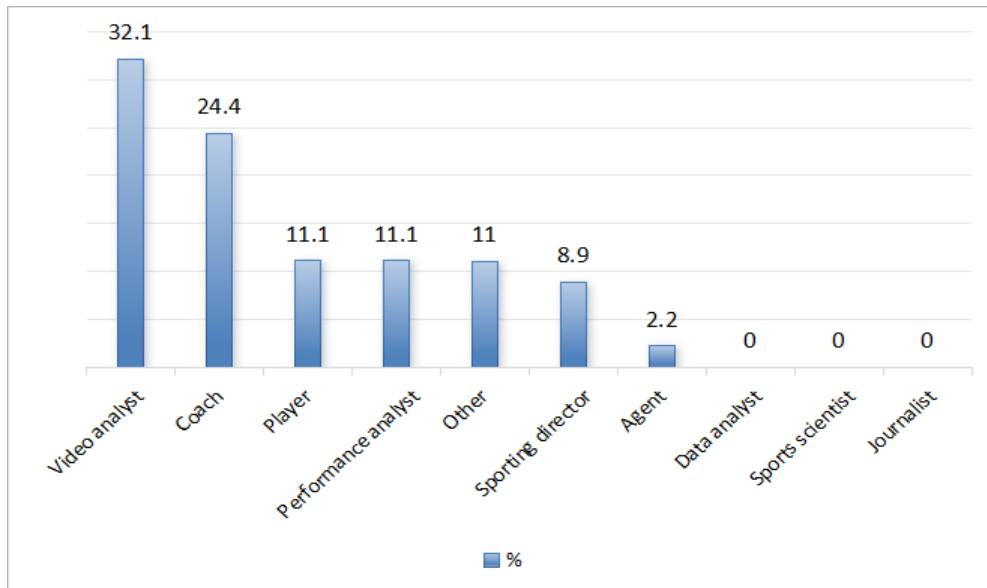


Fig. 5. Ideal previous position, in cases where a candidate has not worked as a scout

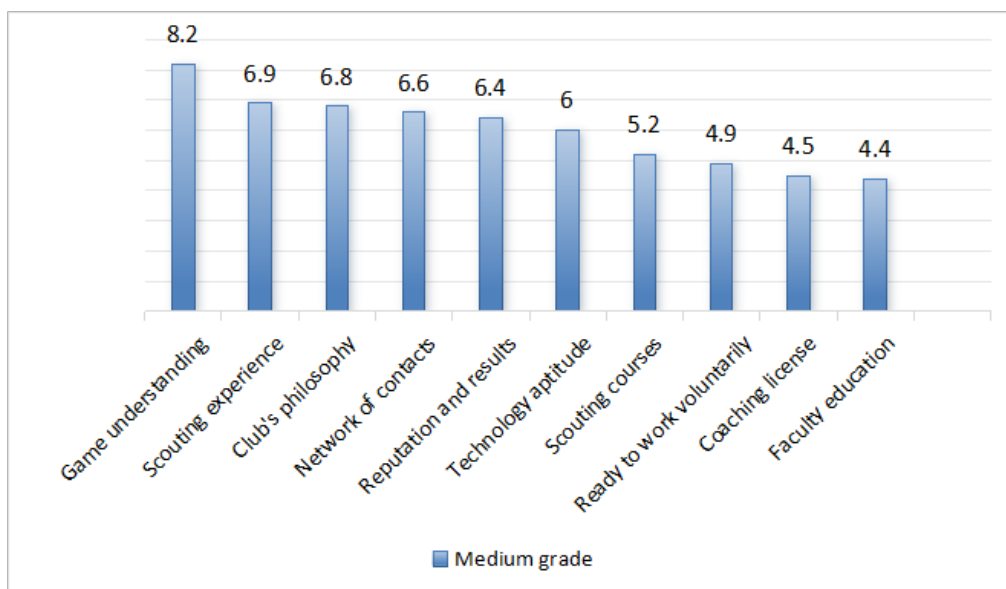


Fig. 6. Biggest asset of a scouting candidate

clubs can improve recruitment and screening processes, and national associations can design more effective scout education programs.

A limitation of this research is the restricted understanding of why heads of scouting select qualities. Future research could address this through qualitative interviews. Additionally, investigating sources of unconsciously biased evaluation may be a promising direction for enhancing scouting practices.

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