

# The Nike Academy

*A Worldwide talent search that became a compelling showcase of football*

From 'Nike The Chance' to 'Nike's Most Wanted':  
The Australian perspective



# Background



In 2009 Nike asked, '*what if we started a football team?*'. Within 12 months, that question went from a scribble on a notepad project pad to a global marketing phenomenon. Out of the blue, Nike marketing teams engaged with the Nike Academy recruitment campaign – 'Nike The Chance' which then became 'Nike's Most Wanted'.

This question by Nike, also had an impact on the Australian youth football paradigm as at that time there was a void in our professional pathway. During the Pre-Nike Academy period, Australian talent could access the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS), state football programs and the National Youth League - which all suddenly ceased.

The demand for showcase exposure, trials and opportunities has always been at the forefront of Australian player's minds, and Nike's offering opened a new elite pathway that players were searching for when options were limited. Therefore, this project explores firstly, how the Nike Academy captured the imagination of Australian footballers who were invited to showcase their game in pursuit of a professional contract.

Secondly, this project also focusses on this exciting period for all international youth football, where Nike in 2010 began the worldwide search for football talent. In 2010, 75,000 young players attended Nike trials across 42 countries including Australia. It was a unique time - where the Nike showcases also attracted scouts, talent spotters, coaches, agents and club football/technical directors.



# Research and Methodology

## The Aim of this project is three-fold:

- to capture a snapshot of the inspiring impact that the Nike trial showcase and academy had on a hopeful football generation of dreamers;
- highlight the importance of the Nike Academy project for young players who had no connections, were outliers, possibly had no funds, no access to scouting networks, and came before the recent boom time in football analytics and scouting platforms; and
- articulate why the Nike Academy trials signalled a new pathway for Australian players who may have missed European opportunities to showcase their talents.

In essence as Jimmy Gilligan, The Nike Academy's head coach, stated – that the premise of the Academy's project was '***There are a lot of players there - that should not be lost to the game***'.

As part of this project, I reviewed a plethora of resources, research articles and videos which included:

- a significant number of YouTube videos reviewed from over 30 different nation trials including Nike Football – Inside The Chance U.S.A, Nike Football: The Chance South Africa finals, Nike Football – The Chance New Zealand finals and The Chance – The Constant Battle: Nike Soccer.
- various media articles including by research firms like Graphic Studios and Limelight Sports who were part of Nike activations.
- Nike Academy videos including the Nike Football: The Chance 2011/2012 trials, 'Undiscovered – 2013' - A Nike digital production, Nike Most Wanted 2015 Part 1, 2, 3, 4 and the Nike All to Play For – Global Showcase 2015 and Videos by various Nike Academy specific content channels including Joltter (Finland), UniSports Web TV (Sweden) and LocalFC (Australia) including the video on the 'Nike academy Closing? Why?'.

# About Us

Peter Paleologos is the founder of Libero Consulting and currently one of Australia's leading registered football intermediaries, football lawyer and football agent. He is Co-President and General Secretary of the Australian Football Agents Association Incorporated (AFAA)

Peter's research biography in Football includes:

- Recent graduate of FIFA executive programme in football agency 2023 (1st Edition).
- Appointed FIFA Pro Bono Counsel in 2019.
- Author of the Australian Youth Footballer's Regulatory Guide and The Language of Football Agents.
- Editorial contributor at Football Legal (international football law journal) with over 35 articles published covering countries like Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, Fiji and Jamaica.
- Presented at workshops and conference on Agents regulations and Football Agency business, to Australian coaches taking the Asian Football Confederation Professional Licence as well as agents and stakeholders from Australia and Africa.

# The Objectives of the Nike Academy

**For the Nike Academy:** The Nike Academy found an opportunity to build the biggest global showcase of talent. Global elite youth players were offered a chance to enter the professional game, and get noticed through world-class coaching. They get insights into the mindset and physical demands playing against elite club academies. Nike also received football industry authentication of saying *"We own an authentic academy that's as close to being a real football club as can be"*, and that Nike is producing potentially world class players from grass roots football.

**From The Chance to the Most Wanted:** As far as football is concerned, the largest recruitment campaign known worldwide was born with the name 'Nike The Chance'. The transition from 'The Chance' to the 'Nike Most Wanted' brand was to keep the concept evolving, fresh and exciting.

**For Australian Football:** The objective of the Nike Academy to get players noticed was recognised by Football Australia where their Head of National Performance, Luke Casserly at the time said, *"FFA is delighted to be working with Nike on this project. Our national elite player pathway has come a long way but we also understand there are many talented players outside our mainstream system"*.

**Solving a football talent identification problem:** In football, high performance centres and youth scouting infrastructure were only a recent innovation. Nike recognised a void, and in 2009 got down to work to fix it.

**Nike Academy as a brand:** Thousands of young footballers from around the world applied to join in the trial process. Millions also followed The Academy's every move on the rapidly emerging social platforms. Embracing the opportunities that social media presented, the Nike Academy cameras were always rolling, helping to define brand content and quickly establishing it as Nike's most engaged digital asset.



# The touchpoints of the Nike Academy concept

**NIKE MOST WANTED**  
GLOBAL SHOWCASE 2016



- The Nike Academy has been a source of intrigue since its inception partly because it has maintained an element of secrecy. It developed rapidly into a full-time program, moving base from Loughborough University (England) to the English Football Association's Centre of Excellence at St George's Park in 2013.
- Nike employed staff to rival any top club football academy, who would nurture the 24-player squad made up of sometimes over 15 different nationalities.
- The Nike Academy was a last chance to go professional for many players which made it relatable and a cool concept.
- In most of the final trials, the top 100 players worldwide competed for a Nike Academy contract, sometimes only limited to eight places. Those who were invited to join the Academy would live, train and play together until they are either signed by a professional club, or asked to leave.
- In 2015, a 3-day challenge was held with coaches from around the world to prepare finalists. Coaches were expected to rank all trialists players in some form of order.
- When selecting players for trials, Nike preferred players 16 to 19 years old.
- Being in the Academy is like being a professional player who trains every day. There are no guarantees in the duration players stay in the Academy. A player who showed greater potential will be accepted to the Academy, where the numbers of players are adjusted accordingly.
- Player turnover was high but the potential rewards were extraordinary: a professional contract, and the beginning of an otherwise unlikely career in football.
- Nike would earmark different regions for player trials. In 2015, Nike were very active in looking for players in Europe – in particular Germany, France, Italy, Spain as the technical ability of them stood out.
- By 2012, the final 100 players, from 55 countries, were selected from a record of over 100,000 global entrants.



# Marketing Slogans and Catchphrases



The Nike Academy used catchy slogans and catchphrases to promote its trials and seize the imagination of talented and aspiring young footballers. From a worldwide slogan campaign to local geographical catchphrases, Nike captured the attention of all:

## Worldwide:

- The Chance – Stand up, Stand out
- Who wants it most
- Nike Academy - Push the limits
- The Academy – Fearless wins
- Play to be remembered
- The Chance – Write the Future
- Nike Academy - Full time full on
- Get Noticed - Get Scouted - Get Signed – Nike Academy
- Take your chance - The Academy 2012/13

## Localised:

- Metti in mostra il tuo talento (Show off your talent) - The Chance Italy
- Nike - Scout yourself. Make the team.
- The Chance Pacific Finals - Australasia
- Mi Moneto Es Ya (My time is now) - The Chance Uruguay
- The Global search begins: Who's next? – The Chance New Zealand
- The search is on : Who's next? - The Chance Australia
- My time is now - The Chance South Africa
- Mi Momento es Ahora (my Moment is now) - The Chance Mexico
- To Jest Moj Czas (This is my time) - The Chance Poland

# A suite of the Brand Logos of the Nike Academy





# From Nike The Chance to Nike's Most Wanted

**The Nike Academy** transitioned from *The Chance* to *Nike's Most Wanted*.

Just like The Chance, Nike's Most Wanted was a global football talent search that gave young unsigned players an opportunity to get noticed and to join the Nike Academy. Players could originally gain a place in the Nike Academy in trials known as The Chance, while players since 2014 have to use the Nike Football app to register for one of its Most Wanted events.

Both concepts promoted Nike's values on football. Yet it was not just a change in the Nike Academy brand name that occurred. A major change at the Nike Academy since 2013/2014 was that the players were no longer offered a one year scholarship. Academy players were now only guaranteed a Nike Academy spot for just a month and were moved on if they did not perform on a consistent basis.

This performance style based academy shift changed the Nike Academy concept whereby players were always on 'trial'. Essentially, Nike's Most Wanted concept evolved into a continued trial process where Nike held more trials globally throughout the season, opening up more player opportunities to join the Academy.

The end game was to get the players out the door as quickly as possible into professional football clubs. This shift added pressure on players to perform consistently to avoid being replaced by the Academy. In the last two years up to 2016, 44 players came through the Academy, and 19 were playing professionally.

# Unique Marketing Features of the Nike Academy

## The Marketing campaign

- The Academy was a **branding** machine for Nike – where the Nike Academy could scale its brand in the football space. Nike engaged with something like 200,000 (Facebook) likes from throughout the world in its first Nike Academy campaign.
- Nike's excellent marketing messaging including promoting the dream of making it as a footballer. Players could scroll down the Nike Academy's Facebook page and see comment after comment, from country after country, many of them in broken English, but all conveying the same basic question: **How do I join?**
- The Nike Academy global talent search had become well-known amongst most of the young players circles.
- Further, media representatives from around 40 countries descended on some Nike Academy finals.
- Nike used a social media drive with hashtag **#NIKEMOSTWANTED**
- During its campaigns, Nike aimed to be morally and ethically correct while increasing its reach in youth football.
- Nike Academy was also branded as an alternative for reaching the big time whereby it nurtured talented youngsters who had escaped the attention of the top clubs.
- Nike Academy had an easily identifiable – Nike Academy 'The Chance' or 'Most Wanted' painted Car or Van which was going around to trials.

# A campaign that captured a tech savvy generation

## The Technology innovation

- Nike utilised an advanced registration platform being the Nike Football Application. To get selected for Nike Most Wanted, players would sign up through this Nike Football App. Players could write their own future, by generating videos and visuals of their own football skills to get noticed and selected to participate in local events and trials in their country.
- There was a threefold process to be selected. Generally, players submitted their registration online and Nike would select the strongest players from the Football resumes submitted.
- Alternatively, players were being spotted and referred by a Nike scout, affiliated Club or representative – a Nike scout would approach a player that was spotted and ask if the player would like to enter directly.
- Otherwise some players were been identified by Nike as an emerging talent, and they will be asked to enter by Nike directly.
- Nike also used new technology for youth football talent identification – where at the trials Nike saw they had a great laboratory for some of the training and innovations Nike's was doing along the line. Basically, the trials we're a lab for them to do some football and technical product testing.
- Nike Academy was first and foremost a football academy, but also a good, worthwhile academy for technology advancement in the football analytics and big data space.
- Nike also created new type of football industry roles like the regional Co-Ordinators of Scouters.

# The Nike Academy trial and showcase model

**Nike Academy Trials** would be very competitive, demanding and testing. With over 100 players at some trials it can be very hard to pick the final group to progress. Everyone started in the same boat. There are no set positions (other than the Goalkeepers) - so it can be hard for some players to show themselves and receive the ball to explore their creativity and nous.

## ***Features of the Nike Academy Trials***

**Arrival:** Introduction to Nike Academy happened with each player receiving a personalised player bag and fitted out boots and training gear. Hotel rooms and Player's lounge were made available. Some trialists kicked off their morning by selecting their boot of choice from Nike's new four-silo collection.

**Testing at Trials included:** GPS testing, Batak challenge, Yo-Yo test, Endurance and Elasticity tests, 30-meter sprints and Nike's own Sparq testing (Speed, Power, Agility, Reaction, Quickness) a training and conditioning system. Players will then be assessed through training drills including 5v5, 7v7, 8v8 side games. Current football professionals (players and coaches) would come and watch trialing and chat and give encouragement and feedback.

**During the trials there are constant deliberation meetings** by Nike's scouts and coaches using each trialist Nike picture/information card to identify and rank players. Trialists were reduced in number at the showcase, until the last final group was announced where they will undertake a 11v11 showcase game.



# The Australian trials



## Reflections on the Australian trials:

Australia had a special relationship with the Nike Academy - Tom Rogic getting his opportunity through the program, as well as alumni Dejan Pandurevic, Emilio Martinez and Ryan Blumberg all giving Australian football a great name on the world talent development stage. In fact, Jon Goodman, Manager at Nike Academy who reflected on Australian players at the Finals said: "You guys are in the top small percentage - Australians have that little bit of grit".

Whilst Nike Chance coach, and former mentor of Harry Kewell at Leeds United, Paul Hart paid tribute to Australian footballers and their attitude to the game, "Aussie players have a good mentality - a strong mentality".

Nike Australia had open trials across multiple locations, including Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne, Newcastle and Sydney. Those who impress at the trials were selected to attend the all-expenses paid Pacific Final (with New Zealand finalists) in Sydney or Melbourne. The impact of the trials allowed Head coach Ron Smith (ex-AIS) to say that he will be alerting A-League coaches to any prodigious talents he sees. At Australian finals, it was about showing good technique/technical ability, physical fitness, positional awareness and a steely determination to make it.

Despite Australia often being chastised for producing players with a lack of technical ability, Smith was surprised at how many youngsters possessed an ability 'to manipulate and control the ball with a great touch, all while having their head up looking for options'. For Smith, small-sided games were much better to get an initial impression of a player than a full match.

Further, Smith said if he was still the Head Coach of the AIS, he would have no hesitation in offering some of these players a scholarship. Even players who were from smaller clubs like Stipe Trbuhovich, from Werribee City, impressed enough to win the spot after a trial match. This open lens used to find talent across Australia made the Nike Academy trials a rare offering.



# The New Zealand trials

**The New Zealand trials experience** according to Danny Hay, ex New Zealand National team coach and leading coach/selector at many of the New Zealand based Nike Academy trials was about 'players needing to have that desire, have that hunger, have that ability when it actually counts and do they do the simple things well'.

According to Hay, 'New Zealand loses too many talented footballers at a young age therefore by having more opportunities like [the Nike Academy], players feel like they're actually being given a chance. They've still got to be prepared to make the sacrifices and work hard and actually take the opportunity when it does present itself, but the fact that we're getting more doors opening is really positive'.

Hay also observed that there is still a general lack of awareness by many youth players as to just how tough it is to hold onto a place at a team in Europe. Further, that New Zealand footballers tend to develop later, as a result of not having the same levels of coaching and competition as youngsters that those in elite footballing nations do.

Moses Dyer, an Attacking Midfielder from Auckland, was seen as someone who fitted the Nike 'The Chance' brief - strong technical skills - rarely gave the ball away and had the X Factor.





# The United States of America trials

**The USA trials experience** was all about the USA Finals tryout – where the message by selectors to trialing candidates was - every second of every training, every practice, every testing of players will be evaluated - so they had to bring the hunger and the passion, and compete. Further, other USA based trials observations and nuances included:

- David Santesteban - USA Soccer Technical Advisor stated that when you get to the highest level – everybody is good, everybody is fast, everybody has technique, everybody has got the understanding of the tactical and collective. Further, Nike Academy USA selectors wanted to see all players to trial as a conceptual collective.
- Players needed to bring it every time they step on the pitch.
- When players get the ball – they must circulate it.
- The USA trial scouts were building a portfolio of these players over the 3 days of trialing and double checking them against their technical eye. Type of players that progressed to finals from the USA - where ones who were sharp, showed creativity in the final third, savvy with a street edge and have a good driven ball.

# International trial anecdotes



## Observations and anecdotes from various trials around the world:

- We are going to England with a bag full of dreams (Chilean trialist)
- Various professional players come to motivate us and set an example (Spanish trialist)
- Pep Guardiola at the Spanish trials said that the first thing I look for 'is individual skill, good pass, good control - their speed of thought'. It's about technique at that age
- In the Peru 2012 Nike Academy trials there was a huge campaign on the Nike trials – Billboards, social media, Radio, Football Shows on TV, Internet and Newspapers
- Luck can't smile on all 100 players here (Uruguayan trialist)
- The capability and style of each player is unique - no one can alter that (Hong Kong Scout)
- We use the Tactical Insight test (Belgium scout)
- It's raw talent - it's not been coached - it's not been nurtured - it's been allowed to be a free spirit. But you need a bit of guidance for their technical ability to stand out (Italy scout)
- I have to get my professional contract as many get USA College Scholarships but do not go professional (USA trialist)
- People stop talking to you if they don't care (Brazilian trialist)
- The reason that you guys are sitting here is because the scouts found out that you guys got something (Sweden coach)
- The Chance can be very important - can be the first step and also the last possibility to become a professional football player (@ Belgium/Sweden/Netherland combined trials by Harrauld Stelder Head coach/Youth scout)
- We have to compare good players with good players (English coach)
- You're the chosen ones because you have shown your own hunger desire, now is your time, this is probably going to be your hardest audition within your footballing lives, to make the final 3 you need to deliver supernatural performance (Harold Manciya, South Africa Brand Manager)
- Do you have what it takes to make it overseas (Craig Rosslee Scout -The Chance South Africa)
- 'Difficult' is not part of their vocabulary (Argentina Scout)

# Players and Coaches who graced the Nike Academy



**Nike The Chance**

@TheChanceNike

Follow

Nike launched its global search with support at the time of Arsenal coach Arsene Wenger who stated that by the Nike Academy 'providing young players from around the world with the opportunity of elite coaching and state-of-the-art facilities to reach their full potential is a very powerful proposition. I look forward to actively participating in the scouting and review of exciting young players as they compete in 'The Chance'.

Both national trials and the final trials saw involvement of a plethora of top coaches and elite players such as:

- In 2012 Pep Guardiola launched Nike's 'The Chance' Barcelona finals.
- Guus Hiddink visited the Nike Academy training base.
- In Australia/New Zealand Most Wanted Pacific trials - Head Scouts and former Socceroos, included Brett Emerton, Craig Moore, Kofi Danning, Simon Colosimo and John Aloisi assessed the players.
- Guest at the Global Finals included Rafael Van Der Vaart and Michael Essien. Van Der Vaart addressed the 100 'Chancers' and said 'football is a lot about luck'.
- At the 2012 Barcelona - Day One of the Global Finals, the players got a visit from Barcelona's Iniesta, Sergio Busquets and Pedro where they were given football tips.
- Giovanni Van Bronckhorst was the first ambassador for 'The Chance' Northern Europe.
- The Nike Academy also had collaborations with top class professional players, including Sami Khedira, Rio Ferdinand and Francesco Totti.

The suite of top coaches and players brought a compelling elite flavour to the whole Nike trials and Global final experiences.

*'You sense they'll never forget this moment - all unsigned hopefuls with a dream. Who would've believed it? Cameras flash, microphones are thrust forward, but the post-announcement excitement is over in a moment'*

## The impact of the Finals:

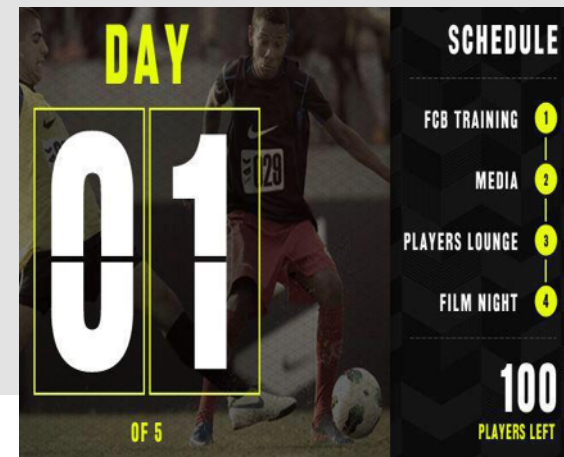
**Coaches expectations:** Jon Goodman, Manager at Nike Academy said *"We are looking at players with professional standards and physicality and explosiveness. We evaluate players consistently by the knows, wants + needs of the Nike Academy". Goodman also reiterated that 'in terms of catching the coach's eye – you always remember the last thing that players do – so that can contaminate the thought process so we need to have an objective viewpoint over the 3-day finals'.*

For Jimmy Gilligan, head coach, who observed *'...these players are the best out of their countries. The idea of the Nike Academy and the way it is set up is to actually put players in the shop window. To give them an opportunity to showcase their selves to get into professional football'.*

Nike Academy coaches made the final player selection based on speed of actions, technique, pitch intelligence, game shifting and conditioning. Players who train fast, mark fast, clear fast. Whilst noting other challenges faced by players merging from different countries and cultures. A South Korean tries to communicate with a Brazilian; a Spanish and a Frenchman strike up a defensive combination; and an Aussie and a Japanese link up for an attack. But they find a way. The standard is excellent.

**Australians at the finals:** At the Nike Academy 2011 finals, 100 players had an agonising wait at Wembley Stadium to find out who made it to the final 32. Australasia was the standout region and the biggest story at the Academy's first ever trials in London with all four of Australasian trialists - Melbourne's talented Alon Blumgart, Sydney keeper Niko Matic, Tom Rogic and Kiwi defender Tom Doyle - selected in the final 32. The four Australian and New Zealanders beat out players from Brazil, Argentina and a host of European powerhouse nations.

# The Global Finals



# Case Study - Tom Rogic



**The background scenario:** Tension is unbearable. One can only imagine what is going on in the heads of the players. The first name is read out. It's French. Then two South Africans, Belgian, South Korean and two more English names are announced as the media from those respective parts of the world punch the air with joy. Seven names down, one to go.

Have we missed out as Australians? "The last player is a young man who's shown tremendous skill. He's from Australia and his name is Tom Rogic".

- Rogic was one of eight winners of Nike's inaugural 'The Chance' competition.
- Since then, Rogic signed a deal with A-League's Central Coast Mariners and then signed a four-and-a-half year deal with Glasgow Celtic. Rogic was a success story that should inspire any young Aussie player. In his own words, *"I gave it my all to impress the judges and scouts. When you give it your all, you will have no regrets"*. Rogic also articulated that Nike Academy is a never ending job interview, where every week is an opportunity to win a professional contract. Every game is a job interview, so there is no shortage on the competitiveness! A bad game is an opportunity lost.
- A regular day for Rogic involved getting out on the pitch for training in the morning and then going to college for about three hours. In the afternoon, players head back onto the pitches, or in the gym for a strength session, then dinner.
- Back in 2011, Rogic beat major odds as one of the winners of the Chance, which was entered by 75,000 young footballers from around the world. Basically, it was a **1** out of every **10000** chance!



# The program offering at the Nike Academy

**Academy set up:** At the Nike Academy, players experience world-class facilities, elite coaching, and input from nutritionists, psychologists and fitness trainers. The players selected to the academy are full time and train nearly every day. There are two full-time sports sciences specialists, a head goalkeeping coach, a head coach, an assistant coach and administrator, and a social media executive who puts things onto Facebook and Nikefootball.com.

**Match arrangements:** Matches are typically exhibitions against some of the best academies in the world, with some eye-catching results by the Nike Academy squad against youth teams from Barcelona and Internazionale. Each week the Academy have a game against a professional club/academy to showcase players. Professional clubs come visit the Academy with one thing in mind: 'We have 18 boys here, come in and have a look at them, and if you'd like to take any of these boys for a trial, you're more than welcome.'

**What were the challenges at the Academy?** Bringing together players from all over the world, some of whom do not speak any English when they arrive. Homesickness is not uncommon.

**Distinctive dynamics at play:** Players change behaviour when the cameras switch on – though that may not be bad preparation for life as a footballer. Further, the Academy is not a club and not in a league. Academy not governed by a (club) chairperson. Interesting Nike never took the step of buying a professional club. Seeing the academy infrastructure already in place it is hardly a stretch to imagine Nike taking the route of Red Bull, which has bought clubs in Leipzig, Salzburg, São Paulo and New York. But it did not!

**Bottom line - it is about players earning contracts:** Nike laid a lot of opportunities on the table, and will lose players with no return (no transfer fees or training compensation payable) as they are not a club. Ultimately, Nike Academy coaches prided themselves predominantly on helping players earn contracts.





# Impact of the Nike Academy on youth development

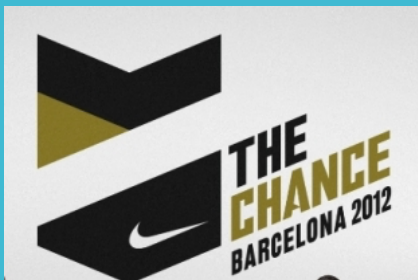
The impact of Nike Academy at the time was two-fold being its effect of how trials should be organised and how Academies should be set up.

Players challenged themselves and reached new heights at the trials. Most trialist craved the opportunity to being selected for the next stage of the process. In fact, the popularity of the Nike Academy trials can be best exemplified where the Selector or Scout would give a black card to a successful trialist with Nike the Chance logo stating 'You've been scouted and chosen by Nike Football'. Different countries interpreted the trial opportunity differently. In the USA, it would be organised as a combine or try-outs. The mindset at many European trials was that 'this is European football. Players needed to be patient defensively and patient in possession'. For those in Australia, Asia and South America, it was a possible pathway into European professional football.

The Nike Academy was created as an Accelerated program to support talented youngsters who are not currently in the professional game. Players will live the life of an elite footballer and train at the best facilities under the watchful eyes of club coaches and scouts. With different coaches at the academy players would progress a lot and are trained to specifications. Yet Football is a constant audition and players have no more than one year to showcase their talent. The period of stay in the Nike Academy is limited, because the Nike Most Wanted search does not stop. The finalists of the Chance or Most Wanted Global trials would play against the current Nike Academy team in a showcase trial game to put pressure on them.

The Nike Academy was an unrivalled opportunity and a one of a kind experience of trialing so many youth players.

# Outcomes and Pathways



The Nike Academy offered players a chance to pursue football dreams in a unorthodox fashion. It was a more merited selection in a way as was less about connections and who you know. Further, the program celebrated those players with a passion for the game and the best technique, giving them the chance reach their potential.

The successful Academy trialists who were chosen would experience world class facilities, elite coaching, while being constantly evaluated and benchmarked by a world-class team of coaches and scouts.

The only difference between the Academy and a professional club is that they've got a contract and the Nike Academy players haven't, but playing for an opportunity is good preparation for when getting a trial with a professional club.

Since 2010, Nike Most Wanted has provided elite training opportunities to thousands of talented footballers, and more than 20 alumni — including Dylan Burns (Nottingham Forest), Tom Rogic (Celtic Football Club), Bruno Covas (Santos FC), Dominik Boettcher (Hamburg), Abdul Waris (FC Spartak Moscow) and David “Titi” Accam (Helsingborgs IF) — have made their professional dream a reality.

In an informed observation, Jon Goodman - Nike Football Academy Manager stated that 70% to 80% of the Academy's alumni will have professional trials and 35% of the alumni will secure a professional contract.

# A Showcase lost



**THE CHANCE**  
WRITE THE FUTURE

The Nike Academy 'The Chance' and 'Most Wanted' trials provided both an opportunity but also a compelling youth football narrative. It was time to raise the bar and allow many youth players to chase their dreams. Players whose clubs got rid of them, did not offer professional contracts and who maybe would end up on the football scrap heap and play the amateur leagues and to never resurface again, had another chance.

Even for those players who were not selected for the Academy, were empowered. They would register for an invitation to The Nike Academy trials via the Nike Football App, with coaches at local tryouts selecting the final participants. In other words, football, football and more football over a couple of days was a fantastic experiences for the players.

Many youth players and those passionate about the Nike Academy trial experience miss the ongoing exciting announcements at that time like: *In the upcoming days Nike Most Wanted will travel to Northern Europe to look for the best unsigned footballers between 16-21 years. The try-outs will take place in the following cities: Ghent, Stockholm, Apeldoorn and Amsterdam.*

These announcements would always gain the attention of ambitious youth players who would wish to be the next The Chance or Most Wanted wannabe hero.

Unfortunately, there are no real reason why the Nike Academy ceased in 2016. Possibly it was seen as an expensive full time program or it was time for Nike to pivot to a new direction. It was a pity as since 2009, The Nike Academy had provided thousands of young footballers' access to elite training and trialing opportunities, and many Nike Academy tyros had gone on to earn professional contracts.

# Final Remarks



It is well known that Tom Rogic was overlooked by the so-called pathway in Australia and only became a professional player thanks to 'The Chance' by Nike Academy Final. This scenario highlighted that there has always been an inherent lack of professional pathway opportunities in Australia - and that there is a common held view that we need a better trialing and professional contracting ecosystem.

The Nike Academy model tapped into that sentiment and provided a launching pad for many talented Australian players to be 'seen'. Maybe trialing out of your comfort zone - suits the Australian footballer mentality as many Australian players who got to the Global Showcase Finals showed they are on par with many of their worldwide peers. They just needed 'The Chance.' Further, the Nike Academy was about players internationally showing their playing style and opening up their footballing horizons by being right now part of an exciting concept that brought together - a dream, a world leading brand, technology innovations and an elite stage. The concept brought together ambitious, talented players from all over the world - many who were on the outside - to compete in the best v best youth trials in the history of the game. In essence, the Nike Academy was about players taking their opportunity on their own terms as the stakes were always higher than just the three points of a regular club game.

If players got through the national and global trials into the Nike Academy - they got to showcase their skills daily, have elite coaches and mentors, and develop and improve their talent, with one aim; to get the attention of clubs and finally be the one 'noticed'.

# References

Websites reviewed with specific Nike Academy content and featured in this project content:

- The Nike Academy website @ <http://www.nike.com>
- Inside Sport Australia @ <https://www.insidesport.com.au/chance>,
- FTBL Australia @ <https://www.ftbl.com.au/news/coach-wowed-by-aussie-talent-230156>,
- Spain's leading Football newspaper 'Marca' @ <https://www.marca.com/>
- Guardian newspaper @ <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2016/nov/25/nike-academy-big-time-route-promising-players>,
- Stuff New Zealand @ <https://www.stuff.co.nz/sport/football/84227236/nike-academy-offers-kids-chance-to-pursue-football-dreams-in-unorthodox-fashion>
- Junpiter Football @ <http://www.junpiterfutbol.com/>
- Articles about Australian football pathways including @ <https://juegodeposicion.wordpress.com/>

# Thank You

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*Nike began advertising an intriguing concept called 'The Chance'.*

*As the name suggested, it was an opportunity for unsigned players whose careers were yet to make a dent on professional football to 'get noticed, get scouted and get signed'*

