

# Sport Coaches' Perceived Role Frames and Philosophies

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## **ABSTRACT**

Philosophy underpins all aspects of coaching and by creating a formal philosophy coaches may improve their coaching effectiveness. The role that coaches fulfill is based on their experience, knowledge, values, opinions and beliefs, but how coaches frame their role and form their philosophy is still unclear. This study investigates these aspects by interviewing coaches at various stages of their coaching career. It concludes that as coaches gain both knowledge and experience their ability to articulate a coherent philosophy and, more importantly, contextualize it for subsequent use in a more holistic coaching practice is enhanced. As a key element of coach development, the inclusion of a coaching philosophy, values clarification, and consideration of the coach's responsibilities could improve their practice and better meet the needs of their charges.

**Key words:** Beliefs, Coach Development, Coaching Philosophy, Roles, Values

## **INTRODUCTION**

Elite performance in sport has been attributed to innovations in sport science, technological advances, training systems and nutritional analysis. Little attention however, has been given to the place of the coach in the pursuit of excellence in sport. There is a tendency to privilege the technological, biophysical and scientific aspects, because they are perceived to be easier to control [1]. In the United Kingdom (UK), although the coach has a crucial role to play, much of the emphasis is generally on the performer.

The tasks of coaching have changed considerably in the past twenty years, largely as a result of the professionalization and commercialization of many major sports. This has had an impact on the way coaches perceive their function and responsibilities in the coaching process. If the role of the coach cannot be clearly defined, then it may be difficult to develop a framework that delineates the differences between the different levels of coaching. Thus, it makes the effective analysis of coaching competence at the various levels difficult to

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achieve. Some researchers in this area have concluded that there is a clear differentiation between participation and performance coaching [2, 3], but others have argued that coaching must be viewed from a more holistic perspective rather than a somewhat simplistic standpoint [4, 5].

Irrespective of the analysis of their work, experienced, knowledgeable and educated individuals are required to meet the needs of those in sport at all ages and stages [6]. If the joint aims of lifelong sport and competitive success are to be realised, then more attention has to be focused on the work of coaches and the initial introduction and basic skills of the particular sports to highlight the importance of fundamentals and to encourage the later development of higher-order skills, such as decision making and problem solving [7-8]. Many coach educators have suggested that beginner participants would benefit from the most 'experienced' coaches [9]. It may be a commonly held belief that this will not happen unless the coaches are 'experienced' at the novice level, and able to demonstrate the appropriate coaching approach combined with an appropriate level of expectations. However, the level that people choose to coach at can be linked to their motivations, aspirations and their reasons for becoming involved [10]. A coaching setting that offers a supportive learning environment, appropriate levels of challenge for both the coach and the participants, and that engenders a passion for the sport can produce a positive and productive sporting outcome [8, 11].

#### WHAT IS A COACHING PHILOSOPHY?

Philosophies and beliefs of teachers have been linked to both their knowledge and understanding of teaching and learning approaches and their subsequent actual practice [12]. These judgments and others reflecting their role within teaching have been made prior to their entry into the teaching profession [13]. This suggests that coaches' pre-established beliefs would identify them with a particular coaching role as a result of their life experiences. Individuals are motivated to coach for different reasons, have different ambitions and motivations to continue and this is a consideration that coach education structures may not address.

The established hierarchical coaching structure tends to result in the least experienced coaches operating at the stages most critical to long-term sporting development, rather than experienced coaches leading well-organized sessions of age-appropriate activities [14]. This attitude is further encouraged by the traditional coach education structure where the perceived advantages and recognition are only available at the elite level of coaching.

The origins of coaching expertise must begin with the definition of the domain of performance associated with all levels and the requisite skills sets; for example, what are the behaviours that constitute an expert coach? Whatever level coaches are working at they must have an appropriate coaching style, methods of communication and language, level of intensity as well as the ability to handle the time and energy demands. All of these must be socially, culturally, athletically and sport-specifically suitable at all times. The process by which coaches embrace aspects of their practice, concentrate on various components and ultimately develop performers is dependent on their knowledge, values and attitudes towards the sport and coaching [2, 15-16], which ultimately determines both their role and philosophy.

#### THE DEVELOPMENT OF A COACHING PHILOSOPHY

Globally, many coach education programmes include aspects examining coaching philosophy and the subsequent development of a personal coaching philosophy [17-19].

According to Weiss et al. [20] the development of a coaching philosophy should be grounded in developmental psychology, particularly for coaches involved in youth sport.

A philosophy is based upon beliefs, those formed through sport as a participant and coach, and based upon educational background and life experiences [21]. A personal coaching philosophy can be viewed as a tool to enable coaches to question their practice and develop their own understanding and knowledge, as well as their performers [22]. Much of this information can be presented to novice coaches in a generalised manner, using theoretical frameworks during initial coach education courses. This practice does not convey the complexities and contradictions inherent in the formulation and subsequent expression of a formal coaching philosophy. Coaches can be viewed as "merely technicians engaged in the transfer of knowledge" [23, p.103] or be encouraged to consider the holistic role of the coach [24]. When initially developing a philosophy, coaches can be influenced by the beliefs and practices of the organisation, their own knowledge and beliefs, as well as the perceived relevance of a coaching philosophy to their own role and coaching practice [25-26].

## PHILOSOPHY IN PRACTICE

Do coaches perceive a philosophy of coaching to add value to their coaching practice and enable them to become more effective? Experts within coaching, teaching and instruction regularly reflect upon their beliefs and coaching philosophy as a means of monitoring their professional practice [27]. In athletics, coaching effectiveness is determined by use of a humanistic philosophy, focussing upon individual aptitudes and aims [28]. Experienced coaches are more likely to re-examine their practice and have the previously established knowledge base to make informed change when necessary. They are also more likely to embrace new method and approaches within their practice [29].

Novice coaches, on the other hand, tend to concentrate on organisational aspects as well as session content rather than question their own belief system [30]. At this stage of development, it is difficult to comprehend that a coaching philosophy has to continually adapt and be flexible enough to modify in differing contexts [31].

The aim of this study is to investigate the complexities of the coaching role, specifically the tensions, confusions and contradictions engendered within this highly unstructured environment. This is accomplished by investigating the full spectrum of coaching expertise from those that have reached the highest level of coaching qualifications through to those individuals who are striving to develop coaching expertise. This study also examines the range of perceptions of what is believed to be the role of the coach, and the importance of a coaching philosophy in coaching practice.

## METHODS

### PARTICIPANTS

The participants for this study were all practising coaches ( $n = 21$ ), who had completed a minimum of an introductory coaching course in their chosen sport. More detailed information regarding the background and qualifications of these coaches is contained in table 1.

### COACH INTERVIEWS

In total, 21 separate, semi-structured individual interviews [32] were conducted, one with each of the coaches involved in this study. The purpose of the interviews was to elicit their views of their current coaching role and how their coaching philosophy was affected by their coaching practice. The three researchers involved in this study were all former PE teachers

with coaching experience at national level [33]. The questions asked in the interviews were constructed by the lead researcher in line with Hill et al. [34] utilising primary questions, secondary questions and probes, arising from previous published research. This resulted in the development of an interview guide, covering areas of coaching role, coaching philosophy, coaching practice, and coach development. This was then given to the other two researchers involved in the study for discussion. All researchers agreed that the questions were appropriate in terms of their potential to elicit responses to the topic under investigation. The questions were piloted with three coaches with varying levels of experience and qualifications [6]. This process ensured that the questions were suitable and the coaches were encouraged to discuss, in detail, their experiences and views on the topics in question.

Table 1. Participant Coaches

Coding	Sex	Age	Sport	Number of Years Coaching	Number of Years at this Coaching Level	Highest Educational Qualification
<b>Level 1 Coaches</b>						
MF1	Male	19	Football	1-2 years	1-2 years	Secondary School
FH1	Female	18	Hockey	< 1 year	< 1 year	Secondary School
FB1	Female	18	Badminton	< 1 year	< 1 year	Secondary School
MB1	Male	20	Basketball	3-5 years	3-5 years	Secondary School
<b>Level 2 Coaches</b>						
FI2	Female	20	Ice Skating	6 years	< 1 year	Further Education
FS2	Female	31	Swimming	12 years	6-10 years	Undergraduate
MB2	Male	23	Basketball	6 years	3-5 years	Further Education
MF2	Male	32	Football	< 1 year	< 1 year	Secondary School
MH2	Male	37	Hockey	12 years	3-5 years	Postgraduate
<b>Level 3 Coaches</b>						
MF3	Male	21	Football	5 years	1-2 years	Further Education
MF3*	Male	25	Football	3 years	1-2 years	Undergraduate
MA3	Male	51	Athletics	32 years	8 years	Postgraduate
MR3	Male	27	Rugby	10 years	8 years	Further Education
<b>Level 4 Coaches</b>						
MT4	Male	42	Tennis	25 years	> 10 years	Undergraduate
MS4	Male	37	Squash	20 years	> 10 years	Undergraduate
FL4	Female	36	Lacrosse	21 years	> 10 years	Postgraduate
<b>Level 5 Coaches</b>						
MF5	Male	43	Football	23 years	> 10 years	Undergraduate
MC5	Male	46	Canoeing	27 years	> 10 years	Postgraduate
MF5*	Male	61	Football	37 years	> 10 years	Postgraduate
MB5	Male	58	Basketball	32 years	> 10 years	Postgraduate
MS5	Male	45	Skiing	24 years	> 10 years	Postgraduate

All of the interviews were conducted in a place chosen by each of the coaches and at a time that was most convenient to them. The interviews were carried out and digitally recorded in an area free from distraction. To put the participant at ease, each interview session began with an informal conversation between the researcher and participant [35].

## DATA ANALYSIS

Interviews were analysed to interpret the meaning of the phrases used by coaches in response to questions [36]. The qualitative posture of 'indwelling' was adopted in order to investigate the coaches' responses in a reflective and empathetic manner [33]. The analysts involved in this process were researchers working in the field of the coaching process and, because of their background in coaching and levels of experience and knowledge, it was felt that they could analyse the subjects' responses in a responsive, adaptive and holistic manner [37]. In order to accomplish this, the lead author (who also conducted the interviews) read and re-read the transcripts and highlighted themes and issues. The lead researcher's interpretation of the themes was then reviewed by the other researchers, thus ensuring investigator triangulation [38]. This process also generated a discussion that served as a valuable medium for critical reflection of each theme as well as an opportunity for all researchers to agree on the most salient features of each script within the context of this investigation. Following this meeting, the lead researcher re-analysed each interview script according to the questions asked in order to create a more focussed framework for the analysis [39]. This process involved categorising the emergent themes using the constant comparison method of analysis [40-41].

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Each of the coaches was asked the same questions from the interview schedule, but the depth of the answers varied considerably. Generally the interviews with Level 5 coaches lasted far longer than those with Level 1 coaches, who were generally not able to discuss the topics in the same depth as their more experienced and higher qualified colleagues.

### VIEWS OF COACHING ROLE

The majority of the coaches ( $n = 9$ ) at Levels 1 and 2 found it hard to contemplate the enormity of the coaching role, as they had little experience of coaching or as participants at an elite level. They were largely preoccupied with ensuring that the participants had fun and were safe rather than focussing on a progressive coaching programme. The level 2 coaches ( $n = 5$ ), who in theory should have acquired more experience and knowledge, were equally as inept at expressing their understanding, as coach MF2 demonstrates:

*"...when I'm coaching, I just like to think I'm passing on knowledge, with the skills you're doing."*

However, FI2 was able to develop her thoughts a little further:

*"A coach should be a leader, should show people in a certain direction, be a good role model and be enthusiastic, be interested in what they're doing, be interested in learning new techniques."*

Although she considered that this was a definition of the role of the coach, she was unable to articulate how she demonstrated this in her coaching. Coach MH2 had obviously considered his role from a wider perspective, because he suggested:

*"The primary role of the coach is to do the kind of sports development part - developing the player for whatever level they're going to play at."*

This may indicate that he had progressed from the delivery skills approach and was beginning to view his coaching role more laterally. While most of this group of Level 1 and 2 coaches thought that the primary role of the coach was to ensure the safety of the participants and make their sessions fun, how they develop further to enhance their ability to coach beyond this level must be questioned. Much of the information presented to coaches at this level does reinforce these two key aspects [19, 42]. Early-career coaches tend to concentrate on behaviour management and safety issues similar to early-career PE teachers [43]. To a large degree, the attitude towards the coaching role is formed by previous experience in sport as a participant and the philosophy of their coach [10]. All of these coaches had been involved in sport as participants and, as mentioned previously, a number were still taking part as well as coaching. They had also recently attended coach education courses organised by their national governing body. Although many of their attitudes would have been established through previous participation and experiences, research has concluded that these attitudes are difficult to change through formal coach education courses [4, 44].

The Level 3 coaches (n = 4) had considered their role more profoundly and generally from a much wider viewpoint than that expressed by the Level 1 and 2 coaches. Their comments suggested that they found the role and activity of a coach to be problematic as it was constantly changing and evolving depending upon the coaching context. Coach MR3 thought:

*"The experiences I've had in the role of the coach, you're a jack-of-all-trades, you have to do everything."*

Coach MA3 characterized his experiences of working with athletes at an elite level, saying:

*"I suppose it's management of the training, the planning of, the management and co-ordination of training and competition plan. With the athletes that I've got, they're fairly committed, fairly good - the planning bit is the easy aspect - then we've got to start linking in strength and conditioning, getting the massage at the correct time, getting the aqua-running suite sorted, so there's actually a bit of lifestyle planning in their as well because I try to ease the burden".*

Coach MA3, who worked with middle and long distance runners, drew attention to the holistic nature of coaching at this level by his attempts to become involved in many aspects of his athlete's lives, allowing them to concentrate on their training. Interestingly, Coach MF3, the youngest and the most recently qualified of this group, still displayed some of the beliefs of the Level 1 and 2 coaches in terms of planning and fun aspects. However, he appears to have advanced the way of looking at the monitoring and evaluation of the long term competitive aspects of football, declaring:

*"Well, I think first and foremost you've got to be organised and you've got to plan your sessions out in advance, although that's something I've only found out by experience. At first, I think you could leave it to the hour before you thought about*

*the session but I think since I've got involved with a team, I've actually been more organised because there's goals that you try to work towards, you want to see as much improvement as possible, especially when you're monitoring their games at the weekend. I don't get paid for that coaching, but it's definitely the one I feel most motivated by. I think there's so many things, you've got to encourage fun, you've got to kind of care for your athletes, you've got to keep on encouraging them and just look out for what's best for them and encourage them to take part in other sports as well."*

The more sophisticated understanding and appreciation of the nurturing, forward planning and motivational aspects of his practice are examples of key features of effective coaching [36]. His somewhat shallow or naïve perception may be explained partially by his age and his length of career in coaching, but he demonstrates an awareness of a complex range of the functions that comprise the coach's work.

The Level 4 and 5 coaches all perceived their roles from multiple viewpoints; some had a far more convoluted and complex understanding while others also displayed a production or commodity point of view as well the more typical view incorporating the context and the performer [45]. All of these coaches acknowledged that their role had changed profoundly throughout their careers and, was still evolving. Coach MF5\* thought:

*"My view is that the coach represents effectively a shareholder, and given the professional game, we're speaking about shareholders, we're speaking about a game that's developing furiously in a business context. I think the coach is seen as a part of that whole mechanism. So as you're actually working with youngsters, very aware that the youngsters you're working with have got to serve a purpose for the club and that it is eventually to play for the first team. Because of that, the whole process of learning isn't something the coach is aware of, it's almost sort of a bully boy tactic is used, but it's as much because the manager and subsequently the chairman are looking for something tomorrow and little attention is paid to the maturation process."*

Coach MF5\* views the players as apprentices, who must be developed to produce a return on investment and (literally in the case of the professional club) a profit. Those that use such methods utilised to gain these returns show little concern or nurturing of the players; nor any consideration of their needs. This approach can be successful in certain coaching environments, when there is pressure to produce results [46].

Coach MF5\*'s viewpoint was completely contradicted by Coach MT4:

*"The main role for me is to make sure that if they are 8, 9, 10 year old, they're still playing in their 20's. If I've done that, then I think I've succeeded. The other role as a development coach is that you have to aid their basic motor skills. I do a lot of stuff with 5, 6, 7, 8 year olds and before they can hit the ball back and forward they need to learn a lot of basic skills such as running, hopping, throwing, catching. Yes, it's good that they get a racket but they need to underpin a lot of that stuff and I don't think a lot of coaches see that."*

Coach MT4 suggested that it was important for him to know his performers, not just as tennis players but also as youngsters. This apparent contradiction between MF5\* and MT4



can be explained by the different environments in which they are coaching, Coach MF5\* in a professional team environment and MT4 in a nurturing environment working with young individuals. This could indicate that, although these coaches hold top qualifications from their national governing body and both have over ten years experience, there are extreme differences in their perceptions of their coaching role as well as their approach. Coach MT4 viewed coaching as a long-term process where the tennis players aspired to varying levels of play, but its key purpose was to develop life-long players. Coach MC5 also mentioned the long-term approach to skill development and also viewed it from an educational perspective, which was a key component of his personal philosophy, saying:

*"The role of the coach changes with the context really, but if I was to talk about coaching generally, I would say it's about the facilitation of the development of the athlete. I would put it into the context of long-term development; they're there to prolong the development of the athlete over many years. Really, they don't have to come with any pre-conceived ideas of where the athlete is going to go, you have to be led by the athlete."*

Coach MB5 also focussed on personal development and the concept of nurturing players, looking at long term growth and development:

*"I have a feeling it depends what level you want to talk about. ....When I first came to Scotland I got very heavily involved with the juniors international team, which was then under 19, now under 18, and I think what you're looking for in terms of coaching is nurturing, more of a maternal/paternal viewpoint where you are trying to seek out the talent and to sort of put it in a space, in a place where it can grow and emerge. ....I worked with some players at a semi-professional level, which involved working with a club which recruited Americans, you change the agenda slightly, you're much more results orientated and you're much more concerned with person-management. If you then go on from that to senior international level, say GB, I was involved with 5 teams at GB level, it's man-management and possibly massaging egos as well. And all levels, junior, semi-professional and through to GB international level, I think a coach has to turn the dial and re-tune, re-organise their agendas and work out what you've got in front of you."*

Coach MB5 highlighted how he considered his role had changed throughout his coaching career. He demonstrated that the athletes were pivotal, but his approach varied dependent upon their stage of development and the context. Another coach, MF5, summed up his attitude towards the enormity of his role:

*"Huge, absolutely huge; personally you can't encompass the whole role by yourself, you need specialists in all these different areas to help you out. In my own role right now, you tend to see it as more of overseeing rather than doing all the parts in it. Initially when I started I wanted to do all the parts myself .... a man that hunts two rabbits catches neither .... probably took me about a year before I understood that, but that has probably shaped the way I think now as a manager. Pulling together all the aspects of preparing players for competitive games."*



The coaches in this study showed a wide scope of views concerning their perception of their role, ranging from Coach MF5's view above to the extremely limited appreciation exhibited by many Level 1 and 2 coaches. As coaches gain more experience, their awareness of the holistic nature of coaching develops and they appear to consider more variables as contributing to effective coaching. It does highlight that context, appropriateness and the core activity are critical at all levels.

#### PERCEPTIONS OF COACHING PHILOSOPHY

In the discussion of their role and philosophy of coaching, the aspect of competition produced a wide range of opinions. FL4, a lacrosse coach, summed up her dilemma, saying:

*"Well, it's funny because I think my philosophy is more about individuals being empowered but yet I know that in the team you have to work within a structure so my structure might not be as rigid as it seems to be. Mine has developed through both playing and coaching - mostly it feels like you learn what not to do while you are being coached by other people and you learn what to do when you're doing it."*

It has been reported that coaches believe that they (mostly) learn on the job and from watching and working with more experienced coaches [47]. Thus, it could be suggested that coach FL4 has a well developed knowledge of coaching theory to draw upon that she has gathered from her own coaching practice.

The Level 1 and 2 coaches had difficulty expressing their perceptions of their coaching role, perhaps because at this stage of their development they have not dealt with the various levels of expectations and the joys and sorrows of success and failure. If coaches are to develop expertise throughout the performer pathway, then the formulation of a philosophy underpinned by their belief system must be addressed as an explicit part of their formal coaching course. As the demands placed on coaches differ in the various coaching environments, there will concomitantly be considerable variation in the framing of their roles. Similar beliefs were expressed when this group of coaches were asked to explain their coaching philosophy. Some Level 1 coaches, such as MB1 thought:

*"I don't really understand the question. I like younger kids to have a laugh and to have a laugh with them as long as they are enjoying it, they are learning as well."*

Enjoyment does not presuppose learning and suggests that the role Coach MB1 is fulfilling is that of a child-minder. Coach FI2 had considered her philosophy, but:

*"I wouldn't say I have developed a philosophy, I don't think I coach enough."*

The development of a coaching philosophy should not be dependent on a specific amount of experience or an identified level of qualification, but should underpin all viewpoints and attitudes even if coaches do not recognize the importance of a coaching philosophy. MB2 has a similar view, saying:

*"It varies right now from day to day, because I'm learning so much. My basic philosophy is that it is a continuous process."*

Coach MB2 apparently realised that a coaching philosophy has to continually adapt and be flexible enough to modify in differing contexts [31]. The statements of MB1, FI2 and MB2 suggest that these particular coaches did not understand the concept or importance of a coaching philosophy. The development of a functional guide to coaching philosophy may be appropriate so that there is a global understanding of the term when it is used. At this stage of their development, they are not able to put their experiences into any type of context from which they will be able to learn. They are currently building their knowledge bases, but they are not demonstrating any ability to link the various aspects of knowledge they have. They merely appear to be concentrating on the sport-specific content; i.e., what they need to know so that they can stand up in front of a group and deliver a session. This is similar to the developmental stages of teaching skills where less experienced teachers tend to try to control activities more closely perhaps due to a lack of confidence and familiarity with the environment [47]. Teachers' belief systems have been shown to influence their teaching style and (by extension) their practice, so it would be reasonable to suggest that coaches' belief systems would also influence their own actions [30]. The development of a philosophy and associated beliefs plays an important part in many, if not all, aspects of coaching and perhaps aspiring coaches should be encouraged to contemplate this aspect of coaching at an early stage to allow for a natural progression as they gained more knowledge and experience. This is part of the process of development, where values are clarified.

The Level 3 coaches were generally more involved with their participants and their coaching commitments appeared to link with their philosophy, with Coach MF3 thinking, very simply:

*"I feel that my approach to the coaching, is that I think they enjoy it and I feel I've learned along the way."*

Coach MR3 and Coach MA3 both appeared to link their philosophy of coaching with their beliefs about sport and their athletes in a wider sense, with Coach MR3 saying:

*"I got asked this in an interview a couple of weeks ago - I'm not really sure how to word it. In a rugby sense, I believe in positive play, I believe in excitement, it's a tough one, my philosophy is in style of play, I think. I really, really get annoyed with people who play negative rugby and just do things to slow the game down, but it can be a beautiful game so I just want to see that. In terms of actually coaching the people who are involved with me, it's to get the best out of them, be very, very positive with them but I think the girls would probably tell you that I don't hand out criticism for nothing. I like to have this sense of pride within them and if I do come down with a criticism, they know that they have to change that. It's this building of the expectation of the girls to perform and it's a self-expectation on their part."*

It evident that Coach MR3 has certain expectations of his players and he requires them to approach practice with the same sense of purpose and commitment with which he approaches his coaching, but it also seems that he does not have a clear grasp of the meaning of a coaching philosophy. Research illustrates that the coach can only develop a belief system once they have an established knowledge base. This in turn can affect their learning approaches and their actual practice [12]. Coach MA3 expressed some strong viewpoints - highlighting aspects of his philosophy - which perhaps reflected the individualism associated with a sport such as track and field athletics rather the team sport of rugby union:

*"I think it's quite athlete-centred and fairly holistic - it doesn't just look at the performance, nor does it just look at one aspect of the performance and I'm not sure whether that includes the fact that I have quite a long-term view whereas some of the athletes may have a shorter-term view."*

Coach MA3 conveyed a strong sense of his own beliefs in this statement, perhaps reflecting a combination of his age, years in coaching and his academic background as well as his coaching qualifications. The Level 3 coaches of this study all work in very different environments, but are all defined by the performance of their athletes or teams. Three of the four are involved in the preparation of athletes for elite competition, which must influence both their philosophy and coaching approach as demonstrated by coaches MA3 and MR3 in their reflections on their coaching philosophy. According to O'Bryant et al. [13], a belief system is created early in life, based on experiences and learning. It can be argued that coaches such as MA3 and MR3 had developed their 'coaching' philosophies, not just while coaching but throughout their playing careers and, of course, throughout their own socialization as children.

The coaches with both a higher level of coaching qualification and greater experience displayed a greater depth and understanding of their coaching philosophy and its importance to their coaching practice. When asked what he now believed, Coach MF5 made reference to his coaching philosophy constantly changing, according to his circumstances and environment, thinking:

*"It's changed every year - I've added something or taken away something or altered something every year. I've adapted all the time to the surroundings. When I first started off, I felt that I could probably change any player in the world but my philosophy's changed on that - you can't. You can certainly make people better, of course you can, however I do believe that there is only a certain pool you can pick from. I also thought that you could attract young lads, 8, 9, 10 years old to become great players but my philosophy's changed on that as well. I now realise that they have to go through so many different things to reach the level where they're competent enough to fulfil potential. My philosophy on how the game should be played has changed - it used to be all aesthetics and we're a delight to watch but now it's almost win at all costs - I want to win more than anything else."*

This constant adaptation of his coaching philosophy appeared to indicate significant higher-order thinking in regard to his view of his coaching and the beliefs that underpin his practice as a coach. It is suggested that, as Tsangaridou et al. [12] opine, that Coach MF5's philosophy has developed as a consequence of his acquisition of more knowledge and experience in a different coaching environment where winning was the only thing that mattered. It appears that there has been such a fundamental change in his operational belief system that Coach MF5 actually questions the validity of his original coaching philosophy. It also contradicts the finding of Schinke et al. [45], who proposed that the philosophy of a coach was formed before they entered coaching by their experiences as a player. Coach MF5 had been a professional football player in the Scottish Premier League and moved into coaching when his playing career prematurely ended following injury. It would be consistent to suggest that his attitudes and beliefs about coaching and his philosophy formed as a player would have reflected the realities of play that he subsequently experienced as a manager.

## IMPACT ON COACHING PRACTICE

A coaching philosophy is believed to underpin individual coaching practice [2]. Since many coaches work independently, deciding upon session content and the structure of their session, this gives them a certain autonomy that may not be underpinned by current best practice [48]. Scant research has been reported concerning any association between coaching philosophy and coaching practice [15]. Coaching philosophies are generally not able to be distinguished by viewing coaches' behaviour. This is evident from Coach MS4 who, as previously stated believes strongly in nurturing athletes. He admitted that this was a firmly held belief, but pressures and constraints during coaching practice often meant he could not always do this in practice:

*"There are certain key points that I have to make during a session. Sometimes I observe that one player is not quite getting it and make a mental note to speak to them. I don't always get around to it."*

Coach MA3 had similar experiences as he considered,

*"It would be nice just to go to the track, make sure you do what you're meant to do and then leave, but I don't think it would optimise their performance."*

He continued to say:

*"I wish sometimes that I didn't care about coaching and the athletes so much. It would make my job so much easier, but I guess if I wanted things easy I would never have got into coaching."*

This suggests that MA3 feels a responsibility to his athletes, perhaps related to both his beliefs and his perception of his coaching role. This feeling of responsibility is also referred to by Coach MH2:

*"We also find that through the hockey, not only are you developing their skills but it's more about discipline, teamwork, to an extent, nutrition. So the primary goal is the development of the player but there are secondary things that come along with that which might be things like social responsibility."*

Coach MH2 highlighted a number of key aspects he viewed as key to his responsibilities: player development, social responsibility, and their psychosocial development. These concepts stress the holistic nature of the coaching role - even for Level 2 coaches - and demonstrate that coaches must be equipped to deal with participants from a variety of social and cultural backgrounds and with varying experiences of being coached. Talking of coaching at an elite level, coach MR3 stressed the differences between coaching environments, drawing attention to the need for the coach to be flexible and adaptable in terms of both role and philosophy:

*"In rugby you've usually got a backs and a forwards coach, a fitness coach, a defence coach and an analyst and a manager so you don't have to do so much, but when you're just doing it in a club environment you have to do all of these things. I don't think there is a definitive role of a coach, I just think it's dependent on how many people are involved in the team that you are part of, if you are part of a team."*

Coach MR3 was reviewing his experiences, purely from a rugby perspective; he did not refer to the psychosocial development or social aspects deemed so important by Coach MH2. This could be attributed to the coaching environment as Coach MR3 was working with a National Rugby Squad whereas Coach MH2 was operating in a club environment with younger players. The emphasis of Coach MR3 was competition oriented and perhaps this was due to the prominence placed on success by the national governing body in rugby union. Coach MT4 was representative of the majority of the more experienced coaches ( $n = 8$ ), considering the long term development of his players:

*"Always you should look when you are coaching at what do you want them to be at age 18 - it's not important what they are doing now and a lot of parents get caught up in that, they get caught up in scores."*

The environment that these highly qualified coaches were working in, whether full-time, professional coaches or part-time volunteers, was one of high pressure, high stakes, and was very competitive where good performances from both coach and athlete were crucial.

Other coaching beliefs reflected the culture of sport in the UK:

*"It might come down to whether we're taking sport seriously in this country. Full stop. I think we're a bit slow out the blocks, a kind of Corinthian attitude towards nurturing athletic talent in an ad hoc 'chariots of fire' type way. Well, the world has now grown up and it's taken us a long, long time to get that. 2012 in London is going to be a wake up call for everybody in sport at all levels, in all capacities..."*

This sentiment was echoed at various stages by all of the coaches. These coaches felt that coaching, and indeed sport, was not supported at the elite level, sufficiently to permit success in global competition and maintain credibility as a sporting nation. Much of this was attributed to the lack of professionalization of coaching as well as a perceived poor transition of many sports organizations from amateur status to professional organisations. The strategic role of many national governing bodies in the UK has been regarded as being a weakness, with a significant number being unable to adjust to the commercialization of sport [49].

## **CONCLUSION**

The coaches interviewed in this study show a clear development of their thoughts and depth of understanding of the complex and dynamic role of the coach and their own philosophy that underpins their coaching practice. The coaches at Levels 1 and 2 generally did not exhibit an obvious awareness of their core values and coaching methods. It is suggested that the acquisition of a coherent coaching philosophy would enable these, if not all coaches, to approach their coaching practice with consistency and clarity. The coaches at Level 3 showed evidence of a more profound consideration of their coaching philosophy and of the recognition the direct impact a coaching philosophy has on their coaching processes and strategies. The Level 4 and 5 coaches demonstrated a conceptual awareness of key ideas related both to sport and coaching, as well as an appreciation of the social, cultural and political values associated with the practice of coaching.

Perhaps, as the results of this study suggest, coaches initially see little value in a philosophy as they are attempting to cope with more tangible aspects of coaching practice, such as session content and organisation. The methods used by coach education organisations to present this information may not always be clear to coaches with little

experience. Novice coaches do not appear to have a unified understanding of what it means to develop a coaching philosophy. This can lead to confusion, especially as a philosophy is individual, complex and suited to context, not a simple model that can be easily presented to a large group, as most initial coach education courses appear to be.

The development, articulation and application of a set of beliefs and values underpinning coaching are related to the knowledge and experience of these coaches, rather than merely their coach education. None of the Level 1 coaches have progressed beyond a high-school education and generally lack coaching experience, with most (75%) having been involved for less than two years. The Level 2 coaches show a similar trend, with the exception of Coach MH2, who has amassed a great deal of knowledge through his educational achievements and his club coaching experience. The Level 3 coaches exhibit a range of educational experiences and number of years coaching. The Level 4 and 5 coaches were very experienced, with over 20 years of total experience in coaching and over 10 years at their current level. A significant factor was that all coaches at Level 4 and 5 ( $n = 8$ ) held undergraduate degrees, with most ( $n = 5$ ) possessing a postgraduate qualification. Not surprisingly, this group also demonstrated the most complex understanding of the impact of their own values and beliefs on their role as a coach.

The differences apparent between the novice coaches and the expert coaches show a number of confusions and contradictions in this study. None of the coaches attribute their coaching philosophy (or lack thereof) to their coach education experiences. The novice coaches were not sufficiently engaged with their coaching to consider their practice in a wider role frame and link that to a formal philosophy. The expert coaches had more eclectic experiences in coaching, education and life that they were able to construct into statements of beliefs, if not formal philosophies of coaching. Perhaps this is too complex a topic to be included at initial levels of coach education as they currently exist.

Recent research has considered the promotion of an athlete-centred philosophy as a tool to combat child abuse in sport [50], but surely coaching must be viewed from a more holistic approach; i.e., instead of just using the development of a philosophy as a tool to prevent issues, it could be a positive development to benefit both the coach and athlete. The development of a coaching philosophy does not appear to be explicitly addressed in coach education courses in the UK. The inclusion of a coaching philosophy, values clarification and consideration of the coach's responsibilities could improve their practice and better meet the needs of their charges. The more knowledge that a coach can utilize, contextualized for their particular coaching environment, the more likely they are to become effective coaches.

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