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Title - **“Active” and “passive” coach pathways: Elite athletes’ entry routes into high-performance coaching roles**

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Abstract

This study sought to analyse the lived experiences of so-called “fast-tracked” coaches from men’s association football and rugby union by seeking to understand how these individuals prepared for and then transitioned into a post-athletic coaching career. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 13 male coaches. All participants were former elite athletes and had followed a fast-tracked pathway into their current post-athletic coaching roles. Participants were based in England and had retired from an athletic career within 12 months of being interviewed. Two general categories of “active” and “passive” coach pathways were identified for the career trajectory. Active coaches purposefully prepared for a coaching career during their athletic careers, whereas passive coaches did not. Passive coaches’ decisions to become a coach were often reactive and made after retiring from a competitive athletic career. Results indicate that only the career trajectory of passive coaches reflects a fast-track pathway. None of the active or passive coaches negotiated any formalised recruitment processes into their first post-athletic coaching roles. The suggestion is that prejudicial recruitment practices

are enacted by senior club management which creates a homogenous coaching workforce. This furthers the need for greater governance of high-performance coach recruitment within England for these sports.

Keywords: coach development; coach recruitment; association football; rugby union

Introduction

An emerging body of research on coach development has focused upon reporting the pathways and the career "stages" through which high-performance coaches progress (Barker-Ruchti, Lindgren, Hofmann, Sinning & Shelton, 2014; Erickson, Bruner, MacDonald & Côté, 2008; Koh, Mallett & Wang, 2011; Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016; Watts & Cushion, 2017; Werthner & Trudel, 2009). These studies show that it is commonplace for high-performance coaches to have prior experience as elite athletes in their respective sports. Such a finding has been frequently reported in other research situated in the broader context of coach development that have not specifically analysed coach pathways (e.g., Christensen, 2013, 2014; Gilbert, Côté & Mallett, 2006; Gilbert, Lichtenwaldt, Gilbert, Zelezny & Côté, 2009; Mielke, 2007; Morrow & Howieson, 2014, 2018; Nash & Sproule, 2009; Purdy & Potrac, 2016). Consequently, coaches themselves have reported that the development processes for learning coaching skills and knowledge is somehow embedded in their former experiences as athletes (Cushion, Armour & Jones, 2003; Mallett, Rynne & Billett, 2016).

Thus, former competitive-athletic careers regularly appear in high-performance coach pathway models. For example, Erickson, Côté and Fraser-Thomas (2007) conducted a "retrospective interview procedure" that quantitatively analysed the types of coach development experiences of 19 high-performance team and individual sport coaches situated within the contexts of "three Canadian universities and one high-performance club" (p. 304). As a result, Erickson and colleagues produced a five stage model that included the age ranges coaches experienced each stage. These were: 1) diversified early sport participation (age 6-12); 2) competitive sport participation (age 13-18); 3) highly competitive sport participation/introduction to coaching (age 19-23); 4) part-time early coaching (age 24-28); and 5) high-performance head coaching (age 29+). Although the authors acknowledged a range of variances regarding the timescale coaches experienced each stage of the pathway, this and

other similar pathway models have nonetheless received criticism. In particular, Christensen (2013) has contended that such empirical analyses have depicted high-performance coach pathways to be a-theoretical, linear and one-dimensional, essentially simplifying the coaches’ career trajectories to be a “generic stepwise model that describes careers in terms of age-specific and chronologically ordered milestones” (p. 99-100). By proposing this, Christensen (2013) infers that the actual career trajectory of elite athletes making the transition to high-performance coach has previously reflected a functionalist attitude by considering it as a logical and unproblematic process.

Assumptions of a functionalist and unproblematic career transition may be one reason for the fast-tracking of elite athletes into high-performance coaching roles which has been described as a somewhat new phenomena prevalent in elite sport (Rynne, 2014). Indeed, Rynne’s (2014) definition of fast-tracked coaches outlines the accelerated routes current or former elite athletes follow “through formal accreditation structures” so their transition into post-athletic high-performance coaching roles are “expedited” (p. 300). There is, however, a paucity of empirical research which has analysed the individual lived experiences of those negotiating this career trajectory. The experiences of coaches are important to consider in order to challenge the notion as to whether the fast-tracked career trajectory between elite athlete and high-performance coach is as logical, simplistic and unproblematic as previously inferred. The aim of this study, therefore, is to provide the field with an original contribution by better understanding the experiences of whether fast-tracked coaches within men’s association football (hereafter referred to as football) and rugby union prepare for a post-athletic high-performance coaching role, and how they actually transition into these roles.

The rationale and value for analysing the fast-track pathway from athlete to coach within football and rugby union is based on the notion that the practice has been supported by both sports’ respective international and national governing bodies (NGBs). For example, the

European governing body of football - the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) - and the English NGB of rugby union - the Rugby Football Union (RFU) - exempt elite athletes from having to attain entry level qualifications when registering on higher level coaching qualifications. Within UEFA’s latest *Coaching Convention* policy (UEFA, 2015) it is stipulated that NGBs such as the Football Association (FA) and additional member bodies like the Professional Footballers’ Association (PFA) of England and Wales can “organise a specific course for integrating the content of a UEFA B diploma course with that of a UEFA A diploma course for long-serving players” (p. 22).[1] In this case, and within the context of the United Kingdom (UK), elite athletes do not require UK Coaching Certificate (UKCC) levels one and two, which are considered “entry level” qualifications.

UEFA’s (2015) policy defines “long-serving” players to be “a player who has played at least 7 full years as a professional in the top division of a FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) or UEFA member association” (p. 22). Similarly, the RFU have organised and delivered level three coach education courses solely for former senior professional players without requiring them to have acquired the same UKCC level one or two coaching accreditations. In maintaining such practices, governing bodies plainly assume that a previous playing career helps to develop coaching skills and knowledge. While there is little or no evidence to support this assumption at present (Cushion et al., 2010), it can be suggested that a playing career does help to develop the requisite skills and knowledge for a coaching role (Cushion et al., 2003; Watts & Cushion, 2017) on account that the two sports of football and rugby union have longstanding histories of high-performance coaches possessing competitive-athletic careers (Carter, 2006; Collins, 2009; Kelly, 2008; Mielke, 2007). Needless

[1] UEFA B and A coach accreditation is respectively assigned to UKCC level three and four status.

to say, fully understanding exactly how a competitive-athletic playing career helps develop coaching skills and knowledge still remains.

Attempts to offer insight on this topic have resulted in a number of empirical analyses identifying that high-performance coaches with former competitive-athletic careers are able to accumulate indirect coaching experiences that combined act as an apprenticeship of coaching (Blackett, Evans & Piggott, 2018; Cassidy & Rossi, 2006; Cushion et al., 2003). Additional research that has sampled experienced coaches has reported that a competitive-athletic career did not always adequately prepare them for a post-athletic coaching career, yet it did provided them with an “advantage” (Watts & Cushion, 2017, p. 77). One such advantage is that competitive-athletic careers provide high-performance coaches with the ability to accumulate species of capital (Bourdieu, 1986) through the embodiment of field specific values (Christensen, 2013).

In addition to economic capital, Pierre Bourdieu (1986) proposed additional species of capital to explain how social agents consciously and subconsciously negotiate relations of power with one and another. For Bourdieu (1986) capital was also present in the guises of: social capital – the relationships and connections with others; cultural capital - educational qualifications and/or sporting achievements such as titles and medals; physical capital – the physical attributes of the corporeal body; and symbolic capital – an accumulation of all the other forms of capital that enables social agents to acquire status and respect from others. Each species of capital can manifest itself in either an institutionalised, embodied or objectified state. It is the accumulation of capital which bestows power onto agents. Yet “capital does not exist and function except in relation to a field” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 101). The value ascribed to certain species of capital is therefore dependent upon the field in which each agent is positioned with.

The concept of field denotes the multi-layered social spaces that encompass networks of social relations which agents operate and compete for power within (Morrow & Howieson, 2018). Although elite level sport can be considered as being one field, it acts as an overarching field that houses football and rugby union. These two sports are considered to be two semi-autonomous fields on account that they both have distinctive subcultures that define them from one another as well as other sports. On this basis, each field values different forms of capital by virtue of its own subculture (Wacquant, 1992).

When researching high-performance coach pathways within the field of elite Scandinavian sport, Christensen (2013) drew upon Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital to explain why it is common for successful athletes to transition into a post-athletic high-performance coaching roles by stating:

> One of the most obvious ways to obtain recognition, status and influence in the world of high-performance sports is to demonstrate results in one’s own athletic career, thus accumulating cultural capital in the objectified forms of medals, titles and ranking… Hence, at least in Scandinavia, it is not unusual for a world championship to lead to a coaching career (p. 106).

On this basis coach learning and development has been increasingly argued to be a socially influenced and constructed process through the growing recognition that coaching, and thus coach development, is part of the lifeworld (Bowes & Jones, 2006). By making this claim, a dialectical relationship between individual coaches and the club environments where they practice on a day-to-day basis has been increasingly made. The relationship between agency and structure initially creates and then socially reproduces particular coaching knowledge and practices, leading many of these studies to have drawn upon a range of concepts emanating from sociological theories. Indeed, a number of such studies have utilised Bourdieu’s theoretical framework to explain the value a competitive-athletic career has for coach development (e.g., Christensen, 2014; Cushion et al., 2003; Watts & Cushion, 2017).

Another study that has drawn upon Bourdieusian concepts centred its analysis on why and how senior high-performance directors of English football and rugby clubs supported the fast-track pathway (Blackett, Evans & Piggott, 2017). The directors profiled their respective club's athletes on their prospective coaching abilities in an informal mode of coach talent identification. The athletes with the perceived attributes relevant for coaching efficacy were actively encouraged and provided with additional introductory coaching roles that supplemented their athletic careers. These opportunities were discursive attempts to promote informal coach learning and to enable these future coaches to be further socialised to the "club culture" so that it would be legitimised and then socially reproduced in their subsequent coaching practices. This socialisation process enabled prospective coaches to accumulate embodied forms of cultural and symbolic capital, seen as important factors for coaching efficacy on the basis of their ability to immediately legitimise their positions of power through quickly attaining athlete respect (see also Potrac, Jones & Armour, 2002).

From this, Blackett and colleagues (2017) indicated that the individual athletes fast-tracked into high-performance coaching roles seemed to be heavily accountable and somewhat passive to implicit influence exerted onto them by the social field (i.e., their club's management) when developing coaching skills and knowledge. Although this assertion is made after having focussed on the unique population of elite athletes transitioning into high-performance roles, this finding nevertheless contrasts to the claims made in the broader coach development literature that coach development "solely" originates "from self-directed learning and practical coaching experience" (Sherwin, Campbell & MacIntyre, 2017, p. 7 – see also Erickson et al., 2008; Mesquita, Riberio, Santos & Morgan, 2014).

In this light, the overarching aim of the present article has been to understand whether or not fast-tracked high-performance football and rugby union coaches were largely passive or active agents in their coach development. Specifically, the article sought to analyse the lived

experiences and social processes for how such a population negotiated the fast-tracked transition from elite athlete to high-performance coach by posing three main questions. First, did the coaches during their careers as elite athletes actively prepare for a post-athletic high-performance coaching role? Second, if they did, what experiences aided their coaching skills and knowledge development? Third, what recruitment processes did they have to negotiate to access their coaching roles?

By conducting this research we do not claim to have any epistemological bias towards whether athletes who have been fast-tracked into post-athletic coaching careers do make better or more effective coaches. Although we are aware of the conclusion drawn by Schempp, McCullick, Grant, Foo and Wieser (2010) that their study of 134 head coaches across multiple team sports did not find a significant statistical relationship between head coaches’ on-field success of results and their own professional playing experiences, we balance this by admitting there have been a number of cases where effective and successful coaches do have competitive-athletic backgrounds. Simply, therefore, our intention is to heed Schempp and colleagues’ (2010) recommendations that the “relationship between playing experience and professional coaching warrants more investigation” (p. 79). As such, the study’s aim is to provide an original contribution to the coach development literature by analysing the lived experiences and pathways of a group of coaches who seem to dominate high-performance coaching roles in these two sports.

Methods

Study design

Semi-structured interviews were employed on account that we wanted to analyse the lived experiences for how fast-tracked coaches prepared for a post-athletic high-performance coaching career. These were judged to enable the researcher to engage in a dialogue which

allowed the research participants to provide rich, detailed explanations on the issues and processes associated to their development and fast-track career trajectory (Purdy, 2014; Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

To enhance the prospect of obtaining credible and trustworthy data (Tracy, 2010), and to avoid inaccurate or biased memory recall by asking study participants to recall events elapsing over an extended career history (Ericsson, Prietula & Cokely, 2007), two purposive sampling criteria were applied: 1) participants had recently retired from playing in the last 12 months; and 2) they were registered to attend their sport’s senior professionals’ level three coach certification programme. The combination of these criteria enabled us to theoretically identify (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) a sample who had at least begun the fast-tracked career transition from elite athlete to a post-athletic coaching career and thus meet the intended research questions.

Context

Participants were recruited from the PFA and RFU’s level three senior professionals’ courses, because they provided access to participants who were negotiating the fast-tracked coach pathway route at the time of the study. Based within England, these senior professionals’ courses only accepted senior athletes with a competitive-athletic career. Registered candidates were required to complete a number of assessments in multiple formats and environments over 12 months, situated both internally and externally to the course. Internal course learning environments included formalised classes, workshops and practical sessions led or facilitated by course tutors. External learning environments were situated in the day-to-day context within which candidates regularly practised coaching. Both courses began with a three-day residential component.

Procedure

The RFU National Coach Development Officer and a PFA Regional Coach Development Officer, who were “gatekeepers” in this context (Purdy, 2014), gave permission to complete participant recruitment by agreeing to the following ethical conditions that had been approved by the first author’s institution: 1) any course candidate who participated in the study would do so by their own will and that declining to participate would not adversely affect a candidate’s success of attaining accreditation; 2) none of the participant’s identities would be disclosed to any representative of the PFA or RFU; and 3) that any information disclosed within the study would not compromise a candidate’s ability to successfully attain accreditation from the course. Participants were then directly approached in person by the first author during the residential component at the beginning of each course. Initial participant acceptance was verbally obtained during these first exchanges. Participant written consent was then provided at this time or just before data collection if a face-to-face interview was scheduled at a later date.

Sample

Each course had between 20-25 registered candidates. In total, 13 White male participants were recruited (six from football and seven from rugby union). Recruited participants met the sampling criteria after having retired from a competitive-athletic career within 12 months of being interviewed and had all found coaching roles within a number of contexts (see Table 1). Pseudonyms are used when reporting participant data. Club names and individuals named in interviews have been coded in order to protect the participants’ identities (Saunders, Kitzinger & Kitzinger, 2015).

Sport	Pseudonym	Highest athletic level (international / domestic club representation)	Length of competitive-athletic career (years)	Time since retirement from competitive play (months)	Coaching role at time of interview / context (Time in post)	Part-time (PT) or Full-time (FT) coaching contract	Additional previous coaching experiences other than club imposed coaching roles (time in roles)
Rugby	Chris	Full International / Premiership	18	10	Director of Rugby / men’s semi-professional (6 months)	PT	None
	Roger	Full International / Premiership	8	1	Joint head coach / men’s semi-professional (2 weeks)	PT	None
	Charles	Full International / Premiership	13	5	Attack coach / men’s professional high-performance (2 weeks) & Head coach / men’s semi-professional (2 months) & Private boy’s school coach (2 months)	All PT	Ladies team (2.5 years) Amateur men’s team (1.3 years)
	Max	Premiership	15	2	Assistant coach / men’s semi-professional (8 months) & Academy coach / youth development (10 months)	Both PT	Youth academy (2 years)
	Gary	Championship	11	2	Assistant coach / men’s semi-professional (1 year) & school coach / youth development (6 months)	Both PT	Youth team (10 months)
	Barry	Full International / Premiership	15	2	Scrum & backs coach / men’s high-performance (4 months)	PT	None
	Corey	Premiership	14	9	Director of Rugby / men’s semi-professional (3 months)	All PT	International youth team specialist coach (9 months) School club

					& Position specific coach at 2 clubs / men’s professional high-performance (9 & 6 months)		(2 years)
Football	Kyle	Premier League	16	4	U16 Academy coach / youth development (4 months)	FT	U16 Academy coach (5 months)
	Ethan	Championship	18	10	U16 Academy coach / youth development (3 months)	PT	None
	Tristan	U20 International / Premier League	14	11	U18 Academy coach / youth development (10 months)	FT	Academy coach (8 years)
	Oscar	U21 International / Championship	18	2	U16 Academy coach / youth development (1 month)	PT	Academy coach (7 months)
	Magnus	League One	10	9	U18 Academy coach / youth development (4 months)	FT	None
	Sebastian	Full International / Premier League	15	11	U18 coach & U21 assistant coach / youth development (4 months)	FT	Non-league academy manager (7 months)

Table 1 Participant characteristics at the point of interview

Data collection

Interviews were conducted by the first author either face-to-face (n = 6) or over the telephone (n = 7) depending on the preference of each participant. All face-to-face interviews were held in a private location of the participants’ choice. Interviews lasted between 35 minutes and 48 minutes (mean 40.41 minutes, ± 4.3). Unlike face-to-face interviews, a limitation of telephone interviews is that it restricts the researcher’s ability to create a rapport with the participant as well as not being able to recognise visual cues such as body language that can gauge the participants’ reactions to questions (Gratton & Jones, 2010). These limitations did not adversely affect the quality of data collected because the initial recruitment processes undertaken at the senior professionals’ course facilitated in some form of rapport to have been built. Furthermore, by virtue that all of the participants had been elite athletes meant they had considerable experience of being interviewed via telephone, and were consequently all comfortable with this method of data collection.

Questioning was informed by wanting to identify whether the participants were active or passive agents in their coach development and so covered the broad topics of: 1) background/contextual information of athletic careers such as the level of club or international representation (e.g., “at which clubs did you play for?” and “what was the highest level you played at?”); 2) motivation for transitioning into a post-athletic coaching career (e.g., “why did you decide to become a coach?”; 3) intentional or unintentional methods of preparing for a post-athletic coaching role (e.g., “to what degree did you prepare to be a coach during your playing career?” and “form your perspective, to what extent were coaching qualifications helpful for your coaching career?” or “how much did you prioritise getting your coaching qualifications?”); 4) the nature of any prior coaching experiences (e.g., “what coaching roles did you have before this one?” and “how much coaching did you do whilst you were an athlete?”); and 5) the recruitment processes undertaken for attaining current or previous

coaching roles (e.g., “how did you get your current and previous coaching jobs?” and “can you explain the reasons as to why you began to coach as a player?” along with “why did you decide to occupy a coaching role whilst still competing as a player?”).

Questions intended to elicit contradictory or comparable views for defining cultural differences between the sports were also integrated into the interview structure. For example, the following question was asked to Chris, a rugby union player, in relation to him having to obtain coaching qualifications in order to secure a full-time coaching role: “When I’ve spoken to footballers, they don’t seem to have those same issues, so why do you feel as if you are jumping through those ‘hoops’ in rugby more so than what footballers are doing?” Interviews were transcribed verbatim by the first author generating a total of 287 double-spaced pages of interview transcripts.

Data analysis

The Bourdieusian species of capital theoretically sensitised and informed our analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). We stress, however, that this concept only partly informed us as we were receptive to the possibility that other pre-existing or new concepts could emerge from the data. Data were therefore analysed through an abductive logic (Blaikie, 2009) where “theoretical ideas are played off against one and another in a developmental and creative process” meaning that “data are interpreted and reinterpreted in the light of an emerging theory, and, as a result, change in the process” (p. 156).

To complement the abductive research strategy, a constant comparison method of data analysis was conducted, meaning that data were analysed in concert with data collection (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Data were initially open coded. Here, raw quotes were identified and coded into categories that described the raw data units. This resulted in a wide range of free nodes (n = 26). This was then followed by axial coding whereby the lead author interpreted

relationships amongst the free nodes and then determined the inter-related connections between the data sets and existing theories (Hallberg, 2006). This enabled the underlying social processes and latent meanings for the phenomenon to be identified (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), and which led to three core themes emerging.

Addressing trustworthiness

Operational and theoretical researcher memos were continually created throughout data collection and analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). During data analysis, theoretical memos assisted in the interpretation and reassembling the data into themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). These were used as reference points to explain how the first author had interpreted the data and to also critically reflect on the emerging themes (Corbin & Strauss, 1998).

The computer software package of QSR*NVivo 10 (QSR International, UK) was used for all data analysis. The use of this data management software facilitated in transparency between the research team in regards to how the analysis had been interpreted. The software afforded the research team the ability to appreciate the rationale and basis for how the first author's theoretical memos were constructed, as these memos had clearly identifiable links to the free nodes and themes (Bringer, Johnston & Brackenridge, 2004). A degree of "trustworthiness" was also achieved in the analysis through the research team drawing upon these memos and then engaging with reflexive practices, both individually and collectively, through holding critical group discussions at regular intervals (Sparkes & Smith 2009). When disagreements arose on how the interpretation of the data had been analysed, further analysis and comparison between each participant's data and the literature was conducted. This process identified specific themes to be further questioned in following interviews. Critical reflection of the interpretation of data and the continual process of identifying data anomalies prevented confirmation bias (Gratton & Jones, 2010). Participants were asked via email to member check

whether their interview transcripts were "accurate, balanced, fair and respectful" of their views (Sparkes & Smith, 2009, p. 495). All participants accepted that their transcripts were accurate representations.

Results

The first theme generated from the data analysis was: "initial access routes into coaching". This represented how the participants were internally promoted by their clubs during the competitive-athletic careers to gain what we have categorised as their first "informal coaching roles". These roles were always initially imposed onto the participants by their club hierarchy and were considered as contractual obligations that were part of a competitive-athlete's duties. Reflecting the findings of other high-performance coach development and pathway studies (Watts & Cushion, 2017; Erickson et al., 2007), such coaching experiences were judged to contribute to the participants' apprenticeship of coaching through the promotion of social learning (Blackett et al., 2018; Rynne, Mallett & Tinning, 2006, 2010).

The second theme represents two general categories of "active" and "passive" coach pathways that were identified for the career trajectory. After being introduced to coaching through their first introductory coaching roles, active coaches purposefully prepared for a coaching career during their athletic careers by intentionally acquiring additional coaching roles and sources of coaching knowledge. The coaching roles which these active coaches committed to on a regular basis have been categorised as "formalised coaching roles". Passive coaches did not perform these actions. Instead, their decisions to become a coach were often reactive and made after retiring from a competitive athletic career. Indeed, as Figure 1 depicts, it is the career trajectory of passive coaches which coheres with previous conceptions of a fast-track pathway (Rynne, 2014) and not that of active coaches.

The third theme identified how the participants were “offered” their first formalised and post-athletic coaching roles, thus exposing the social processes underpinning the transitional phase from athlete to coach. Of particular interest were the recruitment practices encountered by each coach and the destinations of their first “post-athletic coaching roles”. None of the coaches negotiated any formalised recruitment processes to access their first post-athletic coaching role. Rather, these opportunities arose after senior club management or fellow coaches “offered” these coaching roles to the participants through informal recruitment procedures. These figures acted as “significant others” and had pre-existing relationships with the coaches from their competitive-athletic histories. This subsequently meant that after retiring from a competitive-athletic career, six coaches acquired a coaching role in the last club they had represented as competitive athletes and five participants were at the first club they had represented. The two anomalies were Chris and Magnus who attained their first post-athletic coaching roles at clubs they had never represented as athletes. Nevertheless, like the rest of the sample, Chris and Magnus did not negotiate any formalised recruitment procedures for their roles.

The discussion of results is presented in a manner which mirrors the transitional nature of the participants’ career trajectories, beginning by detailing participants’ initial access routes into coaching, and then conceptualising why the significant others offered coaching roles to the participants. The discussion then outlines the cultural differences between the two sports, and in doing so, extends our understanding on high-performance coach pathways by making a theoretical case for them to be considered anything but functional or one dimensional.

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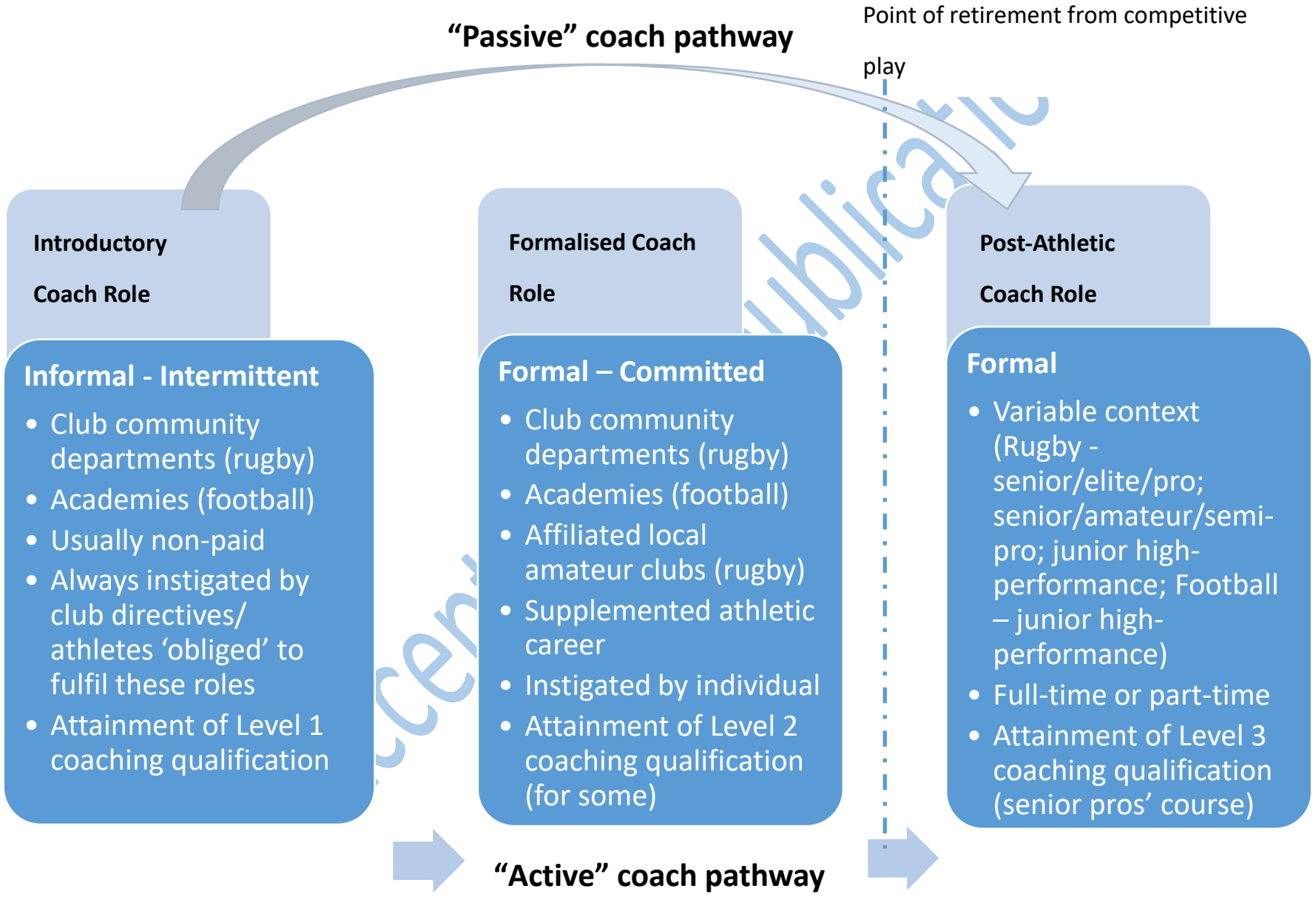

Figure 1. Distinction between “active” and “passive” coach pathways

Access routes into coaching

All study participants had been internally promoted into their first "introductory coaching role" during their competitive-athletic careers. Participants described how, during this time, it was considered an obligation for a professional athlete to fulfil informal and intermittent coaching roles *within* their affiliated clubs' youth academies or community programmes.[2] Corresponding to the findings of existing coach development research (Barker-Ruchti et al., 2014; Christensen, 2013; Erickson et al., 2007; LaVoi & Dutove, 2012; Nash & Sproule, 2009), participants' first introductory coaching roles were undertaken during the early stages of their competitive-athletic careers and were considered to contain low levels of responsibility. The italicised text within Gary and Chris' statements illustrates how, according to participants, this obligation was imposed on them by their clubs' directors:

> ...when I was at (current English National League One rugby union club 1) *we were always placed* with schools and things and that's where it started, coaching levels and the coaching badges and seeing how kids develop from coaching. And that's where it just kept on coming and going… work with the community, with schools, also with young offenders and things like that… Because it was something that *the club* really invested in, the young people, and I think that's where everything [coaching] started. (Gary, emphasis added)

> Part of being a rugby player, you *get sent* out to schools to things like that so I'd only ever coached kids. I didn't enjoy it… coaching kids anyway… when I was playing. So maybe if I'd been coaching men then maybe I would have got more of a buzz [for coaching]. (Chris, emphasis added)

The emphasis placed on "you get sent out to schools" and "you always get placed with schools" suggests that these opportunities were more like imposed obligations rather than merely offered to the participants as voluntarily coaching experiences. The difference between the two sports were the recorded locations of where their first introductory roles were based.

[2] Each professional football and rugby union club within the UK has a community department. The remit of these departments is to focus on actively engaging the local population within the club's locality (McGuire & Fenoglio, 2004) in order to increase the club's profile and thus attract are larger spectatorship (Watson, 2000). To achieve this, community departments deliver a range of coaching schemes to not only children within school (Blair & Capel, 2008) and out of school (Cronin & Armour, 2015), but also the adult population (Watson, 2000) that address a number of social issues such as: social inclusion (Tacon, 2007), anti-social behaviour (Crabbe, 2007) and education (Parnell, Stratton, Drust & Richardson, 2013).

For rugby union participants, these introductory roles were set within their club’s community departments. For the football participants it was their club’s youth academies or pre-academies. Tristan explained how he was expected to undertake a coaching role in his club’s pre-academy that worked around his competitive-athletic commitments:

> It was literally two nights a week I had to coach, and I was taking the under eights. The under eights are sort of classed as pre-academy because they can’t sign officially with the academy until they are under nine, so pre-academy. (Tristan)

Irrespective of where these first formalised coaching roles were located, the seemingly imposed mandate for the participants to fulfil additional coaching roles alongside their competitive-athletic careers is suggestive of their club’s hierarchy attempting to provide social learning opportunities whereby the participants could observe and learn from other coaches (Blackett et al., 2017, 2018; Cushion et al., 2003; Lemyre, Trudel & Durand-Bush, 2007). In addition to this mode of coach learning, as competitive-athletes, both sets of participants had been enrolled onto their respective NGB’s UKCC level one or, in some cases, level two coach accreditation by their club’s senior management. Corey and Sebastian reported their experiences:

> …the first year I was signed within the academy at (current Premiership Rugby Club 3) you know, “they”, *the academy put us through* coaching qualifications so we could go out into the community and coach, coach kids, and I think it’s developed from there into a passion really. (Corey, emphasis added)

> Well when you’re a YTS [youth team scholar] you have to take your level one coaching badge, you know the kids still do it now. It’s pretty basic stuff. (Sebastian)

This finding signifies how many of the participants who had acquired prior formal coaching qualifications had not strictly undertaken a fast-tracked pathway into coaching. As the following section discusses, the impact of these qualifications on the participants’ coach development was seemingly limited as neither these qualifications nor the introductory

coaching roles instilled any desire for the passive coaches of wanting to pursue a post-athletic coaching career. For the active coaches, however, such introductory coaching roles were regarded as a motivational catalyst to pursue a post-athletic coaching career. The following section details participants’ experiences concerning the next phases of the pathway.

“Active” and “passive” coach pathways

Based on the emerging findings that introductory coaching roles inspired some of the participants to seek a post-athletic coaching role, whereas for others it was not the case, meant that the coaches fell into two categories of “active” (n = 6) or “passive” coaches (n = 7). The ambition of active coaches to attain a post-athletic coaching career was consciously made and “self-initiated” (Barker-Ruchti et al., 2014, p. 122) during their athletic careers *after* they had practiced in an introductory coaching role (Christensen, 2013). Essentially, active coaches tended to take the initiative in order to prepare for an intended post-athletic career in coaching. In so doing, active coaches self-initiated access onto further formal NGB coach education courses during their athletic careers and consciously sought additional coaching roles that supplemented their competitive-athletic careers. Because these coaching roles were committed to on a regular basis they have been classified here as “first formalised coaching roles”. The pathway of active coaches is presented at the bottom of Figure 1.

Some active rugby union coaches explained how financial constraints forced them to occupy multiple formalised coaching roles before attaining their first post-athletic coaching role (see Table 1). The majority of these formalised coaching roles were paid, supplementing their playing salaries. This was not an issue which was grounded in the football participants’ data as their coaching experiences were mainly voluntary ones all set within their club’s youth academies. Even when Charles was just about to be appointed as a specialist position coach on

a part-time contract at a Premiership rugby union team, he explained how he still had to acquire other coaching roles because of these financial constraints:

> Basically I’m just scratching a living. The (Premiership rugby union club 1) team, the team that excites me the most, but they’ve got no money so it’s a case of I need to scrape together a living and also gain some coaching experience. So the other opportunities, two of them have come up and I’ve taken them, and the third one I’m hoping to sort out in the next couple of weeks. (Charles)

Charles’ experiences suggest that the transition from athlete to coach for him and the other rugby union athletes was more complicated and less simplistic than previous representations of high-performance coach pathway models have depicted (cf., Erickson et al., 2007). Additionally, the financial constraints were seemingly specific to rugby union and can potentially explain why more rugby union coaches were classified as active coaches (n = 4) compared to the amount of active football coaches (n = 2). For example, Corey was one of the six active coaches who clearly explained how he consciously transferred to another lower level rugby union club which would better accommodate a formalised coaching role alongside his competitive-athletic career. Corey’s explanation also illustrates how he and others categorised as active coaches exercised their own agency for the purposes of continuing to prepare for a post-athletic coaching career:

> I was sort of coming to the end of my playing career. I took options to be able to, you know, accelerate my coaching experience rather than maybe staying in the game [as an athlete] for another season or two… when I left (current Premiership Rugby Club 2) I joined (current Championship Rugby Club 1) and I insisted to try to get a coaching role within a school so that I could get my hours of delivery up. (Corey)

Whilst continuing to compete as an athlete, Corey had a clear intention to actively acquire the coaching experiences and the coaching knowledge which came from such direct experiential learning opportunities (Barker-Ruchti et al., 2014; Erickson et al., 2008; Gilbert & Trudel, 2005). This decision contrasted with those made by passive coaches, such as Ethan. After having recently retired from a competitive athletic career (see Table 1), Ethan explained

how his focus had been centred on extending his athletic career for as long as possible over preparing for a post-athletic coaching career:

> So, you know, I've gone down that route of, you know, wean myself off it [playing] and play for as long as I could, and then obviously started my coaching badges this year. I mean I should have done them years ago while I was still playing, but you know, when you're a footballer like, you just think the world revolves around you playing football. *You don't think about the coaching aspect* but as you get older, you know, you think well perhaps I could do that. And now it's apparent that now my body has packed up playing wise that [coaching] is something that I quite fancy having a go at. (Ethan, emphasis added)

Passive coaches met two criteria: 1) had not practised in any formalised coaching roles in addition to their first imposed introductory coaching roles (see top pathway in Figure 1); and 2) had not attained any additional coaching qualifications through *their own initiative*. We emphasise the centrality of "their own initiative" because both active and passive coaches had attained at least a level one coach certification whilst contracted to their club's as youth athletes. As we highlighted in the previous section, this was part of their clubs' adherence to NGB and player union policies which encourage clubs to up-skill and educate youth athletes.

At the point of interview, many of the coaches viewed attendance and the attainment of formal coach accreditation as the main barrier or "stepping-stone" (Christensen, 2013, p. 108) to negotiate for a transition into a post-athletic coaching career. With the benefit of hindsight, Sebastian explained how he continues to advise current competitive-athletes on the advantages for attaining their formal coaching qualifications during their athletic careers:

> …my friends now who are still playing… I tell them all the time, do them [coaching qualifications] when you are playing. You know you've got so much time on your hands, don't leave it until you've finished playing to think well I'm going to do my coaching badges now, because every job in youth football now you need to have your badges. (Sebastian)

Similarly, Chris was one who regretted not obtaining his level three coaching qualification whilst he was a competitive-athlete. When reflecting on this, Chris explained:

519 > What a plonker! Why didn’t I do my badges earlier? Because I could have
520 > done... I could have done that ten years ago and then I could have done my level
521 > three and I wouldn’t have to go through all this rigmarole that we are having to
522 > go through now... So that’s really frustrating, but, but I never, I never thought
523 > I’d enjoy it, and I didn’t enjoy it, coaching kids anyway [within club community
524 > departments]… (Chris)
525

526 Passive coaches, like Sebastian and Chris evidently regretted not being pro-active in
527 regards to attaining coach accreditation during their competitive-athletic careers. As Chris’
528 statement highlights, many of the participants deemed formal coach accreditation structures as
529 an inconvenience to negotiate rather than viewing them as opportunities to up-skill themselves
530 for a future coaching career (Watts & Cushion, 2017). For the passive coaches who had attained
531 lower level coaching qualifications whilst they were athletes, they did not judge these to be of
532 any value. For example, Magnus explained how this early experience had little effect on his
533 coaching development:

534 > …when I was in my scholarship [youth contract] I did my level two coaching
535 > badge but I never really took much notice of it. It was just one of those things
536 > that got in the way of playing football and stopped me going out and training
537 > and that. I genuinely never thought that, I just thought, I think I thought that I’d
538 > be playing football forever. My career was football, I’d maybe make enough
539 > money not to have another job or I’d go straight into being a manager, something
540 > like that. (Magnus)
541

542 Hence, although Magnus had attained a coaching qualification during his competitive-
543 athletic career, he had not sought this through his own initiative and he had not sought any
544 additional formalised coaching roles until after he had retired as an athlete. Similarly, Chris
545 and Sebastian respectively explained how they had not intentionally sought a post-athletic
546 coaching career:

547 > It wasn’t like when I was still playing and you know readying myself for
548 > retirement to go straight into coaching. It was because literally, right, I’ve
549 > retired, I’m going to go working. I start working and then its, right, do you want
550 > to coach? I’m like, not really, I’ll give it a go and finding actually that I quite
551 > like it, I think I’m quite good at it. (Chris)
552

> In my mind I wanted to take that step from retiring into it [coaching] but you know I bit the bullet and went into it as academy manager at (current Non-League Football Club 1) at twenty nine, thirty years old; had a season there which was extremely difficult… In the whole master plan of it all you probably sit down at twenty five and think well I’m going to play for another ten years; at thirty five I get to a certain age [and] that’s when I’ll call it a day [from playing] and go into coaching but it just didn’t happen like that for me. (Sebastian)

To further emphasise how Sebastian was categorised as a passive coach, when he was asked whether he actively prepared for a post-athletic coaching career during his time as an elite athlete, he recalled the following anecdote:

> Do you know what it’s one of my regrets. My mate who I played with at (current League One Football Club 1), one day I went round [to his home] and he had a folder. I said what’s that? He said oh it’s all sessions that I’ve done through different people, coaches that I’ve enjoyed so I’ve written them down. And I remember at the time thinking oh how sad is that you know, what is he doing that for? Now looking back I wish I had because I’m doing a lot of the stuff off memory. (Sebastian)

Passive coaches did not conduct any forward thinking and preparation exercises for a post-athletic coaching career, irrespective of whether formal coaching qualifications had been attained. This suggests that there was a lack of deep, meaningful reflection and critical analysis towards developing their coaching knowledge and skills having been performed. On this basis, when passive coaches like Sebastian attained their initial post-athletic coaching roles, they seemed to be more reliant upon replicating their previous coaches’ dispositions and coaching practices (Jones, Armour & Potrac, 2003).

The implications of mimicking previous coaches not only suggests a lack of critical reflection being undertaken, but also a lack of coaches’ self-awareness regarding their own understanding for why they behave and coach in the ways they do. As was the case for Sebastian, when this does happen coaching knowledge and practices are socially reproduced after their uncritical adoption (Denison, Mills & Konoval, 2017). This subconscious embodiment of coaching dogma has been argued to create a homogenous coaching workforce

on account that it restricts the advancement of coaching knowledge and skills (Blackett et al., 2018; Mills & Denison, 2018). Indeed, when analysing the practices and development pathways of serial winning coaches, Lara-Bercial and Mallett (2016) reported that these coaches emphasised the foundations for their success were based on the necessity to continually self-reflect and thus have heightened levels of self-awareness.

To assist coaches becoming more reflective, formalised high-performance coach education programmes across a number of international contexts have been found to firmly embed a wide range of opportunities for coaches to be critically reflective within their courses so that they become more self-aware (Callary, Culver, Werthner & Bales, 2014; Ferrar et al., 2018). Although the coach education literature has universally advocated coaches to be reflective, it is a skill which coaches require time and assistance to refine (Gilbert & Trudel, 2005). Yet, even when coaches are given guidance on how to reflect and what to reflect on, no matter what context they operate within, they do not always perform this to the desired extent (Cushion, 2016). The lack of reflection was identified by Watts and Cushion’s (2017) sample of eight high-performance coaches to be a limitation of the fast-tracking transition as this pathway did not afford coaches to “learn their trade” by “starting at the bottom” and undertake a sufficient coaching apprenticeship (p. 91). Nevertheless, even though many passive coaches in the present study did state that although they may have been fast-tracked into their first post-athletic high-performance coaching role, they still regarded themselves to be very much learning their trade and therefore inferred to conducting some level of reflection. Kyle surmised this by stating how he perceived his first post-athletic coaching role to be a learning environment: “I’m at the bottom of the ladder now, I see it as a bit of an internship”.

To further emphasise the identification of passive coach developmental pathways, Kyle’s explanation of how he was appointed to his current youth academy position is revealing. Kyle had been categorised as a passive coach on the basis that he had not accumulated any

formal coaching qualifications in addition to those he was mandated to attend as part of his own youth playing contract. Moreover, Kyle was very clear in describing how he had planned to take up a post-athletic career external to sport. Irrespective of this, Kyle described how an extended injury resulted in him accumulating additional coaching experiences within his club's youth academy which accordingly led onto his appointment by the same club as their under 16 lead coach:

> Well I retired in the summer through injury, so May time, and (current Championship Football Club 1) have *offered*, well they *offered* me a coaching role, because my [playing] contract was expired with them… I never really, like probably most footballers thought about, you know, well *I didn't really see myself going into coaching***.** And then through the injury at (current Championship Football Club 1) they've really sort of *supported me and pushed me* to get involved with the coaching, particularly (name 1 – Academy Director) who is an ex-player as well, he's in charge of the academy… And at the current time I'm the manager of the under sixteens at the academy full-time and so it's just worked out quite well for me at the minute…Like I said *I've never sort of pushed myself to go into that area* [coaching], I've never had any sort of aims and you know I've *fallen into it* a little bit at the minute so I'm going to take it as far as I can… I sort of made my mind up that I was going to move away from football and go into the estate agents side because I set that up in 2007 you know with the idea of it being something to go into after football. And that's where my plans were, to go into that and work in there because I've done little bits and bobs throughout my career and being involved a little bit. But then this opportunity came up and you know I really enjoyed the coaching. (Kyle, emphasis added)

The passive coaches noted how their pathways into either their first formalised post-athletic coaching roles were primarily instigated by "significant others" who worked within the club to which they were contracted. As Kyle highlighted above, his own career transition into post-athletic coaching was with the same club for whom he had competed. As with other participants, Kyle claimed he was "offered" the position without having to negotiate any formalised recruitment processes. This career pathway reflected many of the other coaches. It is this theme of both active and passive coaches being internally promoted by their clubs which the next section considers.

The “offer” of a coaching role

A consistent theme contributing to the elite athlete to high-performance coach pathway for both active and passive coaches was the existing connections between the study participants and their clubs. At the time of the interviews, 11 out of the 13 participants had been directly appointed into a coaching role by the same club they had represented either *first* (n = 6) or *last* (n = 5) in their athletic careers. Similar results have been reported by Watts and Cushion (2017) who identified in their sample of eight high-performance football coaches that five of them were coaching at clubs they had previously represented as players. The two exceptions to this particular pathway within the present study were Chris and Magnus who respectively moved into adult semi-professional and youth-based coaching roles at clubs they had not previously played for as athletes.

The participants did recognise the support they received from senior board members, coaching staff and academy directors, who had facilitated access to their first formalised or post-athletic coaching roles. At the same time, none of our participants stated that such actions represented either an explicit or implicit club strategy, and none could provide reasons for why they had been required to coach within the youth academies or community departments of their clubs, other than they were obliged to do so as part of their contractual arrangements as elite athletes. Both categories of coaches struggled to fully define or explain why they had been selected and ultimately appointed in these coaching roles beyond vague statements such as “the opportunity arose” (Barry); “a coaching job just fell into my lap,” (Chris) or; “I’ve just fallen into it” (Corey). This fits with previous research (Blackett et al., 2017, 2018) which suggest club directors and/or significant others profiled potential coaches on an intuitive level in ways which sought to reproduce their own playing and coaching ethos by selecting coaches with the “right” outlook. Existing athletes were considered a likely source of such individuals. For

example, both Tristan and Oscar attained their first formalised coaching roles at their first professional club whereby a significant other with whom they had an existing relationship was involved in their selection. They respectively explained the recruitment processes for their appointments:

> I started here as an eight year old and didn't leave until I was twenty four so it's sort of been my club really. I live locally and originally when I came back the academy manager at the time, a guy called (name 1), he was assistant manager at (current non-league Football Club 1) the team I was playing for. He left (current non-league Football Club 1) to become sort of assistant academy manager at [current Championship Football Club 1]. He was looking for coaches to come in and join the scheme and obviously my name cropped up and he asked me to come in. So that's when it started my coaching and things started from. (Tristan)

> About two months ago I had a phone call from an ex-colleague of mine who I played with at (current Championship Football Club 1), he's ended up going back to (current Championship Football Club 1) as a coach within the academy and he invited me in for a sort of briefing. And we ended up having a conversation and I started coaching there about a month ago, four days a week in the evenings coaching the under sixteens at the academy level, which is, it's nice to go back. Obviously I started at (current Championship Football Club 1) and it's nice to be going back there. And so many faces that I know from playing with and playing against over my career. And it's like, I mean football is such a small community you know, you're always crossing paths with each other in your career and it's sort of nice that I've ended up at (current Championship Football Club 1) with them *[sic]* people… (Oscar)

Both Tristan and Oscar inferred that the appointment of their first formalised coaching roles were facilitated by existing relationships (Purdy & Potrac, 2016; Rynne et al., 2006, 2010) and the institutionalised social capital (Rynne, 2014; Watts & Cushion, 2017) they had acquired and sustained throughout their competitive athletic careers (Bourdieu, 1986). In Oscar's case he was recruited by an ex-team mate employed by his first club which made his transition into coaching more fluent as he found his first formalised coaching role to be:

> Quite enjoyable. I think what's made it easy is because I started out at this club, *I know* this club and *I know* the academy director, *I know* a lot of the coaches from playing with them because I started out at (current Championship Football Club 1)… (Oscar, emphasis added)

Comparable views were reflected in Roger's explanation for why he had returned to take his first post-athletic coaching role at his first club as an athlete:

> …I'm going back to a team called (current semi-professional rugby football club 1). They are a team I played for when I was a kid and I stayed there until I was twenty four so *I know* quite a few people down there and I'm intending on going back down there next season because I need to do my level three [coaching qualification] and I think it's a good place to go and work. (Roger, emphasis added)

Hence, the participants' views suggest prior socialisation and enculturation into a clubs' specific culture was important when transitioning into coaching roles (Lemyre et al., 2007). A reason why participants either returned to their first club or remained in their last club to fulfil their first formalised or post-athletic coaching roles was based on a perceived familiarity with the club culture. Roger explained that he deemed his first club to be: "a big family club, so I like that because I think that's where I want to incorporate my playing philosophy." Thus, familiarity was perceived by the participants to bring added confidence for practicing as a coach, not only in terms of familiarity with individuals but for the more ephemeral features of the social norms, subcultures, coaching and playing philosophies pertaining to that particular club (Blackett et al., 2017, 2018).

Moreover, because none of the participants had navigated a formalised application or interview process, it seemed that the club's management deemed familiarity of the participants to be an important feature and the base to offer a post-athletic coaching position on. Even as a passive coach who did not harbour any ambitions to become a coach upon retirement, Chris explained how he had been headhunted by a club director to take up a head coach position and which meant he felt to have been in:

> …quite a fortunate position that I've been in, I did not really actively look for anything [coaching position]. Not really. I threw out a few feelers and all of a sudden you know I ended up as a head coach somewhere. (Chris)

Existing social networks and relationships based on social capital were therefore important in facilitating access to participants’ first introductory or formalised coaching roles (Rynne, 2014). Such findings cohere with those of other empirical studies that have sought to analyse the continued under-representation of ethnic minority football coaches within Western European high-performance domains (Bradbury, van Sterkenburg & Mignon, 2016). In doing so, a key feature for the marginalisation of this population was a perceived lack of meritocracy for high-performance coaching appointments because club directors and owners preferred to target individuals already known to them, and who thus possess greater levels of institutionalised social capital (i.e., elite athletes). Indeed, our participants certainly recognised the value their social capital had for attaining a post-athletic coaching role. Charles explained how his social capital and the use of his personal agent helped facilitate his opportunity to gain his post-athletic coaching role with a Premiership rugby union club without the need to be formally interviewed:

> Luckily, my agent who is the agent of (name of Director of Rugby for Premiership rugby union club 1) at (Premiership rugby union club 1), he asked if (name of Director of Rugby for Premiership rugby union club 1) would be interested in taking me on in some capacity. He said that he would be very interested. So he *offered* me a coaching role at (Premiership rugby union club 1). (Charles, emphasis added)

Bradbury and colleagues (2016) assert how senior club directors who circumvent formal recruitment by purposefully targeting “preferred” candidates, socially reproduce prejudicial practices of marginalising ethnic minority coaches within football (p. 14). The results from our study can suggest that these headhunting recruitment exercises are still being implemented within the context of men’s high-performance English football but also within men’s high-performance English rugby union.

Limitations

The effectiveness of interview transcript member checking as a means to achieve rigor and validate data within qualitative research studies has recently been debated (Thomas, 2017). Criticisms have argued it to be ineffective because of practical issues which result in participants not fully reviewing transcripts when asked (Smith & McGannon, 2017). Compounding this is that in some cases participants completed member checks many days or even months after the interviews were conducted, meaning that their thoughts and opinions of the interview subject matter could have potentially changed. In the circumstances when participants do not agree with their original thoughts, Smith and McGannon (2017) have claimed that participants may not always amend these inaccuracies because of “political leanings and personal interests” (p. 7).

Without being able to guarantee that all participants did complete the member checking process, we are confident that the transcripts were at least checked and agreed by participants. After each interview we sustained contact with all participants to confirm another interview as part of a broader longitudinal study designed to further track their coach development. During this dialogue, we expressed the importance for each participant to complete member checks and communicate the accuracy of these as this would affect the framing of the future interviews. Needless to say, given that we conducted data collection prior to the publication of the recent literature which has criticised member checking (e.g., Smith & McGannon, 2017; Thomas, 2017), we recognise that alternative methods such as member reflections can generate greater levels of enriched understanding of the data whilst addressing trustworthiness.

We also recognise that our sample size of 13 participants can be judged as being small for a study of this nature. Five more willing participants’ involvement was declined because they did not meet the highly defined theoretical sampling criteria. By researching the pathways of such a substantive population involved in high-performance sport, we encountered a number

of difficulties in trying to recruit participants from what can be considered as highly insular and secretive fields. As researchers who have not been involved in the fields of elite football and rugby union, we realised that as “outsiders” we possessed a lack of social, cultural and symbolic capital that are valued in these fields. This we felt contributed to our inability to recruit more participants as a considerable number of approached candidates rejected our study invitation.

Researchers who have analysed high-performance sport have managed to recruit greater participant numbers by capitalising on either their own previous competitive athletic experiences (e.g., Kelly & Harris, 2010), or their roles as educators delivering on high-performance coach education programmes (e.g., Morrow & Howieson, 2014, 2018). To reduce the high rejection rates in future, we propose that researchers without these forms of capital develop further networks with key gatekeepers to improve accessibility (Purdy, 2014). Given these limitations, we act with caution when concluding upon our results in respect of not generalising the findings from these two substantive fields across other contexts not yet researched.

Conclusion

The present study sought to investigate how a sample of 13 fast-tracked male coaches in football and rugby union experienced the transition into post-athletic high-performance coaching roles. The study provides greater insight into the multiple routes taken by elite athletes into high-performance coaching roles as we identified two groups of coaches: first, “active” coaches, who had taken the initiative to actively seek training and employment in a coaching career; and second, “passive” coaches, who had tended to become coaches in a relatively

unintentional way as opportunities arose (or were offered to them). This finding corroborates to Christensen’s (2013) aforementioned claim by suggesting that the career pathway between elite athlete and high-performance coach is not as one-dimensional as has previously been presented (cf., Erickson et al., 2007). Indeed, on the basis of our results, we propose that the coaching pathways for active coaches are not entirely representative of a fast-track trajectory. Instead, they are more akin to what Rynne (2014) has described as “traditional” coach pathways (e.g., those usually assigned to coaches without a competitive-athletic career). It is only the passive coaches’ pathways which reflects what has been considered as a fast-track career trajectory.

In light of defining two categories of coach, we also suggest that the previously inferred notion presented by Blackett and colleagues (2017) of elite athletes being passive in terms of their coach development is questionable. Yet, whilst recognising the importance of not generalising our findings across other contexts, by identifying the category of active coaches, we nevertheless balance this statement by also questioning the accuracy of previous assertions presented by Sherwin et al. (2017) and others (Erickson et al., 2008; Mesquita et al, 2014) that coach development “solely” originates “from self-directed learning and practical coaching experience” (p. 7). For the six participants in the present study who were categorised as active coaches, “self-initiation” of a career trajectory towards coaching was apparent as they actively sought to negotiate opportunities to accumulate more direct coaching experiences (Barker-Ruchti et al., 2014). Such coaches did so in order to acquire more coaching knowledge and skills to prepare them for a post-athletic high-performance coaching career. Active coaches also occupied coaching roles during their competitive-athletic careers and had attained entry level coach accreditation at this time. Once again, this indicates that what has previously been considered a fast-tracking pathway into coaching is not entirely accurate. Instead, this particular pathway seems to represent a lengthy process of a coaching apprenticeship and one

838 which passive coaches had not undertaken. It is here whereby we identified rugby union
839 participants to have occupied multiple coaching roles and experienced a broader range of
840 coaching environments due to the financial pressures they encountered and which heightened
841 their need to gain more paid coaching roles. This is compared to the majority of the football
842 participants who had accumulated voluntary experiences within their respective club’s youth
843 academies. This finding, therefore, extends our understanding of athletes’ coach learning
844 journeys during their competitive athletic careers. Future research in this area would benefit
845 from continued analysis of the impact a passive or active career pathway has on the
846 development of coaching knowledge and skills, and whether this impacts the ability of these
847 respective categories of coaches to be effective in their roles.

848 Nonetheless, the perceived value of a competitive-athletic career not only aided coach
849 development but importantly socialised individuals to their club’s cultures. Through this
850 process, the value of participants accumulating institutionalised social capital through
851 developing and sustaining social networks with “significant others” who facilitated the
852 recruitment and appointment processes was evident. Indeed, the importance of Bourdieu’s
853 social capital enabled participants to attain their first formalised or post-athletic coaching roles
854 and theoretically informs our conceptualisation of the high-performance coach pathway for
855 such a substantive population (Christensen, 2013; Rynne, 2014).

856 Interestingly, none of the participants had to negotiate any formalised recruitment
857 processes for these roles. In light of this particular finding, and by recognising that all of our
858 sample were of White ethnicity, we support the recommendations proposed by Bradbury and
859 colleagues (2016) that greater levels of governance need to be implemented in order for clubs
860 to implement equitable and transparent recruitment processes for appointing high-performance
861 coaches. Having a bespoke version of the US National (American) Football League’s Rooney

Rule[3] may be a potential mechanism to promote greater diversity for the coaching workforce across the two English sports. Further, by combining the present study’s findings with those of Blackett et al. (2017), the preference of senior club directors to internally promote athletes into coaching roles would seem to be preferentially weighted towards elite athletes currently employed by the same clubs as their directors. This recruitment strategy can be judged to impose discriminatory practices on to populations who are not able to obtain experience as a competitive athlete in elite men’s football or rugby union and can therefore be seen as a mechanism for the perpetuation of particularly disabled people and women coaches being underrepresented within the two sports (Norman, 2010).

As previously discussed, we also argue that by undertaking such a recruitment strategy can create a homogenous coaching workforce, one with a narrow developmental experience that is docile to the club’s culture and thus restricts the prospect of coaching practices to be extended in any innovative manner (Blackett et al., 2018). Organisational learning can suffer as the advancement of coaching knowledge and skills is restricted because normative assumptions about how to coach are acquired during a competitive-athletic career which are then uncritically adopted in their post-athletic high-performance coaching roles. Extending the line of analysis in the direction of organisational learning can be a prosperous venture when attempting to understand how elite athletes fast-tracked into high-performance coaching roles can become ever more effective along with the rest of the coaching workforce.

[3] The NFL introduced the Rooney Rule in 2002 as an affirmative action policy that requires professional NFL teams to shortlist and interview at least one candidate from a minority ethnic background when recruiting a new head coach.

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