The next logical step? An examination of elite athletes' transitions into post-athletic high-performance coaching roles

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Introduction

The trend of elite athletes retiring from competitive sport and moving into high-performance coaching roles is now widespread across many sports (Mielke, 2007). When reviewing the background credentials of most elite and successful coaches across men's or women's sport, experience as a former competitive athlete can quite easily be identified as a regular and seemingly important theme (Barker-Ruchti et al., 2014). Indeed, a high-performance coach not possessing a prior competitive-athletic career is rare (Kelly, 2008). Subsequently, for athletes considering a post-athletic career when approaching retirement, the historical and cultural acceptance of this pathway has resulted in the transition into a coaching position to be regarded as the 'next logical' step to follow. As will be highlighted later in this chapter, the career trajectory between athlete and coach has been regarded by the athletes themselves, fellow coaches and senior sports club directors to not only be a logical progression but one that is seamless. These perspectives have been mirrored by empirical research that has analysed coach development pathways. The coach pathway models that have been created have thus represented the transition between athlete and coach in what can be best described as a functionalist attitude on account that such transitions are unproblematic (Christensen, 2013).

Perceptions of a logical and seamless transition from athlete to coach have even been made by national governing bodies of sport (NGBs) and their respective coach education programmes. Increasingly many NGBs now offer bespoke coach education programmes for current and former high-performance athletes. Within the UK's elite sporting circles these are regularly referred to as 'senior pros' courses (see Blackett, Evans & Piggott, 2018; 2020). These courses accelerate the athlete to coach transition further through affording current and former senior professional athletes with concessions to register onto higher level coaching qualifications without having

acquired the lower level entry qualifications. Such accreditation is necessary for entry into a high-performance environment and has led to the perception that elite athletes are 'fast-tracked' into high-performance coaching roles (McMahon, Zehntner, McGannon & Lang, 2020); a luxury not afforded to aspirant high-performance coaches without a competitive-athletic tenure (Rynne, 2014).

Yet, counter to this assumption, both current affairs news stories and scholarly research have recently begun to report how the onset of retirement from an elite competitive-athletic career is a difficult transition for individuals to negotiate (Crocket, 2014; Jones & Denison, 2017). Although much of this research has approached the subject of athletes' retirement from a psychological discipline, recent studies have also now increasingly used a sociological lens to analyse this issue to explore notions of identity (re)creation. These studies have shed light on the power dynamics attached to the socio-cultural environment which athletes leaving sport are susceptible to. Theoretical appraisal of these lived-experiences has been beneficial for a range of stakeholders in helping to provide more support that contribute to improved experiences for such athletes when transitioning out of sport. Importantly, however, these studies have been significant in helping signpost athletes themselves to a range of cultural issues which they can become ever more attuned to when preparing for life after sport.

This chapter offers an account of a group of men's rugby union and football players based in the UK who negotiated a 'fast-tracked' career trajectory into a post-athletic high-performance coaching role. The chapter principally draws upon the work of Blackett's doctoral (2017) research whilst referring to published work emanating from this project (e.g. Blackett et al., 2017; 2018; 2019; 2020). The objective of Blackett and colleagues' analysis was to investigate the lived-experiences of the 'fast-tracked' coach pathway phenomenon through a social-cultural lens. Their research principally sought to identify the social processes which supported this pathway and how individuals as active social agents negotiated it. Before reporting on the results of their final study which followed a cohort of current and former elite athletes enrolled on a 'fast-tracked' coach accreditation course in football and rugby union, an overview of Blackett and colleagues' proceeding iterative works offers important contextual background information so that a more complete picture of the group's experiences can be provided.

Based on scant empirical analyses having been conducted on this phenomenon, a Straussian grounded theory methodology was selected for the project to follow. The outcome was to develop a middle-range theory that explained and theorised the career trajectory across the two sports (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). A proceeding theoretical sensitivity phase overviewed coach development studies and the sociological theories that had been utilised in them. Post-positivist theoretical frameworks devised by Erving Goffman, Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault were found to have been frequently drawn upon to theorise and conceptualise a range of social mechanisms affecting coach efficacy, behaviour and learning for coaches situated across participatory, development and performance contexts. Consequently, these frameworks and their associated concepts acted as 'sensitising concepts' (Bowen, 2006) that guided the framing of data collection and analysis. An abductive research methodology was therefore applied to the project, whereby an interplay through constant comparisons with existing theory and new theory grounded amongst the data could be made (Hallberg, 2006).

The theoretical sensitivity phase also critiqued the samples of extant literature in the area of coach learning and development. This identified how published work had largely conducted coach-centric designs for their studies by primarily having sampled coaches on several topics such as: their general athletic and coaching experiences, perceptions of coaching efficacy along with coaching knowledge acquisition. Analysis on the wider structural mechanisms associated to coaches' social environments was lacking. For example, key stakeholders like senior club directors and youth academy directors who indirectly and directly supported the fast-track pathway by acting as mentors, facilitators and ultimately employers of these coaches had not been analysed. Therein, senior boardroom directors and youth-performance academy directors of elite UK rugby union and football clubs were identified as original theoretical samples to address two overarching questions of: (a) why they supported the fast-track pathway by appointing former elite athletes with limited or no coaching experience as head coaches for their respective clubs, and (b) when identifying future coaching talent, how did they facilitate athletes' transitions into coaching within either their respective club's senior team and youth academy environments?

Coach talent identification: Key stakeholder perspectives

After receiving ethical approval from a University ethics board, a total of 20 White male directors participated in the research and were each interviewed on one occasion. Eight participants resided on the senior boardrooms and thus had central involvement in the selection and recruitment process of appointing head coaches for their club's senior teams (football=3 and rugby union=5). Twelve participants were central to the coach recruitment processes for their respective club's youth academy (football=7 and rugby union=5). Eight participants were themselves former professional athletes in their sports (football=3 and rugby union=5).

The results indicated how both sets of directors preferred to appoint former elite athletes as coaches of the senior team or as academy coaches in comparison to appointing external candidates without a competitive-athletic tenure because of two main points: (a) trust, and (b) respect. During a competitive-athletic career, athletes were subjectively profiled through coach talent identification processes and judged on how *trustworthy* they were to continue upholding each club's principles and values in any future coaching practice. Former elite athletes were judged to be better served in attaining athlete to coach *respect*. The ability to acquire respect was seen to enable a newly appointed coach to quickly, if not immediately, legitimise their positions of authority. For the senior club directors, coaches legitimising their authority and establishing athlete respect was foreseen to best achieve successful on-field team performances and results (Blackett et al., 2017). Academy directors' priority, however, was for coaches to help develop youth players over a longer period in order to progress them into the senior teams, rather than winning matches in the immediate future (Blackett et al., 2019).

For both senior and academy directors, there was a heightened level of cynicism and scepticism on the value NGB coach education courses had in developing their interpretations of necessary skills and knowledge for coach efficacy. This is because the priority of reproducing a club's culture and values through coaching practice was not seen to be something that was imparted within these contexts and was the central reason as to why they held less value in the minds of these key stakeholders. Such sentiments signified how the senior club directors therefore acted as cultural intermediaries and "arbiters of taste" in valorising skills and knowledge attached to their club's cultural fields (Blackett et al., 2017, p.755). Hence, Bourdieusian concepts

of capital, habitus, field and practice were applied to theorise these interpretations and illuminate the socio-cultural issues for such coaching appointments.

To promote the acquisition of field specific coaching skills and knowledge valued by clubs, current senior players were actively encouraged and mandated as part of their contractual obligations to fulfil coaching roles within their club's community programmes and youth academy settings. Experience in these environments offered athletes an initial coaching apprenticeship, an important setting that has been frequently reported to be part of elite coaches' pathways (Watts & Cushion, 2017). These apprenticeships acted as important socialisation processes as they were laden with cultural messages so prospective coaches would begin to embody the club's values to then be practiced in future coaching roles. The remit of the academy directors was to proactively facilitate these forms of learning through covert socialisation practices. Blackett et al. (2019, p. 91) defined the role of an Academy Directors as one which reprised a "cultural governor," as they discursively imparted coaching knowledge aligned to the club's values and culture onto novice coaches.

Theorisation of the social processes enacted by Academy Directors in this instance aligned more to Foucauldian disciplinary concepts of control, surveillance, normativity and docility. That is, academy directors acted as significant figures in disciplining athletes' developing coaching knowledge and practice to correspond with their respective academy's, and importantly, their club's overarching 'club culture.' The mechanisms enacted here by the Academy Directors promoted subjected knowledge by tightly controlling what coaching knowledge and practices these prospective coaches acquired. By recruiting coaches internally in this way was viewed to minimise any potentially disruption so the status-quo of the club's culture of coaching and playing philosophies would remain. The advantage of recruiting academy coaches who had an existing affiliation with the club through a playing career was therefore founded on perceived greater levels of conformity. This was because these individuals were judged to have already previously been socialised, and thus more willing to accept the club's culture toward coaching and playing styles that reflected each club's collective identity.

By ascertaining some of the broader structural aspects that contribute to supporting the 'fast-track' pathway in rugby union and football, Blackett et al (2017; 2019) identified some significant social processes and mechanisms which support athletes'

transitions out of sport and into post-athletic coaching roles. Yet after investigating the thoughts from key stakeholders, the criticism that these perceptions were overtly deterministic and reductive was applicable. Therefore, the requirement to ascertain whether those experiencing this pathway conformed or resisted these normative club values when negotiating the transition out of sport and into a coaching role was important.

Following athletes' transitions into post-athletic coaching roles

The project's following iteration purposefully sampled 15 current and former elite male athletes in the sports of rugby union (n=10) and football (n=5). Following ethical approval, each participant was interviewed on two separate occasions over a 12-month period (Blackett, 2017; Blackett et al., 2018, 2020). The objective here was to progressively follow the cohort who were: (a) still actively competing in sport but planning for a future high-performance coaching role, or (b) who had just retired from a competitive-athletic career and who were in the process of becoming high-performance coaches. All participants were recruited on account that they were at the time of invitation beginning their enrolment on a level three coach qualification in rugby union or football. Only current or former elite athletes were eligible to enrol onto these courses. Eligibility criteria onto these courses did not require the candidates to possess any prior entry level qualifications such as level one and two coach accreditations. Interviews were conducted at the start and end of the courses. Table 1 outlines the participants' characteristics in further detail.

TABLE 1. COMPETITIVE-ATHLETIC CAREER CHARACTERISTICS AND COACHING ROLES OF PARTICIPANTS AT EACH INTERVIEW (ADAPTED FROM BLACKETT, 2017)

Sport	Pseudonym	Highest athletic level (international/ domestic club representation)	Length of competitive athletic career (years)	Employment status at interview 1 (Part-time or Full-time)	Employment status at interview 2 (Part-time or Full-time)
Rugby	Sonny	Full International/ Premiership	12	Premiership athlete (FT)	PT voluntary school assistant coach
	Henry	U20 International/ Championship	4	Championship athlete (FT)	Championship athlete (PT) but also FT college team coach
	Casper	Full International/ Premiership	18	Adult semi-professional head coach (PT)	Adult semi-professional head coach (PT – same club as interview one)
	Rory	Full International/ Premiership	8	Adult semi-professional joint head coach (PT)	Unemployed/unattached coach
	Conrad	Full International/ Premiership	13	Professional coach (FT)	Professional coach (FT - same club as interview one)
	Calvin	Full International/ Premiership	8	Championship athlete (FT)	Premiership athlete (FT)
	Mark	Premiership	15	Adult semi-professional coach (PT)	Adult semi-professional coach (PT- same club as interview one)
	Greg	Championship	11	Semi-professional player-coach (PT)	Coach (FT – different club as interview one)
	Billy	Full International/ Premiership	15	Professional coach (FT)	Professional coach (PT - same club as interview one)
	Connall	Premiership	14	Director of Rugby at semi-professional level (PT) and coach at Premiership club (PT)	Coach at Premiership club (PT - same club as interview one)

Football	Kieran	Premier League	16	Youth academy coach (FT)	Youth academy coach (FT - different club to interview one)
	Eamon	Championship	18	Youth academy coach (PT)	Youth academy coach (PT – same club as interview one)
	Tim	U20 International/ Premier League	14	Youth academy coach (FT)	Youth academy coach (FT - same club as interview one)
	Owen	U21 International/ Championship	18	Professional athlete & youth academy coach (PT)	Non-league adult assistant coach (FT - same club as interview one)
	Stuart	Full International/ Premier League	15	Under 21 &18 assistant coach at Premiership club	Premiership U21 head coach (FT - different club as interview one)

As table 1 indicates, Calvin was the only participant who remained as a full-time competitive athlete at the point of the second interview with all other participants having transitioned into a post-athletic coaching career, albeit with varying degrees of success.

Results

In contrast to previous coach pathway models, the present study identified multiple trajectories when transitioning into post-athletic coaching roles. Importantly, not all participants felt that they had successfully navigated entry into a high-performance coaching role either, but instead were still partway on this pathway. Some participants encountered what can be considered as fluent and seamless transitions, whereas others had faced difficulties that had somewhat disrupted their transitions in either acquiring or retaining a post-athletic coaching role. Although there were some similar themes across the sample that can contribute to the development of a middle-range theory, there were differences between sports but also within sports. Shared characteristics and themes for the transition are first reported. The discussion then culminates by being framed around the theme of identity (re)creation as this was a significant theme grounded in the data.

Active and passive coach pathways

During their competitive playing careers, all participants were encouraged to fulfil minor coaching roles either within their club's youth academy settings or community departments. These were informal, ad-hoc in nature and did not have any significant responsibilities attached to them (Blackett et al., 2018). These opportunities were created by the club hierarchy, serving to provide the athletes with an introduction to coaching whilst offering the hierarchy an opportunity to profile prospective coaching talent. Hence, these initial coaching roles were categorised as 'introductory coaching roles' and for some of the participants acted as a catalyst to pursue further, more formalised coaching roles.

From this point, two categories of coaching pathways were identified in the form of 'active' and 'passive' pathways (Blackett et al., 2018). Active pathways represented individuals who throughout their competitive-athletic careers had intentionally, and by their own accord, accumulated both entry level coaching qualifications and direct coaching experience to help them prepare for their retirement and transition into a coaching post. These coaching experiences were classified as 'first formalised

coaching roles.' They were intentional commitments alongside their athletic careers rather than a continuation of the ad-hoc forays working with academy teams or contractual obligations to work within the clubs' community programmes imposed by their club's key stakeholders (e.g. Senior and Academy Directors). Out of the ten rugby union participants interviewed, seven were classified as having undertaken an active pathway along with two out of the five football participants. Those classified as having undertaken a passive pathway had not of their own self-initiative sought additional coaching experiences nor any entry coaching qualifications. Consequently, only those coaches who were recorded to have followed a passive coach pathway were considered to have undertaken a 'fast-tracked' career trajectory like that as described by Rynne (2014). Figure one illustrates the two pathways.
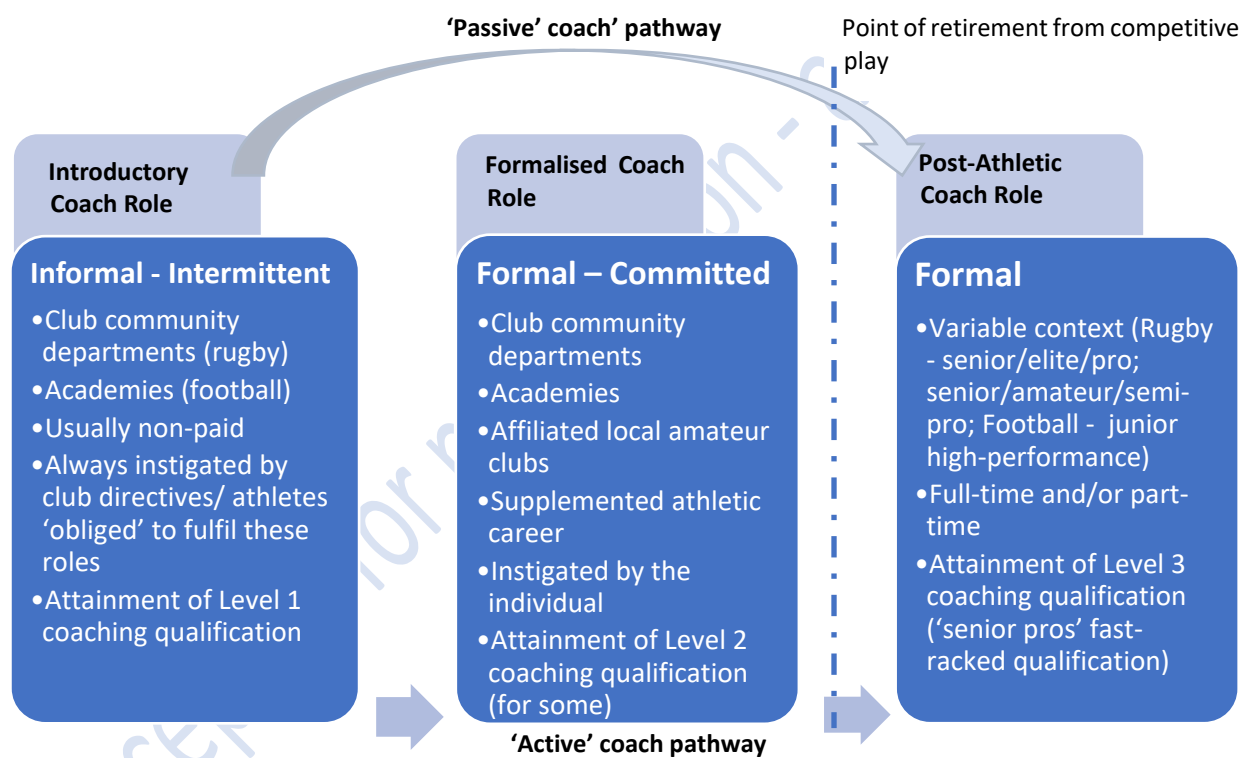

FIGURE 1. DISTINCTION BETWEEN 'ACTIVE' AND 'PASSIVE' COACH PATHWAYS (BLACKETT ET AL., 2018)

The reasons why more rugby union participants followed an active coach pathway was because of financial constraints compared to their footballing counterparts. The lower salaries as a rugby union player compared to those available in football meant that many of the rugby union participants felt they had to occupy dual careers where their coaching pay would supplement their athletic pay. Footballers on the other hand could afford to: (a) not have to supplement their playing salaries with extra coaching work,

nor did they necessarily need to proactively prepare for life after being an athlete, or (b) if they were interested in coaching then they could voluntarily work within their youth academies rather than seek out additional paid coaching roles (Blackett et al., 2018). Nevertheless, mirroring the results from the previous studies when interviewing the directors (Blackett et al., 2017; 2019), the locations of where the majority of participants' first formalised coaching roles were located whilst they were still playing, or when they had retired form a competitive-athletic career was an interesting theme. This highlighted the importance of establishing and maintaining social networks and is the theme which the following section outlines.

Club attachment of coaching destinations: Significant others offering roles

Apart from two rugby union participants (Henry and Casper), the remaining 13 participants had been offered a first formalised coaching role by the same club they had once represented as a professional athlete. None of the participants had to formally apply or be interviewed for these positions. It was key stakeholders labelled as 'significant others' who offered these roles (Blackett et al., 2018). For eight of the participants (football = 2 and rugby union = 6), these roles were located within the *last* club they were contracted to as a player. This trajectory was categorised as a 'continuation' pathway whereby the internal transition from athlete to coach was followed within their last club. For the other five participants (football = 3 and rugby union = 2), these roles were at the *first* club they had professionally been contracted to as a player. This was categorised as a 'boomerang' pathway, like a child returning to the parental home after graduating from university. Both pathways are illustrated in figure two. Two participants' pathways deviated, however, from these two categorisations. Henry began coaching a tertiary education team. This team was one Henry had previously represented as an athlete prior to obtaining a professional contract elsewhere. Thus, Henry's pathway shared similarities with the boomerang pathway, but unlike the others, Henry's first formalised coaching role was not attached to a professional club. Casper, therefore, was the anomaly, as he obtained a coaching position with a club which he had not previously represented, nor did he have any prior affiliation with.

Pathway 1 - Boomerang

| Club 1 Athlete | Club 2 Athlete | Club 3 Athlete | Club 1 Coach |

Pathway 2 - Continuation

| Club 1 Athlete | Club 2 Athlete | Club 3 Athlete | Club 3 Coach |

FIGURE *2*. CATEGORIES FOR DESTINATION OF FIRST FORMALISED COACHING ROLE

None of the participants reported any awareness that these clubs had performed any subjective modes of coaching talent identification processes and were therein strategically recruiting current and former athletes in coaching posts as a result. From an agential perspective, underlying reasons why the first and last clubs were preferable destinations to begin the transition into coaching were pragmatic ones, like being close to their home locations. Yet additional factors such as familiarity with the club environment concerning the institutionalised social capital regarding relationships with staff and players were important. Familiarity with the ephemeral features of coaching and playing philosophies associated to the overarching club cultures acted as more significant incentives though (Blackett et al. 2020). Prior socialisation in these settings meant that the participants had subconsciously embodied these external club values onto their own internal selves. As such, the alignment of these structural and agential values meant these clubs were deemed sanctuaries where the novice coaches could establish and then consolidate their developing coaching identities (Blackett, 2017). A preference was evident for returning to a previous club rather than going to a new environment to begin creating a new coaching identity. The following section conceptualises this theme further and reports the difficulties encountered by some of the participants in balancing these values with their strengthening coaching identities.

Creating a 'coach identity' from an 'athlete identity'

The successful transition into a post-athletic coaching role was principally based on the perception of (re)creating their identities from that of an 'athletic identity' into an 'coach identity.' Upon starting a new coaching role, either by returning to a previous club or continuing with an existing club, the need to quickly consolidate a coaching identity through defining a 'coaching philosophy' was seen to be of central importance (Blackett et al. 2020). This process, however, was not a fluent and seamless process for many participants. Having an existing affiliation with the club, its players and fellow coaches meant that separating themselves and (re)creating an identity away from their previous athletic identities brought tensions. When beginning a new post-athletic coaching role, the common perception held by the cohort was that coaches should possess more authority (Potrac, Jones & Armour, 2002). This subconsciously influenced their attitudes towards how they should act and behave as a coach differently to how they behaved as an athlete (Cushion & Jones, 2014). When attempting to present a new coach identity that exhibited more authority but was alternative to their athletic identities though, resulted in feelings of dishonesty by way of them perceiving to have been presenting a coaching 'front' or façade. Unlike other studies on coaching expertise which has highlighted the benefit of employing multiple identities in the act of coaching (e.g. Consterdine, Newton & Piggin, 2013), these novice coaches judged dishonesty to be the principal feature of coaches either quickly losing their athletes' respect or never gaining it.

Negotiating this problematic issue initiated deep and meaningful reflexive processes on how to overcome this in a mode corresponding to Foucault's (1997) askesis and ethic of self-care. Here the novice coaches reflected on their own values, but also began to reflect on how they had folded the external club values like coaching and playing philosophies. They had begun to turn subconscious knowledge into consciousness.

In conjunction with everyday experiences of practicing within their club environments, the 'senior pros' courses instigated this level of reflexivity. It is on this point where some of the participants began to either contest or conform to their club's cultures and ideologies towards coaching and playing styles. The experiences of those that did contest the club culture were negative and resulted in them losing their coaching position and then having to depart the club. At the time of the second interviews, Greg

(rugby union) along with Stewart and Kieran (football) had gained new coaching roles at alternative clubs to the those they had previously been with at the time of the first interview. Rory was unattached and continued to seek a club to coach (see table one). Irrespective of whether they had followed an active or passive coaching pathway, after being profiled and then supported into these post-athletic coaching roles, these four coaches by the point of the second interviews had explicitly rejected and contested their clubs' coaching ideologies towards coaching and playing philosophies. By undertaking these conscious actions meant that they had not become docile in accepting the overarching club ideologies as the previous iterations had suggested. It is here where Bourdieu's habitus development can be critiqued in accordance of its overtly reductive and deterministic nature. Rather, in these four instances, Foucault's concepts of askesis and ethic of self care offer a more relational conceptualisation of power by indicating the agential capabilities to employ their own reflexive strategies for creating their own 'coaching identity' (Blackett et al. 2020).

For the other 11 participants, there too was a conscious recognition that they complied to the club culture and its methods of playing and caching philosophies. This level of consciousness was not present at the first interview however, but these cultural tensions had been brought into consciousness and reflected upon 12 months later during the second interview which coincided with the culmination of their level three 'senior pros' course. The justification for why coaches complied was because they either agreed with the overarching philosophy, or they simply wanted to avoid jeopardising their career after recognising the micropolitical environment in which they practiced within. Many of those who had accepted their respective club cultures had come to regard their newly created coaching identity to be a fixed construct whereby they had already consolidated their perceptions, philosophy and identity towards coaching. Those that had contested the club cultures, however, were more likely to regard their coaching identity as a fluid entity: they considered the journey to coaching efficacy to be the destination, likely to change through further education, experience and reflection (Jacobs, Claringbould & Knoppers, 2016).

Practical implications

The project sought to understand the processes and lived-experiences of elite athletes supposedly being fast-tracked into high-performance coaching role's within men's rugby union and football. Importantly, the pathways undertaken by the cohort were not one dimensional as has been previously reported. Some of the cohort followed a fast-tracked career trajectory into a post-athletic coaching role. Others meanwhile had invested significant time and effort in accumulating both formalised coaching experiences and qualifications when actively preparing for a post-athletic coaching career (see figure 1). This pathway did not represent a fast-tracked route. Nonetheless, the limitations of this study are that there is no suggestion as to which pathway led to more coaching success. Recommendations for future research would benefit by employing further longitudinal research by continuing to follow such coaches over a greater duration of their careers to ascertain the outcomes of each pathway.

The project's findings have implications for both the individual athletes transitioning into post-athletic coaching roles along with the structural support mechanisms such as coach education systems and the coach talent identification processes. Firstly, for the individual athletes, the lessons learnt by the participants in this study signify that there were advantages and disadvantages for becoming consciously aware of the structural and cultural issues that covertly influenced and shaped their coach learning. By consciously reflecting on the club's cultures (i.e. their ideologies toward coaching and playing strategies), resulted in these four individuals losing their first post-athletic coaching jobs. The acquisition of this new knowledge, along with the understanding of how to critically appraise existing norms was therefore disadvantageous to a degree because their actions resulted in job losses. Interestingly though, these four participants claimed that these decisions were beneficial as they viewed this as having made them better coaches in the long term. In their eyes, questioning their current club's coaching dogma, then departing for a new club and experiencing different coaching and playing styles made them more rounded coaches. These coaches all had a fluid attitude towards the development of their coaching identities. In so doing, they seemed to be open and eager to avoid reproducing and recycling existing coaching and playing styles. This itself can be a positive as it prevents toxic coaching practices from being recycled (McMahon et al., 2020) or for outdated styles of play to be unquestionably socially reproduced (Denison, Mills & Konoval, 2017).

From a coach development perspective, if coaching knowledge and practices are to continually advance, then reliance of former athletes transitioning into high-performance coaching roles, fast-tracked or not, is dependent upon not uncritically reproducing the doctrine of club's coaching cultures and ideologies. Should the career transition between elite athlete and high-performance coach persist, however, then the benefits of current elite athletes acquiring experiences from other cultural fields (i.e. other clubs and sports) to broaden their horizons and assist their abilities to critique the status-quo of their current club's ideologies is recommended. Even if this helps strengthen their acceptance of their club's approaches to coaching and playing, this can help these athletes more quickly consolidate their emerging coaching identities. Finally, recommendations can be made about the potential difficulties of transitioning into a coaching role with a club that individuals had previously represented, either through a boomerang or continuation pathway. Balancing tensions between maintaining relationships with friends who continue to play, but who are now being coached by those beginning their coaching careers was problematic. It was a strain exhibiting and sustaining authority whilst retaining these relationships, as was negotiating new relationships with fellow coaches and line managers such as Academy and/or Senior Directors.

The research's findings can also inform the structural support mechanisms such as how coach education and learning processes are designed to support these novice coaches along with the key stakeholders categorised as significant others such as senior and academy directors. For example, when most research on coach development and learning report coaches to not value formal coach education courses (e.g. Piggott, 2012; *inter alia*), after initially holding some resentment towards the 'senior pros' course at the beginning, the study's participants did come to value them by the end. Therefore, if it is important for elite athletes to extend their coaching experiences and learning away from their present clubs, then in some instances NGB coach education courses are the only avenue for offering this. By shortening these courses and accelerating current and former elite athletes through these courses therein seems counter intuitive if further critical appreciation of coaching is to be conducted. In so doing, then hopefully the consolidation of a coaching identity can be made, one that is continually developing rather than being a fixed entity.

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