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Devaney, DJ, Nesti, MS, Ronkainen, NJ, Littlewood, MA and Richardson, DJ

Athlete Lifestyle Support of Elite Youth Cricketers: An Ethnography of Player Concerns Within a National Talent Development Program

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Abstract

The 15-month ethnography reported here investigated the culturally and contextually relevant lifestyle concerns for which national level youth cricketers seek support, and the personal meanings ascribed to them. Players discussed lifestyle challenges and support, with five themes emerging: (1) players appreciating lifestyle support, (2) adapting to the new environment, (3) managing competing demands, (4) educational choices and professional contracts, (5) identity negotiation in critical moments. The challenges impacted players' sense of self, wellbeing and ultimately performance. The findings suggest lifestyle practitioners should support players through counselling approaches, strong player relationships and environment immersion with a view to impacting performance.

Keywords: career transitions, ethnography, identity, sport psychology, lifestyle

23 **Athlete lifestyle support of elite youth cricketers: An ethnography of player concerns**
24 **within a national talent development programme**

25 Research and literature within the area of career development and transitions has
26 evolved considerably since early research investigating athlete retirement (see Mihovilovic,
27 1968; Ogilvie, 1987; Baillie & Danish, 1992; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993). This evolution has
28 provided a view of career development and transitions that now adopts a lifespan perspective
29 encouraging a focus on within career transitions as well as retirement, a more holistic
30 approach to athlete career development and transitions (Wyllemann, Alferman, & Lavallee.
31 2004; Wyllemann, Reints, & De Knopp, 2013) and increased interest in dual career
32 experiences of athletes' combining an athletic career and academic study (e.g. Ryba,
33 Stambulova, Ronkainen, Bundgaard, & Selänne, 2015).

34 With regard to youth athletes, there has been increased attention to dual career
35 experiences, highlighting the challenges of finding an optimal balance between the demands
36 of the athlete and student roles (e.g. McKenna & Dunstan-Lewis, 2004; Stambulova,
37 Engstrom, Frank, & Linner, 2015) and identifying the costs and benefits of combining study
38 and sport during adolescence (e.g. Jonker, Elferink-Gemser, & Visscher, 2009; Wyllemann,
39 Reints, & Wanter, 2007; Aquilina, 2013). Research has also highlighted how the challenges
40 of pursuing a dual career during development stages overlap with matters such as relationship
41 challenges, life skill development, social life, identity (Tekavc, Wylleman, & Erpic, 2015),
42 and how pursuing a dual career connects to an athlete's sense of identity, purpose and
43 wellbeing (O'Neill, Allen, & Calder, 2013). Further, Christensen and Sorensen (2009)
44 highlighted the role of sport specific cultural factors, finding that although young footballers
45 in their study worked hard to meet both their study and footballing demands, the underlying
46 assumption within football culture emphasised the expectation that young footballers would
47 show complete dedication to football, over and above other concerns, such as their education.

48 This often resulted in the early foreclosure of identity and a rejection of further educational
49 development.

50 Aligned to these findings, there have been arguments for the delivery of holistic and
51 ecological applied practice within talent development environments (Henriksen, Stambulova,
52 & Roessler, 2010). There have also been arguments for the mutual benefits of supporting
53 performance and personal development simultaneously (Miller & Kerr, 2002; Gilbourne &
54 Richardson, 2006). This research has provided applied sport psychologists with a more
55 complete understanding of the different areas of athletes' whole lives and how transitions
56 within these can overlap and interact at key stages along their career journey.

57 A wide variety of approaches a practitioner may take to transition intervention have
58 been described, for example the Life Development Intervention (Danish, Petitpas, & Hale,
59 1992; 1993; 1995), and Stambulova's (2010) Five Step Career Planning Strategy. These
60 approaches have generally emphasised the development of goal setting skills, as well as
61 situating the present demands of an athlete between a past from which the athlete can learn
62 lessons, and a future towards which the athlete is motivated to progress. Alongside these
63 developments, athlete lifestyle programmes (sometimes referred to as career assistance or
64 athlete life-skill programmes) such as the Career Assistance Programme for Athletes (CAPA)
65 (Petitpas, Danish, McKelvain, & Murphy, 1992), the United States Olympic Education
66 Centre (USOEC) and the Australian Athlete Career and Education (ACE) programme, have
67 been developed to help alleviate athletes' anxieties regarding their future and prepare them
68 for retirement from their sport and the pursuit of a new career. In the UK today, national sport
69 institutes, for example, the England Institute of Sport (EIS) deliver the Performance Lifestyle
70 programme to Olympic sports, and some professional sports. Other professional sporting
71 bodies such as, the Welsh Rugby Union, have developed their own similarly aligned support
72 services. In cricket, the Personal Development and Welfare programme (PDW) is currently

73 delivered by practitioners working for the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) to the
74 England National teams, and a similarly aligned PDW programme delivered to professional
75 domestic county clubs by practitioners working for the Professional Cricketers Association
76 (PCA).

77 There has been limited academic literature which has explicitly focused on the nature
78 of support provided by lifestyle programmes. However, Stambulova and Ryba (2014)
79 acknowledged that there is great diversity in the "more than 60" programmes they have
80 identified worldwide (p.7). Yet, they suggest that most often it is the sport psychology
81 personnel who deliver these programmes with the primary focus on providing education,
82 guidance and skills with a view to helping athletes prepare for life after sport and to help
83 manage athletes' demands outside of their sport.

84 There have been various accounts of what lifestyle support should look like, yet there
85 has not been a description or analysis of what lifestyle practitioners actually do. The ECB's
86 Personal Development and Welfare Programme which is the context of the present inquiry, is
87 described in official documents as providing: "integrated, impartial support to players and the
88 team environment, to develop resilience in and out of cricket as a personalized service within
89 the three areas of wellbeing, lifestyle and personal development" (ECB, 2017; see also EIS,
90 2017). This suggests that this organisation promotes a more immersed, relational,
91 psychologically informed and performance oriented provision of support than is described in
92 the academic literature. Moreover, in this particular institution, lifestyle support is not within
93 the remit of sport psychologists, but a practitioner who might be an ex-athlete, or have a
94 degree in a non-sport or non-psychology related field. Despite the diversity that is likely to
95 exist also in other sport organisations, the most relevant guiding literature for lifestyle
96 programmes has been conducted from a sport psychology perspective. This has created a lack
97 of role clarity for both lifestyle practitioners and the sport psychology practitioners they work

98 alongside, and may have contributed to the portrayal of lifestyle support within the literature
99 as focusing on practical skill development as rather than some of the more relational elements
100 of the role.

101 Therefore, there is a need to better understand the actual practices of lifestyle
102 practitioners and the contextually and culturally specific concerns for which elite athletes
103 seek lifestyle practitioner support. Nurmi (2004) suggested that the adolescent years are the
104 most critical for the formation of identity, development of cognitive motivational strategies
105 and the social and organisational skills that may impact the educational choices and career
106 aspirations of individuals. This suggests adolescence would provide a valuable context for
107 such research. Due to a lack of previous research that uses methodology allowing for the
108 presentation of athletes' voices and capturing of their daily existence in specific contexts
109 (Ronkainen, 2014), it is also felt that a focus on the personal meanings athletes bring to these
110 lifestyle concerns is also necessary. Further, Stambulova and Ryba (2014) called for research
111 aligned to career development, transitions and assistance which was more socio-culturally
112 and contextually informed, as well as research which blend the applied and the theoretical.

113 Rather than focusing on a specific within-career transition, such as from youth to
114 senior sport, the present study seeks to understand the daily existence and the holistic lifestyle
115 concerns of youth cricketers embedded in a talent development environment. Using a
116 practitioner-researcher ethnographic approach within a national talent development
117 programme, our research was guided by two research objectives:

118 1. To understand the nature of contextually and culturally specific lifestyle concerns for
119 which elite youth cricketers seek support, and the personal meaning they ascribe to
120 them;

121 2. To gain an understanding of how athlete lifestyle support ought to be positioned
122 within this context and at this stage of young cricketers lives.

123 **Methodology**

124 **Theoretical positioning**

125 The current study used an ethnographic approach to data collection, with the aim of
126 understanding individuals' experiences' of lifestyle concerns within the broader context of a
127 national cricket talent development programme. The philosophical underpinning of the study
128 lies a in critical constructivist perspective (Richert, 2010). Critical constructivism maintains
129 that the reality in which people live is constructed by the efforts of people to understand and
130 make sense out of living. The distinction between social constructionism and critical
131 constructivism is that the latter maintains that personal mental activity makes an important
132 contribution to the reality that is constructed (Richert, 2010). In other words, both individual
133 and social processes contribute to the construction of reality. The current study aligns with
134 critical constructivism in trying to study how individuals make sense of their experiences and
135 lifestyle challenges within a specific context and culture. By maintaining that the individual
136 makes important contributions to the meaning-making process, this perspective allows for a
137 more traditional concept of self as located within the individual. This approach subscribes to
138 ontological realism (i.e. there is a world which is independent of our knowledge of it)
139 combined with epistemological constructivism (i.e. our knowledge remains subjective and
140 incomplete).

141 **Participants**

142 The talent development programme examined in this research consisted of two squads
143 of players between the age of 15 and 19 who had been selected as players with the highest
144 potential nationally within their respective skill areas. The participants in the study were

145 members of one of these squads. At the beginning of the research, there were 16 players in
146 the squad, 12 of whom were on their second year on the programme, and four were in their
147 first year. After 12 months, four players were deselected, and four new players joined the
148 programme. As such, members of the setting over the course of the research included 20
149 players selected from their First Class Counties (professional clubs playing national domestic
150 game who are awarded First Class status), and fourteen support staff including a head coach,
151 operations manager, six different skills coaches, two physiotherapists, two strength and
152 conditioning coaches, a performance analyst and a performance psychologist. Membership of
153 the programme involved attendance at residential domestic training camps, overseas
154 competitive and non-competitive tours and home competitive tours. The finer details of the
155 programme will be described later in the paper. Of the 20 players involved in this study, 16
156 were in full time secondary education throughout the period of data collection.

157 **The Researcher and Reflexivity**

158 It is often the mission of ethnographic research not to interfere with the environment
159 under study. The practitioner-researcher status simply did not allow for this. Indeed, I could
160 often be perceived as taking on the role of action-researcher, as data uncovered and
161 practitioner interventions became more and more interrelated over time. However, this was
162 deemed a symbiotic relationship as the insights derived from research improved player
163 support, and the improved relationships and trust aided the continued collection of data. Yet,
164 this increased the requirement for self-reflexivity throughout all stages of the research.
165 According to Day (2012), reflexivity concerns three interrelated issues. These are: 1) the
166 researcher underlying assumptions about knowledge production (epistemology), 2) issues of
167 power, researcher identity and positionality, and 3) reflexive techniques to produce good
168 quality, rigorous qualitative research. Schinke et al. (2012) further highlighted the importance
169 of self-reflexivity when fulfilling the role of both researcher and practitioner. Given the

170 practitioner-researcher approach in the present study, engagement with self-reflexivity is
171 particularly important. It is considered appropriate to discuss how my own background,
172 training and philosophical positioning may have contributed and shaped the research process.

173 I have completed a degree in Psychology, and a Master's degree in Sport Psychology.
174 Although I have a competitive background in both individual and team sports, I had no
175 involvement within the game and culture of cricket, either as a player or a practitioner prior
176 to entering the research setting. My experience as a sports performer provided me with an
177 understanding of the experiences and challenges involved with youth talent development.
178 However, I had no previous experience within cricket and entered the setting as a cultural
179 outsider. Although this created challenges when entering the setting, it also provided me with
180 a more critical perspective with regard to the cultural norms and daily practices for those
181 operating within the sport. My approach as a practitioner is particularly grounded in
182 humanistic and existential psychology where the individual's existence and the experiential
183 knowledge that they obtain in their pursuit of excellence are paramount with a particular
184 focus on meaning, responsibility and freedom (Ronkainen & Nesti, 2017) I did not aim to
185 begin the research process with a theoretical framework or set of research questions to
186 answer. However, I did bring a sensitivity and curiosity for what I would understand as
187 psycho-social and cultural challenges and lifestyle-based concerns. This will inevitably have
188 been influenced by a number of factors, most significantly my educational background and
189 philosophy of practice, and what Day (2012) referred to as the researchers theoretical
190 traditions and perspectives as well as methodological practices.

191 My philosophy of practice will have shaped my interactions with staff and players as a
192 practitioner and in doing so shape the nature of data which was co-created through these
193 interactions. I will also have interpreted the players experience and identified their lifestyle-
194 based challenges through this lens. This placed a high value on my practitioner reflection and

195 the role of the research team as critical friends (Smith & Sparkes, 2002) to challenge my
196 interpretations and some of the biases which inform them. Further, my educational
197 background in psychology and sport psychology means that I effectively performed the role
198 of lifestyle practitioner from a holistic sport psychology perspective. However, this is not the
199 only training route for lifestyle practitioners. Therefore my interpretation of what concerns
200 players faced may contrast with the interpretation of practitioners who possess an alternative
201 training background. Consistent with the paradigmatic positioning of the study, the findings
202 ought to be viewed as one insight into the lifestyle experiences of elite youth cricketers, from
203 the perspective of a practitioner-researcher with a specific philosophy of practice and
204 educational background. Finally, use of “I”, “me” or “my” will refer to the first author
205 throughout the remainder of the manuscript, whilst “we” will denote the research team
206 (Tedlock, 2000; Foley, 2002).

207 **Procedure**

208 I entered the setting as an ethnographic outsider (Ely, 1991), which can provide a
209 challenge in gaining entry. However, my role as PDW practitioner allowed for a seamless and
210 natural entry, establishment of trust and familiarisation with the participants. The dual-role of
211 researcher and practitioner was deemed to be symbiotic, given the requirement for strong
212 practitioner-player relationships, confidentiality and trust to succeed in both. However, it
213 placed considerable importance on my commitment to maintaining a diary of personal
214 reflections. Practitioner-researcher ethnography of this nature has occurred previously
215 (Faulkner & Sparkes, 1999; Peters, McAllister, & Rubinstein, 2001a). Similarly, Peters et al.
216 (2001a) reflected that the approach was to the benefit of their research in cancer care as for
217 them, simply hanging out and observing waiting rooms in a cancer clinic would be highly
218 challenging and awkward otherwise.

219 My role as a PDW practitioner involved the development, delivery and case
220 management of individual and group support for the squad. This included pro-active
221 academic support and group education as well as one-to-one support that were more player-
222 led and emergent in nature. Over a 15 month period, I attended eight residential training
223 camps, ranging from 3 to 10 days, a home competitive series, an overseas competitive series,
224 an overseas development camp and provided occasional support for players outside of the
225 programme activity. I was based at the main development headquarters consisting of practice
226 areas and residential accommodation, typically 5 days per week. This allowed for a uniquely
227 practitioner based approach to the research, while still drawing on ethnographic research
228 principles. For example, when not delivering support to players or coaches, the first author
229 was fully immersed within the environment, allowing for a more typical ethnographic
230 position of hanging out and observing events as they unfolded (Woodward, 2008).

231 **Data Collection**

232 Observations of the setting, daily practices within the programme and the sport more
233 broadly, and of the day-to-day lives of players, provided the backbone to the ethnographic
234 research process (Ely, 1991). These were supplemented by informal conversations with
235 players and staff and formal conversations occurring through my activity as a practitioner
236 within the setting. Notable moments and interactions were written down in a notepad in the
237 form of keyword entries (Krane & Baird, 2005) as soon as possible after they occurred, but
238 normally away from the scene. Observations and conversations were then captured fully in
239 the form of a research log (Krane & Baird, 2005), typically at the end of each day of
240 engagement and never more than 24 hours after the original observation (Emerson, Frets, &
241 Shaw, 1995). These entries were then supported by practitioner-researcher reflective diary
242 entries, during which I could attempt to make sense of key observations, conversations and
243 their implications (Krane & Baird, 2005). My reflections occurred regularly after periods of

244 time with the squad, and on a more ad-hoc basis. All data extracts presented are taken from
245 field notes, capturing the scenes and conversations that occurred. Although this meant
246 capturing data from memory, it was felt that audio recording dialogue would have
247 jeopardised the relationship development with participants and would have been at odds with
248 the practitioner role delivery.

249 Assuming a critical constructivist perspective to achieve the purpose of the research,
250 the focus of data collection was on how individuals experienced and made sense of their
251 lifestyle concerns, but also how this was shaped by the broader cultural and contextual factors
252 associated with membership of the programme, and the sport. Initially, my focus was quite
253 broad capturing what daily life looked like for players. As relationships developed and the
254 breadth of experiences became clearer, daily life began to provide the backdrop against which
255 more individually relevant concerns played out. In that sense, the observational lens narrowed
256 from the contextual and cultural, towards locating individual experience within these. The
257 research team acted as "critical friends" (Sparkes & Smith, 2002) throughout data collection
258 and analysis, challenging the first author to discuss the interpretations and methodological
259 concerns as they arose. For example, this included helping to position the data within
260 theoretical frameworks, appropriately challenging and/or focusing the first author's
261 observational lens, and negotiation of arising ethical dilemmas as a result of the practitioner-
262 researcher role.

263 **Data Analysis and Representation**

264 Data analysis was based on a qualitative description approach (Sandelowski, 2000). In
265 this sense, although data coding was systematically applied, the codes were generated from
266 the data themselves, with collection and analysis mutually shaping each other (Sandelowski,
267 2000). Thematic analysis was completed, in alignment with guidance provided by Braun and

268 Clarke (2006). This involved: (1) familiarisation through repeated reading whilst searching
269 for meaning and patterns amongst the data, (2) generating initial codes and organising data
270 into meaningful groups, (3) sorting different codes into potential themes and collating
271 extracts from the data into themed groups, (4) reviewing themes in line with Patton's (1990)
272 dual criteria of internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity, (5) defining and naming
273 themes before (6) using data extracts to produce the report. These steps allowed for the
274 organisation of themes within the three groups. These were: player concerns; programme
275 factors; and PDW support factors. Player concerns were the primary focus of the research and
276 therefore provided the themes for presentation within the manuscript. However, the broader
277 programme factors and PDW support factors played a secondary role in helping to position
278 the discussion of the themes presented in this paper within the broader context and culture.
279 The data analysis allowed for description and interpretation of player lifestyle concerns
280 within their specific context with an attempt to theorise patterns of description (Patton, 1990)
281 with regard to previous literature (Frith & Gleeson, 2004) and the researcher's contextual
282 awareness.

283 **Ethical considerations**

284 This study was approved by the University ethics committee and the programme
285 manager was identified as an appropriate gatekeeper to provide consent to overt research
286 access to the programme. This was facilitated by the researcher's entry to the setting as a new
287 practitioner within the staff team. All members of the setting were provided with a verbal
288 briefing of the practitioner-researcher's role, aims of the research, data collection procedures
289 and were offered assurances regarding anonymity and confidentiality. Players and staff were
290 also informed that they maintained the option to withdraw from participation at any time.
291 However, no participants opted out of research at any point throughout the study.

292 Ethics can be a complicated subject when it comes to conducting ethnographic
293 research, due to the unpredictable nature of the work (Goodwin, Pope, Mort, & Smith, 2003;
294 Ferdinand, Pearson, Rowe, & Worthington, 2007). There were a number of ethical dilemmas
295 to negotiate during the study. One concern was that despite the overt research stance, it was
296 felt that participants came to view me more as a practitioner than a researcher as trust and
297 rapport was developed over time. This could have resulted in participants sharing a level of
298 information not intended to be included in the research. However, I was open about my
299 research work and players frequently saw me carrying out research work within the setting.
300 They frequently asked me about the purpose and progress of the research I was doing with
301 them. Further, it is important to appreciate that when players disclosed concerns to me, such
302 as feeling homesick, struggling to meet expectations or not knowing what to do after
303 finishing secondary school, it became my responsibility to support them as a practitioner,
304 ensuring a mutual benefit and thereby reducing the power imbalance inherent in research
305 settings. In general, when working within the applied setting, I felt that the ethical practice as
306 a practitioner equated to good ethical practice as a researcher, for example, non-judgemental
307 support, a primary focus on player welfare and confidentiality. However, it was also
308 explained to participants that what was considered confidentiality in practice would be
309 considered anonymity in research.

310 **<u>Findings and discussion</u>**

311 What follows is the practitioner-researcher's tale of the "self" and the "other", whilst
312 trying not to let the "self" dominate and allow the "other", in this case the players collective
313 story of cultural and contextually relevant lifestyle concerns and the personal meaning
314 ascribed to them, to be presented. The first section offers a description of the environment
315 that the players experienced on the development programme before presenting the players'
316 experience of support and the lifestyle concerns they required support for. Pseudonyms are

317 used for participants throughout the discussion. The data extracts represent one individual's
318 experiences at a given time, however, the narrative attempts to recreate a holistic view of
319 experience which is representative of what any individual may experience in the programme
320 at a point in time.

321 **Entering the national development programme**

322 I met the staff team the night before the first day of a camp, referred to as profiling
323 and used as a means of gaining an understanding of the players' strengths and areas to work
324 on for the coming winter. At the pre-camp meeting, I was initially struck by the high number
325 of staff involved (14 people sitting around the table), their attention to detail and their
326 demanding standards. I attempted to control my emotions and wondered if players struggle to
327 control theirs during their first taste of the environment. However, I sensed that staff seemed
328 to buy in to the idea of supporting players on and off the pitch through their descriptions of
329 the players' home life, previous struggles and character. Over time, I often heard staff state
330 that they aimed to uphold 'unashamedly high standards' through 'high challenge and high
331 support' where players would learn to understand the demands of their aspirations as
332 potential international cricketers. What this meant in practice became clearer at the following
333 training camp. It was a 10-day, very intense training camp right at the end of the post-season
334 break. The goal was to provide a level of 'culture shock' regarding what was expected and
335 demanded, through exposure to levels of training and performance under pressure that
336 players would not have experienced before.

337 The content of days on camp included strength and conditioning sessions, various skill
338 development sessions, and classroom sessions normally with a performance psychology,
339 personal development or tactical theme. Player schedules also included academic study
340 sessions of up to 2 hours per day to compensate for the time missed at school. Players could
341 use their spare time to benefit from any specialist staff support if they wished. Everyone

342 would eat together, train together, study together and enjoy their limited downtime together
343 in what is an incredibly immersive experience, often including 6.30am alarm calls, and ten to
344 twelve hour days with performance and behaviour demands right on the edge of the players'
345 capabilities.

346 Players were held accountable for a high level of performance. Training would follow
347 a cyclical pattern of developing skills, training under pressure and being tested under pressure
348 in specific scenarios. From a behavioural point of view, coaches told me that they expected
349 players to hold a high level of professionalism, including time keeping, having the right kit at
350 the right time and taking responsibility for tidying the environment. Failure to meet
351 behavioural or performance demands could result in "consequences" such as a 5-minute
352 physical challenge for performance shortcomings. For committing a "behavioural" faux pas
353 such as arriving late to a session, the culprit may be required to clean everyone's dishes after
354 lunch or may not be allowed to take part in training. Staff sought to lead by example and
355 create enthusiasm for the challenging nature of the programme. For example, it soon became
356 obvious that consequences could also be delivered to any staff member, all in pursuit of
357 "unashamedly high standards". Beyond these camps, there were overseas tours, lasting from
358 two to four weeks, aimed at exposing players to competition and playing conditions beyond
359 what they had experienced before and which would challenge them in all aspects of the
360 game; hence maximising their development and enhancing their ability to "tour" successfully.

361 For players, the programme represented a new environment to balance with their first
362 class county academy or professional programmes, their educational aspirations and in many
363 cases, their ambitious school cricket programmes or scholarships, all while striving to
364 maintain a social balance with families and friends. The dual role of student and cricketer
365 meant missing many days of school, sometimes sitting mock exams in foreign countries and
366 carrying out two-hour study sessions in hotels and press rooms on tour before returning to the

367 UK to prepare for exams during the early cricket season. Alongside these unique demands on
368 players, the programme was committed to developing players on and off the field, respecting
369 the player's educational aspirations, assisting players in the delivery of a charity project
370 overseas and seeking to support the welfare of players through the performance psychologist
371 and the personal development and welfare practitioners.

372 **Players Appreciating Lifestyle Support**

373 On the first morning of profiling camp, I met each player formally for the first time. I
374 was surprised by their readiness to engage and discuss concerns that they currently had. This
375 seemed to reflect their respect and appreciation for the PDW role and their enthusiasm to
376 develop a relationship from the off. Kieron, arrived into his first meeting with me, and
377 without introduction announced his recent frustrations and need for support:

378 I really need to speak to you…I have just moved to a new school and the difference in
379 schools is just crazy. I was at a state school before, and the expectations of people
380 there are so different. I am not sure I really fit in, or am even cut out for boarding
381 [school] to be honest. I changed because it is a great school, better logistically for
382 everything really, and I guess it is a good training environment for my cricket. But I
383 have been missing home a lot and I have not really settled.

384 The coaches had suggested that players often responded very differently to the array
385 of challenges that lay ahead, and that the player's response would play a key role in
386 furthering, or stifling their development. However, this first insight highlighted how the array
387 of challenges would include the private and personal, and not just cricket. Kieron was
388 struggling to adapt to his new life at a new school and was expressing a sense of loneliness,
389 isolation and homesickness. It also highlighted how the personal and the performance were
390 strongly interrelated for players as personal decisions were taken for the sake of cricket

391 development. Craig later recognised the importance of the off-the-field factors and the value
392 of having the PDW to talk to about “problems”, as a player may feel the need to separate the
393 personal from cricket so that their lives are not seen as interfering with performance:

394 I think it’s really good having a PDW. It gives you someone to talk to about the stuff
395 that you can’t really tell the coach. Stuff that you don’t want them [the coaches] to
396 know, or what you think if they did know, they might think of not playing you. Like
397 stuff about school, or problems that you have, or even if you are really tired and are
398 just struggling to keep going!

399 In their work with young footballers, Gilbourne and Richardson (2006) suggested that
400 although it is the performance agenda that will attract coaches to the idea of psychological
401 support for young athletes, they state that successful practice is “held together” by the
402 practitioners “capacity to care” which embraced the self-awareness and empathic qualities
403 that engender compassion. They also suggested that a symbiotic relationship exists between
404 the performance and caring agendas. Rob, a second year player, summarised this relationship
405 very simply:

406 I think it is one of the most important roles to be honest. If you don’t have that (PDW
407 support) some people could really struggle…I would even say it is linked to
408 performance. The stuff you (PDW) help us with is not performance, but by helping us
409 it directly helps…by me being on top of everything else and my mind being in the
410 right place, I can then go out and play. But if not, it can be really hard.

411 Rob’s comments suggest that there are no non-performance factors, just some areas of
412 support that influence performance (perhaps) less directly than others. Although there is a
413 growing awareness of the value of supporting both the person and the athlete (Ravizza, 2002;
414 Nesti, 2004), this is not currently represented in all research or practice. There is

415 overwhelmingly more research investigating the psychological elements of successful skill
416 delivery, than research investigating how supporting athletes on a more personal level can
417 contribute to both wellbeing and performance. Further, there has been no previous literature
418 that has discussed the relationship and overlap between support of a lifestyle nature and a
419 performance psychology nature. The player discussions cited earlier would appear to suggest
420 that the divide between the two is more blurred than support infrastructures and current
421 literature seems to suggest.

422 When talking to players, I was struck by the value many players placed on developing
423 a trusting relationship with me from the outset. Kieron, openly shared the depth of his
424 struggles and his perceived importance of the PDW role when he had first joined the
425 programme:

426 At times last year I was coming into PDW meetings in tears. I used to really struggle.
427 It took time to be able to speak about it [personal issues] as well, like at first she
428 [PDW] would have been asking me a lot of quite touchy feely questions, but I didn't
429 really want to talk about that stuff with someone I didn't know or trust yet. But once I
430 could, it was a lot easier and you begin to feel better and be yourself a bit more. I
431 hope that with time together on the programme, I can show you that trust as well.

432 Kieron identified the difficulty, and value of discussing issues of a personal and
433 emotive nature without a strong trusting relationship in a highly competitive, unforgiving and
434 rather masculine high performance environments (see Parker, 2001). Nesti (2004) stated that
435 such a strong relationships allowed for what he referred to as, 'the encounter' to occur, where
436 both parties are at ease and can converse freely, yet the nature of the conversation is intense
437 and focused. Nesti (2010) stressed how this should not be mistaken for simply a conversation
438 as it has a clear aim, which is clarification of the issues at play. This important element of

439 counselling (Nesti, 2004) is missing from descriptions of lifestyle support roles within the
440 literature, which has instead focused on the more practical elements of the role, like career
441 guidance or educational support. Further, as discussions of practitioner philosophies of
442 practice (Poczwardowski, Sherman, & Ravizza, 2004) and of counselling approaches (Hill,
443 2000) for sport psychology practitioners have emerged, this has not been applied to athlete
444 lifestyle practice.

445 **Adapting to the new environment**

446 The "high challenge and high support" programme approach appeared to be embraced
447 by many players who had learned how to cope and access the "high support". For those who
448 hadn't, or for new members of the group, the high-octane, action packed milieu could be
449 overwhelming. Players' sense of being overwhelmed could relate to physical demands,
450 organisational demands or behavioural demands. It was further fuelled by the level of
451 emotional investment which players attached to their place on the programme and the
452 demand to meet expectations in order to maintain it. One evening, John, a coach, highlighted
453 that George may be struggling to cope during his first week in the programme:

454 He has had a bit of a wobble today, after a tough session he just got a bit emotional
455 and said he wasn't sure if he was cut out for this. He has done ok, he has just been hit
456 with a few consequences and his technique has been a bit exposed at times. He might
457 need a chat [with you], just to break the ice a bit. He has had a really tough
458 introduction this week and he won't be used to this level of demand.

459 There was minimal judgement from this coach, just empathy with the challenge the player
460 was facing and how important him overcoming this would be for his long-term development.
461 George shared his shock at the intensity of the programme, and his investment in the
462 programme:

463 I am not really used to this type of environment, the intensity, and judgement and
464 consequences. So it has just been quite hard to take in the first week. It's tough
465 because I have had to make a commitment to cricket and drop rugby which has been a
466 tough decision, but I still think it is the right decision, I guess this is just what I need
467 to do, I just need to get used to it and get better.

468 George appeared to doubt his ability to compete at this higher level. He also shared
469 that he also had to make a decision with regard to what sport to focus on as a result of his
470 selection. His difficult experiences early in the programme appeared to create a sense of
471 doubt about whether he had made the right decision, probably one of the first life decisions
472 he had been required to take regarding his future.

473 George's description of his challenges in adapting to the new levels of performance
474 expectation are consistent with what Relvas, Littlewood, Nesti, Gilbourn and Richardson
475 (2010) termed as the "developing mastery" stage of development for football players. Relvas
476 et al. (2010) outlined this stage of development in a critique of previous developmental
477 models of transition as lacking the contextual details and specificity critical to better
478 understand the unique social and cultural features within many sports Relvas et al. (2010)
479 suggested that players in this stage had already progressed through the development stage of
480 Wylleman et al. (2004) transition model, yet lacked the attributes and experiences to be
481 considered the finished or polished article and still required focused and continued
482 development work. The transition to the national development programme in the current
483 study undoubtedly involved a similar step up in performance expectations for players, and in
484 the level of performance which may be tolerated. There were still contextual differences from
485 Relvas et al.'s (2010) football participants, in that these young cricketers had stepped up to a
486 new level in International youth cricket, but not necessarily a step towards a professional role
487 at their counties. However, the players in this study did still experience what Relvas et al.

488 (2010) labelled social insecurity and comparison on a psychological level, new coaches on a
489 psycho-social level and uncertainty and isolation on an environmental and cultural level.

490 Players' experiences of adapting to the programme appeared to align with what
491 Bourke (2002) referred to as a form of culture shock, a psychological phenomenon which
492 may lead to feelings of helplessness, irritability and disorientation which players would have
493 to accept and learn to cope with in order to keep progressing. Finding a way to endure the
494 malaise that could accompany the personal demands of balancing these multiple roles could
495 begin to have an effect both when on camps, and when at home as Jack revealed:

496 Yeah, I have been really tired, more worn out I suppose…like I never have time to
497 just sit and chill for a bit...and even here (at the development centre) actually,
498 sometimes when you get back, you can feel like you need to just chill or else you will
499 not get to sleep, you just need a break…when we finish late like we have done for the
500 last couple of days, it can really knock you off…you almost get energised by having a
501 little down time, or even a game of pool, just having a laugh.

502 Jack's personal sacrifices resulted in fatigue, and a lifestyle which was significantly different
503 from his adolescent peers, similarly to professional golfers in Carless and Douglas's study
504 (2009). However, for them, golf was already a professional career. Jack was describing how
505 cricket was at risk of feeling like a job, even though it wasn't a career yet, and there were still
506 many areas of typical adolescent development unfinished, both educationally and socially.

507 For other players, including Kieron, the time spent away from home, on tours or long
508 training camps and away from those people close to them provided a particular challenge::

509 Last year I found it really tough because the first half of the tour is all training and
510 then its matches. And when I reached the halfway point last year, I just couldn't see
511 how I would reach the end…I had a few conversations actually with the PDW, and

512 with one of the players I roomed with, which just about helped me get there…I think I
513 was just missing home.

514 Kieron explained how, on a personal level, the programme was really challenging him, yet, it
515 was important for him to persevere as the career he wanted would require him becoming
516 much more comfortable and able to spend large parts of his life living like this.

517 In their study on the development of mental toughness at one of the biggest soccer
518 clubs in the world, Cook, and colleagues (Cook, Crust, Littlewood, Nesti, & Allen-
519 Collinson, 2014) described how coaches sought to foster independence and resourcefulness
520 within their players. Given the demands of the young cricketers in this study these are
521 certainly two characteristics that players are required to possess (or acquire) in order to
522 successfully navigate their way through the programme. However, one coach, Gerard
523 recounted that it was the challenge for the coaching team to recognise where each individual
524 was 'developmentally' with regard to coping with these demands and identify how the
525 coaches and support team, could help these players to evolve:

526 Basically, we are asking these guys to behave like adults. With where they want to go,
527 there is no shame in that, because I think that is what they need, but sometimes we
528 have to remember that they are still teenagers, some only 16, and they will not always
529 be ready for that developmentally. For me that is a constant tension in the programme,
530 balancing their demands, our education of them and the challenges we put in place
531 with where they are in terms of their individual development.

532 Without attention to the personal stories and challenges that sat behind observable behaviour,
533 there was a risk of coaches misjudging the lived experience of the player who in the context
534 of their development might be showing significant toughness in persevering through tough
535 challenges even when they might not necessarily appear to be. Current literature describes

536 athlete lifestyle programmes as predominantly helping athletes with life skill development or
537 career and education guidance (Stambulova & Ryba, 2014). However, these findings suggest
538 that practitioners may find themselves more often supporting challenges which are more
539 personal, psychological and emotional in nature. This suggests that the positioning of support
540 provision ought to prioritise the ability to support issues of this nature, as should the desired
541 skills and knowledge of practitioners performing the role.

542 **Managing competing demands**

543 Players, who were selected to the programme, were required to take on this new
544 commitment alongside what was already a considerable investment of time. They would now
545 be required to balance school, county cricket training, their social lives, their family lives and
546 this significant commitment involved with joining national development programme. Soon
547 after being selected onto the programme, I as PDW organised a meeting for players who are
548 in full time education at their school. For Simon, a first year player, this brought him together
549 with his parents, representatives from his county cricket club, representatives from the school
550 and me. We met to ensure that everyone understood the commitments necessary when joining
551 the programme and discussed plans to cope with the weeks of missing school whilst away on
552 tour. The conversation would often divert towards discussion of skill development and
553 cricketing needs, the different coaches he would be working with and how his training needs
554 could be met around his class times. This often required further input of even more members
555 of the players' support network. I considered how aligned these stakeholders could actually
556 be in supporting the player.

557 Similar to what Richardson, Gilbourne and Littlewood (2004) observed in football
558 academies, these young cricketers were exposed to a high number of significant development
559 stakeholders. This created a risk of the players hearing mixed or conflicting messages, or

560 having to work to maintain contact with staff across a range of environments. This was
561 viewed by players and staff as having the potential to be detrimental for player development.
562 Brian, a physiotherapist commented on the programmes occasional need to simply clarify and
563 bring together the variety of messages players received, rather than add to them:

564 You think of these players, the number of people with an invested interest in them is
565 insane. You have the academy director, academy S&C, academy physio and academy
566 bowling or batting coach. Then you have the second team staff, maybe the first team,
567 maybe school cricket staff and then you add out programme staff, plus parents who
568 are obviously at the centre. So you are looking at about 17 or maybe even 22 people if
569 the player is at a cricket school…If we can get everyone pulling in the same direction
570 it might work, but if they are pulling in different directions, it just becomes very hard
571 for the player.

572 The potential incongruence between different stakeholders across different
573 environments was perceived as potentially anxiety-provoking by several players. Rob, a
574 player in his second year on the programme shared his worries about possessing the level of
575 independence required in order to maintain positive relationships with the different staff. For
576 example, players may have to report training loads and injuries to a number of
577 physiotherapists in different environments which may include school, county or the national
578 programme. Alternatively, they may need to clarify what they should do in response to
579 receiving conflicting advice from coaches in their county and national programmes. Further,
580 the requirement to meet the demands of all staff began to create pressure and stress for
581 players, as they felt the need to keep all these stakeholders happy:

582 I have been feeling quite overwhelmed recently. I have a lot on my plate with school,
583 the programme and then having changed clubs. That has led to a lot of things to be

584 done. It feels like I have just been making one big mistake every day. Basically
585 making someone angry every day, and I have really been worrying, like worrying that
586 I have done something wrong or forgotten to do something I should.

587 Coaches are one of the most important actors within a youth sport context and play an
588 influential role in either facilitating or hindering the development of young athletes (Camire,
589 Forneris, Trudel, & Bernard, 2011). Therefore, it is no surprise that for players, maintaining a
590 positive relationship with their coach(es) is thought to be highly important. However, it was
591 striking that as the number of stakeholders' rose, this relationship could also become a source
592 of stress, with players like Rob worrying that he was letting others down by not meeting his
593 commitments rather than seeing the network as a source of support. Reid, Stewart and Thorne
594 (2004) recognised the importance of developing a highly functioning multi-disciplinary team.
595 However, there remains no discussion of the challenges of multiple teams working with a
596 player, perhaps with different approaches or philosophies. Relvas et al. (2010) acknowledged
597 the challenge of maintaining consistency in approach, communication and culture between
598 first team and academy structures within football clubs. Players in the current study operated
599 across anything from two to four cricket environments, in addition to school and home
600 environments. This appeared to have the potential to impact the coach-athlete relationship
601 and their subsequent working dynamics, something not discussed in the literature.

602 The players' attempts to manage relationships with such a high number of coaching
603 staff often appeared a stressful and dysfunctional dynamic where players could be left
604 wondering who they need to keep happy and confused by what could appear to be conflicting
605 messages. The potential for players to feel insecure and confused amidst this need to keep
606 others happy appeared to present a risk to players as they struggled to maintain a sense of
607 personal authenticity (Ronkainen & Nesti, 2017). As Guignon (1993, p. 227) suggested,
608 everyday existence may become "fragmented into a series of means-end strategies governed

by the latest public attitudes about what constitutes success". In this case, the "public" refers to the coaches and stakeholders within the various environments that the players perform. This could impact the players developing sense of self (Nesti, 2004), place their identity in a state of flux (Richardson, Relvas, & Littlewood, 2013) and negatively influence their ability to take responsibility for their own development, both as people, and performers.

Somewhat paradoxically, coaches discussed their desire to encourage players to take responsibility for their development, as Gerard recognised:

> The guys who are really on route to making it, are the ones who are driving their own development, they are strong enough to challenge the coaches…they are taking the lead. They are independent, whereas the opposite is someone who is just hearing it, doing bits here, doing bits there, no real direction from them…I think a large part of our role, is trying to encourage that [empowerment], create independence.

The coaching staff made efforts to tackle the challenge of aligning player support across different environments. However, the number of differing support options offered to the players often resulted in a disconnection between how coaches wanted players to develop independence and a sense of responsibility, and the players feeling the need to please those overseeing their development.

Education Choices and Professional Contracts

At any time, players' education commitments were viewed by coaches and players as welcome intellectual stimulation, a backup plan, or as something which simply got in the way of playing cricket. Typically, there was respect for the value of gaining an academic grounding on which players could fall if needed. This resulted in prioritisation of practical educational support and most players completing secondary qualifications successfully.

632 However, players often remained unsure regarding further education and its value beyond
633 secondary qualifications, as was highlighted by Jack:

634 I mean I have never really thought about university before, but I have started to now,
635 just because you don't know if you are going to get a contract or not. So I will apply,
636 but if I get a contract I will turn down the place, it is just in case I get released,
637 everything really hinges on the contract.

638 Conversations with players on the subject of education often reflected their hesitations
639 of discussing the prospect of not getting the career in professional cricket that they want. At
640 times, there was confusion in terms of what they "are supposed to do?" regarding educational
641 decisions. As such, Henry's idea of "taking a gap year to focus on my cricket" appeared to
642 become code for "I need to try and earn a contract and I am not sure how going to university
643 might affect this".

644 However, for Conor, it was a more complex decision given his academic ability, his
645 upbringing and his concern regarding the impression it could give:

646 For me, I can't see me not going to University, because of my up-bringing; it's just
647 really a question of what is the right time? I am quite keen on going to University, but
648 there are some problems with that…Do you have to compromise cricket or your
649 education, because I really don't want to do that. Also how does it play into county
650 consideration, being available to play or being noticed and considered by the coach?

651 The players in this study placed significant importance on their education as they looked to
652 balance educational demands with the demands of the programme. This appears to contrast
653 with findings from other professional team sports, such as football where Richardson (2003)
654 suggested that the "seductive nature of the football environment may dilute the desire for
655 educational development" (p-58) after signing a one or two-year professional contract. In

656 contrast, cricket has long been recognised for its middle-class culture and close affiliation
657 with independent schools (Tozer, 2012). This was reflected in Conor's reference to his family
658 upbringing when considering his university options. Further, cricketers in this study were
659 planning for the future and open to discussing their educational plans either as a dual-career
660 or as a back-up plan in case they did not receive a professional contract. This also contrasted
661 with findings from football (Christensen & Sorensen, 2009) in that for many players, their
662 educational aspirations were afforded significance and the requirement in the future for a full
663 commitment to cricket or education did provide a troubling dilemma which they would have
664 to confront. This said, the cricketers were still worried about the perception that going to
665 university might create among coaches. Moreover, education was still often viewed by
666 players and coaches as an ethical responsibility and back-up plan as opposed to something
667 which may offer the individual a life project, creating a more rounded sense of identity that
668 would subsequently limit the risk of identity foreclosure and its negative impacts (Pummel,
669 Harwood, & Lavallee, 2008). This seems an important point given Nurmi's (2004) portrayal
670 of how important the adolescent years are.

671 The current findings suggest that elite youth cricketers develop within a socio-cultural
672 landscape that is relatively supportive of players pursuing both secondary education and
673 cricket. However, the players' decisions regarding further education were heavily influenced
674 by their contract status and the beliefs of coaches who acted as gatekeepers to a professional
675 career. A further challenge for these young athletes is that in cricket, unlike many Olympic
676 sports (Aquilina, 2013), going to the university is not typically seen as a mutually beneficial
677 part of the developmental pathway, but as a separate pursuit. The current findings highlight
678 the socio-cultural differences between sports and the impact this has on athletes career and
679 dual-career decisions. This will inevitably influence athlete support needs within different
680 socio-cultural landscapes.

681 **Identity negotiation in critical moments**

682 Given Nurmi's (2004) portrayal of adolescence, it must be acknowledged that the
683 challenges, career decisions and defining moments previously described occur during a phase
684 of life which is itself transitional in nature. It could be argued that the magnitude of this
685 developmental transition from adolescence to adulthood is somewhat understated within the
686 transition literature, particularly with regard to identity negotiation and development. For
687 Kieron, the need to negotiate identity in the face of challenge came in recognising that the
688 perception his peers have of him is inconsistent with who he felt he wanted to be, and who he
689 was previously:

690 You see, I have been a captain in everything else I have done prior to this, at my
691 county, at my school, but now I realise that because of my character, because people
692 do not see me as someone who can be serious, I will never be captain in this
693 environment… I think it came from when I first joined the programme, I felt like an
694 outsider, there was a big group from just a couple of counties and I think I realised
695 that using my comedy was a way for me to be accepted and to get in with the group,
696 so I just kept on doing that.

697 Many coaches commented on the struggle players have in finding their feet, and learning to
698 simply be themselves within national squads. They reflected that this seemed to be a barrier
699 to them playing freely and eventually proving themselves to be capable of playing at that
700 level. However, given the players investment in cricket, this often created a personal cost too,
701 both during time on the programme and in their broader lives. Kieron, having already shared
702 his struggle to be himself in this environment, later went on to highlight the struggle of
703 another player in his first year on the programme:

> He just doesn't seem comfortable here…because I captained him before, and he wasn't like this, and I think that's maybe why he isn't performing as well as he can. It's like one of those two things needs to happen first, you need to get a performance and then you feel comfortable, or you feel comfortable and then you can perform.

The players concerns were interrelated with significant career transitions, for example, entering the national level programme or finishing secondary education and entering professional cricket. However, the concerns players described fit better with what Nesti and Littlewood (2011) referred to as "critical moments" which need to be viewed in the context of transitions, rather than just the specific transitions themselves. Nesti & Littlewood (2011) suggested that a critical moment could range from something to nothing, could be large or small, intended or unintended and may have a negative or positive effect on a person's sense of self (self-awareness and self-knowledge). In other words, they are the frequently experienced moments in our lives where we must confront the anxiety associated with an important change in our identity. Critical moments may include a player's recognition of what is expected from them in order to be successful in the programme, or the experience of struggling to maintain a positive relationship with a number of coaches. From an existential perspective, the anxiety associated with critical moments is not simply the result of the impending need to perform, but the uncertainty of the player's current situation, as well as the responsibility and freedom to act. From an existential view, to live authentically is to face this anxiety, be true to oneself and act according to one's core beliefs and values (Ronkainen & Nesti, 2017). These cricketers were faced with demanding situations beset with uncertainty that require a responsibility to act, but within an environment which made authentic decisions challenging, leaving their sense of identity in a state of flux. As has been suggested, the existential element of career development has remained absent from the literature. Instead, discussion of support for athletes tends to revolve around barriers to transition, coping

729 techniques and mental skills. There is limited discussion of supporting athletes with a holistic
730 approach focusing on their identity negotiation throughout adolescence despite the fact that
731 this would appear to provide an important addition to ensure support for the whole athlete
732 experience.

733 The concept of critical moments better recognises the dynamic environments that the
734 young cricketers operate in and the potential for seemingly mundane day-to-day events to
735 hold significant influence over their development. It also helps emphasise that challenging
736 moments within the career are not inherently negative experiences and may actually provide
737 an exciting opportunity for personal growth, self-awareness development and the
738 development of existential courage (Nesti & Littlewood, 2011). However, the potential to see
739 personal challenge as an opportunity for growth, self-awareness and development is
740 something inherent to an existential philosophy of practice as opposed to a suggestion that
741 tough experiences could instead be somehow reframed for athletes as nice, or pleasant. For
742 example, Mike, who particularly struggled with the level of structure and discipline required
743 on the programme, reflected that although going through the challenge had been really
744 difficult, he had learned a lot about himself with regard to the negative impact of a lack of
745 discipline:

746 I obviously have had a few events…where I have lost it. But I think it is good, the
747 coaches all really held the line with me, and I think I need that. I have never had that.
748 I need to learn to just get on with these things if I am going to be part of squads in the
749 future… I think I have learnt a lot about myself and some of the things that I struggle
750 with, but it was hard

751 Other players reflected that with the right support, certain skills, such as organisation and
752 time management were learned through necessity created by the challenge of managing

753 demands. Players also acknowledged the value of gaining clarity over what they want to
754 become, when faced with tension created as a result of uncertainty and identity negotiation.

755 **Conclusions**

756 The first research objective was to understand the nature of contextually and culturally
757 specific lifestyle concerns for which elite youth cricketers seek support, and the personal
758 meaning they ascribe to them. Participants discussed the value of being supported with
759 experiences which were personal, psychological and emotional in nature which were related
760 to their on-going negotiation of challenges within and outside of cricket. This is in contrast to
761 the sometimes ambiguous and practical support highlighted previously in athlete lifestyle
762 programme research (Wylleman et al. 2004; Stambulova & Ryba, 2014). This support was
763 viewed as being instrumental in maintaining wellbeing and improving performance. There
764 also appeared to be a disconnect between coaches desire for players to develop independence,
765 freedom and choice, and the players experiences of feeling constrained by cultural practices
766 in their attempts to do so. The concerns appear to fit the concept of critical moments more so
767 than transitional challenges, due to their everyday nature, their requirement for identity
768 negotiation and their potential to lead to growth and development in players. The second
769 research objective was to gain an understanding of how athlete lifestyle support ought to be
770 positioned within this context, and at this stage of young cricketer's lives. Supporting these
771 concerns requires the development of deep and meaningful practitioner-player relationships,
772 trust and confidentiality as well as a perspective of the practitioner as being somewhat
773 removed from the performance agenda. This appears to create a paradox between the
774 perception that lifestyle concerns are removed from the performance agenda, and the
775 realisation that lifestyle issues, and lifestyle support are often explicitly linked to
776 performance. Through these findings, this study fills a gap in the literature regarding the
777 nature of concerns for which elite youth cricketers (and perhaps other athletes) may seek

778 support from lifestyle practitioners. This provides greater direction regarding what
779 practitioners will be required to do in practice. These findings have important implications for
780 research, sporting organisations and individual practitioners.

781 In order to ensure that athlete lifestyle support meets player's needs, we suggest that
782 lifestyle practitioners be immersed within the performance environment as opposed to on the
783 periphery of the support infrastructure. This position has been proposed before by Anderson
784 and Morris (2000). However, it is still recognised that such an immersive approach is not
785 readily embraced or prioritised by such environments (and their budgetary constraints). We
786 also argue that the value of psychological knowledge and counselling approaches may be
787 worth embracing more explicitly than they currently are in lifestyle support, and have
788 indicated that counselling which draws on existential psychology can be applicable with
789 young athletes when they strive to form authentic life goals and identities. The findings also
790 suggest a need to shift the athlete lifestyle agenda beyond the educational and practical
791 support described in the literature.

792 The nature of lifestyle concerns expressed by elite youth cricketers alongside the
793 perceived impact of lifestyle support on performance and the value counselling psychology
794 can offer lifestyle support provision, suggests that the lines of role division between lifestyle
795 support and performance psychology may be more blurred than support structures imply. It
796 would appear that dividing roles and responsibilities without appreciation for their
797 interrelatedness could in essence, break up the whole experience of the athlete, at the cost of
798 truly holistic support. The emphasis on more direct performance support within the sport
799 psychology literature and the wide ranging training backgrounds of lifestyle practitioners
800 may leave both practitioners under-prepared for the nature of holistic support needed. For
801 athletes, this could result in neither practitioner recognising the support need, or not having
802 the required skills and knowledge to provide effective support when it is sought out. It may

803 also leave practitioners unprepared for the demands of the role, negatively impacting their
804 own wellbeing and their chances of retaining their position in a competitive environment
805 which requires visible impact from the role.

806 For future research, it is suggested that investigating individuals experience of the
807 critical moments (Nesti & Littlewood, 2011) identified here and the lifestyle practitioner
808 support provided during these would be valuable. Continuing to use methodology which
809 captures the day-to-day lives of athletes in other sports and stages of development is
810 necessary to further our knowledge of athlete support needs across different sports, different
811 sporting cultures and different stages of the career. It will also be important to further
812 investigate the relationship between the performance psychologist and the athlete lifestyle
813 practitioner, given their somewhat ambiguous overlap and the apparent psychological
814 elements of lifestyle support.

815 In this study, the practitioner and researcher roles were symbiotic in their dual-focus
816 on athlete care and wellbeing, but did create a sense of role conflict between active
817 practitioner and (a more) neutral researcher. The combination of practice and research created
818 ambiguity regarding confidentiality as a practitioner and researcher, requiring careful
819 management of data and a limited presentation of the broader lives and backgrounds of
820 participants. Representing participant stories from memory was a necessary limitation, in
821 order to not compromise the trust involved in performing the practitioner-researcher role.
822 However, the practitioner-researcher approach was considered a major strength of this
823 research as it provided a uniquely applied insight into the player's experiences. Having the
824 role of the practitioner who was there to support the players rather than just gather
825 observations facilitated the gathering of rich, emotional and honest insight into player's lives.
826 The longitudinal nature of immersion also acted as a strength in terms of the depth of data

827 accrued and researcher credibility, helping to advance understandings a relatively under-
828 studied topic.
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