

Running head: "ACTIVE" AND "PASSIVE" COACH PATHWAYS

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4 Title - "Active" and "passive" coach pathways: Elite athletes' entry routes into high-  
5 performance coaching roles

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10

## 11 **Abstract**

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

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

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

Accepted for publication

## 29 **Introduction**

30 An emerging body of research on coach development has focused upon reporting the  
31 pathways and the career "stages" through which high-performance coaches progress (Barker-  
32 Ruchti, Lindgren, Hofmann, Sinning & Shelton, 2014; Erickson, Bruner, MacDonald & Côté,  
33 2008; Koh, Mallett & Wang, 2011; Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016; Watts & Cushion, 2017;  
34 Werthner & Trudel, 2009). These studies show that it is commonplace for high-performance  
35 coaches to have prior experience as elite athletes in their respective sports. Such a finding has  
36 been frequently reported in other research situated in the broader context of coach development  
37 that have not specifically analysed coach pathways (e.g., Christensen, 2013, 2014; Gilbert,  
38 Côté & Mallett, 2006; Gilbert, Lichtenwaltdt, Gilbert, Zelezny & Côté, 2009; Mielke, 2007;  
39 Morrow & Howieson, 2014, 2018; Nash & Sproule, 2009; Purdy & Potrac, 2016).  
40 Consequently, coaches themselves have reported that the development processes for learning  
41 coaching skills and knowledge is somehow embedded in their former experiences as athletes  
42 (Cushion, Armour & Jones, 2003; Mallett, Rynne & Billett, 2016).

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

54 other similar pathway models have nonetheless received criticism. In particular, Christensen  
55 (2013) has contended that such empirical analyses have depicted high-performance coach  
56 pathways to be a-theoretical, linear and one-dimensional, essentially simplifying the coaches'  
57 career trajectories to be a "generic stepwise model that describes careers in terms of age-  
58 specific and chronologically ordered milestones" (p. 99-100). By proposing this, Christensen  
59 (2013) infers that the actual career trajectory of elite athletes making the transition to high-  
60 performance coach has previously reflected a functionalist attitude by considering it as a logical  
61 and unproblematic process.

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

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

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

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

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<sup>1</sup> UEFA B and A coach accreditation is respectively assigned to UKCC level three and four status.

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

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

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

125           The concept of field denotes the multi-layered social spaces that encompass networks  
126 of social relations which agents operate and compete for power within (Morrow & Howieson,  
127 2018). Although elite level sport can be considered as being one field, it acts as an overarching  
128 field that houses football and rugby union. These two sports are considered to be two semi-  
129 autonomous fields on account that they both have distinctive subcultures that define them from  
130 one another as well as other sports. On this basis, each field values different forms of capital  
131 by virtue of its own subculture (Wacquant, 1992).

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

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

141  
142           On this basis coach learning and development has been increasingly argued to be a  
143 socially influenced and constructed process through the growing recognition that coaching, and  
144 thus coach development, is part of the lifeworld (Bowes & Jones, 2006). By making this claim,  
145 a dialectical relationship between individual coaches and the club environments where they  
146 practice on a day-to-day basis has been increasingly made. The relationship between agency  
147 and structure initially creates and then socially reproduces particular coaching knowledge and  
148 practices, leading many of these studies to have drawn upon a range of concepts emanating  
149 from sociological theories. Indeed, a number of such studies have utilised Bourdieu's  
150 theoretical framework to explain the value a competitive-athletic career has for coach  
151 development (e.g., Christensen, 2014; Cushion et al., 2003; Watts & Cushion, 2017).

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

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

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



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

183 By conducting this research we do not claim to have any epistemological bias towards  
184 whether athletes who have been fast-tracked into post-athletic coaching careers do make better  
185 or more effective coaches. Although we are aware of the conclusion drawn by Schempp,  
186 McCullick, Grant, Foo and Wieser (2010) that their study of 134 head coaches across multiple  
187 team sports did not find a significant statistical relationship between head coaches' on-field  
188 success of results and their own professional playing experiences, we balance this by admitting  
189 there have been a number of cases where effective and successful coaches do have competitive-  
190 athletic backgrounds. Simply, therefore, our intention is to heed Schempp and colleagues'  
191 (2010) recommendations that the "relationship between playing experience and professional  
192 coaching warrants more investigation" (p. 79). As such, the study's aim is to provide an original  
193 contribution to the coach development literature by analysing the lived experiences and  
194 pathways of a group of coaches who seem to dominate high-performance coaching roles in  
195 these two sports.

196

## 197 **Methods**

### 198 **Study design**

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

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

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

214

### 215 **Context**

216 Participants were recruited from the PFA and RFU's level three senior professionals'  
217 courses, because they provided access to participants who were negotiating the fast-tracked  
218 coach pathway route at the time of the study. Based within England, these senior professionals'  
219 courses only accepted senior athletes with a competitive-athletic career. Registered candidates  
220 were required to complete a number of assessments in multiple formats and environments over  
221 12 months, situated both internally and externally to the course. Internal course learning  
222 environments included formalised classes, workshops and practical sessions led or facilitated  
223 by course tutors. External learning environments were situated in the day-to-day context within  
224 which candidates regularly practised coaching. Both courses began with a three-day residential  
225 component.

226

227 **Procedure**

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

241

242 **Sample**

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

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

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

250 Table 1 Participant characteristics at the point of interview

251

252 **Data collection**

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

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

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

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

288

### 289 **Data analysis**

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

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

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

306

### 307 **Addressing trustworthiness**

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

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



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

330

## 331 **Results**

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

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

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

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

372

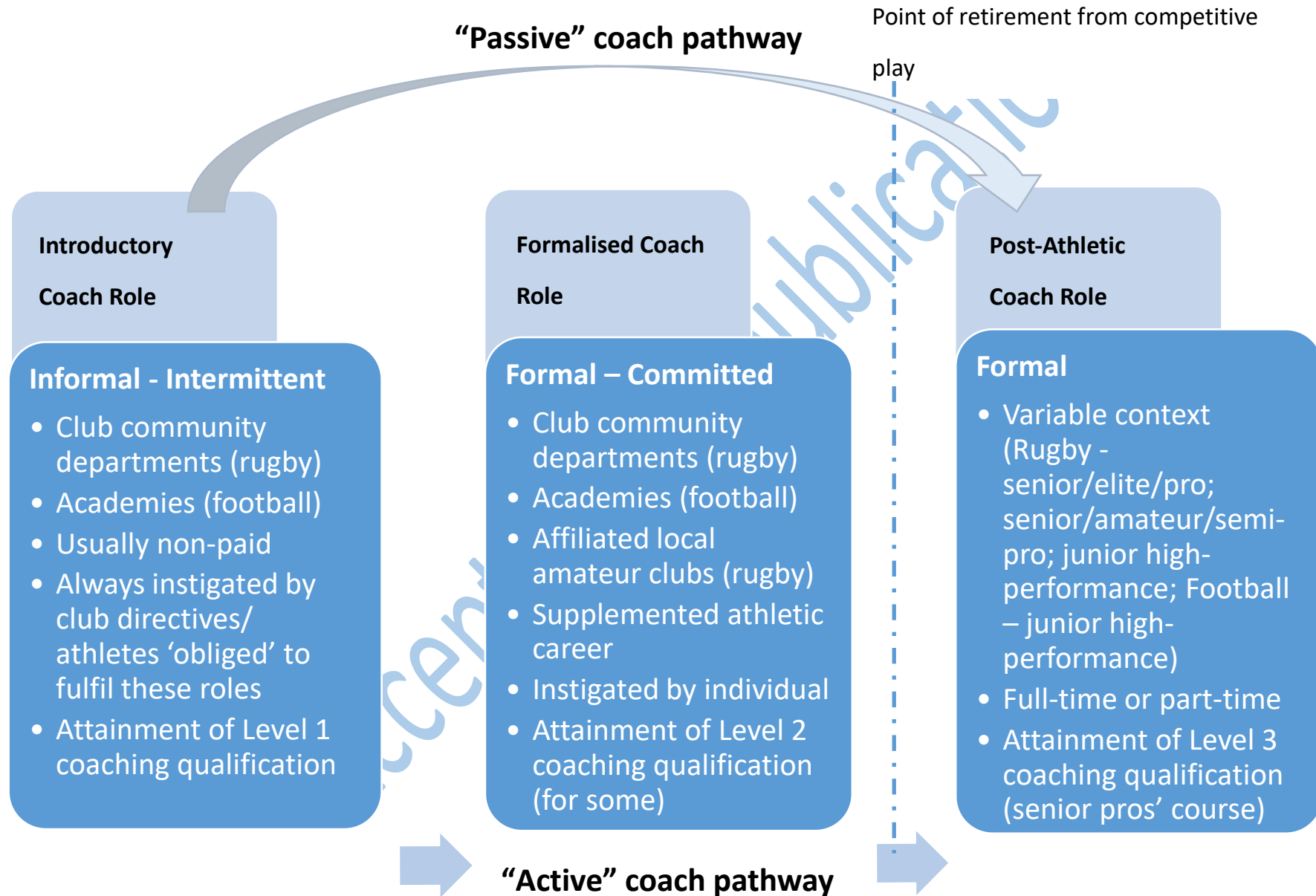


Figure 1. Distinction between "active" and "passive" coach pathways

374 **Access routes into coaching**

375 All study participants had been internally promoted into their first "introductory  
376 coaching role" during their competitive-athletic careers. Participants described how, during this  
377 time, it was considered an obligation for a professional athlete to fulfil informal and intermittent  
378 coaching roles *within* their affiliated clubs' youth academies or community programmes.<sup>2</sup>  
379 Corresponding to the findings of existing coach development research (Barker-Ruchti et al.,  
380 2014; Christensen, 2013; Erickson et al., 2007; LaVoi & Dutove, 2012; Nash & Sproule, 2009),  
381 participants' first introductory coaching roles were undertaken during the early stages of their  
382 competitive-athletic careers and were considered to contain low levels of responsibility. The  
383 italicised text within Gary and Chris' statements illustrates how, according to participants, this  
384 obligation was imposed on them by their clubs' directors:

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

392  
393 Part of being a rugby player, you *get sent* out to schools to things like that so I'd  
394 only ever coached kids. I didn't enjoy it... coaching kids anyway... when I was  
395 playing. So maybe if I'd been coaching men then maybe I would have got more  
396 of a buzz [for coaching]. (Chris, emphasis added)

397  
398 The emphasis placed on "you get sent out to schools" and "you always get placed with  
399 schools" suggests that these opportunities were more like imposed obligations rather than  
400 merely offered to the participants as voluntarily coaching experiences. The difference between  
401 the two sports were the recorded locations of where their first introductory roles were based.

---

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

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

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

410           Irrespective of where these first formalised coaching roles were located, the seemingly  
411 imposed mandate for the participants to fulfil additional coaching roles alongside their  
412 competitive-athletic careers is suggestive of their club's hierarchy attempting to provide social  
413 learning opportunities whereby the participants could observe and learn from other coaches  
414 (Blackett et al., 2017, 2018; Cushion et al., 2003; Lemyre, Trudel & Durand-Bush, 2007). In  
415 addition to this mode of coach learning, as competitive-athletes, both sets of participants had  
416 been enrolled onto their respective NGB's UKCC level one or, in some cases, level two coach  
417 accreditation by their club's senior management. Corey and Sebastian reported their  
418 experiences:  
419

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

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

427           This finding signifies how many of the participants who had acquired prior formal  
428 coaching qualifications had not strictly undertaken a fast-tracked pathway into coaching. As  
429 the following section discusses, the impact of these qualifications on the participants' coach  
430 development was seemingly limited as neither these qualifications nor the introductory  
431  
432

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

437

#### 438 **"Active" and "passive" coach pathways**

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

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

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

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

464           Charles' experiences suggest that the transition from athlete to coach for him and the  
465           other rugby union athletes was more complicated and less simplistic than previous  
466           representations of high-performance coach pathway models have depicted (cf., Erickson et al.,  
467           2007). Additionally, the financial constraints were seemingly specific to rugby union and can  
468           potentially explain why more rugby union coaches were classified as active coaches ( $n = 4$ )  
469           compared to the amount of active football coaches ( $n = 2$ ). For example, Corey was one of the  
470           six active coaches who clearly explained how he consciously transferred to another lower level  
471           rugby union club which would better accommodate a formalised coaching role alongside his  
472           competitive-athletic career. Corey's explanation also illustrates how he and others categorised  
473           as active coaches exercised their own agency for the purposes of continuing to prepare for a  
474           post-athletic coaching career:  
475

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

482           Whilst continuing to compete as an athlete, Corey had a clear intention to actively  
483           acquire the coaching experiences and the coaching knowledge which came from such direct  
484           experiential learning opportunities (Barker-Ruchti et al., 2014; Erickson et al., 2008; Gilbert &  
485           Trudel, 2005). This decision contrasted with those made by passive coaches, such as Ethan.  
486           After having recently retired from a competitive athletic career (see Table 1), Ethan explained  
487

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

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

498  
499 Passive coaches met two criteria: 1) had not practised in any formalised coaching roles  
500 in addition to their first imposed introductory coaching roles (see top pathway in Figure 1); and  
501 2) had not attained any additional coaching qualifications through *their own initiative*. We  
502 emphasise the centrality of "their own initiative" because both active and passive coaches had  
503 attained at least a level one coach certification whilst contracted to their club's as youth athletes.  
504 As we highlighted in the previous section, this was part of their clubs' adherence to NGB and  
505 player union policies which encourage clubs to up-skill and educate youth athletes.

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

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

516  
517 Similarly, Chris was one who regretted not obtaining his level three coaching  
518 qualification whilst he was a competitive-athlete. When reflecting on this, Chris explained:



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

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

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

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

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

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

561  
562 To further emphasise how Sebastian was categorised as a passive coach, when he was  
563 asked whether he actively prepared for a post-athletic coaching career during his time as an  
564 elite athlete, he recalled the following anecdote:

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

572  
573 Passive coaches did not conduct any forward thinking and preparation exercises for a  
574 post-athletic coaching career, irrespective of whether formal coaching qualifications had been  
575 attained. This suggests that there was a lack of deep, meaningful reflection and critical analysis  
576 towards developing their coaching knowledge and skills having been performed. On this basis,  
577 when passive coaches like Sebastian attained their initial post-athletic coaching roles, they  
578 seemed to be more reliant upon replicating their previous coaches' dispositions and coaching  
579 practices (Jones, Armour & Potrac, 2003).

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

586 on account that it restricts the advancement of coaching knowledge and skills (Blackett et al.,  
587 2018; Mills & Denison, 2018). Indeed, when analysing the practices and development  
588 pathways of serial winning coaches, Lara-Bercial and Mallett (2016) reported that these  
589 coaches emphasised the foundations for their success were based on the necessity to continually  
590 self-reflect and thus have heightened levels of self-awareness.

591 To assist coaches becoming more reflective, formalised high-performance coach  
592 education programmes across a number of international contexts have been found to firmly  
593 embed a wide range of opportunities for coaches to be critically reflective within their courses  
594 so that they become more self-aware (Callary, Culver, Werthner & Bales, 2014; Ferrar et al.,  
595 2018). Although the coach education literature has universally advocated coaches to be  
596 reflective, it is a skill which coaches require time and assistance to refine (Gilbert & Trudel,  
597 2005). Yet, even when coaches are given guidance on how to reflect and what to reflect on, no  
598 matter what context they operate within, they do not always perform this to the desired extent  
599 (Cushion, 2016). The lack of reflection was identified by Watts and Cushion's (2017) sample  
600 of eight high-performance coaches to be a limitation of the fast-tracking transition as this  
601 pathway did not afford coaches to "learn their trade" by "starting at the bottom" and undertake  
602 a sufficient coaching apprenticeship (p. 91). Nevertheless, even though many passive coaches  
603 in the present study did state that although they may have been fast-tracked into their first post-  
604 athletic high-performance coaching role, they still regarded themselves to be very much  
605 learning their trade and therefore inferred to conducting some level of reflection. Kyle surmised  
606 this by stating how he perceived his first post-athletic coaching role to be a learning  
607 environment: "I'm at the bottom of the ladder now, I see it as a bit of an internship".

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

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

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

636  
637 The passive coaches noted how their pathways into either their first formalised post-  
638 athletic coaching roles were primarily instigated by "significant others" who worked within the  
639 club to which they were contracted. As Kyle highlighted above, his own career transition into  
640 post-athletic coaching was with the same club for whom he had competed. As with other  
641 participants, Kyle claimed he was "offered" the position without having to negotiate any  
642 formalised recruitment processes. This career pathway reflected many of the other coaches. It  
643 is this theme of both active and passive coaches being internally promoted by their clubs which  
644 the next section considers.

645

646 **The "offer" of a coaching role**

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

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

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

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

683  
684 About two months ago I had a phone call from an ex-colleague of mine who I  
685 played with at (current Championship Football Club 1), he's ended up going  
686 back to (current Championship Football Club 1) as a coach within the academy  
687 and he invited me in for a sort of briefing. And we ended up having a  
688 conversation and I started coaching there about a month ago, four days a week  
689 in the evenings coaching the under sixteens at the academy level, which is, it's  
690 nice to go back. Obviously I started at (current Championship Football Club 1)  
691 and it's nice to be going back there. And so many faces that I know from playing  
692 with and playing against over my career. And it's like, I mean football is such a  
693 small community you know, you're always crossing paths with each other in  
694 your career and it's sort of nice that I've ended up at (current Championship  
695 Football Club 1) with them [*sic*] people... (Oscar)

696  
697 Both Tristan and Oscar inferred that the appointment of their first formalised coaching  
698 roles were facilitated by existing relationships (Purdy & Potrac, 2016; Rynne et al., 2006, 2010)  
699 and the institutionalised social capital (Rynne, 2014; Watts & Cushion, 2017) they had acquired  
700 and sustained throughout their competitive athletic careers (Bourdieu, 1986). In Oscar's case  
701 he was recruited by an ex-team mate employed by his first club which made his transition into  
702 coaching more fluent as he found his first formalised coaching role to be:

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

707

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

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

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

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

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

736

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

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

756  
757 Bradbury and colleagues (2016) assert how senior club directors who circumvent  
758 formal recruitment by purposefully targeting "preferred" candidates, socially reproduce  
759 prejudicial practices of marginalising ethnic minority coaches within football (p. 14). The  
760 results from our study can suggest that these headhunting recruitment exercises are still being  
761 implemented within the context of men's high-performance English football but also within  
762 men's high-performance English rugby union.

763



764 **Limitations**

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

775           Without being able to guarantee that all participants did complete the member checking  
776 process, we are confident that the transcripts were at least checked and agreed by participants.  
777 After each interview we sustained contact with all participants to confirm another interview as  
778 part of a broader longitudinal study designed to further track their coach development. During  
779 this dialogue, we expressed the importance for each participant to complete member checks  
780 and communicate the accuracy of these as this would affect the framing of the future interviews.  
781 Needless to say, given that we conducted data collection prior to the publication of the recent  
782 literature which has criticised member checking (e.g., Smith & McGannon, 2017; Thomas,  
783 2017), we recognise that alternative methods such as member reflections can generate greater  
784 levels of enriched understanding of the data whilst addressing trustworthiness.

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

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

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

804

805

## 806 **Conclusion**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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