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4 'Let them get on with it': Coaches' perceptions of their roles and coaching

5 practices during Olympic and Paralympic Games

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Abstract

5 How coaches prepare and perform is critical for athletes' performances (Gould, Guinan,  
6 Greenleaf & Chung, 2002), however, little is known about coaches' roles and coaching  
7 practices during major competitions such as the Olympic or Paralympic Games. To assist  
8 coaches in their efforts to improve athletes' performances in competition environments,  
9 greater understanding is needed about the coaching process during major competitions  
10 and how coaches prepare and perform. Therefore, the purpose of the present study was  
11 to examine track and field coaches' perceptions of their roles and coaching practices  
12 during competition at major events. Eight coaches, seven male and one female, who had  
13 coached one or more athletes to an Olympic or Paralympic medal were interviewed.  
14 Inductive content analysis indicated that creating an athlete focused supportive  
15 environment, detailed preparation and planning, use of effective observation and  
16 limited intervention, coach and athlete psychological preparation and managing the  
17 process were salient during competition at major events. These findings suggest that  
18 during major competition the coach's role is supportive and facilitative. Actions are  
19 largely unobtrusive and in response to athletes' needs, but remain as detailed as other  
20 phases of the coaching process. The findings are discussed in relation to the coach as  
21 orchestrator.

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24 Key words: Coaching process, coaching behaviour, performance excellence,  
25 orchestration, coaching psychology

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### 1 Introduction

2 Coaching is a relational and contextual process that focuses on the guided  
3 improvement and long-term development of athletes (International Council for  
4 Coaching Excellence, 2013). This process involves the provision of purposeful activities  
5 and interventions that focus on improving athletes' performances (Lyle, 2002). Despite  
6 a growing body of research examining what coaches do, this research largely focuses on  
7 practice or training environments and excludes an important part of the coach's role –  
8 coaching during competition (Smith & Cushion, 2006). Furthermore, much of the  
9 research has examined coaches working in youth or collegiate environments (e.g.,  
10 Becker & Wrisberg, 2008; Claxton, 1988; Cushion & Jones, 2001; Gallimore & Tharp,  
11 2004), with much less known about coaching during major competitions such as the  
12 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Although the central focus of the coaching process is to  
13 facilitate athletes' preparation and performances (Lyle, 2002), coaches are also  
14 performing (Giges, Petitpas & Vernacchia, 2004) and how coaches prepare and perform  
15 is critical for athletes' performances (Gould, Guinan, Greenleaf & Chung, 2002).  
16 However, little is known about coaches' psychological preparation and how their  
17 performance can affect athletes. The present study is part of a larger study examining  
18 the coaching practices of coaches and their effectiveness in the preparation leading up  
19 to and during the Olympics and Paralympics. In the present study we explored  
20 successful Olympic and Paralympic track and field coaches' perceptions of their roles  
21 and coaching practices during major competitions, including their psychological  
22 preparation. In addition, as a means to capture the dynamic and complex nature of  
23 coaching we examined the coaches' roles and practices through Jones and Wallace's  
24 (2005) concept of coaching as orchestration. There has been only limited empirical  
25 examination of this concept (i.e., Santos, Jones, & Mesquita, 2013) and it has not been  
26 explored in the competition context. Therefore, a secondary purpose was to examine  
27 coaching as orchestration during major competition.

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### 1 Coaches' influence on athletes' Olympic performances

2 Coaches and coaching issues have been identified as critical factors in Olympic  
3 performances (Gould & Maynard, 2009). The factors perceived to influence athletes'  
4 performances were examined in series of studies conducted by Gould and his colleagues  
5 (Gould, Greenleaf, Chung, & Guinan, 2002; Gould, Guinan, et al., 2002; Gould, Guinan,  
6 Greenleaf, Medbery, & Peterson, 1999; Greenleaf, Gould, & Dieffenbach, 2001). In a  
7 survey of 296 Atlanta and 83 Nagano Olympic athletes, Gould, Greenleaf, et al. (2002)  
8 found that coaches were perceived to have positive and negative influences on athletes'  
9 performances. Athletes perceived trust in the coach, dealing effectively with crisis  
10 situations, making decisive but fair decisions, total commitment to helping athletes to  
11 succeed, and implementing clear performance plans to have a positive influence on their  
12 performances. In contrast, not keeping things simple, over coaching, spending too much  
13 time with athletes, unrealistic expectations, and conflict were perceived to have a  
14 negative influence on athletes' performances. In a second study (Greenleaf, et al., 2001),  
15 interviews with 15 Olympic athletes (N=8 Atlanta, N=7 Nagano) also found that coaches  
16 were associated with positive and negative influences on athletes' performances.  
17 Coaching related factors that had a positive influence on athletes' performance were  
18 contact, trust, friendship, a good plan, well established performance routines and  
19 treating the Olympic Games like any other competition. Factors such as conflict, power  
20 struggles, and a lack focus by the coach on the team climate were perceived to have a  
21 negative influence on athletes' performances. In their study of a female footballer's  
22 journey through the preparation for and performance at the Olympics, Pensgaard and  
23 Duda (2002) found that it is important for the coach to create positive learning  
24 situations that fostered athletes' belief in the possibility of reaching their goal. Gould, et  
25 al., (1999) interviewed coaches and athletes from teams that failed to meet expected  
26 performance levels and those who exceeded performance expectations about the factors  
27 affecting their Olympic performances. Participants of teams that failed to meet

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1 performance expectations reported problems associated with coaching such as a  
2 negative attitude towards the coach, lack of trust and poor communication between  
3 coach and athletes and the coach not being able to deal with distraction and situations at  
4 the event. The findings of these studies indicate that coaches are important for athletes'  
5 performances and maintaining quality relationships with athletes, having a clear vision  
6 and plan for the competition, being prepared for the distractions and situations that may  
7 arise, engaging in quality coaching, and not over coaching are important aspects of the  
8 coach's role during competition.

9 Coaches' performances at the Olympics

10 Giges, et al., (2004) argued that just as athletes are performing so too are coaches  
11 and therefore as much attention should be given to coaches' preparation and  
12 performance as has been given to athletes. Recent examinations of elite coaches' sources  
13 of stress and coping (e.g., Olusoga, Butt, Hays, & Maynard, 2009; Olusoga, Maynard, Hays  
14 & Butt, 2012) suggest that researchers are beginning to heed Giges et al.'s call and  
15 examine the performance of coaches. However, little is known about how coaches  
16 prepare and perform during major competitions. The 'coach as performer' analogy is  
17 perhaps most evident when coaching at a major competition such as the Olympic or  
18 Paralympic Games. In these situations, coaches are expected to perform their coaching  
19 duties in a highly pressurised environment, often where their jobs depend on their  
20 athletes' performance successes (Gould, Guinan, et al, 2002). For example, in an  
21 interview with legendary Olympic swim coach, James Counsilman, it was revealed that  
22 he was often nervous at major competitions but worked hard to hide his own stress  
23 responses from his swimmers (Kimiecik & Gould, 1987). Counsilman had learned that  
24 athletes model their coaches' anxiety levels and can become more nervous and perform  
25 poorly.

26 In their research with Olympic Games coaches, Gould, Guinan et al. (2002) found  
27 that the coaches felt their effectiveness was hindered by marked changes in their

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1 coaching behaviours, an inability to establish trust with the athletes, and poor handling  
2 of crisis situations. Conversely, keeping things simple, having realistic expectations for  
3 their athletes, and following a performance plan facilitated effective coach performance.  
4 In a recent examination of coaches' perceptions of the factors that enabled them to  
5 coach in a stressful Olympic environment, Olusoga, et al. (2012) found the key factors  
6 were psychological attributes (e.g., emotional control and confidence), preparation (e.g.,  
7 strategic approach), effective communication, an athlete-focus, consistent behaviour,  
8 and coping at the event (e.g., team and emotional support). The current literature  
9 demonstrates that coaches play a critical role in athletes' performances at major  
10 competitions and are performing in their own way. This research also provides valuable  
11 insight into a broad range of factors that might be considered and planned for by  
12 coaches and support teams to facilitate athletes' performances. However, little is known  
13 about coaches' specific roles and coaching practices during major competitions.

### 14 Coaching during competition

15 The limited research that has examined what coaches do during competition  
16 suggests that coaches behave differently under practice compared with competition  
17 conditions (Cushion, 2010). For example, Smith and Cushion (2006) found that the  
18 lower frequency of instruction and higher occurrence of silence during competition was  
19 a deliberate coaching strategy to allow time for learning and was not time off-task. It has  
20 also been suggested that competition is a time for greater reactive decision making,  
21 where coaches observe and evaluate progress on an on-going basis and act when  
22 necessary (Cushion, 2010). In addition, coaching during competition at major events  
23 also includes the immediate preparation, briefings, and breaks in performance, all of  
24 which are opportunities where coaches may influence athletes' performances. Although  
25 providing valuable information about the behaviours of coaches in practice and  
26 competition conditions, the coaching behaviour research has generally been limited to  
27 observations of a discrete range of behaviours such as instruction, feedback, and

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1 organisation. With a few notable exceptions (e.g., Potrac, Jones, & Armour, 2002; Smith  
2 & Cushion, 2006) this research does not reveal the reasoning behind coaches' actions,  
3 nor, does it capture the dynamic and complex nature of coaching process during major  
4 events (Potrac, Brewer, Jones, Armour, & Hoff, 2000; Jones & Wallace, 2005).

5 Theoretical framework: Coaching as orchestration

6 To frame our exploration of the dynamic and complex nature of the coaching  
7 process during major competitions, we drew upon the concept of coaching as  
8 orchestration (Jones & Wallace, 2005; 2006). This was derived from Wallace and  
9 Pocklington's (2002) use of orchestration as means to capture complex educational  
10 change. Jones and Wallace (2005) argued that the orchestration metaphor could be  
11 employed to theorise coaches' contribution to the coaching process. Coaching as  
12 orchestration was defined as: "a coordinated activity within set parameters expressed  
13 by coaches to instigate, plan, organise, monitor and respond to evolving circumstances  
14 in order to bring about improvement in the individual and collective performance of  
15 those being coached" (Jones & Wallace, 2005, p. 128). Orchestrator coaches, it was  
16 proposed, engage in extensive management of uncertainty, improvisation, and  
17 adaptation to evolving situations, whilst "making sure the set course, which is carefully  
18 considered in advance, is followed as closely as possible" (p. 131). Orchestration  
19 recognises that coaching as a social activity demands appreciation of "the interaction  
20 and interconnectivity of events" (Jones, Bailey, & Thompson, 2013, p. 272) and involves  
21 both structure and ambiguity.

22 Central features of coaching as orchestration include, steering rather than  
23 controlling, structure with flexibility, and close, often unobtrusive, monitoring.  
24 Orchestration asserts that coaches steer rather than control the coaching process  
25 shaping of the working environment with little overt leadership. This is achieved by  
26 unobtrusive monitoring and channelling athletes' agency through encouragement and  
27 perceived mutually agreed agendas. The process of steering has been described as

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1 'behind the scenes string pulling' (Jones & Wallace, 2005; Jones, et al, 2013) and is  
2 supported by Santos, Jones, and Mesquita's (2013) findings that elite Portuguese  
3 coaches carefully consider their actions generating an illusion of empowerment to  
4 ensure compliance with their agenda. Mallett's (2005) reflection on his coaching with  
5 the Australian men's Olympic sprint relay teams demonstrates equally careful  
6 consideration of his actions and shaping of the coach-athlete working relationship. In  
7 contrast, however, he described how he facilitated an autonomy-supportive  
8 environment whereby he worked with athletes to genuinely shift responsibility and  
9 meaningful decision making back to athletes (Mallett, 2005). Further examination of this  
10 feature of the orchestration concept would be valuable to determine a better  
11 understanding of the extent to which the process is controlled or guided and who is  
12 steering the process and how.

13 Coaching as orchestration suggests that the coaching process is structured,  
14 individuals have clear roles, and great attention is given to the detail (Jones & Wallace,  
15 2005). For example, the vision and strategy for an athlete is likely to have been  
16 developed long before arriving at the Olympic or Paralympic Games. However, the  
17 importance of coaches having a clear vision and plans for athletes during the event has  
18 also been identified in research with Olympic coaches and athletes (Gould, Greenleaf, et  
19 al., 2002; Gould, Guinan et al., 2002; Greenleaf, et al., 2001). However, whilst retaining  
20 consistency, coherence, and sight of the overall objective, coaching is also flexible,  
21 adaptable, and often unobtrusive (Jones & Wallace, 2005). Flexibility is a necessary  
22 component to adapt to the dynamic circumstances ever-present in sport. The flexibility  
23 is framed by guidelines that provide a definitive focus and direction without which  
24 athletes may become uncertain of what is expected of them. Evidence from research  
25 with Olympic athletes suggests that a good plan, being able to adapt tactically, and  
26 coping with distractions and situations that may arise are factors that have a positive



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1 impact on athletes' performances (Gould, et al., 1999; Gould, Guinan et al., 2002;  
2 Olusoga, et al., 2012)

3       According to orchestration, structure with flexibility is achieved through close  
4 monitoring of athletes' 'on field' performances and 'off field' interactions, challenges,  
5 and emotions. Continual close monitoring has been described as noticing (Jones, et al.,  
6 2013) and is viewed as being critical to effective orchestration because coaches must be  
7 able to 'see' or notice what is happening and recognise opportunities to act (Jones et al.,  
8 2013). The monitoring, and indeed coaches' actions, is often unobtrusive with coaches  
9 continually observing and analysing situations in light of the fit with their mental model  
10 of expectation (Côté, Salmela, Trudel, Baria, & Russell, 1995). Observing, analysing, and  
11 responding to events both on and off the 'field' are direct intervention functions (Lyle,  
12 2002) that are critical for the athletes' performances. However, what coaches observe  
13 remains a topic of much discussion. Research suggests that one feature that separates  
14 expert coaches from other coaches is that they notice more relevant information, often  
15 more quickly, and are primed to observe different things (Schempp & McCullick, 2010).  
16 Experts notice things that are 'not the norm' and have established repertoires of  
17 responses from which to make decisions about how to act (or not act) (Schempp &  
18 McCullick, 2010). Much still remains to be discovered about what coaches pay attention  
19 to, when and how this is used to inform action.

20       In summary, research examining factors influencing athletes' performances at  
21 major competitions indicates that coaches play a critical role and that they are also  
22 performers (Gould, Guinan, et al., 2002; Olusoga et al., 2012). Despite suggestions that  
23 coaching is likely to be different in competition compared with practice, little is known  
24 about coaches' roles and coaching practices during major competitions such as the  
25 Olympic or Paralympic Games. In addition, it is argued here that competition at major  
26 events as a setting for coaching is indeed dynamic, complex and replete with ambiguity.  
27 Coaching as orchestration provides a promising avenue for developing our

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1 understanding of the roles and practices of coaches during major events. Therefore, the  
2 purpose of the present study was to examine the perceptions of track and field coaches  
3 who have produced Olympic and Paralympic medallists to gain a better understanding  
4 of their roles and coaching practices during competition at major events. A secondary  
5 purpose was to examine coaching as orchestration as a means to capture the coaching  
6 roles and practices during major events.

### 7 Methods

#### 8 Participants

9 Eight track and field coaches, seven male and one female, who ranged in age from  
10 46 to 72 years volunteered to participate in the study. The events coached included  
11 Heptathlon (Multi-events), Long Jump, Triple Jump, High Jump, 100m, 400m hurdles  
12 and 100m hurdles. To be considered for inclusion in the study, and to ensure the  
13 credibility of the data emerging from the interviews, coaches were required to have  
14 coached one or more athletes to an Olympic or Paralympic medal. In total, the coach  
15 participants had coached athletes to 19 Olympic or Paralympic medals: 11 gold; 4 silver;  
16 and 4 bronze. The coaches had between 21 and 51 years of coaching experience ( $M =$   
17 30.25 years). All were employed full-time as coaches and six were employed by their  
18 National Governing Body. They had attended between one and ten Olympic or  
19 Paralympic Games and between them amassed over 30 Olympic and Paralympic  
20 coaching appearances. At the time of the interviews, the coaches were at the end of a  
21 four-year Olympic cycle (i.e. just after the London 2012 Olympic/Paralympic Games).

#### 22 Procedure

23 Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the authors' institution.  
24 Subsequently, fifteen coaches were invited to discuss their perceptions of their roles and  
25 practices during Olympic or Paralympic events. Initial contact was made through email  
26 or a telephone call to each of the participants explaining the aims of the study and the  
27 expected commitment. Ten coaches replied stating they would like to be involved and

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1 eight coaches fully committed to the study. Once coaches agreed to participate in the  
2 study, they were emailed a formal letter, informing them of the nature and purpose of  
3 the study. Participants were assured that their comments would remain anonymous and  
4 that data would be treated confidentially. Convenient dates and times for the interviews  
5 were then agreed upon and informed consent was obtained before data collection. In  
6 keeping with the tertiary institution's ethical procedures regarding confidentiality, all  
7 participants were given a code (e.g., Coach 1).

### 8 Data Collection

9       Based on existing coach development literature (e.g., Gilbert, Cote', & Mallett,  
10 2006), a semi-structured interview guide was developed (Appendix A). This ensured  
11 that all participants were asked the same set of major questions. However, as  
12 participants were encouraged to elaborate, the natural flow of conversation directed the  
13 discussion and explored the coaches' unique experiences in greater depth as they arose  
14 (Patton, 2002). The interview guide was divided into two main sections and the coaches  
15 were reminded to focus on their Olympic and Paralympic experiences throughout. The  
16 first section involved introductory questions about the coaches' experience and  
17 background, and encouraged participants to talk descriptively (Patton, 2002). The  
18 second part of the interview guide focused on the coaches' perceptions of their roles and  
19 coaching practices during competition which occurred over several days at the event.  
20 This section was further divided into 3 sub-sections. The first sub-section discussed the  
21 coaches' beliefs about their role and involvement. The second sub-section discussed  
22 what the coaches' do for the athlete such as coaching behaviours, how their actions  
23 affect the athlete, considerations taken into account when acting or not. The third sub-  
24 section discussed what the coaches do for themselves to improve their ability to assist  
25 the athlete. The questions initially focused on the day of competition (e.g., what is your  
26 role on the day of competition? However, because track and field events in the Olympics  
27 and Paralympics typically take place over several days, the coaches were encouraged to

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1 discuss their roles and practices during the wider 'Olympic competition' (e.g., what is  
2 your involvement during competition? What do you do/not do?). Additional follow-up,  
3 probing, elaboration, clarification questions were used throughout the interviews to  
4 elicit in-depth information and to ensure that the coaches had discussed everything they  
5 felt relevant. Coaches were also given the opportunity to add anything relevant that was  
6 not discussed during the interview. All the interviews were conducted by the first  
7 author. They were carried out either face to face, through Skype or over the telephone.  
8 Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and was audio recorded.

### 9 Data analysis

10 The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed. To ensure  
11 trustworthiness and in keeping with procedures recommended and used within  
12 coaching research, (e.g., Côté, Samela, Baria, & Russell, 1993; Olusoga et al., 2012) the  
13 transcripts of each interview were content analysed by both authors independently. The  
14 analysis was both deductive and inductive using axial and open coding (Patton, 2002).  
15 The analysis was deductive in that the overall areas of the study were delineated by the  
16 literature and interview guide (e.g., role, actions for the athlete, actions for oneself) and  
17 axial coding was used to find evidence of the coaches' roles and practices. However, in  
18 keeping with the exploratory nature of the study inductive analysis and open coding  
19 was used to analyse features of the complex and dynamic coaching practice. Following  
20 initial coding of the data, preliminary lower order themes were developed. At this stage  
21 the authors discussed and reached agreement on the themes emerging from data and  
22 their meaning in relation to the purpose of the study. These themes were then analysed  
23 further through an iterative process which involved organising the lower-order themes  
24 into groups, then discussing and providing rationales for the groupings. This process  
25 continued until both authors were satisfied that no further groupings were needed to  
26 adequately represent the data (i.e., consensus was reached). These final groupings  
27 became the higher-order themes.

### 1 Results

2 Overall, the coaching process during major events was athlete-led with the  
3 coaches adopting a supportive and facilitative role including managing the wider  
4 performance environment. Through detailed preparation and planning most of the  
5 coaches' work had been completed prior to the event and the coaches expressed a  
6 desire to let athletes get on with their performances. However, they closely observed  
7 and monitored the athletes' preparation and performances, assisting when asked by the  
8 athlete or if they felt some input was needed. Facilitating the psychological preparation  
9 of the athletes was an important part of their coaching practice on the day of  
10 competition. The coaches were also performing in their own way and ensuring that their  
11 performance was effective required mental preparation and planning.

12 Six higher order themes emerged from the data representing the coaches'  
13 perceptions of their roles and coaching practices during major competitions. These  
14 themes were: athlete focused supportive environment, preparation and planning,  
15 observation, analysis and intervention, athlete psychological preparation, coach  
16 psychological preparation, and management. Each of the themes comprised a number of  
17 lower order themes. These are summarised in Figure 1. The number of coaches whose  
18 responses fit with each theme is cited next to each higher and lower-order theme. In the  
19 following sections each higher-order theme is described, and lower-order themes  
20 explored in detail.

#### 21 *Athlete-focused supportive environment*

22 How coaches interpret their roles has implications for what they are likely to do  
23 (Gilbert & Trudel, 2004). The athlete-focused supportive environment higher order  
24 theme reflected the coaches' perceptions that their roles and actions during competition  
25 centred on the athlete and his/her needs. This theme comprised four lower-order  
26 themes: athlete-led process, athlete empowerment, support for athlete's performance,  
27 and coach behaviour.

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1           *Athlete-led process.* During competition at the event the coaches believed the  
2 coaching process should be, and was, led by the athlete rather than directed by the  
3 coach. The coaches described the process as athlete-focused and largely athlete-led. The  
4 comments of Coach 6 clearly illustrate this focus: “I am there for support but not there to  
5 lead. It is all about the athlete... It is not just athlete centred, it is athlete led.” Their focus  
6 included facilitating athlete’s ownership and avoiding ego-involvement. Coach 2 stated  
7 that his “philosophy is that they [coaches] should be there for the athlete, focused on the  
8 athlete, not on themselves.” Several coaches described how earlier in their careers they  
9 had been too involved but had learnt to step back and allow the athletes to lead the  
10 process. For example:

11           When I first started in professional coaching, I interfered a bit too much ... I  
12           got over that and all I do now is I am with them. I am there and let them  
13           bounce off me. Otherwise, I just let them get on with it because they don’t need  
14           anyone fussing around them at an important competition. (Coach 3)

15           *Athlete empowerment.* All the coaches expressed a desire to let the athletes  
16 perform, but to be there if they were needed. Coach 4 focused on “creating the  
17 environment where the athlete is in control.” Coach 5 questioned the athletes to ensure  
18 they knew their plan for the competition: “I get them to tell me what their game plan is.”  
19 Coach 6 explained his view in this way:

20           ...it is up to athlete... it is their competition, it is their life and what happens is  
21           for them it is not about the coach... There is, not a handing over of  
22           responsibility because it’s a team effort, it’s a pairing. There is a case of “we  
23           have got here together, that’s great, now you take it on. This is your glory,  
24           not the coach’s...”

25           *Support for athlete’s performance.* The coaches viewed their role during major  
26 competition as supporting the athlete to perform to his/her best. Coach 2 indicated that

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1 “on the day, my job really is to ensure the athlete competes to their potential. Whatever  
2 that takes, within reason.” Coach 6 expressed it this way:

3 I honestly see myself as, not a crutch, but a supporter who’s at a distance...

4 At that stage, it is all about the athlete... However, if you see the wheels  
5 coming off you need to intervene.

6 *Coach behaviour.* The coaches treated the competition as a normal day. Coach 1  
7 referred to it as “just another day in the office.” For many of the coaches this involved  
8 providing consistency and stability for the athletes, particularly not changing their  
9 behaviour. The importance of consistent behaviour from the coach was highlighted by  
10 Coach 7 who reflected on the consequences of a time when she had mistakenly changed  
11 her behaviour:

12 When moving the hurdles (trying to help her), she bit my head off... ‘just leave  
13 me to it.’ You see I don’t normally help her with these, but because of the  
14 stressful environment, I thought I would help her... I’ve just got to let her go  
15 with the flow and let her manage her own warm up.

16 Treating the competition as everything as usual was facilitated by the strong  
17 relationships the coaches had established with the athletes over time prior to the Games  
18 and knowing how to work with and support them. Coach 6 described his approach in  
19 this way:

20 Different athletes act differently at different times and a coach comes to know  
21 this... I tailor my communications, body language, around what the athlete is  
22 expecting... What does not change for me is having a positive attitude... I’m  
23 very controlled and constructive in my thinking, nothing should change... I  
24 act... the way the athlete expects me to behave... I have an understanding of  
25 the athlete... everything is based on how well you know your athlete... the  
26 relationship.

27 *Preparation and planning*

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1           The preparation and planning higher-order theme reflected the work done before  
2 arriving at the Games and during the Games to ensure that athletes were appropriately  
3 prepared to compete to the best of their ability. This theme comprised three lower-  
4 order themes: high quality work prior to event, rehearsal and simulation, and joint  
5 process.

6           *High quality work prior to event.* Many of the coaches indicated that the coach's  
7 work had been done prior to the competition and the event was the time for the athlete  
8 to perform. The coaches believed that detailed preparation and planning prior to the  
9 competition was critical for optimal athletic performance on the day. Coach 8 commented  
10 that "all the hard work should have been done in advance." The following quotes illustrate  
11 the coaches' views:

12           My role is in the weeks and months prior, I go over everything for the day of  
13 competition with the athlete ... I speak to the athletes in the weeks before and  
14 put on paper, you know, wake up at this time etc... exactly what to do and  
15 when. I keep my mouth shut on the day. (Coach 1)

16           For developed athletes,... people overestimate the role of the coach... if  
17 coaches need to coach their athletes whilst competing... what are they doing  
18 when coaching before the competition?... They should sit back and enjoy the  
19 competition... In training, the whole reason is to teach athletes to compete  
20 well and out there let them get on with it... I have come to understand I have  
21 done my job prior to competition. (Coach 3)

22           Coach 1 went on to describe an experience which demonstrated the value of pre-  
23 competition preparation when an athlete needed to refocus after a poor performance:

24           ...she messed up in [event]... she came back to the warm up track and I said  
25 'do you remember what to do in these circumstances, 'she said 'yes'... [I]  
26 knocked on her door 2 hours later... she had left [the event] behind her and  
27 was in control of the situation and could make a joke at difficult moment in



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1 her career... This was because we went over this scenario so many times  
2 before... 'What will you do? What do you need to do and feel, thought  
3 process?'... I did not have to say anything... all I had to say was 'do you know  
4 what you now have to do'.

5 *Rehearsal and simulation.* Preparation included rehearsing elements of the  
6 plan and performance, including travel, pre-performance routines, and simulating  
7 'big event' conditions. The coaches made comments such as "this would all have  
8 been rehearsed beforehand. It is a ritual that they have gone through several times"  
9 and "keep to routines the importance of which has been explained previously."

10 Coach 5 described rehearsing their travel plans:

11 We always have a defined time when we go to the track. We've run that  
12 system 3 or 4 times, we never leave it to chance, taking the bus and organising  
13 that trip 3 or 4 times before the competition. (Coach 5)

14 This coach also described how at an appropriate time during their preparation he  
15 would simulate the noise and distractions of a major competition so the athlete could  
16 experience the conditions and learn to cope:

17 ...the athlete must be in a good place technically for you to do this. If the  
18 athlete is struggling with their training technically, you wouldn't carry out  
19 this exercise. I would have a ghetto blaster at training to create as much noise  
20 as I can, and then I try to communicate with the athlete in the session, and try  
21 to talk over it. I would try to create noise and distraction. I would get people  
22 to walk in front of the athlete. I would move their mark. I would put a cone in  
23 their way. So that the athletes can develop skills for the big stage. (Coach 5)

24 *Joint process.* Competition plans were developed jointly between coach and  
25 athlete and generally worked back from the time of competition. Coach 6 indicated  
26 that he and the athlete "agree sensible things and processes beforehand." Coach 7  
27 explained their joint process:

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1 We created a run sheet for the day... a run of tasks... we work out what time  
2 the event is, what time the call room is, what time we have to start warm up,  
3 what time we need to be at the warm up track, what time the bus is etc... all of  
4 those things.

### 5 *Observation, analysis and intervention*

6 The observation, analysis, and intervention higher-order theme reflected the  
7 coaches' actions during the competition directly related to athletes' performances. This  
8 theme comprised four lower-order themes: monitor preparation, input and feedback,  
9 observe performance, and decide to intervene.

10 *Monitor preparation.* The coaches monitored athletes over the course of the day  
11 and during preparation. Prior to competition, they monitored the athlete's state of  
12 readiness and ensured plans and routines were being followed. The monitoring was  
13 often unobtrusive:

14 ...out of the corner of my eye I am keeping an eye on my athletes to make sure  
15 that they are doing what they should be doing... whilst keeping an eye on  
16 reporting times and once they report... I give them time checks as they go.  
17 (Coach 2)

18 *Input and feedback.* On the day of competition the coaches engaged in  
19 limited direct coaching, providing only minimal input and feedback. As Coach 8  
20 explained, the preparation and planning prior to the competition supported the  
21 coaching process at the Games, enabling the process to be athlete-led and require  
22 only limited coaching intervention: "you don't want to do much... if you are doing a  
23 lot on the day then you are patching things up... all the hard work should have been  
24 done in advance... [just] remind them of the usual things." The performance  
25 process was led by the athlete with the coaches responding to athletes' questions:

26 Biggest competition... [the athlete says] 'just let me know where I am on the  
27 board, I can do the rest'. I just answered the questions he asked... There are

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1           some things a coach wants to say but that is not what the athlete wants to  
2           hear... you need to understand what athlete requires. (Coach 6)

3           I normally don't say too much unless she talks to me. Sometimes we chat  
4           about silly things like where her boyfriend is sitting, or look at that guy's  
5           jacket. Sometimes it is specific questions... So then you are giving feedback, at  
6           this point it's about how she feels, rather than technical. (Coach 7)

7           If the coaches were providing information or feedback it was "concise and  
8           accurate", "very simple" and reinforced key messages and readiness:

9           ...when giving the athlete feedback during the competition, I try to keep it  
10          simple, positive and general in nature, and don't say too much technically.

11          As a principle I think every time you say something, it creates inhibition for  
12          the athlete because they have to digest the information, so normally I would  
13          say, 'yeah it looks great' ... I like to restrict myself to only the most necessary  
14          information. (Coach 1)

15          *Observe performance.* Observation and analysis of athletes' performances was a  
16          very important activity for the coaches during the competition. For example coaches  
17          reported getting the "best seat that they possibly can to observe their athlete" and that  
18          they "concentrate very hard on the competition and focus on who I am coaching... seeing  
19          everything they are doing". The observation and analyses was critical to enable the  
20          coaches to provide specific feedback to the athlete if required:

21          ...athlete comes out and misses by a mark... I sit there and work out why they  
22          missed the board by a mark... you evaluate and then you give feedback.  
23          (Coach 2)

24          ...athlete is going down the runway... video... discuss this is what I saw, this is  
25          what I think you ought to do to improve it, ask the athlete what they did, what  
26          do they think they saw... give them one or two bits of information... They can't  
27          take in any more... everything should be simple. (Coach 8)

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1           *Decide to intervene.* The coaches only intervened if they felt something was  
2 not right or the athlete requested it. The coaches would shape the actions of the  
3 athlete if they felt it was necessary. Coach 4 suggested that, “the athlete is central  
4 to everything... but at times you have to steer the athlete to where they need to be  
5 to perform even if they don’t realise it themselves.” Coach 5 made an analogy of a  
6 curling stone and brush. The coach being the brush: “you know when you have a  
7 curling stone, and you have a brush on the ice and you control the direction of the  
8 stone with a brush.” The coaches would also intervene if they felt the athlete’s  
9 preparation or performance was not progressing well. Coach 3 explained how he  
10 approached direct coaching on the day in this way: “if they ask me technical  
11 questions I will give them an answer and if they are making a terrible mistake, I will  
12 put them right. But my interference now in major competitions is very few and far  
13 between.” Coach 6 described a more subtle but no less direct intervention: “if I see a  
14 problem that needs some thought process I will draw their attention [to it].”

15           The decision to intervene, however, was not always straightforward. Coach 8  
16 discussed a challenge he faced and his decision making process:

17           In the competition the decision to intervene is very much a judgement call, and can  
18 almost be seen as a gamble. In the Olympics, I noticed that the athlete was taking  
19 two more strides than they normally take, but she looked good coming in and  
20 comfortable at the board. So do I potentially throw petrol on the situation and light  
21 a match by telling the athlete ‘your run up is all wrong’, or do I say nothing?  
22 Sometimes as a coach, you need to have the confidence to say nothing. That’s when  
23 you, as a coach, become a bit of artist, where the situation is quite thick and it’s  
24 layered, and you’re comfortable enough to go “let it be”. Inside you might be going  
25 “f\*\*\* hell, f\*\*\* hell, f\*\*\* hell”, but you look at it and you go, ‘nah just let it go’, let it sit.  
26           It’s a gamble.

27           *Athletes’ psychological preparation*

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1           The athletes' psychological preparation higher-order theme reflected the roles  
2 and practices the coaches' engaged in to assist athletes to be in an appropriate mental  
3 state during the competition. This theme comprised three lower-order themes: manage  
4 emotional state, instil confidence, and maintain task focus.

5           *Manage emotional state.* All the coaches identified that part of their role was to  
6 ensure the athlete was mentally ready to compete and assist this process if necessary.  
7 The coaches commented "my job as a coach is getting the athlete settled into being in the  
8 right place for that competition" and it is "very much creating a focused, confident not  
9 arrogant, relaxed, supported athlete." Coach 8 discussed minimising the pressure the  
10 athlete felt: "our job is to take off all pressure... our job to unload her [athlete]." Coach 1  
11 described the need to help the athlete manage their emotions: "In general as a coach... it's  
12 about emotions... when they are too great you pull them down... when they are  
13 depressed... you pull them up... always focused on this is where you have to be." Coach 6  
14 explained his approach in this way:

15           Athletes are grown people and should be sensible, however, their minds are  
16 on fire, especially on the day of competition... [The coach should] be  
17 supportive, positive, be aware of what the athlete needs, not what you think  
18 the athlete needs and or/wants, which can be slightly different...

19           The coaches often monitored athletes' psychological states, unobtrusively, and  
20 managed it by assisting athletes to cope with anxiety, remain relaxed, or energised. Coach  
21 2's description of the way he facilitated athletes' psychological preparation reinforces his  
22 monitoring, confidence building and also his flexibility to adapt to the circumstances  
23 facing him:

24           basically... monitoring the state of the athlete all the time ... if they are  
25 agitated or confident,... and I try not to make it obvious, just looking and  
26 feeling the right vibes. If things don't feel or seem right my job is to try and  
27 settle [the athlete] as much as I can and if there is a bit of self-doubt there, I

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1 can try to instil confidence back... I make it up as I go... I have a number of  
2 tools in my bag of what to say and how to say it and it depends on the  
3 scenario that faces me which tool I pull out.

4 *Instil confidence.* The coaches focused on supporting and building the athletes'  
5 confidence. For example coaches talked about "giving confidence" and "making them feel  
6 like a million dollars". They also modelled confidence no matter how they felt "I try to  
7 almost show confidence and transfer it from me to them."

8 *Maintain task focus.* Ensuring the athletes are focused on the task of performing and  
9 were not distracted was also an important role for the coaches. Coach 5 explained his role  
10 was do whatever was needed, this might be to assist the athlete with refocusing, smooth  
11 out any minor issues, take care of the small things so that the athlete could focus on  
12 performing: "my role is I don't let them get distracted... If needed, I am the re-focuser. I'm  
13 a smoother outer... the 'don't worry about the small stuff'."

### 14 *Coaches' psychological preparation*

15 The coaches' psychological preparation higher-order theme reflected the actions of  
16 the coaches to optimise their own performance. Coach 5 compared himself with the  
17 athlete: "I need to focus and prepare my mind just as the [athlete] does." This theme  
18 comprised four lower-order themes: manage emotions, show confidence, maintain task  
19 focus, and strategies.

20 *Manage emotions.* The coaches recognised that their emotions could affect their own  
21 performance as well as that of their athletes. Coach 8 stated: "if I look anxious, stressed, all  
22 I am going to do is transfer that to the athletes and that is of no value at all... you deal with  
23 your own anxiety so as not to worry [the athlete]." They discussed "suppressing their  
24 emotions", "feeling in control", being "as relaxed as possible", and "appearing clam." Coach  
25 6 explained:

26 ...stability comes from the coach. I don't think a nervous coach or an over anxious  
27 coach helps the athlete perform. The idea is to appear calm and I think that is what

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1 the athlete wants. Everything is matter of fact. There is enough tension without the  
2 coach being stressed as well. Therefore, I aim to act as normal as possible, no matter  
3 how I feel. Even if I'm feeling insecure, or having bad day, the coach needs to  
4 supress their emotions.

5 *Show confidence.* The coaches described "looking confident" no matter how they  
6 were actually feeling. Coach 2 explained "I am pretty good at supressing my emotions and  
7 looking confident even when feeling very insecure." This was often described as being  
8 relaxed. Coach 5 said "I try to be as unnervous and relaxed as possible." Coach 4  
9 commented being "relaxed, chilled out, very free and easy."

10 *Maintain task focus.* Staying focused was also important to enable the coaches  
11 to perform their roles during the competition to support the athlete. Coach 4  
12 described being nervous but remaining focused "observing everything and not  
13 necessarily communicating a lot... In the call room I can be very nervous but I'm  
14 very controlled, knowing exactly where we are all the time... and what is going on.  
15 Coach 1 indicated the need to "be aware of it [nerves]" but to remain "focussed on  
16 the job and fully aware of things that are not right."

17 *Coping strategies.* The coaches reported using a range of methods to help them  
18 manage their emotions and stay focused during the competition. These included "normal  
19 breathing techniques to keep calm", "talking to other coaches", "walking a lap" to gather  
20 their thoughts, "stopping negative thoughts", "talking to themselves", taking time out for  
21 themselves when possible and having a plan for their own performance. Coach 4  
22 described his approach in this way:

23 ...on the day of competition... my day is equally as planned out as the  
24 athletes... I don't have any interference from what is going on... I will phone  
25 home in the morning... there is no further interference... [I try to be] in  
26 control not showing any nerves... being as confident as I can and that is part  
27 of the plan... and that is also part of training.





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1 expressed a desire to let athletes get on with their performances. This was possible due  
2 to the detailed preparation and planning prior to the competition and the experience  
3 level of the athletes. The coaches still had important roles. They engaged in detailed,  
4 often unobtrusive, observation and analysis of the athletes' psychological and physical  
5 preparation and performances. This enabled them to provide feedback and intervene if  
6 requested by the athlete or if something was not right. The coaches also recognised and  
7 actively worked to control their emotions and portray themselves as confident and  
8 relaxed. The findings from the present study provide valuable insight into how the  
9 coaching process is implemented in highly pressurised sporting environments such as  
10 the Olympic and Paralympic Games. These findings can assist those working in these  
11 environments to develop a greater understanding of the influences on athletes'  
12 performances and the implementation of coaching practice to facilitate improvements in  
13 performance.

14 Previous research has examined factors influencing athletes' performances at the  
15 Olympic Games and factors associated with successful coaching in this environment  
16 (e.g., Gould, et al, 1999; Gould et al, 2002; Gould & Maynard, 2009; Greenleaf et al, 2001;  
17 Olusoga et al, 2012; Pensgaard & Duda, 2002). Our findings are consistent with this  
18 research, specifically, the coaches in the present study emphasised preparation and  
19 planning, not over-coaching, managing the athletes' emotional states, and helping the  
20 athlete maintain focus. The findings also reinforce the notion that coaches are  
21 performing (Giges, et al, 2004) and therefore managing their own emotions and  
22 maintaining consistency in their behaviour is essential to their effectiveness (Gould &  
23 Maynard, 2009).

24 Examining the coaches' roles and coaching practices in greater detail allowed us  
25 to explore how coaches operate in these complex and dynamic settings. Using Jones and  
26 Wallace's (2005) concept of coaching as orchestration it was clear that the coaches  
27 could be described as orchestrators and their coaching during competition as

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1 orchestration. The concept of orchestration suggests that coaches steer rather than  
2 control the coaching process. One coach's use of the curling stone and brush analogy to  
3 describe his role and practice captures this unobtrusive steering of the process and  
4 supports the concept of coaching as orchestration. Unobtrusively steering the coaching  
5 process could be interpreted as manipulative on the part of the coach. Where the coach  
6 shapes the athletes' experience to serve the coaches' own interests and there may only  
7 be a *perception* that the agenda is mutually agreed between coach and athlete (Jones &  
8 Wallace, 2005). Some support for this notion comes from a study of five elite Portuguese  
9 coaches which found that the coaches carefully considered their actions to engender an  
10 illusion of empowerment to ensure compliance with their agendas (Santos et al, 2013).  
11 This might suggest a hierarchical coach-athlete relationship. Such an interpretation  
12 appears somewhat at odds with more humanistic, athlete-centred views on coaching  
13 (e.g., Kidman, 2005; Mallett, 2005) where coaches support athletes' autonomy, show  
14 genuine care for athletes' perspectives, and involve athletes in meaningful decision  
15 making to facilitate responsibility and ownership of the overall objective. The coaches in  
16 the present study did appear to steer the coaching process, however, they also described  
17 a process whereby the athlete was the central focus and they worked to empower the  
18 athlete to lead the process. From the coaches' perspectives this 'agenda' was mutually  
19 agreed between athlete and coach, rather than the result of a hierarchical relationship  
20 where the coach set the agenda. Examples such as coaches limiting communication with  
21 athletes unless requested by the athlete (e.g., answering their questions) or an athlete  
22 berating the coach for behaviour that was not 'normal' (e.g., 'helping' with hurdles)  
23 suggest the coaches were perhaps not as 'in control' of the process as even the  
24 orchestration concept seems to suggest. In fact, athletes, particularly experienced  
25 athletes, actually determined the process during competition at the event. Rather than  
26 resist this situation or see it as cause for concern, the coaches embraced, encouraged,  
27 and actively supported the athletes' autonomy. Their approach appeared to be a genuine

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1 expression of empowerment that let the athletes 'get on with it.' It is important to note  
2 that the coaches in the present study were working with experienced elite athletes.  
3 Future research should continue to explore how the coaching process is steered and  
4 determine whether coaches working with less experienced development athletes also  
5 adopt an empowering approach.

6 The coaches' desire to let the athletes get on with performing and their  
7 willingness to 'stay in the background' was largely possible due to the established  
8 coach-athlete relationships and detailed planning and preparation prior to the event  
9 and day of competition. Establishing a strong relationship between the coach and  
10 athlete enables the coach to understand the psychological needs of the athlete and  
11 respond accordingly (Gould & Maynard, 2009). Preparation and planning has been  
12 identified as an important factor influencing athletes' performances (Gould et al, 2002)  
13 and part of successful coaching in the Olympic environment (Olusoga, et al, 2012). In  
14 addition, sport psychology researchers have suggested that preparing athletes for  
15 dealing with disruptions and helping them to avoid distractions is one of the most  
16 important things coaches can do to assist athletes in their Olympic performance (Gould  
17 et al, 2002; Orlick & Partington, 1988). Structure and attention to detail are central  
18 features of orchestration (Jones & Wallace, 2005). The detailed plans and routines  
19 provided structure, clear direction, and a strong foundation from which the athlete then  
20 had the freedom to perform. They were developed prior to competition, sometimes over  
21 years, and reduced the ambiguity in the setting for athletes and coaches. This provided a  
22 sense of control where complete control is not possible.

23 Another key finding was the extensive use of observation by the coaches, whereby  
24 they were constantly monitoring and assessing the athletes' preparation and  
25 performance. From an observer's perspective, the coaches may appear to be 'off-task',  
26 however, the coaches were very much 'on task'. They were actively, but silently,  
27 observing the athlete's preparation and performance. The use of silence by the coaches

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1 provides support for Rupert and Buschner's (1989) notion of silently monitoring as a  
2 coaching strategy, where the coach reflects on appropriate interventions. Silent  
3 observation by the coach was also found by Smith and Cushion (2006) to be a deliberate  
4 coaching strategy, with coaches silently monitoring individual performance, and  
5 reflecting upon timely and appropriate intervention. The extensive use of observation  
6 and analysis and limited direct intervention is another central feature of orchestration  
7 (Jones & Wallace, 2005; Jones, et al., 2013). Borrowing from Mason's (2002) work, Jones  
8 et al (2013) argued that noticing was the foundation for orchestration in that before a  
9 coach can act he/she needs to recognise an opportunity to do so. The coaches in the  
10 present study were clearly noticing. Of interest is what they were noticing. The coaches  
11 described looking for things that were 'not right'. Although the coaches did not directly  
12 mention it, this suggests they had a representation in their mind or mental model of  
13 what they expected to see (Côté, et al, 1995). This extended beyond the athletes' sport-  
14 specific technical and tactical performances. At major events the coaches attended to the  
15 athletes' psychological states, the actions and psychological states of support staff,  
16 potential for distractions and the possible impact of their own actions and psychological  
17 state on athletes' performances. These findings support the importance observation and  
18 analysis play in coaching and as perhaps one of the distinguishing features of expert  
19 coaches (Schempp & McCullick, 2010). Investigations into what, when, and why coaches  
20 notice and how this is used to impact performance holds promise to further our  
21 understanding of the coaching process and influences on coaches' performance.

22 Another important finding from the present study was that the coaches provided  
23 only limited input and feedback to athletes during major events. This finding is in  
24 contrast, to research examining coaching behaviours in training situations. For example,  
25 Potrac, Jones and Armour (2002) finding that the football coach in their study used  
26 frequent instruction. The high frequency of instruction was explained by the coach's  
27 desire for control over the team's and players' improvement and the coach's conscious

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1 efforts to portray his knowledge of the game and thereby gain the players' respect. Our  
2 finding is consistent with the limited research examining coaching during competition,  
3 which suggests a greater emphasis on silent observation and 'on-task' monitoring and a  
4 lower frequency of instruction (e.g., Smith & Cushion, 2006). In the present study, the  
5 coaches used simple and concise input and feedback to provide a definitive focus,  
6 thereby reducing ambiguity for athlete, and maintain momentum towards their  
7 objectives. This allowed the athlete to continue their preparation or performance with  
8 only minimal disruption. However, the decision to intervene could be a complex  
9 decision making process, with the coaches considering a wide range of information to  
10 decide whether or not to intervene and, if so, what to do and when. The cognitive ability  
11 to make repeated rapid assessments of circumstances, compare them with mental  
12 models, and make an appropriate intervention has been suggested to be a cornerstone  
13 of coaches' expertise (Schempp & McCullick, 2010).

14 Coaching as orchestration focuses on the social activity of coaching, the  
15 interactions amongst various stakeholders in complex and dynamic contexts. It  
16 considers the management of coaches, themselves, largely in the context of how they  
17 steer others. The findings from the present study indicate that although the focus of the  
18 coaching process is on the athletes and their performances, coaches are performing in  
19 their own way. The coaches were consciously managing their own performance, albeit  
20 for the betterment of the athletes' performances. This finding supports the growing  
21 recognition that coaches are performers (e.g., Giges et al, 2004; Olusoga et al, 2012) and  
22 that personal preparation is important for the facilitation of a successful coaching  
23 performance (Gould, Guinan et al. (2002). To date, only a small number of studies have  
24 examined how coaches prepare for their performance during competition at major  
25 events or how they perform at these events. In addition to managing their own  
26 emotions, the coaches in the present study indicated that it was important for them to  
27 take time out to relax away from the stresses of the environment, so that they could

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1 function to the best of their ability, both physically and mentally. Recognising the value  
2 of leaders' personal well-being (physical, spiritual, emotional and mental) to their  
3 performance is gaining recognition (e.g., Giges, et al, 2005; Loehr & Schwartz, 2001;  
4 Olusoga et al., 2012). Greater understanding of coaches' own preparation and  
5 performance will enable developments in education and support to ensure coaches are  
6 appropriately prepared for the pressurised environment of major events such as the  
7 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

### 8 Limitations and future directions

9       Our findings provide valuable insight into the process of coaching during track  
10 and field competition at major events, however, it is not our intention that these findings  
11 be generalised to other sports, or contexts. This is for several reasons. First, due to the  
12 small number of participants it would be inappropriate to generalize the findings  
13 beyond this sample. Second, coaching is a contextualised process and the present study  
14 focused on coaches working with experienced athletes from one sport, track and field, in  
15 a very specific context, the Olympic and Paralympic Games. How coaches in different  
16 sports, with different athletes, and in different contexts, interpret their roles and coach  
17 is might not be the same as that of the coaches in our study. However, our findings do  
18 provide some interesting directions for future research. To further our understanding of  
19 the coaching process during competition researchers might examine coaches working  
20 with athletes in different contexts (e.g., other sports or working with developing  
21 athletes). For example, one of the coaches in our sample stated that you cannot stop an  
22 athlete in the middle of the 800m, therefore, coaching during the actual performance is  
23 limited. However, a basketball coach, for example, can call a timeout, make substitutions,  
24 use quarter- and half-time breaks as opportunities to influence athletes' performances.  
25 Questions might focus on the extent to which coaches' recognise the ambiguity in sports  
26 settings, what attempts, if any, are made to retain control, and how they manage  
27 uncertainty for the athlete but equally for themselves. Furthermore, the present study

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1 only gained the insight of the coaches. Gould and colleagues (Gould, et al, 1999; 2002;  
2 Greenleaf et al, 2001) found that athletes' also had views on their coaches' effectiveness  
3 leading up to and during the Olympics. Future research should include more in-depth  
4 analysis of athletes' perceptions, specifically about the coaches' roles and the process of  
5 coaching during competition. This could include consideration of athletes' perceptions  
6 of coaching as orchestration.

### 7 Conclusion

8         The present study provides detailed insight into eight coaches' perceptions of  
9 their roles and coaching practices during competition at major events. The coaches  
10 emphasised that competition was a time to 'let the athletes get on with it', noting that all  
11 the work was done prior to the competition, and only minimal input, if any, was needed.  
12 This is not to say that the coaches had no part to play, rather that much of their role was  
13 unobtrusive. They supported and facilitated athletes' performances, closely monitoring  
14 athletes, and intervening only if needed. This involved the use of psychological  
15 strategies to manage the emotions and focus of the athlete, the support team, and  
16 themselves. The findings provide preliminary support for coaching during competition  
17 as orchestration, and the coaches appeared to be the orchestrators. However, further  
18 research is warranted to examine who steers the process and how, and whether this  
19 changes as athletes gain more experience. In addition, the coaches were engaged in  
20 detailed noticing and some insight has been gained about what coaches notice. This is a  
21 promising area for future research to identify what coaches notice and how this informs  
22 coaching practice. Finally, the findings indicate that coaches are performing in their own  
23 way and a greater understanding of the coaches' performance process is needed to  
24 ensure coaches can be adequately prepared to perform effectively in highly pressurised  
25 environment such as the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

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## COACHING DURING OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC GAMES

1 Figure 1. Olympic and Paralympic track and field coaches' roles and coaching  
2 practices during major events.

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## COACHING DURING OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC GAMES

- 1 Appendix A. Interview Guide
- 2 Can you tell me about your coaching background?
- 3 What do you see your role during competition?
- 4 As the coach, what are you doing for the athlete?
- 5 As the coach, what are you doing for yourself?
- 6 What is your philosophy on what your role should be on the day and why is this?
- 7 Why do you take a particular approach, and how did it develop?
- 8 Can you tell me of a critical incident (moment) on competition day where you had to
- 9 make a decision that affected the athletes performance?
- 10 Can you give me an example of a successful outcome?
- 11
  - Why did you make that decision?
- 12 Can you give me an example an unsuccessful outcome?
- 13
  - Why did you make that decision?
- 14 How have you, the successful coach, developed your ability to coach successfully in an
- 15 Olympic environment?
- 16