

Looking Beyond 2012 - Ethical Conflicts for Coaching: A Review of Key UK Sport-Based Policy

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Introduction

Sport continues to represent one of the most valued cultural practices in most Western societies. As such, the impact of sport and physical activity policy touches the lives, at least peripherally, of the majority of residents in the UK - around 38% as participants (North, 2009). Around 1.1 million sports coaches deliver approximately 1.68 million coaching hours per week (North, 2009). These numbers, coupled with the prominence of high profile coaches, the impending 2012 Olympics and a burgeoning academic literature, reinforce the importance of a critical examination of coaching policy in relation to the overarching sport policy. By selecting key themes from selected core sport and coaching policy over the last 20 years, with a particular focus on the implications for the nature of the coach-athlete relationship, this paper aims to analyse the extent to which coaching and sport policy are conceptually, philosophically and politically aligned. The paper aims to challenge the current policy-practice gap inherent in coaching, offer some considerations for coaches wishing to embrace the growing theoretical drive to coach holistically whilst holding in tension the contemporary return to competition as the primary vehicle for achieving governmental objectives.

A considerable influence in contemporary coaching policy in the UK is, and has been, the impending Olympics and the aspirations for a meaningful sporting legacy. However, the place of coaching within Olympic legacy is troublesome to pinpoint and has been slow to emerge from the key stakeholders. A considerable part of the 2012 Olympic legacy lies in the physical development of the area immediately surrounding the Olympic Park; however, the 2005 bid team were equally vociferous that the impact of the games would surround an ambitious upsurge in participation permeating all societal groups in the UK (Girginov and Hills, 2008). Alongside this, the inevitable performance-related legacy is intended to establish the UK as a world-leading sporting nation (Olympic Board, 2007). Despite the lack of evidence surrounding the effective implementation of Olympic legacies (Girginov and Hills, 2008), the role of coaching in delivering

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these two latter targets has been articulated. However, the outworking of the legacy in terms of performance sport coaching appears to have been completely neglected. The role of coaching at the participation level is discussed within six recommendations by Sports Coach UK (2010), concerning the allocation of £3m by the Mayor of London's Legacy Fund and also in the announcement of the £135m 'People Places Play' initiative, to be delivered by Sport England. In terms of those elements relevant to coaching, the 'People Places Play' initiative aims to train 40,000 sports leaders as volunteers to provide grassroots sporting opportunities and, through the 'Sportivate' programme, to enable teenagers and young adults across the country to access six weeks of sports coaching (Sport England, 2010). The Mayor of London (2010) also cites sports leaders alongside coaches as potential benefactors of his monetary allocation. The difference in these roles, alongside the legacy implications, can be further understood by analysing the policy-driven development of sports coaching over the last 20 years. Particular consideration will be given to roles of those tasked with the provision of grass-roots sports and the implications this has for coach-athlete relationships.

Raising the Game (DNH, 1995) was published by John Major's Conservative government and was intended to ignite resurgence in UK sport. Driven by a series of poor international performances at major sporting events, the document emphasised physical education teachers as the primary deliverers of grass-roots sport doing little to address some of the key findings of the Coaching Review Panel (1991) several years before. *Coaching Matters* (Coaching Review Panel, 1991) reviewed the status of coaching and coach education in the UK, suggesting that coaches should play a more substantial role in a centralised and coordinated sport strategy from grass-roots to the elite. Despite a pyramidal understanding of talent development and a conception of competition as an aspirational incentive, *Raising the Game* acknowledged, if only briefly, the importance of 'fair play, self-discipline, respect for others, learning to live by laws and understanding one's obligations to others in a team' (DNH, 1995: 7).

Game Plan (DCMS/Strategy Unit, 2002) was published by Tony Blair's New Labour government and represented a considerable shift in sport policy. *Game Plan* (DCMS/Strategy Unit 2002) brought together performance-related sporting targets with more sociocultural factors relating to social exclusion and physical activity for health. Perhaps unintentionally, the health, social inequality and social justice-related implications of *Game Plan* (DCMS/Strategy Unit, 2002) furthered the understanding of a more holistic appreciation of participant

development through sport. Whilst caged in economic justification and international success, *Game Plan* (DCMS/Strategy Unit, 2002) sat broadly supportively alongside the *Coaching Task Force - Final Report* (Coaching Task Force, 2002) enabling a progressive development of the nature and role of the sports coach, which emerged more concretely in the *UK Action Plan for Coaching* (NCF, 2008). It was the *Coaching Task Force - Final Report* (Coaching Task Force, 2002), which established the ambitious aspiration to professionalise the coaching industry by 2012, stimulating an increase in commissioned research and academic discourse. However, the publication of *Playing to Win* (DCMS, 2008) evokes some fundamental questions. Whilst *Playing to Win* is supportive of the ambition to create a world leading coaching system by 2016 – a core objective of the *UK Action Plan for Coaching* (NCF, 2008), the overt separation of physical activity-related and performance focus changed the nature of the relationship between sport and coaching policy. The social inclusion focus, so prevalent in *Game Plan* (DCMS/Strategy Unit, 2002) had been entirely eliminated. The changing nature of the relationship between sport and coaching policy was evident throughout the lifespan of *Game Plan* (DCMS/Strategy Unit, 2002). Green (2009) suggests New Labour's governance principle of New Public Management (NPM) with its principle of evidence-based policy making and accountability in exchange for freedom in decision making, did little to unite National Governing Bodies (NGBs), who remain fiercely independent and exclusive. Further to this, there remains considerable confusion in the UK regarding which key institutions are responsible for leading which aspects of sport policy (Grix, 2009). This fierce independence of NGBs considered alongside the lack of a cohesive governance system directly hinders an industry, such as sports coaching, which seeks to operate across the vast and confusing map of UK sport. One of the central visions of the *UK Action Plan for Coaching* is to 'create a cohesive, ethical, inclusive and valued coaching system where skilled coaches support children, players and athletes at all stages of their development in sport' (NCF, 2008: 2). Cohesion and ethical principles are difficult concepts to embrace in a system which rewards NGBs independently for successful performance on the international stage. Of particular concern for this paper are the ethical implications for the coach-athlete relationship in light of the contemporary foci of sports coaching policy and frameworks.

Ethical sports coaching practice

There are many viewpoints from which to consider what comprises ethical practice in sports coaching. For some coaches, ethical practice considerations are little more than ethical dilemmas featuring the

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conflict between the good of the individual and the good of the team (Bergmann Drewe, 1999). However, this paper will consider this concept to be much more broadly based. The prominence of ethical practice as a core underpinning principle has risen greatly over the last decade and represents a key component of the central vision of the *UK Action Plan for Coaching*. *The Action Plan* articulates its aim to 'create a cohesive, ethical, inclusive and valued coaching system where skilled coaches support children, players and athletes at all stages of their development in sport' (NCF, 2008: 2). This somewhat altruistic conception of coaching has been evident through all the key reports over the last 20 years (e.g. *Coaching Matters* (Coaching Review Panel, 1991), *Coaching Task Force - Final Report*, (DCMS, 2002), *Coaching Workforce Document* (North, 2009)). The implications of such an ethically-driven vision are substantial considering that sports' coaching has commonly been conceived as little more than creating safe, fun environments for young people and generating winning environments for performance athletes with a predominant focus on psychomotor development leaving other developmental domains to the role of the physical education teacher (Bergmann Drewe, 2000). The fundamental importance of considering ethical practice is underlined by Taylor and Garratt's (2008) assertion that this concept represents one of the fundamental criteria in the journey to professionalization.

The broader implications for ethical practice can be seen further within the *UK Action Plan for Coaching* (NCF, 2008: 1) which places greater responsibility on the sports coach by underlining:

Sports coaching is central to developing, sustaining and increasing participation in sport. It drives better performances and increased success as well as supporting key social and economic objectives throughout the UK. At all levels of society, coaches guide improvement in technical, tactical, physical, mental and lifestyle skills, contributing to personal and social development.

These holistic factors are in keeping with the societal enrichment agenda of *Game Plan* (DCMS, 2002) and place health, economic and personal development issues firmly alongside the performance mandate of sports coaching. This shift in responsibility for holistic development is reflected in contemporary coaching research and serves to broaden the understanding of ethical coaching practice; *The UK Action Plan for Coaching* (NCF, 2008) demands coaches re-evaluate the experience of athletes by considering individual developmental

pathways irrespective of talent development considerations. Coaches, therefore, have an ethical and moral responsibility to focus on the holistic development of the athlete. Despite this, the majority of coaches in the UK are predominantly focussed on psychomotor development, with very little consideration given to cognitive or affective domains (Cassidy, Jones and Potrac, 2009). Consideration of a more holistically-driven coach practice must incorporate implications for the coach-athlete relationship and also coaching pedagogy. The relationship between ethical coach-athlete relationships, coaching pedagogy and policy can be further understood by considering the concepts of empowerment and the ethic of professional service.

Holistically-focussed coaching practice and empowerment

Having outlined the mandate for holistic development above, this paper will consider the concept of ethical practice to be inextricably linked to placing the holistic development of the individual at the heart of the coaching process. Kidman (2005) calls this athlete-centred coaching. The political journey, as articulated above, regarding the ethics of sport coaching has been an interesting one. The ethical implications of *Raising the Game* (DNH, 1995) were surprisingly limited, comprising the rather bland statement that:

The government believes that such concepts as fair play, self-discipline, respect for others, learning to live by laws and understanding one's obligations to others in a team are all matters which can be learnt from team games properly taught. (DNH, 1995: 7)

Game Plan's (DCMS, 2002) developmentalist perspective, alongside the *UK Action Plan for Coaching's* (NCF, 2008) athlete-centred vision leave sports coaches destined to grapple with the concepts of autonomy and empowerment. In considering these concepts, Kupfer (1987) suggests autonomy refers to not simply being free from others' control, but demands awareness of the control of relationships. Central to the *UK Action Plan for Coaching* (NCF, 2008) lies the coach-athlete relationship, which *Sports Coach UK* identify as the fundamental pinnacle of coaching. Furthermore, key elements of the literature identify the concept of an educational relationship to best represent the practise of sports coaching (Wikeley and Bullock 2006) and that issues of power most readily illustrate the fundamental challenges within contemporary sports pedagogy (Jones, 2006).

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These issues and tensions have considerable history in the sports coaching literature. Ravizza & Daruty (1984: 78) suggested three primary issues epitomised the ethical challenges of sports coaching:

1. The nature of the coach's philosophy or attitude related to coaching a particular sport;
2. Current information about the risks, complications, and benefits associated with the specific aspects of participation in that sport;
3. Recognition that feasible alternatives may exist to the coach's position in certain situations and the athlete is responsible for communicating reasons for a change in the team plan or individual strategy as it relates to training and performance.

These challenges speak resoundingly into contemporary sports culture. For example, a coach cognisant of the risks, complications and benefits associated with professional American Football will be commonly presented with the problem of whether to counsel young athletes into a sport which could well lead to premature death between 20-30 years early (Hoffman, 2010). Such tensions appear increasingly uncomfortably when considered alongside *Playing to Win's* (DCMS, 2008) unquestionable emphasis on podium success and the pressure this will impose on sports coaches in terms of funding streams. Contrastingly, the 'feasible alternatives' within the third aspect of Ravizza and Daruty's (1984) framework provide an interesting lens through which to view the increasingly prevalent discussions surrounding athlete empowerment. This re-conceptualisation of the coach-athlete relationship is built around, and resonates with, discussions regarding contemporary sports pedagogy.

Contemporary sports pedagogy challenges the majority conception of coaching practice in the UK, which can be modelled with the coach as knowledge dispenser and power holder. Such coach-athlete relationships and pedagogies inhibit coaches' ability to develop the athlete from a holistic perspective, particularly concerning intellectual competencies and critical thinking (Cushion *et al.*, 2003), thus presenting an immediate and considerable barrier to the fulfillment of the *UK Action Plan for Coaching's* (NCF, 2008) central vision. Athlete-centred relationships and pedagogic models require the athlete to become more actively engaged in the process, increasingly dependent on each other and to tackle cognitive as well as physiological challenges. The coach's role is to create environments commensurate with facilitating the holistic development of the participants (Gréhaigne *et al.* 2003).

Kirk (2005) proposes that sport has been held back from realising its holistic developmental potential by mind-body dualism - a dichotomisation of the physical and the cognitive. Despite this, most coaches would consider competent athletic performance (particularly in team activities) as inseparable from quality decision making (Baker et al., 2003; Turner, 2005). Performers are 'legitimate peripheral participants' in their early developmental stages and should be encouraged to develop deeper, more mature and fuller participation in time. Whilst not specifically written in a sport context, Lave and Wenger's (1991) work in this area is increasingly cited by contemporary sports pedagogists (e.g. Mallett *et al.*, 2009) and, as Fuller *et al.* (2005) contend, Lave and Wenger intended their theoretical approach to be applicable across all areas of social practice. Their approach emphasises the potential for learning to occur at a variety of sites and times, from a variety of sources and for the 'planned curriculum' to be only a part of the learning experience. Learning is situated and as such the sources of knowledge are birthed in the experience and not just the coaches' content. A description of pedagogical models is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is clear that such practices have a considerable role to play in the holistic development of athletes and, therefore, on the ethical practice of sports coaches.

The ethic of professional service

A second consideration impacting on the coach-athlete relationship is outlined by Taylor and Garratt (2010a) as the professional service ethic - that practitioners put the needs of the athletes before their own. Whilst this clearly has parallels with the concept of athlete-centred coaching discussed above, the concept of the professional service ethic not only reinforces, but extends the nature of the challenge to the coach-athlete relationship. Whilst this ethic is not referred to in sports policy, considerable foundations have been laid in the various coaching documents. Since *Coaching Matters* (Coaching Review Panel, 1991), the subservient position of the coach has been reinforced. *Coaching Matters* adapts Lao-Tzu's 'Tao Te Ching' stating 'Coaches are best - when people barely know they exist ... of coaches who talk little - when their work is done, their aim fulfilled, their charges will say 'we did this ourselves' (Coaching Review Panel, 1991: 13). Such notions are further contextualised by considering Taylor and Garratt's (2010b) illustration of the coach-athlete relationship as a vulnerable client coming into contact with a skilled professional. Whilst the vulnerability of the client is not always illustrative of the coach-athlete relationship (consider the case of elite Tennis coaches), it is certainly representative of the bulk of practice in the UK. The ideal

underpinning this notion of professional service is, therefore, based on a combination of altruism, obligation and professional responsibility (Taylor and Garratt, 2010b). As discussed above, the majority of sports coaching practice in the UK can be understood to be technocratic and characterised by the coach as power holder and knowledge dispenser. Contrastingly, the notions of altruism, obligation and professional responsibility align well with those underpinning the motivation to volunteer (Taylor and Garratt, 2010b). Around two thirds of the coaches in the UK are unpaid (North, 2009) and the vast majority of paid coaches also began in a voluntary capacity. Some of the most common motives for volunteering as a sports coach surround perceiving a debt to the sporting community, giving something back to the sport and wanting to provide opportunities for youth talent development. Taylor and Garratt (2010b: 110) reinforce this assertion by suggesting 'Within the critical mass of voluntary coaches, the notion of community betterment and social welfare also resonates strongly in the wider ideals of volunteerism and community action'. The idealistic notions of the role of the sports coach will sit well with the predominantly volunteer workforce that will continue to drive the heart of sports coaching in the UK well beyond the 2012 and 2016 deadlines (North, 2009). Those in favour of the drive towards professionalism should take heart from the nature of volunteerism.

Whilst numerous pedagogic models enhancing the understanding of athlete-centred coaching have been illustrated above, few models within cotemporary coaching discourse describe the position of the coach as subservient. One model which is, therefore, worthy of further consideration is Servant Leadership. Extensively discussed within a management context (Greenleaf, 1977), this model features, as the name suggests, the desire of the leader to be, above all else, servant-hearted. The servant leader seeks to demonstrate qualities such as listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualisation, foresight, stewardship, growth and building community (Greenleaf, 1977). It is beyond the scope of this paper to review this model further; however, it is worthy of note that Servant Leadership has received positive support in the coaching domain (Rieke *et al.*, 2008), although the volume of this research is extremely limited and requires considerable further investigation, particularly in a UK context. Despite the paucity of research concerning this model in a coaching context, when considered alongside the drive towards professionalism within the *Coaching Task Force – Final Report* (Coaching Task Force, 2002) and *Action Plan for Coaching* (NCF, 2008), the need to re-examine traditional hierarchical structures within coaching is starkly evident. Considered together, the framework of this paper suggests the ethic of

professional service will resonate strongly with the coaching community in the UK. However, once again the ethical underpinnings of *Playing to Win* (DCMS, 2008) cast a considerable shadow over such laudable ambitions and contribute to extending the apparent policy-practice gap.

Despite the centrality of coaching ethics to the professionalisation debate and the prominence of codes of conduct on NGB websites, Passmore (2009) suggests very few coaches reflect on their ethical viewpoints. It is clear that if coaching is to make the journey towards professionalisation, the real-world impact of such policies needs to be exponentially increased. Furthermore, the nature and implications of ethical practice need to be more deeply appreciated as a fundamental component of the coach-athlete relationship, bound up with conceptions of empowerment, athlete-centredness and servant leadership. This may appear to some 'pie-in-the-sky' idealism; however, by understanding that it is in the notion of community and sport as a legitimate tool for societal enrichment that initially draw the typical sports coach onto the field in a voluntary capacity, it is in the appreciation of the serving nature of the volunteer that sports coaching will retain its basis for ethical practice.

Participant development

In order to better understand the issues surrounding participant development for sports coaches, it is helpful to review the position in which sport and coaching policy sits alongside theoretical models of participant development. Whilst all policy documents discussed in this paper are cognisant of the performance sport environment, the underpinning philosophical and political motives raise fundamental questions over issues of participant development. As discussed above, the central visions of the *UK Action Plan for Coaching* (NCF, 2008) support both coach and participant development. Coaches are tasked to develop the physical, technical, tactical and mental capabilities of the participants, but also, when coaching children, aim and plan to develop the five 'Cs' of competence; confidence; connection; character and caring, which is based on the work of Jelcic *et al.* (2007). Bailey *et al.* (2010) proposed an adaptation in which the important area of creativity has been added. In addition to the theoretically driven agenda outlined above, Townend (2009), whilst undertaking a consultation report for the UK Coaching Framework, reinforced the importance of re-conceptualising traditional notions of participant development by reporting that participants identified a need for coaches to be participant-centred and led by individual needs rather than the needs of the sport or of competition. The participants felt that

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the emphasis when coaching children should be based around fun, enjoyment and general skill development, with a greater emphasis placed on technical skill development when approaching more performance-based opportunities. This attitude was also reflected by parents who also placed a considerable level of importance on the coach's ability to develop the wider life skills of children. By this, they refer to the skills such as listening, teamwork, discipline, confidence, and social interaction, as well as being encouraged to succeed (Townend, 2009). These data reveal a participant development agenda which is founded on a mutually supportive framework of athlete-centred theory such as that discussed in the previous section and the desire for a more contemporary appreciation of the coach-athlete relationship.

The foci of *Playing to Win* (DCMS, 2008) comprise volume of provision at school level and international success amongst the elite. Whilst both aspects are undeniably crucial to the development of sport in the UK, the complete absence of any athlete-centred strategy or any recognition of contemporary models of participant development undermines the developmentalist perspective of the previous decade and disregards the burgeoning academic literature in this field. *Playing to Win* (DCMS, 2008) encourages competition from a young level suggesting the implementation of internet-based league tables at school level. Such a policy is deeply concerning when considered alongside Balyi's (2001) assertion that young athletes tend to under-train and over-compete. Whilst some (e.g. Baker *et al.*, 2003) have queried the evidence base for Balyi's (2001) Long Term Athlete Development (LTAD) model (Bailey *et al.*, 2010), it has been adopted and adapted (individually) by all UK NGBs. Whilst the general tenet of matching an athlete's developmental stage to the ratio of training and competition is in line with an athlete-centred perspective, the LTAD model is predominantly physiologically-based (Bailey *et al.*, 2010) and does not fulfill the holistic perspective alluded to in this paper. Additionally, with the current structures and funding streams of sport in the UK built around NGBs operating largely in isolation from each other, young athletes often find themselves torn between opportunities across a number of sports. A holistic appreciation of coaching necessitates challenging the commonly held belief that early specialisation in sport is a pre-requisite for eliciting elite performance. Developing pathways for young athletes which are designed not only to enable progression to the elite platform, but also to minimise the all-too-common tendency of talented young athletes to either drop-out or burn-out, should be paramount. Côté *et al.*, (2009) reinforce the

importance of such a strategy by highlighting the poor reliability of long-term predictors of athletic development.

The debate surrounding early specialisation can be furthered by considering the relationship between deliberate practice and elite performance. Côté *et al.*, (2007) highlight that, in stark contrast to LTAD's proposition of 10,000 hours (Balyi & Hamilton, 2004), it is common for elite performance to be attained with just 3,000 to 4,000 hours of sport-specific training. Côté *et al.*, (2009) propose seven postulates concerning youth sport activities that lead to both elite performance and continued participation. Amongst these postulates is a recommendation of diversification of activities and an emphasis on retaining a sense of deliberate play as the learning mechanisms valuable to a holistic developmental process.

The complete failure of *Playing to Win* (DCMS, 2008) to demonstrate any awareness of participant development principles such as Côté *et al.*'s (2009) postulates represents a significant challenge to NGBs and coaches who will have to run against the political tide if they wish to maintain a well-informed participant development framework. One such challenge is Côté *et al.*'s (2009) notion of sampling relating to performers participating in a broad range of activities. The *Coaching Workforce Document* (North, 2009) furthers this call, by suggesting the abandonment of pyramidal models of talent identification. North (2009) suggests such models are plagued by high drop-out, burn-out and only value value upwards progression as an outcome. The need to see beyond the 'production-line' style approach to talent identification and development, characterised by institutionalism and elitism, is essential if coaching policy is to have a meaningful impact on practice. The early years or initiation phase of sport as characterised by Bloom (1975), should be a period of variety and fun within sport. The neglecting of the acquisition of fundamental movement skills and the development of physical literacy for the emphasis on early competition can be highly detrimental to individual enrichment and development. Bailey *et al.*, (2010) also suggest that grounding in fundamental movement skills provide a foundation that can be developed to influence later participation patterns.

Playing to Win's (DCMS, 2008) competitive sporting structure encouraging people to play to win with the aim of developing success in elite international competition could conversely lead to a forfeiture of certain talented individuals. Abbott *et al.* (2007) describe a preoccupation with current performance over long-term development. It is likely that with an increase in competition, especially at a young

age, this position would be exacerbated. Bailey *et al.* (2010) also advocate that, due to the relative age effect (RAE), it is imperative not to confuse ability with maturity and coaches should protect against inappropriate talent identification and development models that could result in the loss of a host of talented athletes. *Playing to Win* (DCMS, 2008) asks the question whether the current competition structure works. Yet this seemingly rhetorical question was answered with opportunities for more competition at each level without any real justification for the link between competition and either increases in participation, or success at the elite level. In two international studies on the factors that influence success at an elite level, the observation from athletes from all countries was that the key determinants for success were finances, better training opportunities and better support staff with coaches (Legg *et al.*, 2008; De Bosscher *et al.*, 2006). It was also identified that the system for the development of coaches was poor in all sample countries including the UK, (Legg *et al.*, 2008, De Bosscher *et al.*, 2006). The overwhelming message from consideration of the literature outlined here is that *Playing to Win* (DCMS, 2008) has overlooked a number of crucial developmental aspects and has misplaced the emphasis on competitive opportunities, rather than on long-term, holistic, athlete development, complimented by improved financial support, better training opportunities, a less blinkered operation of NGBs and access to enhanced coaching support systems. Such a strategy appears wholly contradictory to the participation element of the Olympic legacy; a failure to create a meaningful coaching strategy coupled alongside a return to pyramidal models of talent identification and development is hardly likely to create the radical upsurge required in sporting participation. With the emphasis of *Playing to Win* (DCMS, 2008) and the pre-election Conservative manifesto (Conservative Party, 2010) firmly on competitive opportunities, the challenge for coaches will inevitably become how to ensure participants' develop within such a context. By examining the nature of competition from a philosophical perspective, there are lessons for coaches to learn regarding preparing athletes for these environments.

Managing competition: the challenge for contemporary coaching

In recent discourse Michael Gove (Secretary of State for Education), in his letter to Baroness Sue Campbell (Chair of the Youth Sports Trust), stipulates a commitment of the coalition government to encouraging a greater emphasis on competitive sport embodying the ethos of achievement and self-improvement (Gove, 2010). This shift in agenda reflects the wider contemporary articulation of sports policy that places competitive sport at the forefront of government initiatives and

envisions high-quality coaching as an enabler for delivery. The reconceptualisation of the school and youth sporting landscape outlined by the coalition government presents a number of challenges when considered alongside the *Action Plan for Coaching* (NCF, 2008). When considered from the perspective of coaching philosophies, the shift in the conceptualisation of coaching practice outlined in the previous sections, from the development of psychomotor domains to a more holistic, athlete-centred, focus raises a number of potential conflicts. This section addresses the policy-practice gap and potential conflict and possible resolution between competition and holistic athlete development.

Some authors (e.g. Bergmann Drewe, 1998; Jones 2006) have suggested that many coaches are particularly well placed to engage with young people in a more holistic developmental process due to having small coach to athlete ratios and substantial dedicated coaching time. For many young people, coaching environments represent one of the most engaging components of their lives. The distinction that has led coaches to focus predominantly on the physical outworking of sporting skills has been, at least in part, due to the relationship between coaching and competition (Kretchmar, 2005). The place of competition in sport is particularly explicit in the coaching environment and represents the predominant focus of the process, reinforcing the necessity of considering the nature of competition and how this affects coaches' pedagogy.

As previously articulated, due to current coaching policy, but also considering the content of the Conservative Manifesto for Sport (Conservative Party, 2010), discourse surrounding competitive environments is growing, building on that instigated by *Playing to Win* (DCMS, 2008). These policies are underpinned by a widely contended assertion that competitive sports activities, when correctly understood and appropriately taught, provide an opportunity for self-discovery, experiencing excellence and building social relationships on many levels (Watson and White, 2007). This perspective upon sporting activity was birthed in the rise of muscular Christianity in the 1800s and has formed a platform for the instrumental nature, or potential, of competition as viewed today (Watson, Weir and Friend, 2005). Furthermore, competitive sports activities are championed to engage individuals in a process of emancipation (including inclusion and equality), empowerment and critique as constituent factors (Kirk, 2006). However, in contrast to the positive spin of government policy documents it is also recognised that competitive sports activities have equal power to corrupt individuals and develop many undesirable

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moral qualities (Bergmann Drewe, 1999) and it is here that we find the dichotomy of competition for national good and the challenge to the practicing coach.

For some authors, competitive sport has become an example of a training ground for self-interest, materialistic productivity, market place forces and consumer, rather than co-operator, characteristics (Hoffman, 2010).

There is growing belief that sport, rather than encouraging moral value ... promotes just the antithesis ...egotism, cynicism, nihilism, an obsessive focus on money, and win at all costs mentality that fosters disrespect for competitors and society. (Spencer, 2000: 143)

Kirk (2006) contends that this competitive attitude, unchallenged, would inevitably confirm the transition of the world of sport into mere entertainment. *Playing to Win* (DCMS, 2008) embraces 'sport for sport's sake' rhetoric, yet Spencer (2000) and Kirk (2006) raise serious questions regarding whether the endpoint of such a perspective is even remotely desirable. For the athlete-centred, holistically-focussed coach, this presents the challenging position of utilising the damaged vehicle of contemporary competitive sport for a purpose for which is does not appear fit. As such, coaching is faced with a policy-practice gap which needs to be addressed. Taylor and Garratt (2010: 124) recognised there are 'concerns regarding the lack of standards for coaching and strategies for training and employment, including guidance on the moral and ethical responsibilities, which have tended to evolve informally in concert with the many diverse traditions of sports coaching'. Given the centrality of competition to the current generation of sport policy in the UK and Taylor and Garratt's (2010) assertion that this aspect of the coach-athlete relationship is somewhat unrefined, it is important to discuss the underpinning principles at play here.

A holistic focus demands coaches be responsible for inculcating moral character in respect to young athletes' ability to demonstrate respect for societal and cultural rules, possession of standards for correct behaviours, a sense of right and wrong and integrity including showing respect for their club, coaches and fellow players (Bailey et al. 2010; North, 2009). Whilst most coaches would agree with such statements, Hoffman (2010) suggests a genuine appreciation of these issues will require a major shift in coach education and coaches' mindsets, and yet policy documents such as *Raising the Game* (DNH,

1995) believe such concepts as fair play, self-discipline, respect for others, learning to live by laws and understanding one's obligations to others in a team are the natural outcomes of competitive environments (DNH, 1995: 7).

Watson and White (2007) recognise the prevailing culture of coaching for competition is more akin to a warlike preparation of the athletes where the opposition is recognised as the barrier to success and, more extremely, the enemy. Embracing a holistic base for participant development may require coaches to appreciate that this situation can hardly be regarded as the breeding ground for positive moral character. In challenging this perspective, it is helpful to draw on educational discourse recognising the pedagogical base to many of the issues discussed above (Jones, 2006). The educational discourse surrounding competition embraces a wide range of ethical and moral problems. Bergmann Drewe (1999: 117) states:

Moral reasoning and sport are seldom uttered in the same sentence. In the current climate of illegal performance enhancing drug use, intentional injuries on and off the field, misappropriated sport scholarships, and so forth, one might ask the question whether moral reasoning has anything to do with sport...The high value placed on winning makes it almost acceptable for athletes to cheat, take drugs, *etc.*

There are many undesirable aspects of modern sport, yet most coaches, educationalists and policy makers hold steadfastly to the belief that sport has much to offer the young person in terms of their holistic development (DCMS, 2008; NCF, 2008). The challenge for coaches is to understand this complex social and educational relationship in terms of how it should shape practice to ensure the positive holistic development of the athlete.

Re-evaluating the nature of competition

Bergmann Drewe (1999: 14) stipulates 'although physical educators may not be able to change societal values regarding winning and losing, they can make progress in striving to diffuse the win at all costs mentality by stressing the striving together in the pursuit of excellence'. The key to such a shift lies in the original essence of the root words for competition - *com-petitio* - overcoming problems by striving together. The sense here is that competition cannot and does not exist without an opponent and as such the starting point for morality in competitive sporting encounters must be the recognition of the inherent reliance upon the opponent for the experience to exist

(Morgan, 2003). This forces coaches to re-evaluate the position and purpose of the opponent, from that of enemy to a pre-requisite asset in the pursuit of excellence. Morgan (2003: 187) suggests:

The principle value of athletic competition is not in the winning, but in the process of overcoming the challenge presented by a worthy opponent. What makes competition in sports morally defensible is seeing it as a mutual quest for excellence...athletes ought to win (or lose) gracefully, treat their opponents with respect, have respect for the rules of the game, and challenge their opponents. Athletes are involved in a co-operative project to strive for excellence. Emphasis ought to be on the process and not simply the outcome.

The implications for coaches lie in the preparation of the athlete for competition. Instead of considering opponents as enemies to be overcome, Bergmann Drewe (1999) suggests, athletes will encounter moments in competition when a decision has to be made discerning whether a certain behaviour would be ethically and morally defensible. For athletes to make such decisions, athletes must have some underlying ethical guidance. Hsu (2004) suggests it is difficult for athletes, when faced with problems of moral conflict within competitive situations, to resolve these issues without critical thinking skills. The role of the coach in modelling moral behaviour is of considerable importance in creating the critical thinking skills to facilitate the appropriate moral responses of their athletes to conflicting situations faced in the act of competition. However, Hsu (2004) acknowledges this is insufficient to develop character, recognising that a morally educated sports person will demonstrate behaviours not only in accordance with a specific principle (*e.g.* fair play) but also an appropriate disposition (*e.g.* respect for others). The practice-related implications for coaches extend far beyond the scope of this paper; however, principles such as upholding the rules of competition, respecting the opponent, officials and the game itself are clearly of paramount importance. (Morgan, 2003: 11) summarises this issue by suggesting 'it is only through comparison with something outside oneself that people are able to evaluate their skills and abilities and it is only through continued striving together with that something that people are able to realise their potential' - a potential that demonstrates itself in holistic terms.

This represents, perhaps, an opportunity for UK coaching policy to promote a legacy which could have global significance. Undoubtedly

the 2012 Olympics will provide a global stage from which a message will be established. As Falcous and Maguire (2006) recognise:

As well as spanning geographical barriers, it (sport) is well placed to transcend ethnic, cultural and linguistic boundaries. Accordingly, media groups, in conjunction with corporate executives, have utilized sports broadcasting as a key commodity in penetrating global markets. Yet there is more than an economic dimension to the process; the mediation of sport acts as a transmitter of cultural values, messages and ideologies on a global scale (Maguire, 1993; Miller et al., 2001; Rowe, 1999; Whannel, 1995).

The 2012 Olympics provide an opportunity to address and promote some of the intrinsic values of sport, inherent in a holistic coaching philosophy, and champion the 'mutual pursuit' perspective of competition to a global audience. The challenge of this moral agenda, for policy makers, governing bodies and practitioners, is clear and complex especially when acknowledging the current lack of knowledge or resources in implementing such ideals.

Conclusions

The journey towards professionalisation requires coaches to engage in a deep and reflective review of the coaching practice in the UK. The nature of the coach-athlete relationship and the pedagogical implications will necessitate a broad re-conceptualisation of this relationship with ethical principles representing a core pillar on which such a review should be based. Despite the ease with which ethical coaching practice in the form of athlete-centred holistic development can sit alongside policy documents such as *Game Plan* (DCMS, 2002) and *The Coaching Task Force - Final Report* (Coaching Task Force, 2002), the underpinning New Labour principle of NPM has led to a focus on podium athletes (Green, 2009) to the detriment of genuine holistic development and societal enrichment. This challenge is furthered by *Playing to Win* (DCMS, 2008), where the outcome of sporting performance appears to matter more than the quality of the coach-athlete relationship or the holistic development of the athlete. Whilst theoretically and ethically-based reflections on the coach-athlete relationship may leave practitioners grappling with notions of empowerment, coaches are severely disincentivised to embrace such strategies which may well take time to develop and settle - *UK Sport* review funding on an annual basis. Despite this, we hope coaches will continue to embrace contemporary sports pedagogy, engaging athletes

in cognitive and physiological challenges and encouraging inter-athlete dependency.

Many of the concepts and ideas discussed here are aspirational; it is clear that coaching remains under-theorised and insufficiently modelled. There is a demonstrable need for greater research into the coach-athlete relationship and coaching pedagogy. There are considerable question marks over the implications for ethical coaching practice raised within *Playing to Win* (DCMS, 2008), which appears to contradict the developmental agenda outlined in previous policy documents. There is extensive discussion of participant development within the academic literature; however, *Playing to Win* (DCMS, 2008) appears unaware of the developments in this area. Regardless of the model NGBs and coaches may adopt, there is a clear need to abandon UK sport's obsession with early specialisation and to take a more considered look at the nature and structure of competition. Current coalition plans for an Olympics-style youth sport competition complete with league tables for school sport, should be carefully considered to ensure an ethical and developmental understanding of the impact of the preparation for competitive sport. This lack of coherence in the system for coaching provision and development undermines this crucial pillar of sport development (De Bosscher *et al.*, 2006). Furthermore, appreciation of the implications of the NPM agenda appear to have led to a conflict between the government's desire to empower the sporting institutions, including the NGBs, and the need to ensure a top-four medal position at the 2012 Olympics. A truly coordinated strategy would embrace a cross-sport athlete-centred approach to participant development models. The emphasis of *Playing to Win* (DCMS, 2008) is clearly focussed on the development of competition and a 'culture change' to a competing to win emphasis. The development of a policy which emphasises elite success is not uncommon, as sporting success can be used to develop a country's international brand (Legg *et al.*, 2008); a common pattern in the lead-in to hosting an Olympic games (Houlihan, 2009). With the forthcoming Olympic Games in London, the focus for elite success has been accentuated. However, the focus on competition in the short term could lead to less success in the long term. This paper questions whether *Playing to Win* (DCMS, 2008) and the *Action Plan for Coaching* (NCF, 2008) are compatible, particularly in light of the centrality of a sustained and enhanced participation base to the Olympic legacy. In *Playing to Win* (DCMS, 2008) the principles of ethical practice and holistic participant development are overwhelming overshadowed by performance-related targets, representing a backwards step in the journey to professionalise a coaching industry founded upon ethical,

inclusive and holistically-driven practice. Considered this way, *Playing to Win* (DCMS, 2008) is little more than a last minute attempt to instigate a politically expedient strategy that considerably undermines the athlete-centred development of the previous policy documents.

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