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Conflict between a captain and star player: An ethnodrama of interpersonal conflict experiences

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ABSTRACT

Within sports psychology, researchers have explored intrapersonal conflict, and how individuals perceived to be “problematic players” can create conflict in a team environment. We present an exploration of the psychosocial processes of a case of interpersonal conflict that occurred in an elite sports environment. The case centers on Warwickshire cricket club’s successful, treble-winning season in 1994, and focuses on the conflict that occurred throughout that season between club captain, Dermot Reeve and star batsman Brian Lara. The data sources used in this study were the autobiographical accounts of the captain and star player, supplemented by autobiographical accounts from the coach and a third player, and subsequent interviews with seven other players from the team. We first adopt the role of story-analysts, by undertaking a thematic analysis of data and then the role of story-tellers via the development of an ethnodrama, developed to illustrate the conflict between Reeve and Lara. The dialogue within the ethnodrama highlighted some of the determinants of these conflicts and the resulting consequences from multiple perspectives of those involved. Recommendations are offered in terms of interpersonal conflict and the potential use of ethnodrama as a pedagogic resource.

Lay Summary: Using autobiographies and player interviews, we studied conflict within one of the most successful sports teams in history. The data are presented as an ethnodrama to showcase the complexity of conflict, encourage reader engagement with the results, and promote discourse on varied perspectives on conflict.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- This work provides a novel insight into the conflict between a captain and star player occurring in an elite environment.
- The ethnodrama allows readers to understand the determinants and consequences of conflict from multiple perspectives.
- The ethnodrama could be used as a resource to develop shared understanding, create empathy for different perspectives between individuals in conflict, and stimulate discussion as an educational resource in performance domains.

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In team environments, if an individual engages in behaviors that are not understood by those around them, this can create social challenges, such as interpersonal conflict (Wachsmuth et al., 2017). Cope et al. (2011) categorized such an individual as a “team cancer” (hereon “problematic player”¹) and defined this player as, “an athlete who expresses negative emotions that spread destructively throughout a team” (p. 24). Researchers have examined the impact of such so-called problematic players in organizational settings (e.g., Felps et al., 2006), and to our knowledge, only four studies have examined the incidence of such individuals in a sporting context (i.e., Cope et al., 2010; Heelis et al., 2020; Leggat et al., 2020; McGannon et al., 2012). Together, these studies illustrate a range of negative impacts the so-called problematic player can have on team functioning, which includes conflict developing between individuals within a team (e.g., Leggat et al., 2020). Indeed, the extant research can be taken to indicate that so-called problematic players have a potentially substantial impact on the social environment within sport teams and are likely prominent individuals within such settings. Nevertheless, no research has explored specific cases of conflict involving a so-called problematic star player in an elite team environment.

Numerous researchers have explored the incidence of conflict within sports environments. Barki and Hartwick (2004) defined interpersonal conflict as, “a dynamic process that occurs between interdependent parties as they experience negative emotional reactions to perceived disagreements and interference with the attainment of their goals” (p. 234). Researchers examining conflict in sports have identified a range of negative impacts that result from interpersonal conflict, including negative emotions and cognitions (Mellalieu et al., 2013), reduced cohesion and increased competitive anxiety levels (Partridge & Knapp, 2016), and reduced levels of collective efficacy (Leo et al., 2015). Wachsmuth et al., in a programme of work, explored the conflict between coaches and athletes. To elaborate, Wachsmuth et al. (2018a) found outcomes of such conflict can include emotional (e.g. anger), cognitive (e.g. blame), and behavioral (e.g. shouting) responses. Extending this work to explore the conflict between individuals within teams (e.g., between coaches and athletes), Wachsmuth et al. (2017) developed a conceptual framework of interpersonal conflict in sports relationships. In this framework, the authors propose a variety of conflict determinants (viz. intrapersonal, interpersonal, and external factors), although the core of the framework is the nature of the conflict, that is, the content (i.e., the cognitions, emotions, and behaviors of those involved in the conflict), and how this conflict can be described (i.e., its duration, frequency, and intensity). Finally, the authors offered strategies that might prevent or manage conflict and outlined a range of consequences of conflict (viz. intrapersonal, interpersonal, and performance).

It is reasonable to assume that so-called problematic players may be a potential cause of interpersonal conflict, and as such, a small number of studies have begun to explore their influence in team environments. To illustrate, Cope et al. (2010) interviewed coaches who described “team cancer” players as negatively influencing team processes by destroying the cohesion and stimulating clique-formation. McGannon et al. (2012) also examined problematic players in a team environment, through media data on Sean Avery, a professional ice-hockey player. McGannon et al. highlighted several negative influences attributed to Avery, which included the player being a distraction to others

on the team, and reductions in team unity. More recently, Leggat et al. (2020) interviewed coaches and players to examine the impact of a specific type of problematic player, one who is particularly talented or a “star player” (Cope et al., 2011) and identified numerous negative outcomes. For example, outbursts from the problematic player were perceived to impact negatively other players in training and competition, cliques were seen to develop, and negative behaviors were perceived to spread throughout the team. Taken together, the findings of these three studies can be interpreted to indicate that so-called “problematic players” have a primarily negative impact on team functioning.

In addition to highlighting the potential negative impact of problematic players, researchers have begun to provide recommendations for preventing and managing conflict in team sports environments. Coaches participating in Wachsmuth et al.’s (2018b) interview study reported using implicit (e.g., developing relationships and open lines of communication) and explicit (e.g., self-regulation of emotions and actions) prevention strategies. In terms of understanding and working with problematic players, Leggat et al. (2020) briefly highlighted some potential considerations, which included the need for leaders to communicate and build a relationship with the player, as well as the possibility of considering sanctions for undesirable player behavior, regardless of their ability. Heelis et al. (2020) interviewed coaches about their experiences of working with problematic players and highlighted early identification and management of such players, fostering positive relationships with them, and setting clear expectations as key strategies in managing such players.

Although there is a growing body of research examining so-called problematic players in a team sport, there are several opportunities to extend this work in light of some current limitations. For instance, one limitation of the current research (Cope et al., 2010; Heelis et al., 2020; Leggat et al., 2020) is that researchers have hitherto sought the perspective of only one stakeholder, that of the “the perceiver” of the so-called problematic player (e.g., coach or teammate). Single perspectives on complex dynamics are unlikely to provide the richness of insight that multiple perspectives may offer. Indeed, allied to the potential value of multiple perspectives is the suitability of the term “problematic player.” Bickley et al. (2016) used the phrase “challenging but talented” in their approach to working with such players in sports environments and stated, “disputes among individuals arise not so much from errors of fact and argument but from differences of perspective—incomplete perceptions, each from a different angle of view, of a more complex reality” (p. 43). Bickley et al. used the parable of the blind men and the elephant to illustrate how individuals in sport become trapped in their own unique, but isolated perspective, unable to form a clear mental picture of the “problem” (i.e., the elephant). Therefore, in this study we aimed to make a novel contribution to this area by considering conflict from multiple perspectives, including that of a player labeled as “problematic,” and examples of conflict between this player and their captain. In doing so, we hoped to better illuminate the social complexities inherent within this body of research and address the potentially inappropriate labeling of individuals as “problematic” in sport.

From a methodological perspective, we aim to further build on the conflict literature by illustrating examples of conflict situations through the use of narrative inquiry.

Narrative inquiry is a psychosocial approach that focuses on stories to understand more about the psychological implications of issues, such as conflict that can occur in a sporting context (Papathomas, 2016). Stories are the key feature of narrative inquiry, as individuals use stories as a way to make meaning and sense of who they are (Frank, 2010), and in the current study, we use narrative inquiry to explore stories people tell about their experiences of conflict, and how they make sense of this conflict. Autobiographies are one form of relational self-story that, when grounded in narrative inquiry, provide a resource that allows us to understand more about life experiences over time (Pipkin, 2008). In the current study, we build on literature that has used narrative inquiry and autobiography in a sporting context (e.g., Howells & Fletcher, 2015; McGannon & McMahon, 2019; Morgan et al., 2015). For example, Morgan et al. sampled the autobiographies of eight members of England's 2003 World Cup-winning rugby union side, to examine the psychosocial processes that underpin team resilience in elite sports teams. We also use creative methods to present findings in the form of an ethnodrama. Cavallerio et al. (2022) recently used an ethnodrama to evocatively convey the experiences of parents of gymnasts who have suffered from overuse injuries. Similarly, Smith and Arthur (2022) presented conflict situations between Sir Alex Ferguson and his players as an ethnodrama. Our research adopts a novel methodological approach by combining autobiography and interview data sources, representing different perspectives on conflict through an ethnodrama. This approach will enable practitioners to develop an understanding of the social complexity of conflict and labels like “problematic player.”

In summary, we aimed to extend the literature on so-called “problematic players” (e.g., Cope et al., 2010; Leggat et al., 2020) and interpersonal conflict (e.g., Wachsmuth et al., 2017) in three specific ways. First, Wachsmuth et al. called for researchers to consider different contexts to examine more fully the: (i) sources of conflict; (ii) the conflict process; (iii) ways to prevent and manage conflict, and; (iv) conflict outcomes. We aimed to respond to Wachsmuth et al.'s call by examining specific instances of conflict that occurred in an elite sporting environment between a specific type of leader (i.e., a playing captain) and a “star player,” who the captain perceived to be “problematic.” Second, we use autobiographical data and narrative inquiry to explore interpersonal conflict which builds on the work of Cope et al. and Leggat et al. by seeking the perspectives of the so-called “problematic player,” the captain, and connected actors (i.e., teammates, the coach) who observed, were influenced and influenced the conflict. Thus, the current study builds on existing literature by illustrating sources and outcomes of conflict from multiple perspectives, including the problematic player themselves, which has yet to be considered in previous research. Third, in this study, we also aimed to address Wachsmuth et al.'s call to further consider how to prevent and manage conflict between leaders and athletes. Our hope was to achieve this not by offering decontextualized, “off-the-shelf” strategies to prevent or manage conflict, but instead, by seeking resonance and discourse among readers by presenting the data in an innovative, accessible form of an ethnodrama. In doing so, we hope the results will benefit readers by showcasing the complexity of conflict, thereby raising awareness and stimulating discussion on its possible prevention and management. The value of this raised awareness is also the acknowledgment of the importance of attending to issues of power, leadership,

and micropolitics in sports organizations (see Cruickshank et al., 2013; Potrac & Jones, 2009).

Method

Design and research perspective

The design of this study was underpinned by ontological relativism (i.e., the reality is multiple, created, and mind-dependent) and epistemological constructivism (i.e., knowledge is constructed and subjective). Consistent with these philosophical beliefs and the study aims, the narrative inquiry was the chosen method, which refers to a psychosocial approach that focuses on stories, to understand more about the psychological implications of issues, such as intrapersonal conflict, that can occur in a sporting context. Autobiographies were primarily used as the source of data, as such texts involve stories people tell about their lives. Given that autobiographies are one form of relational self-story that, when grounded in narrative inquiry, provide a valuable resource to learn about life experiences, it was deemed such data was very appropriate to be used to explore conflict. Interviews were also used as a secondary source of data to offer additional perspectives of conflict situations from players outside the captain-player dyad. Finally, the findings are presented as an ethnodrama, specifically in the form of a chat show, to allow a reflective conversation between the two main characters (captain and player) about the conflict that previously occurred. In line with the philosophical underpinning of the study, we were not looking to present one “true” picture of the conflict, instead, we were interested in the subjective interpretation of conflict from different individual perspectives. For example, autobiographies have previously been critiqued as they provide a subjective account of the person telling the story (Smith & Watson, 2010). However, this “subjective truth” is an advantage in the current study as it allowed us to show different perspectives of conflict in an ethnodrama by presenting knowledge constructed through relational interactions rather than something that is objectively observed or found. We also recognize that the knowledge about conflict in the current study was constructed through the authors’ interaction with the autobiographical data, through the analysis, and then presenting the findings using creative methods. Indeed, we acknowledge here our background and experiences so readers can appreciate how we interpreted and presented information about the conflict from multiple perspectives.

The first author has a strong interest in cricket and had played at a recreational level. This author has previously published work on so-called problematic players and has previously used autobiographies to explore aspects, such as stressors and mental health in cricket. This author saw an opportunity to use the information published in autobiographies written by Reeve and Lara to explore the conflict between them, due to the detail provided in both autobiographies about different instances of conflict that occurred. The author was aware of the conflict previously from media reports, and how Lara had often been perceived as a difficult player. This situation intrigued the author (e.g., when Reeve spoke so negatively in his book about a specific season, despite how successful the team had been) and motivated the author to explore this situation in the current study. The second author is an experienced sports psychologist and has worked

in elite environments where conflict inevitably occurs. This author also has an interest in cricket and grew up in Birmingham supporting the local county side, Warwickshire, which meant having a specific interest in this conflict example. These experiences and understanding helped to prompt discussion with the first author about the development of the ethnodrama, and the interactions between Reeve and Lara illustrated in the dialogue. The second author had contacts with Warwickshire that helped arrange interviews with former players, which added depth to the ethnodrama by including perspectives of players beyond Reeve and Lara (although this author did not previously know any of the players interviewed). We (authors 1 and 2) do not attempt to distance ourselves from our experiences, interests, and understanding in this area, nevertheless, we invite readers to consider how our backgrounds shaped the current study. The third author has no experience in cricket and had no knowledge of the conflict that occurred between Reeve and Lara. This neutrality provided an advantage to the current study, as the third author was able to encourage reflexivity throughout the process. For example, when developing the ethnodrama, this author ensured that the voices of both Reeve and Lara were suitably heard within the dialogue.

The case

In line with our aim to explore the conflict between a leader and a player perceived to be problematic, one such example that met this criterion was the well-publicized conflict that occurred within the Warwickshire cricket side, which is one of the 18 professional county sides in English domestic cricket. The conflict was between an Englishman and club captain, Dermot Reeve, and star West Indian batsman, Brian Lara, primarily during the 1994 season. Lara had signed for Warwickshire at the start of the 1994 season. Ten days after the contract was formalized, and before he joined the club, Lara scored a world-record 375 runs in an international test match against England. Furthermore, during the season for Warwickshire, Lara performed at an exceptionally high level, which included breaking the scoring record for individual innings (501 runs), which remains a world record. For his performances during the 1994 and 1995 seasons, Lara was awarded the prestigious Wisden Leading Cricketer in the World award. Indeed, Lara is perceived to be one of the most talented batsmen in cricket history, and at the time, was recognized as the world's best batsman (Wikipedia, 2020). Thus, he was deemed appropriate for meeting the criteria of a "star player." During the 1994 season, with Lara's involvement, and Reeve as the captain, Warwickshire had unprecedented success, winning three domestic trophies, and being the runners-up in the fourth competition. No team has ever matched this feat, making the Warwickshire team of 1994 arguably the most successful domestic team in the history of English cricket. Yet, despite Lara's performances and the team's success, it was well-publicized in the British media that there was on-field and off-field conflict between Lara and club captain Reeve. For example, in an article on the cricket website, ESPNcricinfo.com on "famous cricket spats," Reeve and Lara were included, and the article segment concluded how "their relationship reached a nadir when Reeve called Lara a 'prima donna' and Lara walked off the field. Sixteen years on, it seems fair to assume that they are not on one another's Christmas-card lists" (ESPNcricinfo, 2010).

Both players have since written autobiographies, which included extensive details of the conflict that occurred between them during that season. With this data being available in published autobiographies (Reeve & Murphy, 1996; Lara & Scovell, 1995) this was a suitable case to allow us to explore and understand the conflict between a captain and problematic player in an elite team sports environment.

How material was collected, analyzed, and presented

The first stage of the research process involved the first author reading the autobiographies of Reeve and Lara and identifying instances where there were “perceived disagreements and interference with the attainment of their goals” (Barki & Hartwick, 2004, p. 234). Several clear, specific examples of conflict were evident, including where Lara disagreed with Reeve’s tactical approach, an on-pitch incident involving a mobile phone, an incident where Lara claimed Reeve called him a prima donna with Lara subsequently verbally abusing Reeve and then walking off the pitch, and disagreements over Lara’s fitness and time-keeping. The first author extracted the data from the books, and these stories of conflict were initially read and re-read from the standpoint of “story-analysts.” Deductive thematic analysis was conducted to identify the key features within the stories these “characters” told based on Wachsmuth et al.’s (2017) framework of interpersonal conflict. This allowed us to identify instances of conflict and the potential antecedents and outcomes that were evident across the conflict stories. As coauthors, we all acted as critical friends to encourage reflexivity through the analysis process, by reviewing and challenging these interpretations (Smith & McGannon, 2018).

The next step in the analytical process involved developing an ethnodrama, thereby taking on the roles of “story-tellers,” by linking together the data about the instances of conflict in an interesting and explanatory way (Dowling, 2012). Creative Analytical Practices (CAP) have been used by researchers in a sporting context to present results in an innovative, accessible way, with ethnodrama being one form of written CAP that communicates data as a written play or theatrical script. For example, researchers have used ethnodrama to illustrate coach development processes (e.g., Cassidy et al., 2015), present three elite swimmers’ presentation of self (e.g., McMahon et al., 2017), and to illuminate the experiences of parents of gymnasts suffering from overuse injuries (e.g., Cavallerio et al., 2022). We aimed to support and extend this ethnodrama literature by integrating different viewpoints to create a dialogue between the characters, and use autobiographical data directly to develop this dialogue. This approach was in line with the research aims and we invite the reader to consider conflict and its impact from multiple perspectives. We hope that this presentation of knowledge will help psychologists help clients navigate conflict and increase the likelihood that these results will reach a wider audience (cf. McMahon et al., 2017), specifically, practitioners, science and medicine staff, coaches, athletes, and administrators.

Cassidy et al. (2015) highlighted how script writing is a foundational step in the development of an ethnodrama. Initially, the first author assembled accounts from Reeve and Lara, to create a coherent dialogue, which was structured around the specific incidences of conflict identified. A further character, the facilitator of the conversation in the ethnodrama, was used to ask questions to appropriately stimulate the dialogue

between the main characters. The other authors acted as critical friends to encourage reflexivity around the clarity and realism of the conversation, and to ensure both voices were heard in the dialogue (i.e., the dialogue represented the causes and outcomes of the conflict situations from both Reeve and Lara's perspectives). Nevertheless, our primary focus was on piecing together the dialogue between Reeve and Lara, to create an authentic script (i.e., taking the words from different autobiographies, and making it more believable that the people were having a "live" conversation). Yet, during the editing process, we, the authors, were cognizant to maintain the original sentiment and meaning of the words written in the autobiographies. Thus, direct quotes from the autobiographies were left intact, although, for literary purposes, certain amendments were made. For example, we altered the tense in places, and added/removed names, so that the dialogue would be more suited to people speaking together face-to-face. For example, when Reeve stated in his autobiography, "It was all too easy for Brian, and early on I realized that he didn't have ...," this was amended to "It was all too easy for you, Brian, and I felt you didn't have," which reflected how Reeve would have spoken if speaking directly to Lara.

Dowling (2012) suggested that in developing an ethnodrama story, events and actions are drawn together by an appropriate plot that links incidents together and allows the characters to be introduced appropriately. We based the ethnodrama on eight specific scenes, each linked with instances of conflict that occurred. In addition, we drew on creative non-fiction techniques, to enliven these discussions by setting them in an appropriate context where Reeve and Lara might have engaged in a discussion about their playing careers and specifically, about their time at Warwickshire where the conflict occurred. One appropriate and realistic scenario was for Reeve and Lara to be involved in a chat show scenario (i.e., a segment on a sports show involving interviews with invited guests). Somewhat ironically, around the time of writing, the second author attended a 25-year reunion celebration of the 1994 season where a panel conversation between five players from that year took place. As such, in using a chat show format for the ethnodrama presentation, we mirrored real events and conversations. This scenario allowed the two characters to reflect on their time at Warwickshire, putting Reeve and Lara at "center-stage." A further part of the creative nonfiction process allowed an additional character (the presenter) to ask questions which served to facilitate a structured dialogue between Reeve and Lara. Such a chat show format allowed us to illustrate interactions between the two principal characters and provided a novel format to illustrate the emotional responses to the conflict between them.

Collecting and integrating different perspectives

A chat-show scenario allowed an audience to be present, and for the members of that audience (i.e., the coach and other players from that season at Warwickshire) to be asked questions by the presenter. Although the majority of the ethnodrama content is from Reeve and Lara directly, these additional perspectives offered further reflections and insight into the complexity of the conflict that occurred. Thus, we subsequently sought additional material to add multivocality and alternative perspectives to the conflict reported by Reeve and Lara. First, we looked for autobiographies that had been written by others involved in that season. The only ones found were those written by

the coach (Bob Woolmer²) and a fellow player (Paul Smith). These books (Woolmer & Tennant, 2000; Smith & Donald, 2007) were read, and where they spoke about the 1994 season, and about Reeve or Lara specifically, relevant passages were highlighted and added to the data set from which the dialogue was created. To gain further information, we tried to contact every player involved in that season. The second author used personal contacts to help retrieve contact details for eight players, and seven agreed to be interviewed. No further information is offered about these players to preserve anonymity. After institutional ethical approval was gained, semi-structured interviews were conducted by the second author with each of the players individually. These started with a general conversation about the team dynamics during the 1994 season, and the participants offered their thoughts and opinions about that season (e.g., “What can you tell me about the team dynamics during that season?”). When the captain (Reeve) or the player (Lara) came up in conversation, the interviewer probed more to understand the player’s perceptions of the aspects of conflict (e.g., “what do you recall about the relationship between Reeve and Lara?” “How did you experience and understand their relationship and behavior toward each other that year?” “How did their relationship influence you?”). Interviews were on average 42 min long and were recorded and transcribed. These data were incorporated into the final data set, and quotes were selected to enhance the final dialogue, with the perspectives of the seven players being represented by three fictional characters in the audience of the ethnodrama. By creating three composite characters, this further reduced any possibility of responses being attributed back to individual participants. Finally, elements of creative non-fiction were also used to develop a “plot” and frame the dialogue, with a “prologue” (i.e., both Reeve and Lara coming onto a stage and being introduced by the presenter) added to provide an initial “contextual framing” for the discussion to follow.

Results

Prologue

A presenter sits on stage, to his side are two chairs, and a studio audience are in the background. Cameras and lighting are also there. The presenter, stands, and faces the camera.

Presenter: So, we’re here today to look back on, and celebrate Warwickshire’s most successful ever season ... the 1994 season, when they won three trophies and were only denied by Worcestershire in the Natwest [Cup] final from making it a clean sweep.

In the audience we also have players and support staff from the team that year, welcome to you all (*pausing, and looking at the audience*).

Today we’re going to discuss what made them so successful with two of the key players from that side. First, please welcome onto the stage Dermot Reeve, Warwickshire’s captain that year.

Reeve strides on to the stage with an outward confidence belying a sense of anxiety, with a half-smile and wave to the audience; he shakes the presenter’s hand, and sits down ...

Presenter: And second, we have the player that contributed so much to Warwickshire’s success that season. He scored nine centuries including the world

record score of 501, which remains a world record, Champion West Indies batsman ... welcome to the stage ... Brian Lara.

Lara walks on with a broad smile, and as some members of the audience rise to their feet to welcome him, Lara responds by raising both hands and waves back.

After shaking the presenter's hand, Lara approaches Reeve and offers his hand—Reeve, struggles to return eye contact, awkwardly shakes Lara's hand ...

Scene 1: Lara's recruitment and early days at the club

Presenter: So, we're here today to remember and celebrate that famous season in 1994. Brian, tell us your early memories from that historic season.

Lara: (*Smiling, speaking confidently and at ease*). I actually remember my arrival very clearly. Camera crews and photographers were at the airport and journalists were pulling and tugging to interview me. I was a cricketer here to play cricket but I was being treated like some kind of world-famous celebrity.

I remember answering lots of questions, most of which seem to be geared toward me breaking more records. I tried my best to smile and be polite as possible.

Presenter: Brian, sounds like there was lots of attention, what did you think of it all?

Lara: I thought it was quite remarkable. I realized then that the pressure would be on me from that moment.

Presenter: (*turning to Reeve*) What were your early memories of that season, Dermot?

Reeve: (*fairly serious, with a corporately polished air*). It was an atmosphere of sweetness and light when Brian arrived. Even though he was now the world's highest scorer in test history, he said all the right, modest things and seemed to have an ideal temperament for the inevitable trappings of mega-stardom that were bound to come his way.

Presenter: So, you were both looking forward to the season ahead?

Reeve: Yes, at the club, we were clapping our hands with glee. Phones jangled off the hook at Edgbaston after that, membership went through the roof, the sponsors loved all the exposure and the players and myself were thrilled to have such a player in our dressing room.

Lara: (*looking serious for the first time*). Yes, although when I signed, I realized Manoj Prabhakar was their first choice as an overseas player. I knew Dermot wanted Prabhakar as he opened both batting and bowling.

(*Lara casts a sideways look at Reeve*).

Scene 2: Initial problems arising

Presenter: (*addressing the audience that includes the coach and other players from the 1994 season*). So, any recollections from the audience about the early stages of that season?

Coach: I remember on his first day at Edgbaston [Warwickshire's home stadium] when Brian attended a press conference, and I was impressed with how maturely he handled the occasion.

Presenter: What about on the pitch?

Player 2: When Brian arrived, we weren't disappointed; time and again he annihilated bowling attacks. Every team would bring on their best bowlers against him, only to be repeatedly smashed to the boundary fences. No one could control Brian on the pitch. He was on a different level.

Presenter: What a great time to be playing for Warwickshire? (*curious, but searching*)

Player 2: Yes, definitely! We were excited to watch, our crowds grew, and our expectations skyrocketed.

Player 3: I agree, records start falling—people were queuing around the ground to become members. Brian started that year with hundred after hundred and he just looked the best player you'd ever seen in your life; he never looked like getting out.

Presenter: Dermot, what were your thoughts on the way the season started?

Reeve: You know, after six weeks of the 1994 season, everything seemed perfect for Warwickshire, we were winning games, Brian was batting brilliantly, and our "team-ness" was great.

Presenter: Yes, of course, Brian scored six centuries in a row, and then went on to break the world record with that score of 501 not out.

Lara sits still, smiling, and the audience bursts out in applause. Lara holds his hand up and waves to the audience to acknowledge the applause. Reeve sits there stony-faced and waits for the applause to die down.

Reeve: Yes, that's true. But in all honesty, even then, I was looking for the Elastoplast to hold things together.

(Turning to look directly at Lara, with a serious expression and gritted teeth). It was all so easy for you, Brian, and yet I felt you didn't have a great deal of respect for county cricket. You started to look for ways to get out of fielding and you made it clear that you only wanted to bat.

(pause)

That 501 not out seemed to convince you, Brian, that the standard of county bowling was far inferior to that in the Caribbean, and all too quickly you needed extra motivation to play.

(Reeve pauses again)

With the inevitable commercial deals raining down on you, I felt you lost your edge.

Presenter: *(looking to the audience, and seeing the coach ready to interject)* Do you think that's fair, what Dermot has said about Brian?

Coach: That first day we met, I also met his agent. I had always felt that it was important to put the player's sport first and make money second, but during that season, there were times when I felt the very opposite occurred.

Player 1: *(speaking forcefully in disagreement).* I don't think it is fair. You've got to remember that Brian's life changed forever within a few weeks. He was just 24 years old and everyone wanted a piece of him.

(Camera pans to Lara, nodding his head in agreement)

Player 1: I remember going back to his Edgbaston apartment at the end of the day's play. His answer machine was full. His fax machine had used a huge roll of paper, and his mailbag stacked up taller than his dressing room chair.

Presenter: Dermot, you have often been praised for your captaincy skills and your ability to motivate your players. Were you not able to motivate Brian?

Reeve: (*looking at the presenter, avoiding eye contact with Lara*). I think Brian might have been more committed if he'd been captained by someone else than me. Right from the start, the chemistry wasn't right between us. We never had a beer together and he went out of his way to avoid me socially. Early on, I invited him round to my flat to get to know each other, but he declined. I could live with that, a captain doesn't need to be liked, just respected.

Presenter: Do you remember this Brian, did you have a problem with what was going on, and Dermot's captaincy in general?

Lara: Yes, I recall a match where we were anxious to avoid being fined for not bowling overs at the required rate, we were rushing things and not enough time was being spent on working out how we were going to get batsmen out. This does not tend to make for exciting watching.

Presenter: Dermot—how do you recall that?

Reeve: Because of the daft rule about bowling a minimum of 18 1/2 overs in an hour, the overrate was always a worry to captains, and the rest of the side would understand when I chivvied them along to move around quickly in the field. But Brian would saunter around and when I clapped my hands and shouted, "come on Brian. Over rate," He didn't like that.

(*Reeve, pauses, looks directly at Lara, with a serious expression, and continues*)

I also heard you questioned my tactics on the field to some of the guys.

(*Camera pans to Lara, who simply shrugs his shoulders in response to the accusation, perhaps a reflection of his culturally-infused perception of being laid-back*).

Presenter: Dermot, how did you respond to Brian openly questioning your captaincy?

Reeve: I had a quiet word with our chief executive, but his response was disappointing: He just said, "keep him sweet Dermot, he special, he's the best player in the world." Then I turned to our coach, whose advice was equally unhelpful in my eyes: "handle him with 'kid gloves.' It's only for this season. He's different."

Presenter: Let's go to the coach. Have you got any thoughts on this?

Coach: I didn't agree with you, Dermot. I thought that pushing Brian over relatively minor issues would be counterproductive. After all, he continued to score runs throughout all of this, and at the same time being put under outrageous pressures by the agents to make money. So long as the rest of the team remains supportive of each other and encourages Brian when he played, it would be OK.

Reeve: (*shaking his head*). To me, that was just storing up trouble after just a few weeks of what was a long season.

(*pauses for a moment to look at Lara, and with even greater intensity, continues*)

I was proved right in the long run, and at a cost to my self-esteem.

(*Reeve holds his glare at Lara, as Lara shrugs his shoulders, more awkwardly than before*).

Scene 3: Disagreeing over tactics

Presenter: I understand there was an incident in a game against Middlesex, where you had a disagreement.

Reeve: Yeah, at one stage, Middlesex were blocking out for a draw and I decided to try and get them interested again in a run chase as I felt this would bring us a greater chance of victory. I brought on Brian to bowl his leg breaks.

(Reeve looks at Lara intently)

You certainly weren't the worst bowler and I thought you would either get a wicket or help boost their run rate; either way, I insisted on attacking the field.

Presenter: Brian, what do you remember?

Lara: I was unhappy about the attacking field because it meant you wanted me to give them runs. I hadn't warmed up and the whole business was unsatisfactory. At the end of my third over I felt some pain in my shoulder and asked permission to leave the field, which was granted.

Reeve: I also remember in the dressing room afterward you [Brian] had a go at me, saying you couldn't understand why I was putting you on without a run-saving field. I tried to explain that with 20 overs left I felt we needed to keep Middlesex interested in the target by feeding them some runs, but you wouldn't see it initially.

Lara: This was going to be my first experience of this type of cricket. I did not agree but kept my mouth shut.

Reeve: *(Looking accusingly at Lara)*. But that wasn't the case Brian, was it! Our coach confided in me that you were unimpressed by my tactics.

Presenter: *(turning to the audience)*. Coach, do you recall this?

Coach: Yes! I remember as Middlesex edged closer to victory, Brian became disillusioned with the game's progress and walked off the field claiming he had a knee problem. He told me this was why English cricket was rubbish, and that in the Caribbean the game was never played in this way. I was disappointed with his attitude. Nevertheless, it was the first time I recognized the strong views he held on cricket.

Reeve: *(Interrupting)*. So it was clear to me that he didn't value my captaincy all that highly.

(Reeve looks at Lara with a frown).

Scene 4: On-field argument

Presenter: There was an incident at Northampton in the middle of the season where it sounds like the two of you really fell out! Brian, what do you remember?

Lara: Yeah! I'd scored 197 in our innings, but I'd also had a short delivery from Curtly (Ambrose) that crashed onto the back of my helmet, leaving me with a sore head. I still felt dizzy the next day, but I fielded when they were batting. There was a big partnership going on when one of their batsmen appeared to nick [a slight touch of] the ball and our keeper made a splendid low catch. But the umpires gave him "not out."

I was sure he had hit the ball and it was a fair catch and I said, "We've got him out once, let's do it again . . ."

Reeve: *(interrupting Lara)*. But that's not the whole story, is it Brian? When the umpire said, "I saw the ball bounce—not out," you [Brian] said to him, "You must have f***ing good eyesight then."

Lara: (*slightly agitated*). Then you told me, “Umpires in this country don’t like that.” And then when I tried to say something else, you said to me “Don’t act like a prima donna.”

Reeve: But that’s not exactly the truth is it, Brian. My words led you to send a torrent of abuse and four-letter words at me in front of the whole team. I instantly realized what an important moment this was. All the boys were listening, and my leadership and credibility in their eyes were on the line,

After you had told me to “f*** off” seven times, this is when I *actually* firmly said, “you’re turning into a prima donna.”

(*Pause, with Reeve and Lara glaring at each other*).

Presenter: So what happened next?

Reeve: At the end of the over, Brian pointed to his knee and shouted to the umpire, “sore knee” and walked off the field.

(*Pause. Presenter looks at Lara, who shakes his head—another pause ...*).

Lara: I was feeling so dizzy that I asked permission to go off and spent the rest of the day in the dressing room, lying down. This had nothing to do with the earlier incident.

Presenter: Dermot, what did you think of this at the time?

Reeve: To be honest, it was the worst example of player indiscipline I had experienced in my career. I had never heard a teammate speak like that to another, never mind to the captain.

(*Reeve’s face, tense, tight lipped, and speaking with intensity*).

It led to the worst week of my cricketing life.

Presenter: Really Dermot, the worst week? The team were having such a brilliant season!

Reeve: (*ignoring the positive comment of the Presenter*). I hoped the club’s administrators would back me up when we had the inevitable enquiry. But Warwickshire handled Brian with “kid gloves” and it made me realize that I lacked support at the club. In the end, I had to swallow my pride, and think about my own future, while the club kept a superstar happy. It cast a shadow over the rest of that historic season for me ... (*Reeve pauses and looked over at Lara*) and I was close to drifting out of the game because of you, Brian.

Presenter: (*turning to the audience*). Do any of you recall that incident at Northampton?

Player 1: I do, and in reality, it was no big deal. These things happen during the season.

Presenter: I wonder if this had any influence on the team?

Player 1: Despite the publicity, the confrontation didn’t disrupt the match-winning efforts of the side. Everyone is still rooted for everyone.

(*pauses for a couple of seconds*).

I played hundreds of first-team games for Warwickshire and heard much worse than what came out that day. You would have to cull the earth of trees to print every event where Derm was told to “F*** off.” If Joe Bloggs swore, no one gave a damn, but if it was Lara, it made headlines. It was all a bit of storm in a teacup; team morale that year was great. There were a few off-field issues with players and their home lives, but that’s

cricket; As a team, we were so successful and all that winning made for a happy team—we were like rockstars around a triangle of night venues around the Hagley Road, Harbourne, and town—with all the good and bad things that come with that.

Scene 5: Lara appears to not want to play

Presenter: It does appear, Dermot, there you had a certain level of frustration, despite how well the team was doing overall.

Reeve: I was having to work at getting you [Brian] onto the field on Sundays. you seemed to be trying hard to get a day off. “I don’t like Sunday cricket,” you would tell me, complaining about your sore knee.

I was, trying to ignore the fact that the star player didn’t like or rate his captain.

Presenter: What did you think of fielding in one-day matches, Brian?

Lara: I was embarrassed that I must’ve dropped almost as many as I caught. There was no excuse for that. Maybe it was through lack of concentration through being out in the field most days in a long, hot summer when there were few breaks.

Presenter: Let’s go to the audience for their opinions on this.

Coach: I have various thoughts. When he made that amazing 501 not out, he was stunned by the amount of media attention he attracted and was to continue attracting. During these emotionally and physically demanding times, Brian was usually polite and erudite, but as time passed, he became more reclusive.

Early in the season, he practised spasmodically, and he was also reticent about attending team practices. And there were occasions when he arrived at the ground as the game was starting.

Presenter: Coach, did you notice the impact that Brian’s behavior had?

Coach: I did notice that Dermot and a number of the other players were upset that he did not take more interest in that part of the game

Presenter: Dermot—how did you deal with this ongoing situation?

Reeve: I called a meeting of our senior players to ask for their advice. I was worried that team spirit might get corroded when they saw the amount of leeway you [Brian] were getting, arriving late almost every morning.

Presenter: And how did that go?

Reeve: We agreed the important thing was to get him on the field and to make sure our own personal standards didn’t drop.

Presenter: How did you feel about this?

Reeve: I was worried about this preferential treatment, and how much indiscipline might creep in as the club tried to accommodate Brian. When Brian asked to miss a cup game against a lower-level team, because his girlfriend was arriving that day from Trinidad, I was really put on the spot.

He still arrived 90 min late ... It was a totally embarrassing situation, and the press were beginning to ask questions about why Brian was spending so much time off the field.

(Turning to address Lara directly)

Brian, you were being paid handsomely to play county cricket, yet you clearly didn’t have a great deal of respect for it.

Presenter: So Brian, what do you think of Dermot's comments about your attitude to playing.

Lara: There was one Sunday league game, I was interviewed, and I said my knee was playing up so I didn't think I would be playing...

Reeve: (*interrupting*): This was one that really disillusioned me. You were late arriving at the ground, and then announced you weren't fit to play, that your knee was sore, and that you were still complaining of headaches.

A physiotherapist told me that there was not much wrong with Brian's knee in his opinion, but you insisted he wasn't fit to play. I went off and told the team. Then the chairman came in and said, "do it for me Brian, please play." The chairman had earlier said, "Brian's got to play; the TV cameras are here."

I was furious at the way Brian had been pampered into playing. Then I watched him field brilliantly despite his earlier protestations about his sore knee.

Lara: That's true. "It's live on TV and we want to make it six wins out of six" he said. I was offended by that. They didn't seem concerned that I was injured. Other players missed matches, but they seem to be doubting whether I was genuinely injured.

In the end, I decided to back down and play but I wasn't happy about it.

Presenter: Let's go to the audience for your thoughts on this.

Player 2: Too much was asked of Lara that summer, there were times when he was simply exhausted, but was forced to play. I remember that Sunday game, if you looked at the facts and understood the demands, then you would see that the guy had hardly had a second off the pitch over the previous few months. He just needed a day off.

Presenter: What did you think of the way this was handled?

Player 2: (*shaking his head*). In no other occupation would this occur. In sports, such as football, managers like Arsène Wenger and Sir Alex Ferguson make great capital out of resting their star players when they deem it necessary.

Lara: It's tough for the overseas players. They are the ones the public comes to see and they are expected to play in every match even if they are not fully fit. But if I believed that this impacted on my international future, I would not risk my test career just to play in a few more games.

Scene 6: Apologies

Presenter: It sounds like things were really deteriorating between the two of you

Reeve: I had another meeting with the senior players about Brian. The general feeling was that we had to grin and bear it, otherwise he might just disappear on a plane to Trinidad and not come back.

Still, I felt a little isolated, and even more so when the Chairman told me that Brian was demanding an apology from me, for calling him a "prima donna."

I pointed out to Dennis that Brian had told me to "f*** off" seven times before I mention the word "prima donna." He replied, "if you phone him and apologize, I'm sure he'll do the same."

"Apologize for what?" I said. "What are the club going to do about Brian's behavior?" I couldn't believe my ears.

Dennis answered, "he's having such a good season, we mustn't upset him. He's a great player Dermot, let him have his way this season."

Presenter: Let's ask the audience—what did you think about this situation?

Player 2: There was a clash of personalities, although regardless, Dermot and Brian still both performed, somehow. One game we lost, they batted at each end and didn't talk to each other. Everyone could see that they didn't get on. But they found a way to still be on the same pitch and perform. They deserve credit.

Coach: Dermot seemed to put out that Brian became too much the focus of attention, and there were several occasions where he and I differed as to how Brian should be treated.

Dermot often talked about the situation in terms of my letting him down and I wrestled with that little proposition as well. I am a firm believer in giving the captain full support, so effectively what I was doing by counseling caution, was going against the grain (of my coaching approach).

Presenter: (*turns to Reeve, and is just about to ask "so Dermo..." when Reeve interrupts*)

Reeve: (*speaking fiercely*) At that point, Brian Lara was bigger than the Warwickshire County cricket club. I felt that if I refused, I might not be backed up by the cricket committee. With my form below par, Brian was undeniably more productive than me.

Presenter: I see we have a hand up in the audience.

Player 3: I definitely remember Dermot and Brian had a fairly up-and-down relationship. It must have been so difficult for Dermot as captain to try and reel Brian in all the time and Brian as the best player in the world at the time could basically do whatever he wanted to do.

Presenter: What did you think of how Brian should have been managed?

Player 3: In fairness, you sort of left him to do it because he was scoring you a hundred every game so, [Brian], if that's how you want to play then carry on.

Presenter: (*looking back to Reeve*) What happened when you spoke to Brian then?

Reeve: I hated doing it, but my pride had to take a backseat, so I picked up the phone. He was very quiet at the start. I said "we have to get a working relationship going for the sake of the team. It doesn't matter if we are not mates."

I remember you replying, "you're right, I'm sorry the incident ever happened... but you never wanted me here in the first place."

(*Speaking more calmly and looking directly at Lara*)

I was stunned. It dawned on me that you had heard about all the discussions about an overseas player and that he had thought I'd not wanted to sign him. This gave me some insight into why you had no time for me.

I tried to explain... I told you that I would have preferred an all-rounder because of the balance of the team. But I told him enthusiastically and honestly that he was the best batsman that I had ever seen and how lucky we were to have ended up with him.

Scene 7: Team talk at the start of a cup final

Presenter: So, Brian—how were you feeling at this time?

Lara: That was the start of a two-week period which was the low point of the season to me. The sniping built up and by the morning of the Benson & Hedges final at Lord's, I was being portrayed in one newspaper as "willful, arrogant and insubordinate." I was now feeling the full force of the media.

Reeve: (*looking at Lara*) According to you, this was the worst fortnight of your life. I wonder how you would have felt in my position. I was isolated, out of form as a player and getting no support on a serious disciplinary matter, and having to swallow my pride.

Lara: I woke to some pretty nasty headlines in the newspapers on the morning of the Benson & Hedges final. *The times* wrote: “Caribbean charmer feels the heat as nice guy image fades.”

This wasn’t nice to read. I remember reading about Terry Venables talking about Paul Gascoigne and how people don’t understand “the pressures and expectations these people live with daily,” with “none of the good things get noticed, only the negatives.” I’m sure they think the whole world is against them). That’s how I felt!

When we had a team meeting about 20 min before the start of play, I asked for permission to speak. I told the players that I consider myself part of the team, no different from anyone else, and assured them I was still fully committed to playing with them. “I enjoy playing for Warwickshire and want to see us win every competition this season” I said. It was a very short speech, and I could tell they accepted and were happy. I shook hands with every player and we left the dressing room to take the field.

Reeve: Yes, Brian you could surprise me. I remember the Lord’s dressing room was hushed as you apologized to the team for his recent behavior. You shook hands with everyone and as I stuck out my hand, you embraced me. I was very surprised and moved by that gesture and by what you had said. it was certainly a great way to get the boys together as a unit before going out to beat Worcestershire.

Scene 8: Later period of the season/reflections

Presenter: What happened in the rest of the season?

Reeve: (*looking directly at Lara*). Even when we created history in September, winning the Sunday league [one of the four domestic competitions] down at Bristol, I got the impression that you didn’t rate the achievement all that much ... You’d been given permission to drive down for the Sunday game (after not playing in the final championship match), but you arrived late and didn’t take part in a pre-match practice. Afterward, in the pumped-up atmosphere in our dressing room, I looked over at you and thought “this doesn’t mean much to you, mate we’ve won three trophies in one season but it doesn’t look like it’s been a great day for you, like it is for us.”

(*Lara sits smiling but shaking his head*)

Reeve: Even after the final, and your apology, Brian you still didn’t really seem motivated for us during the rest of the season. I felt county cricket was now too easy for you, and the one-day game had little appeal.

You’d moan during the day about your sore knee, and feeling tired, and then you’d be off out of the dressing room door like a shot to play golf toward the end of the season, I was openly asking our physio, “is golf good for his knee?” To be told, “no, that’s if the knee is a problem for him.” Try as he could, our physio Stuart Nottingham couldn’t find any serious damage to Brian’s knee.

Presenter: (*recognizing Lara shaking his head in disagreement*). Any other thoughts on the impact Brian had on the team that season?

Player 1: You can criticize anything and anyone if you dig deep enough. I can't think of a player who was never late at some stage of his career. Little was written or said about all the positive things he was doing off the field. For example, Brian personally organized our end-of-season party, buying all the alcohol and food, paying for a DJ, etc. Brian did lots of things others didn't. No one acknowledged that.

Player 3: I agree. Brian was said to be a bad influence. Some said he wasn't a team man and was only there to make money. I beg to differ. Too many people made demands on his time. If he didn't respond positively to these people he was criticized. At his young age, and without much help from a club that was ill-prepared for such success, he was put in some impossible situations. Brian cared.

Player 2: Brian could have easily just said... "no... I'm not having this; I've done enough anyway." He could have looked at it selfishly—"I've now become the world recordholder—I'm now playing in England for the first time, we've got a chance of winning—my profile's going to go through the roof." The bottom line was he kept churning it out, he kept performing and with everything else, he was a nice guy, he contributed massively.

Player 3: Brian certainly had good days and bad days; on good days he'd be the nicest guy in the world, and on a bad day, he wouldn't know you were there.

Player 1: While we were in London, Brian agreed to give up his time to promote his home island of Trinidad at a function in Leicester Square. Over 2000 people gathered, each in some way, had a direct link with the tiny island. Brian's speech was based on the pride of being Trinidadian and how much the country's development meant to him.

He stayed for ages after, chatting and signing all sorts of memorabilia thrust in his direction. If you believe what was being printed, you'd think he was the most mercenary person on earth. Yet that night, like many others, he gave his time for free.

Reeve: Some of these comments are very fair. I did notice the positive effect you [Brian] were having on the batsmen. He would help them out and boost the confidence in the middle, and during one match against Middlesex at Lord's, he gathered the top six batsmen together under the Compton Stand and talk for half an hour about responsibility, building an innings and why they should not throw their wickets away. So, although he was unpopular for his lack of commitment off the field, he was thoroughly committed to the team's success on it. I believe Brian was with us all the way that season, but immense outside pressures sometimes gave the impression that he was not. Ultimately, I'd say that Brian was very hard work for me as club captain. He was a genius, but a genius isn't necessarily a great team man.

Presenter: Well on that note, I think it's time to draw this to a close. Can I just say a big thanks to Brian (*audience start clapping*) and Dermot for joining us today, and all of you in the audience, and sharing your thoughts on that special season?

Discussion

We believe this study extends the current scholarly understanding of conflict in sport by exploring real experiences of conflict that occurred in an elite sports team between a captain (Reeve) and a star player perceived to be "problematic" (Lara), and by illustrating the complexity at the center of the antecedents and outcomes of this conflict from

multiple perspectives. In terms of the nature of the conflict, the ethnodrama presented highlights how the conflict unfolded over the course of the season with diverse triggers, frequency, and intensity. Public incidents of conflict occurred at several critical moments, including on-pitch arguments, and off-pitch disagreements over the “problematic player’s” behavior and commitment, and yet were not related to on-field performance. By presenting these events as an ethnodrama, we were able to illustrate the determinants and consequences of conflict that occurred in this specific context from the differing perspectives of those involved in the conflict. In doing so, our study significantly extends existing interpersonal conflict literature (cf. Wachsmuth et al., 2017) and research examining problematic players (e.g., Cope et al., 2010; Leggat et al., 2020; McGannon et al., 2012) through a novel approach and offer of an accessible insight to specific conflict from multiple perspectives. Our study also makes a unique contribution to the literature by including the perspective of the so-called “problematic player,” and those of the captain, coach, other players, and in doing so, we highlight the social and psychological complexity of conflict from one example from an elite sport environment.

The present work contributes to an enhanced understanding of interpersonal conflict in sport (e.g., Wachsmuth et al.’s framework), by drawing attention to the causes of conflict in this specific relationship between a leader and a so-called “problematic player.” For example, the expectations Reeve had for Lara’s conduct on and off the pitch (e.g., disciplined approach including punctuality, conforming to the team’s work ethic) were not met by Lara, and in turn, Lara perceived he was not supported by Reeve to deal with the relentless demands emanating from the club, media, and public. It is apparent that Reeve had clarity regarding behavioral and attitudinal indicators that he perceived important for team culture, and that he felt Lara did not always align with these. The identification of this misalignment helps us to understand the patterns of behavior and micropolitics occurring between the captain and player, with each using power in different ways in striving to meet their own needs and achieve their personal goals (McCalla & Fitzpatrick, 2016). The ethnodrama illustrates these power dynamics through the interplay in the dialogue as they disagreed and pulled in different directions regarding their needs, and became entrenched as they perceived the other to be impeding their own goals, thus perpetuating the conflict. It appeared Reeve viewed Lara’s behavior, regardless of the quality of Lara’s individual performances, to negatively impact on the team culture which Reeve had carefully cultivated in the preceding seasons. For Reeve, this was a primary cause of the conflict. Reeve also suggested Lara did not respect his approach to captaincy, although Lara mentioned that he didn’t understand the approach taken by Reeve. Furthermore, Lara felt he wasn’t wanted by Reeve (perceiving he was a second-choice recruit), and Reeve acknowledged that he never found, or prioritized, the time to talk to Lara and come to a shared understanding. These cognitions and beliefs, and avoiding initial communication (e.g., not addressing personal concerns, not clarifying expectations) also perpetuated the conflict and undermined their relationship. These examples of ineffective communication as well as the perceived differences in personality are in line with Wachsmuth et al.’s (2017) framework of conflict antecedents.

This ethnodrama further extends current knowledge by highlighting a variety of consequences of the conflict, with the most apparent being the intrapersonal consequences for both Reeve and Lara. Specifically, Reeve reported several negative affective consequences by expressing disappointment and anger over a lack of support from senior officials at the club, whom Reeve perceived to indulge Lara's behavior due to the increased attention and revenue that Lara brought. Reeve also noted considering leaving the team and also his own performance slump during this time, thereby supporting Wachsmuth's (2017) contention that declining performance can be a consequence of conflict. From Lara's perspective, negative affective responses resulted from being treated poorly, and from a lack of understanding of the intense scrutiny and demands on his time Lara faced. This understanding of outcomes of conflict from different perspectives supports other research using a narrative inquiry approach. For example, Papatomas et al. (2015) explored narratives of disordered eating from the perspective of the athlete and their family members and found that when there were contrasting narratives, various negative outcomes, such as frustration and anger occurred, which led to conflict in the family system. The intrapersonal consequences of the conflict observed in the ethnodrama also support and extend extant related literature (e.g., Cope et al. 2010; Leggat et al., 2020; Wachsmuth et al., 2017), although extending this work by showing that those athletes labeled as "problematic" also experience negative effects. Thus, developing an understanding of the personal and performance history, the current demands, and the factors that maintain or influence that individual's coping behavior, are fundamentally important for understanding their behavior in any given context (see Bickley et al., 2016).

Although our data were interpreted to demonstrate the negative effects of the conflict for both Reeve and Lara, we were somewhat surprised that the data from teammates revealed the conflict appeared to have a limited impact on team dynamics. Previous research has noted negative effects on the team environment due to conflict linked to athletes labeled as "problematic," with both Cope et al. (2010) and Leggat et al. (2020) reporting the primarily negative impacts of such individuals to be on team processes, including reduced cohesion, and clique formation. Indeed, unlike in other studies reporting intragroup conflict to have negative impacts on team processes (e.g., Leo et al., 2015; Partridge & Knapp, 2016), the players interviewed here reported Lara having positive influences on performance and team social environment, including supporting others' development and supporting social events. This observation, therefore, poses several challenges to Cope et al.'s (2011) definition of such an athlete, as one who "expresses negative emotions that spread destructively throughout a team" (p. 24). In this case, was Lara primarily "problematic" for Reeve, and did the impact of the captain's associated negative emotions stop with him? Indeed, is the fundamental use of a term like "problematic," well, problematic? What is clear from the available data is that the universal use of the label "problematic" for Lara is neither appropriate nor substantiated by the multiple perspectives available and presented here.

Our findings also provide an insight into potential missed opportunities for effectively managing conflict. It is evident from these data that chances for Reeve and Lara to communicate more fully were missed, which may have helped them develop a shared understanding of each other's experiences and perspectives. Both players experienced

extraordinary success during the 1994 season, but at a personal cost that at least partially appeared to overshadow their experience at that time (certainly in the case of Reeve). Heelis et al. (2020) highlighted the need to foster positive relationships between leaders and problematic athletes, and the need to address the concerns of the athlete to effectively manage the athlete. Within the present ethnodrama, there were opportunities where communication (e.g., around expectations, differing perceptions) might have enabled a greater shared understanding between the protagonists. Yet, expressing this as a need for the captain to “manage” the player may be misleading. Given Reeve’s subjective and contextualized experience of Lara as “problematic,” we would argue that the use of “challenging” rather than “problematic” is a more appropriate term to use to describe such a player. This revised term would avoid negative connotation, judgment, or labeling of such players, and support our view that behavior, and therefore the antecedents, beliefs, and behavior associated with conflict can, and perhaps must, be understood in context. Such a use of the term “challenging” is also in line with Bickley et al.’s (2016) use of “challenging but talented,” and supports Bickley et al.’s suggestion that conflict involving such players needs to be understood from different perspectives. Bickley et al. offer a process for psychologists to better help individuals collaboratively engage in purposeful discussion and reflection to allow for the development of a shared understanding of the “problem” from both the perspective of the leader and the athlete, and, in turn, use this to inform a coherent, consistent and holistic intervention plan that is open to testing and review.

Applied implications

Wachsmuth et al. (2017) called for researchers to examine conflict prevention and management, in terms of the behaviors leaders and athletes exhibit in resolving conflict. The current study contributes to literature highlighting causes of conflict, and thus, informs applied practitioners with suggestions for preventing conflict. For example, a lack of communication and shared understanding between Reeve and Lara appears to have been both a major conflict antecedent, perpetuating factor, and consequence in the present case, and it follows that systems that promote shared understanding and formulation of challenges within an organization (cf. Bickley et al., 2016; Wagstaff, 2019) are likely to promote psychologically safe environments where individuals can disclose and challenge each other without fear of recrimination. Nevertheless, we are reluctant to attempt to develop generic suggestions for preventing or managing conflict at this juncture. Instead, we hope our work contributes to practice through the use of ethnodrama as an educational resource to engage readers and stimulate reflection and dialogue. Indeed, we believe these narratives can function to communicate complex knowledge in ways that are highly accessible to different audiences, not just academics (see Scott et al., 2012), and thus, can be used as a resource for knowledge dissemination and education. That is, we would agree with Parsons and Lavery (2012) that dialogue is a foundational feature of social life and an important way in which we come to understand one another. Thus, this ethnodrama could be used with sports teams to promote social awareness of conflict that can occur in sports teams and demonstrate the importance of developing a shared understanding of colleagues in sports organizations.

Another way the ethnodrama might be useful to applied practitioners is how it provides an insight into different conflict experiences, which could be used in workshop settings to prompt debate without the necessity of experiencing conflict first-hand. Such an approach may stimulate reflection, acceptance, and compassionate and empathic sports systems. Taking the last of these, in a review of conflict resolution, Klimecki (2019) outlined the key role empathy plays in developing positive interpersonal relationships in groups and highlighted how empathy was associated with higher readiness for reconciliation following the conflict. Similarly, Oswald (1996) suggested that perspective taking was key in developing empathy, through seeing the position of another person from that person's point of view. Taking these various themes, practitioners might undertake an educational approach to promote curiosity and empathy as a proactive approach to avoiding conflict, which seeks to ascertain a shared understanding of conflict when it does occur. Returning to the current case of conflict between Lara and Reeve, it would appear that there was a lack of shared understanding, empathy, and non-judgmental perspective taking within the team which may have deduced the conflict between these individuals. In addition, as the side was so successful that season, it is possible that the conflict involving a star, the problematic player had a negative impact on team functioning as previous research has suggested (Cope et al., 2010; Leggat et al., 2020). Our findings would allow discussion in workshop settings about both positive and negative outcomes that might result from interpersonal conflict within teams. By creating an ethnodrama to engage applied audiences, this work makes a novel contribution to the literature by providing a resource that illustrates different perspectives of conflict that can stimulate discussion about various key issues that can create conflict in sports teams.

Strengths, limitations, and future research directions

A strength of the current study lies in the presentation of data in a novel form that meets the call of Papatomas (2016) for researchers using narrative inquiry to consider innovative ways to present findings. Future research might present the findings in other novel ways (e.g., a performance piece acted out), with a different format, such as using visual methods potentially engaging applied audiences further (Szedlak et al., 2019). In addition, the ethnodrama allows us to discuss a range of conflict situations and how they impacted on the captain and the star player from each of their perspectives. Although many of these situations are likely to still resonate today (e.g., expectations of media and fans on the player), we acknowledge that the case is somewhat dated. For example, star players are likely to be under substantial scrutiny in the current climate, given the extensive media coverage and the demands of social media allied with contemporary elite sports. In future research, scholars might consider how such modern contextual circumstances might lead to conflict between sporting leaders and players and consider how this might be effectively prevented or managed. Alternatively, professionals considering using ethnodrama as a pedagogic resource might evaluate the extent to which the dialogue developed here effectively stimulates discussion, reflection, learning, and change.

The use of autobiographical data was a strength as it allowed us to access accounts of conflict from an elite environment (Sparkes & Stewart, 2016). Nevertheless, it is important to remain cognizant of the potential limitations of autobiographical sources. That is, Gronn (2005) suggested that autobiographical sources should be avoided or at least must be treated critically if used in academic research. Consequently, we draw on Smith and Watson's (2010) strategies for reading and engaging with life narratives and autobiographies, with three of these strategies (viz. narrative plots and modes, temporality, coherence, and closure) particularly pertinent in critiquing the use of autobiographical data in the current analysis. First, considering *narrative plots and modes*, it is noteworthy that Reeve starts his book with chapters about the 1994 season and the conflict with Lara. Thus, it appears this conflict is a primary part of Reeve's story, and in turn, there is more detail about the conflict in Reeve's story. This may explain why the negative consequences for Reeve at times appear to come across more strongly in the ethnodrama. Second, *temporality* refers to the timing of the autobiography being published, and it is important to highlight that Reeve published his book after Lara. In some cases, this means that Reeve directly responds to comments Lara made in his book (e.g., recalling the wording used at the incident at Northampton). We believe this aided the flow and authenticity of the dialogue, as Reeve's direct responses create the sense that he is talking and responding directly to Lara. Finally, when considering *coherence and closure*, Smith and Watson suggested that the reader assesses the coherence of the story, which includes reflecting on any digressions, contradictions, or omissions. For example, although Lara makes excuses concerning aspects of the conflict, such as leaving the field, he does not mention other aspects relating to his behavior that might have been deemed unprofessional. As such we invite the reader to engage with and undertake their own assessment of the coherence of the dialogue using this framework for evaluating the autobiographical data included here.

In summary, this study significantly extends extant knowledge by illuminating specific conflict between a captain and a player perceived to be "problematic," and has highlighted some of the causes and outcomes of this conflict from the perspectives of the captain, the problematic player, and others (i.e., players, coach) involved that season. Furthermore, the use of multiple perspectives drawn from autobiographical and interview data contributes to the growing research involving narrative inquiry that has addressed complex, social issues in sport (Cavallerio et al., 2016; Papatthomas et al., 2015). Indeed, this work extends the extant narrative inquiry and autobiographical sports literature through the innovative use of ethnodrama that has allowed us to illustrate experiences of conflict from multiple perspectives. Indeed, we hope the ethnodrama script will resonate with readers who will be engaged and motivated by identifying with the characters, context, and plot of the vignettes (e.g., Smith et al., 2015). The rigor we have applied to present the data as an ethnodrama should enhance naturalistic generalizability (Smith, 2018), resonance, discourse, and action among readers.

Notes

1. Similar to Leggat et al. (2020), given the evocative nature of "cancer," we have concerns with the use of this term in this context. Moreover, labelling anyone as "cancerous" is unhelpful and potentially traumatic for the individual and is unlikely to facilitate a shared

understanding, reduction, or resolution of conflict within an environment. Therefore, we initially use a term consistent with Leggat et al.—“problematic player”—and yet elaborate throughout the narrative on our own views on the suitability of this term. As such, where the narrative is not impeded, we have tried to use “so-called problematic player” to distance ourselves from its use. Where “problematic behavior was used by other authors,” we have retained this. “Player” is used here given the commonality of “player” over “athlete” in team settings, while we do acknowledge that not all teams comprise “players,” this term was accurate for the sample in the present study.

2. Bob Woolmer passed away in 2007, so instead of naming him in the dialogue, we just refer to him as the coach in the script.

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