An Examination of the Stress and Mental Ill/Well-Being Experiences of Elite Football Coaches

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DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed: *L.Baldock*

Date: 21/10/2022

STATEMENT 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by giving explicit references. A biography is appended.

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STATEMENT 2

I hereby give consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be available for photocopying and for inter-library loan, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organisations.

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Baldock, L., Cropley, B., Neil, R., & Mellalieu, S. D. (2021). Stress and mental well-being experiences of elite football coaches. *International Sport Coaching Journal*, *8* [Suppl. ICCE Abstract]. https://doi.org/10.1123/iscj.2021-0066

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Published Book Chapters

Baldock, L., Cropley, B., Mellalieu, S. D., & Neil, R. (2020). The stress and well-being of those operating in groups. In R. J. Schinke & D. Hackfort (Eds.), The Routledge *International Encyclopedia of Sport and Exercise Psychology: Vol. 1: Theoretical and Methodological Concepts* (pp. 620-634). Routledge. – **Chapter 2 - Literature Review**

Peer-Reviewed Conference Communications

Baldock, L., Cropley, B., Mellalieu, S. D., Neil, R. (2018). The demands experienced by elite football coaches at the end of the season. Research presented at Faculty of Life Sciences and Education Research Conference, University of South Wales, Pontypridd, UK.

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Baldock, L., Cropley, B., Mellalieu, S. D., Neil, R. (2019). An exploration of the holistic stress experiences of professional football coaches and their impact on well-being. Research presented at British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences Conference, King Power Stadium, Leicester, UK.

Baldock, L., Cropley, B., Neil, R., & Mellalieu, S. D. (2021). Stress and mental well-being experiences of elite football coaches. Research presented at International Council for Coaching Excellence Global Coach Conference, Lisbon, Portugal.

Contribution to Published Outputs and Overall Thesis

To disseminate the research conducted in this PhD programme, chapters 2-5 of this thesis have either been published in peer-reviewed academic journals (Chapters 3 and 4), as book chapters in sport psychology texts (Chapter 2), or are in preparation to be submitted for publication (Chapter 5). Noticeably, the authors listed on these publication references consist of myself as lead author (Lee Baldock), alongside each member of my supervisory team (Prof. Brendan Cropley, Professor Stephen D. Mellalieu, and Professor Rich Neil). Within the narrative of each of these chapters (Chapters 2-5 are presented in

their published format), the use of "we" has often been utilised to indicate our collective beliefs in relation to the contribution of the research produced or in relation to procedural aspects of the research. Consequently, in attempts to clarify explicitly the contribution of myself and my supervisors to the work presented in this thesis, I was responsible for justifying, designing, and steering the entire programme of work presented in this thesis. This also involved writing each chapter of the thesis and for Chapters 3-5 (e.g., Studies 1-3), independently conceptualising all study aims and methods, collecting, analysing, and preparing the data, and making sense of the findings and their implications. During this process, my supervisory team: (a) challenged my reasoning and decisions made throughout the entire programme of work; (b) helped with the building of networks and relationships that would be integral to sampling participants for each study; (c) acted as critical friends during data analysis for the studies presented; and, (d) reviewed each chapter in attempts to ready them for thesis presentation and/or for publication.

Additional Publications

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Abstract

To build on the evidence base regarding the stress experiences of elite coaches, the purpose of this thesis was to provide an in-depth examination of the stress and mental ill/well-being of elite football coaches. Specifically, this programme of research consists of three empirical studies that sought to: (a) examine the holistic stress experiences of elite football coaches and how these experiences influenced their professional and personal lives and their mental well-being; (b) investigate how elite football coaches' stress and mental ill/well-being experiences might fluctuate over time and particularly, how stress-related components and their relationships might influence mental ill/well-being fluctuations; and, (c) explore how elite football coaches might be better prepared and/or supported to cope more effectively with the demands associated with their roles and design a supportive, stress and mental ill/well-being intervention. In study one, interviews were conducted with professional football coaches to comprehensively explore their stress experiences and the associated influence on their mental well-being. In this study coaches reported to ineffectively cope with most of the stress experiences reported, irrespective of how they appraised and responded to stressors, and this appeared to have detrimental implications for their mental well-being. However, a cross-sectional research design was adopted meaning that no consideration was afforded to how coaches' stress experiences might change over time and influence their mental well-being. Coaches also appeared to report stress experience implications that were more representative of mental ill-being. Consequently, in study two a concurrent mixed-methods research design was adopted to longitudinally explore the stress and mental ill/well-being of elite football coaches. Findings provided support for the importance of: (a) longitudinally exploring stress and mental ill/well-being given that coaches reported decreased mental well-being scores at the beginning of the season and increased emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation scores at the end of the season, with stress process components appearing to influence these fluctuations; (b) coaches being able to effectively cope with high severity stressors to maintain or improve their mental well-being; and, (c) coaches being able to positively appraise and respond to stressors (particularly those high in severity) to avoid the development of burnout symptoms. The findings of study one and two collectively substantiated the need for further efforts to be made to help elite football coaches better cope with role-related stress. Therefore, a multipart, sequential mixed-methods research design was adopted in study three to better understand elite football coaches' perceptions on how coaches might be better prepared for, or supported with, the demanding nature of their roles, and then to use these findings to develop a supportive, stress and mental ill/well-being intervention. In part one, coaches provided numerous suggestions on how they might be better prepared and/or supported and particularly alluded to the role that coach education might play in this process, with these suggestions subsequently considered during the following development of a proposed coach education stress and mental ill/well-being intervention. In part two, through a Delphi approach, the intervention components were then iteratively evaluated and amended to enhance their potential efficacy, leading to an intervention deemed theoretically, contextually, and practically suitable. The research presented in this thesis offers novel empirical insight into the relationship existing between the concepts of stress and mental ill/well-being. It also exemplifies how further efforts need to be made by national governing bodies, coach education programmes, clubs, and coaches themselves to support football coaches with the demanding nature of the role at the elite level. Such efforts might lead to coaches functioning more effectively, experiencing increased mental well-being, and avoiding experiences of mental ill-being.

Prologue

'Managers' and 'Head Coaches'? - Blurred Lines in Role Responsibility and Terminology

If someone is involved on the coaching side every single minute of every day, thinking about the team they are going to pick, the next training session and the player situations they would have to deal with in any normal week, how can they be thinking about the next signing or who is coming in for next season?

- Gary Neville, former Manchester United Football Club player and current Sky Sports football pundit

'Managers' and 'Head Coaches'? - Blurred Lines in Role Responsibility and Terminology

For those in charge of professional football (soccer) clubs, ensuring the employment of a group of staff that will guide the club and its players towards their goals can be a complex yet vital process (Bridgewater, 2010). Perhaps most important and speculated on is the employment of the individual positioned at the head of the group of players and performance staff (e.g., coaches, sport science staff) at the club. The title of this role in most sports is usually the "Coach", but in football in the UK, the title of this position has traditionally been the "Manager" (Kelly & Harris, 2010). In football in the UK, however, clubs are increasingly adopting a club structure that is often referred to as the *European model* by appointing a "Head Coach" (Morrow & Howieson, 2014). In fact, at the time of writing this prologue (2018), five out of the 20 English Premier League (EPL) football clubs did not employ a traditional Manager, alternatively employing a Head Coach as the lead position. Accordingly, there appears to be a lack of understanding and confusion around these developments, particularly in relation to the nature of each role and whether they indeed differ, leading to media reporters and researchers often utilising both titles for individuals operating in these roles interchangeably (e.g., Frick et al., 2010; Van Ours & van Tuijl, 2016). This lack of title and role clarity becomes problematic for researchers who aim to explore this sample and the roles they occupy. Thus, for the purposes of ensuring clarity throughout this Ph.D., this section aims to unpick where the confusion surrounding the titles and responsibilities of these roles lies, and subsequently outline the terminology that will be used throughout each of the following chapters to describe individuals who occupy these positions.

Former Tottenham Hotspur Football Club Manager/Head Coach, Mauricio Pochettino, attempted to articulate how the inherent responsibilities of being a Manager

or Head Coach in elite football differ. Pochettino, leaving his role as Manager of Southampton Football Club was employed by Tottenham Hotspur on the 27th May 2014 and appointed with the title, 'Head Coach'. In a later interview he suggested, "If you're the Manager, you decide many things about the club. But if you're a Head Coach, your responsibility is to play better and try to improve the players and get positive results. In Southampton, I was a Manager. My responsibility was not only to coach the team. Here I am a Head Coach - a head coach is head of your department. My department is to train the team" (Lewis, 2014). Despite such an attempt to differentiate the roles, it is arguably oversimplified, particularly when considering the nature of both roles and the reported responsibilities of those holding such positions across modern-day football clubs. To elaborate, according to Pochettino, responsibility as a Head Coach appears to lie in training, developing, and preparing the 1st team as best as possible to perform in matches (Morrow & Howieson, 2014). To do so, however, like a traditional Manager, the Head Coach is often responsible for *managing* the performance team staff (e.g., players, 1st team coaches, sport science staff). They have also been found to have to manage the expectations of key stakeholders (e.g., boards, supporters), be involved in key transfer decisions, and deal with the media speculation and attention of their respective clubs and staff (Ogbonna & Harris, 2014).

For those operating in the role of a traditional Manager, whose role responsibilities are ostensibly associated with an increased level of control over the overall running of the club by whom they are employed, their reported responsibilities appear to overlap considerably with those reported by Head Coaches (e.g., managing staff and boards, scouting and making key decisions on signing/selling players, and negotiating contracts; Kelly, 2008). To further explicate this lack of clarity, like Head Coaches, Managers are also ultimately judged on their ability to *coach* and lead their

team to positive performances and results. In fact, many modern-day Managers are often plauded for their coaching philosophy, style of play, and development of players (e.g., Pep Guardiola – current Manager of Manchester City Football Club). Consequently, trying to differentiate between both roles despite such high levels of overlap in the nature of respective responsibilities appears problematic and perhaps oversimplified to the point of false representation of the roles.

When Pochettino negotiated a new five-year contract with Tottenham Hotspur FC in 2016, his job title also changed from Head Coach to Manager and he stated, "It's true that 'Manager' is a word that means different things than Head Coach. Maybe I was always Manager from the first day I arrived here - and maybe it describes my job better" (Stone, 2018). Speaking on transfer movements of players, Pochettino then later suggested, "I am only coaching them and trying to get the best from them. Sell, buy players, sign contract, not sign contract - I think it is not in my hands … Today, I feel like I am the coach" ("Tottenham boss 'not in charge' of transfers", 2019). Having failed to sign players that he had identified as key transfer targets, Jose Mourinho, former Manager of Manchester United Football Club also suggested, "Football is changing and probably football Managers should be called Head Coaches. I think we are more the Head Coach than the Manager" (Bascombe, 2018). While it is possible in both instances that Pochettino and Mourinho were using the media as a vehicle to air their frustrations about the handling of transfers to the hierarchies of their respective clubs (see Molan et al., 2016), it seems even for those operating as a Manager or Head Coach, uncertainty might exist surrounding the title, nature, remit, and daily responsibilities of both roles (see Kelly & Harris, 2010).

The appointment of a Head Coach as opposed to a Manager has reportedly been influenced by clubs in the UK increasingly recruiting an individual in the role of *Director*

of Football (DoF) or *Technical Director* (referred to throughout the remainder as DoF), a trend adopted from other European countries (Morrow & Howieson, 2014). At the time of writing (2018), only five of the 20 English Premier League clubs did not employ a DoF. A DoF is often considered as the intermediary between the Manager/Head Coach and the board of the club, and someone that attends to aspects away from the day-to-day coaching and performance of the 1st team (e.g., overseeing player recruitment/transfers, the academy, performance/support staff, playing philosophy of the club; Kelly & Harris, 2010). Accordingly, it would appear recruiting a Head Coach, whose main responsibility lies in the day-to-day coaching and performance of the first team, may be more conducive to clubs that hire a DoF. Despite this, 11 of the 15 clubs in the English Premier League who employed a DoF in 2018 did so alongside a Manager. This is in spite of the Manager traditionally seen in the UK to have increased control over activities that appear to sit within the remit of the DoF and influence the long-term strategy of the football club (e.g., buying/selling players, youth development; Morrow & Howieson, 2014). Ian Cathro, 1st team Coach at English Premier League club Wolverhampton Wanderers Football Club (in 2018) has, however, highlighted how the responsibilities of the DoF role may differ across clubs. He stated, "Clubs will operate differently in what the DoF does, some operate with maybe a Head of Recruitment, some more in the business, some more in the football" ('The director of football debate', 2017). Adding to this, Bridgewater (2010) suggested that the distribution of managerial roles between the Manager/Head Coach and DoF is sometimes a function of club size, with Managers/Head Coaches at more financially developed clubs focusing more on football-related matters and having less responsibility for club operations. It would, therefore, appear that the role responsibilities of the Manager/Head Coach and DoF often change at different clubs, which is reinforced by Parnell et al.'s (2018) contentions that each club

offers a unique context in relation to these roles and their associated responsibilities. Consequently, the role responsibilities of Managers or Head Coaches may differ considerably at different clubs, and may or may not depend upon whether a club employs a DoF and/or on what the club expects of both.

To conclude, irrespective of the title of Manager or Head Coach, the responsibilities assumed within these roles appear to be ultimately decided by the owners and boards of individual clubs. This may be influenced by the idiosyncratic needs of clubs, their perceptions of what they feel is needed from their Manager/Head Coach, and potentially whether they employ a DoF. That said, crossover exists between the roles of the Manager and Head Coach and has led to suggestions that individuals occupying either role can, or perhaps should, be considered together within research settings (e.g., Frick et al., 2010). Consequently, arriving at a general consensus regarding terminology that encompasses all for the purposes of the current Ph.D. becomes problematic. However, given that individuals occupying similar positions in other sports are referred to as coaches, and Managers and Head Coaches are mainly judged on guiding their teams to successful performance and positive results, for the purposes of this Ph.D. both will be referred to as 'coaches' throughout its entirety.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

There are only two types of (football) manager. Those who have been sacked and those who will be in the future.

- Howard Wilkinson, Chair of the League Managers Association

Introduction

Elite sport coaching is recognised as a social, non-linear process that is characterised by complexity (e.g., coaches operate in dynamic and micropolitical environments), ambiguity (e.g., a lack of certainty surrounds the attainment of results), and contestation (e.g., there are few universal answers to guide practice), where elite coaches'[1] abilities to optimise athlete performance and goal achievement is judged and heavily scrutinised (Altfeld et al., 2018; Jones et al., 2016). Whilst navigating the inherent complexity of their vocation, elite coaches experience a multiplicity of demands associated with their roles that are not merely or solely performance-related, including (but not limited to): role administration (e.g., record keeping, handling budgets), training and performance (e.g., planning sessions and preparing for competition), working within and externally representing organisations (e.g., managing athletes, staff, and board members, public relations and media responsibilities), and maintaining an appropriate work-life balance; Norris et al., 2017). The role of an elite coach is, therefore, highly demanding, and coaches must effectively manage the multitude of demands they experience and the significant pressure associated with their roles to ensure this pressure does not come at the expense of their own and their athletes' performance, their personal lives, and their health and mental well-being (Olusoga & Thelwell, 2017).

For coaches operating in highly globalised and economically powerful sports such as football (soccer), the increased attention, speculation, and financial importance

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[1] Utilising the term "elite" to represent key sport stakeholders (e.g., athletes, coaches) is heavily contested and debated in academic circles. Consequently, Swann et al.'s (2015) taxonomy for classifying elite sport samples has been considered and adapted for the coaches sampled throughout this thesis and would generally classify the participating coaches as "successful elite" (e.g., operating in the top two leagues of their respective country, have experienced infrequent success in the top league, possessing over two years' experience at their highest level of coaching, football is a national sport in the country they work, and their team's performance is consumed by a semi-to-global TV audience). Thus, while "elite" is often used in aspects of this Introduction to represent "world-class elite" coaches and clubs in attempts to identify and exacerbate the uniqueness of high level football in relation to other sports, throughout the remainder of the thesis its utilisation represents generally, "successful elite".

associated with on-pitch success, when compared to other sports, arguably places them in working conditions that only add to, and exacerbate, an already inherently demanding vocation. To elaborate, football is widely reported to be the most popular spectator sport worldwide, with 3.572 billion people tuning in at some point to watch the matches played at the 2018 International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) World Cup held in Russia (with 1.12 billion people from around the globe watching the final; FIFA World Cup Russia Global Broadcast and Audience Summary, 2018). To further explicate football's global position, four out of the five sporting competitions paying the highest prize money to competitors and tournament winners are football events (e.g., Champions League, FIFA World Cup, Europa League, and Union of European Football Associations [UEFA] Euro; Forbes, 2018), with the Champions League, the elite European club competition, awarding the highest amount of prize and bonus money ($1.5 billion) of all sporting competitions. Finally, the English Premier League (England's top football division), the most watched professional sport league in the world, boasts a sports TV rights deal of £4.464 billion for Sky Sports and BT Sports to air matches from 2019 to 2022 (BBC Sport, 2018).

The globalisation of football means that for elite football clubs, the game has become a growing business enterprise (Kristiansen et al., 2012). This has led to clubs in the English Premier League often possessing multimillion pound sponsorship deals (e.g., Manchester United Football Club's current shirt sponsor Chevrolet is worth a reported £64 million per year; Rashed, 2019) and for some, even holding a place in the stock exchange. Paradoxically, influencing the ability of clubs to maintain their position as a successful enterprise is the ever-increasing public interest that this globalisation brings, with unrivalled attention now existing across all media platforms (e.g., television, newspapers, online articles, social media) surrounding the daily on-goings of elite

football clubs and their high-profile staff (e.g., coaches and players; Mills & Boardley, 2016). Consequently, clubs now exercise tighter control measures over their public image and need their staff to promote the "right image" of their club (Price et al., 2013). For the coach, this is particularly pertinent as their role requires being the face and voice of the club to the media and ultimately being accountable for their own actions and those of their players, as well as team performances and results (Bridgewater, 2010). Handling such pressure and responsibility is made more complex, however, by coaches and the players with whom they work being subjected daily to high levels of public scrutiny, which constitutes not only their team and individual performances, but also how they manage their professional selves and how they live their lives outside of sport (Dosil, 2006). With coaches often being in a position of *legitimate power* (i.e., possessing formal authority due to the position they occupy; Lyngstad, 2017), coaches are often expected to not only lead by example, but to also publicly address issues emanating from this intense scrutiny to the media (e.g., player misconduct or personal life issues, rumoured reasons for poor performances), whilst knowing that their responses will be subjected to further journalistic and public examination (Mills & Boardley, 2016). As a result, it is imperative for coaches when publicly managing such situations to co-construct a social identity embodying confidence, strength, and dominance (cf. File, 2018), for if they fail to demonstrate that they can effectively manage this array of factors in a positive manner, it could be publicly and economically damaging for the club (e.g., league fines, sponsorship withdrawal; Kristiansen et al., 2012), and themselves (e.g., questioned competency, role dismissal; File, 2018).

Coinciding with the management of high levels of media attention and scrutiny, elite football coaches also operate daily in environments of complexity and that appear to present a range of challenges for which they must contend (Thompson et al., 2015).

Indeed, in attempts to successfully fulfil the main requirement of their role (e.g., attaining positive results; Bridgewater, 2010), like elite coaches operating in other sports (see Thelwell et al., 2010), football coaches have to invest considerable time and resources into structuring practices and specific game plans, manage highly paid athletes (who all have their own agendas and career-related targets that may conflict with the team's vision) and team dynamics, and make important team selections. It could be argued, however, that for elite football coaches the difficulties associated with managing these facets of their job may be augmented when considering, amongst many other factors: the need to manage growing club structures and the increasing size of performance and support staff teams (e.g., 1st team coaches, sport science staff, physiotherapists, performance analysts), the micropolitics associated with working with multiple key stakeholders at clubs (e.g., players, staff, boards, supporters), the number of rostered players, and the increased level of power and agency that players have, which is linked to their increasing financial independence (Bentzen et al., 2020; Morrow & Howieson, 2014; Thompson et al., 2015). Indubitably, such factors contribute to a working environment for elite football coaches whereby, should a coach fail to build positive relationships with key club stakeholders and maximise the potential of their players, they are usually made the "scapegoat" and dismissed from their role (Bentzen et al., 2020). It is perhaps unsurprising then that coaches have highlighted the importance of not only engaging in on-field management, but to survive in their role, going beyond their specified role responsibilities by taking an interest in players' wider lives that they lead away from the field of play (Mills & Boardley, 2016). Consequently, the role of the elite football coach is increasingly consuming and has even led to suggestions that it becomes more than just a job, and instead, part of the self (Mills, 2019).

For coaches operating in the world of elite football, the environment is largely considered to be abrasive, emotional, and unpredictable (Gamble et al., 2013), comprising low levels of trust and high job insecurity (Mills & Boardley, 2016). Appearing to contribute significantly to this unpropitious environment are the *contextual power brokers* at clubs, who coaches must constantly seek and maintain the approval of to remain employed (Potrac et al., 2007). Accordingly, in the knowledge that club hierarchies can unquestionably influence the conditions that coaches must work in and how well they are able to do their job (cf. Cruickshank & Collins, 2012), researchers have highlighted the importance of coaches having the ability to strategically influence and manage club owners/directors to gain their trust and support (e.g., Thompson et al., 2015; Relvas et al., 2010). The complexity associated with *managing upwards*, however, is often further exacerbated by many club owners and boards comprising individuals of huge wealth (that they import into clubs) and with business acumen outside of football, but with little experience, knowledge, and understanding of the game itself (Kelly & Harris, 2010). Despite this lack of understanding, it is commonplace in football for owners and directors of clubs to make decisions on, and attempt to influence, football matters that would traditionally fall into the remit of the coach. Consequently, owners and directors may impact the performance and subsequent success of the team for which the coach is ultimately responsible (e.g., transfer policies, team and player selection, style of play), often leading to issues of conflict (Bentzen et al., 2020). In attempts to avoid this, elite football coaches have reported having to be in a constant state of bargaining and negotiation with those at board level, where they must appear to be cooperative but also shrewdly persuasive on key footballing decisions (Ogbona & Harris, 2014). Failure to appropriately manage these relationships and situations may lead to implications not only for themselves and team success, but also for other key stakeholders within clubs

(e.g., assistant coaches, sport science and support staff) for whom they must also manage and are often accountable for (e.g., role dismissal; Molan et al., 2016). The role of the elite football coach appears, therefore, to extend beyond the realms of merely coaching, to leading and managing relationships with stakeholders in a complex, highly pressurised environment comprised of unique power distributions (Morrow & Howieson, 2014).

In consideration of the multitude of demands that coaches potentially experience, merely existing, let alone trying to perform effectively, in the world of elite football is increasingly challenging (Bentzen et al., 2020). Still, yet to be considered are the potential consequences of working in these highly pressurised and challenging environments for coaches and for their lives away from the role. The job of an elite football coach is heavily time constrained, involves working long and unsociable hours (e.g., evenings and weekends) in the search of marginal performance gains, and is consumed by extensive travel (Altfeld et al., 2018). This can be particularly problematic not only for the *performance* and *mental well-being* of coaches, but also for those with families who are likely to frequently experience situations of conflict between their professional and personal lives (Joncheray et al., 2019). In such situations, elite football coaches have suggested that accommodating the family context is almost impossible, and that reducing their professional commitment for family is simply not an option when operating in a context consumed by limited time and the necessity for results (Burlot et al., 2016). Thus, for elite football coaches, who operate in a role that is arguably one of the most demanding in sport when it comes to a necessity for positive performances, poor work-life balance, and its associated implications may be the norm (e.g., lack of family time, increased risk of divorce; Graham & Dixon, 2017).

A range of other factors associated with the role may also lead to implications for the mental well-being of elite football coaches and the happiness and quality of life of

their families. For example, the media regularly report stories that extend to the private lives and families of elite football coaches. Further, given the incomparably high turnover rate of coaches in elite football (average tenure in English football's top four leagues in 2017-18 was 1.18 years; League Manager's Association, 2018), rarely do coaches stay in roles and in one geographical location for an extended period, resulting in a need for them to relocate when assuming a new role (if they are successful in finding one). Finally, the potential implications for coaches and their families when coaches are inevitably dismissed from their role are largely unconsidered (Mills, 2019). In regard of issues associated with job turnover, coaches have previously reported experiencing extreme psychological discomfort when being dismissed from their positions (e.g., feelings of dejection, loss, and a lack of self-respect), which is further exacerbated by the heightened levels of public denigration and media intrusion that ensues, which may also impact their families (Mills, 2015). Additionally, it is often the case that coaches can find it difficult to find a new job in elite football when out of work, leading to potential threats to identity associated with not being able to fulfil a role synonymous with their personal and public image (Mills, 2019).

Taking these factors into consideration, elite football coaches exist in a world that is irrepressibly demanding and that appears to have the potential to affect their mental well-being and that of their families (and wider social networks) when they are both in and out of work. It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that coaches are increasingly reporting the experience of a range of negative health and well-being implications as a direct result of their roles. For example, referring to his physical state following his dismissal as manager of Liverpool FC, Brendan Rodgers stated, "I lay in fear one night thinking I was having a heart attack … it was a reaction of the body, the tightening of everywhere around my chest. It was starting to condition itself in terms of not having that

pressure (from being in charge at Liverpool)" (Pearce & Gilpin, 2017). Further, Pep

Guardiola, having been highly successful during his tenure as FC Barcelona manager

between 2008 and 2012, decided to relinquish his role citing reasons associated with

burnout, "I'm drained and need to fill up. The demand has been very high. I rise each day

and don't feel the same. You can only recover by resting and getting away. It would have

been a bad idea to continue" (BBC Sport, 2012). These accounts are two of many that

further highlight the severity of the pressure potentially experienced by elite football

coaches and the mental ill/well-being implications associated with an inability to

effectively cope (for further anecdotal insights, see "Living on the Volcano", Calvin,

2015).

      Considering the previous discussion, it appears that elite football coaches may all

experience, and potentially have to cope with, incomparable pressure and demands to

those operating in other sports (Mills & Boardley, 2016), with implications for how they

operate in their jobs and for their mental ill/well-being. Despite elite football coaches

arguably being at the centre of public interest and media attention globally, relatively

little is actually known about the demands elite football coaches experience in their role,

how they respond to and cope with them, and the potential implications of such

experiences on how they operate and function in their daily lives (Kelly, 2017). This

might be due to researchers often struggling to gain access to elite football coaches,

meaning that our knowledge about them and their daily role experiences is minimal and

often limited to auto/biographical, anecdotal, and journalistic accounts (Ronkainen et al.,

2020). Indeed, the results-orientated climate of elite football is a likely reason as it leaves

high profile coaches perhaps being unwilling to show any vulnerability and discuss role-

related stress to remain in their jobs and persist in the search for the competitive edge

over their opponents (Bentzen et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the stress experiences of elite

coaches of other sports and their impact on the performance of them and their athletes has received significant research attention (e.g., for a review, see Norris et al., 2017). Consequently, research exploring the stress experiences of elite football coaches, and how these experiences impact upon their daily lives and mental ill/well-being is warranted. This research can offer novel insight into the experiences of coaches who operate in such a uniquely demanding environment, enabling a broader picture of how coaches might be coping in elite football, and lead to coaches being better prepared for the demanding nature of the role in elite level football.

Purpose of the Thesis

This thesis consists of a programme of research that sought to provide detailed insight into the stress and mental ill/well-being experiences of elite football coaches. The specific aim of this thesis was to provide detailed empirical evidence in relation to how the stress process is experienced by elite football coaching populations and its impact upon their professional and personal lives and overall mental ill/well-being. To achieve this aim, the specific objectives of this thesis were to: (a) examine the holistic stress experiences of elite football coaches and the how these experiences influenced their professional and personal lives and their overall mental well-being; (b) investigate how elite football coaches' stress and mental ill/well-being experiences fluctuate over time and particularly, how stress-related components and their relationships influence mental ill/well-being fluctuations; and (c) explore how to better prepare/support elite football coaches to cope more effectively with the demands associated with their roles at the elite level, and subsequently design a supportive, evidence-based coach stress and mental ill/well-being intervention.

To achieve these objectives, a critical realist philosophical position was adopted throughout this programme of work. Consequently, a thorough and detailed attempt at

best attending to the individually proposed thesis objectives is presented, involving the utilisation of various qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis procedures. To achieve the first objective, traditional methods of qualitative enquiry were used with elite football coaches (e.g., semi-structured interviews), alongside alternative data analysis and presentation techniques (e.g., cross-case causal networks) to visually represent data collected and supplement supporting narratives. To achieve to the second objective, an advanced longitudinal quantitative data analysis approach (e.g., linear mixed modelling) was adopted to explore how stress-related components predicted mental ill/well-being fluctuations over time. Finally, to achieve the third objective, a data collection and analysis approach that allowed for the collection of qualitative and quantitative data (e.g., a Delphi method), was used to iteratively evaluate and amend a proposed stress and mental ill/well-being intervention for elite football coaches.

Structure of the Thesis

Following a *prologue* that sought to present a position on what title would be used to represent elite football coaches/managers throughout the thesis, this thesis presents six main chapters and a closing reflective epilogue. Of these chapters, three empirical studies are presented, with two that are mixed-method or muti-part.

After this Introduction, Chapter 2 comprises a review of literature in relation to the concepts of stress and mental well-being in sport. This includes conceptualising both constructs, identifying the findings of the extant literature in each area in sport, and critically discussing the need for researchers in sport to further explore how key stakeholders' stress experiences might influence their mental well-being. Building upon the insight provided in this Introduction regarding the context of elite football coaching and why it might be necessary to explore the stress and mental ill/well-being experiences of elite football coaches specifically, Chapter 2 discusses how research might be

advanced conceptually in the areas of stress and mental well-being and theoretically underpins the programme of research presented in this thesis. The thesis is presented in this way as the literature review was written for dual purposes: (1) a book chapter on stress and mental well-being in groups for a sport psychology text; and, (2) as a literature review and chapter in this thesis. Given that the remit of the book chapter involved reviewing and discussing the literature in stress and mental well-being across different sports, levels, and stakeholders, Chapter 1 has provided insight into why the concepts of stress and mental ill/well-being warrant exploration in the context of elite football coaching. Indeed, Chapter 2 has been published as a book chapter:

> Baldock, L., Cropley, B., Mellalieu, S. D., & Neil, R. (2020). The stress and well-being of those operating in groups. In R. J. Schinke & D. Hackfort (Eds.), *The Routledge International Encyclopedia of Sport and Exercise Psychology: Vol. 1: Theoretical and Methodological Concepts* (pp 620-634). Routledge.

In line with the first objective of this thesis, a cross-sectional and qualitative investigation of eight professional football coaches' holistic stress experiences and how these experiences influenced their professional and personal lives, and mental well-being was conducted and presented in Chapter 3 (Ph.D. Study 1). This study has been published as:

> Baldock, L., Cropley, B., Neil, R., & Mellalieu, S. D. (2021). The stress and mental well-being of professional football coaches. *The Sport Psychologist, 35*, 108–122. https://doi.org/10.1123/tsp.2020-0087

In line with the second objective of the thesis and influenced by the findings of Study 1, a longitudinal, concurrent mixed methods investigation of the stress and mental ill- and well-being experiences of elite football coaches across one entire season (a year in duration) is presented in Chapter 4 (Ph.D. Study 2). This study has been published as:

Baldock, L., Cropley, B., Mellalieu, S. D., & Neil, R. (2022). A longitudinal examination of stress and mental ill/well-being in elite football coaches. *The Sport Psychologist.* Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1123/tsp.2021-0184

In line with the third objective of this thesis and based on the findings of Study 1 and 2, a multi-part study is presented in Chapter 5 (Ph.D. Study 3) that involved: (a) exploring the perceptions of elite football coaches on how they might be better prepared and/or supported to cope with the demanding nature of their roles; and, (b) using these findings to develop a stress and mental ill/well-being coach education intervention. This chapter is undergoing final preparations for submission to a peer-reviewed journal.

In Chapter 6, a summary of the findings from the entire research programme are provided, alongside a discussion of the theoretical contribution and conceptual advancements made. This is also supplemented with a discussion of the practical implications of the programme of research and its existing impact for coach education and development. Finally, a reflection of the strengths and limitations of the research programme are provided, alongside a section outlining where future research attention might be needed to further advance our understanding of the concepts of stress and mental ill/well-being, how they are experienced by stakeholders in sport, and how such advancements might be necessary to inform future interventions aimed at supporting them with their stress and mental ill/well-being experiences.

The thesis is concluded with a reflective epilogue in which I provide insight into my journey of personal development across the research programme. This section explores some of the important learning experiences and challenges faced throughout the research programme that had significant influence on my development as an independent

researcher, as well as documenting my progression in a range of key areas that I believe have contributed to this development.

Considerations in the Presentation of the Thesis

The time taken to complete this thesis was extended significantly, mainly due to difficulties in sampling the elite level football coaches throughout each study, the longitudinal and mixed methods nature of Study 2, and the multi-part and iterative intervention evaluation conducted in Study 3. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 also decreased the rate in which data could be collected in part two of Study 3 due to its associated rules and regulations leaving national governing bodies closed and those operating in them that were integral to data collection being furloughed. Nevertheless, since commencement of this programme of research, the Literature Review (Chapter 2; Baldock et al., 2020), Study 1 (Chapter 3; Baldock et al., 2021), and Study 2 (Chapter 4; Baldock et al., 2022) have been disseminated via published outputs (e.g., book chapter or peer-reviewed journal articles). Consequently, as Chapters 2-4 are published outputs, it was decided to present each of these chapters in the exact format that each of them appears in their respective publications, which has some implications for the overall presentation of this thesis.

First, whilst the Introduction (Chapter 1) presents insight into the potential contextual demands and complexity associated with elite football coaching in attempts to underpin the rationale for focusing on the sample chosen for this thesis, the Literature Review (Chapter 2) was written as a book chapter and presents a comprehensive review of the conceptual developments and wider research associated with the concepts of stress and well-being across sporting populations. Therefore, while divorced from the context of elite football coaching, the Literature Review does raise some conceptual limitations of the research conducted up until that point in time that naturally underpinned the body

of work that follows within this thesis. In accord, and in representation of the logical progression and development of this thesis, contemporary and context-specific research is discussed in the introductions to each of the three studies presented in chapters 3, 4, and 5. This approach enabled me to provide a sound rationale for the aims of each study, remove potential unnecessary repetition, and demonstrate my ongoing engagement with the developing evidence base in the areas of stress and mental well-being, particularly in the context of sport coaching.

Second, despite presenting these chapters in their published formats, the journal and book formatting requirements allowed for each chapter to be presented throughout the thesis in generally the same way, including: (a) American Psychological Association 7th Edition format with English (UK) spelling (7th Edition); (b) the numbering of tables and figures re-starting in each chapter; and, (c) associated reference lists being presented at the end of each individual chapter. Nevertheless, a few minor alterations to formatting were made for the purposes of this thesis, which entail: (a) references to appendices being made that were not possible in their published versions (e.g., ethical approval forms, interview guides); and, (b) published outputs being referenced in line with American Psychological Association 7th Edition guidelines and further referenced in line with their study number for clarity purposes throughout this thesis (e.g., Baldock et al., 2021 [Ph.D. Study 1]).

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CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Putting in more hours would be counterproductive to my well-being. It's (work-life balance) the most difficult part of the job. You need a supportive wife who is willing to make sacrifices in order for me to do my job properly … It's important that when you do see the children, that you're totally there with them, which I'm going to be honest and say I'm not, because I'm still thinking about other things (the job).

- Eddie Howe, Newcastle United Football Club Manager

Introduction

The influence of stress experiences on the performance and mental well-being of sports performers has been a focal point of considerable academic attention (e.g., Hanton & Mellalieu, 2014; Neil et al., 2016), with performers' potential to experience stress in their sport environments widely acknowledged (Hanton et al., 2015). Recently, the stress experiences of other key stakeholders in sport organisations (e.g., coaches, sport science staff) have also been a focus of researchers (e.g., Kerai et al., 2019; Olusoga et al., 2009). This research has recognised the potential demands (e.g., long working hours, internal/external expectations) associated with the roles these key stakeholders undertake to help athletes achieve optimal levels of performance (Wagstaff, 2019a, 2019b; Wagstaff et al., 2015). The demands these key stakeholders encounter are accentuated by the notion that, alongside athletes, they themselves do not operate in isolation, but function within highly complex social groups and organisational environments in sport that may also have an influence on their own performance and mental well-being (Fletcher & Arnold, 2016). Yet, although athletes and other key stakeholders usually operate as part of groups in sport organisations, "groups and organisations don't behave, people do" (Wagstaff, 2019b, p. 1). It is through this perspective that stress and mental well-being in sport have been explored, with a focus on the individuals operating as parts of groups in sport organisations, rather than the impact of an individual's stress and mental well-being experiences on others operating in the same group. This chapter will, therefore, critique the research on individuals' stress and mental well-being, but, where possible, attempt to highlight the potential implications that the stress and mental well-being experiences of individuals can have on others within groups in sport organisations.

Although the developments of the literature on stress in sport have led to an increased consideration of the stress experiences of athletes and other key stakeholders

operating in sport organisations (as opposed to solely athletes), the consequences of these experiences have generally been explored solely from a performance perspective. There appears to be a consensus, however, concerning the potential implications that stress experience have upon the mental well-being of those operating in sport (Neil et al., 2016). To date, research into these concepts has been largely dichotomised, with the direct link between them receiving scant empirical consideration. Specifically, the impact of stress experiences on mental well-being has tended to mainly be considered in relation to mental ill-being outcomes (e.g., burnout), and the potential impact of individual key stakeholder's stress experiences upon the mental well-being of themselves and their colleagues who operate within their group has largely been neglected. To address the recent advances in the study of stress in sport, and the limited attention paid to the impact of stress experiences on the mental well-being of athletes and other key stakeholders in sport, this chapter seeks to: (a) provide an overview of the contemporary conceptualisations of stress and mental well-being in sport; (b) discuss the main developments in stress and mental well-being research in sport; and (c) offer considerations as to how researchers can seek a more comprehensive understanding of how experiences of stress may impact upon the mental well-being of those operating as part of groups within sport organisations.

Conceptualising Stress in Sport

Early research exploring stress in sport focused solely on athlete experiences and was informed by different conceptualisations of the construct (Neil et al., 2007). This resulted in stress-related terminology being operationalised differently across different studies, which can lead to confusion when one is attempting to collectively interpret findings. For example, stress has been described as an environmental stimulus, a response to a stimulus, and as an interaction between an athlete and the environment,

sometimes interchangeably (Fletcher & Scott, 2010). Fletcher et al. (2006) highlighted the particular issue around this inconsistent utilisation of the term stress, suggesting that the findings of such research were limited owing to a failure to distinguish between the causes and consequences of stress and the oversimplification of a complex process caused by failure to consider the cognitive-evaluative underpinnings of the stress experience. Based on these limitations, Fletcher et al. proposed a framework of stress to guide future research, which was informed by Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional theory of stress and Lazarus's (1991) cognitive-motivational-relational theory of stress and emotion (CMRT).

Through their transactional theory, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) defined stress as, "An ongoing process that involves individuals transacting with their environments, making appraisals of the situations they find themselves in, and endeavouring to cope with any issues that may arise" (Fletcher et al., 2006, p. 329). According to transactional theory, individuals experience stressors (e.g., environmental demands, such as pressure to perform), to which they attribute relational meaning. Relational meaning is construed from the individual's relationship with the demand and the environment in which it is experienced, and it is represented by an ongoing process of cognitive evaluation (otherwise known as appraisal). According to Lazarus and Folkman, there are interconnected stages of appraisals: primary appraisal and secondary appraisal. Primary appraisal occurs when a stressor is considered to have the potential to harm the well-being of an individual. Here, it is proposed that stressors are viewed as a threat (i.e., one perceives the stressor as potentially damaging to one's goal, values, or beliefs), a challenge (i.e., one perceives the stressor as a positive obstacle towards their goal, values, or beliefs), or a harm/loss (i.e., a perception that damage to one's goal, values, or beliefs has occurred). Secondary appraisal refers to whether the individual believes that they

possess the resources required to effectively cope with the stressor they encounter (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). It is from this process of appraisal that an individual will then respond emotionally and, potentially, behaviourally, while selecting the coping strategies (where possible) to be employed to deal with the stressor encountered. If there is a perceived imbalance between the stressors experienced and an individual's appraisal of their available coping resources to manage the stressors (e.g., social support), the transaction results in strain, manifesting as negative emotional and, if the emotional experience is not controlled, negative behavioural responses. Whether an individual experiences further strain from this point is determined by how successful the coping strategy employed is within the context in which the stressor has occurred (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Building on this body of work, Lazarus (1991) proposed the CMRT to better illuminate the synthesis of appraisal and emotion. Within this perspective, Lazarus suggested that, in environments that are stressful, the duration, intensity, and quality of an elicited emotion are dependent on the expectancies manifested by individuals in relation to the significance and potential outcome of an encounter for their mental well-being (i.e., stressor; Lazarus, 1999). As in the transactional theory of stress, these expectancies are suggested to be manifested by an individual's cognitive-evaluative reactions (appraisals) to stressors. However, Lazarus proposed that, within the primary appraisal, individuals may also view the transaction as a benefit (i.e., transaction has been beneficial to one's goals, values, or beliefs). Lazarus also stated that this primary appraisal is determined by three appraisal judgements: goal relevance, goal congruence, and the type of ego involvement of the individual (for a review, see Lazarus, 1999). In relation to an individual's perceived ability to cope, secondary appraisal is suggested to be comprised of cognitive-evaluative thoughts related to three areas: blame or credit,

coping potential, and future expectations (Lazarus, 1999). It is such cognitive-evaluative thoughts that are posited to influence an individual's emotional responses, which, in the sporting context, can affect actual performance (Lazarus, 2000).

An Overview of Stress Research in Sport

In attempts to better understand the stress experiences of sport performers, many researchers adopting either the transactional theory of stress or CMRT have focused on exploring the main components underpinning the stress process in isolation (e.g., stressors, appraisal, responses, coping, or outcomes; e.g., Fletcher & Hanton, 2003; Thatcher & Day, 2008) and the relationships between these components to develop a more holistic understanding of the mechanisms underpinning the stress-emotion process (e.g., Neil et al., 2016; Neil et al., 2011). This section will explore some of the key developments of this research by summarising the main findings and discussing the potential impact of stress experiences on the performance and mental well-being of different key stakeholders (e.g., athletes, coaches, support staff) operating as part of groups in sport organisations.

Early research exploring the transactional process of stress in sport focused specifically on athletes, who reported experiencing a wide range of potential stressors (e.g., performing poorly in practice, weak teammates) in relation to their sporting engagement (see Mellalieu et al., 2009). Subsequent research explored the origins of these stressors and, as a result, categorised demands as emanating from either competitive (i.e., demands primarily and directly associated with competitive performance – e.g., the standard of the opponent) or organisational (i.e., demands associated primarily and directly with the sports organisation - e.g., travel) sources (e.g., Fletcher & Hanton, 2003; Woodman & Hardy, 2001). In exploring the prevalence of these different sources of stressors, the athletes in Hanton et al.'s (2005) study recalled

more stressors originating from organisational sources than competitive. Further, Hanton et al. found that, although their participants experienced the same competitive stressors, the participating athletes highlighted experiencing a number of different organisational stressors unique to their sport. These findings regarding the prevalence and uniqueness of organisational stressors have subsequently led researchers to explore organisational stress and its impact on sport performance and mental well-being outcomes, with the findings of this body of work discussed throughout this chapter.

Researchers also began to examine the stress experiences of those potentially termed as the "team behind the team", with coaches receiving significant consideration over the last decade (for a review, see Norris et al., 2017). Following the approach of the athlete stress literature, researchers initially explored the nature and sources of stressors experienced by coaches (e.g., Olusoga et al., 2009; Thelwell et al., 2008) and found that coaches also reported experiencing a range of performance (related to themselves and their athletes) and organisational (e.g., environment, leadership, personal, and team) stressors in their roles. The stressors experienced by other key stakeholders in sport organisations have also been considered, with physiotherapists (e.g., Kerai et al., 2019) and sport psychologists (e.g., Fletcher et al., 2011) reporting experiencing a variety of performance and organisational stressors. Consequently, the range of stressors reported by key stakeholders in sport illuminates the potentially demanding environment within which they operate.

Beyond the identification of stressors, researchers have explored the coping strategies utilised by a range of elite and non-elite athletes (e.g., Didymus & Fletcher, 2014; Thelwell et al., 2007) and coaches (e.g., Olusoga et al., 2010; Thelwell et al., 2010). Thelwell et al. (2007) highlighted that elite athletes utilised numerous coping strategies to manage stressors both during (e.g., reappraising, blocking distraction,

venting) and after (e.g., social support, self-reflection) performance, and emphasised that athletes experience stressors that are unique to their individual sports. Similar findings were also identified for coaches, with Thelwell et al. (2010) reporting that elite coaches utilised a range of coping strategies in their roles (e.g., reflection, venting, communicating with other coaches) to cope with performance and organisational stressors. Although research examining the coping strategies of other key stakeholders in sport is scant, sport psychologists have reported a greater prevalence towards the use of problem-focused coping strategies (Cropley et al., 2016). Despite this research providing insight into the strategies that key stakeholders adopt to cope with the stressors they experience, a lack of understanding exists around what is effective in manipulating their stress-emotion experiences positively for the benefit of performance and mental well-being.

When examining the coping strategies that performers adopt, many researchers have categorised them according to their function (for a review, see Nicholls & Polman, 2007). Some of the more prevalent strategies and categories reported include: cognitive (e.g., blocking distractions); behavioural (e.g., removing oneself from situation); problem-focused (e.g., increased effort); emotion-focused (e.g., venting); and avoidance-focused (e.g., behavioural disengagement; for reviews, see Nicholls & Polman, 2007; Norris et al., 2017) strategies. In attempts to better understand the function of coping strategies beyond the aforementioned categorisations, Didymus and colleagues (e.g., Didymus, 2016; Didymus & Fletcher, 2014) identified that coping is an adaptive process (i.e., constantly changing in response to perceived environmental cues and available personal resources) and categorised coping strategies into coping families according to their adaptive function (e.g., dyadic coping, information-seeking, self-reliance). The adaptive nature of this conceptualisation links to the dynamic process perspective of

stress and emotion proposed in CMRT, as it aligns with the view that coping efforts may change as an individual appraises and responds to stressors over time.

Research has also examined athletes' appraisals of stressors. Findings from this work have indicated that athletes from a range of sports and levels (e.g., elite to non-elite) report threat, harm/loss, and challenge appraisals, with a range of situational properties of stressors (e.g., novelty, unpredictability, ambiguity) being reported as key determinants in the type of appraisal elicited (e.g., Dugdale et al., 2002; Thatcher & Day, 2008). Focusing on athlete appraisals of organisational stressors, Hanton et al. (2012) reported that athletes appraised the organisational stressors they experienced solely as threat or harm. Hanton et al.'s participants also reported a lack of perceived control over the organisational stressors they experienced and few coping resources to manage them. Collectively, these findings highlight the unpredictable nature of stressors, with those emanating from organisational sources being appraised as threatening owing to them being perceived as uncontrollable. Supplemented by a lack of resources to manage these demands, the implications for performance behaviour and mental well-being are potentially harmful.

To better represent the dynamic nature of the stress and emotion process, and to examine the impact of this process on performance behaviour, researchers began to move away from examining components of this process in isolation and adopt a more holistic approach to their inquiry (e.g., Neil et al., 2011; Neil et al., 2016; Miles et al., 2016). Neil et al. (2011) considered the stressors, appraisals, emotional responses, and the role of further appraisals in the behavioural responses of elite and non-elite athletes. Neil et al. reported that, despite athletes initially negatively appraising the stressors they were experiencing, which was accompanied by negative emotional responses, many athletes reported a further level of appraisal represented by whether they perceived the initial

appraisals and emotional responses to be facilitative or debilitative for performance. This further appraisal determined their subsequent performance behaviour. For example, when negative emotions were experienced and perceived as debilitative for performance, some athletes reported engaging in a range of negative behavioural responses (e.g., focusing on extraneous factors). In contrast, when the emotional response was interpreted as facilitative, this experience was associated with a range of positive behavioural responses (e.g., increases in motivation, effort, and focus). The studies of Neil et al. (2016) and Miles et al. (2016) supported and built upon these findings when examining temporally the stress and emotion experiences of non-elite and elite cricketers across different performances and prior to, and during, competition, respectively. Their collective findings highlighted that the participants experienced a range of reoccurring stressors at different times across competitions. Their findings also supported the fundamental tenets of CMRT, in that their participants' emotional and behavioural responses to stressors were suggested to be mediated by a continuous and ongoing process of appraisal over time, which was determined by the stressor's perceived impact on the participants' goal attainment. The participants also reported that these appraisals were influenced by their previous performances, levels of confidence, and their perceptions of control over stressors, which highlighted the adaptive nature of how appraisals of similar stressors may change over time.

For other key stakeholders in sport organisations, the scant existing literature considering the appraisal of stressors is limited to coaches. For example, Didymus (2017) examined the stressors, their situational properties, subsequent appraisals, and coping of elite coaches and found that the participants appraised the variety of stressors they experienced mainly as a threat or challenge and, to a lesser extent, as harm/loss or beneficial. These findings supported the tense-based conceptions of primary appraisal

outlined in CMRT. Specifically, participants' threat and challenge appraisals arose only when they perceived future harm or benefit to occur from stressors, whereas harm/loss and benefit appraisals were reported only if the participants perceived that such impact had already occurred. Although the responses of coaches to stressors were not examined by Didymus, Olusoga et al. (2010) had highlighted previously that elite coaches reported psychological (e.g., negative cognitions and emotions), behavioural (e.g., negative body language), and physical (e.g., increased heart rate, shaking) responses to the stressors they experienced. Perhaps more importantly, the coaches in Olusoga et al.'s research reported that these responses influenced their performance behaviour (mainly negatively), and such responses could be projected on to their athletes. These findings have since led to studies identifying athlete and coach perspectives on coaches' responses to stressors (see Thelwell et al., 2017; Thelwell et al., 2017). Collectively, the findings of these studies suggest that athletes are able to detect when coaches are experiencing stress via verbal and behavioural cues, and that the impact of coach stress on coach performance is mainly negative owing to the associated negative perceptions of competence, self-awareness, and coaching quality.

The study of other key stakeholders' responses to stress is limited and has also tended to be explored in relation to the impact on their performance. For example, Cropley et al. (2016) examined the responses of sport psychology practitioners when effectively and ineffectively coping with stressors. Cropley et al. found that effective coping led to positive beliefs (e.g., optimism, confidence), and ineffective coping led to negative beliefs (e.g., incompetence, distraction), which ultimately impacted on their performance. Given that coping ineffectively has been suggested to lead to responses (e.g., emotions) in coaches that may be detected by athletes and influence performance, this may also be the case for other individuals who operate within sport groups. Although

limited in sport, research has found that emotions and affective states can be transferred from one individual to others in groups via emotional contagion and, subsequently, influence group behaviour (e.g., Barsade, 2002). Given that athletes and key stakeholders usually operate alongside each other as part of groups in sport, a range of potential consequences for the performance and well-being of group members may also exist should any athlete and/or stakeholder ineffectively cope with the stressors they experience. With this in mind, importance has been placed on key stakeholders in sport regulating their emotions and aligning them with the expectations of the organisations within which they operate (Wagstaff et al., 2012). In line with the tenets of emotional labour theory (see Hochschild, 1983), researchers have explored the potential outcomes for sport science support staff when adopting the emotional regulation strategy of emotional suppression (e.g., Hings et al., 2018; Larner et al., 2017). This limited body of research has found that, although suppressing emotional responses may lead to better professional outcomes (e.g., buy-in, better relationships), it may come at personal psychological cost and lead to outcomes associated with burnout (e.g., emotional exhaustion). Consequently, the responses of athletes and key stakeholders to the stressors they experience and their management of them may have performance and mental ill/well-being implications not just for themselves, but also for other individuals they operate alongside in sport groups.

As highlighted throughout, the investigation of stress in sport has generally tended to refer to key stakeholders' acute responses to stressors and their impact on performance. Largely neglected, however, are the implications of the stress and emotional experience upon their mental well-being. Attention has, however, been afforded to mental ill-being indicators, such as burnout, which is considered to be a chronic, debilitating form of strain traditionally characterised by symptoms of emotional

exhaustion, depersonalization, and a lack of personal accomplishment (Maslach, 1982).

Burnout has been associated with a range of negative consequences for athletes and

coaches (e.g., decreased motivation, job dissatisfaction and withdrawal, and decreased

performance and well-being; Goodger et al., 2007). Nevertheless, although we can

assume that burnout may be an indicator of low mental well-being, the direct relationship

between stress and mental well-being has received scant consideration in sport. This

warrants attention, as the components of the stress-emotion process (e.g., appraisal,

emotion, coping) may help explain mental well-being changes and provide a better

understanding of how to enhance the mental well-being and performance of key

stakeholders in sport groups.

Conceptualising Well-Being

Although research has explored mental well-being in a range of populations for

some time, only over the last decade has mental well-being been afforded consistent

research attention in the sporting context (McNeill et al., 2018). This attention seems to

have mirrored the recent increase in wider public and government interest in mental well-

being, with the majority of researchers in sport only previously paying lip-service to

mental well-being when exploring related concepts (e.g., burnout; see Carson et al.,

2018). When examining mental well-being, researchers have adopted different

conceptualisations of mental well-being that have led several authors from different

fields (and now sport) to take issue with the lack of consensus as to how mental well-

being should be defined (e.g., Didymus et al., 2019; Neil et al., 2016). Most researchers

tend to agree that mental well-being is a global, subjective, multidimensional construct

linked to happiness and is important for health, productivity, and job performance (e.g.,

Diener, 2009). Nevertheless, the issue remains of the lack of consensus as to which

components actually constitute mental well-being, leading to a variety of approaches adopted by researchers to understand mental well-being.

Traditionally, research has adopted one of two distinct approaches to explore mental well-being: the hedonic or the eudaimonic approach (Ryan & Deci, 2001). The hedonic approach conceptualises mental well-being as a subjective construct, comprised of life satisfaction, positive affect, and an absence of negative affect (Diener et al., 1999). Often referred to as subjective well-being, this conceptualisation accentuates how outcomes of happiness, pleasure, and positive emotions best reflect mental well-being and includes cognitive (measured through life satisfaction) and affective (measured through both positive and negative affect) components (Neil et al., 2016). Through subjective well-being, the hedonic conceptualisation has received significant research attention in a range of fields (including sport), with it being consistently associated with positive mental and physical health outcomes and relationships and increased life expectancy (for a review, see Diener, 2009). However, advocates of the eudaimonic approach have raised issues about the concept of subjective well-being for its failure to account for the importance of positive human functioning on mental well-being, highlighting that life has to be meaningful and not solely pleasant (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

The eudaimonic approach proposes that mental well-being is determined by the realisation of human potential, symbolised by personal growth and linked to individuals living and functioning in a way that is congruent with their core values (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Moreover, Ryff (1989) postulated that there are six defining components of eudaimonic well-being (often referred to as psychological well-being): self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, positive relations with others, environmental mastery, and autonomy. With this in mind, Ryff and Singer (2008) suggested that, in order to experience self-realization, purposeful and goal directed action towards satisfying these

components is essential. Eudaimonic well-being, often examined via measures of vitality, has generally received less research attention than the hedonic approach despite being linked with positive health outcomes (i.e., reduced risk of disease, lower mortality; Neil et al., 2016). That said, there are suggestions that, although contrasting approaches are proposed, mental well-being might be most aptly conceptualised in sport as a construct consisting of aspects of both eudaimonic and hedonic principles, as they refer to the process and outcome of mental well-being, respectively (cf. Lundqvist, 2011).

A plethora of research studies exists that explore mental well-being in sport, mainly through the hedonic and/or eudaimonic lenses (Neil et al., 2016). Of these studies, the majority have explored mental well-being from an outcome perspective and through the premise that motivation plays a key role in predicting mental well-being (e.g., Stenling & Tafvelin, 2014). One theory of motivation consistently researched in relation to mental well-being is self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985). SDT proposes that there are three basic psychological human needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) that need fulfilling for an individual to experience psychological growth and mental well-being. There is obvious overlap with Ryff's defining components of eudaimonic well-being, such as autonomy, environmental mastery (competence), and positive relations (relatedness). However, Ryan and Deci (2001) also suggested that satisfying these needs can influence hedonic well-being through fostering life satisfaction and positive mood. Consequently, many studies have examined how a range of environmental factors (e.g., motivational climate) influence psychological need satisfaction and impact upon the mental well-being of athletes and coaches (e.g., Alcaraz et al., 2015; Cronin & Allen, 2018), or, alternatively, studies have considered the impact of individual factors (i.e., perceptions of stress) and their relationship with mental well-being (e.g., Bentzen et al., 2016; Houltberg et al., 2018).

An Overview of Well-Being Research in Sport

A number of reviews of the extant literature on mental well-being in sport have been published. These have encapsulated: (a) a full review of the literature existing between 2003 and 2011 (see Lundqvist, 2011); (b) a review of mental well-being specific to sport organisations (see Neil et al., 2016); and (c) a review of factors linked specifically to coach mental well-being (see Didymus et al., 2018). This section will provide an overview of some of the main research developments pertaining to the mental well-being of key stakeholders operating in sport groups.

Environmental Factors

Many of the recent research developments in mental well-being in sport have examined the influence of factors pertaining to the performance environment (mainly the coaching climate and the coach–athlete relationship) on athlete and coach mental well-being. Regarding the coaching climate, coaches' transformational leadership (e.g., Stenling & Tafvelin, 2014), coach autonomy support (e.g., Stenling et al., 2015), coach-created perceived task-involving climates (e.g., Alvarez et al., 2012), and life-skill-fostering coaching climates (e.g., Cronin & Allen, 2018) have all been found to be positively related to the mental well-being of athletes, mainly via the satisfaction of athletes' basic psychological needs. Linked to these findings, studies have also found that performance climates that satisfied the psychological needs of coaches (e.g., through job security and opportunities for professional development) led to increased coach psychological well-being, and that this increase positively predicted their perceived autonomy support to their athletes (e.g., Alcaraz et al., 2015; Stebbings et al., 2012). Moreover, Solstad et al. (2018) found that youth coaches providing higher levels of empowering coaching to their athletes over time reported higher levels of mental well-being in themselves. Collectively, these findings indicate that sport organisations should

consider the working environments of coaches and the coaching education their coaches

receive, as the environments they operate in and largely create can influence their own

mental well-being and performance and, indirectly, the mental well-being and

performance of their athletes.

The potential impact on mental well-being of the relationship between athletes,

coaches, and others in the performance environment has also been considered. For

example, athletes with an avoidance attachment style, who perceived that the coach–

athlete relationship satisfied their basic psychological needs, reported increased hedonic

and eudaimonic well-being (Felton & Jowett, 2013). Further, low and high levels of

interpersonal conflict with coaches have been associated with athletes reporting positive

and negative affect, respectively (Davis & Jowett, 2014). Further, Felton and Jowett

(2017) examined athlete attachment with coaches and parents and found that increases in

athletes' levels of anxious attachment led to reduced vitality and self-esteem and

increased negative affect. Finally, Wayment and Walters (2017) examined the

relationship between athletic connectedness, goal orientation, and mental well-being in

college athletes. They found that having a social, emotional, and psychological

connection to teammates had a significant and positive impact on athlete mental well-

being, and that the sense of connectedness may be impacted positively and negatively by

task- and ego-related motivation, respectively.

Individual Factors

Some of the recent developments in the mental well-being in sport literature have

seen researchers examine a range of individual factors and their influence on the mental

well-being of athletes and coaches. Indeed, self-compassion (Ferguson et al., 2014),

emotional intelligence (DeFreese & Barczak, 2017), and high trait self-esteem and low

trait perfectionism (Lundqvist & Raglin, 2015) have all been found to positively relate to

athlete mental well-being, with some of the relationships suggested to be determined by athletes being increasingly positive, persevering in their sport, and taking responsibility for their thoughts, emotions, and actions. Further, Houltberg et al. (2018) recently examined the impact that the narrative identities of athletes have on their mental well-being. Houltberg et al. found that a performance-based narrative (e.g., high perfectionism, fear of failure, contingent self-worth) was linked with symptoms associated with low levels of mental well-being (e.g., low levels of life satisfaction), whereas a purpose-based narrative identity (e.g., high purpose, global self-worth, positive view of self after sport) was associated with high levels of mental well-being. These findings may have potential implications for athletes and other key stakeholders in sport groups, given their often-joint pursuit of achieving athletic excellence.

The different types and motives of the goals set by athletes have also been explored in relation to mental well-being outcomes. For example, autonomous goals have been found to lead to increased effort, goal attainment, and, subsequently, positive affect (Smith et al., 2011), and more adaptive autonomous motives led to athletes exhibiting higher levels of vitality (Healey et al., 2014). The ability of athletes to adapt and adjust to goals has also been examined, with Nicholls et al. (2016) reporting that responses to unattainable goals via goal re-engagement positively predicted mental well-being, whereas goal disengagement negatively predicted mental well-being.

Researchers have also explored the individual factors associated with the mental well-being of coaches. For example, Bentzen et al. (2016) examined how changes in motivation and burnout impacted upon the mental well-being of high-performance coaches and found that high-performance coaches' levels of burnout and mental well-being across a competitive season increased and decreased, respectively. This was reportedly due to perceived environmental and subsequent negative psychological need

satisfaction changes. Further, McNeill et al. (2018) explored how self-regulation capacity and perceptions of stress were linked with previously determined burnout and mental well-being profiles in high-performance coaches: thriving (low burnout, high mental well-being), depleted (relatively high burnout and relatively low mental well-being), and at-risk (relatively high burnout and relatively high mental well-being). Those "thriving" reported higher levels of self- regulation and lower perceived stress than those in the other profiles. These findings indirectly indicate the potential relationship between the ability to cope with stress and its impact on mental well-being.

Despite consistent reference to concepts linked to stress throughout the extant mental well-being literature, only recently has a study examined the direct relationship between stress components and mental well-being indicators in sport. Arnold et al. (2017) quantitatively explored the effects of organisational stressors and the coping styles of athletes on positive and negative affect and performance satisfaction. Findings indicated that, for the organisational stressor categories of goals and development (e.g., coach feedback) and team and culture (e.g., attitudes and behaviour of the team), a positive relationship existed between the frequency and intensity of stressors experienced and increases in negative affect (an indicator of lower subjective well-being). Arnold et al. also found no significant relationship between the experience of organisational stressors and positive affect or performance satisfaction (both indicators of higher subjective well-being in sports performers). Although such findings are embryonic, they suggest that organisational stressors may lead to more negative mental well-being outcomes for sports performers. Further, the relationships between specific coping categories and the mental well-being of athletes were also explored, with positive relationships reported between problem-focused coping and positive affect, and emotion-focused coping and negative affect. Arnold et al. suggested that these relationships might

be explained by athletes' perceptions of control over stressors and their ability/inability to take direct action to overcome them.

Despite being progressive and advancing our understanding, the study by Arnold et al. (2017) only identifies the relationship between certain stress components and hedonic well-being indicators. To explore further the direct relationship between the more holistic stress and emotion process and mental well-being, a broader representation of stress and emotion (including appraisals and emotional/behavioural responses) and the inclusion of eudaimonic well-being components may warrant consideration. Indeed, it is reasonable to assume that the experiences of stress and emotion throughout a day would affect the hedonic well-being of an individual, but this would likely be dependent on how well the individual managed the experiences and how impactful the experiences were on them - that is, whether the individual felt that: (a) they had control over the experiences; (b) they had mastered them; (c) they grew as a result of experiencing them; (d) they had a purpose due to experiencing them and/or coping effectively with them; (e) they had support to manage them; or (f) they had an increased acceptance of self owing to navigating them effectively. Consequently, for athletes and other key stakeholders operating in groups in sport organisations, managing their own stressful experiences and creating supportive group environments to help others cope and grow may have significant implications for their own stress and mental well-being experiences, as well as those of others.

Conclusion

Stress has been afforded significant research attention with athletes and now, more recently, with other key stakeholders in sport organisations (e.g., coaches, sport science staff). The findings of this research have highlighted the potential implications of these individuals' stress experiences for the performance and mental well-being of

themselves and those they may operate alongside within groups. Nevertheless, research that examines mental well-being in sport is limited to athletes' and coaches' experiences, has been explored mainly from an outcome perspective, and has largely focused on how differing levels of satisfaction of basic psychological needs may lead to changes in mental well-being. These insights are helpful as they provide an understanding that athlete and coach perceptions of the climates they operate in and create influence mental well-being changes. Research is, however, yet to provide detailed conceptual underpinning for why these changes in mental well-being occur. Indeed, preliminary findings with athletes and coaches have highlighted the direct relationship between key aspects of the stress process (e.g., stressors, coping) and hedonic well-being predictors (e.g., negative and positive affect, levels of satisfaction) and indirectly proposed that perceptions of stress and regulation of thoughts, emotions, and behaviours are linked with mental well-being outcomes. However, such findings lack consistent empirical support, are limited to only some of the individual components of the stress-emotion process, and largely neglect their relationship with the process of mental well-being (e.g., the six components of eudaimonic well-being). Consequently, we echo the postulations of Didymus et al. (2018), who suggested that adopting theoretical frameworks such as Lazarus's (1991) CMRT to further explore the cognitive and affective elements associated with managing demanding sport environments may provide a more comprehensive understanding of the underlying mechanisms behind changes in mental well-being for athletes and other key stakeholders operating in sport groups. Given what we have covered in this chapter, we offer some considerations for future research in the area of stress and mental well-being in sport:

- Despite researchers adopting CMRT to examine stress in athletes and other key stakeholders in sport, limited research exists that explores all of the key

components of the stress and emotion process. Research doing so may provide us with a more comprehensive understanding of this process and its implications for performance and mental well-being;

- The majority of research examining stress in sport has focused on the experiences of athletes and coaches. Given that other key stakeholders exist in sport groups and may have significant influence on the performance environment, researchers should continue to provide further insight into their stress experiences;

- A lack of detailed conceptual underpinning exists that explains why mental well-being levels may fluctuate over time. Researchers may advance our understanding of mental well-being in sport by examining the direct link between the stress and emotion process and the components constituting both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being in athletes and key stakeholders operating in sport groups;

- Little research has explored the impact of the stress and emotion experiences of athletes and key stakeholders in sport on those they operate alongside. Research attending to this area may provide us with a better understanding of the wider implications of stress on group performance and mental well-being.

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CHAPTER 3

STUDY ONE

Stress and mental well-being experiences

of professional football coaches

When you're on the floor and staring at the walls, she's (wife) the one that picks you up. She's been through the whole journey as well, and the kids, and they see it. You do your best to keep it (the pressures of the role) away and try to not bring it home but every manager that says they don't bring it home and they leave it in the car are telling you lies.

- Steven Gerrard – Former Aston Villa Football Club Manager

Abstract

The stress experiences and impact upon the daily lives and mental well-being of professional (soccer) football coaches were explored using an in-depth qualitative design. Eight participants were interviewed using a semi-structured approach with thematic and causal network analysis identifying that: (a) a range of contextually dependent demands were experienced and interpreted in relation to their situational properties; (b) many demands were appraised and emotionally responded to in a negative manner; (c) a range of coping strategies were adopted to cope with stress experiences, with many reported as ineffective; and, (d) stress experiences often led to negative implications for their daily lives and eudaimonic and hedonic well-being. Positive adaptations to some demands experienced were reported and augmented perceptions of mental well-being. The findings of this study make a novel and significant contribution to understanding the interrelationships between the principal components of the stress process and the prospective links between stress and mental well-being.

Stress and Mental Well-Being Experiences of Professional Football Coaches

Elite sport coaching has been widely acknowledged as being an inherently stressful occupation, where coaches are often judged on the performance of their athletes and, alongside many other demands, are expected to: manage their way through a multitude of difficult and ever-expanding tasks; operate under significant internal and external pressure; deal with increasing levels of job insecurity; and, satisfy a range of key stakeholders' (e.g., board members, supporters) often conflicted agendas (cf. Cropley et al., 2020). Consequently, for some time coaches have been referred to as *performers* in their own right (e.g., Thelwell et al., 2008), as failure to effectively cope with the demands they experience can lead to detrimental implications for their performance and how they function in their wider lives. It is with the knowledge of such stress-related outcomes that a range of empirical studies have emerged focusing on the stress experiences of elite coaches (for a review, see Norris et al., 2017).

Researchers examining the stress experiences of elite coaches have adopted either Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional theory of stress (TTS) or Lazarus' (1999) cognitive-motivational-relational theory of stress and emotion (CMRT) to underpin their work (e.g., Didymus, 2017; Olusoga et al., 2009). Within both theories, stress is considered as a process, whereby an individual experiences stressors (e.g., environmental demands), with the situational properties of those stressors (i.e., underpinning properties of a situation that determines it to be stressful) informing an ongoing cognitive-evaluative process (i.e., appraisal). It is from this appraisal process that an individual will emotionally respond, potentially leading to behavioral outcomes and coping efforts that, in the sporting context, may impact upon the individual's performance and mental well-being (for a review, see Baldock et al., 2020 [Ph.D. Chapter 2]).

Researchers investigating coach stress have explored individual components of the stress process, including: the nature and categorization of stressors experienced (e.g., Olusoga et al., 2009; Thelwell et al., 2008); coping strategies employed (e.g., Thelwell et al., 2010); responses to stressors (e.g., Olusoga et al., 2010); and, the situational properties and appraisals of stressors (e.g., Didymus, 2017). Collectively, this research has indicated that coaches: (a) experience a range of stressors emanating from performance-, organisational-, and personal-derived sources that are underpinned by a range of situational properties (e.g., ambiguity, event uncertainty, imminence); (b) appraise stressors as threatening or challenging more so than as beneficial or harmful/losses; (c) employ a range of coping strategies (e.g., increasing effort, seeking advice) to manage stressors; and (d) experience a range of mental (e.g., negative cognitions and emotions), behavioral (e.g., sharper tone of voice), and physical responses (e.g., increased heart rate) to stressors, suggested to negatively affect the coaching environment and their athletes (see Norris et al., 2017). In relation to the impact of coach stress responses (i.e., strain) on athletes, Thelwell et al. (2017) reported that athletes are able to identify when coaches are experiencing strain via verbal and behavioral cues, which can result in negative environmental (e.g., sub-optimal training environment) and personal implications for athletes (e.g., increased anxiety).

Whilst developing our understanding of coach stress and its potential impact on practice, a number of issues within the extant literature remain. First, the individual components of stress have been examined in isolation. This reductionistic approach fails to consider stress in its entirety and as a process (e.g., stressors and their situational properties, appraisals, responses, coping, impact; Baldock et al., 2020 [Ph.D. Chapter 2]). In addition, while Lazarus (1999) suggested that the appraisal process is integral to how individuals emotionally respond to stressors, the emotion response has received scant

qualitative consideration by researchers exploring coach stress. Providing insight into the entirety of coaches' stress experiences by examining each component and the interrelationships between them can provide a more detailed understanding of how stress influences coaches' performance, experiences of strain and well-being (Baldock et al., 2020 [Ph.D. Chapter 2]).

Second, the majority of research exploring coach stress has sampled elite coaches operating across a range of different sports. As coach stress experiences are thought to be contextually derived and will consequently differ across sports (Olusoga et al., 2009), sampling elite coaches from the same sport may allow for a richer depiction of the stress experiences of homogenous coaching populations and the environments within which they operate. One population that has received little attention to date are elite, professional football coaches. This is perhaps surprising given that football coaches are suggested to experience incomparable stressors associated with the need to obtain positive results, being under constant personal and professional scrutiny, and resultant high levels of job insecurity (Mills & Boardley, 2016).

A third issue with the extant literature is that while the impact of stressors on coach performance has been explored (e.g., Thelwell et al., 2017), the wider impact on mental well-being has received less attention (Neil et al., 2016), and has been often investigated through ill-being indicators, such as burnout (cf. McNeill et al., 2018). This is despite researchers finding that performers who report lower perceptions of stress also report higher levels of mental well-being (e.g., McNeill et al., 2018), and experience negative affect following certain organisational stressors (e.g., attitude/behavior of team), but positive affect following their effective utilization of problem- and emotion-focused coping strategies (Arnold et al., 2017).

Well-being has traditionally been understood through two perspectives: *hedonic* and *eudaimonic* well-being (Neil et al., 2016). The hedonic perspective stems from the view that well-being is an outcome, comprising feelings of happiness, positive affect, and life satisfaction (Diener et al., 1999). The eudaimonic perspective stems from the view that well-being is a process, through which positive human functioning and fulfilling human potential is achieved via purposeful action (Ryff & Singer, 2008). Further, Ryff (1989) postulated that there are six eudaimonic well-being dimensions associated with purposeful action (i.e., autonomy; environmental mastery; self-acceptance; personal growth; positive relations with others; and purpose in life) that, when satisfied, lead to self-realization and positive human functioning. In order to promote a more holistic understanding of well-being, Lundqvist (2011) has suggested that well-being should be considered as a construct incorporating aspects of both hedonic and eudaimonic perspectives. Accordingly, it could be argued that an individual's failure to manage and cope with the stressors they experience may impact their life in such a way that it detrimentally influences their perceptions of their hedonic and eudaimonic well-being (e.g., job dissatisfaction, negative relations with others; McNeill et al., 2018). Despite this indication of a potential direct relationship between stress and well-being, recent calls within the sport psychology literature have indicated a need to substantiate such links (cf. Didymus et al., 2018).

Given the limitations of the existing coach stress literature, we aimed to examine elite, professional football coaches' stress experiences and how these experiences impacted upon their mental well-being. Specifically, we sought to: (a) identify the significant stressors professional football coaches experience in their roles; (b) explore their entire stress experiences (e.g., stressors, situational properties, appraisals, emotional responses and coping strategies) and the interrelationships between individual stress

components, with a specific focus on the strategies used to cope; and, (c) explore the impact of these stress experiences on how they function in their professional and personal lives and the subsequent influence on eudaimonic and hedonic well-being. In doing so, we sought to significantly contribute to the sport psychology literature by presenting novel insights into the stress process and the link between stress and well-being.

Methods

Research Design

Our study was underpinned by the philosophical position of *critical realism* (Lincoln et al., 2011). Critical realists reject the notion that only single dichotic perspectives of understanding phenomena exist (e.g., positivism or constructivism), and instead, perceive there to be a *middle ground*. That is, they recognise that an objective world exists free from human perception, but perceive knowledge within that world to be socially constructed through subjective interpretation (Lincoln et al., 2011). Critical realists, therefore, attempt to generate knowledge through observation and asking questions to better understand the underpinning causal mechanisms that explain events (e.g., the interrelationships between stress components and the link between stress and mental well-being). Consequently, our research design involved the adoption of semi-structured interviews and analysis that allowed for the generation of new insights (e.g., interpretive thematic analysis), whilst exploring the mechanical relationships between aspects of the stress process (e.g., causal network analysis). This position was deemed necessary to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomena being explored, and also allowed for the data to be presented in such a way that makes the observed relationships understandable.

Participants

The sample comprised eight male professional (elite) football coaches aged between 34 and 56 years old ($M = 45.8$, $SD = 7.4$). All participants, recruited through direct contact with football clubs or governing bodies of the sport, were sampled purposively according to all of the following criteria: (a) currently or previously employed as a senior first team coach in the English Premier League (EPL); (b) had operated at EPL or English Football League (EFL) Championship level within the last two years; and (c) had worked at either level for a minimum of two years. Seven of the participants were operating as first team coaches in the EPL at the time of the study, with one operating in the EFL Championship. The participants had between three and 14 years ($M = 7.8$, $SD = 5.2$) of experience as professional coaches, and all held Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) Professional Licence coaching qualifications.

Instrumentation

A semi-structured interview process, facilitated through an interview guide, was employed to gather rich information in relation to the aims of the study (cf. Patton, 2015). Based on extant literature (e.g., Didymus, 2017), the interview guide consisted of standardised questions that directed the general topics of discussion, and flexible supporting questions and probes that encouraged participants to elaborate on their answers (e.g., "can you explain what you mean by this?"; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). A pilot interview with a matched participant was conducted to ensure the interview guide explored the aims of the study, and to improve the interviewer's familiarity of the questions and when to make use of appropriate probes. This process led to some questions being re-ordered to enhance the flow of the interview. The final interview guide comprised four main sections (see Appendix B). First, participants' day-to-day roles as elite, professional football coaches were explored to enhance interviewer-

interviewee rapport and help the participants consider more broadly the nature of their roles prior to the specific questioning. Second, in line with Thelwell et al. (2010), the participants were asked to identify the three most demanding stressors that they have generally encountered in their roles. The entire stress experiences as a result of each of the three stressors reported were then individually explored (e.g., "how do you view this demand [positively or negatively] and why?"). Third, participants were asked to describe how these experiences impacted upon their hedonic (e.g., "how does this demand impact upon how happy and satisfied you are with your professional and personal life and why?"), their eudaimonic well-being (e.g., "how do the demands of your role influence the way in which you function in your professional and personal life?"), and their ability to function in their wider lives. Finally, interviews were concluded by exploring the participants' experience of the interview itself, encouraging reflection on whether they had been able to discuss their experiences in full.

Procedure

Following University of South Wales Institutional Ethics Board approval (see Appendix A), using the authors' existing network in elite football, potential participants who satisfied the sampling criteria were contacted via email by a football National Governing Body (NGB) asking for permission to allow the research team to contact them directly. Upon receipt of positive responses, the first author sent a follow-up email, which contained introductory statements, a formal study information sheet, and an invitation to participate. Individuals were also afforded the opportunity to ask the first author any questions (via email or phone call) about the research and their potential participation, which allowed them to make a fully informed decision regarding their participation. Upon receiving written, informed consent, participants were sent a preparation booklet that provided them with the opportunity to familiarise themselves

with the general focus of the interview two weeks prior. Interviews were conducted face-to-face ($n = 2$) or via Skype^{TM} ($n = 6$; due to geographical and access issues) at times chosen by each participant to encourage a positive interview experience (Patton, 2015). Interviews lasted between 45 and 95 minutes ($M = 72.5$, $SD = 24$), were audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim yielding a total of 102 pages of single-spaced text.

Data Analysis and Methodological Rigour

In accord with our critical realist stance, we adopted two integrative analysis procedures to examine the participants' stress and well-being experiences. Initially, an interpretative thematic analysis was conducted to analyse the raw interview data using Braun et al.'s (2016) six-step process. First, the research team read through each transcript several times to encourage data immersion and content familiarisation. Second, the first author inductively generated codes from the dataset, labelling them according to their interpreted meaning. Third, identified codes (e.g., managing players' mentality) were organised into groups (e.g., players) and overall themes (e.g., performance-related stressors) or coping families (e.g., problem-solving; for a review of coping families see Skinner et al., 2003), which were derived deductively from the theoretical underpinnings of the individual components of the stress process, and hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. Next, generated codes and themes were reviewed by the first author to ensure that they appropriately described the extracts of data, and the names of each were amended accordingly to ensure greater clarity. Finally, to ensure reflexivity and attend to the interpretive potential of the data, final codes and themes were scrutinised by the entire research team using a critical friend approach (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Here, the research team challenged the first author to consider potential researcher bias and discuss alternative perspectives on the construction and labelling of codes and themes, which allowed the first author to justify interpretations of the data and thus improve confidence

in the process and outcomes of the analysis (Smith & McGannon, 2017). To address the first objective, hierarchical tables outlining the codes, groups of codes, and overall themes/families derived are displayed for the stressors reported, to offer a detailed insight into the plethora of stressors experienced by this unique sample (see Table 1). To address the second objective, a hierarchical table is again provided to outline the strategies the coaches reported using to cope with the stressful experiences initiated by the stressors (see Table 2; tables for the remaining stress components: situational properties, appraisals, emotional responses, and mental well-being available on request). We deemed this table important to illustrate again the number of different strategies that elite coaches adopt to cope with their stress experiences.

The second stage of analysis involved creating within-case causal networks for each reported stressor and the subsequent stress process using the codes and themes derived from the interpretive thematic analysis. These stressor-specific networks followed the conceptually-ordered stress and emotion process outlined in Lazarus' (1999) CMRT (e.g., stressor, situational property, primary appraisal, emotional response, family of coping strategy adopted [specific strategies offered in Table 2]), and personal and professional impact), and how this process impacted their mental well-being. These were developed to illustrate, and thus better understand, the interrelationships between the variables explored (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Participants' individual stress experiences were then grouped according to the origin of the stressors experienced (e.g., performance, organisational, or personal; see Table 1) to explore stress and well-being experiences in response to stressors from different sources. Following an approach adopted in other qualitative research (e.g., Salim et al., 2016), comparative analysis of the experiences grouped into each stressor source led to three conceptually- and time-

ordered cross-case causal networks being developed that illustrate the overall findings (Figures 1 to 3).

Throughout the analysis, procedures were taken to consider the methodological rigour of our work. Specifically, online audit trails of all supporting documents (e.g., coded transcripts) were kept at each phase of the research process (Braun et al., 2016), to enable assessment of the importance of the findings based on the analytical decisions made throughout, and judge the level of care afforded to each stage of the analysis. Given the elite nature of the participants and specific topic area, ethical responsivity and reflexivity were also deemed paramount and considered via a member reflection process. This allowed the participants to review the transcripts and final manuscript to ensure that anonymity had been maintained throughout, and to offer them the opportunity to add to, edit, and or remove any quotations from their respective interviews (Smith & McGannon, 2017).

Results

Given that stressors are the starting point of any stress experience, Table 1 provides hierarchical insight into the individual stressors experienced by the participants and the sources they emanate from (e.g., performance, organisational, personal). Beyond this, visual representations of the participants' entire stress and well-being experiences are provided via three causal networks that depict the interrelationships between individual components of participants' stress experiences when subjected to stressors from different sources (Figures 1 to 3). The networks also provide a visual representation of how participants' stress experiences were reported to influence their ability to function and subsequent mental well-being. Given that effectively coping has been suggested to lead to more positive behavioral adaptations and well-being responses to stress (McNeill et al., 2018), these figures are supported by another table offering hierarchical insight

into the reported strategies utilised by the participants to cope with their stress experiences and the coping families they are grouped into (Table 2). Supporting narratives are then presented in two main sections: *coach stress experiences*; and, *impact of stress on coach mental well-being,* accompanied by a selection of raw verbatim quotes to offer further illumination of the participants' stress and well-being experiences.

Coach Stress Experiences

The stressors the coaches reported were categorised into 9 groups of codes and then then organised deductively into three sources: performance, organisational, and personal (see Table 1). Consequently, three sub-sections provide insight into the entire stress experiences when experiencing stressors from each source (Figures 1-3).

Table 1

Stressors experienced by professional football coaches

Codes	Groups of Codes	Themes
Managing players' mentality Meeting needs of all players	Players	Performance
Preparing for games Limited time to put on sessions	Training	
Internal perception of own competency External perception of coach/team performance Acceptance from players	Reviews of performance	
Getting positive results Poor results and performances Balancing playing philosophy and short-term results	Matches	
Managing workload and time Time spent on media obligations No time for CPD	Workload	
Politics with non-playing staff Dealing with individuals with different views/values Managing upwards (e.g., board, chief executive) Relationship with new owners	Relationships	Organisational
Working at a club that is never safe from relegation Match day expectations Job security	Club	
Media attention surrounding oneself and club	Media	
Planning for the future Having time for family Maintaining a work-life balance	Private Life	Personal

Performance Stress

Five groups of codes were identified in relation to performance stressors: players, training, reviews of performance, matches, and workload. For example, one coach discussed the stressor of meeting players' needs, "It's (coaching) about 'how do I make sure I'm meeting the needs of all my players?' I am often in that space where I'm thinking, 'Have I done enough for him?' That is a big demand." From a workload perspective, another participant referred to the significant time he spent on media obligations, "My most stressful time when dealing with workload was dealing with the press. I had to see the press most days and it got in the way of seeing players. The workload was immense." All performance stressors reported were underpinned by one of seven situational properties (see Figure 1): event uncertainty, timing of events, self and other comparison, inadequate preparation, imminence, duration, and ambiguity. For example, self and other comparison (e.g., the comparisons an individual makes to themselves and others with regards to performance) underpinned the three performance stressors reported in the 'reviews of performance' group of codes by participants, and is represented in the following quote, "It's (demand of perception) about having professional respect, that feeling of competence, and that's driven by your perception of yourself but it also comes from wanting externals to know you're credible within your professional role and so you put pressure on yourself." Further, event uncertainty (e.g., being uncertain of the probability of something occurring) underpinned two performance stressors reported, and is best documented by one participant when discussing the demand of getting positive results, "Results will determine whether I stay in a job. We want to be successful and be as high up the table as possible but a good performance doesn't always predict the outcome, which causes an element of stress."

Figure 1

Stress experiences of professional football coaches in relation to performance stressors
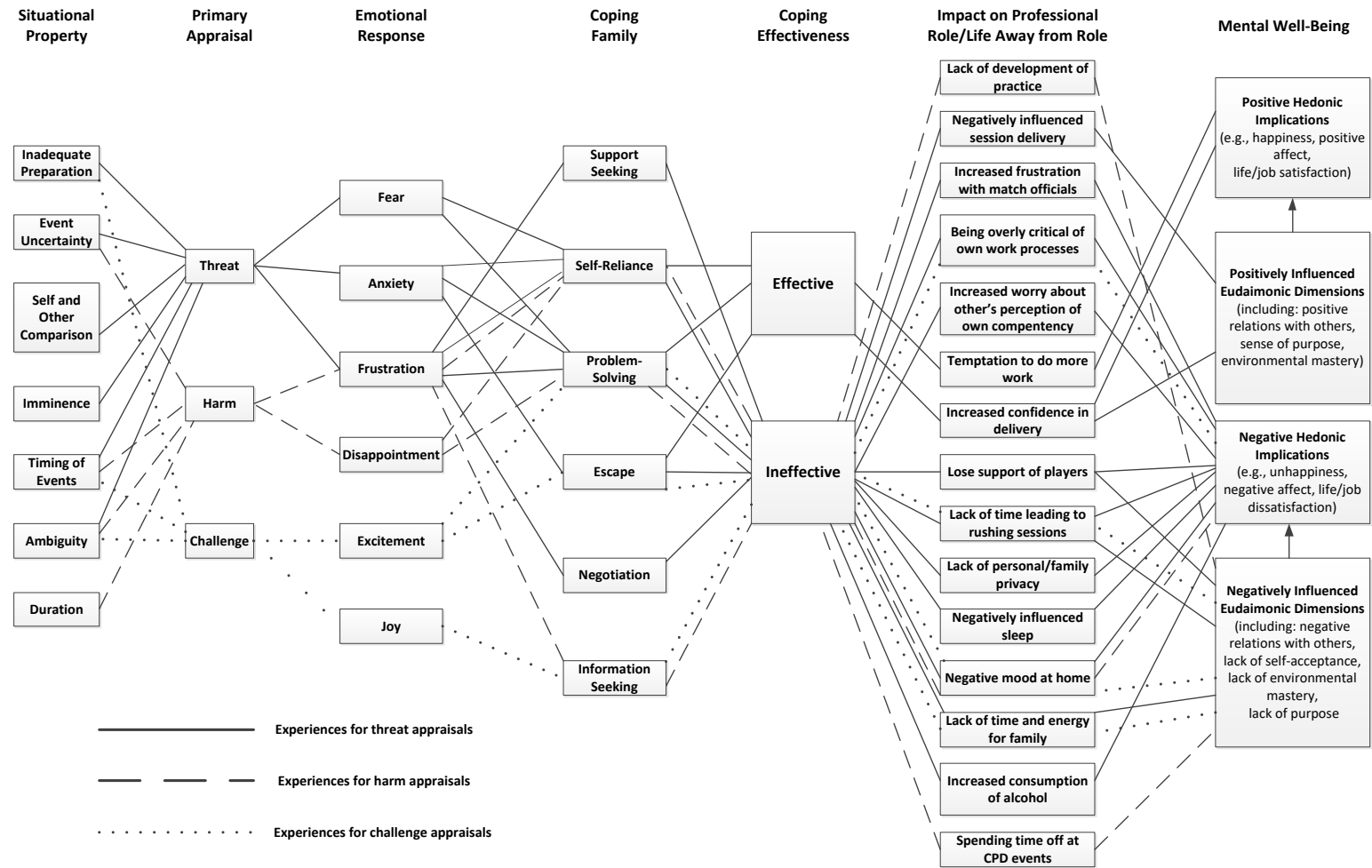
These situational properties led participants to report that they primarily appraised the performance stressors experienced as either a threat, challenge, or a harm/loss. Specifically, performance stressors underpinned by ambiguity and timing of events were appraised as being potentially threatening, harmful or as a challenge. Those stressors underpinned by self and other comparison and imminence were solely appraised as threatening, and those underpinned by duration as harmful. Finally, performance stressors derived from inadequate preparation and event uncertainty resulted in either threat, challenge or harm appraisals respectively. In general, performance stressors were mostly appraised as threats, with participants often alluding to the damage such stressors could do to themselves and others. For example, one participant suggested, "It's (preparing for games) debilitative, you get so hung up on the details that it takes away your rational thinking. You see it that way because it's your livelihood. If it goes wrong it impacts upon you, your family, and on your credibility." Similarly, those performance stressors appraised as harmful were also considered in relation to the damage they caused to themselves, others, or their clubs. For example, one participant referred to the negative impact of not being able to engage in continual professional development (CPD) on his growth and practice, "You find yourself not having time to get your head up and look for other things. It's frustrating in that there's not enough time to have some input into yourself. It stunts your professional growth and that's damaging." Conversely, some participants reported challenge appraisals following the experience of performance-related stressors, with one participant suggesting, "It's (meeting the need of players) a big demand, it's a challenging demand, but it's one I enjoy the challenge of."

Following the appraisals process, participants reported negative emotional responses to threat (e.g., anxiety, frustration, and fear) and harm appraisals (e.g., disappointment and frustration), and positive emotional responses to challenge appraisals

(e.g., excitement and joy). For example, when appraising meeting the players' needs as a threat, one participant reported, "What you always fear is that you miss somebody out. I'm talking that sense of (a player) feeling valued." Whereas, when viewing managing the players' mentality as a challenge, one participant suggested experiencing, "Positive ones (emotions), like excitement related to thinking that we can achieve in this situation."

As a result of the emotional responses reported above, participants reported adopting a range of coping strategies in attempts to manage performance-related stressors. These strategies were grouped into six themes: problem-solving, escape, information seeking, self-reliance, support seeking, and negotiation (see Table 2). Problem-solving and self-reliance strategies were reported to be most frequently utilised by participants, with at least one strategy from either theme used across each stress experience. For example, in attempts to cope with the stressor of managing players' mentality, one participant explained, "There're messages I'll put out to the media that'll filter through to the club and to my players (that then influence how they think and behave)." Further, in relation to self-reliance strategies, one participant suggested having to regulate or suppress their emotional responses to the external perception of coach/team performance in front of their staff and players, "I hide it (emotion) totally. If I'm flat it reflects on them; I don't want them to start thinking that I'm not up to it or wonder what's wrong." Although participants reported the use of a range of strategies, they generally indicated that they ineffectively coped with performance-related stressors. One example of a particularly maladaptive coping strategy was reported when one participant referred to their overreliance on alcohol to escape the pressure of results, "I've had spells in the last 10 years where that (results) has probably made me drink too much and I've seen it as a way of forgetting about things."

Table 2.

Coping strategies reported by professional football coaches.

Codes	Groups of Codes	Coping Family	Codes	Groups of Codes	Coping Family
Planning for training/games Ensuring time for oneself Creating to-do lists Prioritizing	Planning	Problem-solving	Having good qualifications/skills Having a structured way of working Having a supportive family Knowing wife is supported by family Ensuring all bases are covered Sharing demand with other coaches	Comfort blanketing (self)	Self-reliance
Making all phone calls during work commute Planning time to cater to family needs Ensuring appropriate time to sleep	Time management		Accepting nature of role Controlling the controllables Being flexible when operating	Acceptance	
Having a process to work to Preparing stock sessions as contingencies	Preparation		Experience working in high pressured environments Using playing career experiences Reflecting on practice and games	Reflecting on experiences	
Increasing effort Working through to-do lists Working hard to prepare team Arriving to work early Being flexible in approach	Changing behavior		Hiding/masking feelings in front of players Being self-aware of own emotional state Rationalizing importance of role and results	Emotional regulation/ suppression	
Being apologetic to players Speaking honestly to players Confronting problematic individuals Planting messages in media Planting messages in staff	Emotional expression/ management		Speaking with fellow coaches Speaking with club media officer Talking through situations with wife/children Regular communication with chairman Scheduling appointments with owners	Gaining perspective	Support seeking
Playing golf Going for a walk Regularly going to the gym Drinking alcohol Mindfulness Turning phone off Watching television	Changing focus	Escape	Giving individuals a chance Scheduling appointments with players Speaking with ground staff	Mutual support	Negotiation
			Attending CPD in time off Increasing knowledge base	Professional development	Information seeking
Trying to block it out and ignore it Isolate oneself to think more clearly	Cognitive avoidance		Speaking to those at the club Speaking to sport science staff	Asking others	

Organisational Stress

Three groups of codes were identified in relation to organisational stressors: relationships, club, and media. For example, three of the participants discussed the need to have to manage upwards as part of their role, with one suggesting, "Managing up and keeping people in the loop, updated with what you think is happening, where you're trying to take stuff can be a very significant stressor of the role." From a media perspective, another participant referred to the media speculation surrounding him, his club, and the negative attention received, "This is in reference to the sheer magnitude of media attention and speculation I and the club receives, particularly when it's negative and lacks any substance." All reported organisational stressors were deemed to be underpinned by one of six situational properties (see Figure 2): event uncertainty, temporal uncertainty, novelty, timing of events, imminence, and ambiguity. For example, temporal uncertainty (e.g., an individual knows that an event will happen but is unsure of when) reportedly underpinned the stressor of job security, when one alluded to their doubt over the time they had in their role, "Getting the sack is not as greater concern if you're financially OK. Whereas, I could never be comfortable because I didn't know how long I'd be in the role."

The situational properties reported above led to participants appraising the organisational stressors as a threat, challenge, harm/loss or benefit. Specifically, organisational stressors underpinned by timing of events or ambiguity were appraised solely as harmful. Those stressors underpinned by temporal uncertainty and imminence were appraised as threatening or as a challenge respectively, while stressors underpinned by novelty were appraised as harmful or beneficial. Event uncertainty, which was the most frequently cited situational property across the organisational stressors reported, only lead to threat or harm appraisals. Further, despite threat appraisals being most

Figure 2

Stress experiences of professional football coaches in relation to organisational stressors
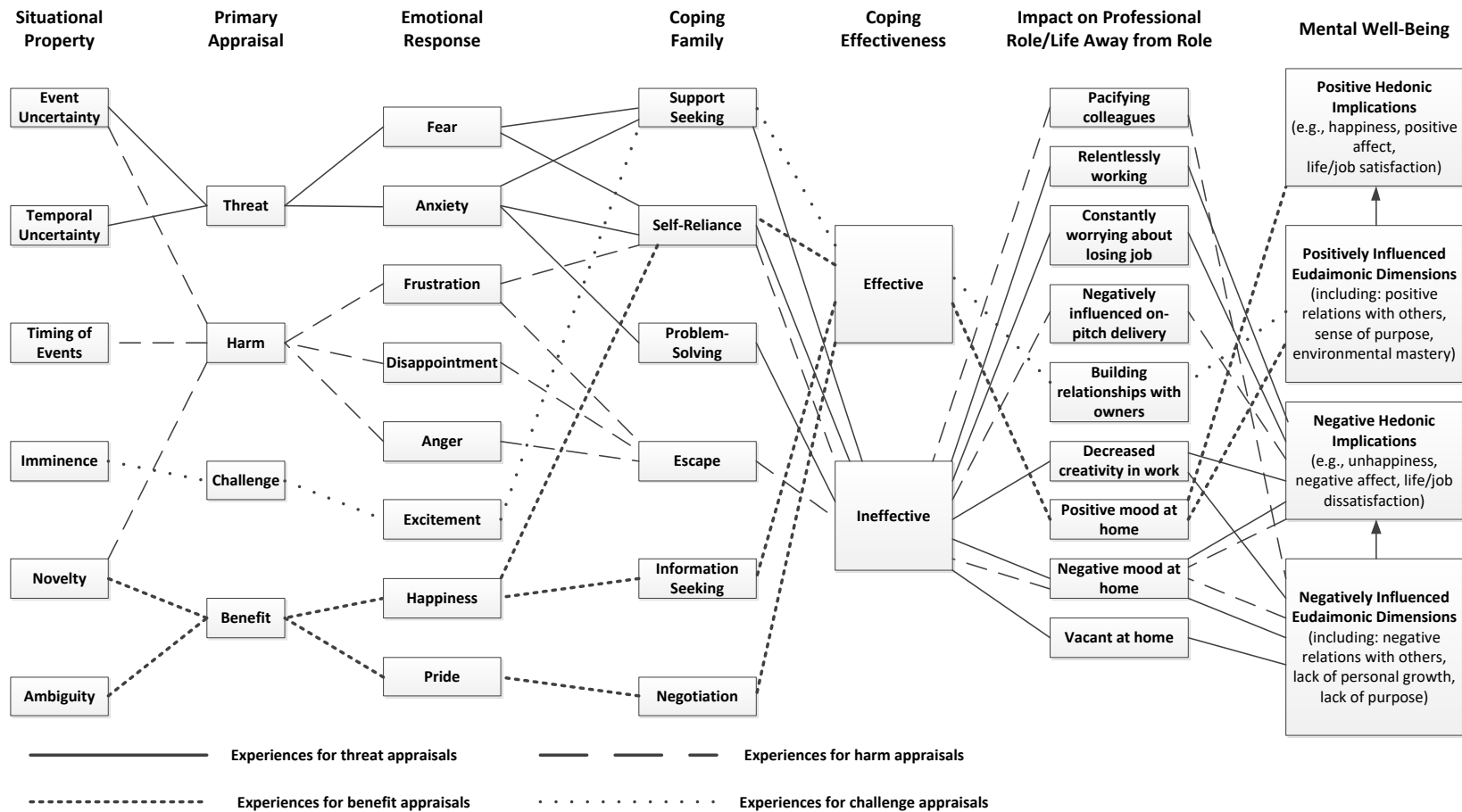
frequently reported, participants reported harm appraisals across three organisational stressors (e.g., relationships with immediate staff, managing up, and politics of non-playing staff). One participant, when dealing with the politics of non-playing staff, reported, "It's a negative because I think some people cause divides and build little empires and when people are trying to build little empires it causes issues." Some participants however reported some organisational stressors to be beneficial for themselves, others, and their clubs, as well as for the attainment of goals. For example, benefit appraisals were reported by three of the participants in relation to managing up, with one suggesting, "you can benefit from it (managing up) if you're open to it and you're open to give and receive honest feedback."

Subsequently, participants responded negative emotional responses to threat (e.g., anxiety and fear) and harm/loss (e.g., anger, disappointment, and frustration) appraisals, and positive emotional responses to challenge (e.g., excitement) and benefit (e.g., happiness and pride) appraisals. For example, when appraising a lack of job security as an elite football coach as a threat, one participant reported, "There's a certain level of anxiety because you understand the nature of football, so you know the effect of it will have big repercussions on your family and your own professional career." In contrast, when appraising the forging of a relationship with new owners of his football club as a challenge, one participant reported experiencing a positive emotional response, "Yes it (emotional response) is excitement. There's part of me that's excited about the plans moving forward and what we can do."

As a result of the emotional responses reported above, participants reported a range of coping strategies in attempts to manage organisational-related stressors. These strategies were grouped into six families: problem-solving, escape, information seeking, self-reliance, support seeking, and negotiation (see Table 2). Self-reliance and support

seeking strategies were reported to be most utilised by the participants. Further, all but two of the participants' organisational stress experiences were suggested to be ineffectively coped with. Whilst some self-reliance strategies were also reported, the organisational stress experiences suggested to be effectively coped with were primarily appraised as either a challenge or benefit, and, encompassed strategies grouped into the themes of support seeking, information seeking, and/or negotiation, and therefore based around some form of communication. For example, to cope with the stressor of managing up, one participant discussed how actively seeking regular communication with the club chairman helped him gain clarity on situations, "To have regular communication is really important. Going out of your way to try to get face-to-face as much as you can … grabbing five minutes with them over an informal coffee can be really beneficial." Another participant alluded to information seeking in attempts to cope with managing up, *"You use your support staff in terms of relaying your thoughts and seeking information from them as well. It might be another member of staff or an assistant." Finally, in the hope of developing mutual support, one participant highlighted the importance of effective negotiation and discussed giving new club owners a chance to deliver on promises they made about the club, "I've been open to them, that's my personality, to give everybody a chance to deliver and believe in what they have said they're going to do."

Personal Stress

A single group of codes was identified for personal stressors: private life. For example, two participants reported difficulties in maintaining a work-life balance, with one suggesting:

> I'm aware of it (work-life balance) having been divorced and having three
>
> children from a marriage that I lost due to the job. The football environment can

be harsh, we don't get much time and you do feel guilt when you're not there. It's

a real stressor of the job.

All reported personal stressors were deemed to be underpinned by one of two situational

properties (see Figure 3): timing of events and ambiguity. For example, timing of events

(e.g., when stressful events occur at the same time and each stressful event is appraised in

relation to another) was reported in relation to how the stressors of a participant's role

often competes with his commitments outside of the role, "The role's so demanding.

You're away a lot and they're (children) asking where you're going and because you're

sapped mentally and physically, you just want to pacify them and it affects your

relationships with them and causes you stress."

These situational properties led to participants reporting that they primarily

appraised the personal stressors they experienced only as a threat or a harm/loss.

Specifically, personal stressors underpinned by ambiguity were appraised solely as a

threat and those appraised by timing of events were appraised as threatening or harmful.

Further, threat appraisals led to negative emotional responses of anxiety and frustration

and harm/loss appraisals leading to guilt. For example, one coach experienced guilt as a

result of appraising not having time for family as harmful, "I think you feel guilty

because you're away a lot and they're always asking where you're going and we never

see you and it does affect you."

As a result of these emotional response, participants reported adopting a range of

coping strategies in attempts to manage personal-related stressors. These were grouped

into three themes (see Table 2): support seeking, self-reliance, and problem-solving. The

participants reported coping both effectively and ineffectively with their personal stress

experiences and mainly utilising self-reliance and problem-solving coping. For example,

Figure 3

Stress experiences of professional football coaches in relation to personal stressors
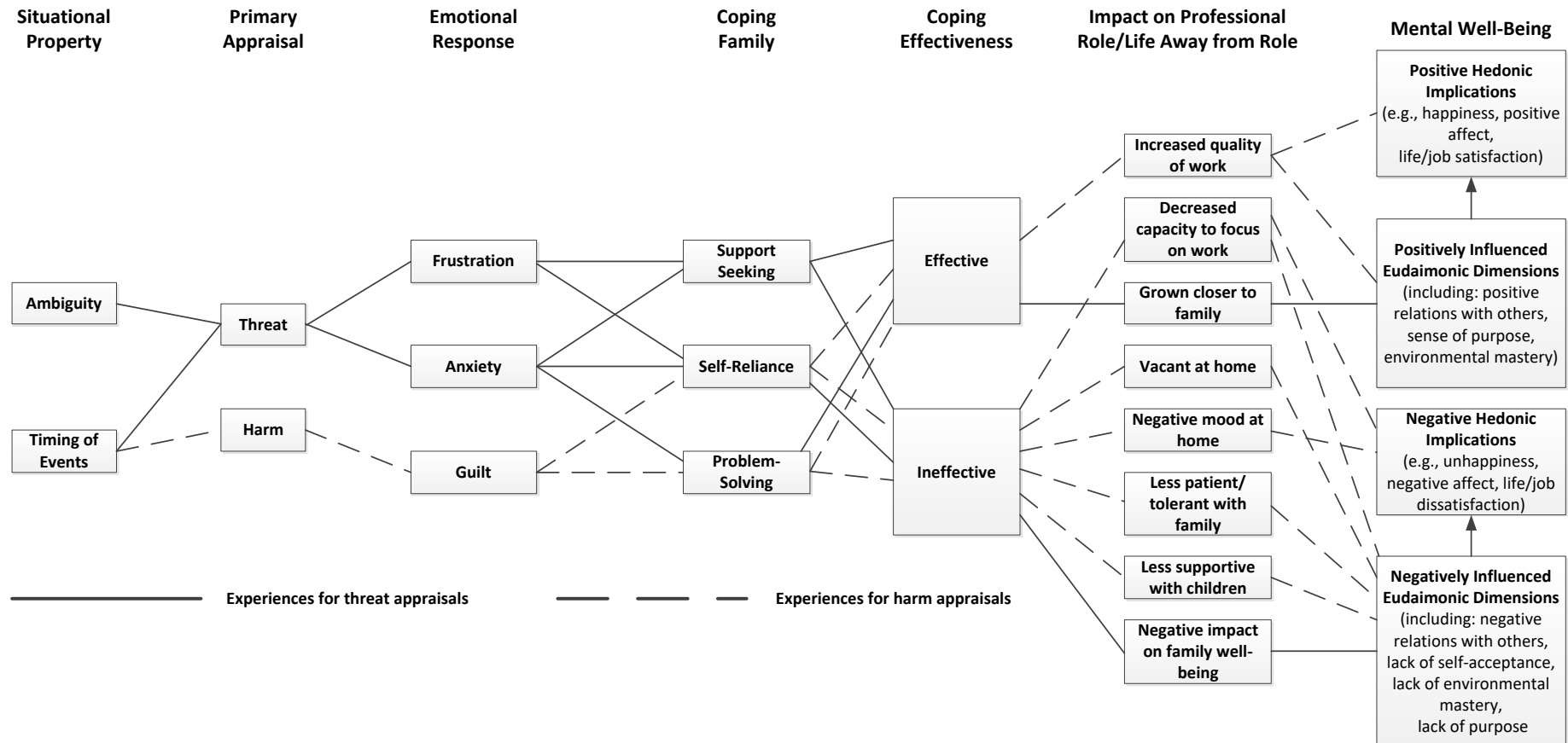
to cope with having time for family and its associated guilt, one participant referred to actively planning time for his family (problem-solving), "Over the Christmas period the balance is almost impossible to get right. But, I'll actively plan to make sure that they'll get that time back in a later stage of the year." In relation to self-reliance, one participant highlighted how he rationalises and accepts the nature of the job when experiencing work-life balance issues and the associated guilt, "So having that perspective of we know the job, we're in the job and we know the good and bad consequences of the job for when things go well or not and if you have an overall acceptance of that, then you're able to stay a little bit calmer and more level."

Stress and Mental Well-Being

Across all of the stress experiences, how effectively participants coped was reported to result in: (a) a range of positive or negative adaptations to functioning that were deemed to influence perceptions of eudaimonic well-being dimensions (e.g., relations with others, sense of purpose); (b) a range of positive or negative hedonic well-being outcomes (e.g., affect, life/job satisfaction); and most significantly, (c) altered perceptions of eudaimonic well-being dimension attainment that subsequently influenced the participants' hedonic well-being.

Impact on Eudaimonic Well-Being

Participants described how the effectiveness of their coping endeavors influenced dimensions of personal and professional functioning associated with eudaimonic well-being. Specifically, participants indicated that, depending on coping effectiveness, they experienced positive or negative perceptions of their relations with others (e.g., influenced relationships with family), sense of purpose (e.g., level of input into their role), personal growth (e.g., amount of CPD undertaken), self-acceptance (e.g., ability to accept nature of role), environmental mastery (e.g., level of competence in role), and

autonomy (e.g., level of independence in role). For example, one participant reported

how investing in time and effort into developing relationships with club owners, fellow

staff, and supporters, as a way of managing upwards helped to improve positive

perceptions of belonging and fulfilment, "Maintaining relationships has meant me getting

longer at a club. The longer you're there the more you build trust and you're seen as

someone with value and knowledge in your area. What comes with that is a sense of

belonging." When discussing balancing playing philosophy and short-term results, a

participant referred to his ability to effectively rationalise his thoughts about this

dilemma, which led to him developing a sense of self-acceptance, "I felt uneasy as a

manager in terms of getting the balance right. Everyone has their own ideals and being

able to rationalise that allowed me to develop that acceptance of my role and of myself."

To delineate the impact of coping ineffectively with their stress experiences, one

participant when discussing the lack of job security, spoke of getting sacked from his job

and how it influenced his perceptions of a range of well-being outcomes (e.g.,

perceptions of a lack of purpose, low self-acceptance), "I didn't want to get out of bed,

found it really difficult to engage with family, and struggled with day-to-day functioning.

I'd lost purpose and direction. The perception was that I was this elite coach and then, I

had nothing." Another participant referenced the lack of personal growth experienced in

his role from being unable to cope with managing workload and time, "In the job I think

those opportunities (to grow and progress) become less and less just simply because of

the pressures of time … You get consumed by the day-to-day."

Impact on Hedonic Well-Being

In relation to hedonic well-being, participants who reported coping effectively

with the stressors they experienced described feelings associated with positive affect

(e.g., happiness, confidence, motivation) and job/life satisfaction. For example, when

coping effectively with the stressor of getting positive results, one participant highlighted how it led to him experiencing positive affect and subsequently influenced his motivation to work, "It's (feelings associated with coping) happiness, overjoyed in some respects because of the relief. High self-esteem and confidence, high levels of motivation, you're more motivated go into work." Conversely, those who indicated ineffectively coping with stressors experienced feelings associated with negative affect (e.g., decreased confidence and motivation, increased anxiety and disappointment) and job dissatisfaction. For example, coping ineffectively with the stressor of getting positive results led one participant to experience negative affect and subsequently influenced his approach to his role, "The feelings are probably frustration, self-doubt, self-critical, lower self-esteem and confidence … When you lose you get up and you know it's (day in work) going to be a drag". Finally, another example stems from a participant reporting disappointment in not being able to manage politics between non-playing staff, "It (political demand) brings your mood down and you feel disappointed, especially when things aren't going right (between staff)."

The Influence of Perceived Eudaimonic Well-Being on Hedonic Well-Being

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, the participants described how their level of coping effectiveness resulted in altered perceptions of eudaimonic dimensions, which subsequently influenced the hedonic outcomes they experienced. For example, one participant suggested that effectively gaining the acceptance of players positively influenced their sense of relatedness (eudaimonia), which subsequently increased job satisfaction and positive affect (hedonia), "You take satisfaction when you know something (player acceptance) has gone well and you've enjoyed it. You feel taller walking in the building and it gives you that spring in your step and affects my mood." More negatively, another participant highlighted the difficulties associated with

managing up and how it led to him feeling disappointed (decreased hedonia) as a result of a lack of fulfilment (decreased eudaimonia), "I'll be more happy in my role when I feel what needs to be delivered is delivered. If you feel that what should be done isn't being done then you do personally feel quite unfulfilled and then quite disappointed." Further, one participant suggested how failure to maintain positive relationships (decreased eudaimonia) with the club hierarchy led to him feeling a limited sense of purpose and value (decreased eudaimonia) in spite of his positive work-related efforts, which subsequently influenced his happiness and levels of job satisfaction (decreased hedonia), "You want to feel valued and that your effort and work has been noted. You don't need them (club hierarchy) singing it from the rooftops but when you feel your work isn't valued, you don't feel happy or satisfied." Finally, in relation to experiencing a sense of purpose, personal growth and autonomy in the role (eudaimonia), one participant highlighted how managing daily stressors resulted in being afforded more responsibility and feeling more positively (hedonia), "As a result of better managing the stressors of the job, I'm happier, feel respected in my job, my boss enjoys what I do, and gives me a lot of input … Personally and privately I'm in a better place."

Discussion

Informed by Lazarus' (1999) CMRT framework, we conducted a qualitative examination of the stress experiences of elite football coaches that uniquely explored the stress process in its entirety, the interrelationships between its component parts, and the subsequent impact on mental well-being. In doing so, we have addressed a number of calls to further explore these areas (cf. Didymus et al., 2018), and believe our findings make a novel and timely contribution to the coach stress and well-being literature. Specifically, elite football coaches participating in this study: (a) experienced a range of stressors emanating from different sources (e.g., performance, organisational, and

personal; see Table 1) and, reported negatively appraising and emotionally responding to most of them irrespective of the stressor origin; (b) employed a multitude of strategies in attempts to cope with their stress experiences (see Table 2) but deemed most of them as ineffective; and, (c) reported ineffectively coping with their stress experiences led to negative implications for their mental well-being. Our findings indicate that the nature of the elite coaching role, particularly in football, may place stressors on coaches that they are unable to manage in an adaptive and positive manner, which impacts on their ability to perform. We suggest, therefore, that football coach education/development programs must be designed to better prepare and support coaches to deal with the stressors they experience in their role.

Many of the stressors experienced by the elite coaches in our study were appraised as either threatening or harmful, with only a small number of performance and organisational stressors appraised positively (e.g., challenge and benefit). In contrast, Didymus (2017) found elite coaches from a range of other sports reported more threat and challenge appraisals of stressors than harm/loss or benefit appraisals. A potential reason for the findings detailed in our study may relate to the importance of the uniquely demanding, elite football context in which we examined coach stress, particularly regarding its influence on the relational-meaning the coaches afforded to their experiences. To elaborate, a range of situational properties deemed influential to the appraisal process were reported to underpin the stressors experienced. Similar to Didymus' findings, these properties largely emulated from those proposed by Lazarus (1999; e.g., ambiguity, imminence), with event uncertainty and timing of events most frequently reported to underpin stressors experienced from all three sources. Additionally, unlike the more globally experienced situational properties identified in CMRT, many of the performance stressors experienced in our study were underpinned

by alternative situational properties that have been previously suggested to be more specific to sporting environments (e.g., self and other comparison; inadequate preparation; Thatcher & Day, 2008), with self and other comparison being the most frequently cited situational property across the reported performance stressors. These situational properties are likely relational representations of the environments and roles that the participants operate in as professional, elite football coaches (e.g., high levels of scrutiny and job turnover, dynamic and turbulent in nature, occupying multifaceted roles; Morrow & Howieson, 2018). Indeed, the relentless and potentially injurious environment in which elite football resides may explain the identification of these situational properties and why more negative appraisals of stressors were reported. Such an explanation fits with Lazarus' CMRT, which purports a confluence of personal (e.g., personal goals) and situational (e.g., properties of stressors) factors influence the relational meaning attributed to stressful situations.

Within our study, we have also illuminated how elite football coaches, who operate in this highly pressurised and turbulent environment, experienced stress by identifying the relationships between their appraisals, emotional responses, and subsequent coping efforts. For example, participants reported only negative emotional responses (e.g., anxiety, frustration) to negative appraisals of stressors (e.g., threat and harm/loss) and, to a lesser extent, only positive emotional responses (e.g., excitement, pride) to positive appraisals (e.g., challenge and benefit). This supports previous research that has reported threat and challenge appraisals result in more unpleasant and pleasant emotions respectively (e.g., Nicholls et al., 2012), and extends understanding of the appraisal-emotion interrelationship for other primary appraisals reported in CMRT (e.g., harm/loss and benefit) that, until now, have not been investigated. In addition, we also found that when participants negatively appraised and emotionally responded to

organisational stressors specifically, they reported ineffectively coping with these stressors, resulting in negative implications for their professional lives (e.g., negative impact upon session delivery), personal lives (e.g., negative mood at home), and mental well-being. These findings support previous contentions that threat and harm/loss appraisals of organisational stressors lead to organisational strain (e.g., negative emotional and behavioral responses; cf. Hanton et al., 2012). In contrast, while such negative implications were reported across many performance and personal stressors, participants did report coping more effectively with some performance and personal stressors, which lead to more positive outcomes (e.g., increased confidence in session delivery, growing closer to family) despite negatively appraising and emotionally responding to them. This may be because individuals perceive they are able to exert less control over, or do not have the resources to be able to cope with, organisational stressors in the same way they might for performance and personal stressors (cf. Hanton et al., 2012). From a practical perspective, therefore, sport psychologists working with professional football coaches may wish to consider strategies that help alter coaches' perceptions of control over organisational stressors, and raise awareness of the potential support mechanisms available to them to improve coping effectiveness and avoid potential negative consequences.

In line with more recent coach stress research (e.g., Potts et al., 2018), we used an existing framework that categorises coping strategies in relation to their adaptive function. These categories are referred to as *coping families*, with each coping family delineating its different role in adapting to, and coping with, stressors (see Skinner et al., 2003). In line with previous elite coach research (e.g., Didymus, 2017), our participants reported utilising a range of strategies across different families, including a mix of strategies across families to cope with the same stress experience. Despite utilising a

range of coping strategies, participants reported they were ineffective at coping with the majority of their stress experiences, which appeared particularly apparent when self-reliance strategies were adopted. Consequently, the lack of coping effectiveness had debilitative implications for their ability to function in the different areas of their lives (e.g., professional; personal; social) and subsequent mental well-being. The ability of high-performance coaches to effectively self-regulate (i.e., regulate one's responses without support from others) has been previously associated with positive well-being outcomes (e.g., job and life satisfaction, happiness; McNeill et al., 2018). Such findings may imply, therefore, that elite football coaches require additional support to foster the development of self-regulation competencies (e.g., use of cognitive restructuring, ability to engage in critical reflective practice) that enhance the effectiveness of coping efforts (cf. McNeill et al., 2018). Alternatively, our findings may highlight that in the context of elite football coaching solely relying on oneself to cope with stressors is maladaptive. Thus, irrespective of the micro-political culture in elite, professional football that may inhibit discussion and sharing of stress experiences (cf. Thompson et al., 2015), coaches may be better served by utilising a range of (social) support networks as more efficacious ways of coping (see Norris et al., 2017).

The participants in our study also reported adopting problem-solving strategies when faced with both performance and personal, but not across many organisational stressors. As problem-focused strategies tend to be used when individuals perceive they are in control of a stressor (e.g., Hayward et al., 2017), it can be argued that the participants did not perceive themselves to be in control of many of the organisational stressors they experienced, which may be indicative of the culture of the sport in which they operate (Thompson et al., 2015). Participants' frequent use of self-reliance and problem-solving strategies, which are generally solitary-based approaches, may be due to

them operating in environments characterised by high levels of job turnover, where they are often held personally accountable for the performance of their players and the decisions they make in relation to performance (Bridgewater, 2010). Issues of trust are, therefore, heightened in such environments and may lead to coaches being largely unwilling to utilise strategies that involve working with others (Kelly & Harris, 2010). This is particularly problematic given that the participants in our study reported adopting socially-focused coping strategies (e.g., support seeking, negotiation) to manage some organisational stressors, which were perceived to be effective and lead to positive adaptations and improved mental well-being. A football coach's ability to build and maintain positive relationships with important people at their club likely impacts upon their working conditions, which ultimately impacts on how well the coach is able to do their job (cf. Cruickshank & Collins, 2012). Improving elite coaches' willingness and ability to adopt more social coping strategies may, therefore, develop their coping repertoires to the extent that they are better able to manage the interpersonal and micro-political nature of their jobs and potentially lead to greater perceptions of well-being. Such contentions highlight the potential efficacy of coach education providers, NGBs, and clubs providing elite football coaches with greater opportunities to develop communities of practice (CoP). CoPs provide a safe and supportive environment in which individuals are able to interact with other coaches and engage in a process of collective learning that could enhance coping efforts directed at the interpersonally demanding aspects of their roles (Cropley et al., 2016).

The findings of our study offer preliminary qualitative support for previous contentions that suggest a direct relationship exists between stress and mental well-being (see Didymus et al., 2018). Specifically, we found that coping ineffectively with individual stress experiences, irrespective of whether they were primarily appraised and

emotionally responded to in a positive or negative manner, led to negative implications for both eudaimonic well-being processes (e.g., negative relations with others, decreased sense of purpose), and hedonic well-being outcomes (e.g., negative affect, life/job dissatisfaction), with the opposite occurring when participants reported coping effectively. Whilst coping effectiveness has previously been reported to directly influence the affective states (i.e., a hedonic well-being indicator) of those operating in high performance sport environments (e.g., athletes, sport psychology consultants; Arnold et al., 2017; Cropley et al., 2016), to our knowledge this is the first study to qualitatively describe how experiences of stress also influence eudaimonic well-being. Indeed, all of Ryff's (1989) six defining components of eudaimonic well-being were alluded to by the participants in response to how they effectively they coped with their stress experiences (e.g., ineffectively managed workload led to decreased CPD and negative perceptions of personal growth).

In our study, changes in participants' hedonic well-being appeared to occur as a result of how well they coped, which also altered perceptions of eudaimonic well-being. For example, how effective participants were in coping with their stress experiences seemed to influence their professional and personal lives (e.g., having increased input in training) and perceptions of eudaimonic dimensions (e.g., increased sense of purpose), which influenced hedonic outcomes (e.g., increased satisfaction). This relationship may be explained by Lazarus' (1999) contentions that individuals ultimately enter all stress transactions with underlying goals that will influence their cognitive judgements and evaluations of those transactions. Participants who ineffectively cope with their stress experiences may, therefore, have perceived the resultant conditions and implications of these transactions to thwart potential goal achievement, leading to altered perceptions of eudaimonia in such situations (e.g., lack of mastery and personal growth) and hedonic

responses (e.g., negative affect, dissatisfaction) as outcomes. Whilst such contentions require corroboration, they also highlight the need for future research to explore the impact of coaches' stress experiences on their well-being across different time points, as perceptions of eudaimonia and subsequent hedonia derived from how they manage situations may differ across time following similar experiences. Nevertheless, our findings provide greater insight into the specific mechanisms behind quantitative research linking coping with both eudaimonic and hedonic well-being in different sporting populations (e.g., athletes, coaches, sport psychologists; Arnold et al., 2017; Cropley et al., 2016; McNeill et al., 2018), highlighting how perceptions of eudaimonic well-being can influence hedonic well-being. This substantiates and advances McNeill et al.'s assertions that mental well-being includes elements of both hedonic and eudaimonic perspectives and suggests that future well-being research should consider exploring both elements together. Although preliminary, our findings collectively suggest that more support is needed to help elite football coaches better cope with the stressors of their role to avoid the associated negative life and well-being implications reported, and subsequent influence on how they function and perform.

<div align="center">**Limitations and Future Directions**</div>

In demonstrating the proposed reflexivity of the research team, we note some limitations of this study. Despite adopting a consistent approach to previous elite coach stress research (e.g., Thelwell et al., 2010), the participants in this study were only asked to discuss their experiences of the three most demanding stressors that they experienced in their roles. Accordingly, researchers have alluded to the key role of importance to the appraisal process (e.g., Didymus & Fletcher, 2017), and how increased task importance has been significantly related to increased levels of anxiety (Nie et al., 2011). Therefore, asking participants to discuss their experiences of the three most demanding stressors

experienced in their roles may have influenced why the participants mostly reported negative transactional experiences and outcomes. Further, the dynamic nature of stress that is likely to influence perceptions of stressors most pertinent at different time points was not captured. In line with Norris et al.'s (2017) recommendation, future research may, therefore, seek to longitudinally explore the stress and well-being experiences of coaches across different points of a season. Such research may offer a more detailed understanding of how stressors may change over time, influence other components of the stress process, and ultimately well-being. Given that CMRT purports stress is a process incorporating a range of interrelated components, future research should also continue to explore innovative ways to represent the relationships between these components, to further understand the stress process and its impact upon mental well-being. Finally, when attempting to understand the implications of the participants' stress experiences on their hedonic and eudaimonic well-being, we note that some of the quotes used to represent low well-being may also be representative of experiences of ill-being (e.g., symptoms of burnout). We encourage future researchers, therefore, to conduct more longitudinal research that seeks to explore the process through which professional football coaches may experience different well-being and ill-being profiles following experiences of stress, and the implications of such profiles for overall mental health and on actual performance.

Conclusion

By adopting Lazarus' (1999) CMRT, this study significantly advances our previously limited understanding of the stress experiences of professional football coaches working at the highest levels of club football (e.g., EPL). Specific insight has been generated regarding the components deemed integral to how individuals experience the stress process (e.g., stressors, situational properties, appraisals, emotions, and

coping). In examining the entire process of stress, we have offered the first empirical study to consider the interrelationships between each component through participants' lived experiences. The examination of the relationship between stress and mental well-being also supports the role of coping effectiveness on reported hedonic and eudaimonic well-being experiences. These findings have significant implications for how current and future professional football coaches are educated and supported regarding the stressors of their role and how they may better manage their own stress experiences to reduce detrimental implications for their practice and their mental well-being.

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CHAPTER 4

STUDY TWO

A longitudinal examination of stress and mental ill/well-being in elite football coaches

I've got a squad of say 25 players at any given time and I can only pick 11. The other players probably don't like you on a Saturday afternoon. I think that this job that we are in is so intense, and there so much expectation and pressure that I think burnout can be prevalent. You need to take every moment you can to recharge within the year. But, I understand why managers won't take time away from it!

- Frank Lampard – Everton Football Club Head Coach

Abstract

A novel concurrent, independent mixed-methods research design was adopted to explore elite association football coaches' stress and mental ill/well-being experiences over the course of an entire season. Elite coaches ($n = 18$) completed measures of perceived stressor severity, coping effectiveness, and mental ill/well-being, with a sample ($n = 8$) also participating in semi-structured interviews, across four time points. Linear mixed model and retroductive analyses revealed: (a) lower mental well-being at the beginning of the season, due to negative appraisals/responses to stressors and ineffective coping attempts; (b) higher emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation at the end of the season; (c) stressors high in severity led to decreased mental well-being (unless coaches coped effectively), and increased symptoms associated with burnout; and (d) ineffective coping attempts led to increased emotional exhaustion. These findings offer novel insight into the specific components of elite football coaches' stress experiences influencing their mental ill/well-being over time.

A longitudinal examination of stress and mental ill/well-being in elite football coaches

The experience of high levels of stress and subsequent detrimental outcomes for elite coaches is well documented in empirical literature (e.g., Potts et al., 2021). Many of these studies have been underpinned by the transactional conceptualisation of stress (*transactional stress theory*; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; *cognitive-motivational-relational theory* [CMRT] of stress and emotion; Lazarus, 1999; for a review see Baldock et al., 2020 [Ph.D. Chapter 2]). Here, stress is viewed as a process involving the transaction between an individual and their environment, whereby an individual first cognitively evaluates (i.e., appraisal) an encountered stressor (i.e., environmental demand) in relation to their personal goals, values, and beliefs (Lazarus, 1999). This cognitive evaluation is influenced by the situational properties of stressors (i.e., underpinning properties of a situation that determines it to be stressful) and involves the extent to which a stressor is appraised as a threat, challenge, harm/loss, or benefit. This process subsequently has implications for how an individual responds (e.g., emotionally and behaviourally), copes, and for performance and mental ill/well-being outcomes (Lazarus, 1999).

Existing explorations of elite coach stress experiences have either considered individual components of the transactional stress process in isolation or the interrelated nature of some of these components (e.g., stressors, appraisals, emotional responses, coping; Baldock et al., 2020) and the ensuing impact on performance (e.g., Didymus, 2017; Olusoga et al., 2009; Thelwell et al., 2017). However, to fully understand elite coaches' stress experiences, researchers have been encouraged to consider the interrelationships between all stress components and their influence on mental ill/well-being (e.g., Didymus, 2017). Indeed, despite being linked as an outcome of the stress process in Lazarus' (1999) CMRT, limited research has comprehensively explored how

coaches' stress experiences might influence their mental ill/well-being. This is potentially indicative of the complexity of the stress process and the difficulty conceptualising both mental ill-being (MIB) and mental well-being (MWB; Baldock et al., 2020).

Defining MWB has been the subject of much conceptual debate, particularly concerning whether it constitutes either of two traditional perspectives (e.g., *hedonic* and *eudaimonic* well-being; Baldock et al., 2020). The hedonic perspective is based on viewing MWB as an outcome, and is represented by an individual experiencing happiness, increased positive affect, and life/job satisfaction (Diener et al., 1999). The eudaimonic perspective is based on viewing MWB as a process and experienced when an individual is flourishing, fulfilling their potential, and engaging in purposeful action in their lives (Ryff, 1989). To experience complete eudaimonia, Ryff postulated that an individual must perceive the satisfaction of six well-being dimensions (i.e., autonomy; environmental mastery; self-acceptance; personal growth; positive relations with others; and purpose in life). Despite such distinct conceptualisations, researchers have recently begun to view MWB as a multidimensional construct incorporating elements of both perspectives (Lundqvist, 2011). In contrast, MIB has received less conceptual consideration and has been vaguely discussed alongside MWB, or, more extensively explored via MIB indicators such as burnout (i.e., a chronic, debilitating form of strain comprising of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and a lack of performance accomplishment; Maslach, 1981), with researchers having often explored how stress-related factors (e.g., workload) and motivational climates might influence coaches' experiences of burnout symptoms (for a review, see Olusoga et al., 2017). MIB has, however, been acknowledged to exist as a separate construct from MWB and despite being related, to exist on its own continuum instead of at opposite ends of the same

(Ryff, 1989). Researchers have also suggested MIB emanates not from an absence of positive affect, but from the distinct experience of negative affect (e.g., anxiety, aversion, distress; cf. Stebbings et al., 2015) and from exposure to environments that thwart an individual's basic psychological needs (e.g., autonomy, competence, relatedness; Bartholomew et al., 2011).

Adopting the multidimensional conceptualisation of MWB, researchers have recently considered factors that might influence the MWB of coaching populations (e.g., Carson et al., 2019; Hill et al., 2021), with their findings revealing that an inability to manage workload, perceiving to have a lack of autonomy and control within their roles, and experiencing feelings of isolation and symptoms of post-competitive loss all negatively influenced coach MWB. These findings advance our understanding of how some factors inherently linked to coaches' stress experiences (e.g., coping with workload, responding to loss) might impact on their MWB. However, much of this research was conducted with coaches operating across different sports and levels and subsequently researchers have failed to consider how the stress process experienced in elite sport-specific contexts might influence coaches' MWB. Further, researchers have tended to only explore isolated aspects of the stress process and their potential impact on coaches' MWB alone. Thus, less is known about how coaches experience the stress process more comprehensively and how it might influence both coaches' MWB and MIB.

In partially attending to these limitations, Baldock et al. (2021 [Ph.D. Study 1]) utilised semi-structured interviews to explore eight elite football (soccer) coaches' stress experiences and the influence of these on their MWB. Baldock et al. reported that irrespective of the participants' appraisals and emotional responses to different stressors, the impact of their stress experiences on MWB was found to be determined by

perceptions of coping effectiveness. These findings offer partial support for the work of McNeill et al. (2018), who identified that high-performance coaches' ability to self-regulate and manage their own perceptions of stress enhanced their MWB and decreased symptoms associated with burnout. Collectively, the findings of the emerging literature provide preliminary support for a direct relationship between coach stress experiences and mental ill/well-being, and particularly the importance of being able to cope effectively to enhance mental well-being. These studies are somewhat limited, however, by their cross-sectional research designs, which are perhaps not representative of Lazarus' (1999) contentions that the interrelational components, and the resulting outcomes, of the transactional stress process change over time as individuals adapt to their stress experiences and encounter new stressors. Longitudinal designs are, therefore, warranted to allow for the examination of how effectively coaches cope with the varying stressors experienced at different time points and how such coping efforts impact mental ill/well-being outcomes (Baldock et al., 2020 [Ph.D. Chapter 2]).

Adopting Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory (SDT; a theory of motivation) to underpin their work, researchers have explored quantitatively how changes in high-performance coaches' perceptions of selected stressors (e.g., workload) and coping strategies (e.g., ability to rest) over a competitive season satisfied or thwarted their basic psychological needs, and subsequently influenced mental ill/well-being (e.g., Altfeld et al., 2015; Bentzen et al., 2016). Collectively, researchers reported enhanced need thwarting and subsequent negative trends in participants' psychological functioning (e.g., high burnout, low well-being) as the season progressed. Despite adopting SDT to underpin their work, however, Bentzen et al. (2016) recognised both stress and motivational perspectives may complement each other in explaining fluctuations of

burnout and MWB, with coaches' perceptions of selected stressors and their ability to cope integral to changes in these outcomes.

The link between stress and motivational perspectives is also supported by Lazarus' (1999) CMRT, with emotional responses suggested to be governed by an evaluative process (i.e., appraisal) that is ultimately goal-orientated (e.g., evaluating a stressor in relation to one's personal goals). Given such links, it could be argued that existing investigations underpinned by motivation theory might be limited in their holistic explanation of the role of stress in influencing coaches' mental ill/well-being fluctuations over time. For example, only selected stressors or coping strategies were considered and, therefore, other stressors and coping strategies that might have equally contributed to mental ill/well/being fluctuations were not explored. Additionally, how coaches' experienced stress cognitively (e.g., appraisals) and affectively (e.g., emotional responses) following stressors was also not explored, despite previously being reported as integral to how stress influences mental ill/well-being outcomes (e.g., positive and negative affect; see Potts et al., 2021). Consequently, adopting a framework to holistically explore how coaches' stress experiences (e.g., stressors, appraisals, emotional responses, coping strategies) may periodically fluctuate and influence their mental ill/well-being could enhance our understanding of the wider causal mechanisms influencing fluctuations over time, and have implications for how coaches are educated on the impact of role-related stress.

Coaches who operate at the apex of their sport are often exposed to a multitude of unique stressors in their role and experience high levels of job insecurity (Cropley et al., 2021). One context in which such demands might be exacerbated is elite football, potentially the most precarious of sports contexts. Indeed, the globalisation of the sport, the financial consequences of success and failure, the level of media and public scrutiny,

and the subsequent high levels of job turnover, which has financial implications for the individual, now typical in professional football, have shaped the context in which coaches operate at the elite level (Thompson et al., 2015). Consequently, the aim of our study was to use Lazarus' (1999) CMRT to inform our exploration of elite football coaches' stress experiences over time, and their specific relationship with mental ill/well-being. We adopted an independent, concurrent mixed-method design comprising simultaneous quantitative and qualitative data collection across four time points of an entire football season (i.e., pre-season [PS], beginning of the season [BOS], mid-season [MS], and end of the season [EOS]). First, we quantitatively explored how phase of the season, perceived severity of stressors experienced, and subsequent perceptions of coping effectiveness predicted mental ill/well-being across the season. Second, we interviewed participants at each time point to explore their stress and mental ill/well-being experiences in order to gain insight into the mechanisms of the potential quantitative relationships identified.

Research Design

Our study was conducted from the post-positivist philosophical position of critical realism (Bhaskar, 1975). Critical realists reject the single dichotomy perspectives of positivism (i.e., if it cannot be observed, it is not real) and constructivism (i.e., all knowledge is constructed socially via discourse), instead believing that different aspects of the world can be better understood through the lenses of either, or even both, positions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Consequently, we adopted an independent, concurrent mixed-methods research design (see Morgan, 2013) comprising quantitative (exploratory) and qualitative (explanatory) data collection across four phases of a competitive professional football season. The quantitative phase explored relationships between specific stress-related factors and coaches' mental ill/well-being levels over time, while qualitative

semi-structured interviews explored in-depth the potential causal mechanisms underpinning these relationships (see Anguera et al., 2018).

Methods

Participants

Eighteen male, full-time, elite football coaches aged between 26 and 53 years old ($M = 38$, $SD = 7.6$) with between one and 20 years of coaching experience ($M = 9.8$, $SD = 6.3$) participated in the quantitative phase. All participants were recruited through direct contact with a football National Governing Body (NGB) and were purposively sampled according to the following criteria: (a) held or currently undertaking a Level 5 Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) Professional Licence football coaching qualification; and, (b) working full-time within the top four leagues of English football (e.g., English Premier League [EPL] to English Football League [EFL] 2), or in the top league of their respective European country. Classed as *competitive elite*, our sample comprised coaches from the EPL ($n = 7$), EFL Championship ($n = 4$), EFL 2 ($n = 2$), and top leagues of European countries (e.g., French Ligue 1, Primeira Liga; Jupiler Pro League; $n = 5$). Eight of the 18 participants also took part in semi-structured interviews at each phase. These participants were aged between 26 and 50 years old ($M = 38.6$, $SD = 7.7$), with coaching experience ranging from five to 20 years ($M = 11.8$, $SD = 5.1$) from the EPL ($n = 4$), EFL Championship ($n = 2$), and French Ligue 1 ($n = 2$).

Measures

Demands/Coping Evaluation Tool

While alternative instruments measuring stressor severity (e.g., Sport-specific Stress Assessment Module; McLoughlin et al., 2022) and coping effectiveness (e.g., Coping Effectiveness Scale; Gottlieb & Rooney, 2004) are available, to ensure relevance to our coaching population, attend to our diverse research aims, and facilitate efficient

longitudinal data collection, an adapted version of Tomaka et al.'s (1993) demands/resources evaluation tool was adopted (see Appendix D). Administered at each phase of the season, this tool prompted participants to self-disclose the three most pertinent stressors they were experiencing at that moment, as well as perceived stressor severity scores (e.g., "How stressful would you rate this demand?"), the coping strategies they adopted, and how effective these coping strategies were (e.g., "How well do you think you coped with this demand?"). Both stressor severity and coping effectiveness questions are scored on a Likert scale from 1 (not stressful, or, coped not well at all) to 6 (very stressful, or, coped extremely well). This scale traditionally determines challenge and threat state scores (e.g., Moore et al., 2012), but we used it to score the stress-related factors explored.

Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale

The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS; Tennant et al., 2007) was used to assess participants' MWB (see Appendix D). This is a 14-item measure (e.g., item: "I've been dealing with problems well"), with all items scored on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (none of the time) to 5 (all of the time). Widely adopted by researchers measuring the MWB of sporting populations (e.g., Grimson et al., 2021), it was utilised over alternative measures as it incorporates cognitive-evaluative dimensions, affective-emotional aspects, and psychological functioning, thus capturing both hedonic and eudaimonic components of MWB (Tennant et al., 2007). Both in previous research (e.g., Cronbach's α = .91; Tennant et al., 2007) and across the four phases of the season in the current study (Cronbach's α scores: PS = .916, BOS = .942, MS = .944, EOS = .928), high internal reliability scores of this measure have been observed.

Maslach Burnout Inventory for Coaches

Given that burnout and its associated symptoms are widely accepted to be indicators of MIB, a coach-adapted version (i.e., the word "recipients" changed to "coaches") of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI; Maslach & Jackson, 1981) was used to assess MIB (e.g., MBI-C; Altfeld & Kellmann, 2014; see Appendix D). Utilised by previous researchers exploring burnout with elite coaching populations (e.g., Altfeld & Kellmann, 2014), and with the traditional MBI a measure of occupational burnout, the MBI-C was used due to the elite nature of the participants whose main occupation was coaching. The MBI-C comprises three subscales: *emotional exhaustion* (6 items; e.g., "I feel emotionally drained from my work"), *depersonalisation* (5 items; e.g., "I worry that this job is hardening me emotionally"), and *personal accomplishment* (7 items; e.g., "I feel I'm positively influencing other people's lives through my work"), with items scored on a Likert scale ranging from 0 (never) to 7 (always). The adapted-MBI-C has previously demonstrated high levels of internal reliability (e.g., Cronbach's α = .87, .70, and .67 for emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment respectively; Altfeld & Kellmann, 2014). Satisfactory to high levels of internal reliability were also found for each subscale across the four phases of the season in the current study: emotional exhaustion (Cronbach's α ranges: .872 - .949), depersonalisation (Cronbach's α ranges: .514 - .894), and personal accomplishment (Cronbach's α ranges: .747 - 895).

Interview Guide

To explore participants' stress and MWB experiences across the season and the mechanisms that may explain relationships between variables identified through the quantitative phase, a semi-structured interview process was adopted (cf. Patton, 2015). An interview guide was developed that comprised a series of standardised questions

related to the aim of the research, designed to guide the general topics of discussion while allowing for flexible supporting questions and probes to be used to encourage participants to elaborate on answers (e.g., "can you explain what you mean by this?"; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). The guide comprised three main sections. First, to prepare participants for the main body of questions and settle them, initial questions focused on their general experiences of the specific phase of the season being explored (e.g., "what type of demands do you generally experience at this point of the season?"). Second, guided by CMRT (Lazarus, 1999), participants were asked questions about their experiences of each of the three stressors they had identified in the quantitative phase (e.g., "how did you appraise this demand and why?"), and the impact of them on their professional and personal lives, including their mental ill/well-being (e.g., "what impact has this demand had on your professional life?"). Finally, as well as offering the participants an opportunity to add any further information, the interviews concluded with a series of questions relating to the rigour of the process (e.g., "were you able to tell your full story?"; see Appendix E).

As a similar line of questioning had been utilised by the first author when collecting data in an earlier study (e.g., Baldock et al., 2021 [Ph.D. Study 1), a pilot study was deemed unnecessary. In demonstrating the reflexivity of the research team, however, a discussion was held between the first and second author prior to data collection in relation to exploring the participants' stress experiences at specific time points, as opposed to exploring them more generally. This discussion led to greater consideration of the temporally specific nature of the interviews and how supporting probes may need to be adjusted (e.g., "can you provide me with an example of how timing may have influenced this response?").

Procedure

Following Institutional Ethics Board approval (see Appendix C), discussions with an NGB identified individuals who met the pre-determined sampling criteria for the study. Individuals ($n = 20$) meeting the criteria were contacted via email, officially asked to participate, and provided with a formal study information sheet. Those responding positively to the invite were then asked to provide written informed consent. Of those contacted, 18 returned signed consent sheets. These individuals were then contacted via email with a link to an online questionnaire (Jisc Online Surveys™), containing the quantitative measures and a reminder of the study information, at four specific time points across the entire season. At each time point, participants were asked to complete the online questionnaire within two weeks of its distribution, all of whom did.

All 18 participants who agreed to participate in the quantitative phase were also invited to take part in interviews at each specified phase of the season. At the BOS, eight participants responded positively to this invite. These participants were then contacted at this phase, and each remaining phase, to arrange a suitable date and time for the interview to take place. One week prior to the interview commencing, all participants were sent a copy of the stressors that they had individually reported within the questionnaire at that specific phase and were asked to consider their experiences of these demands and of the potential impact of their stress experiences on their professional and personal lives. The interviews across all four phases of the season were conducted either face-to-face ($n = 16$) or via Microsoft Teams™ ($n = 16$; due to geographical and access issues), audio recorded, lasting an average of 48 minutes, and transcribed verbatim yielding a total of 237 pages of single-spaced text.

Data Analysis

To explore how the phase of the season, perceived stressor severity, and coping effectiveness predicted mental ill/well-being, four linear mixed models with restricted maximum likelihood were created through JMP (Version 10.02; SAS Discovery software). Each model incorporated the same fixed (e.g., phase, severity of stressors, coping effectiveness, and the interaction between stressor severity and coping effectiveness) and random (e.g., participant ID) factors, with either the participants' MWB or burnout symptom scores (e.g., emotional exhaustion [EE], performance accomplishment [PA], and depersonalisation [DP]) set as dependent variables. How each dependent variable fluctuated across the season was explored, as well as how the fixed factors predicted participants' mental ill/well-being across the season (i.e., how coping effectiveness predicted MWB when controlling for stressor severity at each phase). Descriptive statistics for all fixed factors and dependent variables are reported (see Table 1).

For each of the four models, a range of data check and assumption test procedures were conducted. These included: (a) participant ID being incorporated into each model as a random factor to cater to issues associated with non-independence; (b) visual inspection analyses of the residual plots being conducted, which revealed no obvious deviations from homoscedasticity or normality in the dataset; and (c) variance inflation factor scores of < 2 being obtained for the fixed factors incorporated into each model, demonstrating no issues of multicollinearity.

In line with our critical realist position, a retroductive analysis procedure was conducted for the qualitative phase of the research to generate explanatory insight into the conditions that explained the observed relationships found in the quantitative phase (Danermark et al., 2002). To do so, at each phase of the season, all eight interviews were

read and re-read by the first author to develop familiarity with the content (Braun et al., 2016). Using Lazarus' (1999) CMRT as a guide, data relating to each of the main components of participants' stress experiences for each stressor identified (e.g., situational properties, primary appraisals, emotional responses, impact) were then analysed via directed content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This involved adopting main stress components as overall themes, and where participants offered insight into how they experienced each component of their individual stress experiences, coding their responses in accordance with existing stress theory (e.g., novelty, threat appraisal, anxiety; Baldock et al., 2021; Lazarus, 1999). This encouraged the grouping of codes and allowed for the percentage frequencies of reported data to be taken in an attempt to make comparisons between experiences reported across the different phases of the season. During this process a critical friend approach was adopted, whereby the first author was able to justify any analytical decisions to the rest of the research team and thus improve collective confidence in the analysis outcomes (Smith & McGannon, 2018).

Following initial analysis, to represent participants' individual and collective stress and mental ill/well-being experiences, a series of within-case causal networks (see Wadey et al., 2011) were developed to visually map individuals' stress experiences following each stressor. These were then comparatively analysed and collectively grouped, leading to one conceptually- and time-ordered, cross-case causal network to be developed for each phase of the season (see Appendix F). This process enhanced our understanding of the causal links between stress experiences and specific personal and professional outcomes associated with mental ill/well-being across phases. In line with our critical realist position, this helped us draw causal links between our data and offer detailed explanations of the quantitative findings.

A number of additional procedures were adopted to consider the rigour of the qualitative phase of the study, including: (a) ethical standards being appropriately met throughout; (b) online audit trails of supporting documents (e.g., coded transcripts) maintained at each phase of the analysis, allowing for the assessment of the analytical decisions made throughout; (c) participants being afforded the opportunity to comment on the rigour of the interview process following each interview; and (d) adoption of a member reflection process that allowed participants to review their transcripts, and the final manuscript, to ensure consistency and accuracy in the way in which we had represented their experiences (cf. Smith & McGannon, 2018). All participants provided confirmation of their satisfaction with our interpretations.

Results

In this section we present the findings of both of our exploratory (quantitative) and explanatory (qualitative) analyses. Specifically, after outlining the descriptive statistics of the dependent variables explored across the season, separate sub-sections for each outcome explored (i.e., MWB, EE, DP, PA) are presented. Within these sub-sections, we first describe the quantitative relationships observed in the linear mixed model for that outcome, then present qualitative description/explanations for the quantitative relationships identified, in relation to the mechanisms advocated in Lazarus's (1999) CMRT. A summary of the key, collective findings from both the quantitative and qualitative analyses are also presented in each sub-section.

Descriptive Statistics

Mean variable scores across phases (see Table 1) suggested that the coaches reported moderate MWB levels across all four phases of the season, and only dropped below the UK national average WEMWBS score (e.g., 51.7; Ng Fat et al., 2017) during the BOS phase. Further, mean MBI-C scores indicated that on average the coaches

reported medium levels of EE, high levels of PA, and low levels of DP across each phase, which indicates generally low-medium burnout levels across the season; and are similar to those reported by full-time coaches across a range of other sports (see Altfeld et al., 2015).

Table 1

Mean and standard deviation scores for all variables across four phases of the season.

Analysis Columns	Pre-Season		Beginning of Season		Mid-Season		End of Season	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Severity of Stressors	3.3	1.4	3.7	1.3	4.4	1.2	4.0	1.3
Coping Effectiveness	5.0	0.8	4.6	1.0	4.6	1.0	4.7	1.0
Well-Being	52.1	6.9	49.4	9.7	51.9	8.1	51.7	7.3
Emotional Exhaustion	12.1	6.1	12.4	8.0	13.3	6.7	14.2	5.4
Performance Accomplishment	30.7	5.3	30.1	4.4	29.4	4.5	29.7	5.5
Depersonalisation	7.8	5.1	8.0	4.3	8.1	5.8	9.4	4.3

Model 1: Exploring the Impact of Phase of Season and Stress-Related Factors on MWB

Model one explored the impact of phase of the season and stress-related factors (e.g., stressor severity, coping effectiveness, and their interaction) on coaches' MWB. With an overall model fit of $R^2 = .82$, R^2 *adj.* $= .81$, results indicated that the phase of the season was a predictor of MWB level ($p = < .001$). Specifically, MWB was lower during the BOS in comparison to the other phases of the season (BOS to M-S, +3 [95% CI = 1 to 4, $p = < .001$]; BOS to PS, +2 [95% CI = 1 to 4, $p = < .001$]; and BOS to EOS, +2 [95% CI = 1 to 4, p = < .001]). Further, whilst perceived stressor severity and coping effectiveness scores were not found to be individual predictors of MWB across the season, a main interaction effect was found ($\beta = 0.48$ $S_e = 0.23$, $p = .03$). As scores

relating to the severity of stressors increased, MWB decreased, unless increased coping effectiveness was reported, which led to increased MWB.

Stress Experience Mechanisms Underpinning MWB Fluctuations

Explaining Decreased MWB at the BOS. Lower MWB scores were reported at the BOS than the other phases of the season. As a potential explanation, coaches stated that they experienced the most pressure in their role during the BOS phase, "The expectation, work you've done in pre-season, players that you've brought in, are they going to step up? For me, in comparison to other phases, this is the phase I've felt most pressure in the role." Another coach suggested, "The pressure ramps up. You feel a responsibility to the club, the board … you're expected to push on, new squad, new ideas, all start on zero points. I feel a lot more pressure at the BOS." Lower MWB scores reported at the BOS may be further explained by coaches having particularly negative stress experiences at this phase, which included mostly negative appraisals and ineffective coping mechanisms, subsequently resulting in negative implications for their hedonic (e.g., anxiety) and eudaimonic well-being (e.g., negative relations with others). For example, a greater number of performance (rather than organisational or personal) stressors were reported at the BOS that were largely perceived as ongoing, uncontrollable, and having the potential to negatively influence season goals (e.g., poor start to the season, ongoing key player injuries, player injuries after transfer window closure). The ongoing uncertainty of these stressors was further highlighted by *duration* and *predictability* being the most frequently reported situational properties of these stressors at this phase, with one coach suggesting, "It's (poor start to the season) stressful because other teams have picked up three good wins, and suddenly you're nine points behind. The concern is how long until you pick up a win."

Other than the EOS, coaches also reported appraising stressors experienced at the BOS more negatively (e.g., threat; harm) than stressors experienced at other phases. One coach spoke of how ongoing injuries to key players might hinder their ability to reach set goals for the season (threat), "Our squad was six key players light, and you want a bright start to the season to achieve set goals. You're conscious a bad start makes things incredibly difficult for the season." Coaches also reported only negative emotional responses following negative appraisals, with one coach experiencing anxiety from losing their first few games of the season and not knowing when they would pick up points, "Getting the first points on the board was a worry because it's (winning) out of your control and that played on my mind."

Finally, while strategies from other coping families were also adopted (e.g., problem-solving), coaches reported utilising more self-reliance strategies (e.g., keeping frustrations to oneself) to cope with stressors at the BOS than at any other phase. However, the uncontrollable nature of the stressors experienced, and subsequent uncertainty of them, were reported to often lead to negative implications for the coaches' MWB. For example, coaches referred to how ineffectively dealing with stressors using self-reliance strategies at this phase led to negative affective responses, which influenced their personal relationships, "When I'm alone it's the self-doubt, apprehension, nervousness, worry of getting three points… the problems are the demons in my head", and, "I'm more withdrawn with my family because there's lots on my mind and it influences our relationships." Another coach highlighted how dealing with the expectations of elite football alone was a necessity, but negatively influenced their MWB, "There are certain burdens that only I can carry. I feel it's important that there's things I deal with on my own … it's a lonely business at times, it's recently led to sleepless nights, and I've felt quite low."

Explaining the Relationship between Stressor Severity, Coping Effectiveness, and MWB. As the perceived severity of the reported stressors increased across each phase of the season, MWB levels decreased unless increases in coping effectiveness were reported. In the interviews, coaches indicated that in comparison to reportedly less severe stressors, stressors with higher severity scores across the season were more negatively appraised and responded to, and effectively or ineffectively coping with them ultimately influenced hedonic (e.g., increased positive/negative affect) and eudaimonic well-being dimensions (e.g., relations with others). Specifically, despite utilising a range of coping strategies, coaches reported struggling with stressors high in severity when trying to cope with them alone, and coping more effectively when utilising their social support networks. For example, one coach reported that relying on himself to cope with poor team results had a negative impact on his MWB through experiencing negative affect, highlighting the need for greater support to help him cope more effectively:

> The defeat was bad for me, mentally. I couldn't escape it. I need better coping mechanisms – maybe get some help as it's not like me to experience them feelings. I'm usually good at getting rid of them but these were intense and I struggled with them.

Another coach spoke of his difficulty trying to switch off from the emotions associated with managing his players during the transfer window and the subsequent influence on his personal life relationships, "I don't manage it (player management issues) well … I'll say to my wife, 'C'mon, let's go out for food' and after 10 minutes I'll think about football. I can't switch off from it (negative affect) and that strains our relationship."

From a positive perspective, one coach referenced receiving more support from colleagues to effectively cope with ongoing staff absence, which led to increased perceptions of eudaimonic well-being dimensions (e.g., environmental mastery, personal

growth) and hedonic well-being indicators (e.g., job satisfaction and happiness), "Staff were very willing to go the extra mile to help, and it had a galvanising effect. The effect is it makes you feel a lot happier with how you're managing the situation and satisfied in your job." Another coach discussed speaking to their partner about staff conflict and how it helped them to gain a better perspective, which resulted in the experience of positive mood states:

> It (staff conflict) got intense. So instead of keeping it to oneself, I spoke with my partner about it. It helped because you get a different perspective. You feel a lot calmer about the situation and that puts you in a more positive mood at home and going into work.

Summary of Key Findings. In summary, lower MWB reported at the BOS appeared to result from coaches: experiencing increased pressure to start the season well; experiencing ongoing and uncontrollable performance-related stressors; appraising and responding to these stressors negatively; and ineffectively utilising more self-reliance strategies to cope. This appeared to result in experiencing lower hedonic (e.g., negative affect) and eudaimonic well-being (e.g., negative relations with others). Further, stressors perceived to be high in severity at any phase of the season had negative implications for coaches' MWB, unless coaches reported coping with these stressors effectively. Stressors high in severity were appraised more negatively (than less severe stressors) and when ineffectively coped with, appeared to lead to decreased MWB (e.g., negative affect and relations with others). Utilising social support networks to cope with stressors high in severity, however, was reported to be more effective and appeared to lead to increased MWB (e.g., positive affect, perceptions of mastery).

Model 2: Exploring the Impact of Phase of Season and Stress-Related Factors on

EE

This model investigated the impact of the phase of the season and stress-related factors on levels of EE (R^2 = .84, R^2 *adj.* = .84). The phase of the season significantly predicted levels of EE (p = .003), with EE higher during the EOS phase in relation to two of the three remaining phases (EOS to PS, +2 [95% CI = 1 to 3, p = .001]; and, EOS to BOS, +2 [95% CI = 1 to 3, p < .001]). Further, coping effectiveness was a predictor of EE (β = -0.54, S_e = 0.26, p = .04), with increased scores predicting decreased EE. No significant effects were found between stressor severity and EE, or the interaction between stressor severity and coping effectiveness on EE.

Stress Experience Mechanisms Underpinning EE Fluctuations

Explaining Increased EE at the EOS. Coaches reported higher EE levels at the EOS in comparison to PS and the BOS. Interviews at the EOS phase revealed that coaches mainly experienced more performance and organisational stressors, which were often underpinned by increased uncertainty, mostly appraised as a threat or as harmful to themselves, their clubs, and/or their players, and, therefore, mainly resulted in the experience of negative emotions. One common stressor alluded to by the coaches at this phase that appeared to contribute to increased EE levels was the ongoing workload associated with their role. Indeed, many of the coaches referred to how the relentless workload associated with elite level coaching left them feeling drained during the EOS, with one participant suggesting, "You're just in this relentless cycle … Your game schedule might come to an end but you're already preparing for next season and at that point, you're extremely drained and tired from the season." Another coach referenced the time constraints associated with the many tasks they had to carry out at this phase, "It's the time constraints and feeling that my workload is stretching me really thin. All these

jobs were coming in and I have to get through them and that's very tiring, particularly at this phase."

Participating coaches also reported a range of stressors at the EOS that caused increased uncertainty and were emotionally taxing due to the potential consequences of not adapting to the demand for themselves and relevant stakeholders (e.g., releasing players, loss of form). For example, one coach stated, "It's the level of consequence. You face difficulties all throughout the year, but it's the added emotion at the EOS on all fronts that heightens the exhaustion you feel." Specifically, some of the coaches discussed being fearful of the potential consequences of being on a poor run of form at the EOS, with one suggesting, "The fear of relegation in our club is massive. I imagine it's different for others but there's a lot more pressure on games because of the consequences of not picking up results… relegation, financial reprimands, job security." Another referenced the uncertainty associated with where their team may finish in the league table at the EOS and its subsequent consequences, "The EOS is certainly a pinch point. If we're not in that top six then there's the added anxiety of, 'Where are we going to be next year?', and often, 'Where will me and my family be next year?'" Finally, coaches also alluded to the emotional nature of releasing long-term players from contracts at the EOS:

> The pressure to make the right decision (about contracts) is on because you don't want to say no to a player and then him do really well at another club. It's (EOS) an emotional time because you've seen them grow as people and players. Even if your decision is right for the club, it feels horrible, and you question whether you've made the right decision.

Explaining the Relationship between Coping Effectiveness and EE. How effectively the coaches coped with their stress experiences was found to predict coaches'

levels of EE. This may be explained by the further implications that coaches reported for their general mood states and their professional and personal lives when ineffectively or effectively coping with stressors. Implications that possibly added to or reduced the emotionally exhaustive nature of their roles. For example, after ineffectively coping with their stress experiences many of the coaches reported experiencing negative affective responses (e.g., inability to mentally switch off from the role), which had adverse implications for their family life. One coach described ineffective coping with poor results at the EOS, "As a manager you take full responsibility for results. The lows are so difficult to cope with and whether I'm driving on my own or having dinner with my wife, it's almost impossible to switch off from it and have some mental relief." After ineffectively coping with key player injuries, another coach referred to how their resultant affective responses led to implications for their personal life and further negative feeling states, "The potential impact of it (player injury) meant I was quite moody and snappy at home, which then negatively impacts upon your relationships and makes you feel even worse." Finally, despite high accumulative workload potentially leading to increased feelings of EE, many coaches discussed putting in more effort to cope with work stressors and how this led to detrimental implications for their personal life and to further negative feeling states. For example, one coach suggested, "You're expected to be 24/7 but if you're taking it (work) home and not putting in as much effort into your family, there's certainly resentment towards your work, which obviously snowballs and makes you feel separated."

Summary of Key Findings. The increased EE experienced at the EOS appeared to result from the accumulative effects of a high workload across the season, leaving coaches feeling tired and exhausted, and experiencing a range of uncertain and consequential performance (e.g., poor run of form) and organisational (e.g., releasing

long-term players) stressors at the EOS that were appraised negatively and were emotionally taxing (e.g., fear of relegation, anxiety of family implications if fired). Ineffectively coping with stressors at all phases of the season also led to increased EE scores. This was suggested to result from coaches being unable to get mental relief from the job due to an inability to switch off and experiencing negative affect as a result of ineffective coping, which led to family implications (e.g., strained relationships for prioritising work over family) and further negative emotional states.

Model 3: Exploring the Impact of Phase of Season and Stress-Related Factors on DP

This model investigated the impact of the phase of the season and stress-related factors on coaches' DP levels. With an overall model fit of $R^2 = .72$, R^2 *adj.* $= .71$, phase of the season was found to predict DP ($p = .03$), with scores higher at the EOS in comparison to other phases (EOS to PS, +1 [95% CI = 0 to 2, $p = .02$]; EOS to BOS, +1 [95% CI = 0 to 2, $p = .02$]; and, EOS to MS, +1 [95% CI = 0 to 2, $p = .009$]). Perceived severity of the stressors reported also predicted DP ($\beta = 0.43$, $S_e = 0.2$, $p = .03$), whereas no main effect was found for coping effectiveness or the interaction between coping effectiveness and perceived stressor severity.

Stress Experience Mechanisms Underpinning DP Fluctuations

Explaining the Increased DP at the EOS. Coaches reported higher DP levels at the EOS in comparison to other phases of the season. A possible explanation for this is that coaches reported experiencing many situations of conflict in their roles at this phase (e.g., players challenging coach decisions, staff conflict). Stressors related to conflict were largely negatively appraised, consequently resulting in negative affective responses (e.g., cynicism, anger) and professional life implications characteristic of DP (e.g., frayed relationships with others). For example, one coach alluded to the threat, disappointment,

and negatively influenced perceptions of the club chairman after disagreements on future club direction:

> I've worked hard to get the club into its position and he (chairman) was proposing to take it in another direction … My work was being threatened … and that was disappointing and caused me to feel quite cynical about him professionally and personally.

Another coach alluded to feelings of anger and a loss of respect for a player after they inappropriately challenged an assistant coach's decisions, "If he'd done it (challenge a coach decision) respectfully, I'd have been alright. It made me angry that to a coach who's shown him so much attention, he answered him back and it made me lose respect for him." Finally, coaches highlighted how staff conflict on role responsibilities led to increased tension and strained professional relationships, "Feeling strained, especially with people I work with. It impacts upon relationships because you feel compromised. You're doing more than you should and if it's someone's job you just want them to get on with it."

Explaining the Relationship between Stressor Severity and DP. Increased perceived severity of the reported stressors was also found to predict increased DP. During the interviews, coaches revealed that negative appraisals and emotional responses to stressors high in severity across all phases of the season often led to cognitive and affective states associated with DP (e.g., resentfulness, detachment from their role). For example, when discussing player recruitment, one coach alluded to how the severity of the stress experience negatively influenced his perceptions of this aspect of the role, "The pressure, demand, the volume of phone calls and activity required when signing players, it was bloody ridiculous. It can't be good for people's health, and you begin to feel quite bitter about the process." Another coach discussed how the emotional toll of working

with players with no future led to him feeling frustrated and demotivated in the role, "It's (helping players with no future) really emotionally raw as I was trying to help people that didn't necessarily want to be helped, which leads to feeling quite frustrated with your work and demotivated." When discussing a particularly stressful fixture schedule during the MS phase, one coach referred to the lack of belief he had for his ability to obtain positive results, "It's (schedule) stressful and we're struggling and so a sense of resign, uselessness, and powerlessness. A sense of going against the wind with my sails up and it's hard to see it in a positive light." Finally, when discussing the stressfulness of managing players on big contracts at the EOS, one coach spoke of developing a dislike and lack of interest in this job, "It's (player egos) horrible 'me not we' culture and it kills me. I'm not interested. It's one of those socially intense times where I hate the game, and that isn't healthy."

Many of the coaches also reported being callous and impersonal to players, colleagues, and family members (i.e., DP-related behavioural responses) when experiencing particularly severe stressors. For example, one coach discussed being increasingly insensitive and lacking his usual empathy for players when having to deal with player selection decisions at the EOS, "What I'm seeing is my interactions with players are becoming shorter, sharper, and blunter. Whereas normally, I'd dress things up to not hurt them." Another coach reported staff absence to be a severe stressor, which resulted in a lack of care for players and other staff, "The situation and its component parts probably made me less patient with players and colleagues, less focused on other people's needs, and probably quite impersonal if I'm being honest." Finally, during the MS phase, one coach referred to how the stressfulness of the hectic fixture schedule and its subsequent emotional impact led to him isolating himself further from his family:

It's (MS - December) a very demanding period. For families up and down the
country, it's a time for everyone to come together for the festivities. For us, the
traveling and the games you play, it's the opposite. While you accept it, the
overwhelming nature of it almost makes you shut off your family due to the guilt of
it (being away from home).

Summary of Key Findings. The increased DP experienced at the EOS was
suggested to result from coaches experiencing stressors associated with conflict at this
phase (e.g., disagreements with the club chairman), appraising them negatively, and
subsequently experiencing increased DP-related cognitive and affective responses (e.g.,
cynicism towards others, loss of respect for players). Highly severe stressors at any point
of the season were also found to lead to increased DP. Similarly, this appeared to be
because of coaches appraising particularly severe stressors negatively and this leading to
a range of cognitions and affective states characteristic of DP in relation to the job role
and to others (e.g., feeling demotivated, being callous towards others, lacking empathy
for players and staff).

**Model 4: Exploring the Impact of Phase of Season and Stress-Related Factors on
PA**

This model investigated the impact of the phase of season and stress-related
factors on levels of PA. With an overall model fit of $R^2 = .62$, $R^2 adj. = .61$, the perceived
severity of the reported stressors predicted PA across the season ($\beta = -0.61$, $S_e = 0.23$, $p = .01$). Specifically, increased stressor severity scores predicted decreased PA. No main
effects were found for phase of season and coping effectiveness, and no interactional
effects for perceived severity of the stressors reported and coping effectiveness scores on
PA were observed.

Stress Experience Mechanisms Underpinning PA Fluctuations

Explaining the Relationship between Stressor Severity and PA. Increased perceived severity of the stressors experienced by coaches predicted lower PA scores across the season. Many of the highly severe stressors reported by coaches at all time points were associated with results (e.g., loss of form) or factors influencing team performance (e.g., injuries to key players, quality of training). These demands were mainly appraised as threatening or potentially harmful, which led to various cognitive and affective states characteristic of low PA (e.g., decreased perceptions of professional competence and self-esteem). For example, one coach during the MS phase suggested, "They (poor results) affect you as a person and inflict pressure on you. It's made me question myself, the decisions I've made, and whether I'm good enough to succeed in the job." Another coach, having rated a loss of form at the EOS as high in severity, discussed its negative impact upon his own and his players self-esteem and confidence, "We finished on a low. Previously, we've lifted trophies, been promoted, and made memories. This year wasn't good at all and professionally and confidence-wise, the lack of success hit me and the players hard." At the BOS, another coach discussed how his demeanour and perceptions of competence changed due to the stressfulness of starting the season well, "I was more edgy due to the pressure to start well, but also lacking enthusiasm. You think, 'am I the right guy for the job?'"

From a performance perspective, one coach discussed how losing a key player to injury at the BOS left him questioning his competence, "The pressure increases, and you consider whether you could've done anything to prevent the injury. What was their (physical) load going into the incident? Was there something you could've done to avoid the injury?" When encountering insufficient players in training due to availability, another coach referred to how not engaging in good match preparation left him feeling

underwhelmed with the quality of his work, "You feel pressure as your practice isn't where you want it and detail-wise due to lacking sufficient numbers. That's frustrating and leaves you quite underwhelmed with the quality of your work." Finally, the stressfulness associated with the volume of games at the MS phase led to one coach feeling frustrated and disappointed when letting it influence their decisions:

> It's (volume of games) stressful because it's trying to get the balance right between overloading players, using the squad well, and maintaining results. We'd made the decision in October that we were going to change five or six players to keep it fresh. The boys win on Boxing Day and then I went against the plan, and we get stuffed on New Year's. I'm disappointed in myself. It felt like I'd let myself and the players down.

Summary of Key Findings. As the perceived severity of the stressors experienced increased, PA scores decreased, which appeared to result from many severe stressors emerging from poor results or performance-related issues (e.g., injuries to key players), being appraised negatively and leading to low PA indicators (e.g., feeling underwhelmed with their work).

Discussion

We adopted a concurrent, independent mixed-methods research design to explore elite football coaches' stress and mental ill/well-being experiences over the course of a competitive season. In doing so, we have addressed calls for longitudinal examination of coach stress, as a way of better understanding how and why stress experiences may change over time and influence fluctuations in mental ill/well-being (Didymus et al., 2018). Our findings indicated that elite football coaches experienced moderate levels of MWB and low-medium levels of burnout symptoms across the season. We also found: (a) MWB scores were lower at the BOS, which appeared to result from coaches' negative

appraisals/responses to persistent and uncontrollable performance stressors (e.g., poor results) and ineffective coping attempts, with increased use of self-reliance strategies; (b) EE and DP scores were higher during the EOS in comparison to other time points, perhaps as a result of negative appraisals/responses to stressors associated with accumulative workload, interpersonal conflict, and a range of other performance and organisational stressors (e.g., releasing long term players); (c) stressors high in severity led to decreased MWB unless coaches coped effectively, with particular value placed on utilising social support networks; (d) stressors high in severity led to increased DP and decreased PA across the season, which appeared to result from negative appraisals/responses to stressors via a range of DP- and PA-related cognitions, affective states, and behaviours (e.g., demotivation, questioning own competence, and low self-esteem); and (e) coping effectiveness predicted EE scores across the season, with ineffective coping attempts resulting in the experience of negative affect and subsequent personal implications. Collectively, our findings advance understanding by providing a unique insight into the components (and their interrelationships) of coaches' stress experiences and how they influence mental ill/well-being over time.

A novel finding from our linear mixed model analysis was that coaches reported lower levels of MWB at the BOS, whereas previous research has found the MWB of elite coaches to decrease as their respective seasons progressed (e.g., Bentzen et al., 2016). In our study, coaches reported experiencing significant pressure in their roles to start the season well, and a range of uncontrollable performance stressors (e.g., poor performances, injuries to key players) at the BOS, which they appraised as threatening or harmful to the goals they had set for the season. Coinciding with such stressors and appraisals, a lack of perceived success has been reported to negatively influence the elite coaches' MWB, as role pressure often leads to viewing poor results as a threat to job

safety and doubts regarding personal competence (e.g., Altfeld et al., 2015). In elite

football, this pressure is potentially exacerbated by the time, effort, and significant

money coaches often spend during PS trying to assemble a squad of players good enough

to obtain positive results when the season commences (Baldock et al., 2021). Therefore,

with many coaches having experienced a difficult start to the season despite such

personal and club investment, their perceptions of a range of MWB dimensions (e.g.,

perceptions of competence, sense of purpose; see Ryff, 1989) may have been negatively

affected at the BOS, resulting in lower MWB. With the stressors experienced reported as

largely uncontrollable, elite football coaches might protect their MWB at this phase by

managing their own and other key stakeholders' (e.g., chairperson) expectations of the

BOS by setting more realistic performance targets. Akin to Lazarus' (1999) CMRT,

attempting to view uncontrollable stressors in a more adaptive manner (e.g., as a

challenge) could also lead to positive emotional responses (e.g., excitement) and to

favourable perceptions of MWB dimensions (Potts et al., 2021).

The coaches in this study also reported increased use of self-reliance coping

strategies at the BOS in comparison to other phases, and that such strategies were largely

ineffective, which appeared to lead to adverse implications for their MWB (e.g., negative

affect, strained personal and professional relationships). Relying on oneself to cope with

the uncontrollable performance stressors experienced at the BOS might be representative

of the high levels of job turnover experienced by coaches in elite football (Morrow &

Howieson, 2018). With their jobs being under threat should their teams continue to

under-perform, it appears the coaches might have been trying to exert a level of control

over stressors by dealing with them and their implications alone. However, in accord

with Cropley et al.'s (2021) contentions, adopting self-reliance strategies and carrying

the mental burden of these uncontrollable situations alone only appeared to augment the

issues that the coaches in this study experienced. Consequently, the coaches took their negative affective responses from these situations into other aspects of their work and home-life, which adversely influenced their experience of eudaimonic well-being dimensions (e.g., quality of relations with others). Given these findings, it appears imperative, particularly at the BOS, that coaches consider making better use of their social support networks as it may help them to offload, gain increased perspective, demonstrate more adaptive responses to stressors, and subsequently support the experience of MWB (Norris et al., 2020).

In Baldock et al.'s (2021 [Ph.D. Study 1]) qualitative study of elite football coaches, coping effectiveness was found to determine whether stress experiences positively or negatively influenced MWB. In this study, however, our linear mixed model results indicated that coping effectiveness alone did not predict MWB fluctuations across the season, only predicting MWB when controlling for stressor severity (i.e., as perceived severity of the stressors experienced increased, MWB levels decreased unless coping effectiveness scores increased). This finding suggests that coping effectively with stressors high in severity might be more important for coaches' MWB than it is for stressors perceived to be less severe. This might be because coping effectively with highly severe stressors is perhaps more likely to lead to increased perceptions of competence and personal growth (i.e., eudaimonic well-being dimensions, see Ryff, 1989), due to coaches demonstrating an ability to respond adaptively to more meaningful and demanding stressors.

Coaches in this study also reported to cope more effectively with stressors high in severity across the season and report subsequent positive MWB implications (e.g., perceived sense of purpose and belonging, job satisfaction) when adopting support seeking strategies. Such findings collectively support the underlying contentions of

Fletcher and Sarkar's (2016) challenge-support matrix for developing psychological resilience (i.e., using personal assets to protect oneself from the negative effects of stressors), whereby an environment comprising high levels of challenge (i.e., highly severe stressors) and low levels of support (i.e., social support) can be an unrelenting environment and compromise an individual's MWB. In contrast, operating in an environment that is highly challenging but where individuals feel highly supported has been reported to be a facilitative environment that leads to the development of resilience and presents an opportunity for individuals to experience personal growth. Thus, while the efficacy of specific coping strategies may differ across individuals due to coping being an intrapersonal process (Lazarus, 1999), there appears a growing consensus surrounding the potentially adaptive nature of seeking social support as a coach in attempts to cope with stressful performance stressors and it leading to positive MWB implications (Norris et al., 2020).

While previous research has reported elite coaches experience higher levels of EE and DP at the EOS (e.g., Bentzen et al., 2017), our linear mixed model results advance these findings by revealing that coaches' EE levels were higher at the EOS in comparison to PS and the BOS but not the MS phase. This is perhaps an indication that EE gradually accumulates as the season progresses. Paradoxically, despite the coaches often attributing ongoing workload across the season to this finding, coaches in this study still referenced taking work home during the EOS due to the added potential consequences associated with poor results at this phase (e.g., merit payments, potential job loss, damage to personal reputation). They also reported this to lead to family life implications (e.g., family resenting work) and to further negative emotional states (e.g., anxiety, guilt). Researchers have previously reported that an increased frequency of stressors can lead to burnout implications in elite coaches (see Wagstaff et al., 2018). Our findings offer

further explanation for this relationship, as allowing performance and organisational stressors to interfere with their lives away from the role exposed the coaches in our study to additional personal stressors that appeared to increase the frequency of experienced negative emotional states, which would likely have contributed to elevated perceptions of EE. Considering the growing body of literature reporting that increasing effort and working longer hours in attempts to chase success might be problematic for coaches' mental ill/well-being (e.g., Altfeld et al., 2015; Didymus et al., 2018), researchers have advocated for coaches to ensure they engage in activities that allow them to completely detach from their work. Attempting this at the EOS, however, when there is significant pressure and potential consequences associated with not achieving positive results, might appear unrealistic for elite football coaches as it could augment the negative emotional states experienced (e.g., increased anxiety due to perceived insufficient match preparation). Instead, coaches might be better served preparing themselves and their families for potentially increased workload at the EOS, and pre-planning family time and opportunities for rejuvenation during the off-season. Doing so might alleviate the added personal stressors emanating from work-home life interference and reduce the likelihood of experiencing further negative emotional states contributing to EE (Cropley et al., 2021).

Through analysis of the interviews, the elevated DP levels reported at the EOS were explained by increased experiences of interpersonal conflict in the workplace, leading to negative perceptions of others and wanting to withdraw from those relationships at work (i.e., representations of DP; see Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Incidentally, interpersonal conflict might be characteristic of the elite football environment at the EOS due to increased pressure for results and the potentially conflicting agendas of coaches and other key stakeholders at clubs (e.g., coaches needing

results and non-starting players vying for more playing time to justify a renewed contract; Morrow & Howieson, 2018). Researchers have indicated, however, that if the conditions that coaches operate in thwart their basic psychological needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness, it can lead to MIB implications (e.g., Stebbings et al., 2015). Accordingly, thwarting the basic need of *relatedness*, which reflects the extent to which an individual feels they have positive relationships and belong to a community of others (Ryan & Deci, 2020), due to increased interpersonal conflict at work during the EOS may explain why coaches in this study reported increased DP levels. Consequently, in collaboration with the organisation, coaches may benefit from creating an environment that cultivates openness and clarity on role and performance expectations and giving thoughtful consideration to team composition when hiring new staff, as it may reduce experiences of conflict and ensuing perceptions of DP at highly pressurised phases of the season (Wachsmuth et al., 2020).

Finally, we found increased perceived severity of stressors predicted increased DP and decreased PA levels across the season. While it is our understanding that perceived stressor severity has yet to be directly linked to burnout symptoms in elite coach populations, negative appraisals of stressors have been found to lead to mental ill/well-being implications (e.g., increased negative affect; Potts et al., 2021). Building upon these findings, our interview data revealed that coaches in our study appraised stressors high in severity negatively and resultantly experienced a range of negative affective responses that could be directly linked to manifestations of DP (e.g., frustration, demotivation, aversion for others and aspects of the role) and a lack of PA (decreased perceptions of professional competence and self-efficacy). Through CMRT, Lazarus (1999) contended that the appraisal process is integral to how individuals respond and cope, and to performance and MWB outcomes. Accordingly, our findings significantly

contribute to this understanding by indicating that appraisals also appear to be a key mediator of the relationship between severe stressors and burnout symptoms in elite football coaches. Thus, eliminating the risk of coaches experiencing burnout symptoms in response to severe stressors can come from helping coaches adapt their stressor appraisals. One efficacious approach at doing so might involve developing coaches' abilities to engage in critical reflection across the season, as it has been found to enhance coaches' awareness of how they experience stress and lead to more transformational and adaptive responses to future stressors (i.e., viewing stressors as a challenge and finding more effective resolutions to them; cf. Cropley et al., 2021).

Limitations and Future Directions

Although we believe our findings advance understanding of how the stress experiences and associated mental ill/well-being outcomes of elite football coaches fluctuate over time, we note some limitations. First, coaches in this study were only asked to outline the three most pertinent stressors experienced at each phase and discuss their subsequent stress experiences of them. Other stressors and subsequent stress experiences that may have equally contributed to their mental ill/well-being were not explored. Researchers may, therefore, want to consider research designs that will help them obtain a more complete understanding of the demanding aspects of coaches' roles, as it may lead to more comprehensive insight into the factors contributing to performance and mental ill/well-being.

Second, alongside exploring the three most pertinent stressors at each phase, stressor severity and coping effectiveness scores were assessed via an adapted version of Tomaka et al.'s (1993) demands/resource evaluation tool, which measured these constructs via single items. The use of single item measures can facilitate efficient data collection procedures, which was pertinent in our study due to the commitment asked of

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the sample who were working in highly demanding situations throughout their year-long participation. However, while we appreciate that single items used to measure constructs of little psychological breadth have been recently supported within the psychology literature (see Allen et al., 2022), assessments of reliability (e.g., internal consistency) and validity (e.g., content validity) of these measures adopted in our study were not conducted. Researchers might consider, therefore, utilising alternative, multiple item measures of these constructs to further enhance the reliability and validity of their findings.

Third, only a sample of the initial cohort agreed to participate in interviews at each phase. Therefore, whilst these findings potentially provide us with further mechanistic insight into aspects of the coaches' stress experiences that may explain their mental ill/well-being fluctuations, these experiences might not represent those of all the initial cohort. Caution is needed, therefore, regarding the interpretative potential of the qualitative findings reported, specifically in relation to them being definitive explanations of the linear mixed model results.

Finally, Lazarus' (1999) CMRT proposed two main antecedents influencing an individual's experience of stress: situational factors (e.g., situational properties of stressors) and the personal characteristics of the individual (e.g., personal beliefs, personality traits). Therefore, whilst our findings have advanced our understanding of how experiences of stress might fluctuate across the season and influence elite football coaches' mental ill/well-being, we only explored situational factors (e.g., situational properties of stressors) in this study. Thus, researchers might also wish to explore how the personal characteristics of elite football coaches (e.g., resilience, hardiness) may influence their stress experiences (e.g., how they generally appraise stressors) and their subsequent impact upon their mental ill/well-being.

Conclusion

By adopting a concurrent mixed methods research design, we believe our study advances understanding of the factors influencing elite football coaches' mental ill/well-being across an entire season. To our knowledge this is the first study to: (a) explore fluctuation in levels of both mental ill- and well-being of elite football coaches across a season; (b) explore how stress-related factors influence elite football coaches' mental ill/well-being; and (c) use Lazarus' (1999) CMRT as a framework to understand how elite football coaches' stress experiences differ across the season, influence their lives, and explain mental ill/well-being fluctuations. Our findings highlight that positively appraising stressors (e.g., viewing stressors as a challenge), effectively regulating emotional and affective states, and adapting coping strategies to different stressors (e.g., utilising social support to cope with stressors high in severity) may play a significant role in maintaining increased MWB levels across the season. These findings have implications for football coach education programmes and NGBs. Specifically, organisations might consider how they educate coaches around fluctuating stress experiences associated with the role at the elite level, and to enhance coaches' self-awareness of how they experience stress across the season. Finally, attention should be afforded to the development of coaches' coping repertoires to improve their capacities to maintain their mental ill/well-being over time.

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CHAPTER 5

STUDY THREE

Developing a Stress and Mental Ill/Well-Being Football Coach Education Intervention: Supporting Elite Football Coaches with the Demanding Nature of their Role

I think the key trait for managers – which is the hardest thing in the world to do, is find that space to grow, to reflect, the look from 10, 000 feet on what you've been doing well, but also have that life balance. You don't actually realise the pace you're moving until you step back and step away from it!

- Lee Johnson - Hibernian Football Club Manager

Abstract

A multi-part, sequential exploratory mixed-methods research design was adopted to develop a stress and mental ill/well-being intervention for elite football coaches. In part one, elite football coaches ($n = 15$) participated in semi-structured interviews designed to explore their perspectives on how they may be better supported to cope with role-related demands and maintain high levels of mental well-being. Results indicated that coach education programme providers, clubs, national governing bodies, and coaches themselves could all do more to better prepare and support elite football coaches for the demanding nature of their roles and its potential implications. Using these findings and those in the extant literature, a stress and mental ill/well-being coach education intervention for elite football coaches was proposed. Utilising a Delphi method, in part two expert panellists ($n = 10$) iteratively evaluated the efficacy of the proposed intervention, providing a series of additions and amendments. After three rounds of feedback and amendments, consensus was reached on the potential efficacy of the intervention components, readying the overall intervention for implementation. This study offers novel insight and presents a unique methodological approach to the development of a fit-for-purpose stress and mental ill/well-being intervention for elite football coaches.

Developing a Stress and Mental Ill/Well-Being Football Coach Education Intervention: Supporting Elite Football Coaches with the Demanding Nature of their Role

The stress experiences of elite coaches have received significant research attention (see Potts et al., 2021). This attention has coincided with the professionalisation of coaching, and the greater acceptance of the notion that, like elite athletes, coaches are also performers in their own right and must "perform" in the face of significant role-related pressure (Thelwell et al., 2017). This pressure is manifested through the multitude of stressors (i.e., environmental demands) elite coaches experience daily, which they must cope with to effectively function in their roles (Cropley et al., 2020). An elite coach's failure to cope with stressors can lead to a range of negative stress-related responses (e.g., frustration with work, lacking energy, pacifying colleagues), and implications for their own performance and that of their athletes (e.g., decreased creativity, ineffective session delivery; Baldock et al., 2021 [Ph.D. Study 1]). Consequently, elite coaches must effectively cope with their role-related stress experiences (e.g., stressors and responses to them), as failure to cope may lead to an inability to appropriately support and guide their athletes to optimal performance, and thus deliver on the main remit of their role (e.g., obtaining positive results; Cropley et al., 2020).

Alongside the potential impact on performance, ineffectively coping with stress has been reported by coaches to lead to implications for mental well-being and the experience of symptoms associated with mental ill-being (e.g., role withdrawal, fatigue, private life interference, immoderate alcohol consumption, and depression; see Kenttä et al., 2020). A growing body of quantitative research has also explored the impact of stress experiences on burnout (i.e., a chronic, debilitating form of strain and ill-being indicator;

Maslach, 1981) and the mental well-being of coaches operating across different sports (e.g., Didymus et al., 2020; McNeill et al., 2018). Collectively, these studies report that high workload, perceptions of job insecurity, and low self-regulation capacity can negatively impact coaches' mental well-being and enhance burnout. Through qualitative explorations of coaches' mental ill/well-being experiences, researchers have also suggested high workload, work-home life interference, and an inability to psychologically recover from stress can lead to burnout (Bentzen et al., 2017; Lundqvist et al., 2012).

Given that researchers had often sampled coaches operating across different sports in previous coach-stress explorations, Baldock et al. (2021 [Ph.D. Study 1]) considered the context-specific nature of elite coaching and qualitatively explored the stress and mental well-being experiences of professional football coaches. Building on findings reported in previous literature (e.g., McNeill et al., 2017), coping effectiveness was reported to ultimately determine the impact of stress experiences on mental well-being. Specifically, many of the coaches suggested that when they ineffectively coped with their stress experiences, their mental well-being states were negatively influenced (e.g., reduced perceptions of personal growth). The findings of a further longitudinal, mixed-method study also revealed that ineffectively coping with, what elite football coaches identified as, high severity stressors (e.g., poor run of results, high workload) across the season led to decreased mental well-being and burnout implications for these coaches (Baldock et al., 2022 [Ph.D. Study 2]). This body of work provides novel insights into the context-specific stress and mental ill/well-being experiences of elite football coaches. It also substantiates the need for greater efforts to be made to help them develop the capacities to, and/or be supported to, cope with role-related stress in order to protect their mental well-being and avoid mental ill-being symptoms.

In an attempt to identify ways that elite coaches across different sports could avoid the potential negative performance and mental ill/well-being implications of work-related stress, a range of protective factors have been afforded increased research attention (e.g., rest and recovery, hardiness, resilience; see Altfeld et al., 2015; Cropley et al., 2020; Sarkar & Hilton, 2020). Specifically, appropriate rest and psychological recovery throughout a season, perceived high levels of social support, and increased hardiness and resilience have been suggested to help coaches cope more effectively with stress and buffer against its potential negative implications. Additionally, while some mixed results have been found regarding the efficacy of coach stress management interventions, the following positive implications have also been reported: (a) mental skills training workshops can enhance coaches' abilities to perform better under pressure (e.g., Olusoga et al., 2014); (b) bespoke workshops and 1-to-1 sport psychology support sessions can develop coaches' emotional regulation capacities (e.g., Wagstaff et al., 2013); (c) web-based mindfulness training programmes can reduce coaches' negative perceptions of stress (e.g., Lundqvist et al., 2018); and, (d) developing coaches' self-regulation competencies can decrease coach burnout and enhance their mental well-being (e.g., McNeill et al., 2020).

While the existing stress management intervention literature suggests that successful efforts can be made to help elite coaches across different sports cope more effectively with role-related stress experiences (e.g., McNeill et al., 2020), this literature remains in its relative infancy and the study designs that researchers have utilised need refining to enhance their efficacy across contexts. To elaborate, in many of the existing stress management intervention studies, researchers have sampled elite coaches operating across a range of different sports (e.g., Olusoga et al., 2014; McNeill et al., 2020). Thus, while some of the interventions designed aimed to develop individual coach capacities

(e.g., ability to regulate their emotions), or their ability to utilise strategies more effectively to cope with role-related stress experiences (e.g., effective mental skill utilisation), the contexts (different sports) within which each coach operates, and therefore experiences stress, appears to have been largely neglected during intervention development. This may have contributed to the mixed outcomes reported regarding intervention efficacy and to why researchers have advocated for future intervention designs that cater to the specific contextual needs of homogenous coaching populations (see McNeill et al., 2020).

A further issue with previous intervention designs is that while some researchers have afforded coaches' input into specific aspects of the stress management interventions developed for them (e.g., McNeill et al., 2020), most researchers have neglected the perspectives of the individuals who operate in the contexts for which they are often designed, leading to interventions that may be theoretically sound but contextually unsuitable. In accord, it has been suggested that without the participation of various personnel relevant to the context, a tailored stress management intervention, particularly at an organisational level, cannot be appropriately designed (Elo et al., 2008). Seeking stakeholders' perspectives (e.g., coaches, coach educators, performance directors) during intervention design can allow recipients and facilitators of the intervention to express their own ideas and preferences towards stress management solutions and/or their fit in the organisational context (Rumbold et al., 2018), potentially influencing the engagement of recipients in proposed interventions (Robertson et al., 2013). Thus, obtaining the perspectives of stakeholders when designing stress management interventions for coaches may be crucial to the development of theoretically sound and contextually relevant interventions.

In summary, stress management interventions developed for coaches across sports have been criticised for: (1) failing to consider the specific context of the sports that coaches receiving them might operate in; and, (2) lacking contextual and practical credence due to not considering the perspectives of the end-users (i.e., coaches) and/or those who might support the delivery of them (i.e., organisational staff; Rumbold et al., 2018). Such critique may be particularly pertinent for those attempting to develop a stress and mental ill/well-being intervention for coaches operating in the context of elite football. Indeed, elite football presents a precarious context for a coach to operate in due to its globalisation, the pressure to succeed, the levels of public and media scrutiny, and the high coach job turnover representative of modern-day football (Morrow & Howieson, 2018). Further, despite researchers finding that role-related stress experiences can lead to adverse implications for elite football coaches' mental well-being and the experience of mental ill-being symptoms (e.g., Baldock et al., 2021 [Ph.D. Study 1]; Baldock et al., 2022 [Ph.D. Study 2]), outdated ideals arguably still exist in elite football regarding coaches exuberating machoism and masculinity in attempts to demonstrate their ability to cope with demands of the job and retain their perceived worth to club stakeholders (e.g., club boards and owners; Knoppers et al., 2022). Indeed, Baldock et al.'s findings do present a compelling case regarding the need for the development of a stress and mental ill/well-being intervention aimed at helping elite football coaches better cope with role-related stress. Nevertheless, the context and culture of the sport means that developing an intervention from theory alone, and not obtaining input from elite football coaches themselves or other key football stakeholders during design, will lead to a decrease in the contextual suitability and practical application of the intervention and to a lack of buy-in from elite football coaches.

Consequently, in this two-part study we aimed to obtain the perspectives of a range of relevant key stakeholders to develop, and evaluate the potential efficacy of, a proposed stress and mental ill/well-being intervention for elite football coaches. Specifically, we sought to: (a) obtain the perspectives of elite football coaches on how they may be better supported to cope with role-related demands and maintain positive states of mental well-being; (b) use this data and the findings of previous research to develop a multifaceted coach stress and mental ill/well-being intervention; and, (c) conduct an evaluation (Delphi method) of the proposed intervention prior to full development to ensure its theoretical, contextual, and practical suitability.

Research Design

In this study a multi-part research project underpinned by the philosophical position of critical realism is presented (Lincoln et al., 2011). Those adopting this position understand and accept that an objective world exists, while recognising that knowledge of that world is often socially constructed from our experiences within it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). Further, they perceive knowledge development stems from the problems that we face and trying to answer the questions we have about the world (Danermark et al., 2002). Specifically, in attempts to attend to the aim of the study (i.e., the problem faced), the perceptions of key agents in relation to the study objectives were explored and informed the social construction of knowledge in relation to each objective (subjectivity), as well as group consensus sought on the efficacy of the coach stress and mental ill/well-being intervention proposed (objectivity). To do so, a multi-part, exploratory sequential mixed-methods research design was adopted that involved: (a) qualitative, semi-structured interviews to develop new knowledge that could inform the development of a proposed coach stress and mental well-being intervention (e.g., part one); and, following this, (b) a Delphi method to obtain qualitative and quantitative

feedback from a range of theoretical, contextual, and practical experts (e.g., coach education providers, sport psychologists) on the potential efficacy of the proposed intervention (part two). Both approaches were deemed appropriate given our limited understanding of elite football coaches' perceptions of how they may be better supported to cope with role-related stress, and to gain comprehensive, iterative insight from experts on the potential efficacy of a bespoke, proposed intervention.

Part One: Identifying Future Coping Considerations for Elite Football Coaches

Methods

Participants

The sample consisted of 15 male elite football coaches aged between 26 and 56 years old ($M = 42.2$, $SD = 8.2$), with a varied level of coaching experience ranging from three to 20 years ($M = 9.7$, $SD = 5.4$). All participants were sampled purposively according to the following criteria: (a) currently employed as a 1st team head coach in the top four leagues of English football (e.g., English Premier League to English Football League 2), or, in the top league of their respective European country (e.g., French Ligue 1); (b) had completed, or, were current Union of European Football Association (UEFA) Pro-Licence candidates (Level 5); and, (c) had operated at their current level of football coaching for a minimum of two years.

Instrumentation

Given the exploratory nature of this study, we adopted a semi-structured interview process as a means of data collection. An interview guide was developed to help the interviewer garner rich insight into the participants' views of how they may be better prepared or supported to cope with role-related stress was obtained (Patton, 2015). The interview guide consisted of three main sections of standardised questions that generally guided the discussion in relation to the research aim, and a range of supporting

questions and probes to elicit more information from the participants by encouraging

them to elaborate on their answers (e.g., "can you provide an example of that?"; Sparkes

& Smith, 2014). First, a series of introductory questions were asked in relation to the

potentially demanding day-to-day nature of the participants' roles (e.g., "what is

expected of you in your role as an elite football coach?"). Second, questions focused on

what coach-education, clubs, and national governing bodies (NGBs) could do to better

prepare elite football coaches for, or support them to cope with, role-related stressors

(e.g., "to what extent do you feel as though your football club supports you in your role

as a coach?"). Finally, after providing participants with the opportunity to add any further

thoughts on the research area, a series of questions were asked in relation to the rigour of

the interview process (e.g., "to what extent have your answers been led throughout?")

Prior to data collection, a pilot interview was conducted by the first author with a

semi-professional, UEFA A-Licence (Level 4) qualified football coach, to assess the

efficacy of the interview guide in harnessing informative and relevant responses that

would allow us to address the study aim. Following this, the pilot participant's feedback

and the first author's reflections led to additional probes being prepared to encourage

participants to provide a greater depth of information during the interviews (e.g., "can

you explain what you mean by this?"; for final interview guide, see Appendix I).

Procedure

Following Institutional Ethics Board approval (see Appendix G), the authors'

existing networks in elite football were used to identify coaches that met the pre-

determined sampling criteria. Those meeting the criteria were formally invited to

participate in the study via email, sent a participant information sheet, and offered the

opportunity to ask any questions about the study and their potential participation. Those

agreeing to participate were then asked to provide written consent by completing and

returning a participant consent sheet via email and, following this, a suitable time for the interview was arranged. To encourage more comprehensive and detailed answers in the interviews, each participant was sent a preparation booklet two weeks prior to their arranged interview date, designed to remind them of the aim of the study and prepare them for the nature of the topics to be discussed (Patton, 2015). Due to geographical and access issues (e.g., COVID-19 restrictions) the interviews were all conducted remotely via Microsoft Teams[TM], lasted between 42 and 56 minutes ($M = 50.5$; $SD = 5.2$), were recorded and transcribed verbatim yielding a total of 119 pages of single-spaced text.

Data Analysis and Research Quality

Following the six-phase process outlined by Braun et al. (2016), we conducted an interpretive thematic analysis to analyse our raw interview data. First, all authors read and re-read each transcript to become familiar with the data. Second, a range of codes were inductively identified in the dataset and subsequently labelled in relation to their perceived meaning (e.g., limited awareness of organisational aspects of the role). Third, identified codes were deductively organised into groups of codes (e.g., increased stress awareness) and overall themes relating to where each future coping consideration was proposed to be delivered by the participants (e.g., coach-education programmes). Fourth, the first author reviewed the labelling of all codes and themes generated to ensure that they aptly illustrated the extracts of data, and where needed, slight amendments to wording were made to enhance code and theme clarity. Fifth, acting in the role of critical friends, the rest of the research team challenged the first author on the final codes and themes generated to attend to the interpretive potential of the data (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). To elaborate, the research team verbalised alternative perspectives on the codes, themes, and their labels. This led to the first author either justifying the original analytical decisions or, following in-depth discussion and further review of the

supporting extracts of data, the research team collectively agreeing an alternative label (Smith & McGannon, 2017). Finally, the first author ended the analytical process by writing up the results accordingly.

Coinciding with the phases of thematic analysis, additional approaches were also adopted to consider the methodological rigour of our work. For example, to allow others the opportunity to assess the importance of our findings and the analytical decisions we made throughout, we maintained online audit trails of all supporting documentation (e.g., coded transcripts; Braun et al., 2016). Further, with our participants being elite and likely recognisable individuals, we placed significant importance on ensuring ethical responsivity and reflexivity throughout. Indeed, stringent checks were carried out by the first author to ensure participant identities were appropriately masked throughout all research documentation (e.g., transcripts, final manuscript), and participants were provided with the opportunity to review their own transcript to ensure anonymity had been maintained throughout, as well as add to, edit, or remove any quotations from their respective interviews (Smith & McGannon, 2017).

Results

Given the potential implications associated with the stressful nature of coaching in elite football and to inform the development of a stress and mental ill/well-being intervention, participants' views on what may help or better prepare coaches for, and manage, role-related stress experiences were explored. A range of potential considerations that may be implemented though *coach education*, by *clubs*, or by *coaches and NGBs* were identified and are illuminated below via the use of supporting raw verbatim quotes from participant interviews.

Coach Education

Many of the participants highlighted a number of potential considerations that

coach education providers could implement to help current and future elite football coaches become more aware of, and better manage, the demanding nature of their roles. These were grouped into three main themes: *increased stress awareness*; *experienced coach educators, guest speakers and mentors*; and *problem-based learning and role play*.

Increased stress awareness. One theme constructed from participant discussions was the importance of developing coach awareness of the stress associated with the role, its potential implications, and of strategies they may adopt to better manage their own stress experiences. Referencing the existing lack of discussion about stress, one participant suggested, "It's (stress) just accepted as part of the role you've to get on with and not really talked about. You must raise awareness of it and then give insight into how coaches can better cope with it." Another participant, when suggesting *awareness* should form part of the UEFA Professional Licence coach education qualification, said, "There's no comfortability with stress because of the limited awareness of it. There's ways to better cope with what the role spits out at you and making coaches aware and equipped to cope is important." More specifically, all participants suggested that the organisational demands that form much of the role of an elite football coach should be afforded greater consideration within coach education. For example, one participant suggested, "I think coach education may be able to focus more on the organisational aspects of the role", with another highlighting, "You're not just coaching to make players better, you're coaching in the coaching context, which is much wider than the stuff you do on the grass and should be reflected in coach education." Further, one coach discussed how coach education does not address many of the demands of the role and perhaps should, "There are key things not addressed in coach education. Dealing with conflict, selection, recruitment, agents, work-life balance. We don't really address these to the level we need to and they form most of the role."

Experienced coach educators, guest speakers and mentors. Another theme constructed related to the need for coach education providers to ensure that they employ coach educators who have worked in the elite game, bring in guest speakers with experience, and provide greater access to personal mentors. In relation to experienced coach educators, one participant referred to the lack of coach educators who have experienced the demands of the elite role, and it potentially leading to limited awareness of role-related stress, "I think it's important that coach educators have been through those experiences: different managers, dealing with boards/owners, supporters, media, players with egos on big wages. How many coach educators have been through that? That's one thing to consider." All participants also referred to the importance of coach education programmes sourcing experienced guest speakers to discuss honestly their experiences of managing the stressful nature of the role. One suggested, "It's vital that future coaches and managers get to listen to these things and learn from other coaches' and managers' experiences of the stress associated with their role". Another contended, "There's plenty of scope to educate young coaches and managers going forward. There's enough people about that can give an honest appraisal of the demands that the job has". To support these contentions, one coach suggested, "Hearing other's stories is really important. You get insight into what you don't normally get from coaching courses. Many of the issues are so relatable that everyone might have experienced them, or, can learn new ways of managing them." Finally, one participant referenced how the negative aspects of the role are often not portrayed by guests discussing their roles, and how more awareness for this is warranted:

> We're going on a coach education conference this weekend and I bet there won't
> be someone standing on stage talking about the negative side of the game…
> someone out of work talking through what they've been through over the last 12

months… There's a place for coach education to now also focus on the negatives that come with the role, too!

Finally, some participants referred to coach education providing experienced mentors through their programmes for formal and informal discussions about managing the stressors of their roles. For example, one participant suggested, "There's enough people out there that have been through the experience and willing to pass on that knowledge… it can be done formally in coach education, and I think there's also a place for an informal chat in a 1-to-1." Another participant referred to the potential positive impact of having a longer-term mentor provided beyond coach education courses to be a potential future sounding board and help them cope with difficult times in their professional roles, "Providing a long-term mentor. I don't think coach education should be, 'you've finished your course so on you go' for coach development reasons. If it goes completely wrong, who do I speak to? Mentoring could play a massive role."

Problem-based learning and role-play. Participants discussed the need for coach education courses to provide more time for candidates to discuss their own stress experiences and work through "real-life problems" being experienced in the role. One participant highlighted the insular nature of elite football and the need for a more open, alternative approach to managing stress, "We can try and make people better prepared (for job demands) through the sharing of experiences. Someone might deal with a problem completely different to me and the sharing of how, instead of being insular, can be really beneficial." To add to this, many of the participants referred to coach education providers exploring opportunities for coaches to engage in problem-based learning through the provision of "real-life case studies" that replicate the demands they may experience at the elite level. For example, one participant suggested, "A case-study approach could allow coaches to work through and discuss how they would deal with the

demands existing for elite coaches, which may increase their awareness and be more prepared for if they experience it in the future." Another referred to how a problem-based learning approach could broaden coaches' perspectives on the complex situations coaches experience and into the different ways of managing them, "I'd like to see problem-based learning. We bring a complex scenario we've experienced and everyone unpicks it to see how they'd do it and allow you to see things from different perspectives." Finally, some of the participants referenced how coach education candidates could engage in role play scenarios or watch trained actors acting out role-related scenarios and then depicting them as a group in attempts to improve their self-awareness. For example, one participant suggested:

> Role-play, ethnodramas, in-situ discussion, even fly on the wall type stuff and watching others. The pitch stuff takes care of itself at the higher level. Learning more about yourself, management, interactions with others is key and these methods may help people question themselves and how they manage aspects of their work.

Clubs

Participants highlighted that clubs should explore ways to help current and future coaches be able to better manage the stress associated with their roles. These were grouped into two sub-themes: *increased continuous professional development opportunities (CPD);* and *increased provision of psychological support.*

Increased CPD opportunities. Participants highlighted the lack of CPD opportunities currently provided by clubs for 1st team staff and how an increase in this provision may help coaches develop in their roles and be better placed to be able to successfully manage the demands associated with the role. For example, one suggested, "There are ways of assisting people at work more and maybe that's down to clubs. You

see lots of sport science/medical in-house CPD, academy CPD days, but not at 1st team

level and that could really support coaches."

Other coaches referred to how CPD opportunities may also be a release for some coaches

from the pressure of their roles, whilst giving them new ideas that they can implement

into their roles. In speaking of this, one coach suggested, "CPD is a good release from

that daily grind. Going into another environment refreshes you, being able to take a step

back and seeing something done differently… all 1st team staff should get that chance."

Increased provision of psychological support. Some participants referenced the

lack of psychological support provided by football clubs for 1st team coaches despite the

well-known pressures associated with their role. For example, when discussing the lack

of support currently provided, one participant suggested, "You've seen in schools now

the emergence of mental health officers. Why not in clubs? I do think that clubs could be

doing more to support coaches." Another referenced the importance of clubs

psychologically supporting coaches by employing trained staff as support networks,

"Potentially clubs can help. Having someone trained in clubs for coaches if they feel like

they need support, then there is a support mechanism there." Finally, another participant

referenced a range of strategies that clubs could purposefully engage in to monitor and

support coach welfare, "The support should be better around how you're dealing with

emotions, pressure, and stress. Having a sport psychologist you can speak to … to spot

the signs. Maybe more daily questionnaires around how you feel."

Coaches and NGBs

Participants discussed the role that coaches should play in seeking, and NGBs in

better promoting, activities that may lend to coaches developing the skills required to

better cope with role-related demands, with one sub-theme identified: *seeking and*

signposting of CPD events.

Seeking and signposting of CPD events. Participants suggested that coaches need to take more responsibility for how they manage the demands of their roles by seeking out CPD opportunities. For example, some participants referred to exploring specific higher education courses that may equip them with a greater understanding of certain aspects of their roles. Specifically, "I've just enquired about doing a master's degree in Sporting Directorship. The reason why I've enquired is because I want something that will give me the experience and understanding of how to deal with organisational culture and stressors." Another suggested, "I've thought about a PGCE (Post Graduate Certificate of Education) in Leadership and Management in Football for managers. Things like coping, well-being, self-presentation, all of those things could come to the fore." Other participants referred to how coaches could self-seek opportunities in other fields to help them in their roles as coaches, "I'm a Head Coach so why not go to a Michelin star restaurant and observe the Head Chef looking after his kitchen? It's the same, managing people and the environment. You can then bring your learnings back into football." Despite suggestions that coaches should take responsibility for seeking CPD, some participants highlighted the current a lack of CPD signposting from NGBs and how increased signposting may lead to greater CPD attendance and coach development. For example, one participant referred to the lack of contact from an NGB about CPD events that they run, "NGBs have a responsibility. After completing my Pro-Licence, I was invited on the first alumni event and I didn't get an email for the next two years and had to chase this one (a recent event being attended) up." Another participant also referred to NGBs needing to be better at signposting CPD events from other organisations that may support coaches in their roles:

> There's got to be something put back on the learner around, 'Hang on, the responsibility lies on you as well.' That's fine, but then my next question is,

'Where'd you find the opportunities?' Maybe NGBs need to be better at directing people. We're not great at that and those events could really inform a coach on how to manage situations better.

Part One: Discussion and Summary of Key Findings

Elite football coaches have been found to ineffectively cope with stress experienced in their roles, leading to professional and personal life, and mental ill/well-being implications (e.g., Baldock et al., 2021 [Ph.D. Study 1]). While interventions have been previously deployed to support elite coaches to manage and cope with the demanding nature of their roles and to maintain mental well-being (e.g., McNeill et al., 2020; Olusoga et al., 2014), many have been developed with little input from the end-user (i.e., elite coaches), resulting in reduced contextual credibility. We, therefore, attempted to explore elite football coaches' opinions of how they might be better prepared and supported to cope with role-related demands and maintain their mental well-being. Participants reported: (a) coach education providers should attempt to increase coach awareness of what stress is, the potential stress experiences associated with the role, the implications of stressors, and of the coping strategies they may adopt to better manage their stress experiences; (b) coach education providers should employ experienced coach educators, guest speakers, and mentors, and adopt problem-based learning approaches and incorporate role play scenarios into their educational package; (c) clubs should provide greater role-related CPD opportunities and consider increasing access to psychological support; and, (d) coaches themselves should seek, and NGBs should better signpost, CPD opportunities relevant to the demanding aspects of their role.

Participants identified that coach education providers should work to increase football coaches' awareness of stress, its impact, and how to better cope with it throughout their programmes. This is not the first time that increasing coaches'

awareness of such constructs and aspects of their roles have been identified in order to avoid detrimental outcomes for their performance and to mental ill/well-being implications (e.g., Gorczynski et al., 2020; Thelwell et al., 2017). The current findings do, however, build upon previous researcher contentions surrounding the importance of coach education programmes developing coaches beyond merely the technical components of their coaching practice (see Camiré et al., 2014). Indeed, the role of an elite football coach has often been described as being messy, ambiguous, and turbulent in nature (Thompson et al., 2015). Thus, an elite coach's ability to maintain their own psychological states in the face of such uncertainty and the highly pressurised nature of their roles might make a difference to how they perform in their role, navigate the environments they operate in, and manage those who they are responsible for (e.g., players, support staff) and/or to (e.g., club boards; Cropley et al., 2020). Thus, given that elite football coaches appear to be predisposed to, and must effectively cope with, uniquely challenging and demanding working environments, their education might warrant more specific focus on stress, coping, and its potential impact to prepare them for, and support them with, the dynamic and pressurised nature of their roles. Indeed, it seems worthwhile to explore the benefit of educational workshops or resources aimed at raising coaches' awareness of what stress is and of its potential impact. Further, to create meaningful, relevant, and context-specific learning, providing coaches with greater opportunities and support to engage in more critical reflective practice on their own experiences of stress might be also be considered (Altfeld et al., 2015). This can help coaches understand the antecedents and consequences of their own role-related stress experiences, constructively interpret significant role-related stressors, potentially seek out and develop the necessary resources to effectively cope with stressors they experience, and subsequently maintain or enhance their mental well-being (Kegelaers et al., 2020).

Participants also highlighted how coach education providers might consider employing experienced guest speakers, personal mentors, and role play strategies to help candidates prepare for, or support them with, the demanding nature of their roles. Collectively, these findings seem to fit with the contentions of many researchers who have reported that elite coaches across a range of sports have a preference for more informal, interactive learning opportunities during coach education programmes (see Ciampolini et al., 2020). Akin to suggestions raised by coaches in previous studies (e.g., Morgan et al., 2013), it appears the participants in our study placed value on being able to listen to guest speaking coaches discuss past problematic experiences, working through role-related demanding scenarios as groups, and experiencing such scenarios in a psychologically safe manner through role play. Doing so has been purported to lead to coaches being able to place themselves in 'other coaches' shoes' and identify solutions for how they would effectively cope with stressful experiences they might also encounter in their own careers (Ciampolini et al., 2020). While some football coach education providers have reportedly adopted more informal approaches to better support coaches with their coaching practice (e.g., mentoring, reflective practice; Adams et al., 2016), our findings suggest utilising these approaches in an explicit manner to help prepare and/or support coaches to manage the wider role-related stress experiences they might encounter in elite football.

Participants in the present study also discussed the lack of psychological support currently provided for coaches by clubs, and how increased support may help coaches better cope with the demanding nature of their roles. For coaches, who have often been referred to as 'carers', demonstrating moral concern for the health and well-being of their athletes by ensuring they have access to a web of psychological and medical care is widely accepted as a fundamental part of athlete-centred and effective coaching practice

(Cronin et al., 2018). Nevertheless, the level of psychological support and care for coaches, who also must perform in the face of significant pressure and are, therefore, equally vulnerable to mental health and well-being implications themselves, is perhaps still negligible (Roberts et al., 2018). In football, the lack of support provided by clubs, or seeking of support by coaches, has previously been attributed to coaches wanting to manage others' impressions of them and ensure that they demonstrate masculinity and authoritarianism to key stakeholders (Knoppers et al., 2022). Despite these potentially outdated ideals still existing in elite football, in light of the pressure associated with obtaining results and the high levels of job turnover for coaches in elite football (Bentzen et al., 2020), our findings imply that coaches are becoming more open to the idea of seeking psychological support. Clubs might want to consider, therefore, how they directly support the health and well-being of their coaches. As per the suggestions of coaches in this study and previous research (e.g., Madigan et al., 2019), this might involve providing them with access to a qualified practitioner and/or the daily monitoring of coaches' ill/well-being in a similar way to their players. Ensuring the employment of an appropriately qualified practitioner here would be key to the provision of ethical practice and to ensure coaches are not vulnerable to confidentiality breaches that might implicate them, and subsequently, their position.

Finally, participants advocated for future and current elite football coaches to engage in greater role-related CPD opportunities to better prepare them for, or manage, role-related stress. CPD has been defined in sports coaching as, "all types of professional learning undertaken by coaches beyond initial certification" (Nelson et al., 2006, p. 255). With courses providing such certification often criticised for being delivered over small periods of time and involving little to no follow-up with candidates (Morgan et al., 2013), CPD post-certification has been suggested to be highly valuable for coaches as it

can often involve collaboration with colleagues, personal reflection stimulation, and, ultimately, the development of new knowledge and skills that can help coaches continue to evolve in their roles (cf. Griffith et al., 2018). While researchers have seldom highlighted the role of CPD engagement in helping coaches better manage role-related stress, its comprising components (e.g., developing and utilising social support networks, enhancing self-awareness through critical reflection, and developing psychological skills) have all been found to help elite coaches better cope with stress and avoid detrimental implications for their mental well-being (see Cropley et al., 2020; Olusoga et al., 2014).

Despite the potential benefits of CPD, participants in our study reported limited opportunities for CPD at their clubs, a lack of signposting of CPD opportunities by NGBs, and how football coaches themselves often fail to seek and attend role-relevant CPD. The lack of opportunity, promotion, and seeking of CPD might be indicative of the elite football environment. Specifically, those operating in high profile football coaching positions are often expected to be able to effectively manage the demanding nature of their role and perform without additional support given the widely accepted pressure associated with obtaining results and the high salaries that are often afforded to achieve such outcomes (Morrow & Howieson, 2018). These expectations appear to be far from reality, however, with elite football coaches recently found to be ineffectively coping with their role-related stress experiences, with professional and personal implications (e.g., Baldock et al., 2021 [Ph.D. Study 1]). Additionally, elite coaches have often been found to suffer from increasing workloads during the season that compromise their personal lives and affect the time spent, and relationships with, their family (see Cropley et al., 2020). They have also been found to have limited time for psychological recovery in the off-season (Alfeld et al., 2018). Consequently, it is likely that the lack of elite football coaches seeking and engaging in CPD might also be a function of having limited

time to do so. Collectively, these findings highlight that elite football coaches require better support to engage in CPD, with opportunities and time to access it needed to help them develop their understanding and capacity to cope, perform optimally, and experience mental well-being states.

In part one of this study, elite football coaches demonstrated a desire for future and current coaches to become more aware of stress and mental ill/well-being concepts and to be better supported to manage the demanding nature of the coach's role in elite football. This is despite the traditional ideals in elite football surrounding the need to avoid showing mental weakness and demonstrate authoritarianism and masculinity to key stakeholders of clubs to remain, and succeed, in a role as a coach (Knoppers et al., 2022). Participants in our study referenced numerous ways that coach education providers, NGBs, clubs, and themselves can better prepare future coaches and support current coaches with the stressors inevitably experienced in elite level football. However, the majority of the ideas proposed were mostly linked to developing football coaches' awareness of stress and coping and understanding how stress experiences might influence performance and mental ill/well-being outcomes. While previous researchers have alluded to the importance of developing coaches' self-awareness of how they are experiencing stress to help protect them from experiencing low mental well-being and experiencing mental ill-being symptoms (e.g., Gorczynski et al., 2020), to the best of our knowledge the findings in part one include, for the first time, similar suggestions from elite football coaches. Indeed, it was our intention to develop an intervention informed by the end-user that seeks to better support future and current elite football coaches with their role-related stress experiences and their mental ill/well-being. Using our findings from part one and the extant literature, we developed a proposal for a stress and mental ill/well-being coach education intervention aimed at enhancing elite football coaches'

awareness of stress, coping, and its influence on their performance and mental ill/well-being. In part two, we aimed to iteratively evaluate the theoretical, contextual, and practical value of the proposed intervention for the organisation for whom it was developed.

Part Two: Designing and Evaluating a Supportive Coach Education Intervention

Pre-Intervention Design Procedure

With Institutional Ethics Board approval secured, we met with the Technical Director (TD) of a football NGB to propose using the findings of part one to design a coach education intervention aimed at better preparing and/or supporting elite football coaching candidates to manage their stress and mental ill/well-being experiences. Following the proposal acceptance (see Appendix H), the authors and TD agreed that the intervention would be best suited to elite coaches undertaking the UEFA Professional Licence football coaching qualification. This was due to the qualification being the highest coaching qualification obtainable in European football, the course being framed around preparing individuals to work as a modern-day manager or head coach, and the course aiming to develop the leadership and interpersonal skills required to operate effectively in professional football. Following these discussions, an initial multi-component coach stress and mental ill/well-being coach education intervention using the findings of part one and previous coach education and coach stress literature was designed. We then aimed to iteratively evaluate the potential efficacy of each component of this proposed intervention to ensure it was theoretically, contextually, and organisationally fit-for-purpose.

Proposed Intervention

We proposed to develop a three-component coach stress and mental ill/well-being coach education intervention aimed at better preparing and/or supporting elite football

coaches to manage the demanding nature of the role. In line with the findings of part one, each intervention component was proposed with the aim of enhancing coaches' awareness of stress and mental ill/well-being concepts, their own stress and mental ill/well-being experiences, or other potential role-related stressors they had yet to experience. Consequently, each component is discussed in line with the findings of part one and justified theoretically, contextually, and practically.

Intervention Component One: Educational Resources

In part one of this study, participants referenced how coach education providers should consider ways of enhancing the understanding of future and current elite football coaches regarding stress and mental ill/well-being concepts, and how they might manifest and influence their performance as a coach. Consequently, in line with these findings and previous researcher contentions (see Gorczynski et al., 2020), we proposed an intervention component centring around developing educational videos and resources and making them available to candidates via their online course portal. The flipped learning approach of sharing resources online improves ease of access as candidates could access them multiple times and at times suitable for them, and affords candidates autonomy over their own learning process (Griffiths et al., 2018).

Three example resource types were proposed, with the first being *educational infographics.* It was proposed that these infographics would provide information on topics such as the impact of lifestyle factors (e.g., alcohol consumption, sleep, diet, exercise) on coach mental ill/well-being and approaches to self-care for coaches. Indeed, infographics have been suggested to allow for large volumes of information to be presented more concisely, take less time and energy to visually process and digest the information, and lead to reduced cognitive load for those assimilating the information, which enhances learning and future recall (Dunlap & Lowenthal, 2016; Martin et al.,

2019). While limited research attention has been afforded to the andragogical efficacy of infographics in sport, researchers across related sectors such as healthcare and education have reported health infographics to lead to: (a) enhanced caregiver awareness of their own health status, and the motivation and tools to engage in better self-care (e.g., Arcia et al., 2019); and, (b) enhanced recall of key messages and lead to better comprehension of information by students and university staff (e.g., Wansnik & Robbins, 2018). Further, in line with the proposed objectives of this intervention component, researchers in sport have purported that infographics may enhance individuals' awareness and comprehension of factors influencing mental ill/well-being (e.g., sport-related stressors), of its associated symptoms, and of how they might optimise their use of effective coping strategies (Muir & Munroe-Chandler, 2020). Thus, given the time-demanding nature of the role of elite football coaches and their reported need to enhance their awareness of such areas, accessible educational infographics were deemed appropriate for this intervention component.

The second and third resource types proposed were: (a) four pre-recorded *5-minute insight videos* exploring the concepts of stress, burnout, well-being, and mental health; and, (b) two pre-recorded *20-minute video presentations* exploring the notion of the coach as a performer and improving psychological performance. The 5-minute insight videos aim to educate candidates about the concepts outlined, whereas the two 20-miute minute video presentations aim to explore in-depth how the concepts impact upon performance and how to manage them. While limited in sport coach education, informative digital videos have been widely utilised in mental health and well-being intervention research and have reportedly been efficacious at enhancing individuals' awareness of these and related concepts (e.g., Ojio et al., 2020; Kaplan et al., 2012). The utility and benefits of using digital videos to educate and enhance learner knowledge and

awareness include being cost effective to produce and disseminate, permitting ease of access for end-users, allowing learners to be able to digest the information at their own pace and utilise the resources repeatedly over time (Ramlogan et al., 2014). Finally, differing the duration of video resources (e.g., 5-minute insight videos and 20-minute presentation videos) was proposed given that previous research has reported shorter videos to be more engaging, increase achievement of learning outcomes, and be watched repeatedly over time to enhance learning (e.g., Doolittle et al., 2015), yet longer videos have also been found to improve viewer awareness, knowledge, and understanding of mental ill/well-being factors. Consequently, the intention with these intervention types was to provide different resources to help candidates better understand and learn about stress and mental ill/well-being concepts, and make sense of, and better manage, their own experiences.

Intervention Component Two: Candidate Stress and Mental Ill/Well-Being Reports

In part one of this study, participants highlighted the need for elite football coaches to become more aware of their own stress experiences, of the effectiveness of the coping strategies they employ, and how the stress process may be influencing their mental ill/well-being. Participants also alluded to how clubs should ask coaches to complete daily well-being questionnaires, as their players do, with the findings considered by practitioners in attempts to support coaches and enhance their awareness of their own well-being. Indeed, growing evidence exists surrounding professional football clubs monitoring factors associated with player well-being through daily questionnaires and how such factors can influence their performance (e.g., Noon et al., 2015). Thus, with coaches recognised as performers in their own right, assessing factors associated with candidates' stress and mental ill/well-being experiences over time and providing them with reports on the findings will help them become more aware of how

their experiences fluctuate and help them better understand how their performance is subsequently influenced.

Consequently, this intervention component proposed to increase UEFA Professional Licence candidates' awareness of their own stress and mental ill/well-being experiences across four phases of the season alongside their one-year course tenure. To do so, we proposed candidates would first complete a ~20-minute online survey at four different phases of the season (e.g., Pre-Season, Beginning of the Season, Mid-Season, End of Season – in accord with the protocol adopted by Baldock et al., 2022 [Ph.D. Study 2]), to allow for an examination of a range of factors previously deemed to impact upon or represent coaches' mental ill/well-being: sleep (see Potts et al., 2021), diet (see Baldock et al., 2022 [Ph.D. Study 2]), alcohol intake (see Zhou et al., 2016), recent stress experiences (see Baldock et al., 2021 [Ph.D. Study 1]), hardiness (see Cropley et al., 2020), burnout (see Baldock et al., 2022 [Ph.D. Study 2]) and mental well-being (see McNeill et al., 2018). Following survey completion, we proposed to provide each candidate with a personalised stress and mental ill/well-being report and supporting infographic (see Appendix J). The rationale here was to provide the candidates with a full and informative report on their stress and mental ill/well-being at different time points, while also providing supporting infographics to present the findings in a more visually appealing and digestible manner (Martin et al., 2019). It was hoped that this proposed intervention would help candidates become more aware of their stress experiences at different time points, how they are coping, and their levels of mental ill/well-being and related factors, which might enhance understanding, lead to lifestyle or coping strategy choice changes, or to seeking mental ill/well-being support.

Intervention Component Three: Assessment Centre Pressure Training

In part one of this study, participants referred to how coach education providers should consider greater use of problem-based learning approaches and role play to increase candidates' awareness of potential role-related stressors and how they would respond and attempt to cope with them, to better prepare them for similar situations in the future. Indeed, prior to this study, a component called *Assessment Centre* had been introduced into the respective National Association's delivery of the UEFA Professional Licence that the intervention was being developed for, where coach educators aimed to expose candidates to a range of role-related demanding scenarios via role play. In these scenarios, candidates would have to attempt to cope within a psychologically safe environment (e.g., a mock job interview or press conference). Following such role play encounters and near the end of their course, a viva experience had also been planned to challenge candidates to reflect on their learning journey across the course through questions posed via an "expert panel" (e.g., former elite coaches, coach educators, senior media officials). These components had been previously implemented by the coach education provider. However, in fitting with our part one findings and the existing course structure, to help the candidates learn from their role play experiences our first proposed addition was to ask candidates to engage in a process of formal experiential learning from the assessment centre scenarios, by completing a mandatory, purposefully designed reflective-learning template with the support of their coach education mentor (see Appendix J) and uploading it to their online course portal. In support, purposeful reflective practice has been suggested to reinforce learning from situations, augment critical thinking and self-discovery, and facilitate personal and professional growth via potential behaviour change (Cropley et al., 2015). Ensuring candidates' mentors would help them collaboratively reflect on their experiences was also deemed important, given

collaborative reflection has been found to provide coaches with positive social support, challenge existing beliefs and practices, inspire creativity for effective change, and lead to clearer interpretation of critical moments (Dixon, 2021).

The second proposed addition to the existing course structure and this intervention component was for an appropriately qualified sport psychologist to be added to the existing viva panel to help candidates explore their stress management approaches, assessment centre experiences, and learnings about their psychological performance. Indeed, coaches themselves have previously reported how qualified sport psychologists can help performers develop greater self-awareness and understanding of their stress experiences and how they cope with them, and of how their experience of stress and coping might influence their mental ill/well-being. This support offered by sport psychologists would be due to their theoretical and practical expertise and the professional qualities they have likely developed through training (e.g., ability to appropriately and sensitively challenge and probe, understanding of ethical responsibility; Thelwell et al., 2018). The addition of a sport psychologist was, therefore, deemed important as it might enhance candidate perceptions of the psychological safety associated with the viva, lead to more conceptually and theoretically informed questions and conversation, enhance learning, and provide candidates with post-viva psychological support, if required.

Evaluating the Proposed Intervention

The Delphi Method

The Delphi method is a means of data collection that involves a panel, who hold expertise in a particular area, to engage in structured, anonymous, and iterative communication on a highlighted issue to reach a level of consensus (Dalkey & Helmer, 1963). The proposed efficacy of the Delphi method stems from the notion that when

exact knowledge on a specific topic is not available, eliciting and refining insight from a

group of experts is better than obtaining insight from one individual (Brady, 2015).

Traditionally, the Delphi method is questionnaire-based and possesses the following

signatory features: (a) participant anonymity, which allows for the free expression of

opinion and negates against issues of power, conformity, and the lack of cognitive

diversity typical of group discussion; (b) the provision of controlled feedback to inform

participants of the other experts' views on the topic; (c) iteration, which provides

participants with the opportunity to refine their views in light of the feedback received;

and, (d) analysis and interpretation of the data (Pfleegor et al., 2019; Quartiroli et al.,

2019).

A Delphi method often comprises three rounds. First, a questionnaire is

developed comprising open-ended questions on a potential issue, or what is thought to be

known about a particular topic, to encourage expert panellists to express their opinions

on the issue/topic at hand (e.g., the efficacy of the proposed stress and well-being

intervention). Second, the experts' answers to the first round of questioning are

anonymously fed back to all participants, each panellist is provided with the opportunity

to change or build upon their initial answers having seen the answers of the other experts,

and another set of qualitative and/or quantitative questions are provided in relation to the

panellists' answers to the first round. Finally, a questionnaire (usually quantitative) is

developed from the first two rounds with the aim of generating consensus between the

expert panellists on the issue/topic of inquiry. However, if not found, other rounds may

be conducted until consensus is reached (Brady, 2015).

In light of the above, we deemed the Delphi to be the most appropriate method of

evaluating our proposed intervention for a number of reasons: (1) the mixed-method

approach aligns with the critical realist position of the research team; (2) we could obtain

opinions of panellists with different areas of expertise relevant to the proposed intervention (e.g., coach educators possess contextual and practical expertise, whereas sport psychologists possess theoretical and applied expertise); (3) multiple panellists who work for the organisation for which the intervention was proposed could be sampled and, therefore, issues of power, dominance, and conformity in relation to their answers could be negated; (4) we could sample panellists that are geographically spread out across different parts of the UK; and, (5) online questionnaires could be accessed and completed at a convenient time for potential panellists.

Data Collection

To provide insight into the procedures followed throughout each stage of the Delphi, a chronological outline has been provided and is supported by a visual representation of the process (see Figure 1). This details how expert panellists were initially contacted and recruited and is followed by how each Delphi round was conducted logistically.

Pre-Delphi: Identifying and Describing the Expert Panel

Following the Delphi sampling process utilised in previous sport psychology research (see Quartiroli et al., 2019), we developed a set of inclusion criteria that would allow us to purposively target individuals from three relevant, but different professional backgrounds to formulate our expert panel. Given that the perspectives of elite football coaches had already been obtained in part one, which led to the development of the proposed intervention, we sought to seek alternative perspectives when assessing the efficacy of the proposed intervention, with our inclusion criteria being one or more of the following: (a) individuals currently operating in a role for the target NGB, where they are involved in the design, implementation, and/or provision of Level 5 coach education; (b) individuals who have expertise in the area of coach education provision and coach

Figure 1

Delphi Procedure Flow Diagram
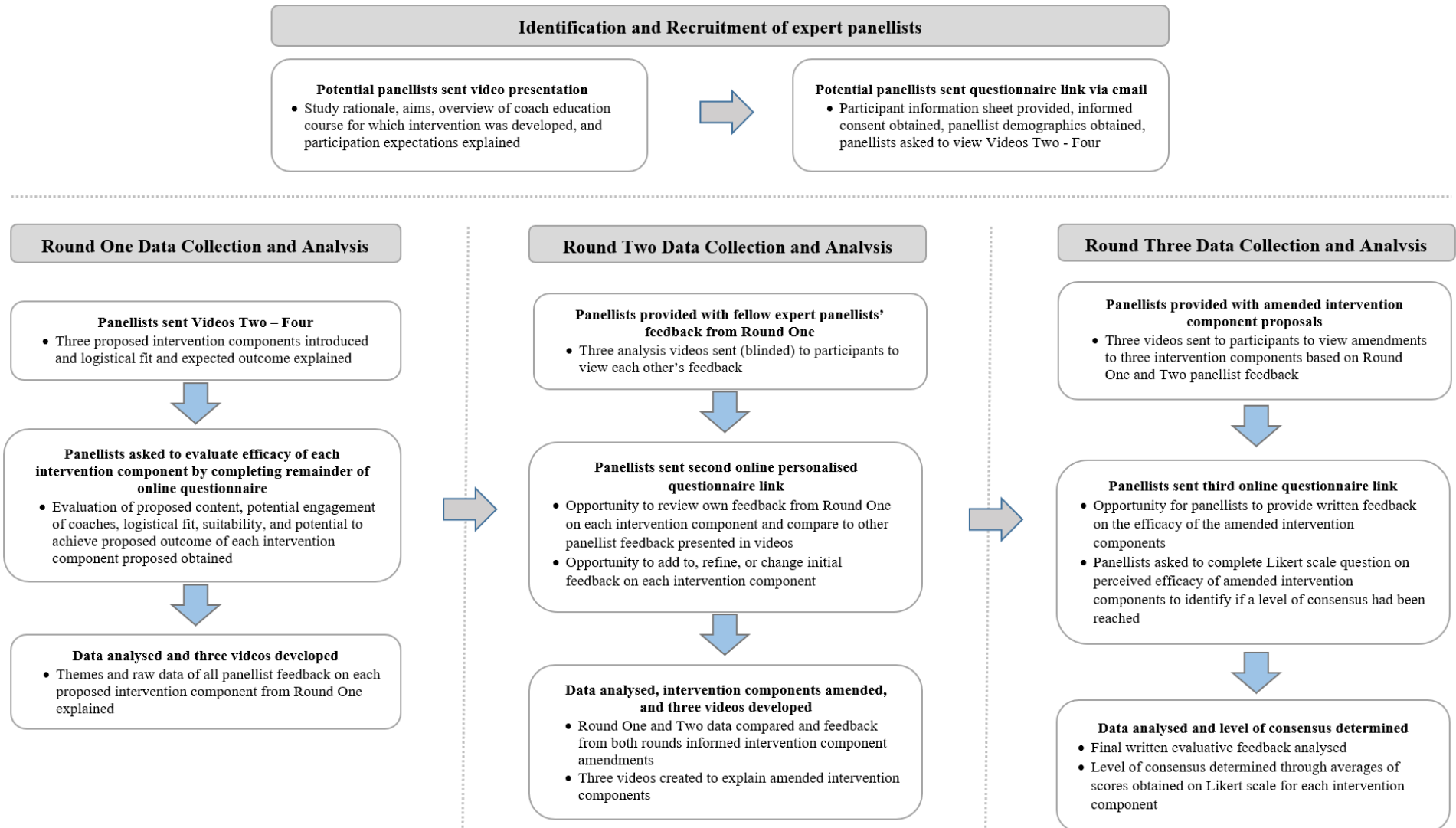
development; and, (c) individuals who have expertise in the area of stress and well-being of coaches (e.g., an accredited sport psychologist). The final panel of experts consisted of 10 males aged between 33 and 56 years old ($M = 41.7$; $SD = 8.2$), who were coach educators ($n = 6$), worked in national coach development ($n = 3$), and/or accredited sport psychologists ($n = 4$), and had a level of experience in their respective roles ranging from 5 to 25 years ($M = 15.8$, $SD = 5.7$; see Table 1 for full panellist demographics).

Table 1

Delphi expert panel demographical information

Country	Age	Specialisation	Qualifications	Role	Years of Experience*
UK	42	Coach Education Football Coaching	UEFA Pro-Licence Bachelor of Science	Coach Educator at a UEFA National Association Head of Player Development at a Premier League Football Club	15
UK	33	Coach Development Football Coaching Sport Psychology	UEFA A-Licence Doctor of Philosophy	Head of Coaching Support at a Football Club Group Sport Psychologist	11
UK	50	Coach Education Coach Development	Bachelor of Education Post Graduate Diploma	Learning Experience Manager (Coaching) at a Coaching National Governing Body	20
UK	44	Coach Education Football Coaching	UEFA Pro-Licence Master of Science	Coach Educator and Head of Player Development for a UEFA National Association	20
UK	41	Sport Psychology Coach Education	Doctor of Philosophy BASES Accredited Sport and Exercise Scientist UEFA A-Licence	Professor Sport Psychologist Coach Educator at a UEFA National Association	14
UK	38	Coach Education	UEFA Pro-Licence UEFA Level 5 Coach Education Tutor	Head of Coach Education for a UEFA National Association	15
UK	36	Sport Psychology	Bachelor of Science Master of Science Doctor of Philosophy HCPC Registered	Reader Sport Psychologist	13
UK	41	Coach Education Football Coaching	UEFA Level 5 Coach Education Tutor Doctor of Philosophy	Technical Director of a UEFA National Association	20
UK	56	Sport Psychology	Doctor of Philosophy HCPC Registered	Senior Lecturer Sport Psychologist	25
UK	36	Coach Education	UEFA Level 1-3 Coach Education Tutor FA Advanced Youth Award UEFA A-Licence	Senior Coach Developer at a Coaching National Governing Body	5

* Years of experience refers to years spent in the respective roles occupied by the panellists

Data Collection and Analysis Procedure

Round One - Obtaining the Sample and Initial Evaluation Completion. Using

the staff list of the NGB, publicly available practitioner (e.g., BPS database) and national

coaching associations' (e.g., UK Coaching) records, individuals who were identified by

the research team to fit one of the sampling criteria proposed were contacted directly via

email, introduced to the nature of the study (via a participant information sheet), and

afforded the opportunity to ask any questions about the research. Those interested in

participating were then sent a short video, which provided them with insight into: the

findings of previous research conducted that informed the research rationale (e.g.,

Baldock et al., 2021 [Ph.D. Study 1]; Baldock et al., 2022 [Ph.D. Study 2]; and part one

findings of this study); the aim of the current research; the nature of the Level 5

Professional Licence coach education course that the intervention was being designed

for; and, finally, what would be expected of them as expert panellists should they

participate. They were then asked to select an Online Surveys^{TM} link, read the first page

of the survey in relation to participation requirements, and, should they still be willing to

participate, provide written informed consent by initialling the designated section before

progressing to, and completing, the next page of the online survey (i.e., a panellist

demographics page). Panellists were then provided access to a second video that

explained what the first of three proposed stress and mental ill/well-being coach

education intervention components entailed, how they would fit logistically into the

Level 5 football coach education course they were designed for, and the expected

outcome of each intervention component for its intended candidates. Once viewing this

video, panellists were asked to evaluate the efficacy of the intervention component by

completing a page of questions specifically designed to help them provide this

evaluation. These questions were designed to obtain evaluative insight from the panellists

in relation to the: (a) proposed content of the intervention component; (b) potential

engagement of the Level 5 coaching candidates with the intervention component

proposed; (c) logistical fit of the intervention component with the course for which it was

designed; (d) suitability of the intervention component for Level 5 coach education; and,

(e) potential effectiveness of the intervention component in helping the course candidates

develop a greater awareness of their own stress experiences and mental ill/well-being.

Panellists were then asked to repeat this process for the remaining two proposed

intervention components, with videos for each individual component accessible as the

panellists progressed through the process.

To analyse the panellists' responses and help inform the development of Round

Two, a preliminary content analysis procedure was adopted, allowing for the

categorisation of responses provided in Round One in relation to each of the three

intervention components. Following this analysis, the first author created three further

video presentations that provided insight into the overall themes generated from the

analysis of each intervention component, with each theme and its accompanying raw data

(e.g., raw answers provided in the first questionnaire by the panellists) presented visually

and verbally throughout. These videos were created to help panellists more easily digest

all feedback provided in Round One in the subsequent round.

Round Two - Analysing Initial Responses and Further Evaluation

Completion. Round Two comprised of panellists being provided with their fellow

experts' answers to the questions posed in Round One around the efficacy of each

proposed intervention component. In line with a traditional Delphi approach, this

iterative process was designed to help participants, having blindly seen the other

panellists' responses, to refine, add to, or even change their initial answers for each of the

questions posed to lead to a more comprehensive and well considered evaluation of the

intervention (Pfleegor et al., 2019). This involved panellists being sent the three video presentations developed to summarise the feedback from Round One (one for each intervention component) and an email that comprised Round Two participation instructions and another Online Surveys™ link. The survey consisted of three pages; one for each proposed intervention component. On each page, panellists were presented with their own individual feedback that they provided on the intervention component in Round One, alongside a space to refine, add to, or change their initial feedback responses across the questions posed. Before completing the questionnaire, panellists were asked to view the video for the respective intervention component, view their own Round One feedback in the survey for that component, and only then add further evaluative information in the space provided.

The feedback received in Round Two was then compared with the feedback of Round One, and if panellists had requested to withdraw their initial evaluative feedback in light of viewing the other panellists' responses from Round One, it was removed. The feedback from both rounds was then considered and, where possible and practically applicable within the constraints of the course, amendments were made to the proposed intervention components.

Round Three – Amended Intervention Proposal and Consensus Reaching. After making amendments to each intervention component based on the panellists' feedback, three final video presentations explaining the amended intervention components were developed and sent to the panellists. An email was again sent to each panellist with participation instructions and a link to a final survey. This survey comprised Likert scale questions directed towards each of the three interventions in attempts to understand whether overall consensus on the efficacy of the revised intervention component for the organisation and elite football coaching candidates the

component was developed for had been reached (e.g., "On a scale of 1 – "Strongly Disagree" to 5 "Strongly Agree", to what extent do you agree that this intervention [Stress and Mental Ill/Well-Being Reports] will lead to the candidates developing greater self-awareness of their own stress and ill/well-being and how/why it fluctuates over time?"). Following this, participants were asked to indicate why they had chosen the specific rating on the Likert scale question and provided with space to offer any further feedback on how the intervention might be more efficacious in attending to its aim.

Results

Incorporating the feedback received on each intervention component, the general results of our Delphi are presented below by round and specific to each intervention component.

Round One

For each intervention component, the evaluative statements received were grouped into two main categories via preliminary content analysis: positive and negative feedback. However, in line with the approach of Quartiroli et al. (2019), any positive (e.g., "well done with this") or negative (e.g., "I'm not sure about this") statements considered not helpful in the development of the final intervention were acknowledged but subsequently eliminated from the dataset. Within each of these categories, statements were further split into sub-categories that were more representative of the nature of the feedback provided (e.g., design and content). The evaluative statements in each of these main and sub-categories for each intervention component are summarised below and supported by a table of exemplar feedback statements (see Table 2; for further insight into the Evaluative Feedback from panellists for each round see Appendix K).

Table 2

Round One – Selected exemplar feedback statements from panellists on intervention components

Sub-Categories	Intervention Component One: Educational Resources	Intervention Component Two: Stress and Mental Ill/Well-Being Reports	Intervention Component Three: Assessment Centre Pressure Training
	Positive Feedback - Selected Exemplar Statements		
Perceived Positive Implications	As an awareness-raising exercise of concepts and their application it will work well	Reports will work really well in raising self-awareness of stress and well-being	Very useful for coaches to become self-aware of how they act in role relevant situations
Design & Content	Excellent themes, design, and approach	I like that the reports provide more depth, with infographics more accessible	Reflective template is important and will lead to enriched reflective accounts
Logistics	Fits well within existing course structure and the curriculum on offer	Good logic surrounding the time point nature of the reports / infographics	Fit seems logical, well thought out, and aligned

Sub-Categories			
	Negative Feedback - Selected Exemplar Statements		
Follow-Up Support	Discussion opportunity of content might be critical for deeper level learning	Additional support may be needed to help candidates to understand report	N/A*
Design & Content	Information provided needs to be evidence-based and may require change over time	N/A*	To avoid reflective approach being tick box, peer-mentor reflection might be powerful
Delivery	Consideration needed around how resources are introduced and consistently nudged to participants	N/A*	Delivery would need to be slick to represent realism
Potential Barriers to Engagement	N/A*	Engagement will depend on how intervention is introduced/reaffirmed throughout candidature	N/A*
Terminology, Conceptualisation, & Measures	Not keen on term 'psychological performance'	Language to be more coach-friendly, less academic	Some coaches may be put off by labelling of "role play"
Logistical	N/A*	N/A*	COVID may influence changes of course structure

* N/A indicates that no feedback statements were provided relating to the identified sub-category for that

specific intervention component.

Intervention One: Educational Resources

All positive evaluative feedback statements for the proposed educational resources were grouped into four categories: *perceived positive implications*; *content and design*; *logistics*; and, *delivery* (see Table 2 for examples of statements provided). For perceived positive implications, panellists provided six evaluative statements that related to how the educational resources would enhance coaches' awareness of stress and mental ill/well-being concepts, their potential ability to cope, and their mental well-being. For content and design, panellists provided six evaluative statements relating to the following five themes: (a) how the focus areas of the resources were evidence-based and clear; (b) how the focus areas of the resources were of the appropriate depth for elite football coaches; (c) how the content ideas were potentially stimulating and engaging; (d) how the different resource types proposed might satisfy coaches' differing needs; and, (e) how layering the content should provide underpinning knowledge, lead to self-awareness development, and lead to practice opportunities. For logistics, panellists provided four evaluative statements relating to two themes: (a) how the resources would fit logistically with the course due to breaks between face-to-face course contact points, and the resources being uploaded to a platform already used by coaches on the course; and, (b) how the resources might provide ongoing support to coaches should they be downloadable or should coaches maintain their access to them post-course.

All negative feedback provided by the panellists for the third intervention was grouped into four categories: *follow-up support*; *design and content*; *delivery*; and, *terminology* (see Table 2 for examples of statements provided). For follow-up support, panellists provided six evaluative statements that detailed how coaches might require follow-up support from course mentors after engaging with the resources, or opportunities to discuss the resource content with peers on their course to aid the learning

process and lead to implications for their practice. For design and content, eight evaluative statements were provided relating to: (a) how coaches might be more inclined to engage with shorter length resources (e.g., bitesise videos); (b) how consideration of EAST principles (e.g., easy, attractive, social and timely) might be important to consider during the design of the resources; (c) how considering alternative resource types to promote engagement might be worthwhile (e.g., coaches being able to download audio from videos); (d) how the resources could focus more on mental well-being factors; and, (e) how the content of the resources need to be evidence-based and might require changing over time. In relation to delivery, five evaluative statements were provided referring to: (a) needing to consider how the intervention is framed and pushed to encourage coach engagement; (b) how it might take significant time investment to produce high quality resources; (c) how mentors need to be appropriately trained to support coaches with the resource information and its application to practice; and (d) how, if resources are downloadable, consideration of copyright is needed. Finally, for terminology, one evaluative statement was provided by a panellist questioning the psychological terminology used relating to the resource focus areas.

Intervention Two: Stress and Mental Ill/Well-Being Reports

All evaluative statements deemed positive for the proposed stress and mental ill/well-being reports were grouped into three categories: *perceived positive implications*; *design and content*; and *logistics* (see Table 2 for examples of statements provided). In relation to perceived positive implications, 17 statements were provided detailing how the intervention component would: (a) develop coaches' awareness of how their role may influence their mental ill/well-being across different time points; (b) lead to coaches seeking support or developing more effective coping strategies; (c) encourage further conversation between coaches; and (d) provide candidates with a better understanding of

the self in order to perform. For design and content, eight statements were provided relating to: (a) the visual clarity of the reports; (b) the bespoke nature of the reports/infographics developed; (c) coaches potentially welcoming the in-depth report and supporting infographic; and, (d) the relevancy of the report information given the demanding nature of the role. Finally for logistics, four statements were provided relating to: (a) the logic of reports being provided across different time points; and (b) how conducting the intervention remotely and around existing course dates would improve its fit with the course structure.

Negative feedback was also grouped into three categories: *support and follow-up action*; *potential barriers to engagement*; and *terminology, conceptualisation, and measures* (see Table 2 for examples of statements provided). For support and follow-up action, panellists provided seven evaluative statements that related to: (a) the potential need to support coaches in understanding the information in the reports/infographics; and (b) following up with coaches to help them act upon their report/infographic findings. For potential barriers to engagement, 10 evaluative statements were provided relating to: (a) how framing, introducing, and reaffirming the importance of the intervention component will be essential in encouraging and maintaining coach engagement; (b) how time points associated with providing the reports might be at different phases of the season for coaches on the coach education course due to coaching in different leagues and warrants consideration: and, (c) how coaches' engagement might depend on the value attributed by the individual coach to the psychological aspect of elite football. Finally, for terminology, conceptualisation, and measures, panellists provided four evaluative statements relating to: (a) the intervention component description and report content needing to be more coach friendly and less academic; (b) the description of a

measure in the stress and mental ill/well-being report needing conceptual consideration; and, (c) there potentially being too much focus on ill-being measures in the reports.

Intervention Three: Assessment Centre Pressure Training

All positive feedback statements regarding the proposed assessment centre pressure training were also grouped into three categories: *perceived positive implications*; *design and content*; and, *logistics* (see Table 2 for examples of statements provided). For perceived positive implications, panellists provided 11 evaluative statements detailing: (a) how the intervention component might increase coaches' awareness of how they act in role-relevant situations; (b) how it provides an opportunity for coaches to engage in experiential and social learning; and, (c) how formal reflection will lead to coaches reflecting on their own performance in the scenarios and in their wider roles. For design and content, panellists provided eight evaluative statements relating to: (a) the contextual relevance of the intervention component to the coaches' role; (b) the role relevance of the scenarios proposed; (c) the reflective template proposed potentially leading to enriched reflective accounts; and, (d) how the intervention component attends to criticisms of coach education not meeting the demands of the job. For logistics, panellists provided three evaluative statements focusing on the fit and alignment of the intervention component to the existing course structure.

All negative feedback provided by the panellists for the second intervention was grouped into three categories: *design and content*; *delivery*; *terminology*; and, *logistics* (see Table 2 for examples of statements provided). For design and content, panellists provided 11 evaluative statements focusing on: (a) the use of more contemporary reflective practice approaches and consideration of when reflection takes place post-assessment centre experience; (b) the need for role play scenarios to be realistic and individualised for candidates; (c) the need to educate mentors and support staff to support

candidates to effectively engage in critical reflective practice. For delivery, panellists

provided five evaluative statements focusing on: (a) catching candidates off guard to

enhance the pressurised experience; (b) ensuring that trust, rapport, and perceived

psychological safety is developed prior to the intervention; and (c) the credibility and

quality of the viva panel and the sequencing of questions. For terminology, three

evaluative statements were provided by panellists that related to the labelling of the

intervention and its components lending to potential disengagement or perceptions of

judgement instead of development. Finally, for logistics, two evaluative statements were

provided by the panellists relating to how COVID-19 may influence the ability of the

NGB to conduct the intervention component given its face-to-face nature.

Round Two

Having been provided with their own and other panellists' feedback from Round

One, panellists were provided with the opportunity to refine, add to, or change their

initial feedback responses for each intervention component in Round Two (see Table 3

for example feedback statements). Three categories of response were provided by

panellists when completing Round Two: (a) reaffirming or adding to their initial

feedback points on each intervention component from Round One; (b) agreeing or

disagreeing with other panellists' feedback from Round One for each proposed

intervention component; and, (c) not wishing to add any further feedback on what had

already been provided by themselves and other panellists. For example, after viewing

their own and other panellist feedback on intervention component one, one panellist

reaffirmed and added to their initial feedback on the importance of potential discussion

time being built into the UEFA Professional Licence coach education programme. This

was proposed to afford candidates the opportunity to discuss and understand the resource

content provided, "I would reiterate the need to build time into the course for

Table 3

Round Two – Selected exemplar evaluative feedback statements from panellists on all three intervention components.

Feedback Type	Intervention One: Educational Resources	Intervention Component Two: Stress and Mental Ill/Well-Being Reports	Intervention Component Three: Assessment Centre Pressure Training
	Selected Exemplar Feedback Statements		
Reaffirming original feedback	I would reiterate the need to build time into the course for discussion between candidates and with mentors to make sense of things.	Reemphasise it may take time to build trust with candidates, and so a coach developer from it could act as a point of contact and sounding board.	To reiterate, the reflective process following the assessment centres and oral examination on completion is a good addition and should be included.
Providing additional feedback	You have got to be clear about the content of these resources, they might need to be updated on a regular basis and be future proofed.	May need to provide candidates with a template to effectively reflect on the resource.	It might be good to have a series of 'Plan B's' to account for logistical issues (e.g., how might the role plays be conducted remotely via Zoom)
Agreeing with other panellist feedback	I really like the concept of EAST - this is a nice framework to consider when designing each resource. In addition, I agree with the need to educate mentors for each resource so that they can support their mentees when using/addressing the resources.	I definitely agree that the use of more friendly language will be important.	Agree with others that "role play" and "viva" language would put people off. This might be non-negotiable for viva, but even "panel" would be a good alternative label.
Disagreeing with other panellist feedback	Finally - the term "psychological performance" is entirely appropriate. We need to change the language that is used in the game and so shying away from "psychological" only works to cement the existing stereotypes and stigma associated with this area.	Disagree with "summary" rather than an "infographic" comment.	N/A*
No further feedback	N/A*	No new comments come to mind beyond the feedback/considerations (positive and negative) appearing fair and reasonable.	I have no further feedback to offer.

* N/A indicates that no feedback statements were provided relating to the identified feedback type for that specific intervention component.

discussion between candidates and with mentors to make sense of things." An example of a panellist agreeing with other panellist feedback from Round One on intervention component three was reported when they suggested, "Agree with others that 'role play' and 'viva' language would put people off." Conversely, some panellists disagreed with other panellist feedback provided in Round One and referenced this in their Round Two feedback. For example, in response to another panellist suggesting that the term, "infographic" should be replaced with "summary" in relation to the reports proposed for intervention component two, one panellist suggested, "Disagree with 'summary' rather than an 'infographic' comment." Finally, across the three intervention components, some participants wished not to add anything further to the feedback already provided, with one suggesting the following on intervention component two, "No new comments come to mind beyond the feedback/considerations (positive and negative) appearing fair and reasonable."

Intervention Component Amendments and Additions

Following consideration of all panellist feedback from both Rounds One and Two, amendments were made (or further considerations afforded) to each intervention component where applicable and logistically appropriate for the proposed intervention aims and coach education programme it was designed for. For example, for educational resources, the following changes were proposed: (a) personal mentors to follow-up with coaches on resource content and discuss (individually or as a group) its application to practice; (b) use of different resource engagement formats (e.g., coaches able to download audio from 5-minute Insight Videos); (c) personal mentors will be educated and upskilled on each resource, and, alongside an accredited sport psychologist, will be available for coaches to access further support; and, (d) resources will be downloadable and accessible post-course for long-term engagement.

For the stress and mental ill/well-being reports, the following changes were made: (a) coaches will be provided with an explanation of how to interpret their report information; (b) mentors will follow-up with coaches to help them reflect and act on report information; (c) psychological support will be made available to coaches should they require it; (d) all language within proposed reports were reviewed and checked for coach friendliness; and, (e) descriptions of measures utilised were reviewed to ensure conceptual appropriateness.

Finally, for assessment centre pressure training, the following changes were made: (a) changes of intervention language to become more coach development focused or coach friendly (e.g., "assessment centre" to "coach development centre", "role play" to "experiential learning", and "viva" to "exit interview"); (b) proposed scenarios to be relevant to coaches' future roles in elite football; (c) coaches to not be briefed before stressful role-related scenarios to encourage realism; (d) personal mentors and an accredited sport psychologist made accessible to support coaches throughout; and, (e) coaches to engage in peer-mentor or group reflection on their learnings from the experience and not solely engage in individual reflection.

Round Three

Final consensus and feedback on the efficacy of each intervention component, which had been modified in accord with panellist feedback from Rounds One and Two, was sought in Round Three. To achieve consensus on the efficacy of the proposed intervention components for achieving their desired aims, like previous researchers adopting a Delphi approach (e.g., Barrios et al., 2021), a 75% agreement threshold was adopted. Consequently, we deemed consensus to be reached in this study should 75% or more of panellists 'Agree' or 'Strongly Agree' with the potential efficacy of the final intervention components.

The final version of intervention component one (i.e., educational resources) achieved consensus, with 60% indicating they *strongly agreed* and 40% indicating they *agreed* that the intervention component will lead to the candidates developing a better understanding of the concepts of stress and mental ill/well-being and their influencing factors, how to better manage the self, and the importance of psychology for coach performance. Panellists were also asked to detail why they had chosen their specific ratings (see Table 4 for example feedback statements on rating choice). Of those who *strongly agreed*, one panellist supported their rating by reporting, "You've listened and proposed to create even more accessible resources - enabling the coaches to access and utilise for longer." Finally, one panellist who indicated that they *agreed* suggested, "All seems very well thought out. The provision of a British Association of Sport and Exercise Science accredited practitioner is an important support mechanism for the process, especially in up-skilling mentors in how to understand and communicate the feedback."

The final version of intervention component two (i.e., stress and mental ill/well-being reports) achieved consensus, with 50% indicating that they *strongly agreed* and 40% indicating that they *agreed* that the intervention component will lead to candidates developing a greater self-awareness of their own stress and mental ill/well-being and how/why it might fluctuate over time. 10% did, however, indicate that they *disagreed*. One participant who *strongly agreed* suggested, "The support the candidates are now offered around these reports (mentoring, option to seek support from a sport and exercise psychologist) and the ongoing focus on these reports throughout will support improved self-awareness." Another panellist who *agreed* stated, "You have given careful consideration and your decision making seems logical with actions taken to address

Table 4

Round Three – Selected exemplar evaluative feedback statements from panellists supporting their intervention component ratings

	Intervention Component One: Educational Resources	Intervention Component Two: Stress and Mental Ill/Well-Being Reports	Intervention Component Two: Assessment Centre Pressure Training
Rating	Selected Exemplar Feedback Statements		
Strongly Agree	The length of materials is now great - varied formats and ultimately short and sharp. Ongoing access to support/supervision for mentors seems valuable. Seems like copyright issues are sorted too.	I really like the variety and depth of the infographic and in-depth report. The action planning and support processes offered to coaches is now very comprehensive and thought through - congrats! The language and conceptual information seems to be nicely balanced.	Scenario-based learning facilitated by reflective practice is a powerful mechanism for improving practice and informing more adaptive behavioural responses to difficult situations. The proposed changes make sense - they support what would be an extremely valuable learning experience.
Agree	I feel the coaches will be positively overwhelmed by the support they are receiving.	Having a mentor will help make-sense and provide an opportunity for appropriate signposting. The personalised infographic will make learning memorable. More coach friendly language is a positive amendment to the intervention.	You have made the process more user friendly with plenty of intervention throughout the year. This support is something new to candidates, so the framing is vital to ensure candidates trust the process.
Neither Agree or Disagree	N/A*	N/A*	N/A*
Disagree	N/A*	Still too much information from my perspective.	N/A*

* N/A indicates that no feedback statements were provided relating to the identified rating for that specific intervention component.

issues and even where no action was taken." However, the panellist who *disagreed* with its potential efficacy reasoned this rating with, "Still too much information for me."

The final version of intervention component three (i.e., assessment centre pressure training) also achieved consensus, with 60% of panellists indicating they *strongly agreed* and 30% of panellists indicating they *agreed* that the intervention component will lead to candidates becoming more self-aware of how they cope with role-relevant situations, and potentially influence the way they cope in future similar situations. A panellist who *strongly agreed* supported their rating choice with the following feedback, "Scenario-based learning facilitated by reflective practice is a powerful mechanism for improving practice and informing more adaptive behavioural responses to difficult situations. The proposed changes make sense - they support what would be an extremely valuable learning experience." A panellist who *agreed* supported their rating by suggesting, "You have provided through the resources, great support. I really like the shift to 'assessment FOR learning' rather that 'OF'. Use of wider formats and opportunities to reflect and share experiences is much better." One panellist did indicate they *neither agreed or disagreed* on the efficacy of this component but provided no explanation.

General Discussion

Researchers have previously found that ineffectively coping with role-related demands can lead to negative mental ill/well-being implications for elite football coaches (see Baldock et al., 2021 [Ph.D. Study 1], Baldock et al., 2022 [Ph.D. Study 2]). To help elite coaches cope more effectively, stress management interventions have been developed across other sports but have been criticised for failing to consider the specific context of the sports that coaches receiving them might operate in, and for often lacking contextual and practical credibility due to not considering the perspectives of the end-

users (i.e., coaches) and/or those who might support the delivery of them (i.e., organisational staff; Rumbold et al., 2018). We adopted a multi-part, exploratory sequential mixed-methods research design to develop an end-user, and expert informed, stress and mental ill/well-being intervention aimed at better preparing and supporting future and current elite football coaches for the demands of the role.

Utility of the Approach

First, the opinions of those working in the context pertinent to this study regarding how future and current elite football coaches might be better prepared and supported to cope with the demanding nature of their roles were explored. To our knowledge, this represents the first study to explicitly seek the opinions of the end-users of elite coach stress and mental ill/well-being interventions prior to their development. This part (one) of our study resulted in the construction of a range of informed ideas to consider for future intervention development, which included implications for coach education providers (e.g., encouraging sharing of stress experiences, use of stressor role plays), clubs (e.g., increased provision of psychological support), NGBs (e.g., better signposting of role-relevant CPD), and coaches (e.g., greater seeking of CPD opportunities). Such findings carry potential importance given that elite football coaches are still often reported to need to exemplify masculinity and strength in their highly pressurised roles, which might result in them being unwilling to share concerns or seek greater support to cope (Goldman & Gervis, 2021). While ethical guidelines surrounding participant anonymity might have dictated why coaches were willing and open to share such insights in this study, the many potential intervention areas reported by elite football coaches does perhaps demonstrate them being open to the idea of being supported to cope with the demands of their roles. Further, while our findings led to the development of a proposed stress and mental ill/well-being coach education intervention in this study,

they also highlight how key stakeholders and other organisations (e.g., NGBs and clubs) in football still need to consider how they might better support coaches to cope more effectively with the demands at the elite level. With coping effectiveness linked with positive implications for the wider lives, mental well-being, and performance of elite football coaches (see Baldock et al., 2021 [Ph.D. Study 1]), doing so might help them thrive and better perform in their roles.

Second, to attend to the aim and objectives of this research, a proposed stress and mental ill/well-being coach education intervention was developed using the findings of part one, and in part two the intervention was iteratively scrutinised and evaluated by a series of expert panellists via a Delphi method. While the Delphi method is being increasingly adopted by sport psychology researchers to achieve consensus on important field-related topics (see Quartiroli et al., 2019), to the best of our knowledge this is the first study to utilise this approach to evaluate the efficacy of a proposed stress and mental ill/well-being intervention prior to full development. We asked a range of experts to provide feedback over three rounds on the intervention components to amend and ready each component for final development. In obtaining such an array of perspectives, we proposed to make a series of appropriate and more informed amendments to the initially presented components and achieve consensus from panellists on the efficacy of the final components in satisfying their individual aims. This novel approach to evaluating the proposed intervention meant we attended to previous limitations of existing stress management interventions (see McNeill et al., 2020), as it helped us to develop a theoretically informed, user driven, practical and organisationally fit-for-purpose, stress and mental ill/well-being coach education intervention for elite football coaches. Consequently, we can be confident in suggesting that when fully developed our intervention will support elite football coaches with their stress and mental ill/well-being

experiences. Given such potential benefits, we recommend future researchers consider adopting a similar approach when developing such interventions to ensure they are most efficacious in supporting elite coaches.

Implications for the Final Proposed Intervention

Throughout the Delphi, panellists provided substantial feedback in relation to how the content, delivery, theoretical underpinning, logistical fit, and candidate engagement in the intervention components might be improved. Utilising this novel approach led to a series of informed amendments and additions to the proposed intervention and its components, which were deemed (by the authors) organisationally applicable, appropriate, and to have positive learning implications for the candidates. The refined intervention components then received panellist consensus in round three in relation to their efficacy in satisfying their individually proposed aims. Some proposed additions in response to panellist feedback on the intervention and its components are presented, alongside theoretical evidence to support them and suggestions concerning their contribution to the efficacy of the intervention.

Prior to delivering the intervention components, panellists referred to the necessity of initially framing the importance of the overall intervention to the candidates to improve their buy-in into its components. Researchers have, previously, stressed the importance of explaining the reasons for interventions to end-users to enhance their buy-in (Randall et al., 2019). In attending to the feedback provided by panellists, we proposed to frame the importance of the intervention and its components through the provision of an online, or face-to-face, evidence-based presentation during the introduction day of their coach education course. This proposed presentation would provide insight into the findings of Baldock et al.'s (2021 [Ph.D. Study 1]; 2022 [Ph.D. Study 2]) research

highlighting how ineffectively coping with stress experiences can lead to detrimental implications for elite football coaches' performance and mental well-being.

For the educational resource component, panellists suggested providing candidates with follow-up mentor support in attempts to help them make sense of the infographic and video resource information and its potential implications for their lives. While researchers have reported to offer participants follow-up support to help them digest and appropriately apply information delivered in stress and mental ill/well-being interventions (e.g., McNeill et al., 2020; Wagstaff et al., 2013), others have failed to offer this support or only signposted where participants may externally access it (e.g., Shannon et al., 2019). Further, despite video resources and infographics being rarely used in coach stress and mental ill/well-being interventions, they have been utilised in wider population mental health literacy interventions with mostly no follow-up support being offered to participants (see Ito-Jaeger et al., 2021). Utilised alone, the resource types proposed in this intervention component (e.g., infographics and videos) have been reported to enhance individuals' awareness of stress and mental ill/well-being, but not whether individuals understand how the information might apply to their lives and help them overcome personal stress and mental ill/well-being issues (Muir & Munroe-Chandler, 2020). In contrast, effective mentor support can help coaches reflect on their own personal experiences, lead to deeper sensemaking and interpretation of information, and potentially result in positive change (Dixon, 2021). Consequently, it was agreed to add mentor support to the final intervention component.

While offering mentor support to candidates had been agreed to be added to the educational resources and stress and mental ill/well-being report components, it was initially proposed as a fundamental part of helping candidates act on their reflections from their assessment centre experiences. To enhance the effectiveness of mentor support

provided across all intervention components, panellists suggested it was important to appropriately train and upskill mentors on their role in the process and in understanding the content provided. Indeed, coach education mentors have reported feeling inadequately prepared and insecure about their ability to effectively mentor, highlighting their desire for greater professional development and to be appropriately upskilled by NGBs (see Bailey et al., 2019). The stress and mental ill/well-being focus of the intervention components requiring follow-up support might also exacerbate such feelings for coach education mentors, with training arguably more important to ensure candidates are appropriately and ethically supported following engagement in these intervention components. Consequently, to attend to panellist feedback and appropriately upskill coach education mentors, an educational workshop delivered to mentors prior to course commencement was proposed as part of the final intervention. This proposal entailed helping mentors understand: (a) the content of the educational resources, stress and mental ill/well-being reports, and assessment centre experiences; (b) their potential importance for candidates' future practice and well-being; and, (c) their own personal competency levels and when and how to appropriately refer candidates to a more trained/qualified practitioner, if needed. This proposed addition can enable mentors to have increased understanding of the scope of their role and the necessary knowledge to offer an appropriate level of support to the candidates.

For the assessment centre pressure training component, a series of other amendments and additions to the initially proposed intervention component were made in line with the Delphi panellists' feedback. For example, panellists referred to how the terms "assessment centre", "role play" and "viva" were not synergistic with the developmental nature of coach education and/or might lead to elite football coaches not understanding or buying in to the intervention. Indeed, researchers have highlighted the

importance of appropriate intervention terminology to support end-user buy in (Randall et al., 2019). Thus, in line with panellist feedback, it was proposed that these terms would be replaced with "coach development centre", "experiential learning", and "exit interview" to enhance applicability to the context of coach education and improve candidate buy-in.

Panellists also highlighted how catching the candidates off-guard with the pressurised encounters planned in this intervention component (e.g., mock press conferences) might enhance the realism of the stressor response experienced by candidates and liken it to what they might experience in elite football coaching roles. Such contentions are supported by previous research findings, with stressors underpinned by situational properties of ambiguity (i.e., when information required to appraise a situation is unclear) and imminence (i.e., period of anticipation before an event) reported to lead to threat appraisals and negative emotional (e.g., anxiety) and behavioural (e.g., decreased capacity to focus) responses in elite football coaches (Baldock et al., 2021 [Ph.D. Study 1]). Consequently, it was proposed that the candidates would not be briefed on what they would experience prior to this intervention component commencing, and that they would experience the stressful encounters separately from other course candidates to enhance the potential psychological realism of the situations.

It was initially proposed that following the assessment centre (coach development centre) experience candidates would have to complete a directed reflective practice template and upload it to their online course portal, with follow-up mentor support offered to help candidates engage with their reflective action plans. However, panellists suggested the use of a reflective practice template was too rigid, and the requirement for candidates to upload their reflections might be interpreted as a 'tick box' exercise. This highlighted the need to consider other forms of reflection (e.g., peer-mentor reflection,

group reflection, audio reflections). Indeed, collaborative reflection has been suggested to provide coaches with a source of social support, affirm and challenge their views and practices, and inspire creativity to grow via discussion, cooperation, and knowledge exchange on collective experiences (Dixon, 2021). The written reflective template was developed and initially proposed to guide candidates to engage in critical reflective practice (e.g., questions posed to ensure learning from experience, which can subsequently impact future practice). However, alternative means of engaging in reflective practice have been reported to be efficacious (e.g., audio reflection; Cropley et al., 2015), and providing coaches with autonomy over aspects of the stress and mental ill/well-being interventions they participate in has been reportedly beneficial for engagement (McNeill et al., 2020). Consequently, it was proposed for the final intervention component that: (a) group reflection would occur post-assessment centre to allow candidates to collaboratively reflect on their assessment centre experiences with their peers; and, (b) candidates would be provided with autonomy to choose how they want to individually reflect on their experiences, using the reflective template as a guide, and working through their reflective action plans with their mentor.

For the stress and mental ill/well-being reports component, panellists highlighted that for the reports to be efficacious in achieving their intended purpose, candidates would need to understand the information provided to them in the reports and how to act on it. This feedback corroborates the views of other researchers on how to enhance participant understanding of the information delivered during interventions and its implications for their lives (McNeill et al., 2020; Shannon et al., 2019). Specifically, panellists stressed the need for providing clear, online visual or auditory information, or clear explanations from a session facilitator. It was, therefore, proposed that insight into how candidates should interpret and act on the report information would be provided in

writing before the reports were received. Further, that mentors would also be available to help candidates reflect on the information and act on it. Finally, panellists suggested that consideration needs to be afforded to offering candidates psychological support if they present mental ill/well-being scores that put them at risk of developing mental health issues. Providing coaches with access to sport psychology services and increasing their perceptions of social support has been previously reported as integral to recovery from mental ill-being implications (e.g., burnout; Kentä et al., 2020). Despite this, rarely has individual-based psychological support been reported to be offered to participants following participation in stress and mental ill/well-being related interventions, with support often signposted instead. Uniquely, to attend to this feedback and ensure candidates are appropriately supported throughout the programme, the final intervention proposed to make it clear to candidates in the summary of their reports that if they feel they might be at risk and require further support, that they should contact the qualified sport psychologist identified.

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Limitations and Future Directions

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Given the unique methodological approach adopted to inform the development of an elite football coach stress and mental ill/well-being coach education intervention, this study represents a novel and timely contribution to the extant coach stress management literature. Nevertheless, in demonstrating the reflexivity of the research team, limitations of the work are noted and future research directions are proposed. First, despite the opinions of elite football coaches being explored in part one of this study, and subsequently utilised to develop the proposed stress and mental ill/well-being coach education intervention components iteratively evaluated in part two, elite football coaches were not asked to be part of the Delphi panel providing the evaluation of the intervention components proposed. While potentially difficult to obtain participation of

elite coaches in such a thorough and iterative intervention evaluation over time, incorporating further end-user (i.e., coaches) evaluation might have provided alternative insights into the efficacy of the proposed intervention components, which could have led to different amendments to each intervention component. Second, while an online Delphi approach via the completion of a series of online surveys was utilised to negate issues of conformity, power, and panellist dominance, and hopefully led to panellists feeling more comfortable to share their evaluative feedback, some panellists opted to not provide further feedback in round two on some intervention components. Similarly, these panellists opted to not explain their efficacy ratings for some intervention components in round three. While these panellists were emailed and asked if they would be willing to share such insights, these panellists declined. Researchers may, therefore, wish to consider how they might obtain more complete datasets from panellists when utilising similar approaches. Finally, formal evaluation of the intervention following implementation is arguably now warranted to truly assess its efficacy. This is important given that Delphi panellists in this study were asked to evaluate the *potential* efficacy of the proposed stress and mental ill/well-being intervention components, which informed proposed amendments to them prior to their full development and implementation.

Conclusion

As a result of the multi-part, exploratory sequential mixed-methods research design adopted, this study makes a novel contribution to the coach stress and mental ill/well-being management literature. Indeed, this study is the first to: (a) explore the views of potential end-users (i.e., elite football coaches) to inform the development of an elite football coach stress and mental ill/well-being coach education intervention; (b) comprehensively and iteratively evaluate the efficacy of a proposed stress and mental ill/well-being coach education intervention via feedback from of a range of theoretically,

contextually, and practically relevant stakeholders, using a Delphi approach; and, (c) use feedback generated from the Delphi approach to make appropriate amendments to the proposed intervention components prior to official intervention development and implementation in the context for which it was developed. Collectively, the findings have important implications for key stakeholders and organisations operating in the context of elite football. Specifically, elite football coaches believe that coach education programmes, clubs, NGBs, and coaches themselves need to do more to better prepare and support coaches to cope with the demanding nature of their roles at the elite level; and, attention should be afforded to the views of end-users of, and contributors to, future interventions aimed at better preparing and supporting football coaches to cope with role-related demands at elite level. Doing so will ensure future interventions are evidence-based, contextually relevant, hold practical credence, and are organisationally fit-for-purpose.

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CHAPTER 6

General Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction

The final chapter of this thesis aims to consolidate the findings of each of the studies presented, discuss how they significantly contribute to knowledge and understanding, and identify the implications emanating from this programme of research in relation to the overall aim of this thesis. To do so, this chapter comprises six individual sections that offer: (a) an overview of the aim, objectives, and main findings of each study; (b) a conceptual discussion of how the findings of this programme of research contribute to theory and advance understanding in the area of stress and mental ill/well-being (MIB/MWB); (c) insight into the practical implications that this programme of research may have for elite football coaches and others in elite sport; (d) a summary of how the outputs of this thesis have been disseminated and led to significant impact for the education and support of coaches in elite football and other sports; (e) an overview of the strengths and limitations of the programme of research and an outline of potential directions for future research in the area; and, (f) a conclusion that draws together the key contributions to knowledge and practice of this thesis.

Overview of Studies

The overall aim of this thesis was to provide detailed and empirical evidence in relation to how the stress process is experienced by elite football coaching populations, and how it might impact their professional and personal lives, as well as their overall MIB/MWB. The intention of doing this was to inform how coaches can be better supported to manage the demanding nature of their role. Prior to commencing this programme of research, considerable attention had been afforded to the stress experiences of elite coaches (e.g., Didymus, 2017; see Olusoga & Thelwell, 2016; Thelwell et al., 2017), with most researchers adopting Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional theory of stress or Lazarus' (1999) cognitive-motivational-relational theory

of stress and emotion (CMRT) to underpin their examination. However, despite stress being purported as a *process* in these theories, much of the extant literature explored individual stress components in isolation (e.g., stressors experienced by coaches), focusing on aspects of, and not the entire stress process. Additionally, researchers had sampled elite coaches operating across various sports in their work (e.g., Didymus, 2017; Olusoga et al., 2009) and in relation to the impact of stressors, mostly considered how coaches' stress experiences might influence their own performance and the performance of their athletes (e.g., Kentta et al., 2020; Olusoga et al., 2010; Thelwell et al., 2017). Consequently, to build upon the extant literature and advance understanding of the stress experiences of elite coaches, research was required that: (a) considered stress as a process by examining main stress components identified by Lazarus and Folkman (e.g., stressors, situational properties, appraisals, emotional responses, coping) and their interrelations; (b) explored elite coaches' stress experiences in the sport-specific contexts they operate in (e.g., elite football); and, (c) considered how elite coaches' stress experiences not only influence their performance in their roles and the performance of their athletes, but also their wider lives and MIB/MWB (Didymus et al., 2018). By attending to the limitations presented above in the context of elite football, shaped by intense pressure to obtain positive results, severe public scrutiny and media attention, and high job insecurity (see Thompson et al., 2015), the current programme of research sought to significantly advance understanding of stress and MIB/MWB in elite coaching. It would also illuminate the experiences of individuals, who despite operating at the apex of sport and in the public eye, had often been described as inaccessible and their experiences somewhat mystical (Ronkainen et al., 2020).

To address the aim of the thesis, several objectives were developed, and included to: (a) examine the holistic stress experiences of elite football coaches, and how these

experiences influenced their professional and personal lives and mental well-being

(MWB; [Ph.D. Study 1]); (b) investigate elite football coaches' stress and MIB/MWB

experiences over time and particularly, how stress-related components and their

relationships might influence fluctuations in MIB/MWB (Ph.D. Study 2); and, (c)

explore how to prepare elite football coaches to cope more effectively with the stress

associated with their roles, and subsequently design a supportive, evidence-based stress

and MIB/MWB intervention (Ph.D. Study 3). The following sections provide an

overview of each of the studies attending to these objectives.

Study 1: Stress and Mental Well-Being Experiences of Professional Football

Coaches

With the call for a more comprehensive examination of the holistic stress

experiences of elite coaches and to move away from solely exploring stress components

in isolation (e.g., Baldock et al., 2020 [Chapter 2]; Didymus, 2017), as well as the need

to substantiate the tentative relationship between stress and MWB (Didymus et al.,

2018), in Study 1 the stress and MWB experiences of professional football coaches were

explored. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight professional football

coaches to explore their stress experiences (e.g., situational properties, appraisals,

emotional responses, coping strategies) of the three most pertinent stressors they believed

they experienced in their roles, and how these experiences impacted upon their

professional and personal lives and MWB. Professional football coaches reported

appraising and emotionally responding to most of the stressors experienced negatively,

irrespective of the stressor origin (e.g., performance, organisational, and personal). The

professional football coaches also reported utilising a variety of strategies to cope with

their stress experiences. These strategies were suggested to be mainly ineffective,

irrespective of how the coaches appraised and emotionally responded to stressors,

leading to a range of negative professional, personal life, and MWB implications. Additionally, professional football coaches also revealed some implications of ineffectively coping that were more representative of MIB and not MWB (e.g., burnout). Finding that coping effectiveness largely contributed to the impact of professional football coaches' stress experiences on their lives, MWB, and potentially MIB also influenced the aim and objectives developed for Study 2. Specifically, coping effectiveness was considered as a factor that may influence changes in MIB/MWB over time.

Study 2: A Longitudinal Examination of Stress and MIB/MWB in Elite Football Coaches

Although the holistic stress experiences of professional football coaches and their influence on their lives and MWB were comprehensively explored in Study 1, this study was cross-sectional in design and did not attempt to consider how stressors and the subsequent experiences of them might vary across different points of a traditional football season. Further, while participants in Study 1 discussed the impact of their stress experiences on their MWB, they gave some indication that the consequences of ineffectively coping may be more representative of MIB. Consequently, in Study 2 a concurrent mixed methods research design was adopted to longitudinally examine stress and MIB/MWB in elite football coaches. This entailed quantitatively exploring how the phase of a traditional football season (e.g., pre-season, beginning of the season, mid-season, and end of the season), perceived severity of the stressors[2] experienced, and subsequent perceptions of coping effectiveness predicted elite football coaches'

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[2] Following the contentions of researchers exploring stress and its impact on health-related outcomes across different fields (Espejo et al., 2011; Fassett-Carman et al., 2020; Vagg & Spielberger, 1999; Shields et al., 2022), stressor severity is considered in this thesis to conceptually represent the subjectively perceived weight of coaches' stress experiences following a stressor. That is, the perceived extent to which a stressor leads to experiences of strain (e.g., negative cognitive, affective, and behavioural outcomes) and negative implications for coaches' lives.

MIB/MWB. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted at each time point (phase) to explore participants' stress and MIB/MWB experiences to gain in-depth insight into the mechanisms underpinning potential quantitative relationships.

Elite football coaches' MWB was lower during the beginning of the season and appeared to result from negative appraisals and emotional responses to uncontrollable performance stressors (e.g., poor results) and ineffective coping attempts (e.g., increased use of self-reliance strategies). Emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation scores were higher during the end of the season and appeared to result from negative appraisals and emotional responses to stressors associated with accumulative workload, interpersonal conflict, and other performance and organisational stressors (e.g., releasing players). Experiencing high severity stressors was reported to lead to decreases in MWB unless participants reported coping effectively (e.g., utilising social support networks), and increases in depersonalisation and decreases in performance accomplishment, which appeared to result from negatively appraising (e.g., questioning own competence) and responding via associated states (e.g., demotivation) and behaviours (e.g., cynicism towards players). Finally, coping effectiveness predicted emotional exhaustion scores across the season, with ineffective coping attempts leading to negative responses and subsequent personal implications that appeared to explain such fluctuations. These findings advance understanding of the stress and MIB/MWB experiences of elite football coaches over time. Alongside elite football coaches reporting in Study 1 to often ineffectively cope with their stress experiences and it to lead to negative MWB implications and indicators of MIB, these findings also offer further support for the need to better assist elite football coaches to cope with the fluctuating and demanding nature of their roles. As such, collectively the findings of Study 1 and 2 provided empirical

support for the objectives of Study 3, particularly in relation to the development of an elite football coach stress and MIB/MWB intervention.

Study 3: Developing a Stress and Mental Ill/Well-Being Football Coach Education Intervention: Supporting Elite Football Coaches with the Demanding Nature of their Role

Across studies 1 and 2, elite football coaches reported ineffectively coping with many of their role-related stress experiences which led to a range of detrimental implications for their professional and personal lives, reduced MWB and increased symptoms of MIB. These findings highlighted that more support is needed to help current and future elite football coaches become better equipped to deal with the demanding nature of their roles. While several coach stress and MIB/MWB interventions had been developed for coaches operating across other sports (e.g., Wagstaff et al., 2013; Olusoga et al., 2014; McNeill et al., 2020), the contexts that coaches operated and experienced stressors in were often not considered during intervention design. Additionally, there had been no consideration of the perspectives of the end-users (i.e., coaches) and/or facilitators of the delivery of these interventions during design (i.e., organisational staff; Rumbold et al., 2018), potentially leading to theoretically sound but contextually and practically unsuitable interventions. To address these limitations in the literature, a multi-part, exploratory sequential mixed methods research design was adopted in Study 3.

In part one, elite football coaches were interviewed to obtain their perspectives on how current and future elite football coaches might be better supported to cope with role-related stress and maintain MWB. It was suggested that coach education programme providers, clubs, national governing bodies (NGBs), and coaches themselves could all do more to better support elite football coaches to be able to effectively cope, with raising

coaches' awareness of stress, coping, and MIB/MWB and of how stress might influence performance and MIB/MWB outcomes. The findings from part one were used to develop a stress and MIB/MWB coach education intervention, for elite football coaching candidates undergoing a Union of European Football Association (UEFA) Professional Licence course, comprising three main components: (a) *educational resources* (e.g., infographics, 5-minute insight videos, 20-minute video presentations) to enhance candidate awareness of stress and MIB/MWB related concepts, of their own stress and MIB/MWB experiences, and how to better manage them; (b) *stress and MIB/MWB reports* to enhance candidate awareness of their own stress and MIB/MWB across different phases of a traditional football season; and, (c) *assessment centre pressure training* that aimed to expose candidates to role-relevant stressful situations (e.g., mock job interview, media press conference), purposefully and critically reflect on these experiences, and undertake an oral viva where a panel of experts could help candidates reflect on and explore their stress management approaches, assessment centre experiences, and learnings about psychological performance from the course.

In part two of the study, a Delphi method was adopted to iteratively evaluate the efficacy of each of the proposed intervention components. Expert panellists (e.g., sport psychologists, coach educators, coach developers) provided feedback on the proposed intervention components over a series of rounds, which led to a range of amendments and additions to each component. Consensus from the panellists in relation to the efficacy of the amended and final proposed components was then sought and obtained. As a result of adopting this novel, multipart research design, the perspectives of elite football coaches (i.e., the end-users of the intervention) and experts led to a theoretical, contextual, and practically underpinned intervention. The adoption of a rigorous approach to the development of the intervention therefore better serves elite football

coaches to become more aware of stress and MIB/MWB concepts, their own stress and MIB/MWB experiences, and how to better manage them.

Theoretical Contribution and Conceptual Advancements

In this section, specific focus is afforded to how the work presented in this thesis enhances conceptual understanding of the processes and constructs explored (and their relationships) in this programme of work, and how the findings of the research conducted build upon those reported in the extant coach-stress and MIB/MWB literature.

Understanding the Link between Stress and MWB

By attending to the first objective of this research programme, the findings of Study 1 (Baldock et al., 2021 [Chapter 3]) significantly contribute to existing literature and advance understanding of how the components of the stress process are experienced by elite football coaches, of the links between the concepts of stress and MWB, and of MWB as a concept. To elaborate, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) proposed eight situational properties of stressors (e.g., novelty, predictability, event uncertainty, imminence, duration, temporal uncertainty, ambiguity, and timing of events) and contended that these properties ultimately influence how individuals appraise stressors and subsequently experience stress. Despite their purported importance to the stress experience, seldom has attention has been afforded to situational properties in coach stress research. Didymus (2017) explored some components of Olympic coaches' stress experiences (e.g., stressors, situational properties, appraisals, coping) in isolation. Didymus' findings suggested situational properties experienced by Olympic coaches were in line with those reported by Lazarus and Folkman and coaches experienced more threat and challenge than harm/loss and benefit appraisals. In contrast, professional football coaches participating in Study 1 of this thesis frequently reported additional situational properties that had previously only been reported by athletes (e.g., self and other comparison and

inadequate preparation; Thatcher & Day, 2008), and mainly threat and harm/loss appraisals. Indeed, the differences in situational properties and appraisals reported by coaches in Study 1 and those in Didymus' work appear to represent relationally Lazarus and Folkman's contentions associated with the situational nature of stress. Specifically, professional football coaches operate in environments associated with increased job turnover, scrutiny, and peer-comparison (Morrow & Howieson, 2018). Due to busy fixture schedules and short turnaround times between matches (e.g., 3-5 days), they have limited time to prepare for competition in comparison to Olympic coaches. Thus, potentially explaining why such situational properties and the greater propensity for negative appraisals were reported. These novel findings suggest that while Lazarus and Folkman proposed globally experienced situational properties of stressors, the situational nature of stress means that alternative properties exist for coaches operating in different contexts. Thus, providing further support for why context-specific investigations of coaches' stress experiences are necessary.

Through CMRT, Lazarus (1999) proposed that an individual's stress experiences can impact their performance and MWB. However, Lazarus offered relatively limited insight into the mechanisms underpinning this process. Beyond Lazarus' work, researchers in sport have also failed to comprehensively detail how stress experiences might impact upon the MWB of coaching populations, often referring to this link in their work but without explicit exploration of it. Nevertheless, prior to the completion of Study 1, Potts et al. (2021) did qualitatively explore how primary appraisals of stressors influenced coaches' perceptions of eudaimonic dimensions of MWB alone, providing initial insight into this relationship (e.g., threat appraisals thwarted coaches' perceptions of autonomy and environmental mastery, whereas benefit appraisals enhanced perceptions of self-acceptance). However, Potts et al. did not consider how other key

components of the stress process (e.g., emotion, coping) might influence MWB. They

also did not consider hedonic well-being indicators in their exploration, despite sport

psychology researchers alluding to how MWB likely constitutes aspects of both

eudaimonic and hedonic conceptualisations (Lundqvist, 2011). In Study 1 of this thesis,

these other key components of stress and conceptualisations of MWB (e.g., hedonia)

were considered and, in contrast to Potts et al.'s findings, revealed that irrespective of

professional football coaches' primary appraisals of stressors (e.g., threat, challenge,

harm/loss, or benefit), how effectively coaches coped with their stress experiences

ultimately determined the impact on their MWB. For example, effectively coping despite

primarily appraising a stressor negatively (e.g., as a threat) was reported to enhance

perceptions of personal growth and job satisfaction. In contrast, ineffectively coping,

irrespective of the primary appraisal type, led to negative implications for coaches'

relationships with others and the subsequent experience of negative affect. These

findings build upon those reported by Potts et al. by highlighting the importance of other

components of the stress process (e.g., coping) in relation to their influence on MWB.

The differences between the findings of Potts et al. and those reported in Study 1 might

also be explained by Lazarus' contentions relating to the ongoing nature of appraisals

throughout the entirety of the stress process. For example, despite appraising a stressor as

a threat, upon effectively coping with that stressor and their responses to it (e.g.,

emotions), professional football coaches' reflections on the *benefit* of experiencing the

situation and its positive outcomes (e.g., professionally and personally), due to coping

effectively, might have influenced their subsequent perceptions of eudaimonic

dimensions (e.g., fulfilment; mastery; increased sense of purpose) and led to experiences

of hedonia (e.g., job satisfaction, happiness). Such findings and explanations are,

however, preliminary in nature and so the impact of coping effectiveness perceptions on

how positively individuals reflect on their stress experiences, as well as its subsequent influence on MWB requires further research attention.

As discussed in Chapter 2 (Baldock et al., 2020), MWB has traditionally been viewed through two differing conceptual viewpoints: eudaimonic (process-focused) and hedonic well-being (outcome-focused; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Indeed, when exploring coach MWB researchers have often considered the distinct conceptualisations of MWB and either explored: (a) quantitively the impact of factors (e.g., workload, self-regulation capacity) on levels of either, or both, eudaimonic or hedonic well-being (e.g., Bentzen et al., 2016); or (b) qualitatively the impact of stress components (e.g., primary appraisals) on only eudaimonic well-being dimensions (e.g., Potts et al., 2021). By conducting a unique qualitative exploration of professional football coaches' stress experiences and their impact on eudaimonic well-being dimensions and hedonic well-being indicators in Study 1, the reported findings appear to advance understanding of MWB as a concept. Ineffectively coping with stress experiences appeared to first influence coaches' perceptions of eudaimonic well-being dimensions (e.g., perceptions of autonomy, personal growth), which then influenced perceptions of hedonic well-being (e.g., experience of negative affect, job dissatisfaction). Intuitively, this would appear logical given the *process* and *outcome* conceptualisations of eudaimonia and hedonia respectively. This logic resembles Lazarus' (1999) contentions in CMRT regarding how an individual's emotional responses (e.g., outcomes) to stressors are ultimately determined by how they appraise them. Indeed, it appears to experience hedonia (i.e., a state inherently linked to how one feels), individuals must positively evaluate the way in which they are functioning in their lives (e.g., positive perceptions of eudaimonic dimensions). Such findings build upon Lundqvist's (2011) suggestions that MWB constitutes aspects of both conceptualisations by providing insight into the relationship

between them and how they are experienced temporally following coaches' stress experiences. Despite offering a potentially new way of understanding MWB, these preliminary findings do require further empirical support and thus advocate for future qualitative explorations of MWB that consider exploring both eudaimonic and hedonic well-being together.

Understanding how Stress-Related Components influence MIB/MWB

By attending to the second objective of this research programme, the findings of Study 2 (Baldock et al., 2022 [Chapter 4]) significantly advance conceptual understanding by providing insight into the key relationships existing between coping effectiveness, stressor severity, and appraisals in predicting MIB/MWB outcomes over time.

In Study 1, coping effectiveness was found to influence how professional football coaches' stress experiences impacted upon their MWB. This finding supported those reported in quantitative research where a significant relationship between coping-related capacities (e.g., ability to self-regulate) and maintaining high levels of MWB (e.g., McNeill et al., 2018) had been identified. However, these quantitative studies were cross-sectional in nature and, therefore, failed to detail how coping-related capacities might fluctuate and potentially lead to fluctuations in coaches' MWB over time. To help to further explore this relationship, in Study 2 the impact of coping effectiveness in predicting MWB fluctuations in elite football coaches was explored over the course of an entire season. In contrast to the findings reported in Study 1 and the existing literature (e.g., McNeill et al., 2018)), coping effectiveness alone did not predict MWB scores across the season. However, a significant interaction effect between stressor severity and coping effectiveness predicted MWB scores across the season. This suggested that as the perceived severity of stressors increased, MWB decreased, unless increased coping

effectiveness was reported, which subsequently led to increased MWB. Such findings advance understanding of the relationship between coping effectiveness and MWB by suggesting that coping effectiveness may only influence coach MWB after the experience of high severity stressors. To further explain this relationship, coaches reported experiencing eudaimonic well-being dimensions negatively (e.g., negative relations with others; see Ryff, 1989) and subsequent negative hedonic responses (e.g., negative affect) from being unable to effectively cope with severe and meaningful stressors. Such an explanation also offers further support for the qualitative findings of Study 1 in relation to the reported relationship between perceptions of coping effectiveness and their influence on MWB dimensions and outcomes.

The contrast between the findings reported in Study 1 and 2 in relation to the role of coping effectiveness influencing coach MWB (e.g., importance of perceived stressor severity) might be due to the respective study designs. In Study 1 coaches were asked to discuss their experiences of the three most pertinent and demanding stressors they generally experienced in their roles. Consequently, it is possible that the coaches in Study 1 might have discussed stressors perceived to be high in severity. This would also support why coaches reported appraising and emotionally responding to most stressors reported negatively, similar to when coaches experienced high severity stressors in Study 2. These findings suggest NGBs, coach education programme providers, and clubs need to ensure elite football coaches are more aware of, and equipped with, strategies to cope effectively with their stress experiences following high severity stressors to avoid negative life (professional and personal) and MWB implications. Study 1 findings also suggest that should coaches not be equipped to effectively cope, and they subsequently experience thwarted eudaimonic well-being dimensions (e.g., lack of perceived growth and competence in their jobs), they will possibly experience negative hedonic

implications (e.g., decreased positive affect, increased negative affect). Such hedonic implications may lead to further implications for the way in which coaches' function and perform in their roles (e.g., anxiety, lack of confidence, inability to manage relationships) and potentially for the performance of their athletes/players and staff (Thelwell et al., 2017).

The findings of Study 2 also add to the growing evidence base emerging in sport psychology regarding the importance of coaches utilising their support networks to cope with stressors and their responses to them, and to maintain or improve their MWB (e.g., Baldock et al., 2021 [Ph.D. Study 1]; Norris et al., 2020). For example, in both Study 1 and 2, elite football coaches reported regularly attempting to cope with high severity stressors by relying on themselves (e.g., keeping frustrations to oneself). Despite possibly being representative of the contexts in which elite football coaches operate (e.g., high job turnover, needing to demonstrate masculinity and control; Thompson et al., 2015), the coaches reported that they coped ineffectively when adopting such strategies and acknowledged that this led to negative MWB implications (e.g., decreased perceptions of competence). In contrast, when coaches sought the support of others to cope with high severity stressors, they reported coping more effectively, which led to positive implications for their MWB (e.g., perceived sense of purpose, job satisfaction). It appears that high severity stressors were reported by elite football coaches to be appraised and emotionally responded to more negatively than less severe stressors. Consequently, rather than carry the negative cognitive and emotional burden of high severity stressors alone, accessing, and utilising support networks appears to help buffer these negative responses and their impact on coaches' MWB by offering them an opportunity to offload, gain perspective, and consider more adaptive responses to stressors. Such contentions have also been supported more recently, with researchers suggesting that seeking social

support might help buffer against the negative emotional components of coaches' stress experiences and negate potentially adverse implications for performance and MWB (e.g., Norris et al., 2022). Collectively, the findings of studies 1 and 2 and those reported by Norris et al. indicate that coaches should be educated on utilising their support networks when coping with stressors that lead to negative cognitive and emotional responses (e.g., high severity stressors), as it might help them perform more effectively in their roles, to positive implication for their wider lives, and to them experiencing greater MWB.

Finally, in Study 2 the links between perceived stressor severity, associated appraisals and responses, and development of symptoms related to burnout significantly contribute to understanding of how stress might influence mental ill-being. Researchers have previously reported increased emotional stress, workload, and decreased feelings of meaningfulness were significant to increased burnout symptoms in high performance coaches (e.g., Altfeld et al., 2015; see Olusoga et al., 2019). The linear mixed model analyses conducted in Study 2 builds on these findings, by indicating that increased severity of stressors predicted increased depersonalisation and decreased performance accomplishment across the season. Interview data further indicated that participants reported the more negative appraisals of high severity stressors resulted in a range of negative affective responses and subsequent cognitive and behavioural manifestations (e.g., anxiety, demotivation, aversion for others, decreased perceptions of professional competence) of such burnout symptoms. Indeed, these findings might offer further explanation to the quantitative relationships identified in Altfeld et al.'s work. First, increased workload was reported to be significant in predicting burnout in Altfeld et al.'s research and represents what might considered a high severity stressor by participants in Study 2. Second, emotional stress was also significant and such scores would likely be influenced by increased negative appraisals (e.g., threat, harm/loss) and subsequent

emotional responses (e.g., anxiety, frustration) to stressors, which were reported by elite football coaches in Study 2. Finally, feelings of meaningfulness scores were also significant and could be linked to the decreased perceptions of professional competence reported by coaches in Study 2 resulting from such negative appraisals. Lazarus (1999) suggests that appraisals are integral to how individuals respond to and cope with stressors, and to the impact of stress experiences on performance and MWB outcomes. This contention has since been supported, with researchers identifying that appraisals influence coaches' MWB (e.g., perceptions of competence; Potts et al., 2021). The findings of Study 2 contribute to this understanding by explicitly identifying the concept of appraisal as being key to the development of burnout symptoms in elite football coaches.

Stress, Motivation, and MWB

Prior to this research programme commencing, significant research attention had been afforded to the influence of the concept of motivation in explaining the MWB of coaches (see Baldock et al., 2020 [Chapter 2] for a review). Many researchers exploring this relationship adopted Deci and Ryan's (1985) *self-determination theory* (SDT) as a theoretical lens to explore how individuals' *basic psychological needs* (e.g., autonomy, competence, and relatedness) were satisfied or thwarted in the environments in which they operated, and the subsequent influence on their MWB (e.g., Altfeld et al., 2015; Bentzen et al., 2016). Approaching the exploration of MWB through a SDT lens appears logical given that basic psychological needs are also represented within the eudaimonic well-being dimensions outlined by Ryff (1989; e.g., autonomy, competence, positive relations with others). Some of this research (e.g., Altfeld et al., 2015), however, also found components associated with *stress* (e.g., specific stressors [e.g., workload], coping approaches [e.g., recovery]) to influence the satisfaction of the basic psychological needs,

and subsequently, MWB. This is not the first time links between the concepts of *stress* and *motivation* had been considered, with Lazarus (1999) referencing the role that motivation plays in influencing individual's appraisals of stressors (e.g., evaluating stressors in relation to their relevance and congruence toward achieving personal goals) in CMRT. Lazarus also purported that how one manages their overall stress experiences may also have performance and MWB implications. Prior to this research programme, however, comprehensive explorations of how coaches' wider stress experiences (and not solely specific components) influenced their MWB using Lazarus' CMRT as a theoretical lens were limited. In adopting CMRT in Study 1 and 2 of this thesis, therefore, the reported findings and their explanations have led to advances in understanding concerning the motivational nature of the stress process and its influence on coaches' MWB.

Across Study 1 and 2, how effectively elite football coaches coped with their stress experiences (particularly following high severity stressors) was reported to determine the consequences for their MWB. This can be explained by Lazarus' contentions in CMRT concerning how individuals enter all stress transactions with underlying goals that will ultimately determine how they cognitively judge and evaluate them. To elaborate, in both studies, the implications of elite football coaches ineffectively coping with their stress experiences on the achievement of their potential goals may have led to altered perceptions of eudaimonic dimensions of MWB (e.g., lack of mastery and positive relations with others, decreased perceptions of competence) and hedonic responses (e.g., negative affect). While further corroboration is required, this explanation suggests coping effectiveness impacts upon goal achievement perceptions and to subsequently altered MWB perceptions for coaches. Such findings and their potential explanations substantiate the reciprocal relationships existing between the

cognitive, motivational, and relational elements of stress outlined in CMRT. Specifically, these explanations illuminate the links between coaches' motivationally underpinned appraisals of stressors, and how these underpinnings form the criteria that coaches evaluate their stress experiences against following coping attempts, which essentially appear to influence their MWB perceptions.

Identifying Coaches' Lack of Understanding and Knowledge of Stress and MIB/MWB

The findings of Study 3 (Chapter 5) have provided significant insight into elite football coaches' current understanding of the concepts of stress and MIB/MWB and their awareness of the impact of stress on their performance and MIB/MWB. Prior to this study, researchers had frequently recommended developing coaches' awareness of stress and MIB/MWB as an important strategy to help them better understand and manage the demanding aspects of their roles and help them perform (e.g., Altfeld et al., 2018; Kegelaers et al., 2020). Despite often being proposed as a strategy, however, scarcely had researchers explored or reported on elite coaches' current understanding of these concepts and their awareness of how they might influence them and their work. Therefore, an NGB's proposed strategy of increasing coaches' awareness of stress and MIB/MWB in attempts to improve how they might manage and cope with role-related demands might not have complemented the needs of coaches – as they required more focus on 'understanding' their experiences of stress. Indeed, the exploration conducted in part one of Study 3 led to elite football coaches reporting that they understood the importance of being able to manage the stress associated with their roles and maintain their MWB but had limited understanding of what these concepts are or entail. They also reported having little understanding of the strategies they might adopt to help them cope more effectively with the demanding nature of their roles and attributed this to the lack of

attention afforded to the stress experience and MIB/MWB within elite football clubs, in coach education environments, and by NGBs. With elite football coaches only appearing to partially understand these concepts and possessing a lack of awareness of how to effectively manage them, it is perhaps unsurprising that in Study 1 and 2 elite football coaches reported utilising a range of ineffective strategies to cope with their stress experiences that led to negative implications for their professional and personal lives and MWB. Collectively, the novel findings reported above further substantiate contentions associated with the importance of educating elite coaches on the concepts of stress and MIB/MWB and the relationships existing between them (e.g., Altfeld et al., 2018). They also provide support for the necessity of developing elite football coaches' awareness of how to better manage their stress experiences to avoid implications for how well they can function in both personal and professional capacities (Kegelaers et al., 2020).

Summary of Contributions

In summary, the research conducted in this thesis has contributed to the extant coach stress and MIB/MWB literature by:

- Offering a unique and comprehensive exploration of elite football coaches' holistic stress experiences and how they might influence their lives and MWB.

- Extending understanding of MWB as a concept by providing novel insight into the relationship between both eudaimonic and hedonic well-being and how they are experienced by coaches temporally following experiences of stress.

- Identifying the key components of the stress process that appear to have most influence over elite football coaches' MIB/MWB fluctuations over time, and why.

- Adding to the growing body of research highlighting the importance of seeking support from others in attempts to cope with stress and avoid performance and MWB implications.

- Raising awareness of how coaches' motivation might be influenced across their experiences of stress and lead to potential MIB/MWB implications; and,

- Gaining elite football coaches' perceptions of their current lack of understanding of stress and MIB/MWB as concepts, of the relationships potentially existing between such concepts, and of how current and future coaches might manage them better.

Practical Implications

The findings of the research presented in this thesis have a range of practical implications for coaches and other key stakeholders across elite football environments. Specifically, these implications relate to how elite football coaches might be better equipped and supported to cope with role-related stress, enhance their MWB, and avoid experiencing increased MIB symptoms.

In the first two studies of this research programme, coping effectiveness (particularly following high severity stressors) was found to be a factor deemed critical in determining whether elite football coaches experienced positive or negative outcomes following stress experiences (e.g., professional, personal, and MWB implications). From a practical perspective, these findings suggest it is imperative that elite football coaches begin to critically reflect on the effectiveness of the coping mechanisms they might be currently adopting. Doing so might lead to adaptations to the ways in which coaches cope with their stress experiences, lead to more positive performance and personal implications, and subsequently, to maintained or even enhanced MWB (Cropley et al., 2021).

Should coaches engage in critical reflection and be unaware of what strategies might be more effective for them, seeking psychological support is also recommended. This presents a potential issue for elite football coaches though given that in Study 3, coaches alluded to the lack of psychological support currently available for them to access in clubs, meaning they might have to access support independently. Similarly, elite football coaches have reported not seeking psychological support when ineffectively coping to avoid demonstrating weakness to players and other key stakeholders in clubs (e.g., club boards; Knoppers et al., 2022). The findings presented in this thesis indicate that coaches would be better served taking responsibility over their performance and MWB by ensuring they access the support that allows them to enhance their ability to cope effectively. Further, clubs should consider providing coaches with access to confidential psychological support that does not implicate them and their positions if they deem it necessary (Madigan et al., 2019). This would help coaches feel more comfortable to seek support that might enhance their ability to cope more effectively, lead to improved functioning in their professional and personal lives, and them experiencing maintained or enhanced MWB.

In part one of Study 3, elite football coaches suggested that coach education providers need to consider different ways of increasing coaches' awareness of the different strategies they might utilise in attempts to cope with the demands of the role at the elite level. Their suggestions included engaging problem-based learning in groups, listening to experienced guest speakers discuss past problematic experiences, being supported by experienced mentors, and engaging in role play scenarios. Such approaches can enable coaches to enhance their understanding and adoption of a wider repertoire of coping strategies when experiencing role-related stress. However, the findings of studies 1 and 2 that highlight the importance of coping effectiveness arguably suggest that it

might also be important to help coaches become aware of the potential effectiveness of the different coping mechanisms learned via these means. This might involve: (a) coach educators, during problem-based learning or role play tasks, explicitly questioning coaches on the pros and cons of them utilising particular strategies to cope with the problems/scenarios given; (b) mentors helping coaches critically question the potential effectiveness of how they might be dealing with, or have dealt with, role-related stressors; and, (c) coach education managers briefing experienced guest speakers on the importance of them alluding to the potential effectiveness of how they coped with the role-related situations they might discuss with coaches. Indeed, while different coaches might cope in different ways and with varying degrees of effectiveness, such explicit consideration of coping effectiveness throughout these different informal learning approaches might lead to coaches increasingly questioning the strategies they use. This could result in coaches adopting strategies following specific stress experiences that are more likely to lead to adaptive and positive performance and MWB outcomes (Ciampolini et al., 2020).

In the elite football contexts explored in Study 1 and 2 of this thesis, some strategies utilised by coaches were reported to be more effective than others, which had subsequent implications for their lives and MWB. Across both studies it was apparent that when coaches adopted self-reliance strategies to cope with uncontrollable and high severity performance and organisational stressors and their responses to them, they reported to ineffectively cope. In contrast, however, when coaches attempted to cope through the seeking the support of others (e.g., seeking social and informational support), they reported to cope more effectively, which led to positive implications for their MWB. Such findings have potential practical implications for coaches and other key stakeholders in elite football. First, elite coaches themselves might consider avoiding the

use of self-reliance strategies and seek the support of others following high severity stressors as it might help them talk through their stress experiences, gain advice, and lead to more adaptive responses (e.g., Norris et al., 2020). Second, coach education providers and NGBs should attempt to help coaches create, and/or, educate coaches on the importance of utilising their support networks in attempts to cope with such stress experiences, as it might help them perform in their roles and maintain their MWB (Norris et al., 2020). They may also consider providing coaches with opportunities to develop communities of practice, where coaches can interact with others in attempts to engage in collective learning efforts that could enhance their ability to cope with the demands of their roles (Cropley et al., 2016). Finally, key stakeholders at clubs (e.g., owners, directors of football) should attempt to create reciprocally supportive cultures that ensure open channels of communication so that staff members (e.g., coaches, support staff) feel that they can access support should they need it.

Finally, in Study 1 and 2, coaches mainly reported negatively appraising (e.g., threat, harm/loss appraisals) and emotionally responding (e.g., anxiety, frustration) to the stressors they were experiencing. For high severity stressors, this also was reported to lead to negative affective responses and subsequent cognitive and behavioural manifestations of MIB indicators (e.g., burnout symptoms of depersonalisation [e.g., aversion for others] and a lack of performance accomplishment [e.g., decreased perceptions of self-efficacy and competence]). Importance should therefore be placed on developing elite football coaches' awareness of how they might be appraising the stressors associated with their roles (particularly of high severity). This might involve coach education programme providers, NGB's, and/or sport psychologists helping coaches to develop the ability, or support them, to engage in critical reflection. Specifically, researchers have identified the transformational potential of critical

reflection in helping coaches become more aware of how they experience stress, and to consider ways of positively adapting their appraisals and subsequent responses to future stressors (e.g., viewing stressors as a challenge; Cropley et al., 2021). Therefore, critically reflecting on stress experiences might lead to more positive implications for the performance and MWB of coaches and help them avoid the potential experience of burnout symptoms, which may occur if negative appraisals are experienced over a prolonged period.

Impact on Coach Education and Development

To ensure that this research programme had impact for the education and development of coaches operating in the context of elite football, one of its objectives was to develop a stress and MIB/MWB intervention for elite football coaches (Study 3). Utilising the collective findings of Study 1 (Baldock et al., 2021 [Chapter 3]), Study 2 (Baldock et al., 2022 [Chapter 4]), part one of Study 3, and those presented in the extant literature, a stress and MIB/MWB football coach education intervention was proposed. In part two of Study 3, the potential efficacy of this intervention was iteratively evaluated. This evaluation led to a range of amendments to each of three components of the initially proposed intervention and to consensus subsequently being reached by a range of experts on the intervention's efficacy. Thus, each component was considered ready for full development and implementation in the context it was designed for (e.g., a NGB's Union of European Football Association [UEFA] Professional Licence [Level 5] course).

Since the completion of Study 3, some components of the intervention (e.g., stress and MIB/MWB reports/infographics) have been through full development and have been subsequently implemented as part of the curriculum of a UEFA Professional Licence course, with other components to be implemented. This has currently led to over 60 elite football coaches receiving personalised stress and MIB/MWB

reports/infographics at four different time points across the course of their tenure on the coach education course (one whole year). Preliminary feedback indicates that this has resulted in raising coaches' awareness and understanding of their own stress experiences, how they are coping and the effectiveness of their coping approaches, and their levels of MIB/MWB and related factors (e.g., sleep). Reflecting on the report information and observed fluctuations has also led to implications for how these coaches manage their stress experiences and lifestyles across the year and to the seeking of further psychological support (this feedback was received by the researcher through the NGB but at the time of submission was restricted from use within this thesis). Considering its impact with Level 5 UEFA Professional Licence course candidates, the NGB that this intervention was designed for has since asked for a similar support mechanism to be delivered to Level 4 UEFA A-Licence course candidates. This has led to over 100 UEFA A-Licence candidates receiving a personalised stress and MIB/MWB report, to similarly raise awareness of the way in which they manage themselves and their practice. Despite this programme of research focusing on the context of elite football coaching, these advancements highlight the impact of the findings of this work for football coaches operating across elite and sub-elite levels of the sport.

In addition to its current impact for elite and sub-elite football coaches, the research presented in this thesis has also been recognised by a NGB that educates, develops, and supports coaches of all sports and levels across the United Kingdom. In light of the links explored between stress, the personal and professional lives, and the MIB/MWB of coaches in the studies presented in this research programme, preliminary discussions have been held to develop a series of further educational and practical resources that coaches across all sports can utilise to become more aware of stress and

MIB/MWB concepts, as well as provided with a series of guidelines on how to better manage their own stress experiences and MIB/MWB states.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research Directions

Strengths

Reflecting on the programme of research presented in this thesis, several strengths are noted. One area of perceived strength lies in the contextual novelty of the body of work presented. To elaborate, despite elite football often being considered the most globally recognised, spectated, and followed sport worldwide (Morrow & Howieson, 2018), the daily experiences of those operating in the sport at the elite level (e.g., elite football coaches) have received little research attention and are, therefore, still relatively unknown. Issues of access to elite football coaches, often influenced by these individuals' unwillingness to share personal role-related insights due to fear of their release leading to professional and personal consequences, means that researchers have even described the experiences of elite football coaches beyond what is presented in the media as largely mystical (Ronkainen et al., 2020). In recent times, researchers have begun to gain increased access to elite football coaching populations to explore their experiences and perceptions of different facets of their role (e.g., role dismissal, development pathways; Bentzen et al., 2020; Morrow & Howieson, 2018). Nevertheless, sampling elite football coaches who operate at the apex of the game in Europe (e.g., English Premier League), across all three studies of this research programme, is considered a particular strength and adds contextual novelty to this body of work. Contextual novelty is further accentuated given the focus on elite football coaches' stress and MIB/MWB and the qualitative approaches adopted throughout this research programme. Indeed, elite football is still often considered to consist of traditional outdated ideals requiring coaches to avoid showing vulnerability, and to instead,

exuberate a sense of masculinity and authoritarianism to succeed in their roles (Knoppers et al., 2020). Consequently, sampling elite football coaches in research that requires them to express personal vulnerability through openly discussing their stress and MIB/MWB experiences is a strength and represents hopeful change and progression in relation to how stress, MIB/MWB, and the importance of managing them in order to thrive is viewed in elite football contexts.

Another strength of the body of work presented in this thesis relates to the theories considered, utilised, and uniquely explored together in attempts to investigate elite football coaches' stress and MIB/MWB experiences. This included: (a) adopting Lazarus' (1999) CMRT as a theoretical framework to comprehensively explore elite football coaches' stress experiences and how they influenced their MIB/MWB; (b) considering both eudaimonic and hedonic conceptualisations of MWB, which led to a range of novel findings being reported in relation to the impact of stress on MWB and the temporal relationship existing between both conceptualisations following stress experiences (e.g., coaches' stress experiences influenced their perceptions of eudaimonic dimensions, which led to subsequent hedonic responses); (c) utilising burnout, and its underpinning theory, to explore indicators of MIB, meaning MWB and MIB could be explored as separate constructs and the impact of the stress experience on them investigated with greater conceptual accuracy; and, (d) using motivational theories (e.g., Deci and Ryan's [1985] *basic psychological needs theory*) to explore how stress component experiences might have led to changes in motivation (e.g., the influence of appraisal and coping effectiveness on goal perceptions) that subsequently influenced the MIB/MWB perceptions of coaches. Such theories and their associated inventories were also further considered and/or utilised in the development of the intervention components presented in Study 3. Utilising and considering an array of established and related

psychological theories has led to each study presented in this thesis being grounded theoretically and conceptually. It has also led to novel insight into the relationships between the concepts of stress, motivation, and MIB/MWB, and to potentially more detailed and accurate representations of the actual experiences of the elite football coaches recruited in this body of work.

The diversity of research designs and strategies adopted throughout this thesis are considered another strength of this research programme for three main reasons. First, the way in which each study design was constructed, and the specific strategies adopted to collect and analyse data throughout the research presented in this thesis, were in accord and congruent with the researcher's philosophical position of *critical realism*. For example, representative of *critical realism* (see Anguera et al., 2018), the designs and mix of methods utilised in studies 1 and 2 meant that key relationships between the phenomena focused on (e.g., stress and MIB/MWB) could be explored and identified, and subsequently explained via further examination of the causal mechanisms underpinning them. Additionally, *critical realists* believe a world does exists independent of human consciousness but that the world is also socially constructed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). Consequently, *critical realists* believe importance should be placed on acquiring individuals' thoughts, feelings, and interpretations of the world and the things we collectively experience in it to comprehensively understand reality (Lincoln et al., 2011). These philosophical assumptions were further actualised in Study 3, with the multi-part design, and the interview and Delphi approaches adopted to collect data, as they meant various perspectives could be obtained (qualitatively and quantitatively) from key stakeholders in attempts to develop a suitable stress and MIB/MWB football coach education intervention. Philosophical and methodological congruence is recognised as a strength of this work as it demonstrates that the aim and objectives of each study

presented have been attended to within the constraints of the position and in a systematic, structured, and informed way.

Second, many of the data collection and analysis strategies (e.g., causal networks, linear mixed modelling, the Delphi method) adopted throughout this research programme have either rarely, or never, been adopted by researchers exploring the stress and MIB/MWB experiences of sport populations. While being first to utilise these strategies in stress and MIB/MWB research does not automatically determine it a strength, adopting such novel strategies throughout has allowed for new and different forms of knowledge to be constructed in relation to the stress and MIB/MWB of elite coaches and to attend collectively to the thesis aim and the aim and objectives of each study. For example, adopting causal network analyses in studies 1 and 2 meant visual representations of elite football coaches' stress and MIB/MWB experiences could be developed that would allow for the interrelationships between stress components (e.g., appraisals, emotional responses) and the relationship between stress and MIB/MWB to be more comprehensively analysed and understood. Consequently, such strategies were integral in constructing the novel insights reported in these studies and therefore contributed to the theoretical and conceptual advancements made throughout this research programme.

The third and final strength of the diverse research designs and data collection and analysis approaches adopted relates to their impact upon the methodological rigour of the studies presented in this thesis. For example, in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted in Study 1 to comprehensively explore professional football coaches' stress and MWB experiences. These were then analysed using a combination of procedures (e.g., directed content and causal network analyses) that allowed for a thorough examination of the data to be conducted. Across Study 2 and 3, longitudinal, mixed-

method, and multiple data point designs were adopted. These study designs added rigour to the way in which the respective study aim and objectives were approached methodologically, and led to the quality, rigour, and value of the findings presented throughout being enhanced.

The final strength of this programme of research refers to how many of the chapters presented in this thesis have already been disseminated to academic audiences via a book chapter (e.g., Baldock et al., 2020 [Chapter 2]), peer reviewed journal articles (e.g., Baldock et al., 2021 [Chapter 3]; Baldock et al., 2022 [Chapter 4]), and to academics and practitioners via a range of local and national oral conference presentations. Having been able to disseminate much of the content presented in this thesis through such a variety of channels, and to different audiences, arguably represents an outcome that highlights the strength of this body of work. Such wide dissemination has meant that a more significant contribution to knowledge in the areas of coach stress and MIB/MWB is thought to have been made. Further, the body of work offers a variety of practical implications for a range of key stakeholders operating in elite football (e.g., coaches, coach educators and developers, NGBs, and clubs), and it has already had an existing impact on elite and sub-elite football coaching and other coaching populations. Arguably, such potential and existing outcomes further reiterate the strength of the research conducted and presented in this thesis.

Limitations

While the perceived strengths of the research programme have been presented and discussed, some limitations are also noted. First, in Study 1 and 2, elite football coaches' stress and MIB/MWB experiences were qualitatively explored following only the three most pertinent stressors they experienced in their role (Ph.D. Study 1) or at each time point across the season (Ph.D. Study 2). While this approach has been adopted by

researchers exploring coach stress previously (see Thelwell et al., 2008), the rationale for only considering participants' experiences following three pertinent stressors included: (a) protecting the time of the elite football coaches opting to participate in interviews, who already operate in very time-consuming roles (Rhind et al., 2013); and, (b) enhancing the manageability of each study given the large scope and amount of data collected. Nevertheless, doing so meant that other stressors and subsequent stress experiences that might have equally contributed to participants' MIB/MWB, or the collective influence of all stressors and their subsequent experiences on their MIB/MWB were not explored. This might have negatively impacted upon the ability to comprehensively identify and understand the links between elite football coach stress and MIB/MWB.

Another limitation concerns the sole situational and contextual nature of the investigations of stress in studies 1 and 2. To elaborate, Lazarus' (1999) CMRT was used to theoretically underpin the exploration of elite football coaches' stress experiences in both studies. Within this theory, two main antecedents are suggested to have influence over how an individual experiences stress and subsequent outcomes: *situational factors* (e.g., environmental context and situational properties of stressors) and *personal characteristics* (e.g., personality traits and types). Despite this postulation, only situational factors (e.g., situational properties of stressors) were considered in Study 1 and 2. While the contextual nature of the investigations of stress in these studies was considered a strength due to the limited research exploring the stress and MIB/MWB experiences of elite football coaches, the personal characteristics of the participants were not explored. Indeed, capturing these alongside the variables that were explored would have proved difficult given the scope of the aim and objectives of each study. That said, considering the personal characteristics (e.g., resilience) of participants might have

provided a more comprehensive explanation of why and how elite football coaches experience stress in the way that they do and the potential influence of these experiences on their MIB/MWB.

Finally, despite the complexity and novelty of adopting a Delphi method in Study 3 to evaluate the efficacy of the proposed stress and MIB/MWB intervention, those approached to be part of the expert panel may be considered as a limitation. For example, elite football coaches' views were sought in part one, alongside findings from other research studies, to inform the development of the proposed stress and MIB/MWB intervention components. However, elite football coaches were not approached to be part of the expert panel providing evaluative feedback on the potential efficacy of the proposed intervention. The decision not to include such individuals was because they had already been asked to offer their views during part one of the study and thus the amount of time required by panellists to engage in the thorough and iterative Delphi process may have overly burdened these individuals. Nevertheless, incorporating elite football coaches as part of the expert panel might have led to alternative end-user feedback on each component and thus led to different amendments and additions to the final intervention components.

Future Research Directions

As a consequence of the research presented in this thesis, several research directions are recommended for future exploration. First, researchers should consider further exploring temporally coaches' eudaimonic and hedonic states following stress experiences. For example, in Study 1 coping effectiveness was consistently reported to lead to either satisfied or thwarted eudaimonic well-being dimensions (e.g., positive/negative relations with others; see Ryff, 1989) for coaches, which subsequently led to them experiencing positive (e.g., positive affect) or negative (e.g., negative affect)

hedonic responses. Despite eudaimonic well-being conceptualised as a *process* and hedonia conceptualised as an *outcome* (Neil et al., 2016), when both are experienced following coaches' stress experiences and whether the influence of one impacts upon the other has received scant empirical research attention. Consequently, while the findings of Study 1 represent the first to describe qualitatively how aspects of each conceptualisation of MWB might affect the other (e.g., eudaimonic dimensions influence hedonic responses), these findings are preliminary and, therefore, require future corroboration in coaching and other populations. With researchers often adopting quantitative measures to explore coaches' MWB, in future it might be worthwhile considering the adoption of more qualitative research designs to examine the temporal relationship between eudaimonia and hedonia following coaches' stress experiences.

Second, prior to this research programme, many coach MWB investigations were underpinned by Deci and Ryan's (1985) *self-determination theory*, with researchers identifying that when coaches' perceptions of autonomy, competence, and relatedness were thwarted in the environments they operated in, they experienced decreased MWB (Stebbings et al., 2012). While Study 1 and 2 were underpinned by Lazarus' (1999) CMRT, often highlighted in the findings were links between stress components and motivation-related concepts in relation to how stress influenced MIB/MWB,. Despite links contended by Lazarus between these concepts, which are suggested as potential explanations of the findings of the research presented in this thesis, limited research has explored the relationships between elite coaches' stress and motivation and the subsequent influence on MIB/MWB (McNeill et al., 2018). Thus, researchers might consider adopting qualitative approaches that allow for a more comprehensive exploration of how the concepts of stress and motivation interlink and influence coaches' MIB/MWB. Doing so could lead to a more thorough understanding of the relationships

between these concepts and influence how coaches are supported to improve their MWB and perform more effectively in their roles.

Third, it is proposed that the research presented in this thesis has overcome the limitations of previous coach-stress literature relating to the lack of consideration of both the contextual and situational nature of coaches' stress experiences. This was considered in Study 1 and 2 through the exploration of the situational properties of the stressors specifically experienced by elite football coaches. While situational properties have been explored in isolation in previous coach stress examinations (e.g., Didymus, 2017), doing so in Study 1 and 2 allowed for unique insight to be provided in relation to how situational properties might influence other stress components (e.g., appraisals, emotional responses) and, subsequently, MIB/MWB. Nevertheless, Lazarus (1999) contended that personal factors are also key antecedents that can influence the way in which individuals appraise and experience stress. Future research exploring the impact of personal factors on elite football coaches' stress and MIB/MWB experiences is therefore warranted. Such consideration would add to the growing research exploring personal factors in elite coaches (e.g., hardiness, resilience; Cropley et al., 2020; Sarkar & Hilton, 2020) by offering a more complete understanding of the factors influencing how stress is experienced and its influence on coaches' MIB/MWB.

Finally, following completion of Study 3, as alluded to earlier in this section, one of the intervention components (e.g., stress and MIB/MWB reports) has since undergone full development and been implemented as part of the curriculum of the UEFA Professional Licence course it was developed for, with the other components still undergoing full development and yet to be implemented. Thus, once all components have been fully developed and integrated, a comprehensive evaluation of the overall intervention is needed. This could involve conducting a process evaluation of the

intervention, where mixed-method data from multiple stakeholders (e.g., coach education staff, technical director, coaching candidates) is obtained in relation to intervention delivery and its actual impact on the target population (Randall et al., 2019). Conducting such an evaluation will allow for insight to be gleaned into the efficacy of the delivery mechanisms of the intervention, their ongoing feasibility, whether the intervention has its intended impact for the end-user (e.g., elite football coaches), and how the intervention might be improved for future UEFA Professional Licence cohorts.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to examine in-depth the stress and MIB/MWB experiences of elite football coaches. A range of novel and substantial theoretical links have been made between the stress experiences of elite football coaches and their MIB/MWB. Collectively, the findings of the studies presented in this thesis have added to the extant knowledge base in the area of coach stress and MIB/MWB by: (a) identifying the interrelationships between components of elite football coaches' stress experiences; (b) providing insight into how specific components of elite football coaches' stress experiences influence their professional and personal lives and MIB/MWB (e.g., stressor severity, appraisal, coping strategy choice and effectiveness); (c) enhancing understanding as to how and why elite football coaches' MIB/MWB fluctuates across different time points; and, (d) identifying ways to enhance the theoretical, practical, and contextual suitability of a coach stress and MIB/MWB intervention. Consequently, the findings presented in this research programme have conceptual and practical implications for researchers and practitioners alike in the understanding of coach stress and MIB/MWB, for its future study, and in their integration into future support mechanisms developed for elite and non-elite coaching populations.

Through the development of a conceptually grounded, research informed, and key stakeholder influenced stress and MIB/MWB football coach education intervention, the research presented in this thesis has also had an impact on the professional development, practice, and ongoing support of elite football coaches, demonstrating the theory-to-practice impact of this work. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, contradicting the traditional ideals reported to still exist in elite football (e.g., the need to demonstrate machoism, psychological strength, and masculinity to survive as a coach; Knoppers et al., 2022), coaches themselves often alluded in this research programme to being open to personally receiving, and ensuring other coaches obtain, further support to cope with the demanding nature of the role. It is, therefore, imperative that NGBs, coach education providers, and clubs continue to consider ways of educating elite football coaches on stress and MIB/MWB, supporting them with their own experiences, and developing their coping repertoires to the extent that they can effectively cope, function, and flourish in their roles.

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Epilogue

Reflecting on my Development as an Independent Researcher: A Personal Account

Developing as an Independent Researcher: Reflecting on the Trials and

Tribulations of Completing a Ph.D.

Introduction

It has taken me close to five years to complete and write-up the research presented in this thesis. During this time, it is fair to suggest that I have been on a challenging yet considerable journey of learning and personal development. Of note, the challenges I have faced and had to overcome during this programme of research extend to my personal life, completing a Ph.D. during a national COVID-19 pandemic, and attempting to progress my career as a university lecturer alongside my studies. Such experiences have no doubt at times been arduous, frustrating, and at significant personal cost (my fiancé might elaborate here), but I believe this process has also been enlightening and essential to my continued growth as a human being across all facets of my life. One pertinent challenge across this time though has been my journey towards developing as an independent researcher, a role I had to adopt at the beginning of this process, quickly learn the boundaries of, and consistently develop in throughout my studies. The following narrative presents a personal account of my journey of developing as an independent researcher, including the trials and tribulations experienced but also revelations for my ongoing development as an academic.

The Beginning – A Journey into the Unknown and Desire for Dependence

Prior to commencing my Ph.D. studies, I completed a B.Sc. Sport and Exercise Science undergraduate degree and an M.Sc. Applied Sport Psychology postgraduate degree. Throughout these studies, it was always a goal of mine to progress onto a Ph.D. programme to continue my development as an academic and hopefully support me on my way to a career as a university lecturer and researcher. Despite such ambitions and publishing research prior to commencing my Ph.D. studies, however, I had relatively

little understanding and knowledge of what it might take to complete a Ph.D., the level of support I would receive, and of what would be expected of me throughout. Consequently, while ecstatic at the time of securing a Ph.D. studentship in an area I had previous interest and a publication in (e.g., stress and mental ill/well-being; see Cropley et al., 2016), at the start of this research journey an overwhelming sense of unknowing dawned in relation to what I should and needed to do and when I needed to do it. These feelings were somewhat exacerbated by the usual provision of timetables, assessment deadlines, and work schedules that I had always been given both in my academic and working life endeavours prior to this point now not being offered. The unknowing of what to do and when to do it led to me experiencing heightened perceptions of *imposter syndrome* and question whether I had the knowledge and understanding, foresight, and academic experience and skills required to complete the programme of work. I now see this point in time, and the weeks following, as pivotal to, and the start of, my journey of *developing independence*.

To avoid demonstrating a level of incompetence to my Director of Studies (DOS), who had provided me with the opportunity, and entrusted me to construct a meaningful and impactful programme of research, I spent roughly two weeks following the commencement of my studies mulling over how to make a start and tackling the ensuing manifestations of imposter syndrome. I thereafter came to the realisation of the irrationality of these thoughts given my lack of experience of completing a Ph.D., so I did what I had been accustomed to doing previously in all facets of my life when not knowing … I sought the guidance of someone with greater experience. A brief meeting with my DOS allowed me to further rationalise the thoughts and feelings I had been experiencing and to begin the Ph.D. process, he provided me with early guidance, asking me to complete two important tasks in the coming weeks. First, he asked me to spend a

month accessing, saving, reading, and making sense of the extant literature in the area relevant to the topic area I was about to conduct research in. Then, when having done this, to put together a two-page research proposal that would ultimately summarise the findings of the extant literature in the area, detail the limitations of this literature to provide an evidence-based rationale for the importance of my work, and stipulate what my programme of research might entail. This early guidance was something I was extremely grateful for as it provided me with an increased sense of knowing and set the foundations for the remainder of my work. Despite unwavering feelings of support, however, the most memorable conversation of this meeting was my DOS making it abundantly clear to me the importance of understanding that figuratively, my hand will not be held throughout the process, and how developing as an independent researcher is a necessary part of the Ph.D. process. I suppose reflecting on this point now, this is where my level of dependence was arguably at its highest (although my DOS and supervisors might disagree!) and would perhaps be expected to subsequently reduce.

Having completed the two tasks asked of me by my DOS, I submitted a copy of the research proposal to the University's Research Graduate School department and had this proposal accepted. As part of the research proposal, I completed a Gantt chart of what I had to complete and when I had to complete it across the next three years of my candidature. I would later realise the potential perils of developing a Gantt chart as a relatively novice academic and perhaps a lack of understanding of potential research completion dilemmas (I explore these in more depth later). Nevertheless, at this point it provided me with direction, a sense of stability and control over my studies, and afforded me the opportunity to begin to demonstrate my ability to walk (somewhat) alone on the research journey. Indeed, I began to write the prologue and first paragraphs of the introduction to the thesis, map out how both stress and mental well-being concepts had

been conceptualised in sport research, and what research had been conducted in these areas in attempts to begin writing the literature review of this thesis. Around this time my supervisory team had also been asked to contribute a book chapter exploring the concepts of stress and mental well-being to a new sport psychology text. Gratefully, my supervisory team then invited me to lead the chapter and after meeting them, it soon become clear that my ideas for the literature review of my thesis closely matched the needs of the book chapter and so it was agreed that I would write the chapter for dual purposes (e.g., chapter and thesis literature review). I felt excited as this would give me the opportunity to further demonstrate my ability to write academically and learn how to produce an alternative published output.

Upon agreeing the proposed plan for the chapter, I was then tasked with writing this independently within a certain timeframe. Writing with an imminent deadline felt somewhat like having an assessment deadline during my postgraduate studies. Only this time, the pressure was accentuated by not wanting to let my supervisory team and/or the editor receiving the book chapter down, or, for not representing my supervisors through my work in the best way possible … I was writing for *me*, but also, for *us*. To ensure the chapter was written on time, I spent countless evenings writing, editing, deleting, re-writing, and stewing over its separate sub-sections until I had a draft that I was relatively happy with. However, a series of amendments and edits ensued from my supervisory team, representing the first time I had received feedback on my writing style, grammar, syntax, and referencing approach during the Ph.D. journey and it culminated in even greater perceptions of imposter syndrome and undeniable feelings of self-doubt. The amendments proposed also took a long time to action due to a range of other competing roles/duties at the time, leading to me not finishing the final chapter by the stipulated submission date. I felt I had let the team down and embarrassingly I had to ask for a short

extension from the editor – it was the first time I'd ever missed an academic deadline and the guilt and worry about others' perceptions of me as an academic seemingly rose exponentially. This again led to late evening after evening (to my partner's frustration) ensuring I thoroughly considered and attended to the proposed amendments while ensuring the flow and plan of the chapter remained. I submitted the chapter slightly before the revised extension date and my supervisors and the editor were happy with the final product, which brought me a sudden sense of relief and felt like an achievement to be proud of – the long nights, the worry, the mulling over the proposed amendments, were all now seemingly worth it, even more so when the book the chapter was written for was published. It was a certainly a tough initiation back into the writing of published outputs, but it undoubtedly shaped the start of my personal development as an academic writer at Ph.D. level. My perception about my ability to write academically and belong at this level had taken a direct hit but I felt motivated to take the learnings from this feedback and apply this during the writing of subsequent chapters of the thesis.

The Middle – The Rocky Road of (Perceived) Growing Independence

Academic Writing

Other than the first few months of my Ph.D. candidature, where I spent a proportion of time trying to understand the existing literature in coach stress and mental ill/well-being, I tried to ensure I engaged in some form of academic writing each week. The reason for this was to attempt to continuously progress towards the completion of my thesis and to achieve other outputs but to also hone, refine, and never 'lose the feel' for writing. Coming into the Ph.D. programme having achieved a 1st class honours at undergraduate level and a distinction at postgraduate level, as well as being a co-author on a peer-reviewed publication (e.g., Cropley et al., 2016), I believed that I had a solid base in relation to my ability to write academically. This belief soon got dispelled early

in my candidature when I received feedback from my supervisors on a thesis chapter that prior to sending them, I thought was well written (how wrong I'd be!). The dreaded sight of a sea of red proposed amendments, writing style edits, and comments was gut-wrenching and led to feelings of apprehension surrounding where I metaphorically stood as an academic. The countless issues I had to attend to certainly influenced any preconceptions I had about my ability to write academically. It also made me swiftly realise I had a lot to learn and this was an area I had to afford significantly more attention and care to in order to develop further and avoid these negative feelings in future.

The countless errors existing in my early work comprised of referencing and presentation inconsistencies (particularly during the change to American Psychological Association [APA] 7th edition guidelines), sentence length issues, overuse or underuse of appropriate punctuation, and the overuse or incorrect use of specific sentence starters (e.g., "albeit" – sorry Brend!). After receiving a few pieces of reviewed work back from my supervisors, I attempted to attend to these errors by developing a checklist of some of the common errors noted and used this checklist to personally review future pieces of work before sending it to them. I am still nowhere near perfect at spotting and eradicating such errors (as my supervisors might attest), particularly when I have been engrossed in a piece of work for an extended period. However, I believe this has led to significant improvements in these areas, enhanced my ability to write more appropriately for academic audiences, has contributed to my growth as an independent researcher, and hopefully saved my supervisors significant time when reviewing my work!

Despite such perceived development, one of the main writing style issues I struggled with, and still do now to less but some extent, was writing each paragraph in a similar and repetitive manner when attempting to be critical (e.g., providing an opening statement about the findings of research, alluding to a limitation in that work with a

"however" statement, and using a "consequently" statement to conclude the paragraph and outline a new proposed direction). I have become increasingly conscious of this lack of creativity in my writing throughout the progress of this thesis, leading to me spending time and placing particular attention on reviewing the construction of paragraphs in other peer-reviewed work, locating and referring to an APA Discussion Phrases guide when writing critically, and reviewing my own work (maybe too much at times) to improve its readability and flow. I do feel that I have improved somewhat because of these efforts but as with the development of any skill, this represents an ongoing journey for me and an area that I intend on further improving in in the future.

Self-Reliance, Personal Mistakes, and Associated Setbacks

I alluded earlier in this section to my initial discussions with my DOS in relation to the necessity of me taking onus and charge of my own Ph.D. programme of research, the decisions made throughout, and the necessity of developing as an independent researcher. Nevertheless, I would like to state that across my candidature as a Ph.D. student, my supervisory team have been unbelievably supportive of me, my research, my career as an academic and practitioner, and this support even extends to facets of my personal life. For this, I am eternally grateful. To have supervisors that you know will always support you with your best interests and your own personal development at heart is more than I could have ever asked for. While I have lent on this support at varying levels throughout the Ph.D. programme, I think it is fair to say that at times I perhaps took too literally the contentions of my early discussion with my DOS and tried to fly solo too quickly, resulting in a few substantial setbacks for me that were mentally challenging to overcome.

Despite searching for support and direction in the early stages of my Ph.D. programme, beyond having my research proposal accepted and having a detailed

understanding of the extant literature in my Ph.D. topic, I felt I knew what I needed to do for my first study and how I would go about doing it. As a result of this, other than for sampling participants due to their networks in elite football and football coach education, I sought relatively little support and guidance from my supervisors for this study in relation to the construction of its aims, the data collection procedures, analysis strategies, and the presentation of the results. I suppose when reflecting on this, this was me attempting to take ownership of my Ph.D. research programme, but also a reflection of my relatively insular personality and my respect for my supervisors' time. This went smoothly up until the point where I sent a full draft of my first study to my supervisors. They were relatively content with what I had done but commented on a potential missed opportunity to greater attend to the limitations of the extant literature and my aims given the nature and quality of data collected, subsequently proposing that I should rethink my analysis of the data and presentation of the results. The elation of completing my first study to then having to rethink, learn, and engage in a possibly more complex analysis of the data, and subsequent re-write of the study, was a tough pill to swallow and in the short term was resentfully taken on board. This was a moment where I began (again) to question my ability and worth as an independent researcher and it led to feelings of undeniable self-doubt. After allowing time for the dust to settle, I accepted their feedback and ideas and began exploring the philosophical and practical approaches to a different data analysis and presentation strategy (e.g., causal network analysis) that would (hopefully) allow me to better attend to the limitations of the literature and the study aims. While a significant setback and mentally challenging time, I am now grateful for such feedback as it led to me producing a significantly better study that does more justice to the data collected. Additionally, not only did I learn a new data analysis and presentation strategy, I also learned vital lessons around: (1) ensuring that my research

enhances understanding as much as it possibly can; and, (2) writing and presenting research in a way that is digestible for diverse audiences (e.g., academics, practitioners).

In reflecting on my development and engagement with the Ph.D. process around this time, and to build a picture of my wider experiences, it seems important that I share a short story of a now humorous, but at the time, harrowing and embarrassing mistake I made in its planning that will stick with me forever. Following the setback experienced in study one, I was determined to learn from my previous mistakes and attempt to ensure that I left no stone unturned in the design, carrying out, and write-up of study two. As a result, however, I became increasingly conscious of every decision I made in the planning, conducting, and write-up of the study, which led me to often seek greater validation and support from my supervisors. One time, I asked a very closed question to them about a type of quantitative measure I had considered utilising for the study and given their expertise and experience, I asked them if they thought it was suitable. Hoping for a "yes" or "no" and "why", I received what I almost always received when asking such a question, "What do you think?" Following this, one supervisor asked me to thoroughly read the extant literature in the area, identify the pros and cons of all measures available, and provide a one-page rationale for my final choice. Despite knowing the lesson that they were trying to teach me here, I knew my supervisors knew the answer and that I could arrive at the answer more quickly if they just told me, so I was left somewhat frustrated by this response. I began to air this with a fellow Ph.D. student and friend as we walked to lunch, "Have you ever asked a question to your supervisors knowing they know the answer, but they never tell you, and instead, guide you to taking the longer route to the solution?" Following lunch, I looked at my phone to see a barrage of WhatsApp messages from my supervisors in our supervision group – I had somehow accidentally audio recorded and sent the whole conversation to them! I had

never wanted the world to swallow me up more. Their replies in no uncertain terms (but at times flavoured with a touch of humour) reminded me of their role in guiding and not doing *my* Ph.D. for me, the importance of *me* being an independent researcher, and therefore the necessity of *me* being able to inform and justify the choices *I* make throughout my Ph.D. programme. A harsh but vital lesson moving forward on my journey to developing as an independent researcher.

A long while after the experience described above, I was now ready to write up the results of study two. Indeed, the mere complexity of the longitudinal, concurrent mixed-methods research design of the study meant that I was venturing into the unknown in relation to how I go about presenting the results of the study. This time, to avoid making a similar mistake to study one and simply writing up the results in the way that I thought might make most sense, I provided a very brief proposed outline to my supervisors. They appeared to be relatively happy with the proposed plan but unwilling to fully commit an answer before seeing a full copy in text. I proceeded to complete a full write up of the study by following the proposed plan and again, felt sheer elation and relief upon sending my supervisors a second completed study – I felt I was now making significant progress with my Ph.D. research programme. This was short lived, however, when my supervisors collectively agreed that the plan did not work and an alternative way of presenting the results was required to decrease the size of the study and enhance the clarity, flow, and quality of the work. This was a crushing setback and felt like *déjà vu* from my earlier experiences in study one, only this time I had attended to my prior mistakes and sought feedback prior to pressing forward with the write up. The lesson that this taught me is that irrespective of the ability to plan, sometimes in academic writing, plans do not always materialise as first expected and the ability to accept this and be willing to adapt and mould the layout of study information is vital. These factors might

ultimately be crucial to improve the final product, not only in terms of the potential to disseminate it via peer-review but to also make it more accessible and meaningful to those for whom the research is ultimately intended.

Building on the notion of acceptance, I completed the programme of research presented in this thesis during the COVID-19 pandemic and this had implications for my ability to collect data for my third and final study. Indeed, to evaluate the efficacy of the proposed stress and mental ill/well-being intervention proposed in this study, I adopted a Delphi method that entailed sampling a variety of "experts" working across the fields of coach education and development and sport psychology and seeking iterative feedback on a proposed intervention from them over a period of time. Engaging with this was extremely difficult given that many of these individuals worked for organisations that were closed due to COVID-19 and some were subsequently furloughed, leading to significant delays in communication and to the data collection phase of the study being extended beyond what was originally planned. Upon reflection, this taught me another valuable lesson as a researcher – that the ability to stick to a well-designed plan might sometimes be taken out of your hands due to unforeseen circumstances and sampling issues that are often out of your control. Consequently, planning for setbacks, considering alternative strategies, or in this case, merely accepting sampling issues or data collection delays might be important in future.

Extending my Qualitative and Quantitative Research Toolkit

Finally, an area that I believe I have experienced significant personal growth in over the tenure of this research programme is my understanding of, and ability to utilise, a variety of methodological approaches to data collection and analysis. In accord, prior to this research programme I had adopted some more generally utilised approaches in my undergraduate and postgraduate studies and had a general understanding of other analysis

techniques (e.g., thematic and content analyses, *t*-tests, analysis of variance). However, to capture stress as a process (in study one and two) and to attend to the aims and objectives of each of the studies presented in this thesis, I have had to learn, practice, and apply a range of alternative and sometimes slightly unconventional data collection and analysis techniques (e.g., causal network analysis, linear mixed modelling, a Delphi method) that I previously had a very limited understanding of. As a researcher in training, to learn and apply many of these strategies and techniques I have had to embark on a seemingly endless journey of reading, watching application videos, engaging in trial-and-error processes, and often having to seek advice from more knowledgeable others to learn where I might be making mistakes – of which there were many. Despite these countless mistakes and often experiencing feelings of self-doubt, I can honestly say this learning journey has been incredibly enlightening and one I have thoroughly enjoyed throughout the Ph.D. programme. Despite my previously limited understanding of the many new techniques I adopted throughout this research programme, I would now feel relatively comfortable independently adopting any of them in future research endeavours. To complete the Ph.D. process feeling like I have extended my researcher toolkit makes me feel proud of the journey I have been on as an academic and feel much more equipped as a researcher to independently tackle future research projects.

The End – Closing One Door and Opening the Next

I close this chapter and the overall thesis by extending huge gratitude for the journey I have been on throughout this process as a researcher and person. One that has been full of ups and downs, extreme highs and lows, seemingly impossible challenges but often improbable outcomes, and lessons learnt for life. Nevertheless, I believe the journey is still in its infancy and I look forward to what lies ahead for me as I continue developing as an independent researcher. To help me as I travel down this road of

continuing development, and hopefully others who might be reading this and heading on a similar journey, I provide a summary of my key learnings about myself and conducting research that have emanated from completing this research programme:

1. **Relishing feeling uncomfortable:** Each output of this research programme that I am truly happy with has ultimately stemmed from me at some point feeling extremely uncomfortable. For if it does not challenge you and make you question yourself and what you are doing/have done, it does not change you and help you grow! That said, it is OK and normal to feel imposter syndrome, self-doubt, and negatively influenced perceptions of self-concept during such times. You don't reach the light at the end of the tunnel without travelling through the darkness (although seeing in the dark would be preferable and perhaps less excruciating but I am far from able to do that)!

2. **Less thinking, greater action (initially):** Like many who have previously or are currently navigating their way through the Ph.D. journey, I am naturally a deep thinker. While this has allowed me to make sense of things from time to time, it has also often been unproductive and led to procrastination and delayed outputs that have not even benefitted from the many thoughts spiralling through my head (e.g., the "what ifs"). What I've learned is that following a swift and considered plan, early action has led to me locating the hidden gems, finding inspiration, and helped me make connections between the ideas and phenomena required to progress with the completion of my work, which I am certain would not have come as early (if at all) if I had continued to overthink and cloud my brain with unhelpful thoughts. Dr Steve Maraboli stated, "An inch of movement will bring you closer to your goals than a mile of intention." This rings even more true when

the worth of proposed action (i.e., intention) is questioned … over, and over, and over again!

3. **Accepting uncontrollable dilemmas:** Throughout this epilogue, I have referred to a range of research-related dilemmas that have been sprung on me and have often been out of my control. These cannot always be effectively managed as a researcher and can often lead to you deviating away from your original plan. While these circumstances are frustrating, I have learned that the quicker these are accepted, the quicker you will be able to plan to move forward and progress with your research. "Understanding is the first step to acceptance, and only with acceptance can there be recovery" – J. K. Rowling.

4. **Life and death, landing on the moon, and research:** Conducting research has become an integral part of my life and what I do for a living. With this, I have often placed extreme importance on it, on the decisions I have made throughout the research process, and on the favourable and not so favourable outcomes I have experienced. To me, this means I care about it but it has also led to me catastrophising certain unfavourable outcomes from time to time and this has not been helpful for me mentally or for the progression of the research. During such times, one of my supervisors often brings me and my waling thoughts back to reality by suggesting something along the lines of, "F*ck me, there are people out there calculating how we might land rockets on the moon and you're telling yourself and me that X (whatever minor issue I am catastrophising about) cannot be overcome!" Such a reality check from time to time is needed and has helped me learn that while research is an important part of *what I do*, it is only a small part of *who I am*, and it does not determine life or death for me. This provides me with perspective and a fresh impetus to attack and overcome the challenge.

5. **Switching off and a fresh pair of eyes:** I have found throughout this Ph.D. that I need to spend large amounts of time at any one point for me to make significant progress when writing up my research. It gets me into a 'writing mode' that spending many individual, short periods of time just simply does not allow, allows me to make significant progress, and this increases my motivation to continue in the following days. However, while this works best for me, it can occasionally lead to me being consumed by what I have done and not being able to see the wood for the trees. I have, therefore, learned the importance of taking calculated breaks from academic writing during such times (e.g., going for a walk or sometimes leaving it for a couple of days). It refreshes me and allows me to re-enter and review the work with greater clarity, leading to me being able to make necessary changes that were not previously 'visible' or apparent. "Almost everything will work again if you unplug it, including you!" – Anne Lamott.

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Appendices

Appendices

Appendix A – Ethical Approval Letter for Study 1

University of South Wales
Prifysgol De Cymru

Professor Julie E Lydon OBE, Vice-Chancellor
Yr Athro Julie E Lydon OBE, Is-Ganghellor

Wednesday 7th February 2018

Mr. Lee Baldock
C/o Faculty of Life Sciences and Education
University of South Wales

Dear Lee,

Faculty Ethics Sub Group Feedback – 'A cross-sectional examination of the stress and psychological well-being of professional football coaches and managers' [18LBBC0101]

I am writing to confirm that on the 6th February 2018, the Faculty of Life Sciences and Education Ethics Sub Group approved your submission for ethical approval.

Please note:

i. Approval is valid for 2 years from the date of issue, you will be notified when approval has expired but you are expected to be mindful of this expiration. Upon the expiration of this ethics approval you may apply for an extension.

ii. The approved documents are attached. If you intend on deviating from the approved protocol, research team, or documentation you will need to seek approval for any changes.

iii. This approval does not confirm that indemnity or insurance are in place for this project.

iv. Please confirm when your research project has closed (a one page closure report highlighting any recruitment issues, adverse events, publications etc. should be appended).

If you have any queries about the committee's decision, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Peter McCarthy
Chair of Faculty Ethics Committee

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Appendix B – Interview Guide for Study 1

Stress and mental well-being experiences of professional football coaches

<u>**INTERVIEW GUIDE**</u>

Participant Number / Code:

Age:

Current Professional Capacity:

Current League Working in:

Number of Years Coaching:

Interview Date:

Interview Location:

Interview Start Time:

Interview End Time:

Introduction

- Welcome the participant and thank them for agreeing to take part

- Remind them of the background to the study:
    - Coaches are integral to the performance of players and teams
    - Coaches have high expectations placed on them personally and professionally
    - Such expectations, or demands, can impact on the performance of the coach and athletes
    - We need to examine what these demands look like, how they cope with them and whether they do so effectively, and how this impacts on psychological well-being in order to inform the field and existing coach education.

- Remind them of the aims of the study… to:
    1. Examine the demands that professional football coaches experience in their roles and their impact on their personal and professional lives;
    2. Examine their appraisals of them, their emotional response, the coping strategies adopted and their perceived effectiveness;
    3. Examine how coping/ineffectively coping impacts upon their mental well-being.

- Remind them of their rights
    - Right to withdraw at any time without consequence
    - Right to refuse to answer a particular question
    - Right to confidentiality – data protection
    - Right to anonymity – *make this explicit and make sure that the participants are comfortable with what will happen*
    - Participants will be sent their transcripts for checking (accuracy) and a copy of the final results to confirm that they are happy that their identities have been protected

- Request for honest answers as a result of the above

- Remind the participants that the interview is being audio recorded for transcription purposes

BEFORE WE BEGIN DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS?

We are essentially covering four areas – make sure that the information gathered achieves these things:

1a: List the 3 biggest demands placed on professional football coaches (Positive or negative)

1b: Their appraisal of them, emotional response and the impact they have professionally/personally

1c: Coping (How? Where? Effectiveness? Consequences?)

1d: Impact on happiness/life satisfaction

2: Link between work-based stress and psychological well-being

Introductory Questions

So before we get into discussing the specific demands you face in your day-to-day life (inside and outside of your job), I'd like to ask some opening questions that are related to your overall experience of working as a professional football coach…

1. Please just spend a few minutes talking about your day to day role as a professional football coach (e.g., what's expected of you, how much direct contact do you have etc.).

   - Ask them to consider both the exciting and the mundane parts of the job
   - What's your relationship like with: (a) the coaches, (b) the players, (c) other support staff, and (d) those working above you?
   - What impact do these relationships have on your ability to carry out your everyday role?
   - How does the day-to-day job impact on your life outside of the game?
     - How easy is it for you to get 'down time' (is this a positive or negative?)
   - Very briefly, on a scale of 1-10 (10 being extremely stressful) how would you rate the levels of stress associated with your role?

Main Body of Questions

Demands, Thoughts, Emotions and Coping

Thank you for your answers. The questions should have given you a feel for the sorts of things we're exploring in these interviews, but now I'd like to talk more specifically about the demands that you currently face in your role as a professional football coach. I

asked you to consider these in preparation for the interview and identify up to 3 of the most significant demands (these can be inside or outside of the sport) – these will be the focus now …

2. Given all of the demands that you thought about in preparation for the interview, can you give me a flavour of the types of demands you thought about please?

3. Referring back to your preparation again, out of those demands, which did you identify as the 3 most significant demands?
    - Rank them in order of significance
    - Explain why they have been ranked in such an order (examples)

Take each stressor in turn and use the following questions for each demand:

4. When faced with this demand, do you generally view/think about this demand in a positive or negative light and why?
    - i.e., Harm/Loss, Threat, Challenge, Benefit

5. How does this demand generally make you feel and why?

6. Considering that specific demand, how have you tried to cope with it?
    - Why do you try and cope in this way?
        - In coping in this way, what does this allow, demonstrate or provide?
    - Where did you learn the coping strategy?
    - In general, how effective would you say this coping strategy is? Why?
    - How do you behaviourally respond when coping in this way?
    - What would the consequences be of not managing/coping with the demand?
        - For you, for others you work with, for those you know outside of the sport?

7. What impact does the demand have on your professional and/or personal life?
    - Think about the impact on players, other coaches, and family/friends.
    - Get examples to support the points

8. Does this demand impact upon how happy and satisfied you are with your professional life? **(Hedonic Well-Being)**
    - Do these feelings transfer to your personal life?
    - Do these feelings change depending on whether you cope successfully/unsuccessfully with this demand?
    - With this demand in mind, what could change that would make you feel happier and more satisfied?

Psychological Well-Being - Functioning

Thank you for those insights, there are some really good things coming out of these discussions. I would now like to move on to talk more about how the demanding nature of your role impacts upon how you function.

9. How well would you say you generally function in a) your day-to-day professional life; and b) your day-to-day personal life?
   - Why?
   - How would you say the demands discussed influence the way in which you function in your day-to-day life?
     - In particular, please consider their impact on the following areas:
       - Self-acceptance - positive attitudes you have about yourself, your past behaviours and the choices that you have made.
       - Positive relationships with others.
       - Autonomy – independent, self-reliant, don't worry what others think about them.
       - Environmental mastery - degree to which you feel competent to meet the demands of your situation.
       - Personal growth - changing in a positive direction, moving towards potential, increasing self-knowledge, and learning new skills.
       - Sense of purpose - life has meaning, working to make a difference, and often feeling connected to ideas or social movements larger than themselves.
         (*May need to explain each one to interviewee*)

Concluding Questions

Thanks for the insights there, it's not easy talking about those things that might cause us stress but your answers will be extremely helpful with my research. I just have a few questions to close with …

1. Do you think your experiences of all of these demands change depending on your run of results at the time and does this subsequently impact on how you feel and function?
2. What do you think is the biggest challenge that professional football coaches have to manage/cope with?
3. What can coach education programmes, governing bodies and clubs do to better prepare coaches to cope with the demanding nature of their roles?

4. What advice would you give young football coaches entering the field regarding how they might cope with the demands?

- How might this help?

Thank you for your answers. Before we wrap the interview up is there anything else that you'd like to add to any of your answers, or is there anything that you think we've failed to discuss?

Final Section: Trustworthiness

1. **How do you think that the interview went?**

2. **Do you feel as though you were led or influenced in any way whilst answering the questions?**

3. **Were you able to tell your full story?**

4. **Did we/I miss anything out?**

Thanks for your time and help with my study.

Appendix C – Ethical approval letter for Study 2

Professor Julie E Lydon OBE, Vice-Chancellor

Yr Athro Julie E Lydon OBE, Is-Ganghellor

University of South Wales
Prifysgol
De Cymru

12/04/2018

Mr Lee Baldock
C/o Faculty of Life Sciences and Education
University of South Wales

Dear Lee

Faculty School Ethics Sub Group Feedback – A longitudinal examination of the stress and psychological well-being of professional/semi-professional football coaches: A season-long perspective [18LB0401LR]

I am writing to confirm that on the 12th April 2018, the School of Health, Sport and Professional Practice Research Ethics Sub Group approved your submission for ethical approval.

Please note:

i. Approval is valid for 2 years from the date of issue, you will be notified when approval has expired but you are expected to be mindful of this expiration. Upon the expiration of this ethics approval you may apply for an extension.

ii. The approved documents are attached. If you intend on deviating from the approved protocol, research team, or documentation you will need to seek approval for any changes.

iii. This approval does not confirm that indemnity or insurance are in place for this project.

iv. Please confirm when your research project has closed (a one page closure report highlighting any recruitment issues, adverse events, publications etc. should be appended).

If you have any queries about the committee's decision, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Peter McCarthy
Chair of Faculty Ethics Committee

Appendix D – Questionnaires used in Study 2 online survey

An adapted version of Tomaka et al.'s (1993) demands-resources evaluation tool

In this section we will be helping you to reflect on, and better understand your recent stress experiences as a coach. We would therefore like you to honestly describe and rate three of the most pertinent demands that you have experienced within the last three weeks either in your role as a coach (e.g., results, having to manage upwards) or, associated with your role as a coach (e.g., time away from the family).

In the past 3 weeks, what have been the 3 biggest demands you have faced in or associated with your job as an elite football coach?		How stressful was this demand? 1 = Not at all stressful 2 = Extremely stressful	Please list the way(s) you coped with each of these demands	How well do you think you coped with each demand? 1 = Not at all well 6 = Extremely well
Demand 1		1 2 3 4 5 6		1 2 3 4 5 6
Demand 2		1 2 3 4 5 6		1 2 3 4 5 6
Demand 3		1 2 3 4 5 6		1 2 3 4 5 6

Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (Tennant et al., 2007)

Below are some general statements about feelings and thoughts. Please tick the box that best describes your experiences of each over the last three weeks.

STATEMENTS	None of the time	Rarely	Some of the time	Often	All of the time
I've been feeling optimistic about the future	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling useful	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling relaxed	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling interested in other people	1	2	3	4	5
I've had energy to spare	1	2	3	4	5
I've been dealing with problems well	1	2	3	4	5
I've been thinking clearly	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling good about myself	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling close to other people	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling confident	1	2	3	4	5
I've been able to make up my own mind about things	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling loved	1	2	3	4	5
I've been interested in new things	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling cheerful	1	2	3	4	5

A coach-adapted version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (e.g., MBI-C; Altfeld & Kellmann, 2014)

You will find 18 statements regarding work-related emotions and thoughts. Please read every statement. If you experience the described emotion [if not, please indicate never and continue with the next statement], please indicate how often you experience this by choosing the associated number.

0 = Never - 6 = Always

1	I feel emotionally drained from my work as a coach	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	I feel used up at the end of the day	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
3	I feel tired when I get up in the morning and have to face another day at work	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
4	I can easily understand how athletes feel about things	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
5	I feel I treat some athletes as if they were impersonal objects	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
6	I deal effectively with the problems of athletes	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	I feel burned out from my work as a coach	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
8	I feel I am positively influencing other peoples' lives through my work	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
9	I have become more callous toward people since I took this job as a coach	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
10	I worry that this job is hardening me emotionally	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
11	I feel very energetic	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
12	I feel frustrated by my job	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
13	I feel I am working too hard on my job	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
14	I don't really care what happens to some athletes	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
15	I can easily create a relaxed atmosphere with athletes	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
16	I feel exhilarated after working closely with athletes	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
17	I have accomplished many worthwhile things in this job	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
18	I feel athletes blame me for some of their problems	0	1	2	3	4	5	6

Appendix E - Interview guide for Study 2

A longitudinal examination of the stress and mental well-being of professional football coaches: A season long perspective

<u>INTERVIEW GUIDE</u>

Participant Number / Code:

Interview Date:

Interview Location:

Interview Start Time:

Interview End Time:

Introduction

- Welcome the participant and thank them for agreeing to take part in the second phase of the research.

- Remind them of the background to the study:
    - Coaches have high expectations placed on them personally and professionally
    - Such expectations, or demands, can impact on the performance of the coach and potentially impact upon their well-being
    - We need to examine what these demands look like, how they cope with them, whether they do so effectively, how these stress experiences differ at different periods of time and how this impacts on coach mental well-being to inform the field and existing coach education.

- Remind them of the aims of the study… to:
    1. Examine the stress and coping experiences of professional football coaches from pre-season to end of season;
    2. Examine whether the stress experiences influence fluctuations of coach burnout and well-being;
    3. Examine what provisions should be put in place to help coaches better cope with the demands they encounter at different phases of the season.

- Remind them that this interview will be looking to further explore some of the results from their most recently completed stress and well-being questionnaire.

- Remind them of their rights
    - Right to withdraw at any time without consequence
    - Right to refuse to answer a particular question
    - Right to confidentiality – data protection
    - Right to anonymity – *make this explicit and make sure that the participants are comfortable with what will happen*
    - Participants will be sent their transcripts for checking (accuracy) and a copy of the final results to confirm that they are happy that their identities have been protected

- Request for honest answers as a result of the above

- Remind the participants that the interview is being audio recorded for transcription purposes

BEFORE WE BEGIN DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS AND ARE YOU HAPPY TO CONTINUE WITH THE INTERVIEW?

<u>Introductory Questions</u>

So before we get into discussing the specific demands you have suggested you are currently facing in your day-to-day life (inside and outside of your job), as a coach, I'd like to ask some opening questions that are related to your general experiences of this particular point of the season…

10. What types of demands do you generally experience at this particular point of the season?
11. How do these differ in comparison to other points of the season?
12. On a scale of 1-10 (10 being extremely stressful), how would you rate the levels of stress generally associated with your role at this point of the season?

<u>Main Body of Questions</u>

Thank you for your answers. The questions should have given you a feel for the sorts of things we're exploring in these interviews, but now I'd like to talk more specifically about the three most pertinent demands that you identified in the questionnaire phase of this research. You identified these demands, how demanding they were, how you viewed them, how you coped with them and whether you coped effectively with them. I'd now like to talk to you about their impact on your role and your life away from coaching.

Take each demand in turn and use the following questions for each demand:

13. You suggested in the questionnaire that the most/second most/third most pertinent demand you are experiencing is…
    - How would you say you appraise this demand (positive or negative) and why do you feel you appraise it in this way?
    - How does this demand generally make you feel?
    - What particular emotions are elicited?
    - Why?

14. What impact does the demand have on your professional and/or personal life?
    - Think about the impact on your performance as a coach, your players, other coaches, and family/friends.
    - Get examples to support the points

<u>Concluding Questions</u>

Thanks for the insights there, it's not easy talking about those things that might cause us stress but your answers will be extremely helpful with my research. I just have a few questions to close with …

5. Do you think your experiences of the demands discussed change depending on your run of results at the time?

6. What advice would you give young football coaches entering the field regarding how they might cope with the demands discussed?
   - How might this help?

Thank you for your answers. Before we wrap the interview up is there anything else that you'd like to add to any of your answers, or is there anything that you think we've failed to discuss?

Final Section: Trustworthiness

5. **How do you think that the interview went?**

6. **Do you feel as though you were led or influenced in any way whilst answering the questions?**

7. **Were you able to tell your full story?**

8. **Did we/I miss anything out?**

Thanks for your time and help with my study.

Appendix F – Causal network analysis for Study 2

Stress and mental ill/well-being experiences of elite football coaches at pre-season

Stress and mental ill/well-being experiences of elite football coaches at the beginning of the season

Stressor Type

Performance Stressors 58.3%

Organisational Stressors 29.2%

Personal Stressors 12.5%

Situational Property

Imminence 8.3%

Event Uncertainty 8.3%

Novelty 4.2%

Duration 29.2%

Predictability 29.2%

Ambiguity 12.5%

Timing of Events 8.3%

Primary Appraisal

Challenge 12.5%

Benefit 16.7%

Harm 54.2%

Threat 33.3%

Emotional Response

Positive Emotions
Excitement
Joy
Pride
Relief

Negative Emotions
Anxiety
Anger
Disappointment
Frustration
Guilt

Coping Family

Self-Reliance 25.6%

Support Seeking 14%

Information Seeking 16.3%

Problem-Solving 27.9%

Negotiation 4.7%

Dyadic 11.6%

Coping Effectiveness

Effective

Ineffective

Impact on Mental Ill/Well-Being

Relationships with Colleagues/Players
Positive atmosphere in office
Enhanced relationships with players

Home Life
Taking positive mood home

Coaching Practice
Spending more time coaching younger players
Positive delivery of key messages to players

Personal
Feeling motivated to go to work
Feeling more upbeat

Coaching Practice
Lack of patience with players
Negative influence of delivery
Negative demeanour in sessions
Having to play younger players
Less effective training preparation
Increased time in work

Home Life
Taking negative work-related emotions home
More pensive demeanour
Limited time with new born child
Speaking to partner about work related disappointment
Stress at home when transfer changes happen outside of 'working hours'
Having to take phone calls when at home

Relationships with Colleagues/Players
Strained relationships with staff
Having to spend time educating board
Having to manage other coaches' emotions
Spending more time with staff to build relationships
Fraying relationships with players

Personal Implications
Constantly thinking about job and decisions made
Difficult for any free downtime
Disrupted sleep

Performance Stressor Stress Pathway ————

Organisational Stressor Stress Pathway — — — —

Personal Stressor Stress Pathway · · · · · · ·

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Stress and mental ill/well-being experiences of elite football coaches at mid-season

Stressor Type

Performance Stressors 50%

Organisational Stressors 37.5%

Personal Stressors 12.5%

Situational Property

Event Uncertainty 12.5%

Temporal Uncertainty 8.3%

Duration 8.3%

Timing of Events 29.2%

Self & Other Comparison 4.2%

Novelty 12.5%

Ambiguity 12.5%

Predictability 12.5%

Primary Appraisal

Challenge 33.3%

Benefit 16.7%

Threat 29.2%

Harm 50%

Emotional Response

Positive Emotions:
Excitement
Empathy
Happiness
Joy
Pride

Negative Emotions:
Anger
Anxiety
Disappointment
Frustration
Guilt

Coping Family

Self-Reliance 16.2%

Support Seeking 24.3%

Information Seeking 8%

Problem-Solving 40.5%

Escape 3%

Negotiation 3%

Dyadic 5%

Coping Effectiveness

Effective

Ineffective

Impact on Mental Ill/Well-Being

Coaching Practice
Became a more cohesive group
Positive influence on coaching demeanour
Being creative with contingency plans

Personal Implications
Increased positive thoughts around player development
Reaffirmed beliefs

Relationships with Colleagues
Increased positive communication with coaching staff
Galvanised staff

Coaching Practice
Having to apologise to players
Fallout between players
Player/coach conflict
Not being able to effectively plan sessions with fellow coaches
Negative influence on coaching demeanour
Less patience with players/coaching staff

Home Life
Bringing negative work-related emotions home
Lack of time for family and partner
Not going to pub with friends
Working from home
Vacant at home
Shorter with wife
Family taking backseat during period (e.g., cancelling plans)
Muting TV to take phone calls

Relationships with Colleagues/Players
Lack of time for colleagues
Strained relationships with coaching staff
Increased animosity between staff
More contact and frustration with Chief Executive and Board
Leaning on staff to be more autonomous
Having to have awkward conversations with players

Personal Implications
Feeling drained from work
Lack of downtime
Perceptions of a lack of purpose
Perceived lack of personal growth
Role and decisions consuming thoughts
Unable to adhere to exercise routine
Consideration for how other coaches cope
Lack of sleep
Disrupted eating patterns

Performance Stressor Stress Pathway ————————

Organisational Stressor Stress Pathway — — — — — —

Personal Stressor Stress Pathway · · · · · · · · · ·

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Stress and mental ill/well-being experiences of elite football coaches at the end of the season

Appendix G – Ethical approval letter for Study 3

University of South Wales
Prifysgol
De Cymru

Professor Julie E Lydon OBE, Vice-Chancellor
Yr Athro Julie E Lydon OBE, Is-Ganghellor

Monday 29th June 2020

Lee Baldock
C/o Faculty of Life Sciences and Education
University of South Wales

Dear Lee,

Faculty School Ethics Subgroup Feedback – 'Identifying Future Coping Considerations for Elite Football Coaches and Designing a Supportive Stress and Well-Being Intervention' [200604LR]

I am writing to confirm that on the 29th June 2020, the Schools of Health, Sport and Professional Practice and Care Sciences Research Ethics Subgroup, approved your submission for ethical approval.

Please note:

i.   Approval is valid for 2 years from the date of issue, you will be notified when approval has expired but you are expected to be mindful of this expiration. Upon the expiration of this ethics approval you may apply for an extension.

ii.   The approved documents are attached. If you intend on deviating from the approved protocol, research team, or documentation you will need to seek approval for any changes.

iii. This approval does not confirm that indemnity or insurance are in place for this project.

iv.   Please confirm when your research project has closed (a one page closure report highlighting any recruitment issues, adverse events, publications etc. should be appended).

If you have any queries about the committee's decision, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Peter McCarthy
Chair of Faculty Ethics Committee

Appendix H – Football Association of Wales Trust letter of support

FAW Trust
Dragon Park, National Football Development Centre
Newport International Sports Village, NEWPORT NP19 4RA

Tel / Ffôn: (01633) 282911
Email / E-bost: info@fawtrust.cymru
Web / Gwefan: www.fawtrust.cymru

Identifying Future Coping Considerations for Elite Football Coaches and Designing a Supportive Coach Education Intervention

Letter of Support and Consent

This is meant as a letter of support from the Football Association of Wales Trust (FAWT) for the research being conducted by Lee Baldock (supervised by Professor Brendan Cropley) from the University of South Wales, into helping football coaches be better prepared to cope with the demands associated with their roles.

I can confirm that I, Dr David Adams (FAWT Technical Director), have met with the researcher and supervisor and discussed the proposed research. As a result, I can confirm that the FAWT will support this research in its aim to develop an appropriate stress and well-being intervention plan that is fit for a FAWT coach education programme. This will involve:

- Providing the researcher with insight into the current educational content delivered to the candidates on our Level 5 coaching qualification.
- The researcher to have access to certain FAWT staff, who he will propose the research to, and should they provide informed content, include them in a sample of 'experts' that will scrutinise the proposed intervention.
- Where necessary, the researcher to have access to FAWT online resources and platforms in order to design a bespoke intervention that is fit for purpose.
- The researcher to use the findings to fulfil the requirements of his PhD; and
- The researcher to publish peer-reviewed articles from the research.

This is done under the following conditions:

- The confidentiality and anonymity of the participants is maintained throughout; and
- The data is owned by the researcher and USW for appropriate peer-reviewed publications and presentation in the PhD thesis. However, any products produced from the findings (e.g., interventions and educational modules) are owned by the FAWT.

It is expected that the FAWT will be given the opportunity to view and comment on any outputs from the research (e.g., final research articles) prior to them being sent for publication to ensure that they are happy that the FAWT is not implicated in any way.

In light of the information detailed in this letter, I consent to the research taking place as it is stated in the *information form* with which we have been provided.

Yours Sincerely,

Dr David Adams
Technical Director

FAW Trust is a trading name of The FAW Football in the Community Limited Registered in Wales 3202751 Charity Registration No. 1057856

Appendix I – Interview guide for Study 3

     Identifying Future Coping Considerations for Elite Football Coaches

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Participant Number / Code:

Age:

Current Professional Capacity:

Current League Working in:

Number of Years Coaching:

Interview Date:

Interview Location:

Interview Start Time:

Interview End Time:

Introduction

- Welcome the participant and thank them for agreeing to take part

- Remind them of the background to the study:
  - Elite football coaches are integral to the performance of their players and teams
  - Elite football coaches have incomparable expectations placed on them professionally (and personally) that may significantly influence their ability to coach and perform in their roles
  - If ineffectively coped with over time, such demands may also significantly influence coach well-being and mental health
  - We therefore need to examine how coaches believe they could be better prepared and supported to cope with the range of demands they may/do experience in their roles in elite football.

- Remind them of the aims of the study… to:
  4. Examine how coach education may better prepare and support elite football coaches for the demands they experience in their roles;
  5. Examine how the clubs coaches operate for may better support elite football coaches with the demands of their roles
  6. Examine how national governing bodies may better prepare and support elite football coaches they experience

- Remind them of their rights
  - Right to withdraw at any time without consequence
  - Right to refuse to answer a particular question
  - Right to confidentiality – data protection
  - Right to anonymity – *make this explicit and make sure that the participants are comfortable with what will happen*
  - Participants will be sent their transcripts for checking (accuracy) and a copy of the final results to confirm that they are happy that their identities have been protected

- Request for honest answers as a result of the above

- Remind the participants that the interview is being audio recorded for transcription purposes

BEFORE WE BEGIN DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS?

We are essentially covering three main areas – make sure that the information gathered achieves these things:

1) What coach education programmes can implement to prepare and support coaches to better cope with the demands of their current/future roles in elite football
2) What clubs can do to help individuals better cope with the demands of their roles
3) What national governing bodies can do to better support elite football coaches with the demands of their roles

Introductory Questions

So before we get into discussing the ways in which we may be able to better prepare coaches to be able to cope with the demands associated with the role in elite football, I'd like to ask some opening questions that are related to your overall experience of working as an elite football coach…

15. Please just spend a few minutes talking about your day to day role as a professional football coach (e.g., what's expected of you, how much direct contact do you have etc.).

- Ask them to consider both the exciting and the mundane parts of the job
- What's your relationship like with: (a) the coaches, (b) the players, (c) other support staff, and (d) those working above you?
- What impact do these relationships have on your ability to carry out your everyday role?
- How does the day-to-day job impact on your life outside of the game?
  - How easy is it for you to get 'down time' (is this a positive or negative?)
- Very briefly, on a scale of 1-10 (10 being extremely stressful) how would you rate the levels of stress associated with your role?

Main Body

Thanks for the insights there, it's not easy talking about those things that might cause us stress but your answers will be extremely helpful with my research. Given what we have just discussed, I now have a few questions around how the field may better prepare and support football coaches to be able to cope with the demands of their role…

Coach Education

7. Given your experiences of going through football coach education pathways, what do you think coach education courses can do differently to better prepare coaches to cope with the demanding nature of their roles?
    a. How would you implement it?
    b. Can you please provide specific examples of how it might work?
    c. At what level of coach education would you incorporate these changes?
    d. Would you say that it is the specific role of coach education to implement this or would there be more suitable pathways?
    e. Do you feel coach education adequately supports you in your role as an elite coach?

Clubs

1. What can elite football clubs do to better prepare coaches to cope with the demanding nature of their roles?
    a. How would you implement it?
    b. Can you please provide specific examples of how it might work?
    c. At what level would you incorporate these changes?
    d. Would you say that it is the specific role of clubs to implement this or would there be more suitable pathways?
    e. Do you feel as though your football club appropriately supports you to be able to cope with the demanding nature of your role?

National Governing Bodies

1. What can national governing bodies in football do to better prepare and support coaches to cope with the demanding nature of their roles?
    a. How would you implement it?
    b. Can you please provide specific examples of how it might work?
    c. At what level would you incorporate these changes?
    d. Would you say that it is the specific role of national governing bodies to implement this or would there be more suitable pathways?
    e. Do you feel as though national governing bodies in football do enough to support coaches to cope with the demanding nature of their role?

2. Finally, other than those we have discussed today, would you say there are any other individuals or pathways that may better support coaches for the demands of their roles?

Thank you for your answers. Before we wrap the interview up is there anything else that you'd like to add to any of your answers, or is there anything that you think we've failed to discuss?

Final Section: Trustworthiness

9. **How do you think that the interview went?**

10. **Do you feel as though you were led or influenced in any way whilst answering the questions?**

11. **Were you able to tell your full story?**

12. **Did we/I miss anything out?**

Thanks for your time and help with my study.

Appendix J – Preliminary supporting materials for proposed intervention components

Stress and mental ill/well-being report example

Stress & Well-Being Report: Collection Point 1

Participant Initials:
Date: May 2022

Following your completion of this Stress & Well-Being questionnaire, a report of the results of each aspect measured in relation to this phase of the season, what these results mean, and their potential implications is provided below. Whilst the measures used have been validated to allow us to provide accurate scores on each of the concepts measured, note that the inferences made are **advisory**.

Sleep

First, we asked you to outline on average how much you sleep each night. A lack of sleep has been associated with a range of physical and mental health implications.

Your score: 7 hours	This amount of sleep is slightly below the amount of sleep recommended by the NHS to be generally needed in order to function effectively (e.g., 8 hours). To see guidance and implications, see: https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/mental-health-issues/sleep/

Alcohol Consumption

Second, we asked you to outline on average how much alcohol you consume each week. Excessive alcohol consumption has been associated with a range of physical and mental health implications.

Your score: 2/10	This amount of alcohol is significantly below the recommended by the NHS to be consumed on a weekly basis in order to avoid health implications (e.g., 14 units). To see guidance and implications, see: https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/alcohol-support/the-risks-of-drinking-too-much/

Diet

Third, we asked you to rate on average how healthy you perceive your diet to be. A poor diet has been associated with a range of physical and mental health implications.

Your score: 2/10	This score suggests that you have a healthy diet meaning you're at low risk of developing negative health implications. To see guidance on diet and its potential implications, see: https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/food-for-thought-mental-health-nutrition-briefing-march-2017.pdf

Hardiness (Resilience)

Fourth, we measured your levels of the personality trait called 'hardiness'. Hardiness is a construct composed of three related attitudes or the 3C's: **commitment**, **control** and **challenge**. Scoring high in all three of these attitudes, therefore, suggests that an individual is better able to cope with stress.

	Your Score (out of 15)	Definition / Interpretation
Commitment	13	Individuals high in commitment have a generalised sense of purpose through which they invest time and energy into the events, things and people in their environment rather than demonstrating avoidance and passivity.
Control	11	High levels of control represent a tendency to believe and act as if outcomes can be influenced through exercising imagination, knowledge, skill and choice, rather than feeling powerless to alter situations.
Challenge	8	A high level of challenge is the belief that change rather than stability is the norm and that change represents opportunity rather than threat.

Total hardiness score = 32 (out of 45)

If your score is between 28 and 33, you are Average in hardiness. People in this category often see the world as interesting and meaningful, and enjoy their daily activities for the most part. They generally see themselves as able to influence things, but also see many situations as not under their control. Most people in this group tend to prefer predictability and stability in their daily lives, and do not seek out new experiences. Approximately 38% of people are in the Average category.

Stress and Coping

Fifth, we asked you to: (a) describe the three most pertinent demands that you have experienced in your roles during this phase; (b) rate how you viewed those demands; and (c) consider how you coped with them. Importantly, ineffectively coping with demands can potentially lead to strain (negative psychological, physical and behavioural responses to demands), which has been shown to negatively impact an individual's professional life and their general health and well-being.

Your Demands	Appraisals (How did you view each demand?)	Your Coping Strategies	Coping Effectiveness
Getting ideas across in leadership role	Somewhat as a challenge & low as a threat, very highly beneficial & lowly harmful	Engaging in 1-to-1's and not group conversations	Coped quite well
Understanding my superior	Somewhat as a challenge & quite low as a threat, highly beneficial & lowly harmful	Arranged a "clear the air" meeting	Coped quite well
Being away from family	High as a challenge & low as a threat, not beneficial & lowly harmful	Regular videos calls	Coped

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Mental Well-Being

Sixth, we measured your mental well-being. Essentially, mental well-being is the combination of: (1) the subjective experience of happiness and life satisfaction; and (2) positive psychological functioning which includes the ability to build and maintain good relationships with others and self-realisation (i.e., feeling good and functioning well). The latter also includes the capacity for self-development, autonomy, self-acceptance and competence. Therefore, scoring low on this scale can suggest negative feeling states (e.g., sadness, frustration, anxiety) and low levels of life satisfaction, and low levels of psychological functioning.

Your Mental Well-Being Score	Definition / Interpretation
48 (out of 70)	Your reported score at this data point classifies you as having **low/medium** mental well-being levels and sits below the national population average score of 51.3. People scoring between 41-45 are considered to be at an increased risk of experiencing negative psychological states, such as: anxiety, distress, and depression. It also means that you're potentially experiencing limited levels of happiness, satisfaction, relatedness, and leading what you perceive to be not always a meaningful life.

Burnout

Finally, we measured your levels of burnout. Burnout is a chronic, debilitating form of strain that develops from ineffectively coping with prolonged work-life stress. The symptoms of burnout are emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced personal accomplishment. Scoring high in emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation and scoring low in personal accomplishment, therefore, determines a greater risk of burnout.

	Your Score	Level	Definition / Interpretation
Emotional exhaustion	11 (out of 36)	Low	Emotional exhaustion relates to feeling emotionally extended as a consequence of prolonged work-life stress and is the main symptom of burnout.
Depersonalisation	3 (out of 30)	Low	Depersonalisation relates to having a negative and distant attitude toward one's work, putting distance between oneself and others in work and where work is perceived as less valuable or interesting than previously.
Personal accomplishment	31 (out of 42)	High	Reduced personal accomplishment relates to when one evaluates his or her achievements at work negatively, which is accompanied with the feeling of poor professional self-esteem.
Total risk of burnout = Low			

Stress & Well-Being Report: Collection Point 1

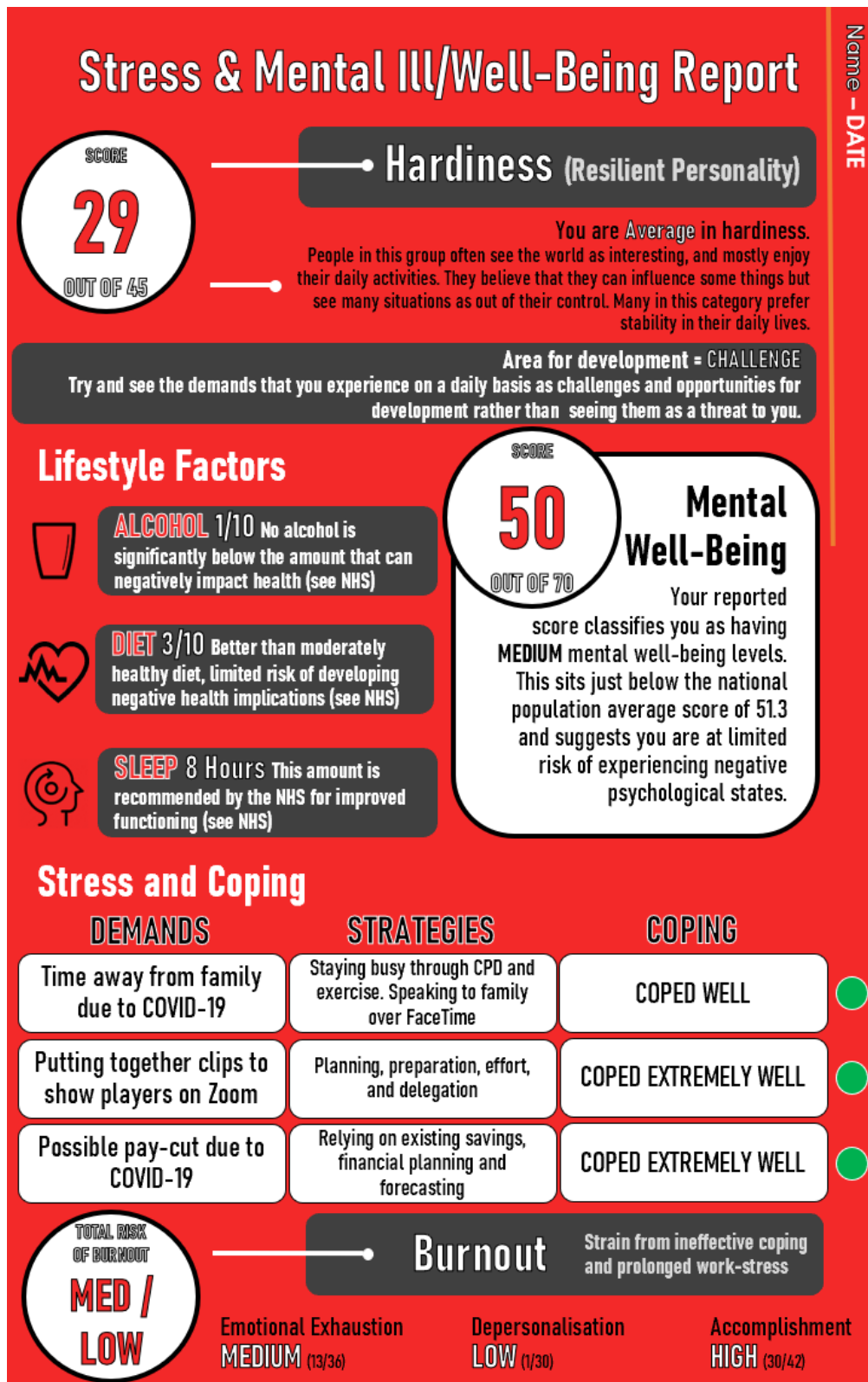## Overall Summary

Overall, it appears from this time point that:

1. Your sleep, alcohol, and diet scores mean that you are currently living in a way that puts you at low risk of developing negative physical and mental health implications as a direct result of these factors.

2. You have **average levels of hardiness** – meaning that you possess medium levels of the personality characteristics that can protect you from the negative effects of stress. It is important that you reflect on how your level of hardiness has come to be this way and how you can enhance it to help you when dealing with the many demands that you experience on a daily basis.

3. You are experiencing demands from personal and organisational sources, you appear to view them more positively than negatively, and seem to be coping with the demands that you face at this period in time.

4. You have a **low/medium level of mental well-being** – meaning that you are currently close to being at an increased risk of developing negative psychological states, such as: distress, negative emotion, anxiety, and depression. Additionally, this means that you are potentially experiencing less positive psychological states (e.g., happiness, satisfaction, positive mood states) that will help you to function and perform effectively. It may be worthwhile considering what factors may be influencing this low/medium mental well-being level or seeking support to help increase this score.

5. You are experiencing a **low risk of burnout** – meaning that you are currently at low risk of job dissatisfaction, negative coach behaviour (i.e., less effective with instruction, support, and feedback), and negative health and well-being implications as a direct result of your job. It may be worth considering what has led to your scores to ensure their continuance moving forward.

Example stress and mental ill/well-being infographic

Stress & Mental Ill/Well-Being Report

Name – DATE

SCORE
29
OUT OF 45

Hardiness (Resilient Personality)

You are Average in hardiness.
People in this group often see the world as interesting, and mostly enjoy their daily activities. They believe that they can influence some things but see many situations as out of their control. Many in this category prefer stability in their daily lives.

Area for development = CHALLENGE
Try and see the demands that you experience on a daily basis as challenges and opportunities for development rather than seeing them as a threat to you.

Lifestyle Factors

ALCOHOL 1/10 No alcohol is significantly below the amount that can negatively impact health (see NHS)

DIET 3/10 Better than moderately healthy diet, limited risk of developing negative health implications (see NHS)

SLEEP 8 Hours This amount is recommended by the NHS for improved functioning (see NHS)

SCORE
50
OUT OF 70

Mental Well-Being

Your reported score classifies you as having **MEDIUM** mental well-being levels. This sits just below the national population average score of 51.3 and suggests you are at limited risk of experiencing negative psychological states.

Stress and Coping

DEMANDS	STRATEGIES	COPING	
Time away from family due to COVID-19	Staying busy through CPD and exercise. Speaking to family over FaceTime	COPED WELL	🟢
Putting together clips to show players on Zoom	Planning, preparation, effort, and delegation	COPED EXTREMELY WELL	🟢
Possible pay-cut due to COVID-19	Relying on existing savings, financial planning and forecasting	COPED EXTREMELY WELL	🟢

TOTAL RISK OF BURNOUT
MED / LOW

Burnout
Strain from ineffective coping and prolonged work-stress

Emotional Exhaustion	Depersonalisation	Accomplishment
MEDIUM (13/36)	LOW (1/30)	HIGH (30/42)

UEFA Professional Licence

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Example assessment centre pressure training reflective template

FAWT Pro-Licence

Reflection

Assessment Centre

1) From a psychological perspective, how do you think you coped with the demanding encounter experienced?

2) What personal factors impacted on the way that you managed / coped with situation?

3) What do you think you did really well in order to cope with the situation (and why)?

4) So what are some of your possibilities for improvements to your ability to cope with such demanding situations?

5) So what have you learned about yourself from this experience?

6) Now what do you need to change / maintain in order to cope better (or continue to cope effectively) with such demanding situations in the future?

6a) How will you do this (what actions do you need to take)?

Coach Signature: Date:

Appendix K – Tables of evaluative feedback responses from each round of the Delphi

Round One – Evaluative feedback from panellists on Educational Resources

Intervention Component One – Educational Resources	
Sub-Categories	**Positive Feedback**
Perceived Positive Implications	• This is suitable for coach education as more awareness of coach stress concepts is needed • Positive step for facilitating greater awareness of such concepts in elite coaches • As an awareness-raising exercise of concepts and their application it will work well • Accessible content that enhances understanding and can be referred to over time is positive • As an informational resource to support the course it could be really powerful and impactful • Excellent approach to influence coping strategies adopted and coach well-being
Design & Content	• Well researched and clear information is suitable at this level • The depth of information is appropriate for elite level football coaches • Excellent themes, design, and approach • Infographics stimulate, engage, and provide opportunity for recall • The multitude of resource types might support coaches with different learning styles • The layered approached sounds good as it provides underpinning knowledge, self-awareness development, and practice opportunities
Logistics	• It would fit logistically with the course structure given the time between contact points • Fits well within existing course structure and the curriculum on offer • Logistically sound given the resources are provided on a candidate using platform • Resources could offer ongoing support if portal access is retained or resources downloadable
Negative Feedback	
Follow-Up Support	• Some will embrace with no support, others may need support • Discussion opportunity of content might be critical for deeper level learning • Need to consider mentor support to follow-up to lead to practical implications • Support from mentors or coach developers to aid learning • Building time into course structure to encourage engagement and discussion would be good • Without further discussion-reflection-sharing the resources might not have a lasting effect
Design & Content	• 20-min videos appear valuable but videos might lose engagement • Infographics and bite-sise videos would be more of a preference than longer videos • Consideration of EAST principles might be of importance • Downloading audio from videos and disseminating to candidates as well would be good Greater focus on well-being factors potentially needed • Quality and interactive nature of resources are important • Better if resources are specific and or applicable to contexts • Information provided needs to be evidence-based and may require change over time
Delivery	• Importance associated with framing intervention • Consideration around how resources are introduced and consistently nudged to participants • Time investment required might be extensive to produce high quality videos • Mentors need to be confident with material to support candidates appropriately • If resources are downloadable, consideration may need to be afforded to copyright
Terminology	• Not keen on term 'psychological performance'

Intervention Component Two – Stress and Ill/Well-Being Reports	
Sub-Categories	**Positive Feedback**
Perceived Positive Implications	• Provides opportunity for people to access support for what is stressful for them • Will help coaches disclose issues that are usually kept inside due to ego-orientated environment • This is a good first step as it provides opportunity to follow-up • Provides coaches with opportunity to link role to well-being • Will make coaches think about how being more equipped to ensure well-being is maintained • These will be crucial as it will help with monitoring and seeing improvements in well-being • Reports will work really well in raising self-awareness of stress and well-being • These will help coaches reflect on the stress and anxiety felt in elite football • Will ensure coaches become more aware of their stress and well-being • Help to develop better understanding of own stress and well-being • These might challenge status quo and encourage further conversation • Provides coaches with insight into which stages of season are most troublesome for them • Could lead to developing strategies to better manage situations at different points of the year • It can develop coaches' knowledge of the self to perform, rather than solely of the game • These can raise awareness of fluctuations across the season and provide ideas for development
Design & Content	• Reports/Infographic are visually clear • Positively phrased and personalised aspect to the reports/infographic • I like bespoke nature of infographics and report • I like that the reports provide more depth, with infographics more accessible • The content is concise and considered • Coaches will welcome two different types of report as it provides preference • Coaches are more likely to engage due to personalised nature • The content of these is relevant to the elite population (e.g., pro-licence candidates)
Logistics	• Good logic surrounding the time point nature of the reports/infographics • If engagement is based around course dates than onto a winner • The intervention appears to fit well with the existing course structure • Being able to conduct this remotely means it can fit with structure well
Negative Feedback	
Follow-Up Support	• Report information could be overwhelming • Additional support may be needed to help candidates to understand report • Follow-up to be targeted at helping coaches with areas of need • Reconnecting with the tool with a mentor to discuss practical implications will be important • Importance of further support via coach developer could be needed • Need to provide candidates with suggestions on how to interpret or act on results • Verbal reminders of importance of candidates to reflect on the reports throughout course
Potential Barriers to Engagement	• Need to inform candidates on why focus on each area being explored • Individualised time points for each candidate • Those with issues may engage more than those that don't • Coaches need to be briefed on confidentiality and value • How intervention is framed and introduced will be important (e.g., psychological safety) • Coaches with more awareness of role other than tactical framework will value feedback • Time points are logical but rigidity could limit scope of intervention if not managed • Consider candidates in different countries that have different seasonal structures • Framing, timing, openness, wider support, layering and revisiting content essential • Engagement will depend on how intervention is introduced/reaffirmed throughout candidature
Terminology, Conceptualisation & Measures	• Use term 'Summary', not 'Infographic' • Overarching focus on ill-being and outcome measures • Language to be more coach-friendly, less academic • Hardiness description needs conceptual consideration

Round One – Evaluative feedback from panellists on assessment centre pressure

training

Intervention Component Three: Assessment Centre Pressure Training	
Sub-Categories	**Positive Feedback**
Perceived Positive Implications	• Intervention could be very successful for preparing for public aspects of role • Very useful for coaches to become self-aware of how they act in role relevant situations • Intervention has potential to enhance the coach education experience • It could create emotional connection for learners and lead to further consideration • Gives candidates an opportunity to learn through personal experience • It will work well as part of a coach education programme due to connection to experience • Role plays offer coaches to opportunities to explore their approaches to managing adversity • The viva gives coaches time to really reflect on their learning journeys and how they have made sense of the demands that they are faced with within their roles • Formal reflection provides opportunity to reflect on different aspects of roles • Intervention is practical, contextually derived and could help coaches understand how they operate in situations in a psychologically safe environment • Candidates will engage fervently due to scenarios being directly related to role
Design & Content	• A mock press conference is a great idea due to it linking to demands of job • The intervention is suitable for coach education due to its learning potential • Needed as candidate comments often made in relation to course not meeting needs of job • Use of pressure situations is useful and highlights personal skills, behaviours, knowledge • Reflective template is important and will lead to enriched reflective accounts • There is value in candidates reflecting in and on action through intervention • Preference is to the forced engagement approach through reflective action plans • Attends to criticisms of coach education not focusing on personal coach-related factors
Logistics	• Intervention seems to be in line with existing course design • Fit seems logical, well thought out, and aligned • Fits well and gives well rounded account of personal development
Negative Feedback	
Design & Content	• Effectiveness will rely on coaches engaging in purposeful reflection • Traditional tools may decrease valuable reflection - other forms may be worth considering • Increasing scenario relevance to the role will increase engagement • Individualising intervention and highlighting benefits needed • There may be an assumption surrounding transfer of role play situations to role • Potential difficulty to replicate realism • Role of mentors and education of mentors will need to be considered • Credibility of intervention may lie in viva panel • Coaches need to be ready to critically reflect to facilitate transformational learning • To avoid reflective approach being tick box, peer-mentor reflection might be powerful • Need to consider when reflection takes place following assessment centre experience
Delivery	• Delivery would need to be slick to represent realism • Sequence of panel discussion may impact outcome (e.g., start with strength) • Person asking viva questions to ensure appropriate level of challenge/ discussion • Emphasise the scenario and catching candidates off guard may influence realism • Development of trust, rapport, and ensuring psychological safety is important
Terminology	• Some coaches may be put off by labelling of "role play" • Terminology (e.g., assessment centre) lends to judgement rather than development • Question necessity of academic term 'viva'
Logistical	• COVID may influence changes of course structure • COVID may influence learning process and face-to-face is a priority

Round Two – Evaluative feedback from panellists on all three intervention components

	Feedback
Panellist	**Intervention One – Educational Resources**
1	1. You have got to be clear about the content of these resources, they might need to be updated on a regular basis, and be future proofed 2. I really like the concept of EAST - this is a nice framework to consider when designing each resource. In addition, I agree with the need to educate mentors for each resource so that they can support their mentees when using/addressing the resources. Finally - the term "psychological performance" is entirely appropriate. We need to change the language that is used in the game and so shying away from "psychological" only works to cement the existing stereotypes and stigma associated with this area.
2	1. Blended formats for resources are a positive that cater for individual preference 2. "Live" resources may be useful to increase the interactivity of the support 3. Examples and stories from coaches who practice excellent well-being / poor well-being may be useful to help the learners bring this learning to life
3	I would reiterate the need to build time into the course for discussion between candidates and with mentors to make sense of things.
4	This has been added to the UEFA A-Licence course now to show progression and supports the coaches' well-being
5	1. To make the link more effectively to coach well-being, the impact of the contents needs to be developed through the mentor on the course. Currently mentors not engaged in this process so this will help making it more focused and developmental in future. 2. This part of the course will need to be done softly and not viewed as a pass or fail - the critical element is that engagement is individual, and some will need more or less support in the area of coach well-being - I think by tutors/mentors being more aware and making this a formal part of mentor - candidate meetings will give greater credibility and lead to coaches adhering to this vital component.
6	Most important is to make content simple/focused. Football people are often driven around their progression and will invest if they see value in it.
7	N/A
8	1. High emphasis on Coach as a Performer helps create a focus on you as the coach not just your practice 2. Increase awareness 3. Retention and access post programme is crucial 4. Access to support between interventions 5. Making resources compelling and quality will lead to candidates wanting to watch, rather than engaging as a tick box exercise 6. The balance of learning should be available for all, in multiple formats, and possibly consider more well-being than ill-being indicators 7. Could units be released based on the situations, so the learning and underpinning knowledge is covered as a programme and group. They then access the learning/scenarios within a window when it is relevant in their practice. Not easy but very collaborative. Mentor support would be essential for this 8. Downloads are essential to continue learning and reflection
9	I would agree with others regarding the delivery positives - it's a big investment of time up front but done well this will be a fantastic offer. Forced engagement seems a positive approach, albeit one that does not guarantee meaningful engagement. I'm unsure I have the answer, but if they could also reflect on it, would this help or just frustrate them? I like the idea of ongoing access (negatives) - if this works in terms of copyright and protection of resources. After the video I did go back and look at the aims again and I think this reflects a really good offer for coaches
10	N/A

Intervention Component Two: Stress and Mental Ill/Well-Being Reports

1	Disagree with "summary" rather than an "infographic" comment
2	1. May need to provide candidates with a template to effectively reflect on the resource 2. Reemphasise it may take time to build trust with candidates, and so a coach developer from it could act as a point of contact and sounding board 3. The infographic could be synchronised with learner's calendar, so they can be reminded of the information at critical points throughout the season
3	Whilst the aim is not to address retention effect, I would reiterate the importance of this as part of the wider and ongoing coach development support
4	I'm still happy with the feedback given
5	N/A
6	1. I definitely agree that the use of more friendly language will be important 2. It is a great idea to offer support at whatever point if needed 3. For this to gain buy-in and momentum, coaches will need to see value in the feedback and be given some clear areas to work on.
7	N/A
8	1. Importance of Mental Health First Aider and psychological support for those presenting with MH and well-being issues 2. The significance of the coach's prior engagement and 'buy in' should be considered on the impact after considering other colleagues' points
9	No new comments come to mind beyond the feedback/considerations (positive and negative) appearing fair and reasonable
10	N/A

Intervention Component Three: Assessment Centre Pressure Training

1	1. It might be good to have a series of 'Plan B's' to account for logistical issues (e.g., how might the role plays be conducted remotely via Zoom) 2. The model of reflective practice and the support the candidates get to engage needs to be explicit and clear to really support critical reflection 3. I like the feedback about the structure of the intervention (e.g., catching the candidates off guard and ensuring an appropriate viva panel)
2	1. Would be mindful on the words "assessment centre" for support attributed to self-care. 2. Is being challenged on strategies mindful of the coaches getting better at dealing with stress? Perhaps any support in this space is used to build on the ideas of the coach, as it is highly contextual and personal. 3. Is there a buddy system available for the learners, so they can connect and support each other as coaches, exchanging stories and strategies?
3	Reflecting beyond coaching is important for me and provides an opportunity to demonstrate the value of this course in that it overcomes the narrative of coach education being divorced from reality.
4	1. The assessment centre has been very rewarding and a critical learning experience for candidates on the course. Candidates haven't had long to prepare which adds to the pressure and we've had experts in the field present when they are conducting the simulation. However, I feel this hasn't been the same experience or pressure for international students and they have missed out by doing this from behind a computer screen (nothing we could do about this). 2. The candidates have taken to reflective practice and used this well during other elements of the course. All three of my current candidates have felt out of the comfort zone in the assessment centre and have reflected in preparation for future role relevant situations. 3. Term VIVA does not really relate to coaching but value in approach - 'exit interview' seems more relevant to the football world
5	1. To reiterate, the reflective process following the assessment centres and oral examination on completion is a good addition and should be included. 2. Agree with labelling - however the explanation and nature of the environment is more focused on development vs assessment. 3. Flexible support is relevant and role of the mentor needs to be more focused on this. 4. Education of mentor to support the wider aspects of the coach (i.e., well-being)
6	The feedback is comprehensive, and I agree with it. Reflecting with someone is a better way to gain insight than if candidates are left to reflect alone

7	N/A
8	1. Wider orientation and support to develop mentors to maximise the experience and support for coaches
	2. Skill and prior experiences in critical reflection will affect and ultimately impact on the effectiveness
	3. Considerations to the importance and emphasis to reduce the risk of 'tick box' and 'going through the motions' for coaches
	4. Significant to encourage reflections beyond on-field (e.g., coach responses, behaviours and actions post loss/win, training after and during a 'slump')
	5. Management and communication to MDT, managing up (Chairman, Board, Football Director)
	6. Support required to coaches, should experiences and environments trigger a stress response or MH/Wellbeing issue
9	Agree with others regarding the valuable contextual relevance and engagement points in terms of design and content (positives). It seems others (with more knowledge of the course) have noted the suitable fit. Agree with others that "role play" and "viva" language would put people off. This might be non-negotiable for viva, but even "panel" would be a good alternative label. I love the idea so am commenting on the label only. Reflection template - looks good - is the coach signature necessary? Audio reflections sound like a nice addition. Given I'd noted the value of the forced reflections, this might offer a nice option to enable flexibility in the "how" and might better prepare them for longer term adherence to such RP behaviours.
10	I have no further feedback to offer.

Round Three – Evaluative feedback comments from panellists supporting their intervention component ratings

Intervention Component One: Educational Resources	
Rating	**Evaluative Feedback Comments**
Strongly Agree	The idea of the resources is excellent - coaches like to access a menu of "things" that they deem personally important and so resources will help to meet individual needs. I like the idea of developing podcasts - these are accessible, easy to make, and will help link to others' stories. Once these are designed it'll be easier to comment on their efficacy but as an idea, they are fundamentally appropriate and potentially beneficial.
Strongly Agree	You have listened and proposed to create even more accessible resources - enabling the coaches to access and utilise for longer.
Strongly Agree	The length of materials is now great - varied formats and ultimately short and sharp. Ongoing access to support/supervision for mentors seems valuable. Seems like copyright issues are sorted too.
Strongly Agree	The steps taken to attend to the feedback are logical.
Strongly Agree	Clear and bite sise content.
Strongly Agree	N/A
Agree	N/A
Agree	I like the blend of additional content that coaches can access.
Agree	I feel the coaches will be positively overwhelmed by the support they are receiving.
Agree	All seems very well thought out. I think the provision of a British Association Sport and Exercise Sciences accredited practitioner is an important support mechanism for the process. Especially in up-skilling the mentors in how to understand and communicate the feedback.
Intervention Component One: Stress and Mental Ill/Well-Being Reports	
Rating	**Evaluative Feedback Comments**
Strongly Agree	The support the candidates are now offered around these reports (mentoring, option to seek support from a sport and exercise psychologist) and the ongoing focus on these reports throughout will support improved self-awareness.
Strongly Agree	The reports can help coaches to reflect and internalise the information based on their experiences at that time in the year. The provision of clearer language, further support and guidance, and the mentor support will all also help the coach to make sense of the information.
Strongly Agree	I really like the variety and depth of the infographic and in-depth report. The action planning and support processes offered to coaches is now very comprehensive and thought through - congrats! The language and conceptual information seems to be nicely balanced.
Strongly Agree	You have given careful consideration and your decision making seems logical with actions taken to address issues and even where no action was taken.
Agree	Having a mentor will help make-sense and provide an opportunity for appropriate signposting. The personalised infographic will make learning memorable. More coach friendly language is a positive amendment to the intervention.
Agree	You have listened to the feedback and acted upon this in a positive way, such as more coach friendly language to be used.
Agree	Changes look clear and are appropriate given the feedback provided
Agree	The intervention seems clearer and easier to follow. It is very important that the feedback is easy to follow for all.
Disagree	Still too much information from my perspective

Intervention Component Two: Assessment Centre Pressure Training

Evaluative Feedback Comments

Strongly Agree	Scenario-based learning facilitated by reflective practice is a powerful mechanism for improving practice and informing more adaptive behavioural responses to difficult situations. The proposed changes make sense - they support what would be an extremely valuable learning experience.
Strongly Agree	I love the label changes you've made, these seem more coach-friendly. The use of online platforms seems suitable, and the use of mock job interviews and press conferences are excellent ideas. The notion of "catching people off guard" is important to challenge, but I'd just be cautious of causing low level of trauma - pack this with mentors to care and support. Audio reflections might help with the engagement... nice work!
Strongly Agree	Careful consideration given to feedback provided and logical actions taken to address them with sound contextual understanding evident.
Strongly Agree	Good intervention with relevant take aways for coaches.
Strongly Agree	Very good terminology changes far more conducive to the audience. Some very good adaptations to the process on the whole.
Strongly Agree	N/A
Agree	You have provided through the resources great support. I really like the shift to 'assessment FOR learning' rather 'OF'. Use of wider formats and opportunities to reflect and share experiences is much better.
Agree	Adaptation from assessment to development is useful. I like the scenario-based learning as it would be memorable.
Agree	You have made the process more user friendly with plenty of intervention throughout the year. This support is something new to candidates, so the framing is vital to ensure candidates trust the process
Neither Agree or Disagree	N/A

Intervention Component Three: Educational Resources

Rating	Evaluative Feedback Comments
Strongly Agree	The idea of the resources is excellent - coaches like to access a menu of "things" that they deem personally important and so resources will help to meet individual needs. I like the idea of developing podcasts - these are accessible, easy to make, and will help link to others' stories. Once these are designed it'll be easier to comment on their efficacy but as an idea, they are fundamentally appropriate and potentially beneficial.
Strongly Agree	You have listened and proposed to create even more accessible resources - enabling the coaches to access and utilise for longer.
Strongly Agree	The length of materials is now great - varied formats and ultimately short and sharp. Ongoing access to support/supervision for mentors seems valuable. Seems like copyright issues are sorted too.
Strongly Agree	The steps taken to attend to the feedback are logical.
Strongly Agree	Clear and bite sise content.
Strongly Agree	N/A
Agree	N/A
Agree	I like the blend of additional content that coaches can access.
Agree	I feel the coaches will be positively overwhelmed by the support they are receiving.

Agree	All seems very well thought out. I think the provision of a British Association Sport and Exercise Sciences accredited practitioner is an important support mechanism for the process. Especially in up-skilling the mentors in how to understand and communicate the feedback.