

**“The Best or the Rest”: An Exploration of UK Rugby Union Coaches’ Team Selection  
Decisions**

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## Abstract

Coaches play a crucial yet complex role in sport, including selecting players for games - a key decision many coaches regularly make. Despite this, little is known about why or how coaches make team selection decisions. The purpose of this thesis, therefore, is to investigate rugby union coaches' team selection decisions, with specific reference to the cues (pieces of information) they use. Chapter 1 provides the context and rationale for this thesis. Chapter 2 comprises a systematic review which reveals the only study that has investigated coaches' team selection decisions directly (by asking coaches), and the 15 studies that examined the differences between selected and non-selected players after selection had occurred. Given the small number of studies found in the systematic review, Chapter 3 contains a narrative literature review which summarises the cues that could influence coaches' judgments and decisions made on their athletes while viewing them. Through a longitudinal interview study, Chapter 4 portrays the large number of diverse cues six rugby union coaches reported using to make team selection decisions and how this information changed dramatically from pre-season to post-season interviews. In Chapter 5, a case study of five rugby union coaches working within the same coaching team revealed the breadth and variety of the cues the coaches reportedly used to make team selection decisions, the processes these coaches went through ("the best or the rest" selection strategy), and how the power relationships among the coaching team impacted their selection decisions. This study also found through visual and audio observations of the head coach that most selection cues were only stated in one training session, suggesting an absence of a clear, long-term selection strategy. Chapter 6 provides coaches with a practical overview of the key results of this thesis and the implications for their coaching practices. Finally, Chapter 7 concludes this thesis by summarising the key findings and making several future recommendations for researchers and coaches.

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Although my name is on this thesis, there are countless individuals who share part of this accomplishment and therefore fully deserve an acknowledgement of their contributions (the very least I could do).

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### Glossary of Key Terms

Confirmation bias	Seeking information that support previously held beliefs
Cue (initial adopted definition)	A single piece of information within an environment that holds meaning and is used to form a judgment
Cue (revised definition)	A single piece of information, from the environment or internal sources, which holds meaning and is used to form a judgment
Constructivism	Multiple realities constructed through lived experiences where meaning (knowledge) is co-created through an interactive researcher-participant dialogue
Cup games	Competitive games against teams, for example, in the same region
Data saturation	No new trends or themes are elicited by new participants, meaning a thorough understanding of the phenomenon under study is achieved and data collection is ended
Decision	A selection of one choice among several choices
Decision maker	The individual(s) utilising the cues to subsequently make the judgment or decision
Dispositional judgment	Judgments about the enduring characteristics of an individual
Episodic judgment	Judgments made about the states of a person at that moment in time
Friendlylies	Non-competitive games against any team

Heuristics	A strategy that ignores part of the information, with the goal of making decisions more quickly, frugally, and/or accurately than more complex methods
Inference	A conclusion based on cues
Judge	The individual(s) utilising the cues to subsequently make the judgment or decision
Judgment	An assessment between alternatives that involves the integration of different cues to arrive at an overall evaluation
League games	Competitive games against teams in the same league
Performance sport environment	Contexts where athletes concentrate on competition rather than participation
RFU	Rugby Football Union
RM	Repetition maximum
Rugby union colts team	Both under-17s and under-18s players
Stereotype	The sum of beliefs, knowledge, and expectations that individuals develop toward members of social categories
Talent identification	The process of recognizing current participants with the potential to become elite players
Target	The individual being judged or decided upon
Weighting (of cues)	The process of placing different weight on individual cues in relation to the decision outcome

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1: Context and Rationale

Rugby union is the most popular full-contact team sport in the world (Fuller, Taylor, & Raftery, 2015; Kerr et al., 2008). It is a possession-orientated (Lamb & Croft, 2016), high-intensity collision sport (Lombard, Durandt, Masimla, Green, & Lambert, 2015) with the aim of scoring the greatest number of points, which is done by scoring a try or a goal kick (referred to as penalty during play or a conversion immediately after a try). Two teams of fifteen players, made up of eight forwards (who tend to be tall and heavy; Durandt et al., 2006; Fuller, Taylor, Brooks, & Kemp, 2013) and seven backs (who are usually fast; Cunniffe, Proctor, Baker, & Davies, 2009; Quarrie & Hopkins, 2007), compete over two 40-minute halves to gain possession and territory (Duthie, Pyne, & Hooper, 2006; Lamb & Croft, 2016; Lombard et al., 2015). To play rugby union, players require a number of specific anthropometric, physiological, perceptual-cognitive, and psychological characteristics and sport-specific skills (Andrew, Grobbelaar, & Potgieter, 2007; Duthie et al., 2006; Faubert & Sidebottom, 2012).

The coach plays a crucial but complex role in sport (Gilbert & Trudel, 2004b; Nash, Sproule, & Horton, 2008). This includes (but is not limited to) teacher, organiser, competitor, learner, friend, and mentor (Short & Short, 2005). A key decision that coaches must regularly make is the selection of individuals to a team (Côté, Young, North, & Duffy, 2007; Couturier, 2009), a complex multi-criteria problem in which coaches must consider a large amount of information (Tavana, Azizi, Azizi, & Behzadian, 2013) to form judgments that lead to team selection decisions. Sport participation is associated with improved psychosocial functioning and emotional wellbeing, vitality, enjoyment, life satisfaction, reduced stress and distress, and a sense of community (Eime, Young, Harvey, Charity, & Payne, 2013) while selection for teams can lead players into the elite developmental trajectory (Côté et al., 2007) and give



them an increased probability of becoming a successful professional senior player (Güllich, 2014). Those who are repeatedly selected also maintain or improve physical and skill performances during a season (Caterisano, Patrick, Edenfield, & Batson, 1997; Gonzalez et al., 2013; Gonzalez, Hoffman, Scallin-Perez, Stout, & Fragala, 2012; Scanlan, Tucket, & Dalbo, 2015), while those not selected can experience detraining (Caterisano et al., 1997), stress (Woods & Thatcher, 2009), and a loss of identity (Neely, McHugh, Dunn, & Holt, 2017). Despite the crucial impact of player selection, little is known about, for example, what information coaches use or the processes they go through when making selection decisions. Furthermore, although we know coaches have a wealth of information available to them when making decisions in other contexts (e.g., within talent development programmes; Vaeyens, Lenoir, Williams, & Philippaerts, 2008), coaches have been found to use instinct and sight to judge their athlete's physical attributes (Fiander, Jones, & Parker, 2013). There is also evidence that coaches in the same team lack consistency when evaluating the same athletes (e.g., Black & Holt, 2009). Taken together, and applied to team selection decisions, coaches may then be making idiosyncratic team selection decisions based on instinct and not on all the available information. Our understanding of coaches' team selection decisions is, however, poor. As coaching is still a developing field (Cushion, Harvey, Muir, & Nelson, 2012), it requires descriptive research to accumulate knowledge and develop an understanding of what coaches actually do (Gilbert & Trudel, 2004b; Potrac, Jones, & Cushion, 2007). Given that selecting players for a team are vital decisions coaches must regularly make (Côté et al., 2007; Couturier, 2009) and our current lack of knowledge on the subject, the need to further our understanding of team selection decisions is clear. The purpose of this thesis, therefore, is to investigate coaches' team selection decisions, with specific reference to the cues (pieces of information) they use.

## 1.2: Concepts, Definitions, and Theories

When making a judgment or decision on another human, people use cues (pieces of information) that arise from the individual they are viewing and the environment they are in. Even after a glance (i.e., 50ms) at an individual's face (cue), people judge others (e.g., their trustworthiness; Freeman, Stoller, Ingbretsen, & Hehman, 2014). This process occurs in everyday situations in both obvious and more subtle ways. For example, dentists (e.g., Brocklehurst, Baker, & Speight, 2010), therapists (e.g., Nakash & Alegria, 2013), and doctors (e.g., Kim, Kols, Prammawat, & Rinehart, 2005) utilise cues when diagnosing their patients based on judgments of their symptoms. These judgments subsequently inform treatment decisions. As another example, when focusing on sex and seating position as cues, if a man is sat at the head of a table (either in a mixed-sex or single-sex group) they are considered to be a leader (judgement), whereas a woman sat in the same place is ignored (Porter, Geis, & Jennings, 1983). People, therefore, regularly use cues obtained from viewing and interacting with others to help make sense of complex and demanding social environments (Macrae & Bodenhausen, 2000).

There are, however, issues when it comes to defining what is (and is not) a cue (Ernst & Bühlhoff, 2004; Martin, 2016; Lim et al., 2005; Rothkopf, Weisswange, & Triesch, 2010). Some have even suggested that the term cue, rather than defined, is treated as implicitly understood (Ernst & Bühlhoff, 2004; Martin, 2016). Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to argue a precise definition of a cue, it is still necessary to explain what is meant when this term is used throughout this thesis. A cue is defined as a single piece of information within an environment that holds meaning and is used to form a judgment (Cooksey, 1996; Dowding & Thompson, 2003; Wiggins, 2006; von Helversen, Karlsson, Mata, & Wilke, 2013). Cues are, therefore, the link between the decision maker and the environment, allowing them to make sense of the world.

A judgment is defined as an assessment between alternatives that involves the integration of different cues to arrive at an overall evaluation (Dowie, 1993; Maule, 2001) whereas a decision is defined as a selection of one among several choices (Dowie, 1993; Newell & Shanks, 2014). A demonstration of these two distinct but closely related concepts is a volleyball coach evaluating players' passing and serving techniques (judgment based on cues) and subsequently selecting a subset of players for a training squad (decision; Gabbett, Georgieff, & Domrow, 2007). What both these processes rely on are cues. This notion is represented in the Lens Model (see Figure 1; Brunswik, 1952) which begins with the stimulus in the environment (e.g., the individual being viewed) on the left side of the model (the criterion). There are imperfect (or fallible) cues (in the centre of the model) that are related to the individual (cue validity) with different importance (or weight; cue utilisation) attached to them which are then used to make a judgment (displayed on the right side of the model). Judgments subsequently form key components (e.g., judgment of probability; Manktelow, 2012) of the decision-making process (Blanchette & Richards, 2010). Cues can be fallible in the accuracy of the information (i.e., ecological reliability) or the accuracy of the cue itself (i.e., ecological validity; Hammond, 1996). If, for example, an individual knows that wealth is an important cue that some people look for when selecting a partner, they may try to deceive others by displaying obvious signs of affluence. The cue is valid for those looking for a partner (ecological validity) yet the information is unreliable (ecological reliability).

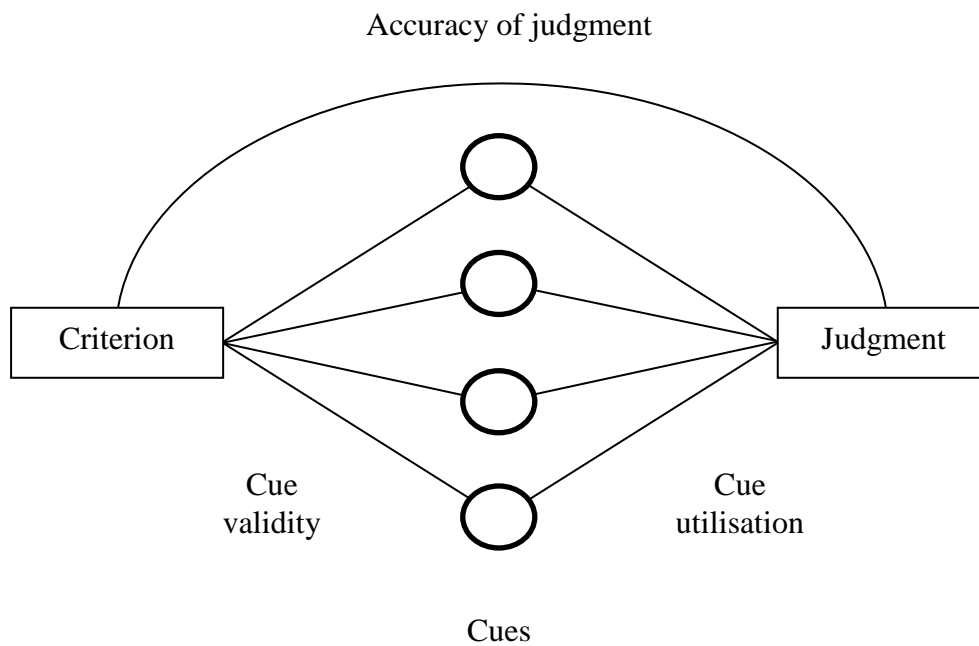
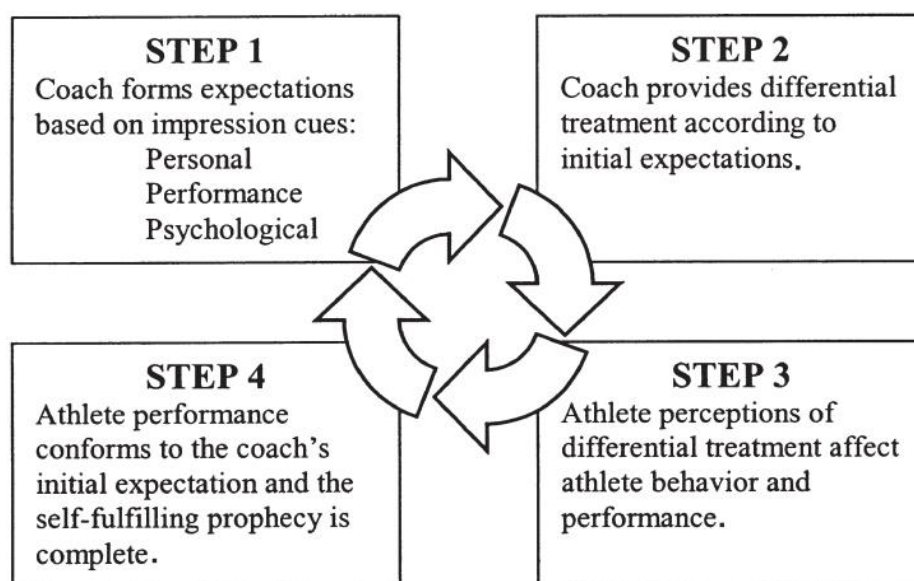


Figure 1. Brunswik's Lens Model (Brunswik, 1952).

Several researchers have attempted to explain how people use cues in their decision strategies. Rational models, for example, assume that people employ compensatory procedures that consider all available cues and their utility to each alternative (Payne & Bettman, 2001), while heuristic models put forward that people apply simple rules that regularly rely on a subset of available cues (Betsch & Glöckner, 2010). Furthermore, as it was observed that people use different decision strategies for the same multiple-cue tasks (Bryant, 2014), several proposals were put forward to explain how people select a decision strategy. For example, the Contingency Model assumes that strategy selections are based on an implicit cost-benefit trade off (Beach & Mitchell, 1978), while the Strategy Selection Learning model suggests an effort-accuracy trade off with a learning mechanism (Rieskamp & Otto, 2006).

Researchers in sport began their investigations of the impact of cues on coaches' judgments and decisions by examining whether impression cues (i.e., information used to form expectations; Solomon & Rhea, 2008) impacted coaches' expectancy judgments of their

athletes - and subsequent behaviour towards their athletes (e.g., Horn, 1984; Martinek, Crowe, & Rejeski, 1982; Rejeski, Darracott, & Hutslar, 1979; Sinclair & Vealy, 1989). These and successive researchers (e.g., Becker & Solomon, 2005; Solomon, 1993; 2001; 2002; 2003; 2010; Solomon & Buscombe, 2013; Solomon, DiMarco, Ohlson, & Reece, 1998; Solomon, Golden, Ciapponi, & Martin, 1998; Solomon & Kosmitzki, 1996; Solomon & Rhea, 2008; Solomon et al., 1996) used the expectancy theory and self-fulfilling prophecy as a framework to explain this process. Expectancy theorists contend that (1) an individual must hold a false belief about a target; (2) the individual must treat the target in a manner that is consistent with the false belief, and (3) the target must confirm the original false belief (Merton, 1948; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). With relevance to coaching, this process is portrayed as a four-step cyclical model (Horn, Lox, & Labrador, 2010; Martinek, 1981; Solomon, 2001) described by Becker and Solomon (2005; see Figure 2).



*Figure 2.* The 4-step expectancy cycle from Becker and Solomon (2005) which is based on work by Martinek (1981), Solomon (2001), and Horn et al. (2010).

Step one is where the coach develops an expectation for an athlete's performance based on personal (e.g., sex, race, or body size), performance (e.g., speed, agility, or game

statistics), and psychological (e.g., confidence, anxiety, or motivation) impression cues. In step two, the coach's initial expectations for the athlete's performance influences coaching behaviours and treatment towards the athlete. In step three, the athlete perceives differences in their coach's treatment, which provides them with information regarding their own level of competence, further impacting the athlete's performance. Finally, in step four, an athlete's performance conforms to the coach's original expectation, thus producing the four-step expectancy cycle and reinforcing the notion that the coach has accurately predicted the athlete's ability.

More recently, researchers have moved away from using the framework of expectancy theory and the self-fulfilling prophecy and have instead focussed on examining how specific cues can influence a variety of coaches' judgments and decisions (e.g., Berri & Schmidt, 2002; Gabbett et al., 2007; Larkin and O'Conner, 2017; Young, 2008). This may be because most research in this area focused on coaches' reliance on impressions of physical ability to assess athlete achievement and on feedback patterns (Solomon & Rhea, 2008). Somewhat more damning, though, is the review conducted by Jussim and Harber (2005) which examined 35 years of empirical research on self-fulfilling prophecies. The authors (who focussed on teacher expectations rather than coaches) concluded that while self-fulfilling prophecies in the classroom do occur, these effects are typically small and do not accumulate greatly across perceivers or over time (they are more likely to dissipate than accumulate). Also, teacher expectations may predict student outcomes of intelligence simply because these expectations are accurate, not because they are self-fulfilling. What this review demonstrated was that even after over three decades of research, the true effects of self-fulfilling prophecies still seem to be ambiguous.

### **1.3: Conclusion**

Coaches must regularly make team selection decisions (Côté, 2007; Couturier, 2009), a key decision that has implications for players beyond who will and will not play in an upcoming game (Caterisano et al., 1997; Côté et al., 2007; Eime et al., 2013; Gonzalez et al., 2013; Gonzalez et al., 2012; Güllich, 2014; Neely et al., 2017; Scanlan et al., 2015; Woods & Thatcher, 2009). Given that we know individuals use cues to make decisions on others, the question becomes, do we know which cues coaches use to make team selection decisions? To answer this, it is necessary to systematically review all research to date that has investigated coaches' team selection decisions.

## **Chapter 2: Why are Some Players Selected and Others Not? A Systematic Review**

### **2.1: Introduction**

Team selection is one of the most crucial decisions a coach must make (Côté et al., 2007; Couturier, 2009). To make these decisions, coaches may use all (Payne & Bettman, 2001), or a subset of (Betsch & Glöckner, 2010), available cues (i.e., a single piece of information within an environment that holds meaning and is used to form a judgment; Cooksey, 1996; Dowding & Thompson, 2003; Wiggins, 2006; von Helversen et al., 2013). Whilst there are studies available that highlight the cues used in other judgments and decision tasks performed by coaches (e.g., judging athlete achievement; Solomon & Rhea, 2008), it is not known which cues inform coaches' team selection decisions.

One area that has been the subject of much investigation, and could have parallels with team selection decisions, is the identification and selection of talented players for development pathways (Williams & Reilly, 2000). The decision to select a player for inclusion into talent development programmes is (usually) made by the coach (Wiseman, Bracken, Horton, & Weir, 2014), who can have a preconceived image of the ideal player (Williams & Reilly, 2000). This image relates to a player's anthropometric, physiological, perceptual-cognitive, psychological, and skill characteristics (O'Connor, Larkin, & Williams, 2016; Vaeyens et al., 2006). Specifically, it has been discovered, for example, that players selected (compared to those not selected) for development programmes are, among others, taller (Williams & Reilly, 2000), older (Gil et al., 2014), have less body fat (Williams & Reilly, 2000), perform better in physical tests, and possess greater technical skills (Vaeyens et al., 2006). The focus of these studies was, however, talent identification (i.e., the process of recognizing current participants with the potential to become elite players; Williams & Reilly, 2000) and not team selection. As a result, it is difficult to know whether the cues coaches used to identify talent are the same as those they use to select teams. The purpose of



this systematic review, therefore, is to present all research that investigated the cues used by coaches to make team selection decisions and the differences between selected and non-selected players.

## **2.2: Method**

A systematic review was chosen as the most appropriate method to achieve the aim of this study because it is a means of presenting the current state of knowledge about a subject while also highlighting knowledge gaps and providing suggestions for future research and practical interventions (Campo, Mellalieu, Ferrand, Martinent, & Rosnet, 2012; Mulrow, Cook, & Davidoff, 1997; Murlow, 1995). To protect data from bias and in the interest of transparency, guidelines set out by PRISMA (Liberati et al., 2009) and Weed (1997) were followed. That is, to first state the purpose of the review, conduct a literature search, evaluate the quality of the research identified, summarize the evidence, and draw conclusions. Both these guidelines have been adopted in previous sport- and coaching-based systematic reviews (e.g., Campo et al., 2012; Harwood, Keegan, Smith, & Raine, 2015).

### **2.2.1: Inclusion/exclusion criteria.**

Studies were included in this review if they provided quantitative and/or qualitative data on (1) the cues used in team selection decisions as outlined by coaches, or (2) the characteristics that discriminated between selected and non-selected players (or athletes) for a game or competition after selection had occurred. In accordance with previous recommendations on conducting systematic reviews (Knipschild, 1995), studies were excluded if they were not full articles (i.e., abstracts, conference proceedings, commentaries, responses, or reviews), not published in peer-reviewed journals, or were not in English. A time period was not used as an inclusion/exclusion criterion as (to the author's knowledge) there has not been a previous review on this subject.

### **2.2.2: Sources.**

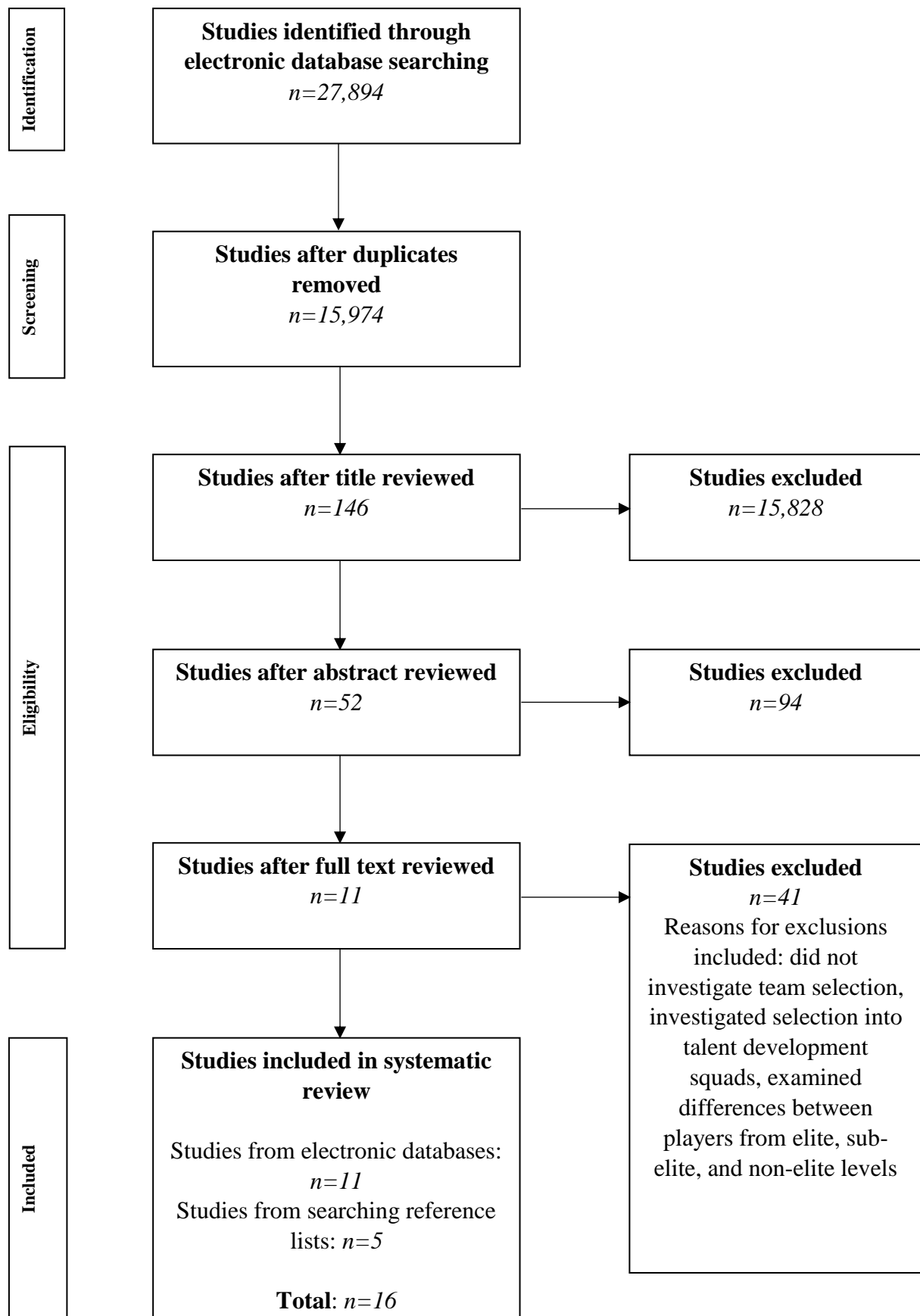
The electronic databases used for the literature search were SPORTDiscus and Web of Science. Searches were limited to sport specific journals (e.g., *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology*, *Sport Psychologist*, *International Journal of Sport Psychology*, *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, *Journal of Sport Sciences*, and *European Journal of Sport Science*) to avoid confusion with team selection in other, unrelated fields (e.g., organizational psychology; Williams, Parker, & Turner, 2010). Further searches were made by reviewing article reference lists of the studies included in the review. To decide which keywords would be used to search for relevant literature, the author performed a general literature search on the topic in question. A list of keyword terms was then created by examining the titles, abstracts, headings, sub-headings, and keywords from the studies found. The final list of keywords was *team (player) selection*, *team formation*, *team (player) selection process*, *team formation process*, *selection (deselection) decisions*, *coach selections (deselections)*, *deselection*, *sport*, *team (multi-player, individual, youth) sport*, *player*, *athlete*, and *talent identification*. Original searches were made in February 2017 and additional searches were made in January 2018. Both searches were identical, apart from a time period constraint was implemented on the second search which began from the end of the first search (i.e., February 2017) to avoid capturing duplicates.

### **2.2.3: Procedure.**

The key words were used in a predetermined search strategy in all electronic databases, which generated an initial list of studies (for PRISMA flow diagram, see Figure 3). Information about each study (i.e., authors, title, source, abstract, publication year, volume, issue, start and end page and doi) was then extracted into a Microsoft Excel<sup>®</sup> spreadsheet to make data analysis more manageable and systematic. Once any duplicates were removed,

sifting was carried out using techniques previously utilized by Nicholls and Polman (2007; for further explanation, see Lloyd Jones, 2004; Meade & Richardson, 1997). More specifically, studies were first reviewed by title, then abstract, and then by full text, with those not meeting the inclusion/exclusion criteria being removed at each stage. Further searches of study reference lists were also completed.

Figure 3. PRISMA flowchart showing the identification and selection of publications.



### 2.3: Results

A total of 16 studies were included in this review. The studies were published between 1987 and 2017, with five studies being published between 1987 and 1999 and the remaining 11 between 2005 and 2017. There was one study (i.e., Johansson & Fahlén, 2017) that met the first inclusion criterion (i.e., studies that provided quantitative and/or qualitative data on the cues used in team selection decisions as outlined by coaches). Johansson and Fahlén (2017) recruited participants who were coaching football ( $n=8$ ) and alpine skiing ( $n=6$ ). Participants were coaching at either the elite national level ( $n=7$ ; all alpine ski coaches and one football coach were at national level) or elite club level ( $n=7$ ) in women's teams ( $n=7$ ), men's teams ( $n=5$ ), or mixed teams ( $n=2$ ). No sex or age information was provided for the participants in this study.

The remaining 15 studies met the second inclusion criteria (i.e., studies that examined characteristics that discriminated between selected and non-selected players for a game or competition after selection had occurred). In these studies, participants represented players (or athletes) from seven sports competing at different levels (e.g., junior, semi-professional, professional, sub-elite, elite, high-school, and university; one study did not state competition level), including rugby league ( $n=5$ ), American football ( $n=3$ ), volleyball ( $n=2$ ), Australian rules football ( $n=2$ ), football ( $n=1$ ), lacrosse ( $n=1$ ), and rowing ( $n=1$ ). The number of participants in these studies ranged from 10 to 88 ( $M=48.33$ ,  $SD=26.70$ ). Both male ( $n=3$ ) and female ( $n=4$ ) participants were included (8 studies did not explicitly state participant sex) and the ages of the participants ranged from 10 to 24 years old ( $M=18.94$ ,  $SD=3.41$ ; one study only stated the age range of participants and another did not state the participants' ages).

Johansson and Fahlén (2017) reported that coaches used a variety of cues ( $N=47$ ; see Table 1) to make team selection decisions, including player cues, coach cues, cues from other

sources, and situational cues. Ten characteristics were found to separate selected and non-selected players (see Table 2) that all related to the players (or athletes) themselves, including their appearance, performances, and situations. The number of characteristics found to not discriminate between selected and non-selected players, however, far outweighed the characteristics that did (see Table 3). Furthermore, one study found no differences between selected and non-selected players. Specifically, Hoffman et al. (2009) found no anthropometric, strength, power, speed, or agility differences between selected and non-selected female lacrosse players.

Table 1

*Summary of Johansson and Fahlén (2017) study which provided data on the cues used in team selection decisions as outlined by coaches*

Author(s)	Year	Method	Level	Sport(s)	Sample	Sex	Age(s) (mean $\pm$ s)	Cues used in team selection decisions as outlined by coaches
Johansson & Fahlén	2017	Interviews	Elite	Football; alpine skiing	14	-	-	Age; attitude; work together as a team; personality; player's capacity; abilities of players; potential; current and past performances; previous results; current form; predictions of future performances; ranking lists; skills; technique; behaviour; career impact on athlete; injuries; experience; price of player; potential selling of player  Amount of time spent with athlete; coaches' intuition; coaches experience of analysing athletes; experience of selection processes; coaches' knowledge of sport; coaches' knowledge of athletes; coaches' goals; coaches' winning mentality; game plan; feelings  Other players; team goals; other coaches; federation boards; federation goals; club boards; club goals; media; agents; general public; sponsors; parents  Opponents; position; rules; quotas; number of athletes

*Note.* - = No explicit statement of relevant information.

Table 2

*Summary of studies included in this review that examined the differences between selected and non-selected players (or athletes) after selection had occurred*

Author(s)	Year	Data collected	Method of analysis	Level	Sport(s)	Sample	Sex	Age(s) (mean $\pm$ s)	Differences in selected and non-selected players (athletes)
Baker	2017	Physical characteristics; upper- and lower-body strength	Factorial analysis of variance	Professional	Rugby league	34	Male	23.3 (4.0)	Age; playing experience; 1RM bench press; 1RM squat; 1RM bench press/body mass; 1RM squat/body mass  (Forwards: 1RM bench press; 1RM squat; 1RM bench press/body mass; 1RM squat/body mass; age; body mass)
Barker, Wyatt, Johnson, Stone, O'Bryant, Poe, & Kent	1993	Physical characteristics; performance variables	One-way ANOVA	University (USA)	American football	59	-	19.7 (1.0)	One repetition squat; vertical jump power; static vertical jump power
Fry, Kraemer, Weseman, Conroy, Gordon, Hoffman, & Maresh	1991	Physical characteristics; physical and performance characteristics	Independent t-test	University (USA)	Volleyball	10	Female	19.6 (0.6)	36.6-m sprint; lower back-hip-hamstring flexibility; one repetition bench press, military press, power clean



Author(s)	Year	Data collected	Method of analysis	Level	Sport(s)	Sample	Sex	Age(s) (mean $\pm$ s)	Differences in selected and non-selected players (athletes)
Gabbett	2009	Physiological and anthropometric qualities	Independent t-test	Junior	Rugby league	88	-	13.2 (0.6), 15.1 (0.6), 16.5 (0.3)	Under 14: Playing experience; maximal aerobic power  Under 16: 10-m sprint; 20-m sprint; 40-m sprint; 0-10-m velocity; 10-20-m velocity; 20-40-m velocity  Under 18: Playing experience
Gabbett, Jenkins, & Abernethy	2011	Physiological and anthropometric qualities; technical and perceptual skill qualities	One-way ANOVA; two-way group x task ANOVA	Professional	Rugby league	86	-	23.3 (3.8)	10-m sprint; 40-m sprint; maximum velocity
Gabbett, Kelly, Ralph, & Driscoll	2009	Physiological and anthropometric qualities	Independent t-test	Elite and sub-elite	Rugby league	64	-	16.0 (0.2), 15.9 (0.6)	Elite: Height; weight
Gabbett & Seibold	2013	Physical qualities	Independent t-test	Semi-professional	Rugby league	32	-	24.0 (3.0)	Playing experience; vertical jump; three repetition squat and chin-up; body-mass maximum repetition bench press; prolonged high-intensity; intermittent running

Author(s)	Year	Data collected	Method of analysis	Level	Sport(s)	Sample	Sex	Age(s) (mean $\pm$ s)	Differences in selected and non-selected players (athletes)
Gravina, Gil, Ruiz, Zubero, Gil, & Irazusta	2008	Anthropometric and physiological characteristics	Student t-test	-	Football	66	Male	10-14 years	Flat sprint; sprint with cones
Hoffman, Ratamess, Neese, Ross, Kang, Magrelli, & Faigenbaum	2009	Anthropometric and athletic performance	Independent t-test	University (USA)	Lacrosse	22	Female	19.2 (1.0)	No differences found
Lawton, Cronin, & McGuigan	2013	Anthropometry; rowing ergometry; lower body strength	One-way ANOVA	Elite	Rowing	12	Female	23.1 (3.8)	Leg press
Le Rossignol, Gabbett, Comerford, & Stanton	2014	Physical qualities; physiological performance; anthropometry; performance variables	Univariate analysis	Professional	Australian rules football	20	-	21.7 (2.4)	Repeated sprint-times

Author(s)	Year	Data collected	Method of analysis	Level	Sport(s)	Sample	Sex	Age(s) (mean $\pm$ s)	Differences in selected and non-selected players (athletes)
Mayhew, Wolfe, & McCormick	1987	Physical qualities	-	University (USA)	American football	70	-	-	Bench press; power clean; 10-yard dash; vertical jump
Schmidt	1999	Physical characteristics; strength; physiological parameters	ANOVA	University (USA)	American football	78	Male	19.9 (1.4), 19.9 (1.6), 19.9 (1.2)	Seated medicine ball puts; one repetition bench press; one repetition leg press
Thissen-Milder & Mayhew	1991	Anthropometry; general and specific motor performance	ANOVA	High-school	Volleyball	50	Female	14.1 (0.6), 15.7 (0.6), 16.0 (0.6)	Agility; ball-handling skills
Young, Newton, Doyle, Chapman, Cormack, Stewart & Dawson	2005	Anthropometric and physiological measures	One-way ANOVA	Professional	Australian rules football	34	-	22.7 (3.4)	Age; playing experience; prolonged high-intensity, intermittent running; countermovement jump; 10-m time; flying 30-m time; right hamstring flexibility

*Note.* - = No explicit statement of relevant information. RM = Repetition maximum.

Table 3

*Player qualities investigated but found not to be significantly different between selected and non-selected players*

Author(s)	Year	Player qualities not significantly different between selected and non-selected players
Baker	2017	Body mass; height (Forwards: Height) (Backs: Height; body mass; age; 1RM bench press; 1RM squat; 1RM bench press/body mass; 1RM squat/body mass)
Barker, Wyatt, Johnson, Stone, O'Bryant, Poe, & Kent	1993	Age; body mass; height; fat %; relative strength; vertical jump power index; static vertical jump power index; vertical jump takeoff velocity; static vertical jump takeoff velocity; reps at 70%; reps at 90%; total reps; load at 70%; load at 90%; total load; 5-yd shuttle run; 10-yd shuttle run; 300-yd shuttle run; 1.5-mile run
Fry, Kraemer, Weseman, Conroy, Gordon, Hoffman, & Maresh	1991	Age; body weight; height; relative fat; fat-free mass; somatotype; isometric peak force; isometric mean force; vertical jump; running vertical jump; 90% max vertical jump endurance; 9.1m sprint; agility T-test; shoulder extension; dorsiflexion; 1 repetition maximum squat; squat/fat-free mass; 2-mile run; sit-ups; isokinetic strength
Gabbett	2009	Under 14s: Age; height; body mass; sum of skinfold; 10-m sprint; 20-m sprint; 40-m, sprint; 40-m sprint; 0-10-m velocity; 10-20-m velocity; 20-40-m velocity; change of direction speed; vertical jump Under 16s: Age; playing experience; height; body mass; sum of skinfolds; change of direction speed; vertical jump; shuttle level; total distance; predicted VO2 max Under 18s: Age; height; body mass; sum of skinfolds; 10-m sprint; 20-m sprint; 40-m sprint; 40-m sprint; 0-10-m velocity; 10-20-m velocity; 20-40-m velocity; change of direction speed; vertical jump; shuttle level; total distance; predicted VO2 max

Author(s)	Year	Player qualities not significantly different between selected and non-selected players
Gabbett, Jenkins, & Abernethy	2011	Body mass; height; change of direction speed; repeated-sprint ability; prolonged high-intensity intermittent running ability; single-task draw and pass; decision accuracy; decision time; pattern recall; pattern prediction
Gabbett, Kelly, Ralph, & Driscoll	2009	Elite: Age; playing experience; sum of skinfolds; 10-m sprint time; 20-m sprint time; 40-m sprint time; 0-10-m velocity; 10-20-m velocity; 20-40-m velocity; change of direction speed; vertical jump height; shuttle level; total distance; estimated VO2 max Sub-elite: Age; playing experience; body mass; height; sum of skinfolds; 10-m sprint time; 20-m sprint time; 40-m sprint time; 0-10-m velocity; 10-20-m velocity; 20-40-m velocity; change of direction speed; vertical jump height; shuttle level; total distance; estimated VO2 max
Gabbett & Seibold	2013	Age; body mass; 3RM bench press
Gravina, Gil, Ruiz, Zubero, Gil, & Irazusta	2008	Height; weight; BMI; % fat; % bone; % muscle; skinfold measurements (i.e., triceps, subscapular, abdominal, supraspinal, thigh, medial calf); sum of skinfold measurements; right strength exerted; left strength exerted; squat jump; countermovement jump; drop jump; absolute VO2 max; relative VO2 max
Hoffman, Ratamess, Neese, Ross, Kang, Magrelli, & Faigenbaum	2009	Height; body mass; 1RM bench press; 1RM squat; vertical jump; peak power (Wingate anaerobic power test); mean power (Wingate anaerobic power test); fatigue rate; peak power (sprint test); mean power (sprint test); VO2 max; 40-yd sprint; T-drill; pro-agility
Lawton, Cronin, & McGuigan	2013	Height; seated height; body mass; 8-site skinfold sum; arm span; 2000-m ergometer time

Author(s)	Year	Player qualities not significantly different between selected and non-selected players
Le Rossignol, Gabbett, Comerford, & Stanton	2014	Sum of skinfolds; 3-km time trial; 10-m sprint; 20-m sprint; 30-m sprint; 20- to 40-m speed
Mayhew, Wolfe, & McCormick	1987	1RM leg press; five-yard shuttle run; 40-yard dash; average repeated 350-yard runs; average heart rate recovery
Schmidt	1999	Sit and reach; sit-ups; dips; 300-yard shuttle; vertical jump; pull-ups (it is not clear if age, height, weight, and body fat were significantly different for starters and non-starters)
Thissen-Milder & Mayhew	1991	Age; height; weight; sum skinfolds (i.e., triceps, subscapular, abdominal, suprailiac, anterior thigh); % fat; shoulder flexibility; sit-and-reach flexibility; vertical jump; anaerobic power
Young, Newton, Doyle, Chapman, Cormack, Stewart, & Dawson	2005	Height; body mass; sum of skinfolds; isokinetic strength; 3RM leg press; 3RM chin-ups; 3RM bench press; vertical jump; predicted VO2 max; left hamstring flexibility

*Note.* RM = Repetition maximum.

### **2.3.1: Cues outlined by coaches (inclusion criteria one).**

The results in this section describing the cues used in team selection decisions as outlined by coaches themselves are all from the study conducted by Johansson and Fahlén (2017). It is worth noting that the results presented here are based on “selections to a team/squad for a season and selections to specific games or competitions” (p.473). As the authors do not distinguish between these two types of selection decisions in their study, every cue has been reported. Consequently, these results (and the subsequent discussion) should be interpreted with this in mind. Cues have been grouped (by the author) into larger categories that relate to the players themselves, the coaches, other sources, and the situation.

#### ***2.3.1.1: Player cues.***

Football coaches stated that they balanced players differing in skills, experience, and age when making selection decisions. Furthermore, these coaches also wanted players who worked best as a team and not simply the best players. Both football and alpine skiing coaches placed importance on the athletes' behaviour and personality (for football coaches, especially personality), while alpine skiing coaches also selected skiers for their attitude and considered the impact selection could have on their athletes' careers. Football coaches described taking the abilities (or “capacity”) of their players and their skills into consideration when making selection decisions. A mix of current and past performances and predictions of future performances formed the basis of selections for both football and alpine skiing coaches. There was also an emphasis (especially for alpine skiing coaches) on previous results. There were some alpine skiing coaches who said that using ranking lists was very important, while others reported basing their selection decisions on skiers' potential and technique. A player's current form, injuries, price, and whether that player is to be sold were considered important selection cues by football coaches.

### ***2.3.1.2: Coach cues.***

The experience of analysing athletes, the selection processes, and the knowledge coaches felt they had about their sport and their athletes contributed to selection decisions. Some football coaches stated that their game plan drove selection by finding players with the relevant skills to meet the demands of the game plan, although others claimed that the players' abilities would shape their game plan. One football coach, however, based selections simply on their intuition (or "gut feeling"). The amount of time spent with their players and their goals, winning mentality, and feelings also influenced coaches' team selection decisions.

### ***2.3.1.3: Cues from other sources.***

For some coaches (it is unclear from which sport), their federation boards decided upon and defined selection criteria. In these cases, coaches would follow these criteria (which were not detailed). Coaches from both sports were also impacted by their fellow coaches, their federation or club and team goals. Furthermore, football coaches described taking other players into account when making selection decisions because they wanted to balance players with different attributes and combine formations of players. These coaches also said that their club boards, the media, agents, the general public, sponsors, and parents can have an impact on their selection decisions (though it is unclear how these sources influenced team selection decisions).

### ***2.3.1.4: Situational cues.***

Football coaches indicated they would take the playing position (and its demands) into consideration when making selection decisions. They also believed opponents are an important factor. Rules affected team selection decisions, such as the pre-determined quotas (which depend on the rankings of each country's skiers and whether the country is hosting the world cup) that inform alpine skiing coaches as to how many skiers they can select for



their teams. The number of athletes available for selection also affected team selection decisions.

### **2.3.2: Differences between selected and non-selected athletes (inclusion criteria two).**

Results in this section are from the remaining 15 studies found in this review. These studies all examined the difference between selected and non-selected players (or athletes) for a game or competition after selection had occurred.

#### **2.3.2.1: *Player characteristics.***

Presented below are the player characteristics (i.e., age, height, weight, strength, speed, agility, aerobic fitness, flexibility, skills, and playing experience) that differentiated selected and non-selected players (or athletes).

##### **2.3.2.1.1: *Age.***

Age was found in two studies (out of 10, or 20%) to discriminate between players selected for a game and those who were not (Baker, 2017; Young et al., 2005). Baker (2017) reported, however, that only selected rugby league forwards were significantly older than non-selected rugby league forwards (there were no significant differences in selected and non-selected rugby league backs, although the age data approached significance). Selected players were older by an average (across both studies) of 5.0 years.

##### **2.3.2.1.2: *Height.***

One study (out of 12, or 8%) reported that selected elite (but not sub-elite) rugby league players tended to be taller than elite rugby league players not selected (Gabbett, Kelly, Ralph, & Driscoll, 2009), with the average difference in height being 4.2 centimetres.

#### *2.3.2.1.3: Weight.*

Two studies (out of 5, or 40%) reported that those selected for games were heavier than those not selected. For example, junior elite rugby league (Gabbett et al., 2009) and adult elite rugby league forwards (but not backs; Baker, 2017) were significantly heavier than non-selected forwards. Selected players were, on average, 6.8 kilograms heavier than non-selected players.

#### *2.3.2.1.4: Strength.*

Eight studies (out of 13, or 62%) found that characteristics relating to a players' upper- and lower-body strength and power were found to distinguish between selected and non-selected players (or athletes; Baker, 2017; Barker et al., 1993; Fry et al., 1991; Gabbett & Seibold, 2013; Lawton, Cronin, & McGuigan, 2013; Mayhew, Wolfe, & McCormick, 1987; Schmidt, 1999; Young et al., 2005). Every study reported that selected players were stronger and more powerful than non-selected players. Upper-body strength and power were measured through a one repetition bench press (Baker, 2017; Fry et al., 1991; Mayhew et al., 1987; Schmidt, 1999), body-mass maximum repetition bench press (Gabbett & Seibold, 2013), military press, power clean (Fry et al., 1991; Mayhew et al., 1987), three repetition chin-ups (Gabbett & Seibold, 2013), and seated medicine ball puts (Schmidt, 1999). One (Baker, 2017; Barker et al., 1993) and three (Gabbett & Seibold, 2013) repetition squats, leg press (Lawton et al., 2013; Schmidt, 1999), and vertical (Barker et al., 1993; Gabbett & Seibold, 2013; Mayhew et al., 1987) and countermovement (Young et al., 2005) jumps were all measures of lower-body strength and power.

#### *2.3.2.1.5: Speed.*

Selected players, according to seven studies (out of 10, or 70%; Fry et al., 1991; Gabbett, 2009; Gabbett, Jenkins, & Abernethy, 2011; Gravina et al., 2008; Le Rossignol, Gabbett, Comerford, & Stanton, 2014; Mayhew et al., 1987; Young et al., 2005), were faster

than non-selected players in short sprints (e.g., 10- and 40-metres; Gabbett et al., 2011) and repeated sprint times (e.g., Le Rossignol et al., 2014).

#### *2.3.2.1.6: Agility.*

In the only study to report on differences in agility (out of 3, or 33%), Thissen-Milder and Mayhew (1991) found that selected players were more agile (measured as a player's ability to change direction in a maze of cones) than non-selected players.

#### *2.3.2.1.7: Aerobic fitness.*

Three studies (out of 9, or 33%; Gabbett, 2009; Gabbett & Seibold, 2013; Young et al., 2005) reported that endurance related performances differentiated selected and non-selected players. Specifically, it was found that selected players had greater estimated maximal aerobic power (Gabbett, 2009) and performed better in a prolonged high-intensity, intermittent running test (Gabbett & Seibold, 2013; Young et al., 2005) than non-selected players.

#### *2.3.2.1.8: Flexibility.*

Selected players (in 2 of 4 studies, or 50%), compared to those not selected, were found to have greater lower back-hip-hamstring (Fry et al., 1991) and right (but not left) hamstring flexibility (Young et al., 2005).

#### *2.3.2.1.9: Skills.*

One study (out of 2, or 50%; Thissen-Milder & Mayhew, 1991) reported that skills specific to the sport being played discriminated between selected and non-selected players. More specifically, selected high-school volleyball players had better ball-handling skills (i.e., forearm pass, overhead volley, wall spike, and bump-set) than non-selected players.

#### 2.3.2.1.10: *Playing experience.*

Four studies (out of 5, or 80%; Baker, 2017; Gabbett, 2009; Gabbett & Seibold, 2013; Young et al., 2005) found that selected players had more playing experience than non-selected players. These studies reported that selected players had been playing for longer (e.g., Gabbett, 2009) or had played more games (e.g., Young et al., 2005) than non-selected players. Baker (2017), however, assumed that because selected players were older than non-selected players, they were also more experienced (rather than collecting data directly related to playing experience).

## 2.4: Discussion

This systematic review sought to present all research that investigated the cues used in team selection decisions as outlined by the coaches themselves and the differences between selected and non-selected players (or athletes) after selection had occurred. One study (i.e., Johansson & Fahlén, 2017) was found that required coaches to outline which cues they use in team selection decisions, in which player cues, coach cues, cues from other sources, and situational cues were identified. The remaining studies included in this review examined the differences between selected and non-selected players (or athletes) after selection had occurred. Whilst one study found no differences (i.e., Hoffman et al., 2009), the other studies reported that selected players were older, taller, heavier, stronger, faster, more agile, fitter, more flexible, performed skills to a higher level, and had more playing experience than non-selected players. It is worth noting, however, that in every one of these studies the number of characteristics found to not discriminate between selected and non-selected players were far greater than the characteristics that did (see Table 3). Although some of the differences between selected and non-selected players almost reached significance (e.g., age of rugby league backs; Baker, 2017) and a low number of non-significant results do not necessarily

mean there is no relation between variables (Liberati et al., 2009), the results discussed below must be interpreted with caution.

Most of the characteristics that discriminated between selected and non-selected players related to physical appearance (i.e., height and weight) and the performance of physical tasks (i.e., strength, speed, agility, aerobic fitness, and flexibility). This finding is not surprising given the high physical demands required to play rugby league (e.g., Till, Darrall-Jones, Weakley, Roe, & Jones, 2017), American football (e.g., Yamashita, Asakura, Ito, Yamada, & Yamada, 2017), volleyball (e.g., Milić et al., 2017), Australian rules football (e.g., Harrison & Johnston, 2017), football (e.g., Mallo, Mena, Nevado, & Paredes, 2015), lacrosse (e.g., Polley, Cormack, Gabbett, & Polglaze, 2015), and rowing (e.g., Thornton et al., 2017). It is, therefore, intuitive that players (or athletes) who are selected to play in these sports possess greater levels of physical characteristics. When coaches were asked, however, they did not state that they used any physical characteristics to select their teams (Johansson & Fahlén, 2017). Although this is a finding from one study so further research is needed to investigate whether coaches intentionally select players based on their physical characteristics.

Players' strength was found by the highest number of studies (eight studies; i.e., Baker, 2017; Barker et al., 1993; Fry et al., 1991; Gabbett & Seibold, 2013; Lawton et al., 2013; Mayhew et al., 1987; Schmidt, 1999; Young et al., 2005) to distinguish between selected and non-selected players. Despite this, questions remain as to whether coaches actually selected players based on their strength, especially as we know coaches may not be interested in strength training (Reade, Rodgers, & Hall, 2008). Given that muscle size is a major determinant of muscle strength (Akagi et al., 2011), and that coaches do rely on "sight" when judging and making selection decisions (Fiander et al., 2013; Johansson & Fahlén, 2017), it is reasonable to assume that coaches may base their selection decisions (or part of

their selection decisions) on size rather than strength. Seven studies (i.e., Fry et al., 1991; Gabbet, 2009; Gabbett et al., 2011; Gravina et al., 2008; Le Rossignol et al., 2014; Mayhew et al., 1987; Young et al., 2005) also reported that selected players were faster than non-selected players. According to Johansson and Fahlén, (2017), however, coaches (or at least the coaches they asked) do not base their selection decisions on a player's strength or speed. The reason for this may be that coaches do not use this information when making selection decisions, or coaches could be omitting selection cues based on players' physical qualities for social desirability reasons (i.e., a tendency to respond to self-report measures or interview questions in a way that individuals perceive to be socially acceptable, rather than to respond in an accurate and truthful manner; Holtgraves, 2004). Future research is required, however, to investigate whether coaches do use information about players' physical qualities when making selection decisions.

Results from two studies (i.e., Baker, 2017; Young et al., 2005) that examined players from rugby league and Australian rules football found that selected players were older than those not selected. Athletes from the same selection year can vary in age by up to 12 months, leading to significant cognitive, physical, and emotional differences between those born early and late in the year (Cobley, Baker, Wattie, & McKenna, 2009). This phenomenon, called the relative age effect (RAE), is more likely to occur in physically demanding sports (Baxter-Jones, 1995), such as rugby league (Cobley & Till, 2017) and Australian rules football (Coutts, Kempton, & Vaeyens, 2014), and has been reported at both youth and adult levels (although there is evidence that in some cases RAEs do not exist in sport; Andronikos, Elumaro, Westbury, & Martindale, 2016). Given that the studies in this review reported that selected players were, on average, 5.0 years older than non-selected players (so not within the same selection year), it is difficult to state that RAEs occurred because the participants' month of birth was not available. Age being used as a selection cue is supported by the notion

that coaches have said they select players based on their age, although it was not clear whether coaches selected younger or older athletes (Johansson & Fahlén, 2017). Older players being selected may have, however, been linked to playing experience. Four studies (i.e., Baker, 2017; Gabbett, 2009; Gabbett & Seibold, 2013; Young et al., 2005) found that selected players had more playing experience than non-selected players and as Baker (2017) stated, older players have more playing experience (though this may not always be the case), meaning that selected players can be both older and more experienced. Coaches have also stated that they selected players based on their age and experience (Johansson & Fahlén, 2017), suggesting that coaches are intentionally selecting older (this claim is a tentative one as it is not clear whether coaches were in fact selecting older players or simply taking age into account when making selection decisions) and more experienced players.

According to one study (i.e., Thissen-Milder & Mayhew, 1991), selected volleyball players had greater skill levels than non-selected players. Coaches could conceivably place importance on the execution and display of sport-specific skills when making selection decisions because coaches often adopt technique-focussed coaching styles that advocate the rehearsal of movement templates (Partington & Cushion, 2011; Rothwell, Stone, Davids, & Wright, 2017). Although there has been a call to move away from these traditional, linear coaching pedagogies to a more holistic, non-linear approach (e.g., Potrac, Brewer, Jones, Armour, & Hoff, 2000), it is commonly reported that coaches still use the traditional approaches to coaching that emphasise the display of sport-specific skills (Vinson, Brady, Moreland, & Judge, 2016). It is, therefore, understandable that selected players would display higher levels of skills than non-selected players, especially as the coach, who is making the team selection decisions, may believe that a set of favourable sport-specific skills are a prerequisite for selection (Oorschot, Chiwaridzo, & Smits-Engelsman, 2017). According to Johansson and Fahlén (2017), coaches do in fact consider skills a prerequisite for selection. In

their study, coaches described how players would be selected if they held the necessary skills (or abilities) needed in relation to the demands of different positions and their game plan (although it should be noted that not all coaches agreed with this as some coaches stated they evaluated their players' skills and then developed a game plan around them, so this might not be a wide-ranging practice). Coaches from this study extended this to say that past performances, previous results, current performances and form, and predictions of future performances all contributed to team selection decisions. As well as team selection decisions, performance related cues have also been found to influence selection decisions in different sporting contexts (e.g., draft selection; Woods, Joyce, & Robertson, 2016).

Johansson and Fahlén, (2017) highlighted several other cues that coaches stated they used as selection cues which have not been investigated in terms of whether they are present in selected players and absent in non-selected players. A player's personality and attitude (which can be an expression of personality; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993), for example, influence a coaches' selection decisions (Johansson & Fahlén, 2017). This is not surprising given that personality has been found to be important in predicting within competition, short-term, and long-term performances (Gee, Marshall, & King, 2010). Some coaches described how their selection criteria were dictated to them by their federation boards (Johansson & Fahlén, 2017). These were well-defined and communicated officially for both coaches and players to see. While some coaches saw this as a necessary step to make selections fair and justifiable, others preferred to be without clearly defined and decided upon selection criteria because they felt more flexible in their selection decisions. Intuition (or "gut feeling"), experience of analysing athletes, knowledge of the sport and athletes, and a game plan were all cues used to make team selection decisions (Johansson & Fahlén, 2017). Previous research in other contexts has suggested that individuals rely on intuition and their own judgments to make employee selection decisions (Miles & Sadler-Smith, 2014) and are even reluctant to use



selection decisions aids (Highhouse, 2008). Coaches expressed similar sentiments when they claimed their eyes were a replacement for statistics and tests (although some coaches did say the two complemented each other), which can lead to a number of biases in their selection decisions (Kirkebøen & Nordbye, 2017) because the selection process (in rugby union at least) relies heavily on coaches' subjective perceptions of their athletes (Calder & Durbach, 2015). Again, however, further research is needed to back up this claim.

With this latter point in mind, it is important to make clear that only one study was found that investigated the cues used in team selection decisions as outlined by coaches. Given that coaching is fundamentally a decision-making process (Abraham, Collins, & Martindale, 2006), and that team selection is one of the most important decisions made (Côté et al., 2007; Couturier, 2009), it seems counterintuitive that the decision maker (i.e., the coach) does not prominently feature in the literature. Furthermore, as the coach is not featured in most of the studies described in this review, it is unclear whether the coach explicitly selected their players on some of the characteristics reported. Whilst, for example, selected players had greater estimated maximal aerobic power than non-selected players (Gabbett, 2009), the coach may have been unaware of this when they made their selection decisions. It has been demonstrated, however, that with studies that ask coaches what they base their selection decisions on we can begin to make these conclusions. Selected players, for example, are older and more experienced than non-selected players (Baker, 2017) and we also know that coaches do take a player's age and experience into consideration when making selection decisions (Johansson & Fahlén, 2017).

#### **2.4.1: Strengths and limitations.**

This study offers an original contribution to the coaching literature using objective, transparent methods (Liberati et al., 2009; Weed, 1997) to present the current state of our knowledge on coaches' team selection decisions. As a result, researchers are offered a

consolidation of the research findings which highlight what we currently know and what we do not. This is a vital step towards developing an understanding of coaches' team selection decisions. There are, however, limitations to this study. Whilst the author conducted an extensive literature search, the current search and inclusion/exclusion criteria could be potential sources of bias. Future researchers, therefore, should consider adopting different criteria (e.g., to include foreign-language studies) to search for any additional studies that may have been omitted unintentionally.

#### **2.4.2: Future directions for research.**

Given there was only one study obtained from this review that specifically examined coaches' team selection decisions (i.e., Johansson & Fahlén, 2017), albeit which is helpful to increase our understanding of these crucial decisions, the extant literature fails to fully answer the question of why some players are selected to play for a team whereas other are not. As such, the current state of our knowledge on coaches' team selection decisions is poor. Future researchers are, therefore, encouraged to plug this gap by focussing their attention on asking coaches about why and how they select their teams. Considering the implications of a player not being selected for a team (e.g., detraining, stress, and a loss of identity; Caterisano et al., 1997; Neely et al., 2017; Woods & Thatcher, 2009), the practical importance of this knowledge is clear. Coaching is a developing field and, as such, requires descriptive research to accumulate knowledge and develop an understanding of what coaches actually do (Gilbert & Trudel, 2004b; Potrac et al., 2007), including what informs their selection decisions.

#### **2.5: Conclusion**

This systematic review revealed a number of cues coaches rely on to make selection decisions and highlighted differences between selected and non-selected players. Furthermore, it demonstrated that some of the characteristics that differentiated selected from non-selected players (or athletes) were in fact selection cues used by coaches (i.e., age,

experience, and skills). There were, however, more characteristics that did not discriminate between selected and non-selected players than did. Furthermore, almost every study included in this review examined the differences between selected and non-selected players (or athletes) after selection had occurred. This means that only one study was found that asked coaches what cues they rely on to make selection decisions. Given that coaching is fundamentally a decision-making process, and that we know coaches use cues to make decisions, the number of cues reported in this study seem remarkably low. If this is the case, then what are the cues that could potentially influence coaches' team selection decisions?

## **Chapter 3: What Could Influence a Coach's Selection Decisions? A Narrative Review of the Literature**

### **3.1: Introduction**

Researchers have conducted a number of studies which have found that certain cues (i.e., a single piece of information within an environment that holds meaning and is used to form a judgment; Cooksey, 1996; Dowding & Thompson, 2003; Wiggins, 2006; von Helversen et al., 2013) can affect specific judgments and decisions, including cues such as smiling (e.g., Floyd & Erbert, 2003) and race (e.g., Rasmussen, Esgate, & Turner, 2005), while personality judgments (e.g., Todorov, Said, & Verosky, 2011) and political voting decisions (e.g., Berggren, Jordahl, & Poutvaara, 2010) are among those affected. Researchers in sport have also discovered that coaches are impacted by cues when making judgments and decisions on their athletes. Solomon and Rhea (2008), for example, found that when making judgments of athlete achievement, coaches relied on a number of cues (e.g., speed, body size, tactical knowledge) that related to six dimensions (i.e., personality, performance, personal, cognitive, mistakes, and knowledge from others). Furthermore, while determining perceived player value, Berri and Schmidt (2002) found that basketball coaches almost exclusively rely on points scored. Although this type of single-cue decision making is common in human judgment (e.g., the 'take-the-best' heuristic; Gigerenzer & Goldstein, 1996; Gigerenzer & Todd, 1999), a coach making game-time decisions, according to Young (2008), cannot rely on a single statistical category. Young (2008) subsequently discovered that basketball coaches depend on several cues to make game-time decisions (e.g., points, steals, assists).

Larkin and O'Conner (2017) attempted to understand which attributes youth sport coaches and recruiters perceived as important when identifying skilled youth athletes (i.e., under 13 years) in football. The attributes considered important were grouped as technical (e.g., striking the ball), tactical (e.g., decision-making ability), and psychological (e.g.,

positive attitude). While this study asked coaches (through interviews and questionnaires) which cues they considered important when identifying talented athletes, Gabbett et al. (2007) aimed to predict selection into a training squad by measuring physiological, anthropometric, and skill test results of selected and non-selected volleyball players. The authors stated that athletes are selected for training squads because of “subjective coaching opinions of their movement coordination in game-specific tasks” (Gabbett et al., 2007, p. 1338). The results demonstrated that coaches relied on subjective evaluations of passing and serving techniques (skills), not physiological and anthropometric cues, to select their athletes. Selection cues may also arise from individuals other than the players. Head coaches can have several coaches (e.g., assistant coaches) all contributing to team selection decisions (Calder & Durbach, 2015; Lemyre, Trudel, & Durand-Bush, 2007), for example, meaning cues from these other coaches could influence head coaches’ team selection decisions. Taken together, what these studies demonstrate is that coaches use a diverse number of cues, in different contexts, to make certain judgments and decisions on their athletes.

Given that selecting athletes for competitive teams is a crucial decision made by coaches (Côté et al., 2007; Couturier, 2009), a clear understanding of what may influence these decisions (e.g., cues from the players, the environment, and others) is needed. The number of studies available that have focussed on team selection decisions (i.e., Johansson & Fahlén, 2017), however, is small. The aim of this narrative literature review, therefore, is to draw on sport-based and non-sport-based research to highlight the cues that may influence coaches’ judgments and decisions. Narrative literature reviews are comprehensive syntheses of previously published information that present a broad perspective on a topic (Green, Johnson, & Adams, 2006). This will enable a clearer picture to be made regarding the cues that could impact a coach’s team selection decisions and create a systematic pool of cues so that further investigations can be done into these specific cues. For example, facial elongation

impacts judgments of height (Re et al., 2013; which can subsequently affect the selection of people into leadership positions; Judge & Cable, 2004) and facial maturity is thought to impact who is selected for a job (Zebrowitz, Tenenbaum, & Goldstein, 1991).

Studies were included in this review if they provided evidence of a cue (or cues) influencing (a) a coach's judgments or decisions on their athletes and (b) non-coaching related selection behaviour. It is worth noting that this review is a summary of the literature, not an exhaustive list of every study. Also, when a judge or decision maker is mentioned, this refers to the individual(s) utilising the cues to subsequently make the judgment or decision. The target refers to the individual being judged or decided upon. The results are presented as individual (or groups of related) cues that have been found to have an impact on either coaches' or other individuals' judgments and decisions.

### **3.2: Player Cues**

Presented below are the player cues (i.e., faces, head, height, somatotype, gender/sex, race/ethnicity, age, behaviour, nonverbal behaviour, and clothing) that could have an impact on coaches' team selection decisions.

#### **3.2.1: Faces.**

One of the most fundamental recognition abilities humans possess is (with the possible exception of words; Kanwisher, 2000) an innate ability to discriminate among human faces (Bailenson, Garland, Iyengar, & Yee, 2006; Farah, 1996; Goldstein & Chance, 1970). Faces can be processed faster and more efficiently than any other class of objects (e.g., chairs, pens, and coats; Farah, Wilson, Drain, & Tanaka, 1998; Kanwisher, 2000) within specialised areas in the brain (Golby, Gabrieli, Chiao, & Ebenhardt, 2001; Kanwisher & Yovel, 2006; Lieberman, Hairir, Jarcho, Eisenberger, & Bookheimer, 2005; Phelps et al., 2000). Traditionally viewed as static objects, human faces are now seen as dynamic. So rather than displaying one single "face," we, for example, move our eyebrows, laugh, and

nod our heads during exchanges (Knappmeyer, Thornton, & Bühlhoff, 2003). Researchers have found that people are able to accurately perceive information about others from very limited facial information, including: appearance (Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani, & Longo, 1991; Kleiman & Rule, 2012), symmetry (e.g., Penton-Voak et al., 2001), width (e.g., Todorov et al., 2011), elongation (e.g., Re et al., 2013), attractiveness (e.g., Little, Burriss, Jones, & Roberts, 2007), maturity (e.g., Rafaële & Testé, 2006), dominance (e.g., Little, Apicella, & Marlowe, 2007), similarity (e.g., Bailenson et al., 2006), gaze direction (e.g., Vertegaal, Slagter, van der Veer, & Nijholt, 2001), smiling (e.g., Naumann, Vazire, Rentfrow, & Gosling, 2009), expressions (e.g., Fecica & Stolz, 2008), and motion (e.g., Ambadar, Schooler, & Cohn, 2005). Aspects of a person's life, like their sexual orientation (Rule & Ambady, 2008), political affiliations (Rule & Ambady, 2010; Samochowiec, Wanke, & Fiedler, 2010), and their religious beliefs (Rule, Garrett, & Ambady, 2010) can be judged solely from their face at levels significantly greater than chance (Kleiman & Rule, 2012).

### **3.2.2: Head.**

It is thought that head movements can influence the judgments and decisions people make on one another. Warnecke, Masters, and Kempter (1992), for example, reported that when judging political leaders, adults (both male and female) were influenced by four head movements. The head movements associated with positive judgments were thought to have signalled reassurance or dominance, while head movements related to negative judgments signalled warmth and loving maternal behaviour (characteristics deemed not appropriate in a political leader). In other contexts, however, it is unclear whether these head movements would have the same effect.

### **3.2.3: Height.**

There is an argument that humans automatically associate perceptions of height with dominance (van Quaquebeke & Giessner, 2010) that extends cross culturally (Fiske, 1992).

More specifically, humans tend to create mental representations that embody abstract concepts (such as dominance) in modal information about space and the body (such as height; Barsalou, 1999, 2008; Glenberg, 1997; Niedenthal, Barsalou, Winkielman, Kraut-Gruber, & Ric, 2005). For example, when people think about power (a related concept) they automatically interpret up, above, and large, whereas down, below, and small are interpretations for powerless (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). So engrained is this link between dominance and height that decisions about whether to fight or flight is often determined by height comparison (Archer, 1988; Parker, 1974).

Evidence suggests that in an ambiguous decision situation where a foul was committed in football and a referee must judge who the aggressor and innocent party is, blame is attributed to the tallest target (van Quaquebeke & Giessner, 2010). Interestingly, the decisions reviewed as part of this study were decisions made by professional referees. What this implies is a group of individuals (albeit a small group out of a larger population) who are paid to make unbiased decisions are influenced by the height of an athlete. However, it has since been found that taller men react more aggressively in sports (Webster & Xu, 2011), meaning referees may be less biased than first thought. While referees may be unconsciously “paying attention” to the height of athletes, it seems athletes and others are also paying attention to the height of referees. In their study, Stulp, Bunnk, Verhulst, and Pollet (2012) found that referees were taller than their assistants, more authoritative (measured by controlling the game), and judged as more competent (measured by which games they were assigned and the teams rankings) than smaller referees, thereby reinforcing the notion that height and authority are positively related.

### **3.2.4: Somatotype.**

To be accepted as a competent professional in your field, research indicates that you should “look the part.” One way of achieving this is to have the appropriate somatotype (e.g.,



Hash, Munna, Vogel, & Bason, 2003). Lovell, Parker, Brady, Cotterill, and Howatson (2011), for example, found that female sports psychology consultants were judged as more effective and desirable (in terms of working with them) by athletes if they were nonobese (rather than obese). This trend of perceived effectiveness has previously been documented between athletes and their sports psychology consultants (Lubker, Watson II, Geer, & Watson, 2008) and performance enhancement consultants (Lubker, Watson II, Geer, & Watson, 2005), and between patients and their doctors (Hash et al., 2003). While the underlying theme of these studies may be that the participants are all in “healthy” professions (and therefore a nonobese physique may be synonymous with those professions in the minds of those making judgments), some have found a similar trend in other areas. Richardson, Hastdorf, Goodman, and Dornbusch (1961), for example, found that children are less likely to be the friend of a drawing of an obese person (compared with a nonobese person). Additionally, DeJong (1980) reported that unless an obese female could offer a medical excuse for her obesity, or cite recent weight loss, she was given a less positive evaluation and was less liked (especially by women).

### **3.2.5: Gender/sex.**

Gender, or sex, have been found to have an impact on several judgments (the terms used below are consistent with how the authors of each study have used them, though they are distinct concepts; Westbrook & Saperstein, 2015). Souchon, Livingston, and Maio (2013), for example, found that handball referees held biases against female handball players as they sanctioned them more frequently than male players (in the same game situations). When questioned, the male handball referees stated negative gender stereotypes (e.g., female players are less competent than male players) which may have accounted for the different interpretations of the same sporting situations. Furthermore, Tracy and Beall (2011) found stark differences of sexual attractiveness between men and women showing different

emotional expressions. Happiness was the most attractive female emotional expression, whereas it was the least attractive emotion expression in men. The same, but opposite, pattern was found for expressions of pride (i.e., attractive for men but unattractive for women). Additionally, these sex-specific patterns largely held across target ethnicity, participant age, and study design (i.e., judging a single target or multiple targets), further emphasizing the role sex as a cue has in the judgment of sexual attractiveness. Porter et al. (1983) also discovered that women are also unlikely to be perceived as leaders by men or women, while Butler and Geis (1990) revealed that both male and female participants gave gender stereotypical judgments of male and female leaders (i.e., female leaders have more warmth and sensitivity while male leaders have more ability, skills, and intelligence). Furthermore, in this latter study it was reported that female leaders, who offered the same suggestions and arguments as male leaders, received more negative affect responses and fewer positive responses (men received less negative affect responses and at least as many positive as negative responses).

### **3.2.6: Race/ethnicity.**

Though the terms race and ethnicity can overlap, they are two distinct concepts (Aspinall, 2007). They are, however, used interchangeably. For example, Ratcliff et al. (2008) stated that a target's race is African American whereas Letzring (2010) used the term ethnicity to describe African American targets. It is beyond the scope of this review to discuss the appropriateness of these terms, so both terms are used below as per the original studies respectively. Stereotypes (i.e., the sum of beliefs, knowledge, and expectations that individuals develop toward members of social categories; Hamilton & Sherman, 1994) are said to be an important form of social categorising often used to establish behavioural norms (Blair, 2002; Ruble, Cohen, & Ruble, 1984). One area that has racial stereotypes is sport. Probably the most perverse racial stereotype is the view that Black individuals of African

ancestry are inherently superior in physical ability (Rasmussen et al., 2005). To demonstrate this, in North America an African American individual was (over 20 years ago) roughly 15 times more likely to reach the NFL and 28 times more likely to reach the NBA than a random non-Black individual (Sailer, 1996). Furthermore, in Britain when Black residents represented about 2% of the total population (roughly 20 years ago), they corresponded to at least 50% of First Division basketball players, boxing champions, and the British athletic squad, and one in five professional soccer players (Cashmore, 1998; Jarvie, 1991; Owen, 1994). Also, in five consecutive Olympic Games (between Los Angeles and Sydney) all 40 finalists in the men's 100 meters were Black, yet the same population had extremely limited success in swimming (Entine, 2000). A consequence of this stereotype is that it may be internalised by Black individuals, which, in turn, can influence participation in certain sports (e.g., basketball, boxing, sprinting; Harrison, Lee, & Belcher, 1999). Even if a Black athlete has taken a path in sport that does not conform to the stereotype (i.e., chosen a different sport), they are still likely to encounter a coach that does. Coaches, for example, may assign athletes to playing positions in team sports because of their racial attributes (e.g., speed and power) and not their actual achieved performance (Bopp & Sagas, 2014; Leonard, 1987; Loy & McElvogue, 1970). Black athletes, therefore, may end up filling positions that require physical prowess and White athletes may find themselves in "thinking" positions. Within the UK, this trend has been found in football (Norris & Jones, 1998), rugby union (Jarvie, 1991), and rugby league (Long, Carrington, & Spracklen, 1997).

### **3.2.7: Age.**

It has been discovered that ageism (i.e., the discrimination against individuals based on their age; Angus & Reeve, 2006) exists (Hummert, 1999; Kite, Stockdale, Whitley, & Johnson, 2005; Kite & Wagner, 2002; McTavish, 1971) with views about ageing being multidimensional, with both positive and negative elements. For example, the largest bias

against older adults (75 and onwards) was seen when stereotypic beliefs about attractiveness were judged (and to a lesser extent competence; Kite et al., 2005). Furthermore, research shows that women experience more age discrimination than men (Duncan & Loretto, 2004), which may be because women are not only judged by their age and gender, but also their looks (or “lookism”; Granleese & Sayer, 2005).

### **3.2.8: Behaviour.**

It has been known for some time that a person’s behaviour can influence how others judge and make decisions on them. Over four decades ago, for example, Nisbett and Wilson (1977) asked people to make a judgment on an instructor. When the instructor behaved in a warm and friendly manner, they were judged as appealing. If, however, they behaved cold and distant they were perceived as irritating. Later, DePaulo, Stone, and Lassiter (1985) found that our behaviour (in this case, sincerity) influences how a person judges the truthfulness of a message. The authors discovered that when someone is highly motivated to lie successfully, their lie becomes easily detectable when someone is watching them (compared to just hearing them). The reason may be because a person’s behaviour is hard to control, even when motivated to do so. An untruthful message, therefore, is detectable by its lack of sincerity. Our behaviour in certain environments can also have consequences. How someone behaves at work, for example, can affect the evaluations given, and rewards recommended, by superiors (e.g., Allen & Rush, 1998). If someone displays behaviours that are constructive, cooperative, and neither mandatory or contractually compensated for (Smith, Organ, & Near, 1983), they can be given better overall evaluations and have better rewards recommended by superiors. This may be due to the triggering of positive affect when these behaviours are witnessed, which can influence superiors’ overall evaluation of a worker and the rewards they recommend (Allen & Rush, 1998).

### **3.2.9: Nonverbal behaviour.**

Nonverbal behaviours, such as body language, play a fundamental role in expressing our affective states, attitudes, and social dynamics (D'Mello & Graesser, 2009). Some, for example, have even concluded that body expressions are as powerful as facial expressions in conveying emotions (Argyle, 1988; Bull, 1987; Coulson, 2004; Ekman & Friesen, 1974; McClenney & Neiss, 1989; Meeren, van Heijnsbergen, & de Gelder, 2005; Van den Stock, Righart, & de Gelder, 2007). Unfortunately, however, research into the impact of body language on judgments and decision making is scarce (Hinzman & Kelly, 2013; Van den Stock et al., 2007). Studies do suggest, however, that body language does in fact have an impact. Emotional body language (i.e., emotional expressions of the whole body; de Gelder, 2006), for example, is reported to reduce the ability to identify emotional faces when they were incongruent (e.g., Meeren et al., 2005). Hinzman and Kelly (2013) found this when they asked participants to identify individuals' race by looking at their faces and emotional body language. Out-group faces were processed faster with angry (vs. happy) emotional body language (while the opposite effect was found for in-group faces).

### **3.2.10: Clothing.**

According to Knapp (1978), we use clothing to judge others, especially in the absence of different information about the person during the first encounter (Harris et al., 1983; Howlett, Pine, Orakçioğlu, & Fletcher, 2013). This is a phenomenon found in sport, where a person's clothing influences the way in which they are judged. For example, athlete participants who viewed target athletes in sport-specific clothing (compared to general clothing) displaying positive (compared with negative) nonverbal behaviour gave more favourable first impression ratings, episodic (i.e., judgments made about the states of a person at that moment in time) and dispositional (i.e., judgments about the enduring characteristics of an individual; Warr & Knapper, 1968) judgments, performance ratings, and were less

confident about winning (Buscombe, Greenlees, Holder, Thelwell, & Rimmer, 2006; Furley, Dicks, & Memmert, 2012; Greenlees, Bradley, Holder, & Thelwell, 2005; Greenlees, Buscombe, Thelwell, Holder, & Rimmer, 2005).

The colour of clothing may also have an impact on our judgments and decisions. Frank and Gilovich (1988), for example, examined the effect athletes' clothing can have on referees' (and individuals acting as referees) decisions. The authors asked both experienced referees and knowledgeable fans to view two identical videotapes of an American football play, the only difference being that in one videotape the defensive team (who acted aggressively in both videotapes) wore white and in the other, wore black. As expected, the team who wore black were penalised more often and treated more harshly by both fans and (somewhat more surprisingly as they are arguably the epitome of objectivity) referees.

### **3.3: Environmental Cues**

Presented below is an environmental cue (i.e., weather) that could have an impact on coaches' team selection decisions.

#### **3.3.1: Weather.**

Investigating the impact weather had on university admissions reviewers' recommendations, Simonsohn (2007) discovered that applicants' academic attributes were weighted more heavily by university admission reviewers on cloudier days while non-academic attributes (e.g., leadership) were given more weight on sunnier days. By using real university admissions officers, the findings have a very real implication in practice as an applicant's probability of being admitted increased by 11.9% if the application was read under optimal, rather than the worst possible, cloud cover. In other words, someone's academic future can be in the hands of something as irrelevant and unrelated as the weather. It is not just cloudiness that can affect people's decision making as Rind (1996) and Strohmets (2001) found that sunshine increases tipping and Guéguen and Stefan (2013)

reported that drivers (both male and female) are more likely to pick up hitchhikers on sunny days as opposed to cloudy days.

### **3.4: Cues from Other Coaches**

Sports teams tend to have several individuals (e.g., assistant coaches or selectors) all contributing to team selection decisions, with a head coach (usually) making the final decisions (Calder & Durbach, 2015; Lemyre et al., 2007). Members of a team communicating with each other has been found to improve the decision-making performances of the team (Ceschi, Dorofeeva, & Sartori, 2014), so it is unsurprising that head coaches value interactions with their coaching staff (Gilbert & Trudel, 2001; Lemyre et al., 2007). Additionally, for groups to make optimal decisions, individuals must cooperatively and effectively share information among their members (Toma & Butera, 2009). It could be assumed, therefore, that when making team selection decisions head coaches would use cues gained from their assistant coaches (or individuals that assist with team selection decisions). When it is considered that these cues are likely to simply be the individual subjective opinions of each coach (Calder & Durbach, 2015), however, then the consistency of this information could be problematic. This was an issue reported by Black and Holt (2009) when they revealed that ski coaches within the same ski club applied an objective athlete assessment tool idiosyncratically, meaning coaches within the same team were lacking in consistency when making decisions on the same athletes.

Nonetheless, whilst not the specific focus of the current research, the nature of group dynamics and related topics, such as group structure, group composition, and conflict in groups (Kerr & Tindale, 2004) are important considerations for those researching team selection within coaching teams in the future. For example, it is known that the evaluation and selection of players in rugby union is prone to coaches' biases because of differences in perceptual subjectivity about how a player actually performed and preferential subjectivity

about what performance aspects are important (Calder & Durbach, 2015). How a group of coaches making a single selection decision combine their preferences to come to an overall agreement (or the least objectionable agreement), therefore, would be an important research topic.

### **3.5: Conclusion**

This study presents examples of research that indicates the effect individual cues can have on judgments and decisions on people. As such, this narrative literature review offers a pool of cues that could influence coaches' judgments and decisions made on their athletes while viewing them. What this review demonstrates is the number and diversity of possible cues that can influence coaches' decisions. Researchers have already investigated how cues can impact coaches' decisions in different sports (e.g., basketball; Young, 2008) and environments (e.g., games; Berri & Schmidt, 2002). Some did this by asking coaches directly (e.g., Larkin & O'Conner, 2017), while others focused on decision outcomes after the decisions had been made (e.g., Gabbett et al., 2007). Given that coaching is a decision-making process (Abraham et al., 2006) and that coaches are responsible for several crucial decisions, including team selection (Côté et al., 2007; Couturier, 2009; Woods & Thatcher, 2009), it is necessary to understand what can influence these decisions. When there is also a lack of consistency among coaches regarding the decisions made on their athletes (Black & Holt, 2009), the need to understand what affects these decisions becomes further evident. There are, however, only a handful of studies that have investigated how cues can influence coaches (e.g., Larkin & O'Conner, 2017) and only one that has specifically looked at coaches' team selection decisions (i.e., Johansson & Fahlén, 2017). In comparison to other professional domains and academic disciplines (e.g., medicine), empirical research into coaches' decision making is somewhat lacking (Gilbert & Trudel, 2004a; Vergeer & Lyle, 2009). If coaches are responsible for deciding, among other things, who will and will not play



in an upcoming game (which has implications for players far beyond these decisions), then knowing what influences these decisions is crucial for both the transparency and players' and coaches' understanding of the coaching process. With this in mind, what cues do influence coaches' team selection decisions?

## **Chapter 4: A Longitudinal (Pre-Post Season) Investigation of UK Rugby Union**

### **Coaches' Team Selection Decisions**

#### **4.1: Introduction**

It is now known that there are many diverse cues (i.e., a single piece of information within an environment that holds meaning and is used to form a judgment; Cooksey, 1996; Dowding & Thompson, 2003; Wiggins, 2006; von Helversen et al., 2013) that people draw upon to make judgments and decisions on others (see Chapter 3, p. 37). In contrast, almost nothing is known about which (or how many) cues sports coaches use when making team selection decisions (see Chapter 2, p. 9). This is surprising given the decision-making nature of coaching (Abraham et al., 2006), the potential for a range of different biases in selection decisions (Calder & Durbach, 2015), and the consequences of team selection on athletes, which can be both positive (e.g., improved psychosocial functioning and emotional wellbeing, vitality, enjoyment, life satisfaction, reduced stress and distress, a sense of community, an increased probability of joining an elite developmental trajectory and becoming a successful professional senior player, and the maintenance and improvement of physical and skill performances during a season; Caterisano et al., 1997; Côté et al., 2007; Eime et al., 2013; Gonzalez et al., 2013; Gonzalez et al., 2012; Güllich, 2014; Scanlan et al., 2015) or negative (e.g., detraining, stress, and a loss of identity; Caterisano et al., 1997; Neely et al., 2017; Woods & Thatcher, 2009).

In the only study available that asked coaches about the selection process, Johansson and Fahlén (2017) revealed that coaches claim to use a variety of cues to make team selection decisions. How a player behaves and their personality, for example, were important selection cues among other player cues (e.g., age, skills, experience), coach cues (e.g., intuition, knowledge, game plan), cues from other sources (e.g., other coaches, federation boards, parents), and situational cues (e.g., opponents, position, rules). Whilst this study represents an

important step towards understanding coaches' team selection decisions, investigating the cues used in team selection decisions was only one aspect of the study purpose and it is not clear whether coaches actually used the selection criteria they reported using. This latter point is particularly important given the low correlation between coaches observed and self-reported behaviour found in other studies (e.g., Curtis, Smith, & Smoll, 1979).

Several studies have also highlighted the differences between selected and non-selected players (or athletes) after selection had occurred. All but one (i.e., Hoffman et al., 2009) of these studies found that selected players were older, taller, heavier, stronger, faster, more agile, fitter, more flexible, performed skills to a higher level, and had more playing experience than non-selected players (or athletes; Baker, 2017; Barker et al., 1993; Fry et al., 1991; Gabbett, 2009; Gabbett et al., 2011; Gabbett et al., 2009; Gabbett & Seibold, 2013; Gravina et al., 2008; Lawton et al., 2013; Le Rossignol et al., 2014; Mayhew et al., 1987; Schmidt, 1999; Thissen-Milder & Mayhew, 1991; Young et al., 2005). Taken together, these studies indicate that coaches do use age, skill, and experience cues when selecting players, as reported by Johansson and Fahlén (2017), because selected players are older, more skilled, and have more playing experience than non-selected players. The knowledge available on the selection cues used by coaches is helpful, but it seems counterintuitive to assume that rugby union coaches either do exactly what they say they do, or only use a small number of selection cues (i.e., age, skill, and experience) in a sport that requires a number of anthropometric, physiological, perceptual-cognitive, psychological, and skill characteristics (O'Connor et al., 2016; Vaeyens et al., 2006). This study, therefore, aims to discover (a) the cues rugby union coaches use to make team selection decisions and (b) whether the cues coaches predict they will use (pre-season) are the same as those they report having actually used (post-season).

## 4.2: Method

### 4.2.1: Participants.

A purposive sampling strategy (Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2003) was used to select information-rich participants who were making (at the time of the interviews) team selection decisions. Participants (a) coached rugby union, (b) made, or had the final say in, team selection decisions, (c) worked within a performance sport environment (i.e., contexts where athletes concentrate on competition rather than participation; Lyle, 1999), (d) held a minimum Level Two formal coaching qualification (the minimum level where coaches are responsible for team selection decisions; Sports Coach UK, 2007, now titled UK Coaching), and (e) had a minimum of five years coaching experience (or medium experienced coaches, to allow for stabilisation in their professional development; Burden, 1990; Santos, Mesquite, Graca, & Rosado, 2010).

Six male, White rugby union head coaches participated in both pre-season and post-season (i.e., August/September and May/June, respectively) interviews (it is worth noting that nine coaches were originally recruited to participate in this study but three could not commit to a post-season interview, so their pre-season interview data was removed from the overall data set to adhere to the longitudinal design of this study). Ages ranged from 30 to 51 ( $M=38.83$ ,  $SD=8.66$ ) and all but one participant was British (one was South African). Participants' coaching experience ranged from 7 to 12 years ( $M=10.67$ ,  $SD=3.87$ ) and all held a minimum Level Two Rugby Football Union (RFU) coaching qualification (one participant held Level Three and another was undertaking Level Three). One participant was still playing rugby union while the remaining five classed themselves as ex-players. Participants were actively coaching a variety of age groups, including: men's seniors (18 years old and upwards;  $n=2$ ), men's colts (between 16 and 18 years old;  $n=3$ ), and boys under-13s ( $n=1$ ).

All teams were classed as amateur and working within a performance sport environment (Lyle, 1999).

#### **4.2.2: Data collection.**

Semi-structured interviews were used to facilitate the gathering of rich and insightful data (Bryman, 2001; Carson, Gilmore, Perry, & Gronhaug, 2005) while encouraging well-informed practitioners (i.e., coaches) to report on their attitudes, experiences, knowledge, and understanding of the topic under question (Rowley, Jones, Vassiliou, & Hanna, 2012). An interview guide (see Appendix A) was compiled for the pre-season interview by reading relevant decision-making literature (e.g., the framing of information as either positive or negative; Johnson-Laird, 1983) and previous research on, or similar to, team selection decisions (e.g., Solomon & Rhea, 2008). The post-season interview guide (see Appendix B) was the same as the pre-season interview guide, but also included questions that challenged themes that arose from data collected during the pre-season interviews. The interviews were all conducted by the author and began with topical, introductory questions intended to build rapport and to encourage participants to begin talking (e.g., “How has your pre-season training been going?”). The main questions followed which allowed participants to explore and discuss what information they used to select teams (e.g., “Describe how you select[ed] your team,” “What, if any, physical aspects of a player do [did] you concentrate on when selecting your team?”). Participants were then invited to add anything missed during the interview (e.g., “Is there anything else that you would like to discuss?,” “Are there any topics you feel we did not cover properly?”). Probes were also used throughout each interview to allow participants to expand upon and clarify their responses (Patton, 2002). For example transcript, see Appendix C.

### **4.2.3: Procedure.**

Following ethical approval from the Ethics Committee in the Department of Psychology at Middlesex University, participants were invited to take part in the study by email. Included in the email was a brief description of the study aims and what would be required of participants should they agree to take part. Interviews were then organised at a variety of locations (e.g., rugby union club or work office) at times and on days that suited participants. Before the interviews began, participants were informed of the interview procedure, its relevance to the study, ethical procedures (e.g., confidentiality and anonymity), and the process of withdrawal. Once participants had any questions answered and were aware of the implications of involvement in the study, informed consent was taken. Each interview was digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim once completed.

### **4.2.4: Researcher subjectivities.**

This study was underpinned by the basic beliefs of constructivism, that is, multiple realities constructed through lived experiences where meaning (knowledge) is co-created through an interactive researcher-participant dialogue (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Hansen, 2004; Ponterotto, 2005; Schwandt, 1994, 2000; Sciarra, 1999). In keeping with this paradigm, researchers are encouraged to report their values and biases as researchers are fundamental in shaping and creating research outcomes (Creswell, 2013; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). As well as adhering to constructivism, the author has played and coached rugby union for over 15 years so has experienced team selection from both a player and coach perspective. Rugby union was chosen because of the author's experience and knowledge of the sport and the contacts he has within the sport. Before this study began, the author did not have a personal relationship with any of the coaches included in this study.

#### **4.2.5: Data analysis.**

Data collected from the semi-structured interviews were first subject to a thematic analytic process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The steps were: (a) familiarising yourself with your data; (b) generating initial codes; (c) searching for themes; (d) reviewing themes; (e) defining and naming themes; and (f) producing the report. The author first began this process by reading all transcripts on several occasions to familiarise himself with the data. Additionally, after reading each transcript for the first time, the author also began to write notes in the margins of the transcripts so he could begin to comprehend passages and start to generate initial codes. These thoughts led to relationships between passages being identified, which ultimately culminated in themes being finalised once they had been thoroughly reviewed. Themes were critically reviewed through multiple reflective and challenging conversations between the author and his supervisors, who acted as “critical friends” (i.e., a process of critical dialogue between people in which one person voices their interpretations to others who listen and offer critical feedback; Smith & McGannon, 2017). These steps allowed for the identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns (or themes) within the data. Themes were identified using an inductive approach (i.e., themes identified were strongly linked to the data; Patton, 2002). A thematic analysis is a widely used qualitative analytic method within sports coaching (e.g., Donoso-Morales, Bloom, & Caron, 2017; Readdy, Zakrajsek, & Raabe, 2016) and wider psychology (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Roulston, 2001) research (for example raw data and coding see Appendix D).

A word frequency analysis (e.g., Solomon & Rhea, 2008; Yamauchi et al., 2011) was also performed to examine the differences (if any) between the cues coaches claimed they would use in selection decisions (pre-season) and what cues they reported actually using (post-season). To perform the analysis, the cues described by coaches in the pre-season interviews were the “words” used to calculate the total frequency across both pre-season and

post-season interviews. Whilst a word frequency analysis allows researchers to examine, for example, the occurrence of responses within data (Grbich, 2013), it should be noted that frequency alone does not indicate importance (Krueger, Casey, Donner, Kirsh, & Maack, 2001). Additionally, therefore, also analysed is the extensiveness (Krueger et al., 2001) of coaches' responses (i.e., how many coaches contributed to each cue) to provide insight into how important coaches felt each category was and the level of similarity among coaches.

### **4.3: Results**

Presented below are the results from pre-season and post-season interviews (and the comparison between the interviews) from all six coaches (for the full list of cues, see Tables 4 to 20). Data are presented in five categories (which emerged from the data): player cues, coach cues, cues from other sources, situational cues, and environmental cues. Player cues, which were cues related to the players themselves (e.g., the players' appearance, performances, and behaviours) were spoken about most often by coaches. Coach cues are cues derived from the coaches themselves internally (e.g., a coach's desires, goals, and knowledge) rather than from any external stimuli. Cues from other sources are cues gathered from external stimuli that are not the players that the selection decisions are being made on (e.g., other players and coaches and parents). Cues that related to the situation coaches found themselves in (e.g., an upcoming game, the rules, and norms) that were not related to any immediate external or internal stimuli (and were intangible) made up the situational cues category. Environmental cues were those tangible cues that were related to future environmental conditions (e.g., the weather and pitch). The results discussed represent the cues coaches both predicted they would use in team selection decisions (i.e., pre-season) and subsequently did report using (i.e., post-season; 110 cues) along with those only reported post-season (148 cues, meaning 258 cues in total). The cues coaches thought they would use from their pre-season interviews but did not report in their post-season interviews (103 cues)



are not included. The reason is this data does not provide any insight into what cues coaches used to select their teams. It does, however, provide information on the coaches' ability to predict their selection decisions so it is discussed in the subsequent word frequency analysis.

#### **4.3.1: Cues.**

Presented below are the cues (i.e., player cues, coach cues, cues from other sources, situational cues, and environmental cues) coaches reportedly used to make team selection decisions.

##### ***4.3.1.1: Player cues.***

###### *4.3.1.1.1: Appearance cues.*

During pre-season interviews, every coach stated they would use a player's size (i.e., their height, weight, or a combination of the two) when making selection decisions, with smaller players set to miss out on selection. One coach even admitted that "...unfortunately, as much as I'd love it to come down to skill a lot of it actually comes down to physical qualities." This view was reflected in post-season interviews by four coaches who indicated that they selected the "big" players and not the "small" players (broad terms were used to describe the size of their players as opposed to the players' actual height and weight). Also, in post-season interviews, two coaches referred to a player's "athleticism" (i.e., the physical qualities that are characteristic of athletes) when making selection decisions, while two coaches were influenced simply by the look of a player (e.g., "young in the face"). Furthermore, in both pre-season and post-season interviews, four coaches (three in both pre- and post-season interviews) said they would use a player's age as a selection cue.

Table 4

*Appearance cues included in the player cues category*

Appearance cues	Pre-season	Post-season	Comparison
Physical appearance			
Size	6	4	-2
Athleticism	1	3	+2
Young face	-	1	+1
How they look	-	2	+2
Age			
Age	4	3	-1
Under 18	-	1	+1

*4.3.1.1.2: Psychological cues.*

A player's attitude was reported in pre-season interviews to affect three coaches' selection decisions. Although attitude was thought by one coach to have more of an effect on participation than selection decisions, "I have had a few players that have had bad attitudes in the past...not that they didn't play but they didn't stay around for too long." In post-season interviews, all the coaches based their selection decisions on players' attitudes. Players with "good" attitudes were more likely to be selected than those with a "poor" attitude. One coach was more specific, "It comes down to who wants to play for the club."

Coaches stated, in both pre-season and post-season interviews, that a player's rugby knowledge (i.e., a comprehension of the game of rugby and its facets) and their understanding of the coach's game plan (i.e., the specific tactics for a particular game or opponent) affects selection decisions. In post-season interviews, three coaches referred to a "rugby brain" (i.e., an intuitive understanding of the game of rugby and its facets) when making selection decisions and two coaches would also select players because they knew the moves (i.e., pre-planned passages of play). Two coaches also highlighted in pre- and post-season interviews that confidence would influence their selection decisions, with one coach saying in his post-season interview that an example of this would be dropping a player from the A team to the B team (an easier standard of rugby) because, as he said to one player "I'm

just gunna put you down into the [B]s for a few weeks where you get some slightly easier games, go score a few tries”’. All six coaches also claimed to take (and reportedly did take) a player’s character into account when considering them for selection. Specifically, players were more likely to be selected if they were reliable, enthusiastic, committed, a leader, team-player, or a “good guy.” In post-season interviews, five coaches also suggested that players were more likely to be selected if they were considered tough, uncompromising, feisty, dogged, to have a good temperament, able to fit in with others, or committed to improving. Also, players who were a “...pain in the arse” were not selected, according to one coach.

Table 5

*Psychological cues included in the player cues category*

Psychological cues	Pre-season	Post-season	Comparison
<b>Attitude</b>			
Attitude	4	6	+2
Who wants to play for the club	-	1	+1
<b>Intelligence</b>			
Rugby knowledge	1	2	+1
Understanding of the game plan	3	3	-
Rugby brain	-	3	+3
Knows the moves	-	2	+3
<b>Confidence</b>			
Confidence	2	2	-
<b>Character</b>			
Tough	-	1	+1
Uncompromising	-	1	+1
Enthusiasm	1	1	-
Pain in the arse	-	1	+1
Reliability	2	2	-
Committed	1	1	-
Committed to improving	-	1	+1
Leadership	2	2	-
Team-player	3	1	-2
Feisty	-	1	+1
Good lad	1	1	-
Personality	4	2	-2
Dogged	-	1	+1
Temperament	-	1	+1
Fit in with others	-	2	+2

#### *4.3.1.1.3: Ability cues.*

Every coach claimed they would base their selection decisions on cues relating to a player's ability. In his pre-season interview, for example, one coach stated "Ability would override [training] attendance and attitude." Furthermore, when discussing the number of players in his squad that would be in the A team and B team based on ability, another coach reported "20% definitely As, 20% definitely Bs...leaving me 60% to prove...your position." A different coach was more specific, "There will certainly be sort of 10 names that...will only be As, always and only As." A different coach reflected on this view, "The squad almost picks itself at some point, you know certainly those 10, 12 guys do." These 10 or 12 players were the "best" players or part of the strongest (or best) team. These players could also execute the game plan, "do a job," or, as one coach stated "...make that impact in a game." Five coaches repeated these same cues, and more, in their post-season interviews. Players were also selected, for example, because they were considered, based on their ability, as starters (i.e., players selected in the first 15 positions), backup or second choice (i.e., players selected only if the starters are unavailable), or "gap fillers" (i.e., players selected only to fill a position and not for any other reason). Gap fillers were selected because they can "do the job" the coach required. One coach even stated that he did not need to select some players, "The backs really picked themselves." A player's reputation, aptitude, potential, and ability to change also contributed to how coaches perceived players' ability.

Table 6

*Ability cues included in the player cues category*

Ability cues	Pre-season	Post-season	Comparison
Ability			
A player	3	4	+1
Ability	6	6	-
Very good	5	4	-1
Second choice	-	1	+1
Best player	5	2	-3
B player	3	2	-1
Ability to execute the game plan	2	2	-
Do the job	-	1	+1
Do a job	1	3	+2
Grunt this out	-	1	+1
On the brink	-	1	+1
Impact in game	3	2	-1
Add strength to Bs	-	1	+1
Strongest team	3	4	+1
Starter	-	2	+2
Back up	-	2	+2
Gap filler	-	1	+1
Backs picked themselves	-	1	+1
Reputation	-	1	+1
Talent			
Aptitude	2	3	+1
Potential			
Potential	2	1	-1
Ability to change			
Ability to change	-	1	+1

*4.3.1.1.4: Performance cues.*

When making selection decisions, every coach stated they would use, and reported using, a wide variety of information relating to their players' performances. Gross motor skills, such as speed, strength, power, and agility, were referenced by coaches in both pre-season (five coaches) and post-season (six coaches) interviews. Balance, coordination, and movement were also stated by one coach in his post-season interview. Five coaches said they would factor aerobic fitness into their selection decisions in their pre-season interviews, as one coach indicated "They've either gotta get fit or else they will be dropped." Only two

coaches (and one in particular), however, placed important on aerobic fitness in their post-season interviews.

There were several general rugby skills coaches predicted to use, and reported using, to select players. These were skills that coaches perceived to be basic, and therefore fundamental. Coaches, for example, stated that players who can tackle, especially with good technique, would (and reportedly did) get selected, “You can’t carry players in a side that can’t tackle.” A player’s body position and running, handling, passing, and ball carrying skills were also cited by coaches as selection cues. In post-season interviews, coaches also selected players for their catching skills and tackling power and, on a broader level, versatile and attacking and defending skills. Players were also selected because of the positions they could play, “[A player] used to get selected then for certain games because he could cover both flank and wing.” Coaches also wanted players to possess position specific skills (i.e., skills that a player needs to perform in a specific position). Forwards, for example, were selected for their scrum and line-out skills (in his post-season interview, one coach also included jackling, which is the winning of the ball, by the defender's team, after a tackle and before a ruck has formed) and a back could be selected if they could kick (in his post-season interview, one coach also included sniping, which is a scrum-half running into gaps around the ruck). Coaches stated in their pre-season interviews, and repeated in their post-season interviews, that a player may get selected because of the style of rugby they play. In post-season interviews, coaches were more specific and said they selected players because they were dynamic or physical rugby players or a “7s player” (i.e., a player with high levels of aerobic fitness, speed, and skill). Also, in his post-season interview, one coach indicated that he selected players once they had demonstrated they had learnt what he wanted them to learn.

Coaches, in both pre-season and post-season interviews, stated that what they see in training and how a player performs would lead to their selection, as one coach explained “If I

see it in training, I'm more confident to select on that basis." Some coaches, more specifically, would base their selections on the effort players put in during training and the number of tackles made. Additionally, in his post-season interview, one coach stated "I'd put the two...front rows against each other and they'd fight it out to see who could dominate." This would subsequently inform his selection decisions.

The tries a player scores during a game was an objective performance cue that was highlighted in both pre-season and post-season interviews. Several other objective performance cues were mentioned by one coach in his post-season interview as he had access to objective performance statistics. Specifically, this coach used the number of carries a player performed, how many tackles they made, how many tackles they missed, and the number of passes they completed. This coach, along with three others, also used objective performance cues gathered by the coaches themselves. For example, how often a player was offside, how many penalties they gave away, the amount of time spent on the pitch, and the size of an opposition player they successfully tackled.

Every coach claimed they would select, and did report selecting, players based on their general game performance. As one coach stated "...we did pick on performance." Coaches thought they would select (or not drop) players who were performing well while feeling like they had no choice but to drop players who were performing poorly, as one coach recalled "There was a couple of games he was awful, I had to drop him." Another coach said he based his selection decisions on how players performed under pressure and how they handled contact. In post-season interviews, there were other specific performance cues that some coaches recalled using when making selection decisions. These cues included whether players contributed anything in open play, ran as effectively as they could, how they defended, if they tackled effectively, how they moved around the pitch, and how well they took the ball to the gain line (i.e., an imaginary line that is drawn through the middle of the

set piece or breakdown width wise dividing the field into two separate regions; Westgate, 2007).

Coaches indicated they would (and reportedly did) rely on their “tried and tested” players (i.e., players the coach previously selected and who performed to an acceptable level) when making selection decisions. In his post-season interview, one coach’s selection decisions were also affected by a player’s performance from the previous year.



Table 7

*Performance cues included in the player cues category*

Performance cues	Pre-season	Post-season	Comparison	Performance cues	Pre-season	Post-season	Comparison
Gross motor skills				Objective game performance			
Speed	4	5	+1	Tries	1	3	+2
Strong	3	2	-1	Performance statistics	-	1	+1
Balanced	-	1	+1	Carries	-	1	+1
Coordinated	-	1	+1	Tackles	-	1	+1
Powerful	2	1	-1	Missed tackles	-	1	+1
The way they move	-	1	+1	Passes	-	1	+1
Footwork	1	1	-	Offside	-	1	+1
Aerobic fitness				Penalties	-	1	+1
Aerobic fitness	5	2	-3	Size of tackled player	-	1	+1
General rugby skills				Time played	-	1	+1
Technique	1	1	-	Game performance			
Basic skills	1	2	+1	General game performance	6	5	-1
Handling	3	3	-	Effort in games	-	1	+1
Skill level	1	1	-	Reluctance in contact	2	1	-1
Skills	-	4	+4	The way they move around the pitch	-	1	+1
Running ability	3	1	-2	Takes it to the line well	-	1	+1
Run	-	1	+1	Perform under pressure	2	1	-1
Versatile skills	-	1	+1	Tackling performance	-	2	+2
Passing	3	2	-1	Defensive performance	-	1	+1
Catching	-	1	+1	Nature of performance	-	1	+1
Defensive ability	-	2	+2	No bullocking runs	-	1	+1
Body position	2	1	-1	Game	-	1	+1
Tackling	4	1	-3	No contribution in open play	-	1	+1
Tackle technique	1	1	-	Pre-season friendlies	-	1	+1
Tackling power	-	1	+1	Historical game performance			
Attacking ability	-	1	+1	Tried and tested	2	1	-1

Performance cues	Pre-season	Post-season	Comparison	Performance cues	Pre-season	Post-season	Comparison
Ball carrier	3	1	-2	Historical game performance	-	1	+1
Position specific skills				Demonstrate what they've learnt			
Position	5	4	-1	What they've learnt	-	1	+1
Scrum	2	1	-1	Must learn how to play	-	1	+1
6	-	1	+1	Player's style of rugby			
Kicking	1	1	-	Player's style of rugby	1	1	-
Positional skills	2	1	-1	Dynamic	-	1	+1
Sniping	-	1	+1	7s player	-	1	+1
Line out	2	1	-1	Physical	-	1	+1
Jumping in the line out	1	1	-				
Over the ball	-	1	+1				
Training performances							
General training performance	5	5	-				
Training	1	2	+1				
Effort in training	2	2	-				
Tackles in training	1	1	-				
Scrum performance in training	-	1	+1				

#### 4.3.1.1.5: *Behaviour cues.*

Only one coach suggested that how a player behaves (in this case, in training) would affect his selection decisions, which he confirmed in his post-season interview. The remaining behaviour cues were only stated in post-season interviews. This included the effort players put in (in general), how players carried themselves, a general description of behaviour (e.g., “how [the players] are within the general scheme of things”), and more specific behaviours in training (i.e., helping others out, engaging in training, and trying to better themselves). Coaches suggested that communication would affect their selection decisions (and reported that it did), including whether players listened (in general and in training) to coaches, the input from players, and, specifically, their positional preferences. As one coach recalled “...if any of the other players came and asked and said they wanted to play a position, we would let them.” In their post-season interviews, coaches also outlined that how a player communicates in training and games and with their coach affected selection decisions.

Table 8

*Behaviour cues included in the player cues category*

Behaviour cues	Pre-season	Post-season	Comparison
<b>Behaviour</b>			
Behaviour	-	1	+1
Effort	-	3	+3
Carry themselves	-	1	+1
<b>Behaviour in training</b>			
Helping others out	-	1	+1
Behaviour in training	1	2	+1
Engaging	-	1	+1
Trying to better themselves	-	1	+1
<b>Communication</b>			
Communication	2	1	-1
Listening	1	1	-
Communication with coach	-	2	+2
Player input	4	4	-
Player position preference	2	2	-
<b>Communication in games</b>			
Communication in games	-	1	+1
<b>Communication in training</b>			
Communication in training	-	1	+1
Listening in training	2	1	-1

*4.3.1.1.6: Personal cues.*

One coach stated, in both his pre-season and post-season interviews, that the school a player attended influenced his selection decisions. Two other coaches, more specifically, recalled in their post-season interviews having to take school or university exams into consideration when making selection decisions. One of these coaches also had to factors in his players' work schedules when selecting his teams.

Table 9

*Personal cues included in the player cues category*

Personal cues	Pre-season	Post-season	Comparison
<b>School</b>			
School	1	1	-
Exams	-	2	+2
<b>Work</b>			
Work	-	1	+1

#### 4.3.1.1.7: Management cues.

Coaches thought they would, and reportedly did have to, think about how selection would affect their players, “What’s gunna have the best effect on that player?” Coaches also suggested that “...sometimes you can use selection as a motivating tool.” In his post-season interview, one coach recalled using selection to reengage a player and (along with another coach) to develop players.

Table 10

#### *Management cues included in the player cues category*

Management cues	Pre-season	Post-season	Comparison
Effect on player			
Effect on player	2	2	-
Motivation	1	2	+1
Reengage player	-	1	+1
Player development	-	2	+2

#### 4.3.1.1.8: Situational cues.

Every coach, in both pre-season and post-season interviews, claimed that a player’s availability and injuries influenced their selection decisions. One coach even implied that his team’s season was defined by players being unavailable or injured. Usually the first cue sought in selection decisions, availability is more important than ability.

It’s almost a compromise at times looking at if someone is a better player but I know that maybe once every four weeks they’re not gunna be available, it might be that we actually go and look at you know, is the player that’s probably beneath them in the pecking order...gunna be more reliable and consistent?

In their post-season interviews, coaches also stated that unknown availabilities and late changes in availabilities also affected selection decisions. A player was deemed unavailable because of their (lack of) fitness, inability to travel to away games, inability to commit to playing games at all, or, specifically for the A team, were returning from an injury.

Most coaches stated in their pre-season and post-season interviews that training attendance would influence their selection decisions. In some cases, whether a player attended training would dictate selection, as one coach recalled “There were two or three kids that consistently were in the B team that had the ability to play at the A team, but they weren't training enough.” Some players, however, could not attend training, which the coaches considered when making selection decisions. One coach also recalled a player leaving training early while another remembered a player turning up late to games, which subsequently affected their selection decisions on those players. A different coach said that towards the end of the season, whoever attended the games would be selected by default because of low player numbers, “It reached a point where we were scrambling for players at such late notice, and we never really knew who would bloody turn up, so it ended up the selection was made in the changing room that morning.”

How many games a player has played, how long they have played at the club, and how much experience they have are all cues that coaches claimed would, and reportedly did, affect their selection decisions. In their post-season interviews, coaches claimed to use several other cues to make selection decisions that related to a player's playing history. Specifically, a player's previous club, how regularly they were playing, how many games they had been selected as a substitute for and the total time spent as a substitute, and whether they had played in a position before were also reportedly used in selection decisions. Three coaches also had to consider a different team some of their players also played for when making selection decisions. Some players, for example, were representing school sides and were therefore not available for selection, whereas others represented county and professional teams, which coaches reportedly used as selection cues.

Table 11

*Situational cues included in the player cues category*

Situational cues	Pre-season	Post-season	Comparison
<b>Availability</b>			
Availability	6	6	-
Unknown availability	-	1	+1
Late change in availability	-	1	+1
Injured	5	6	+1
Fit	-	3	+3
Can't travel	-	1	+1
Returning from injury	-	1	+1
Can't commit	-	1	+1
<b>Attendance</b>			
Been there all season	-	2	+2
<b>Training</b>			
Training attendance	5	5	-
Can't train	-	2	+2
Leaving training early	-	1	+1
<b>Game</b>			
Whoever turned up	-	1	+1
Late arrival for games	-	1	+1
<b>Player's playing history</b>			
Number of games played	2	4	+2
Previous club	-	1	+1
Experience	2	2	-
Played there before	-	1	+1
Who plays regularly	-	1	+1
Playing regular second team	-	1	+1
Number of games spent as substitute	-	1	+1
Years at the club	3	1	-2
Time spent as substitute	-	2	+2
<b>Another team</b>			
Another team	-	3	+3

**4.3.1.2: Coach cues.**

One coach suggested, in his pre-season interview, that the relationship he had with his players would affect his selection decisions, which a different coach stated in his post-season interview. Also stated in pre-season and post-season interviews to influence selection decisions were the styles of rugby (i.e., a general approach to how rugby is played) coaches wanted their players to adopt, the game plans (i.e., the specific tactics for a particular game or opponent) coaches wanted their players to play, the specific requirements (with regards to

physical attributes and/or skills) coaches wanted players to have, and, according to one coach, simply him wanting to see how a player was doing. In his post-season interview, one coach also said his philosophies impacted his selection decisions. Furthermore, one coach recalled a player not being selected because they were not asked whether they were available, “By the end of the season, the A team coach wasn't sending him the ‘are you available?’ part because he didn't give a toss anymore, the A team coach didn't give a toss.” Another coach also remembered allowing a player to be selected (by other coaches) for evidence gathering purposes when he stated “Sometimes you’ve got to let [a selection] go to get the information to then say, ‘up yours’ [to the other coaches].”

A coach’s playing experience (e.g., what position they played) was stated in pre-season and post-season interviews to affect selection decisions as this contributed to a coaches’ knowledge and expectations of the players in those same positions. One coach (in his post-season interview) also said that his coaching experiences helped him make selection decisions. In their pre-season interviews, some coaches thought their pre-conceived ideas about players would impact their selections, one coach for example stated “...you just know what they’re capable of doing.” In his post-season interview, however, this same coach (who was the only coach to say pre-conceived ideas affected his selections in his post-season interview) claimed that these same pre-conceived ideas hindered his selections, “I think preconceived ideas will always hinder selection...mainly because sometimes you see what you wanna see.” Furthermore, another coach (in his post-season interview) revealed that his lack of knowledge about certain positions and players affected his selection decisions by creating uncertainty and a lack of confidence in himself to make effective selection decisions.

The motivations of the coach and what they wanted to achieve were reported in both the pre-season and post-season interviews to affect selection decisions. Some coaches, for example, concentrated on players’ enjoyment or winning when selecting players.



Furthermore, coaches said in their post-season interviews that their beliefs about what their players wanted impacted their selection decisions. One coach believed that his players needed a win, for example, so his selection decisions were different than another coach who believed that some players were not happy being a substitute. One coach even suggested that the way he viewed himself changed how he selected players, “I viewed myself as a player helping them out, so I was just talking to them like I would other guys in [my playing] squad.”

Table 12

*Coach cues*

Coach cues	Pre-season	Post-season	Comparison
Coach-player relationship			
Coach-player relationship	1	1	-
Desires			
Coach didn't give a toss	-	1	+1
See what they're up to	1	1	-
Style of rugby	4	4	-
Game plan	4	4	-
Coach's requirements	1	4	+3
Evidence gathering	-	1	+1
Philosophy			
Coach's philosophy	-	1	+1
Experience			
Coach's playing experience	1	2	+1
Previous coaching experiences	-	1	+1
Goals			
What the coach wants to achieve	3	2	-1
What they want	-	4	+4
Coach's winning mentality	3	3	-
Knowledge			
Coach's knowledge	-	1	+1
Preconceived ideas	3	1	-2
Never seen them before	-	1	+1
Self-concept			
How coach views himself	-	1	+1

**4.3.1.3: Cues from other sources.****4.3.1.3.1: Other players.**

Coaches thought they would, and reportedly did, take the other players within the team into consideration when making selection decisions. One coach, for example, stated “[I

would select] combinations, like the ability of a combination over individual ability.” On the other hand, rather than combining players, some coaches would compare players for one position. If two players were deemed too similar, for example, only one player was selected. For a different coach though (he claimed in his post-season interview) this meant that he selected a player because he was the same as another player. A selection decision on one player sometimes depended on who would replace them if they were not selected. Similarly, an informal ranking system was reported in their post-season interviews by coaches, as one coach articulated “[a player was] third or fourth on the pecking order.” Who was selected in different positions at times (both in pre-season and post-season interviews) influenced the selection of a player. Additionally, who would not be selected if another player was also impacted on selection decisions (from post-season interviews only). In their post-season interviews, coaches reported using the ability of other players and how they performed to make selection decisions. How a player impacts other players was stated in both pre-season and post-season interviews to influence selection decisions, while in just the post-season interviews, coaches took into consideration how the selection of a player would affect other players in general and on their game performances specifically. Furthermore, some coaches changed their selection decisions based on what the other players said to them, especially if they were key players (e.g., captain or vice-captain).

Table 13

*Other players cues included in the cues from other sources category*

Other players	Pre-season	Post-season	Comparison
Comparison to other players			
Same player	-	1	+1
Too similar	2	1	-1
Ranking	-	3	+3
Replacement	2	1	-1
Player combinations			
Combinations	5	2	-3
Other player selections			
Other players	1	1	-
Who isn't playing	-	1	+1
Game performance of other players			
Game performance of other players	-	1	+1
Ability of other players			
Ability of other players	-	2	+2
Impact on other players			
Impact on others	4	1	-3
Impact of selection on others	-	1	+1
Effect on other players performances	-	1	+1
Other player input			
Other player input	3	2	-1
Key player input	3	3	-

#### *4.3.1.3.2: Team.*

The team, rather than individual players, also influenced selection decisions. The ability of the team (e.g., whether the team had the ability to cope without a certain player being selected) affected (from both pre-season and post-season interviews) selection decisions. Also, management of the team was thought to (and reportedly did) influence selection decisions, “Keeping [the players] together as a unit, long term, is probably the most important selection criteria.”

During post-season interviews, coaches stated they took more information about the team into consideration when making selection decisions. The standard of the A team and the B team and whether the team can “afford another week” without a player, for example, were cues for one coach. Alternatively, another coach described basing a selection decision on

whether the team could cope with the selection of a player (as this player was perceived to be of low ability). How a team performs and communicates (as a whole) with their coach also affected selection decisions. What the team wanted to achieve, and the collective winning mentality, influenced selection decisions, as one coach explained “The kids who were kinda like ‘yeah but we still wanna win and we’d still like to win the league so can we have those [games] where you just pick the best players?’”. Some coaches reported that the number of players within the squad in total (including B team players) or the number of players already selected into a team for an upcoming game impacted their selection decisions. Furthermore, one coach recalled how the number of B team players attending training would reinforce his selections, “It’s got to be working somewhere, and the fact that the B team guys, even the crap ones are training each week...nobody’s that upset with the way we’re selecting.”

Table 14

*Team cues included in the cues from other sources category*

Team	Pre-season	Post-season	Comparison
Ability of the team			
Ability of the team	1	1	-
Standard of the 1 <sup>st</sup> team	-	1	+1
Standard of the 2 <sup>nd</sup> team	-	1	+1
Team can cope	-	1	+1
Can afford another week without player	-	1	+1
B team training attendance			
B team training attendance	-	1	+1
Team performance			
Nature of loss	-	1	+1
Team management			
Team management	2	2	-
Team communication			
Team input	-	1	+1
Coach-team communication	-	1	+1
Team goals			
What the team wants to achieve	-	1	+1
Players’ winning mentality	-	1	+1
Number of players			
Number of players	-	4	+4
Second team player numbers	-	1	+1
Enough numbers	-	1	+1

#### 4.3.1.3.3: *Other coaches.*

In pre-season interviews, coaches described how they would rely on other coaches to help make selection decisions. Whilst some were more specific about which coaches would (i.e., in pre-season interviews) have an impact on their selection decisions (e.g., assistant coach and B team coach), most articulated who influenced them in their post-season interviews. One coach, for example, stated “...I pretty much let my forwards coach pick our forwards, you know he works with them more than I do.” Another coach said “...the last say really on the backs came down to [the backs coach].” Rather than other coaches simply making the selection decisions, occasionally their input, playing experience, or relationships with the players influenced selection decisions. Furthermore, one coach recalled thinking about what his B team coaches wanted to achieve and wanting to keep them happy when making selection decisions, “Sometimes I just take [not selecting a B team player for the A team] on the chin and go ‘well actually, it does them a favour, they’ll have a stronger team, they’ll be happier with it’”.

Table 15

#### *Other coaches cues included in the cues from other sources category*

Other coaches	Pre-season	Post-season	Comparison
Other coach input	5	3	-2
Assistant coach			
Assistant coach	-	1	+1
Assistant coach input	2	1	-1
Assistant coach’s playing experience	-	1	+1
Forwards coach			
Forwards coach	-	2	+2
Forwards coach-player relationship	-	1	+1
Backs coach			
Backs coach	-	1	+1
Backs coach-player relationship	-	1	+1
Second team coaches			
Second team coach input	1	1	-
What the second team coaches want to achieve	-	1	+1
Keep second team coaches happy	-	1	+1

#### 4.3.1.3.4: Selection panel.

Two coaches (during post-season interviews) spoke about a selection panel (i.e., a group of senior individuals at a club, such as coaches, captains, and senior players, who collectively discuss selection decisions) who discussed selection decisions, as one explained “Selection as I said went into more of a, not a committee but more of a selection panel.” Who was in the selection panel depended on what coaching (or club) resources coaches had at their disposal (e.g., senior players, other coaches, director of rugby).

#### 4.3.1.3.5: Other sources.

For one coach speaking in his post-season interview, his club (e.g., what the club wanted to achieve) and the club physiotherapist had an impact on his selection decisions. A different coach was influenced by the selection decisions he perceived other teams (in general) made (e.g., what type of players other teams select) while another explained how the parents of the players impacted his selection decisions, “On selection you do get parents that think little [player]’s better than he is...as you go through...that process and sometimes you select them on the bench.”

Table 16

*Other sources cues included the in cues from other sources category*

Other sources	Pre-season	Post-season	Comparison
Selection panel			
Selection panel	-	2	+2
Club			
What the club wants to achieve	-	1	+1
Physio			
Physio input	-	1	+1
Parents			
Parent	-	1	+1
Other teams			
Other teams	-	1	+1

#### ***4.3.1.4: Situational cues.***

Coaches, both in pre-season and post-season interviews, stated that the position they were selecting for influenced their selection decisions. In his post-season interview, however, one coach was more specific when he described how selecting for a substitute position impacted the way he made the decision.

Coaches suggested in pre-season interviews, and reported in post-season interviews, that selection for an A game (e.g., league and cup games) was different to selection for a B game (e.g., friendly). Coaches also described in post-season interviews that the importance of the upcoming game and where the location of the game was (for away games) influenced their selection decisions. Coaches also stated, both in pre-season and post-season interviews, how the opposition (and the coach's knowledge of the opposition) and their league position impacted their selection decisions. Although one coach tried not to do this, "As a coach I don't particularly like looking at the opposition, every now and again there's a game where you really have to." In post-season interviews, coaches also took into consideration the level of the opposition and the size of the opposition's players and the standard of the referees when making his selection decisions.

Coaches thought they would use, and reported using, what happened in the most recent game as selection cues. Specifically, coaches reported using the results of games and the level of the opposition they played as selection cues for the following game. Furthermore, one coach focussed on what position his team were in the league when making his selection decisions.

Coaches suggested in their pre-season interviews that there may be times where they have no choice with selection, which is a situation they also described in post-season interviews. One coach, for example, explained "On a couple of occasions I had no choice because there was no one else." In his post-season interview, one coach recalled how logistics

(e.g., travel arrangements) played a part in his selection decisions when he stated “When I brought one [player] up to the A team I always brought the other [brother] because of logistics.” The rules (e.g., concussion protocol) were also described in pre-season and post-season interviews to impact selection decisions.

In two clubs, players were eligible to play for the adult teams which affected two coaches’ selection decisions because these players would not have been available for selection if they were selected for the adult teams, something suggested in their pre-season interviews, while a different coach (who did not suggest this in his pre-season interview) was influenced by how he had always made his selection decisions (e.g., what type of players he had always selected).

Table 17

*Position cues included in the situational cues category*

Position	Pre-season	Post-season	Comparison
Position dependent	1	1	-
Substitute	-	1	+1



Table 18

*Upcoming games cues included in the situational cues category*

Upcoming games	Pre-season	Post-season	Comparison
Upcoming game			
A game	1	2	+1
B game	2	2	-
Friendly	3	3	-
[Opposition team name] game	-	1	+1
League game	2	2	-
Cup game	2	1	-1
Under 18s cup game	1	1	-
No B game	-	1	+1
Upcoming game	2	3	+1
Importance of upcoming game	-	1	+1
Away game location	-	1	+1
Upcoming opposition			
Opposition	6	3	-3
Knowledge of opposition	3	2	-1
Opposition league position	1	1	-
Level of upcoming opposition	-	1	+1
Size of opposition	-	1	+1
Standard of referee			
Standard of referee	-	1	+1

Table 19

*Situational cues included in the situational cues category*

Situational cues	Pre-season	Post-season	Comparison
Recent games			
Recent results	2	2	-
Level of opposition in previous game	2	1	-1
League position			
League position	2	1	-1
No choice			
No choice	1	3	+2
Logistics			
Logistics	-	1	+1
Rules			
Rules	4	3	-1
Concussion protocol	-	1	+1
Adult team			
Adult team	1	2	+1
Norm			
We always had	-	1	+1

#### 4.3.1.5: *Environmental cues.*

One coach suggested in his pre-season interview, and reported in his post-season interview, that the weather conditions and the pitch his team played on affected his team selection decisions because the weather and pitch surface changed his tactics.

Table 20

*Environmental cues included in the environmental cues category*

Environmental cues	Pre-season	Post-season	Comparison
Weather			
Weather	2	1	-1
Pitch			
Pitch	1	1	-

#### 4.3.2: **Word frequency analysis.**

A word frequency analysis (e.g., Solomon & Rhea, 2008; Yamauchi et al., 2011) examines the differences (if any) between the cues coaches claimed they would use in selection decisions (pre-season) and what cues they reported actually using (post-season). Additionally, the extensiveness (Krueger et al., 2001) of coaches' responses (i.e., how many coaches contributed to each cue) provides insight into how important coaches felt each category was and the level of similarity among coaches.

Table 21 documents the total number of themes, sub-themes, and cues in each category across both pre-season and post-season interviews. The pre-season interview results highlight that coaches stated they would use player cues to make selection decisions more often than any other category. Similarly, coaches in post-season interviews echoed their predictions by stating they mostly used player cues in their selection decisions. Coaches did state in both pre-season and post-season interviews they would (and reportedly did) use coach cues, cues from other sources, situational cues, and environmental cues, but to a lesser extent. Furthermore, the number of cues coaches reportedly used over all categories either increased

or stayed at the same from pre-season to post-season interviews. The frequency with which cues were stated, however, decreased (see Table 22).

In pre-season interviews, coaches thought they would use a total of 213 cues to make selection decisions but reported using only 110 (51.64%) of these same cues in their post-season interviews (meaning 103 cues were not stated) and an additional 148 new cues (258 cues in total emerged from post-season interviews). Table 23 shows that the number of coaches who described using the same cues decreased from pre-season to post-season interviews (apart from four coaches saying the same cues). The cues coaches all stated they would use in pre-season interviews were: size, ability, general game performance, availability, and opposition. In post-season interviews coaches all claimed they used attitude, availability, and injured cues. Also, the number of cues only one coach described using to make selection decisions increased from pre-season to post-season interviews.

Table 21

*The number of themes, sub-themes, and cues from pre-season and post-season interviews*

Categories	Pre-season			Post-season			Comparison		
	Themes	Sub-themes	Cues	Themes	Sub-themes	Cues	Themes	Sub-themes	Cues
Player cues	8	31	142	8	34	166	-	+3	+24
Coach cues	6	-	15	7	-	17	+1	-	+2
Cues from other sources	6	13	26	8	18	45	+2	+5	+19
Situational cues	7	2	28	9	3	28	+2	+1	-
Environmental cues	2	-	2	2	-	2	-	-	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>258</b>	<b>+5</b>	<b>+9</b>	<b>+45</b>

Table 22

*The frequency of cues stated in pre-season and post-season interviews in each category*

Categories	Pre-season cue frequency	Post-season cue frequency	Comparison
Player cues	720	660	-60
Coach cues	85	63	-22
Cues from other sources	137	125	-12
Situational cues	138	74	-64
Environmental cues	7	5	-2
TOTAL	1087	928	-162

Table 23

*The number of coaches who stated each cue in pre-season and post-season interviews*

Number of coaches who stated cue	Pre-season		Post-season		Comparison	
6	5	2.35%	3	1.16%	-2	-1.19%
5	10	4.69%	4	1.55%	-6	-3.14%
4	10	4.69%	14	5.43%	+4	+0.74%
3	21	9.86%	19	7.36%	-2	-2.50%
2	53	24.88%	47	18.22%	-6	-6.66%
1	114	53.52%	171	66.28%	+57	+12.76%
TOTAL	213		258		+45	

#### 4.4: Discussion

This study sought to investigate the cues coaches use to make team selection decisions and whether the cues coaches claimed they would use in pre-season interviews were different to the cues they reported using throughout the season, in the post-season interviews. Results show that coaches use a large number of cues from five categories (i.e., player cues, coach cues, cues from other sources, situational cues, and environmental cues) to make selection decisions, with coaches most frequently claiming to rely on cues that arose from the players. Furthermore, the number of cues coaches thought they would use for upcoming team selection decisions (pre-season interviews;  $N=213$ ) was less than the actual number of cues reportedly used (post-season interviews;  $N=258$ ). Also, just under half (48.36%) of the predicted cues highlighted at the pre-season interview stage were not actually

used in team selection decisions (or at least stated during post-season interviews), suggesting that coaches were unable to predict exactly which cues they would reportedly rely on to make team selection decisions.

#### **4.4.1: Content of the cues.**

When making selection decisions, coaches reported overwhelmingly relying on cues that arose from the players. This reflects previous studies that have examined how coaches assess athletes (e.g., Larkin & O'Connor, 2017; Solomon & Rhea, 2008) and how players are selected for teams (e.g., Ahmed, Deb, & Jindal, 2013; Iyer & Sharda, 2009; Johansson & Fahlén, 2017), but also in broader contexts of how one person makes a judgment or decision on another person (e.g., Brocklehurst et al., 2010; Kim et al., 2005). Given that coaches in the current study were making decisions on their players, it is hardly surprising that much of the information reportedly used originated from the players themselves. The breadth and detail of the player cues coaches claimed to use, however, was a novel result compared to previous studies on team selection (e.g., Johansson & Fahlén, 2017) as coaches drew upon a variety of appearance, psychological, ability, performance, behaviour, personal, management, and situational cues.

Coaches stated they would take a player's age and physical appearance into consideration when making selection decisions. This replicates previous studies which found that coaches considered a player's age when making selection decisions (e.g., Johansson & Fahlén, 2017) and that players selected for games were taller, heavier, and older than those not selected (e.g., Baker, 2017; Gabbett et al., 2009). It is understandable that coaches use physical appearance cues to base their selection decisions on given that greater size is considered a desirable trait in rugby union (Howard, Cumming, Atkinson, & Malina, 2016) because of the high physical demands of the sport (Darrall-Jones, Jones, & Till, 2015). No coach, however, described taking anthropometric measurements of their players. This means

that coaches, who have been found to use “sight” to make judgments on their players (e.g. Fiander et al., 2013; Johansson & Fahlén, 2017), may have been using their perception of a player’s size, rather than objective measurements, to inform their team selection decisions. This has been previously documented within rugby union, evidenced by the existence of relative age effects (RAE; e.g., Lewis, Morgan, & Cooper, 2015), meaning that the bigger (and older) players have an increased probability of selection (Schorer, Baker, Büsch, Wilhelm, & Pabst, 2009).

Psychological cues were stated to affect coaches’ selection decisions (it is worth noting that whilst it is possible there was a shared meaning among participants behind the psychological cues described, it was beyond the scope of this study to clarify this so these results should be interpreted with this in mind), especially a player’s attitude and personality, which has been previously reported (e.g., Johansson & Fahlén, 2017). Every coach stated that a player’s attitude influenced their selection (although this was not stated by every coach in their pre-season interviews). When discussing a player’s attitude, coaches would describe a concept that seemed to be an expression of their personality (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993) that was general in nature and either positive or negative (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981). With regards to personality, it is unclear that when coaches described specific traits they were referencing the big five personality traits (i.e., neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness; Costa & McCrae, 1992) or personality-trait-like individual differences (PTLID; i.e., traits linked to personality that do not belong to the big five; Laborde, Breuer-Weißborn, & Dosseville, 2013) between players. Coaches stated, for example, that a player’s selection would depend on whether they “fit in” with the other players or are “dogged.” Fitting in with others could refer to extraversion (part of the big five), as people who are extravert prefer the interaction of social groups (Maltby, Day, & Macaskill, 2009), while doggedness may be similar to hardiness (i.e., a multidimensional personality trait that is

hypothesised to protect people from stress; Eschleman, Bowling, & Alarcon, 2010), which is considered a PTLID. Whilst it is clear that coaches place value on a player's personality (and attitude) when making selection decisions, it is less clear as to which personality traits coaches are referring to. This means further research is needed, especially as personality can be subject to change (Boyce, Wood, Daly, & Sedikides, 2015) and personality measures can help a coach predict within competition, short-term, and long-term performances (Gee et al., 2010).

There were some players who were selected by coaches based solely on an ability cue, often referred to as the "best" players. Although it has been previously suggested that coaches do not select the best players, but rather they select the players who work best together (Johansson & Fahlén, 2017), within the current study coaches seemed to be stating that they would simply select the best players. Whilst the results from the current study suggest coaches may have followed a 'take-the-best' (TTB; Gigerenzer & Goldstein, 1996) decision strategy, there were no suggestions that coaches used the ability cues to distinguish between two alternatives (a key element of TTB). Instead, coaches were simply selecting these players because they were the best rather than deciding who was the best of two alternatives (in cases where an ability cue was reportedly used). Coaches, therefore, were not generating more than one option when deciding some team selection decisions. This suggests that coaches may have followed a 'take-the-first' (TTF; Johnson & Raab, 2003) decision strategy when selecting these players. TTF suggests that in familiar tasks, experts choose one of the first options that comes to mind because it represents the best option (Johnson & Raab, 2003). Furthermore, options that have been repeatedly chosen in previous decisions are more strongly associated with the current decision (Ward, Ericsson, & Williams, 2013). When selecting the best players, coaches may have, therefore, been choosing the first player that came to mind (rather than generating more than one option) because they have been

repeatedly chosen as the best player in the past. This is not to suggest that coaches exclusively used TTF to make selection decisions. Coaches may have, for example, used TTF to select the best players and then (once all the best players are selected) decided, between alternatives, who else should be selected with a TTB decision strategy (there is evidence that coaches do decide between alternatives when they stated they compared players). Further research is, however, needed to more explicitly investigate the decision strategy (or strategies) used by coaches.

How someone becomes labelled the best player is, however, unclear. Whilst coaches were describing one cue when making these selection decisions (and therefore adhering to the definition of a cue as a single piece of meaningful information; Cooksey, 1996; Dowding & Thompson, 2003; Wiggins, 2006; von Helversen et al., 2013), it is also not known whether this was always the case. Previously, for example, coaches may have considered several different cues that led to the conclusion that a player was the best. So, over time (and after this player has been repeatedly chosen because they are judged to be the best player) coaches could go from using several cues that lead to the conclusion that someone is the best player, to simply one cue, the “best player cue” (although further research is needed to back up this claim). It is also worth noting that while coaches may select the first option because they believe it is the best option (i.e., the best player), it may in fact not be the best option (i.e., not objectively the best player). Consequently, coaches using TTF when selecting their best players is not necessarily a reflection of decision quality, as in traditional TTF studies (e.g., Raab & Laborde, 2011).

With the highest number of cues reported in this category, how a player performs (in several different contexts) can impact coaches’ selection decisions. This reflects previous studies that show coaches use a variety of performance cues to select players (e.g. Johansson & Fahlén, 2017) and that selected players perform better on, for example, physical fitness



(e.g., Barfield & Malone, 2012) and skill tests (e.g., Gabbett et al., 2007) and in games (e.g., Woods et al., 2016). Selected players who are as young as three years old also perform better in technical skill tests than non-selected players (e.g., Archer, Drysdale, & Bradley, 2016) and some have even suggested that performance measures should be preferred to anthropometric measures in talent detection (Melchiorri et al., 2017). As rugby union is a sport that requires, among other things, speed, strength, power, and aerobic capacity (Duthie, 2006), it is no surprise that the coaches in the current study stated that these qualities influenced their selection decisions.

Similarly, coaches described several general rugby skills (e.g., tackling and passing) and position specific skills (e.g., kicking and scrumming) that affected the selection of a player. Again, it has been previously highlighted that rugby union players require both common and unique skills that contribute to performances (Greenwood, 1997; James, Mellalieu, & Jones, 2005) so it not unusual for coaches to use these skills as selection cues. This may, however, suggest that coaches were adopting a traditional, linear approach to coaching where skills are to be mastered and displayed (possibly) in training (Partington & Cushion, 2013; Rothwell et al., 2017; Vinson et al., 2016) and are seen as a prerequisite for selection (Oorschot et al., 2017), something that has been previously reported (Johansson & Fahlén, 2017). Furthermore, in their study, Johansson and Fahlén (2017) found that a mixture of past performances and current performances and form created the foundation for coaches' selection decisions. Coaches from the current study reflected this view with regards to game performances (both past and current) but also included performances within training as selection cues. Interestingly, some coaches spoke about selecting “tried and tested” players. These were players who had previously been selected and performed to a satisfactory (or “safe”) level. As it has been found that coaches stick to tried and tested coaching methods to prove their knowledge and expertise (Harvey, Cushion, & Massa-Gonzalez, 2010), they may

also select tried and tested players because their performances will also prove their knowledge and expertise of selection (or at least not prove otherwise). Furthermore, becoming a tried and tested player may be a step towards being considered one of the best players (i.e., the “best player cue”). Players who perform satisfactorily are selected again because they are tried and tested, and once this pattern occurs enough times, these players are perceived as one of the best players. Further research is needed, however, to substantiate these claims.

It has long been identified that someone’s behaviour can influence how others judge or make decisions on them (e.g., Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). The results from the current study suggest that coaches are also affected by how their players behave and, more specifically, communicate. It has been previously reported that behaviour is an important consideration in coaches’ selection decisions, even trumping other selection cues relating to skills or previous performances (Johansson & Fahlén, 2017). Whilst the effects of a coach’s behaviour on athletes (e.g., Wu, Lai, & Chan, 2014) and athlete behaviour on coaches (e.g., Fiander, Jones, & Parker, 2018) are well known, there is very limited research (to the author’s knowledge) on how athlete behaviour can impact a coach’s decisions on that same athlete. The current study therefore adds to the extant literature by indicating that behaviour is an important and deliberate cue used in selection decisions. Coaches, however, did fail to predict upfront that behaviour would affect their selection decisions (apart from one coach), although they did say communication would be (and subsequently it was perceived to be) a selection cue.

How selection affects a player was also taken into consideration by coaches when they were making selection decisions. It is known that players who are not selected can have negative experiences (e.g., detraining, stress, and a loss of identity; Caterisano et al., 1997; Neely et al., 2017; Woods & Thatcher, 2009), even if they are selected as a substitute (Woods & Thatcher, 2009). Whilst there have been calls to investigate whether coaches actually know

their behaviour can impact their athletes (Thelwell, Wagstaff, Chapman, & Kenttä, 2017), this novel result suggests that (when it comes to team selection at least) coaches do consider how their athletes will be affected by their actions.

Coaches all stated (in post-season interviews) that a player's availability and injuries affected their team selection decisions (during pre-season interviews every coach also predicted they would use the availability cue). Operating at the amateur level, these coaches had to consider that players, instead of attending games (or training), occasionally had to work or study for exams. With regards to injuries, rugby union is a physically demanding contact sport and, as such, has a high incidence of injury (Brooks, Fuller, Kemp, & Reddin, 2005; Hendricks, Sarembock, Jones, Till, & Lambert, 2017; Yeomans et al., 2018). Although research surrounding injuries within amateur rugby union is scarce (Swain, Lystad, Pollard, & Bonello, 2011; Yeomans et al., 2018), coaches from the current study certainly highlighted how important injuries are (with regards to selection), demonstrated by one coach suggesting that his team's season was defined by injuries.

Coaches described several selection cues that, rather than coming from the players, originated from the coaches themselves. The coach-player relationship, for example, was described by one coach as having such a big impact on selection that it meant one player did not get selected because of it. Coaches do not behave in the same way with all their players because of, for example, individual differences in athlete behaviour (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). As a result, a player may not get selected simply because the coach does not "get on" with them.

Johansson and Fahlén (2017) reported that football coaches often connected selection with their game plan (although there was some ambiguity as to whether the game plan dictated who coaches would select or if the abilities of the players informed the game plan). Coaches from the current study described selecting players who had specific physical and/or

skill characteristics (e.g., speed, size, and technique) to fit the coaches pre-determined game plan. This game plan was forged from the coaches' broader style of rugby they wanted their players to play (e.g., fast and energetic or open and flexible) and, for one coach, coaching philosophies. As every coach was working within a performance sport environment (i.e., contexts where athletes concentrate on competition rather than participation; Lyle, 1999), these requirements, game plans, styles of rugby, and philosophies often related to the goal of winning. One coach, for example, stated the team must win games so the club would be seen as the best in the local area. Success as a coach is often judged by the team's performance and achievements (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003), meaning success equals winning and failure equals losing (Cumming, Smoll, Smith, & Grossbard, 2007). Winning is seen differently from coaches working within different sporting contexts (Cumming et al., 2007), but at its very core, coaching is training people to perform better in their sport (Wu et al., 2014). If, however, coaches are focussed on winning they may feel high levels of stress (and lower levels of well-being) and begin to exhibit controlling behaviours towards their players (Ntoumanis & Mallet, 2014; Stebbings, Taylor, & Spray, 2011; van de Pol, Kavussanu, & Ring, 2011). These controlling behaviours can then lead to a number of negative consequences for the players (Cheval, Chalabaev, Quested, Courvoisier, & Sarrazin, 2017), that may ultimately lead to a drop in player performance and an adverse effect on the goal of winning.

Some coaches stated that they made certain selection decisions because of what the players wanted. This demonstrates an understanding of their players' feelings and intentions that can be a key factor in positive relationships (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Losoya & Eisenberg, 2001). If coaches can accurately infer what their players are thinking and feeling (i.e., empathetic accuracy; Ickes, Stinson, Bissonnette, & Garcia, 1990), players are likely to feel satisfied (Lorimer & Jowett, 2009b). Coaches, however, were assuming (i.e., assumed

similarity; Lorimer & Jowett, 2009a) they understood their players rather than knowing they did (i.e., actual similarity; Lorimer & Jowett, 2009a). Further research would be able to discover whether coaches are able to accurately understand their players feelings and intentions, which would lead to positive relationships.

Interestingly, one aspect of every coach cue is they can all be considered long-term and relatively stable. A coach's experience, for example, would likely not change hour-by-hour whereas their emotions can (Abro, Klein, Manzoor, Tabatabaei, & Treur, 2015). Coaches in the current study, though, did not say that any dynamic, rapidly changing cues (e.g., coaches' own emotions and stress, or priming, which is when environmental cues unconsciously affect subsequent judgments and decisions; Weingarten, Chen, McAdams, Yi, Hepler, & Albarracín, 2016) influenced their selection decisions. Therefore, further research is needed to examine whether this occurs, especially as previous research on team selection (e.g., Johansson & Fahlén, 2017) and in other areas (e.g., Lighthall, Mather, & Gorlick, 2009) suggest that these cues would affect coaches' selection decisions.

Previous research found that when deciding on a player for selection, coaches will take the other players into consideration (Johansson & Fahlén, 2017). Coaches in the current study added to this notion when they described, for example, selecting combinations of players (rather than single players), how the selection of a player will affect the other players, and who is already selected in positions around the player being decided upon. Coaches also used the team as a whole as a selection cue, something not (to the author's knowledge) previously discussed in the literature. The ability of the team, what the team wanted to achieve, and the total number of players in the squad, for example, were taken into consideration by coaches when making selection decisions.

For coaches to be recruited to this study, they had to make, or have the final say in, team selection decisions. During pre-season interviews, coaches suggested they might take

their other coaches' opinions into consideration when making selection decisions, but ultimately, they made the decisions themselves. When discussing who actually made the selection decisions in their post-season interviews, however, some coaches stated that it was in fact not them who made (some of) the selection decisions. One coach, for example, let his forwards coach select the forwards while another allowed his backs coach to select the backs. The delegation of decision making can improve teamwork (Flores-Fillol, Iranzo, & Mane, 2017) and help head coaches cope with coaching stress (Olusoga, Butt, Maynard, & Hays, 2010). Delegation could also lend support to the notion of coaching as orchestration (Jones & Wallace, 2005). Orchestration suggests that coaching is a complex social process that requires guiding or steering (Santos, Jones, & Mesquita, 2013). A key finding from a study conducted by Santos et al. (2013) on orchestration was that coaches delegate part of the coaching process to their assistant coaches to develop control over the selection process (as assistants act as surrogates for head coaches). This responsibility, however, was actually an illusion of empowerment (Jones & Standage, 2006) as these coaches gave their assistants the impression of control (e.g., having one-on-one discussions, handling specific parts of training) while making all of the decisions themselves. Rather than making every selection decision themselves, some coaches from the current study gave some within their coaching team (e.g., forwards and backs coaches) complete autonomy over specific selection decisions (e.g., forwards and backs, respectively). Further research is needed, however, because it is not clear if coaches were adopting shared leadership practices (Wallace, 2001), which can provide several benefits (e.g., providing a fulfilling experience for all), attempting to give responsibility to others so blame will not rest with themselves if outcomes are dissatisfactory (Steffel, Williams, & Perrmann-Graham, 2016), or simply because they did not have the power to make these decisions (Watson & Foster-Fishman, 2013).

What type of game is upcoming affected selection decisions, with games typically referred to as A games (e.g., league games and cup games) or B games (e.g., friendly). One coach stated that you select for the A games and the remaining players are automatically selected for the B game (i.e., no selection required for the B game). Coaches tended to select the best players for the A games, with a view to win these games, while the B games were a chance to rotate and allow other players (those not typically selected for the A games) to play. Whilst it is known that there are differences between players selected for A games and B games (e.g., body mass, playing experience, skill; Gabbett, 2002), the current results suggest that coaches do use different selection cues for different types of games (e.g., ability cues for A games and situational cues for B games).

Consistent with previous research (e.g., Johansson & Fahlén, 2017), coaches also considered who the opposition was when making selection decisions. This finding is appropriate when it is considered that the opposing team can have an impact on player performances (e.g., Carling, 2011). Coaches also stated that the results from recent games (i.e., win or loss) would impact selections. For instance, coaches would be hesitant to change winning teams but would make changes in selections if the team lost. This is a selection pattern that has been previously reported in rugby union (e.g., Sedeaud et al., 2017). A further interesting influence on coaches' selection decisions were the number of choices available to the coach. More specifically, some coaches described instances where they felt they had no choice but to select a player because, for example, there were no other players to select. Coaches described these decisions as less than ideal but necessary and seemed to base these selections on nothing other than "there is no one else." It was unclear, however, if there was in fact only one choice available (i.e., one player, meaning the selection decision is automatically made) or if the coaches had already decided that the alternatives were unsuitable and were left with one choice (i.e., had made one or more selection decisions

which led to an unsatisfactory player being chosen because there were no other players to consider).

Coaches suggested that two environmental cues, the weather and the pitch, would affect their upcoming selection decisions. Only one coach, however, stated in his post-season interview that his selections were influenced by these cues. Simonsohn (2007) reported that university admissions officers weighted academic attributes (e.g., GPA) more heavily on cloudier days and non-academic attributes (e.g., leadership) on sunnier days. The current study suggests that when making selection decisions coaches are also affected by the weather, the difference from the Simonsohn (2007) study being that coaches in the current study consciously used weather cues in their selection decisions whereas the university admissions officers did not.

#### **4.4.2: Word frequency analysis.**

The increase in the number of cues from pre-season predictions to post-season recollections suggests that coaches were unable to estimate how many cues would inform their selection decisions. Coaches were also unable to accurately predict their selection decisions as only half of the cues ( $n=51.64\%$ ) coaches predicted they would use for selection decisions were also reported in post-season interviews. Furthermore, the number of new cues reported in post-season interviews outweighed the number of cues coaches predicted they would, and reportedly did, use (148 new cues compared to 110 cues stated in both pre-season and post-season interviews). Coaches, it seems, had failed to foresee future events that would impact their team selection decisions (Kahneman, 2012). When predicting a future event, what makes that prediction “good” is (a) consistency (i.e., correspondence between prediction and judgments), (b) quality (i.e., correspondence between prediction and observations), and (c) value (i.e., benefits of predictions to others; Murphy, 1993). By these criteria, coaches’ predictions on how they will make selection decisions were inconsistent, of low quality, and



of little value to, for example, a player wanting to know how their coach will be selecting their teams. One reason that coaches failed to make good predictions may relate to the projection bias (Loewenstein, O'Donoghue, & Rabin, 2003). It suggests that coaches, in failing to account for factors such as social influences and changes in the environment, may have projected their pre-season (or current) preferences for team selection onto future team selection decisions, thus leading to inaccurate predictions.

Along with the total number of cues increasing, from pre-season to post-season interviews, the frequency with which these cues were reported decreased (1087 times to 928) while the percentage of cues only one coach described using to make selection decisions increased (53.52% to 66.28%). Taken together, these results suggest that, in pre-season interviews, coaches demonstrated more similarities on which cues they think they will use to make selection decisions than in post-season interviews. Furthermore, during the season coaches displayed a pattern of using cues specific to their situations which they did not predict pre-season and were not used by any other coach. This again points to a poor ability to predict their future decisions (Murphy, 1993) and a possible projection bias (i.e., the projection of current preferences on expected future preferences; Loewenstein et al., 2003).

With regards to the cues that all coaches reported in a consistent manner in their pre-season interviews, size, ability, general game performance, availability, and opposition were reported. With no previous research on rugby union coaches' selection decisions, it is difficult to say why the current coaches all thought they would base their upcoming selection decisions on these cues. This is especially true when it is unclear if these coaches received any formal education about team selection from the rugby union governing body, the RFU. If, however, attention is taken away from academic research and formal education and onto the media, there may be a reason. A search of online newspapers reveals several stories about why rugby union coaches have selected their players. Within these articles, coaches are

quoted as selecting players because of their size (e.g., Jones, 2018), ability (e.g., Williams, 2018), performances (e.g., Morgan, 2018), availability (e.g., Cantillon, 2018), and the opposition (e.g., Keating, 2018). Whilst this is only anecdotal evidence, there is research which suggests that the media can influence decision making behaviour (e.g., Robbennolt & Studebaker, 2003), including those within sport (e.g., Sanderson, Weathers, Grevious, Tehan, & Warren, 2016). This may also explain why in post-season interviews coaches only demonstrated similarities on attitude, availability, and injured cues as coaches may have been recalling what happened during the season rather than a media narrative of what they should be selecting players on. These are, however, claims that require further research investigation.

Although coaches did not accurately predict which cues they would use in team selection decisions, from pre-season to post-season interviews the themes and sub-themes largely remained the same (82.76% and 80.43%, respectively). In post-season interviews, for example, coaches said they selected players with a “rugby brain” (cue) which came under the sub-theme “intelligence.” No coach predicted they would use this cue, but they did predict that they would use several other cues that came under the intelligence sub-theme. Coaches, therefore, while failing to predict the exact cues they would use to select players on, were relatively accurate in a broader sense (i.e., the themes and sub-themes). Put another way, coaches roughly knew why they would make their selection decisions, but not exactly. This reflects an observation made by Jones (2009) that coaches may not be able to find the relevant language to adequately convey what they know. Coaches in the current study, however, stated that they were confident that they communicated the cues they both would use, and perceived they did use, to make selection decisions (although this is an area that requires further research).

#### **4.4.3: Strengths and limitations.**

This study offers a number of novel, significant, and interesting results that have yet to be discussed in the existing literature. As discovered in Chapter 2 (see 2.5: Conclusion, p. 35), only one study (i.e., Johansson & Fahlén, 2017) has previously reported on coaches' team selection decisions, but that study's purpose, however, was not to explicitly examine these crucial decisions. Readers are, therefore, offered an insight into both the large number and variety of cues coaches claim to use to make team selection decisions and how these change between pre-season predictions to post-season recollections.

The design of this study was innovative in that coaches were interviewed at two time points, namely pre-season and post-season. This longitudinal, season-long study design is rare within qualitative sport research (Petrovic, Koprivica, & Bokan, 2017) and is crucial for the development of theoretical explanations of phenomenon (Cresswell & Eklund, 2007). This study was an exploration that aimed to provide an intimate first-hand understanding of team selection decisions that others can attempt to verify and expand with further research (Given, 2008). In such studies, smaller sample sizes are appropriate because they can offer a deep understanding of a previously unexplored phenomenon (Boddy, 2016). Furthermore, the total number of participants included in this study was at an acceptable level if participants were interviewed multiple times (Morse, 2000) as data saturation (i.e., no new trends or themes are elicited by new participants, meaning a thorough understanding of the phenomenon under study is achieved and data collection is ended; Kuper, Lingard & Levinson, 2008) can become evident at six interviews (Boddy, 2016).

It is also important to consider the limitations. When coaches explained the information they would use, and reported using, in selection decisions, along with issues pertaining to interviewing people (e.g., memory decay over time, misinterpretation of constructs; Bernard, Killworth, Kronenfeld, & Sailer, 1984; Harris & Brown, 2010) they may

have described both cues and inferences based on cues (i.e., a conclusion based on cues; e.g., Park, Schaller, & Van Vugt, 2008). Training attendance, for example, was a cue coaches predicted and reported using in selection decisions. This is a binary cue which indicates the presence or absence of an attribute (did the player attend training?) relevant to the task (team selection; Hogarth & Karelaia, 2006). On the other hand, in their post-season interviews, two coaches claimed they selected players because of the effort they put in during training. When it is considered that the definition of a cue (as adopted in this thesis) is a single piece of information (Cooksey, 1996; Dowding & Thompson, 2003; Wiggins, 2006; von Helversen et al., 2013), it can be said that “effort in training” is not a single cue (although coaches seemed to treat it as a single cue). Instead, this could be an example of an inference. The cues that led to this inference are, however, unclear. Among the cues reported, therefore, several may in fact be inferences. Some coaches, though, did make the distinction between cues and inferences. One coach, for example, stated he selected players who were good communicators, an inference based on whether they communicated with the other players in training and games and communicated with the coach (cues).

Regarding the information cues provide, coaches in the pre-season interviews indicated they would use cues to make selection decisions that were similar (in terms of description) to, for instance, the “rugby brain” cue. The “knowledge of tackling” cue, which was predicted in pre-season interviews, could conceivably contribute to the rugby brain cue (described in post-season interviews). Coaches, therefore, may have mistakenly described two different selection cues when the information these cues offered was, in fact, the same (i.e., cue redundancy; Karelaia, 2006).

Given the author’s experience and knowledge of rugby union, it could conceivably be both a strength and a limitation of this study. Whilst this experience and knowledge contributed to building rapport with the coaches (Berg, 2007) and allowed for detailed,

informed follow-up questions during the interviews (Sparkes & Smith, 2014), the author could have made assumptions during the research process (e.g., data analysis) based on his background. Although the author attempted to maintain a subjective self-awareness of his potential biases (Readdy et al., 2016), given that qualitative researchers adhering to constructivism position themselves within their research (Petrovic et al., 2017) it is possible the author's experience and knowledge of rugby union did unknowingly alter the research process.

#### **4.4.4: Future directions for research.**

Researchers are provided with a unique insight into a key element of coaching practice, coaches' team selection decisions. Specifically, this study demonstrated not only the large number of cues used to make team selection decisions, but also the variety of cues drawn upon by coaches working with the performance sport environment. Whilst several recommendations for future research have been outlined above (see 4.4: Discussion, p. 85), described below are some key areas. Given the exploratory nature of this study, however, researchers are encouraged to continue to examine the cues used in team selection decisions. The reason for this is to both verify what has been reported in the current study and to identify which cues are universal and which are unique to coaches working within specific contexts. Coaches from the current study, for example, were all from different teams working with players at different levels and ages. As a result, the question of whether coaches working with one team would also consider the number and variety of cues reported here is necessary to answer.

As coaches seemed to select some players based on the "best player cue," further research is needed to determine if this is treated as a single cue by coaches or an inference mistaken as a single piece of information. Furthermore, understanding how a player becomes to be known as one of the best is vital for researchers and those involved in, for example,

talent identification and development. One result from the current study that may contribute to a player being thought of as the best is the notion of “tried and tested” players (i.e., players the coach previously selected and who performed to an acceptable level). Researching the means by which other people (e.g., parents, sponsors, media) might influence coaches’ decision-making behaviour (e.g., Robbennolt & Studebaker, 2003; Sanderson et al., 2016) would also be an interesting line of enquiry, as this study offers preliminary evidence that coaches’ decisions may be influenced by these sources.

#### **4.5: Conclusion**

The aims of this study were to investigate which cues coaches use to make team selection decisions and whether the cues coaches claimed they would use (in pre-season interviews) were different to the cues they reported using (in post-season interviews). Results revealed both the large number, and variety, of cues reportedly used by coaches to make selection decisions. Whilst coaches reported mostly relying on player cues, they also used coach cues, cues from other sources, situational cues, and environmental cues. Coaches were also unable to fully predict which cues they would use to select their teams as only half of predicted cues were also reported in post-season interviews. Furthermore, from pre-season to post-season interviews, the frequency with which cues were stated decreased while the percentages of cues only one coach stated increased. This pattern suggests that coaches were using cues specific to their situation which they did not predict and were not used by any other coach. In defence of the coaches, however, it could be argued that because they work with different players, they would draw upon different selection cues. If we were to look at coaches working together to coach (and make selection decisions on) one team, would the same individualistic results occur?

## **Chapter 5: “The Best or the Rest”: A Case Study of a Rugby Union Coaching Team’s Team Selection Decisions**

### **5.1: Introduction**

Rugby union coaches working within the performance sport environment (i.e., contexts where athletes concentrate on competition rather than participation; Lyle, 1999) claim to use a large number and wide variety of cues (i.e., a single piece of information within an environment that holds meaning and is used to form a judgment; Cooksey, 1996; Dowding & Thompson, 2003; Wiggins, 2006; von Helversen et al., 2013) when making team selection decisions. These include player cues (e.g., ability, performance), coach cues (e.g., styles of rugby, winning mentality), cues from other sources (e.g., other players, other coaches), situational cues (e.g., upcoming game, opposition), and environmental cues (e.g., weather, pitch; see 4.3: Results, p. 57). It is not clear, however, if coaches working within the same coaching team draw upon the same cues (or the large number of cues) previously reported. Additionally, although it is accepted that team selection is a complex multi-criteria problem in which coaches are required to consider a large amount of information (Tavana et al., 2013), the processes coaches go through when making team selection decisions is poorly understood (Bradbury & Forsyth, 2012). Furthermore, as rugby union teams tend to have several coaches all contributing to team selection decisions, with the head coach (usually) making the final decisions (Calder & Durbach, 2015; Lemyre et al., 2007), the coaching team should be taken into consideration when studying team selection decisions. The primary aims of this study, therefore, are to (a) examine which (and how many) cues rugby union coaches, working within the same coaching team, use to make team selection decisions, (b) discover the processes coaches go through when making team selection decisions, and (c) investigate if the relationships among the coaching team impact team selection decisions.

Additionally, head coaches are (usually) responsible for making team selection decisions, along with the help of their coaching team (Calder & Durbach, 2015; Lemyre et al., 2007). It is of vital importance, therefore, that how and why head coaches make team selection decisions is understood. Furthermore, as there has been a low correlation reported between coaches self-reported and observed behaviour (Curtis et al., 1979), it is essential that head coaches are observed when making selection decisions so as not to rely on self-reported data, which can be problematic (Bernard et al., 1984; Harris & Brown, 2010). Also, training is a crucial environment in which coaches communicate their knowledge, experience, and expertise to athletes (Antonini Philippe & Seiler, 2006; Lorimer & Jowett, 2009a; Sagar & Jowett, 2012). A consequence of this is coaches can impact (among other aspects) how well a player performs (Kassing & Anderson, 2014) which could give that player a better chance of being selected (given that most of selection is based on performance cues; see 4.3.1.1.4: Performance cues, p. 62). As such, exploring how coaches spend their time during training is vital. The secondary aims of this study are, therefore, to (d) compare and examine the differences (if any) in the selection cues the head coach stated in his (post-season) interview with those he discussed during training and (e) investigate how the head coach spends his time during training.

## **5.2: Method**

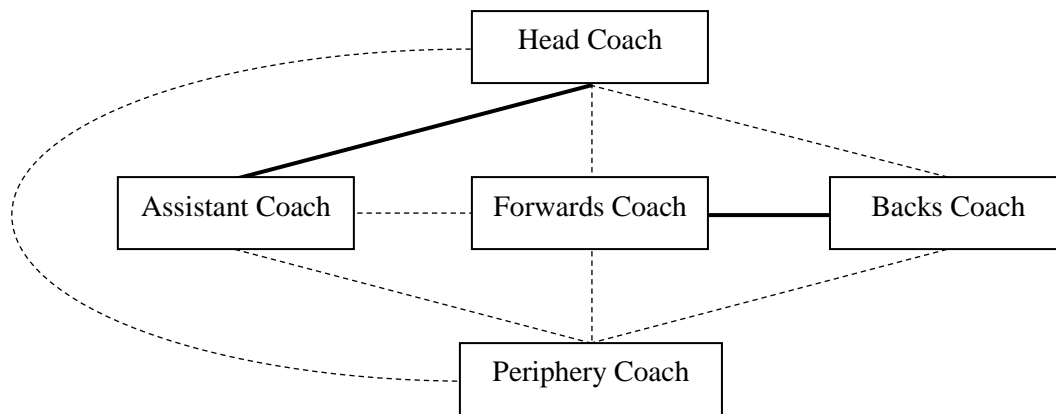
The current study adopted an exploratory case study approach with a single-case, embedded (i.e., multiple units of analysis) design. Yin (2014) suggested an exploratory case study is appropriate when “how” or “why” questions, with no propositions (i.e., no theory development prior to data collection), are being asked about a real-life, contemporary bounded system (bounded by time and place; Creswell, 2013) where the researcher has little or no control over relevant participant behaviours. As previously outlined (see 4.2.4: Researcher subjectivities, p. 55), it should be noted that the author adheres to the beliefs of



constructivism (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Hansen, 2004; Ponterotto, 2005; Schwandt, 1994, 2000; Sciarra, 1999) and has played and coached rugby union for over 15 years.

### **5.2.1: The case.**

The case in the current study was a coaching team made up of five rugby union coaches who were all coaching the same rugby union colts team (i.e., both under-17s and under-18s) over one season (i.e., October to May) in a performance sport environment (i.e., contexts where athletes concentrate on competition rather than participation; Lyle, 1999). Though not formally split into two teams, as demonstrated by all players training together every Thursday evening, an A team (typically higher ability) and B team (typically lower ability) were selected for each game weekend. Games were either friendlies (i.e., non-competitive games against any team), league games (i.e., competitive games against teams in the same league), or cup games (i.e., competitive games against teams, for example, in the same region). Coaches classified themselves as: (a) the head coach; (b) the assistant coach; (c) the forwards coach; (d) the backs coach; and (e) the periphery coach (see Figure 4). It is typical to have several coaches within one rugby union team all contributing to team selection with one coach (usually the head coach) making the final selection decisions (Calder & Durbach, 2015; Lemyre et al., 2007). All coaches were male, White, held a minimum Level Two RFU coaching qualification, and had experience playing rugby union. The information reported below was gained during interviews (see 5.2.2: Data Collection, p. 109) with each coach.



*Figure 4.* The hierarchy of the coaching team (as stated by the coaches). The dashed lines represent all coaching relationships while the solid lines represent long-term relationships between coaches.

#### ***5.2.1.1: The head coach.***

At 36 years old, the head coach was the youngest member of the coaching team. He had been involved with the club for 15 years both as a player and a coach, though at the time he only occasionally played. He had instead been focusing on coaching the colts, something he had been doing for five years. As head coach, he knew that while the other coaches may offer their input on selection, at the end of the day he made the final selection decisions. For eight of his 11 years in coaching, he had been coaching alongside the assistant coach. He believes the length of this relationship is the reason why they were both in tune with their selection decisions. He had coached the under-18s for one season (as under-17s) but this season was the first time he coached the under-17s (as they were under-16s the previous season).

#### ***5.2.1.2: The assistant coach.***

The assistant coach (who was 54 years old) had been coaching for a total of 10 years. At the time, he was coaching both the colts and the men's senior second team. He had also been coaching together with the head coach for eight of these years (in the colts) and claimed that if he and the head coach were to select any side over the past eight years, they would

only be one player out with each other. Like the head coach, he had coached the under-18s in the previous season and coached the under-17s for the first time this season.

#### ***5.2.1.3: The forwards coach.***

The forwards coach described himself as a “clubman.” He was 56 years old and had played or coached at the club for 40 years, starting as a young player who eventually played for the first team, became club captain, and then went into coaching. He coached both the colts and the men’s senior first team. With 25 years’ coaching experience, he was also the most experienced in the coaching team. Unlike the head coach and assistant coach, the forwards coach had been coaching the under-18s for the past 12 years (although he too coached the under-17s for the first time this season). Like the head coach and assistant coach, however, he had a long coaching relationship with the backs coach. Both had been coaching the under-18s for 12 years because they each had a son in this group of players.

#### ***5.2.1.4: The backs coach.***

As mentioned above, the backs coach (who was 48 years old) had been coaching the under-18s for 12 years (his total coaching experience) with the forwards coach. This is because he had a son in this group of players, who was also the captain of the A team. He also coached the under-17s for the first time this season.

#### ***5.2.1.5: The periphery coach.***

The periphery coach (who was 49 years old) was the least involved in the coaching team. Although he had been coaching at the club (and in total) for 19 years, he took a step back this year to concentrate on different roles he had at the club. By taking a step back though, he felt like he had more of an objective view on how the coaching team operated and the players’ attitudes towards selection decisions. He had also followed the under-17s, as well as the under-18s, in previous seasons, so he had some knowledge about all the players in the colts team.

### **5.2.2: Data collection.**

Central to any case study is the collection of in-depth information from a variety of sources (e.g., direct observations, interviews, documents, and reports; Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014). In the current study, data collected were semi-structured interviews with all five coaches and direct visual and audio observations of the head coach. As the head coach stated that he made the final selection decisions (and for practicality reasons), visual and audio observation data collection methods were only focussed on the head coach. Although conversations the head coach had with the coaching team, players, and parents were captured in the observations, only data obtained from the head coach and the coaching team were analysed. Data obtained from players or parents were removed.

#### ***5.2.2.1: Semi-structured interviews.***

One of the most common and important sources of case study evidence (Yin, 2014) are semi-structured interviews (Weiss, 1994) which were used to facilitate the gathering of rich and insightful data (Bryman, 2001; Carson et al., 2005). An interview guide was compiled by reading relevant decision-making literature (e.g., the framing of information as either positive or negative; Johnson-Laird, 1983) and previous research related to team selection decisions (e.g., Solomon & Rhea, 2008). The interview guide (see Appendix B) was used to provide a guiding framework, but coaches could move the interview in the direction they chose (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). The interviews were all conducted by the author and began with topical, introductory questions intended to build rapport and to encourage participants to begin talking (e.g., “How did your season go?”). The main questions followed which allowed participants to explore and discuss what information they used to select teams (e.g., “Describe how you selected your team”). Participants were then invited to add anything missed during the interview (e.g., “Is there anything else that you would like to discuss?”). Probes were also used throughout each interview to allow coaches to expand upon and clarify

their responses (Patton, 2002). It is worth noting the head coach also participated in the previous study (Chapter 4), meaning his interview data is included in both the post-season interviews from Chapter 4 as well as the current Chapter. For an example transcript, see Appendix E.

#### ***5.2.2.2: Direct observations (visual and audio).***

Direct observation is a key tool for collecting data in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013) and, given that a case study should take place in real-world settings, allows researchers to observe participants in the relevant social or environmental conditions (Yin, 2014). Furthermore, direct observations can confirm or challenge self-reported interview data (Green & Thorogood, 2009; Stuckey et al., 2014). Given the potential limitations of relying on self-reported behaviours (e.g., memory decay over time, misinterpretation of constructs; Bernard et al., 1984; Harris & Brown, 2010; see 4.4.3: Strengths and limitations, p. 100), direct observations can provide additional information that is not subject to these issues (Henry & Eggly, 2012). Direct visual and audio observation data were collected over five training sessions across a season (data were collected from five training sessions as the researcher could only access five training sessions).

#### **5.2.3: Procedure.**

Following ethical approval from the Ethics Committee in the Department of Psychology at Middlesex University, participants were approached in person by the author and invited to take part in the study.

##### ***5.2.3.1: Semi-structured interviews.***

Participants were informed of the aims of the interview and what would be required should they agree to take part. Interviews were then organised at a variety of locations (e.g., rugby union club or participants' houses) for days and times that suited the participants. Before the interviews began, participants were advised of the interview procedure, its

relevance to the study, ethical procedures (e.g., confidentiality and anonymity), and the process of withdrawal. Once participants had any questions answered and were aware of the implications of involvement in the study, informed consent was obtained. Each interview lasted between 63 and 82 minutes ( $M=72.27$ ,  $SD=7.63$ ) and was digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim once completed.

#### **5.2.3.2: *Direct observations.***

The head coach was filmed (by the author) using a video camera (Nikon D7000) that was mounted onto a tripod with a proficient zoom. Upon arrival at the rugby club, the video camera was placed in a position where the head coach could be clearly seen. Filming started when the training session began and stopped when the training session ended. A microphone with a digital voice recorder (Olympus WS-450S) was also attached to the head coach five minutes before the training session began and removed five minutes after the training session had finished. Training sessions lasted between 54 and 84 minutes ( $M=72.79$ ,  $SD=11.07$ ) and the author subsequently synchronized the video and audio recordings and transcribed each training session verbatim.

#### **5.2.4: Data analysis.**

##### **5.2.4.1: *Semi-structured interviews.***

Data collected from the semi-structured interviews were subjected to a thematic analytic process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The steps were: (a) familiarising yourself with your data; (b) generating initial codes; (c) searching for themes; (d) reviewing themes; (e) defining and naming themes; and (f) producing the report. Similar to the previous Chapter (see 4.2.5: Data analysis, p. 55), this process began with the author reading all transcripts on several occasions to familiarise himself with the data whilst also writing notes in the margins so he could begin to comprehend passages and start to generate initial codes. After a period of critically reviewing proposed themes (by engaging with supervisors as

“critical friends”; Smith & McGannon, 2017), this process culminated with the final themes. These steps allowed for the identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns (or themes) within data. Themes were identified using an inductive approach (i.e., themes identified were strongly linked to the data; Patton, 2002). Researchers in sports coaching (e.g., Donoso-Morales et al., 2017; Readdy et al., 2016) and psychology (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Roulston, 2001) have frequently utilised thematic analysis as a qualitative analytic method (for example raw data and coding see Appendix F). It is worth noting that data were originally collected for the purpose of examining the cues coaches used to make team selection decisions and, as such, the interview guide was designed for this aim (see Appendix B). During analysis, however, the data depicted information regarding the selection processes coaches go through when making selection decisions and how the relationships among the coaching team impacted their selection decisions.

A word frequency analysis (e.g., Solomon & Rhea, 2008; Yamauchi et al., 2011) was also performed to investigate the level of similarity among the coaching team. To perform the analysis, the cues described by coaches in the interviews were the “words” used to calculate the total frequencies across all interviews. Additionally, the extensiveness (Krueger et al., 2001) of the coaches’ responses (i.e., how many coaches contributed to each cue) was also analysed to provide insight into how important coaches felt each category was.

#### ***5.2.4.2: Direct observations.***

Observational data collected from the head coach talking to himself, other coaches, players, and parents, across five training sessions, were subjected to the same analytic process as the data collected from the semi-structured interviews (i.e., thematic analysis; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Only data relating to team selection and related concepts (e.g., player evaluations) were analysed. Data not analysed included, for example, discussions about the coaches’ personal lives. Similar to the analysis of the interview data, a word frequency

analysis (e.g., Solomon & Rhea, 2008; Yamauchi et al., 2011) was performed to examine whether the information the head coach claimed he used to make selection decisions in his (post-season) interview was different from what he said in training sessions (during the season).

Data were also analysed to calculate the frequencies and types of verbal communication between the head coach and the other coaches, players, and parents and how the head coach spent his time during training (i.e., descriptive statistics; LeCouteur & Feo, 2011). Verbal communication was coded as actions that emerged from data analysis (i.e., an inductive approach). The categories demonstrated: (1) the total time spent by the head coach during training sessions, (2) the average time spent on each action, and (3) the average length of each action interaction. As the data collected during observations focused on the head coach (the microphone was attached to the head coach's jacket), only data from the head coach were used in the word frequency analysis and descriptive statistics.

### **5.3: Results**

#### **5.3.1: Semi-structured interviews.**

Presented below are the results from the interviews with all five coaches within the coaching team (for the full list of cues, see Tables 24 to 35). These results represent the cues coaches reportedly used to make selection decisions (i.e., player cues, coach cues, cues from other sources, and situational cues), the selection processes undertaken by coaches (i.e., upcoming game, discussions among coaches, un/important game, selection decision, post-selection discussions among coaches and players, and team announcement), and the power relationships among coaches that affected selection decisions (all these categories emerged from the data). Regarding the cues coaches reportedly used to make selection decisions, the player cues were cues related to the players themselves (e.g., the players' ability, performances, and personal situations). Coach cues are cues derived from the coaches



themselves internally (e.g., a coach's behaviours, communication, and previous selection decisions) rather than from any external stimuli. Cues from other sources are cues gathered from external stimuli that are not the players that the selection decisions are being made on (e.g., other players, coaches and teams). Cues that related to the situation coaches found themselves in (e.g., an upcoming game, winning the league, and no choices) that were not related to any immediate external or internal stimuli (and were intangible) made up the situational cues category.

### ***5.3.1.1: Cues.***

Presented below are the cues (i.e., player cues, coach cues, cues from other sources, and situational cues) coaches reportedly used to make team selection decisions, aim (a) of this study (i.e., examine which [and how many] cues rugby union coaches, working within the same coaching team, use to make team selection decisions).

#### *5.3.1.1.1: Player cues.*

##### *5.3.1.1.1.1: Appearance cues.*

Most of the coaches reportedly used a player's size as a selection cue when making selection decisions. The periphery coach even thought that other selection cues were being overlooked for size cues, "Players with the better skill set will be overlooked in preference to players who have a bigger size." The periphery coach also stated that smaller players would miss out on selection. Furthermore, the head coach stated that he did not select a player because of his first impression of that player's size. There were some games that coaches selected players of a certain age (e.g., under-17s cup). Additionally, for the important games, coaches would select the under-18 players. According to the backs coach "...there's an under-18s team that would be the A team." The periphery coach thought this happened because of the relationship between the forwards coach and backs coach and the under-18

players. The head coach remembered a time where the other coaches reacted negatively to him dropping an under-18s player, “Everyone’s like ‘whoa, but that lads under-18!’”.

Table 24

*Number of coaches who stated appearance cues included in the player cues category*

Appearance cues	Number of coaches
Physical appearance	
Size	4
How they look	1
Age	
Under 18	4
Under 17	2

#### *5.3.1.1.1.2: Psychological cues.*

Three coaches reported to use a player’s attitude during selection decisions. More specifically, coaches claimed to use a player’s attitude towards the coach, selection, fitness, the game, in training and their team ethic to make selection decisions. The assistant coach remembered a player being dropped for having a poor attitude. Two coaches stated that the intelligence of players influenced selection decisions, with the periphery coach saying that “...slow learners” were usually not selected. The assistant coach said he would look for a player’s confidence and coachability (i.e., a players’ perceived ability to be coached) when making selection decisions. Coaches also claimed to use a player’s character when selecting players. If, for example, a player was thought of as tough, uncompromising, calm, aggressive, or a leader they were selected. Players considered fragile or unreliable, however, were not selected.

Table 25

*Number of coaches who stated psychological cues included in the player cues category*

Psychological cues	Number of coaches
Attitude	
Team ethic	1
Attitude towards selection	1
Attitude towards coach	1
Attitude	2
Attitude to fitness	1
Attitude to the game	1
Attitude in training	1
Intelligence	
Rugby brain	1
Game sense	1
Knows the moves	1
Slow learners	1
Confidence	
Confidence	1
Character	
Tough	1
Uncompromising	1
Calm	1
Leadership	2
Aggressive	1
Fragile	1
Unreliable	1
Coachability	
Coaching ability	1

#### *5.3.1.1.1.3: Ability cues.*

For the important games, coaches would select their best players, or the players labelled as star players, to put out the strongest team, the periphery coach recalled that "...individual players who are labelled the star players [would be selected]." Coaches, for example, would select the strongest (in terms of perceived ability) forwards while the best backs "...selected themselves" (again, because of their perceived ability). The head coach remembered one player being selected for having the reputation of being one of the best players, "He was living on reputation." Players may have been classified as one of the best

for their perceived ability. By contrast, some players were considered backup players who were only selected when the best players were not available.

Table 26

*Number of coaches who stated ability cues included in the player cues category*

Ability cues	Number of coaches
Ability	
Strongest team	4
Best player	5
Very good	3
Backs picked themselves	1
Reputation	1
Best pack	1
Ability	2
Back up	
Back up	1

#### *5.3.1.1.1.4: Performance cues.*

The head coach and backs coach reported to select wingers on their speed. The head coach also selected fast flankers, “We would wanna go a certain way with having two fast 6 and 7s.” Rather than speed, the backs coach stated that selection for some players would be based on footwork while the forwards coach based some of his selections on strength.

Coaches reported using several general rugby skills to help make selection decisions, including: handling, passing, ball carrying, running and running lines, defence, and tackling power. Coaches also reported using position specific skills that related to the positions each player could play. The forwards coach, for example, selected a fly-half who controlled the game and was a kicker. The assistant coach selected a scrum-half who took the ball into contact and an inside centre who could tackle. A player was selected if they were considered a blindside flanker who could jackal (i.e., the winning of the ball, by the defender's team, after a tackle and before a ruck has formed) and cover the blind side (i.e., the side of the scrum, ruck, or maul closest to the touchline). The assistant coach said he selected front row

players who could scrum. The forwards coach stated a hooker was never dropped because of his ability in the scrum, along with his ability in the line-out, while a different player was selected for his mauling. Rather than position specific skills, some players were selected because they could play more than one position, although the backs coach did say he selected specialist players.

Coaches' observations of players in training would influence their selection decisions, the backs coach explained "It was probably a gut feel on a couple of things we saw in training." The head coach was more specific and said he selected players based on the effort they put in during training, their tackle rate, and (along with the backs coach) their general performance.

Most coaches reported using the objective performance statistics (that were available to them) to select players, the head coach recalled saying "We gotta re-look at [selection] and just do it on game stats." This information was also used to confirm selection decisions and to make sure a selection was correct, as the assistant coach suggested "[our selection] was correct based on [the] stats." The head coach even stated that he became reliant on this information, although he did admit to only using the objective performance statistics three of four times throughout the season. The specific performance statistics coaches reported utilising were the number of carries, tackles made, missed tackles, and passes. The head coach recalled selecting one player over another because of the number of carries reported, "Although [player name] was a better scrummager, [player name] would carry more." There were, however, disagreements between the head coach and backs coach as to what was an acceptable number of tackles made and missed. The backs coach thought a 50% success rate (i.e., half of attempted tackle were made, the other half were missed) was acceptable whereas the head coach indicated that it was unacceptable. The objective performance statistics were also used by the head coach to infer game performances. According to the head coach, if a

winger had a low number of carries then it was determined that he did not do much in the game while a forward's low passing count suggested he took the ball into contact too much. To make selection decisions, the head coach also reported that he drew upon how many tries a player scored and how long players were on the pitch for, objective performance cues not provided by the objective performance statistics.

As well as the performance information gathered from the objective performance statistics, every coach also reported using what they saw in games to make selection decisions. In general, players who performed well were likely to be selected again while those who did not perform well were not selected, as explained by the head coach "I dropped [player name] once because he wasn't producing." The periphery coach said coaches were only evaluating one performance, although the backs coach suggested this may have only occurred in situations where the coaches were not sure about selecting a player in the first place, "Unless it was someone where...you...weren't sure about putting them in in the first place and then they don't deliver." More often, though, these decisions were made after more than one performance, as the head coach recalled "There was a couple of games he was awful, I had to drop him." What also impacted selection decisions was how the player reacted after a poor performance, with one player being dropped because he did not react in a way the coaches wanted him to. A player was thought to have performed poorly if they did not put in much effort during a game, defended poorly, did not make their usual runs, was on the edge of a ruck too often, or did not contribute in open play.

At times, some coaches reportedly relied on historical game performances when making selection decisions. The backs coach, for example, described selecting a player because he had seen him play before. The head coach even remembered seeing a player play as far back as the previous year, "He played in the under-17s cup last year when he was a 16 and we, me and [assistant coach name] and [forwards coach name] were like 'fuck, he's the

nuts’’. Although the information coaches drew upon did not always go in the players favour, as the forwards coach argued for a player not to be selected because of the number of yellow cards he had received in previous games. This was a decision that the assistant coach remembered, ‘‘I think he’s had the most yellow cards out of all of them, so that went against him.’’ This is also an example of what the backs coach described as a ‘‘cumulative effect’’ (i.e., selection cues over several weeks, rather than at one point, affecting selection decisions) with regards to selection decisions.

The assistant coach and forwards coach stated that some players were selected because of ‘‘merit,’’ which tended to be improvements in performance made by the player. Furthermore, players were known to have a certain style of rugby which coaches claimed to use as selection cues. Some players, for example, were selected because they were considered an enforcer (by the forwards and assistant coaches), a footballer, or a tackler (by the assistant coach).

Table 27

*Number of coaches who stated performance cues included in the player cues category*

Performance cues	Number of coaches	Performance cues	Number of coaches
Gross motor skills		Objective game performance	
Speed	2	Performance statistics	4
Footwork	1	Carries	2
Strong	1	Tackles	3
General rugby skills		Missed tackles	1
Handling	2	Passes	1
Tackling power	2	Tries	1
Run	3	Time played	1
Ball carrier	2	Game performance	
Basic skills	2	Defensive performance	2
Skills	3	Effort in games	2
Running lines	2	General game performance	5
Runs hard	1	No bullocking runs	1
Passing	2	Edge of a ruck	1
Ball player	1	Game	3
Defensive ability	1	No contributions in open play	1
Position specific skills		Pre-season friendlies	1
Position	2	Historical game performance	
6	2	Yellow cards	2
Controls the game	1	Historical game performance	3
Covering blind side	1	Cumulative effect	1
Over the ball	2	Merit	
Kicking	1	Merit	2
Line out	3	Improved	2
Mauler	1	Player's style of rugby	
Tap and go	1	Enforcer	2
Scrum	2	Footballer	1
Tackle ability	1	Tackler	1
Training performance			
Training	3		
Effort in training	1		
Tackles in training	1		
General training performance	2		

#### *5.3.1.1.1.5: Behaviour cues.*

A player's behaviour influenced whether they were selected. More specifically, how players behaved in training, including whether they helped other players and listened to the coaches, contributed to their selection. Furthermore, the assistant coach and backs coach wanted players to communicate with them and reportedly did not select those players who did



not. The backs coach also suggested that how a player communicated with him affected his selection decisions.

If someone, everything you tell them they just look and go “well you old fart you have no idea what you’re talking about” then you probably think also “well hold on, when it comes down to a decision when you’re quite similar, who am I gonna pick?”

On one occasion, a player not being selected was the result of his communication with the backs coach, “A kid came up and said, ‘look I’m not prepared to go and travel an hour and a half and not get a guaranteed 20 minutes’”. The forwards coach also placed importance on communication in games when it came to selection decisions, remembering one player being selected because he was a better talker than other players.

Table 28

*Number of coaches who stated behaviour cues included in the player cues category*

Behaviour cues	Number of coaches
Behaviour	
General behaviour	2
Behaviour in training	
Helping others out	1
Behaviour in training	3
Communication	
Haven’t told us	1
Backs coach-player communication	1
Player doesn’t want to play	1
Have told us	1
Listening in training	
Listening in training	3
Communication in games	
Communication in games	1

#### *5.3.1.1.1.6: Personal cues.*

The head coach and the backs coach both claimed that the school a player attended influenced their selection decisions because, for example, they were unavailable or the school was highly regarded.

Table 29

*Number of coaches who stated personal cues included in the player cues category*

Personal cues	Number of coaches
School	2

*5.3.1.1.1.7: Situational cues.*

A player's availability (made up of three cues: fit, injured, and availability) was considered by every coach during selection decisions. The periphery coach stated that if some players were simply available they would be selected, suggesting this is a crucial selection cue. Training attendance was also a selection cue reportedly used by coaches, with players being rewarded with selection for attending training. According to the forwards coach, if a player was continually late for training then it was taken into consideration when making selection decisions (although it is unclear what the effect was). Both the head coach and the backs coach said the number of games a player had played influenced their selection decisions. The backs coach also remembered selecting a player because he had previously played in a position before, while the forwards coach recalled a player being selected because he was considered their fly-half, "We played [player name] because he's our 10."

Table 30

*Number of coaches who stated situational cues included in the player cues category*

Situational cues	Number of coaches
Availability	
Fit	2
Injured	4
Availability	4
Training	
Late for training	1
Training attendance	3
Player's playing history	
Played there before	1
Number of games played	2
He's our 10	
He's our 10	1

#### *5.3.1.1.2: Coach cues.*

The relationships coaches had with their players, according to the periphery coach, influenced their selection decisions. This is a view supported by the backs coach, “There’s a bit of history on that [selection].” Coaches also had a style of rugby that they preferred which affected their selection decisions, as the backs coach explained “He’s more of a maverick and I’m perhaps more of a...you should do what you do.” If a player did not fit in to the coaches’ preferred style of rugby, they struggled to be selected. According to the periphery coach “...if they don’t fit into a certain style, then it’s gonna be very difficult to break into the team.” Coaches also stated what they wanted regarding a player’s characteristics. Coaches, therefore, were deciding what they wanted in a player and then selecting players based on their desires rather than identifying what qualities the players had and basing their selections on those, as alluded to by the forwards coach “I just don’t want two bangers, so I’d rather have a ball player that can set up a banger.” The periphery coach built on this notion when he suggested that some coaches were selecting based on what they were comfortable with, “[the coaches] revert back to perhaps old ways or revert back to a comfort zone, what they’re sure of or what they feel safe with.” The head coach recalled a time when he let a player be selected to gather

evidence to prove that the player should not have been selected, while the forwards coach suggested that a player was not selected simply because "...they really piss you off."

During selection discussions, the periphery coach claimed that the coach with the loudest voice or who argued the most had the most influence over selection decisions, "The person who can be bothered to argue the most can have the most influence on [selection]." The backs coach remembered times where he did not push very hard for a player's selection and how doubts over a player's selection affected their subsequent selection. The periphery coach also thought that a lack of knowledge on every player, a winning mentality, and a fear of being seen to make mistakes all affected the other coaches' selection decisions.

Table 31

*Number of coaches who stated coach cues*

Coach cues	Number of coaches
Coach-player relationship	
Coach-player relationship	2
Desires	
Style of rugby	3
Coach's requirements	3
Evidence gathering	1
Comfort zone	1
Piss you off	1
Behaviour	
Coach doesn't push	1
Communication	
Loudest voice	1
Coach who argues the most	1
Knowledge	
Coach has no knowledge of players	1
Goals	
Coach's winning mentality	1
Perception of how other coaches judge the coach	
Fear of making a mistake	1
Previous selection decisions	
Doubt	1

5.3.1.1.3: *Cues from other sources.*

5.3.1.1.3.1: *Other players.*

When making selection decisions, coaches would, at times, use information from the other players. The head coach, for example, remembered selecting a player and not selecting a different player because of the similarities they had to other players. Coaches also ranked players, which influenced their selection decisions, the head coach indicated “Putting people into positions as in we know, OK, those four of the back rowers out of that eight are really what we think are gunna be in and around our league side.” Furthermore, combining players affected team selection decisions according to the backs coach “I think you pick your 9 and 10 [together].”

Table 32

*Number of coaches who stated other players cues included in the cues from other sources category*

Other players	Number of coaches
Comparison to other players	
Same player	1
Too similar	1
Ranking	3
Player combinations	
Combinations	1

5.3.1.1.3.2: *Other coaches.*

The head coach stated that the other coaches would give him their input when it came to selection, something confirmed by the forwards coach and periphery coach. The backs coach did, however, recalled a time when the head coach overruled the other coaches, “[head coach name] took some decisions and said ‘no we’re not gunna put the best side out’ even though logically you might have done.” The periphery coach, however, suggested that the assistant coach and the forwards coach had a lot of influence in selection decisions, “A lot of

weight was going on what [forwards coach name] or, maybe [assistant coach name] was saying on selection.” With regards to the forwards coach, his weight may have been to push a forwards orientated way of playing, according to the periphery coach “[forwards coach name] is a forwards orientation...person, has a certain way of playing.” The forwards coach and backs coach had relationships with the under-18 players that influenced their selection decisions, as the backs coach explained “Where it’s different is [forwards coach name] and I know the under-18 group really well, we’ve known them for years and I’m sure we’re somewhat swayed by what they did at under-15 and under-16.” The periphery coach stated that this was because of a sense of loyalty, “Coaches from the year above were very partisan...and loyal to their particular age group.” Furthermore, the head coach remembered the forwards coach would champion the under-18 players because of this loyalty, “[forwards coach name] would champion him because he was one of his original lads” and “[forwards coach name] was still adamant he wanted his guys.” The backs coach, however, suggested these selections were based on a gut feel. Although he also recalled a time where he told a player their selection was due to himself and the forwards coach simply wanting to select him, “in the end I just probably wanted to pick you, [forwards coach name] did [too]”. The periphery coach also suggested that some selections were due to two players being related to two coaches (the forwards coach and backs coach).

#### *5.3.1.1.3.3: Other teams.*

The head coach and assistant coach suggested that they made some selection decisions because that was what other teams do, when discussing selection cues the assistant coach stated “...that’s like every side isn’t it?”

Table 33

*Number of coaches who stated other sources cues included in the cues from other sources category*

Other Sources	Number of coaches
Other coach input	
Other coach input	1
All coach input	
All coach input	2
Head coach	
Head coach	1
Assistant coach	
Assistant coach	1
Forwards coach	
Forwards coach	3
Forwards coach's way of playing	1
Forwards coach-player relationship	3
Backs coach	
Backs coach	2
Backs coach-player relationship	3
Parental relationship	
Parental relationship	1
Other teams	
Other teams	2

#### *5.3.1.1.4: Situational cues.*

Selection decisions were determined by the upcoming game, in terms of important or unimportant games. The important games were the league games and cup games while friendlies and B games were deemed unimportant. There was one league game, however, that was not important as it was the last game for the under-18 players. The forwards coach recalled "The last game of the season we...picked...a team of just 18s, cause it was their last game ever as an age group." Whilst most coaches concentrated on what type of game was upcoming, the periphery coach suggested that he focused on who they were playing against. There was an occasion where the head coach also focused on the opposition, but it was the opposition in a previous game, "The level of opposition we were playing, he should've just carved it up, but he didn't."

The backs coach suggested that selection decisions may have been different if the team were winning their league. This coach also stated that, at times, there were no choices when it came to selection decisions, which was particularly evident when it came to a lack of backup players, “We didn’t have an obvious replacement.” Sometimes the rules (e.g., the permitted number of substitutes) limited selection decisions. The head coach also recalled selecting players with certain physical characteristics because that was what they had always selected, “We always used to have a fly boy and a brute force.”

Table 34

*Number of coaches who stated upcoming games cues included in the situational cues category*

Upcoming games	Number of coaches
Upcoming game	
Under 18s cup game	3
Friendly	1
[Opposition team name] game	3
Upcoming game	1
Importance of upcoming game	3
B game	2
League game	1
Under 17s cup game	1
Upcoming opposition	
Opposition	1
Level of upcoming opposition	1

Table 35

*Number of coaches who stated situational cues included in the situational cues category*

Situational cues	Number of coaches
Winning the league	
Winning the league	1
No choice	
No back up	1
No choice	1
Rules	
Rules	1
Norm	
We always had	1



### ***5.3.1.2: Selection processes.***

Presented below are the results relating to the selection processes undertaken by coaches (i.e., upcoming game, discussions among coaches, un/important game, selection decision, post-selection discussions among coaches and players, and team announcement), aim (b) of this study (i.e., discover the processes coaches go through when making selection decisions).

#### *5.3.1.2.1: Upcoming game.*

The first step in the selection process (see Figure 5), according to the backs coach, was to assess what type of game was upcoming. This informed the coaches as to how important the game was, which subsequently dictated the quality of the side to be selected and which selection process to follow. For games perceived to be important or unimportant, coaches adhered to the process outlined in Figure 6 or Figure 7, respectively. Once at the end of these processes, coaches would then continue at the “Selection decision(s)” stage in the overall process outlined in Figure 5 below.

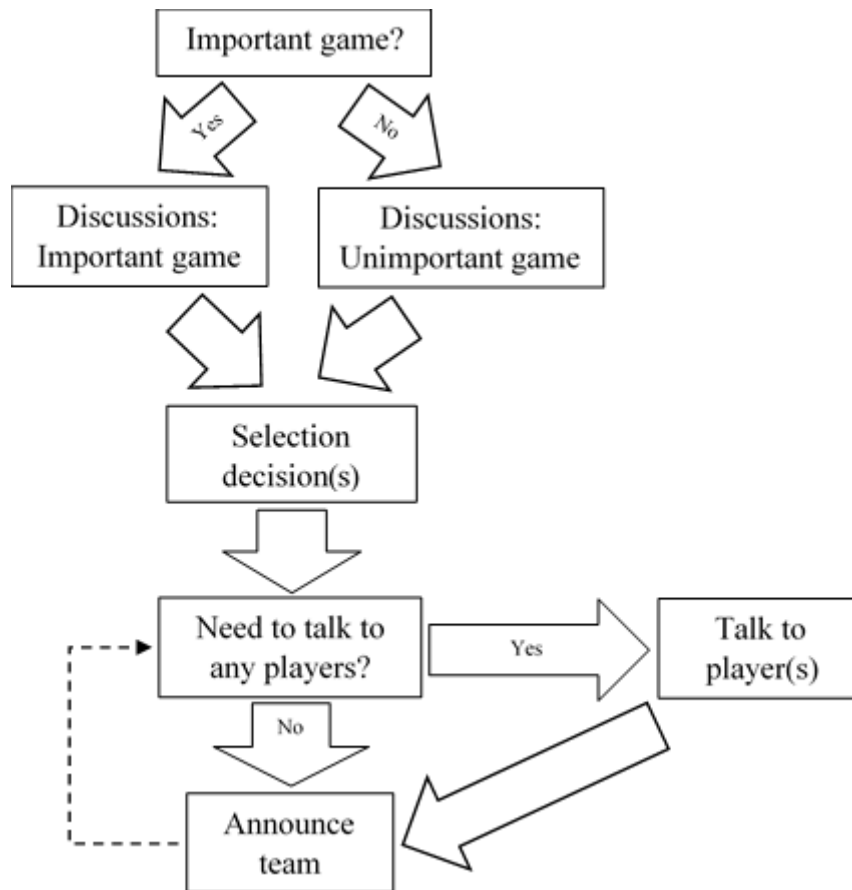


Figure 5. The selection processes.

#### 5.3.1.2.2: Discussions among coaches.

Once the type of game was established, and the quality of side to be selected decided upon, all five coaches began discussing selection. At this point, the head coach usually selected a draft team, as the periphery coach recalled “[head coach name] would make a rough call on what he wants where.” Then, at training, every coach would meet so they could all voice their opinions. The backs coach felt these face-to-face (or verbal communications) discussions were especially important if there were any disagreements in selection.

I think where there were particular contentions we tried to at least have a...either...be there on Thursday to discuss it face-to-face, or if not...there [to] have been at least a phone call with someone, least a verbal, not just a written communication...to make sure it was all balanced.

Whilst these discussions involved every coach, the backs coach indicated that he would have more input on the backs selection decisions and less on the forwards selection decisions (although he would still offer an opinion). As there were three forwards orientated coaches (compared with one backs orientated coach), there would be more arguing about selection decisions involving the forwards. Selection was, therefore, made by multiple coaches who would negotiate with each other. Whilst the head coach wanted the input from all of his coaches, the periphery coach believed these discussions (conducted the way they were) caused issues.

When you don't have one person making an overall decision, and it becomes more of a forum, then you're down to very much the person with the loudest...voice, will have the most influence, or the person who can be bothered to argue the most can have the most influence on [selection].

#### *5.3.1.2.3: Important games.*

An important game (see Figure 6) was usually a league or cup game. Whilst league and cup games were considered A games, however, not all A games were important (for an example, see 5.3.1.2.4.2: Special game, p. 136). For the important games the coaches would simply select their best available team and, for certain games (e.g., cup games), they “knew” who they would select, as the forwards coach explained “Ultimately when it was the 17s cup run, or the 18s cup run, we knew who we were picking really.” The selection of these players (according to the backs coach) was “obvious” or because (according to the head coach) they “selected themselves.” This selection process rarely changed throughout the season, as explained by the backs coach “There was probably...one or two changes...from the...best 15 we would've picked at the start of the season to the end of the season.” Most changes in selections that did occur (of which there were not many) were due to injuries. The periphery coach reflected this view when he suggested that up to seven positions within the team were

protected, meaning that certain players would be selected irrespective of most selection cues, “That place will be taken, if that player’s available, that player will play, regardless of whether that players on form.” Although there were cases where this happened with players who played a specific position (e.g., fly half), the backs coach described simply selecting the best players.

I think we would try and put the best back three on the pitch...and then kind of work out their positions, rather than say “we’ve got a specialist full back and two wings” ...or...“inside centre, outside centre” no put the best two guys on the pitch and they can work it out themselves.

#### *5.3.1.2.3.1: Unavailable.*

Although there were not too many instances of injury or unavailability, the coaches had to occasionally make selection decisions due to these issues. If this happened with the backs, the head coach stated that he knew there was a backup player. In one case, however, the head coach remembered telling the backs coach that they needed a fly-half because there was no backup, “I said to [backs coach name] ‘we needed a 10’ cause [fly-half’s name] was injured or whatever [and] we didn’t have a backup 10.” When this happened, the coaches had to identify a replacement player and support them, even if that meant selecting someone in the under-16s because they had to select someone, as the backs coach stated “You look at the other kids and go ‘well we gotta put one of them in there’”.

#### *5.3.1.2.3.2: Initial doubt.*

There was one instance during the season where the coaches began to doubt whether a player should continue to be selected. The forwards coach remembered that the coaches highlighted his poor performances as the reason for this doubt. The coaches then began to seek evidence (e.g., objective performance statistics) to confirm their doubt, which justified their reservations, so the player was not selected for the next game.

#### 5.3.1.2.3.3: *Tight call.*

At times during the season, coaches had to decide between two players who were perceived to be very similar. At this point, coaches began to seek extra information to help make the selection decision. The information sought was usually not rugby specific (although the head coach did say he would refer to the objective performance statistics). A player's behaviour in training, for example, influenced the assistant coach's selection decisions, "If there's a 50-50 chance between A and B, and B's the one larking about, you have to go with A." Furthermore, whether a player attended training affected who the backs coach selected.

If there's two people who are very much similar and the fly half is turning up every week and is there on a Thursday...it's then pretty harsh to say "there's this kid who's basically the same as you, I don't think he's better than you" [but he's selected].

Similarly, if neither player could attend training, the assistant coach would select the player who informed the coaches that they could not attend. If, however, the coaches could not make the selection decision then both players were selected with a pre-determined plan of substituting one for the other at half time (giving them equal playing time).

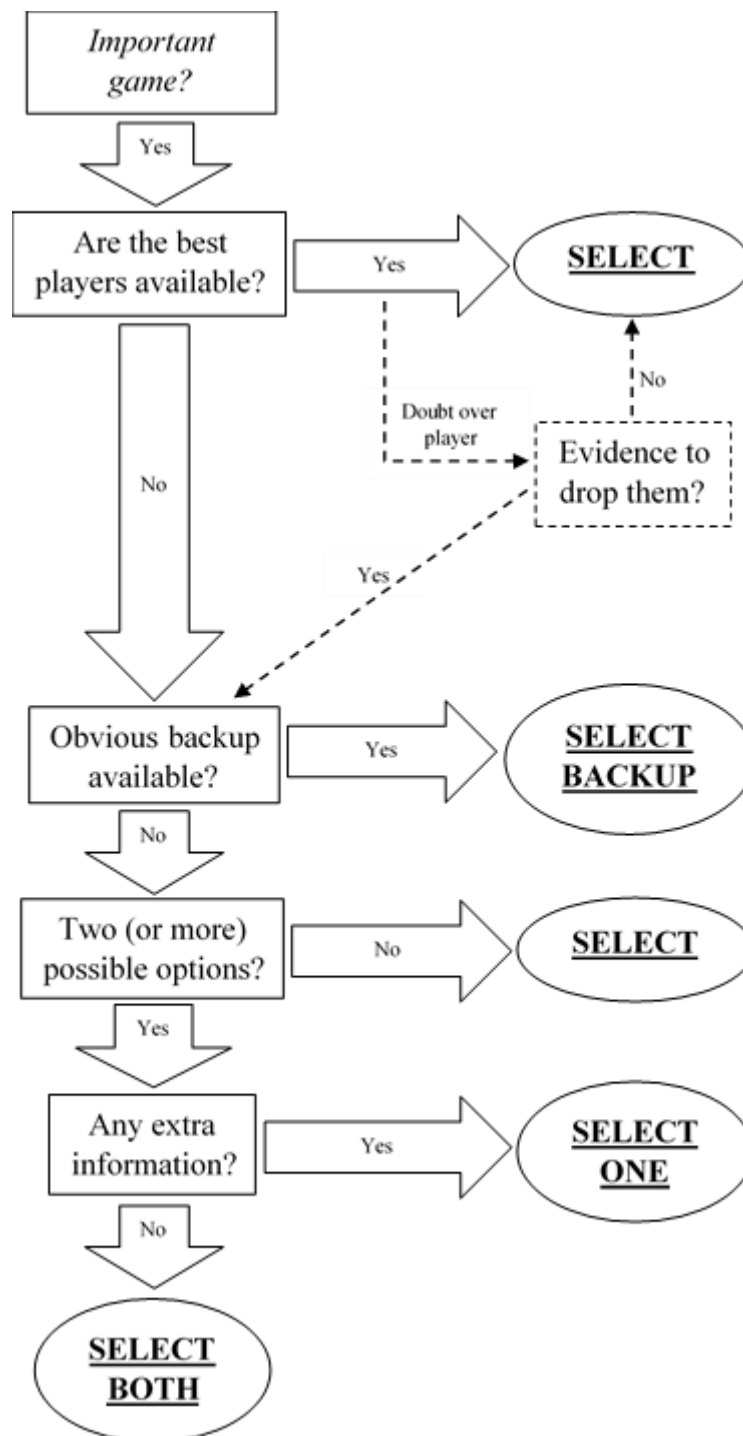


Figure 6. The selection process for an important game.

#### 5.3.1.2.4: Unimportant games.

Unimportant games (see Figure 7) were referred to as B games, which were the friendlies or “weaker” (referencing quality of opposition) games. Coaches saw unimportant games as an opportunity for everyone to play, as the assistant coach explained “You...have a

B fixture, where you try and get rugby for all.” Selection for these games was based on availability, with a focus on players who have not played recently. The head coach even recalled sending a message to every player stating this to be the case, “We’d send all the [players a message] and say ‘right, who’s available? Preference will be going to the guys that didn’t play or were on the bench [last week]’”. The backs coach also claimed they would select a team with more players than normal to give everyone some game time.

*5.3.1.2.4.1: Pre-selection discussions among coaches and “A” player(s).*

The only example of coaches talking to A players as part of the selection process is when the head coach needed to select an A player for a B game, “sometimes I’d have to say to [player name] “[player name] look, we’ve only got two second row, can you come and bench and be the second-row cover?” In this case, the player was happy to be selected so he was.

*5.3.1.2.4.2: Special game.*

For the last league game of the season, the coaches decided to only select under-18 players because it was their last game together. Although usually an important game, this game was thought of as an unimportant game. The usual selection processes (see 5.3.1.2.3: Important games, p. 132), therefore, were replaced with “select an under-18 team.”

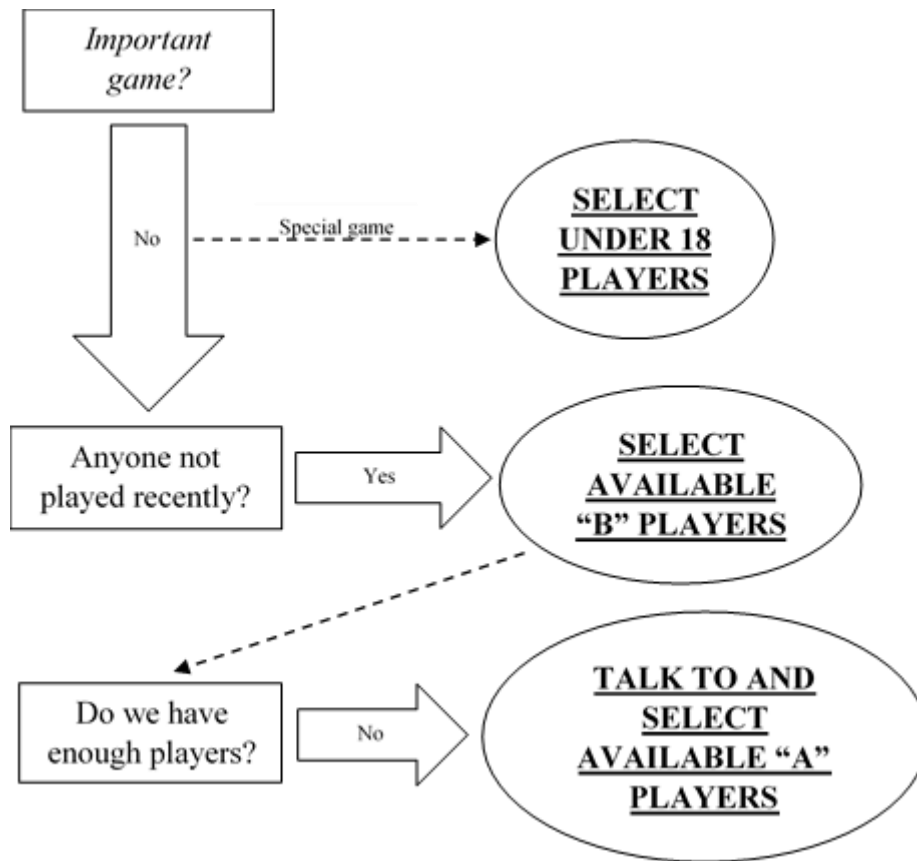


Figure 7. The selection process for an unimportant game.

#### 5.3.1.2.5: Selection decision(s).

Returning to the overall selection process (see Figure 5), while the other coaches may have had an input in selection decisions, according to the head coach, he made the final selection decisions, "At the end of the day the others will give me their input but I'm the one who picks it." The backs coach also shared this view. The head coach and backs coach also stated that the head coach had to overrule the other coaches in some selection decisions. There was one occasion, however, where the head coach wanted to drop a player but was overruled by the forwards coach and backs coach. The head coach explained that "...I wanted to change [player name] a lot earlier, but [backs coach name] and [forwards coach name] were both 'no let's keep going' 'oh OK' so I sort of listened to them." Similarly, the head coach acknowledged that he did not select the backs, "I never picked the backs, I'll be honest there, I knew what I thought I'd have, but it was always, the last say really on the backs came



down to [backs coach name].” The periphery coach went even further and suggested that the head coach relied on the assistant coach and forwards coach to select the team, “A lot of weight was going on what [forwards coach name] or, maybe [assistant coach name] was saying on selection, and...[head coach name] would...go with what [the forwards coach] thought.”

*5.3.1.2.6: Post-selection discussions among coaches and players.*

Once the team has been selected, the forwards coaches suggested that the coaches would inform the players who were not selected during a tight selection decision (it was not clear if this happened with any other players who were not selected).

When you’re explaining it to little [player name] why, and if they have been dropped and they’re right on the edge...before we announced the team to anybody, [head coach name] and I, or whoever it is, will take them aside and explain why, what’s happened, before we announce it.

Usually after the team had been announced (but sometimes before), if it were an important game coaches would also tell the substitutes that they might not play. For an unimportant game substitutes would be informed that they would play.

*5.3.1.2.7: Team announcement.*

Once all the relevant players had been spoken to (if necessary), the final stage of the team selection process was to announce the team to all the players at training, as the backs coach explained “We don’t tend to announce the team until at least part of the way through training on a Thursday night.”

***5.3.1.3: Power relationships among coaches.***

Presented below are results pertaining to the power relationships among coaches that affected selection decisions (i.e., dominance-submission), aim (c) of this study (i.e., investigate if the relationships among the coaching team impact team selection decisions).

#### 5.3.1.3.1: *Dominance.*

According to the head coach he made the selection decisions, “At the end of the day the others will give me their input but I’m the one who picks it.” This was confirmed by the backs coach, who stated that the head coach made the selection decisions, “Ultimately [head coach name], it was down to [head coach name] to take the final decision.” The backs coach went on to say that the head coach also made broader decisions that dictated selection, “It’s not always about picking the best side and I think [head coach name] manages that quite well.” The periphery coach, however, did not think this. The periphery coach recalled that the head coach would suggest an initial team and then the other coaches would negotiate who they wanted to select, “[head coach name] would make...a rough call on what he wants where, and then...you’d have a meeting with everybody together, and everybody would have their input...so it’s all very much a matter of negotiation.” Furthermore, the head coach himself stated that he did not select the backs, something he left to the backs coach. In a broader sense, too, the head coach did not make all the decisions. When selecting a player for the player of the year award, the forwards coach thought the player put forward (in this example, by the assistant coach) was not the correct choice and argued until he made the decisions himself.

When we got to player of the year...we knew [player name] had players’ player, so [assistant coach name] is like being this nice, generous bloke saying “well if [player name]’s got that, then somebody else should get coaches’ player” and I said “well that’s bullshit...my opinion is that if you’re the best player, you get it”...so I argued that point fairly forcibly and the others back me up.

There were several occasions when a coach would overrule another (or more than one) coach when it came to selection decisions. The head coach, for example, claimed he had to overrule the other coaches on a couple of occasions during the season. This included a time

when the head coach was able to overrule the forwards coach (after the head coach was being overruled by the forwards coach) on a selection by using the objective performance statistics.

[Forwards coach name] would champion him because he was one of his original lads, whereas I would be “I’m not too sure” and I’d always have a back-up, and then your analysis came in...I just went [tapping noise] “there you go.”

The head coach, however, did recall times when the backs coach and both the backs coach and the forwards coach together overruled him, he recalled the latter situation “I wanted to change [player name] a lot earlier, but [backs coach name] and [forwards coach name] were both ‘no let’s keep going’ ‘oh OK’ so I sort of listened to them.” The backs coach also remembered himself and the forwards coach overruling the head coach, ““in the end I just probably just wanted to pick you, [forwards coach name] did’ and [head coach name] was standing there and I said ‘he didn’t wanna pick you though’”. The forwards coach also claimed he overruled the assistant coach on a selection decision.

[Assistant coach name] is saying “oh you’ve gotta play [player name]” ...I said “who’s the best player we’ve got...when he’s fit, who’s the best player? Who’s the captain of the side?” And he said “well [player name] is” I said “[player name] has to play” and [player name] played.

There were also times where selection for the adult second team (which was selected by the assistant coach) overruled selection for the colts, as the assistant coach explained “I had first dibs for the 2s, so that’s sometimes caused a little bit of conflict, sometimes, but nine times out of ten people worked around it.”

The assistant coach also described a time when he and the head coach took control over the team that the forwards coach and backs coach had previously been in control of.

Obviously, they come normally with a squad, so pre-season we would then analyse everyone’s position, and then we’d come in to say, to say for instance A, B, C, D, E,

F, G, are normally picked as the first 15, we might go “right A, X, Y, Z, are now in there.”

According to the forwards coach, however, he controlled the team in general, “You see it a lot of the sessions actually that, if I was here then [head coach name] would let me take [it].” Both the assistant coach and periphery coach also thought this was the case. Yet while the forwards coach may have been in control, the assistant coach indicated that he could control the forwards coach, “I can control him, where I’ll say ‘come on [forwards coach name] give it a rest’, or the boys will come up to me and say something and then I’ll go ‘[forwards coach name], come on’”.

The forwards coach claimed that he and the backs coach had an ownership of the under-18 age group within the colts team, “Though [player name]’s age group coming up to colts, there’s no way [backs coach] and I wanted to stop and just hand over to [head coach name].” The assistant coach also stated that the under-18 age group were the forwards coach’s team, “Then also his team, I wanna say his team because the team he brought into the colts.”

There was one example of the forwards coach undermining the head coach on selection. The forwards coach did not agree with how the head coach wanted to select the team so went to the club’s director of rugby to complain. The director of rugby agreed with the forwards coach and instructed the head coach to select the team in a different way.

[Head coach name] said the year before “...the 18s will be the A team and the 17s will be the B team” I said “that’s bollocks, absolute bollocks” so I went to see [director of rugby name] and I said...“you need to have a say here as DOR on what’s happening” and he said “no, if 15 of the 17s are the best players, they will play as the A team” which is how it should be in my opinion, so [head coach name] took that.

There were times when coaches referred to one of two sub-teams within the coaching team. The sub-teams were made up of the head coach and assistant coach as one pair and the forwards coach and backs coach as the other. The backs coach explained that the reason there were sub-teams was the relationships the forwards coach and backs coach had with the under-18 age group.

Where it's different is [forwards coach name] and I know the under-18 group really well, we've known them for years and I'm sure we're somewhat swayed by what they did at under-15 and under-16, whereas [head coach name] hasn't seen any of them, you know whereas we didn't know the under-17 group until this year...[head coach name] and [assistant coach name] are clean on everyone.

The backs coach thought the sub-teams were good as it meant the sub-team who were unfamiliar with the under-18 age group (the head coach and assistant coach) did not have any pre-conceptions, "I think it's good that [assistant coach] and [head coach name] are coming in with no pre-conceptions."

#### *5.3.1.3.2: Submission.*

The periphery coach believed that the head coach totally relied on the forwards coach (and to a lesser extent the assistant coach) when it came to selection decisions. The periphery coach thought the head coach did not take input (or enough input) from the other coaches and instead relied on what the forwards coach (and the assistant coach) said on selection decisions.

He should have had greater input from the pool of coaches, to...help him out, and then a lot of weight was going on what [forwards coach name] or, maybe [assistant coach name] was saying on...selection, and...[head coach name] would...go with what [the forwards coach] thought.

#### **5.3.1.4: Word frequency analysis.**

A word frequency analysis (e.g., Solomon & Rhea, 2008; Yamauchi et al., 2011) investigated the level of similarity among the coaching team (regarding cues) and the extensiveness (Krueger et al., 2001) of the coaches' responses (i.e., how many coaches contributed to each cue) to examine how important coaches felt each category was.

Table 36 shows how many common selection cues the coaching team stated during their interviews. The numbers represent how many of the same selection cues the coaches on the top row stated as the coaches in the left-hand column. The head coach and backs coach reported the same cues more often than any other pair of coaches (with 30 cues), while the forwards coach and the periphery coach reported the least (6 cues).

The level of similarity among the coaching team has been displayed as a percentage of each coach's total cues in Table 37. The results suggest that roughly a third (32.35%) of the information coaches claimed they used to make selection decisions was the same. For over two thirds of the information reportedly used in selection decisions (67.65%), therefore, coaches were not stating the same thing so were relying on their own cues in selection decisions.

There were only two cues that every coach stated they used in selection decisions (i.e., general game performance and best player). Furthermore, most of the cues coaches reportedly used in selection decisions were not repeated by another coach (see Table 37). In fact, the percentage of cues one coach stated (58.62%) outweighed the percentage of cues that two or more coaches stated (41.38%).

Table 36

*The total number of selection cues the coaching team stated and the number of cues and the percentage of commonality among the coaching team*

	Total cues	Head coach	Assistant coach	Forwards coach	Backs coach	Periphery coach	Average
Head coach	71	-	19 (26.76%)	19 (26.76%)	30 (42.25%)	14 (19.72%)	20.50 (28.87%)
Assistant coach	43	19 (44.19%)	-	18 (41.86%)	14 (32.56%)	9 (20.93%)	15.00 (34.89%)
Forwards coach	48	19 (39.58%)	18 (37.50%)	-	11 (22.92%)	6 (12.50%)	13.50 (28.13%)
Backs coach	52	30 (57.69%)	14 (26.92%)	11 (21.15%)	-	19 (36.54%)	18.50 (35.58%)
Periphery coach	35	14 (40.00%)	9 (25.71%)	6 (17.14%)	19 (54.29%)	-	12.00 (34.29%)
							15.90 (32.35%)

Table 37

*The number of coaches who stated each cue*

Number of coaches who stated cue	Total number of cues
5	2 1.38%
4	6 4.14%
3	20 13.79%
2	32 22.07%
1	85 58.62%
TOTAL	145

### **5.3.2: Direct observations (visual and audio).**

Following the results from the semi-structured interviews outlined above, presented below are the results from the analysis of data collected from directly observing the head coach talking to himself, the coaching team, players, and parents, across five training sessions (only data obtained from the coaching team were analysed, not data directly from players or parents). Results relating to cues are presented in four categories (i.e., player cues, coach cues, cues from other sources, and situational cues; for a full list of cues, see Tables 53 to 71). A word frequency analysis and descriptive statistics (for the head coach) are then presented.

#### **5.3.2.1: Cues.**

Presented below are the cues (i.e., player cues, coach cues, cues from other sources, and situational cues) revealed from direct visual and audio observations of the head coach

during the five training sessions, aim (d) of this study (i.e., compare and examine the differences [if any] in the selection cues the head coach stated in his [post-season] interview with those he discussed during training).

*5.3.2.1.1: Player cues.*

*5.3.2.1.1.1: Appearance cues.*

The periphery coach drew upon a player's size (i.e., their height, weight, or a combination of the two) when discussing a selection decision, "[player name]'s getting a little bit big for [a position]." Age was a cue the head coach and forwards coach reportedly used to select players when, for example, it was decided that a team of under-17 players (and some under-18s) would be selected for an upcoming game.

Table 38

*Number of coaches who stated appearance cues, and the number of training sessions mentioned in, included in the player cues category*

Appearance cues	Number of coaches who stated cue	Number of training sessions cue mentioned in
Physical appearance		
Size	1	1
Age		
Under 18	2	4
Under 17	1	1
Under 16	1	1

*5.3.2.1.1.2: Psychological cues.*

Three coaches reportedly used psychological cues when making selection decisions. The forwards coach, for example, told his players that he used their attitude as a selection cue. Furthermore, the periphery coach liked a player because he was "willing" while the head coach wanted to know a player was "confident." The head coach also looked favourably towards a player who was a "nice lad" and unfavourably towards those deemed to be "bad



elements,” “If there is bad elements in the fucking side and we see them, bad elements won’t be fucking there too long.”

Table 39

*Number of coaches who stated psychological cues, and the number of training sessions mentioned in, included in the player cues category*

Psychological cues	Number of coaches who stated cue	Number of training sessions cue mentioned in
Attitude		
Attitude	1	1
Confidence		
Confidence	1	1
Character		
Good lad	1	1
Willing	1	1
Bad elements	1	1

#### *5.3.2.1.1.3: Ability cues.*

When making selection decisions, some coaches would take into consideration how “good” a player was. This may be a general description of a player’s ability (e.g., “he’s a fucking great player”) or more positionally specific (e.g., “[player name] is a good prop”). The forwards coach, however, simply wanted to select the best players, he stated “We’ve got to have our best players on the pitch.”

Table 40

*Number of coaches who stated ability cues, and the number of training sessions mentioned in, included in the player cues category*

Ability cues	Number of coaches who stated cue	Number of training sessions cue mentioned in
Strongest team	1	2
Best player	2	2
Reputation	1	1
Ability	3	3
Solid	2	1
Very good	2	4
Positional ability	2	2
First choice	1	1
What player offers	1	1

#### *5.3.2.1.1.4: Performance cues.*

Every coach reportedly used a variety of performance cues to inform their selection decisions. A player's footwork, speed, and strength all influenced some coaches' selection decisions. The head coach, for example, focused on a player's aerobic fitness. Almost all coaches also cited several general rugby skills. Handling, for example, impacted one player's selection, as the assistant coach explained "It was his hands...his hands let him down." Another player was told by the assistant coach that he needed to improve his ball carrying skills and his ability on the floor with regards to selection. Every coach selected players because of the position they play, especially when it came to selecting substitutes, the head coach indicated "[player name] covers front row, second row...[player name] covers back row...[player name] covers scrum half." This may be because these players had to perform a certain skill specific to their position (e.g., "he lifts done he? [Player name] can lift"). In some cases, however, not being able to perform skills specific to their position went against players, as the backs coach explained "I'm not playing [player name] at full-back, this

kicking thing (inaudible).” Other players were selected for the style of rugby they play (e.g., “physical” players).

How a player generally performed in training affected some selection decisions, as the head coach stated “Let’s see how he goes, let’s see how it goes, put [player name] in to start with and we’ll see how it goes.” More specifically, for one player to be selected the head coach had to see him “get some hits” in training. A player’s general game performance also influenced selection decisions. When discussing selection decisions, almost every coach reportedly used a player’s general game performance as a selection cue, as the forwards coach explained “On Sunday he was fucking awesome out there.” A player’s positional game performance also influenced the backs coach’s selection decision, “I’ve seen [player name] play on the wing.” Two coaches recalled specific cues about players performances when making selection decisions. For example, the head coach remembered a player’s tackling and another player’s lack of contribution in open play, while the assistant coach recalled a player’s lack of speed. One player’s historical game performance influenced two coaches’ selection decisions. The head coach did not want to select this player because he had only played well once in two years whereas the backs coach wanted to select the player for the same reason (i.e., he had played well in the past). These coaches also referred to how this player had been recently performing for another team in selection decisions, for example, the backs coach said “Hear you’ve been playing great at [other team name].”

Table 41

*Number of coaches who stated performance cues, and the number of training sessions mentioned in, included in the player cues category*

Performance cues	Number of coaches who stated cue	Number of training sessions cue mentioned in	Performance cues	Number of coaches who stated cue	Number of training sessions cue mentioned in
Gross motor skills			Training performance		
Speed	3	1	General training performance	2	3
Footwork	1	1	Hits in training	1	1
Strong	1	1	Training	1	1
Aerobic fitness			Objective game performance		
Aerobic fitness	1	3	Performance statistics	1	1
General rugby skills			Game performance		
Handling	2	1	Decision making	1	1
Spatial awareness	1	1	Carries	1	1
Defence	1	1	General game performance	4	4
Ball carrier	1	1	Positional game performance	1	1
Basic skills	1	1	Tackling in game	1	1
Reading of the game	1	1	Passing in game	1	1
Ability on the floor	1	1	Speed in game	1	1
Position specific skills			Scrum in game	1	1
Position	5	5	No contribution in open play	1	2
Kicking	3	3	How player got injured in game	1	1
Scrum	1	2	Historical game performance		
Lifting	1	1	Historical game performance	2	1
Returning	1	1	Another team performance		
Catching high ball	1	1	Another team performance	2	1
Position cover	2	3	Player's style of rugby		
			Physical	1	1
			Takes the bosh	1	1
			Finishes it off	1	1

#### 5.3.2.1.1.5: *Communication cues.*

The head coach sought input from the players themselves to aid selection decisions (the backs coach also recalled doing this once). Players, for example, were asked which positions they would like to play (e.g., “I’ll let you and [player name] sort out inside [centre] and out[side centre]”), whether they were happy playing in an unfamiliar position (“can I put you down as front row cover?”), or whether they were happy starting a game (“[player name], I may have to start you Sunday”). The head coach also highlighted a player talking during a training session, “Who can you hear out there? [Player name].”

Table 42

*Number of coaches who stated communication cues, and the number of training sessions mentioned in, included in the player cues category*

Behaviour cues	Number of coaches who stated cue	Number of training sessions cue mentioned in
Communication		
Player input	2	4
Communication in training		
Talking in training	1	1

#### 5.3.2.1.1.6: *Personal cues.*

Where a player lived influenced the head coach and backs coach when it came to selection decisions, for example, the backs coach asked “...does anyone live up near there?” The school a player attended and the exams they had to revise for also affected selection decisions.

Table 43

*Number of coaches who stated personal cues, and the number of training sessions mentioned in, included in the player cues category*

Personal cues	Number of coaches who stated cue	Number of training sessions cue mentioned in
School		
School	2	1
Exams	1	1
Where player lives		
Where player lives	2	1

#### *5.3.2.1.1.7: Situational cues.*

Three coaches outlined that injuries and availabilities affected their selection decisions. The head coach in particular sought out this information from his players. In all cases, though, this information would determine a selection decision, as the forwards coach explained “We’re assuming if [player name]’s injured...he can’t play.” Some selection decisions seemed to completely rely on whether the player attended training, as the forwards coach stated “...if he doesn’t get here that’s our decision made anyway.” Furthermore, for one player the fact that he had played games went in his favour in selection decisions for the head coach, “He’s been playing when we’ve asked him to play.” The number of games a player had played also influenced selection decisions. The time a player spent as a substitute in the previous game or if they did not play at all influenced selection decisions too. At times, players not selected for an upcoming game meant they were selected for the game after that, as the head coach indicated “For those that are not in it, you know, heads up, keep going, you’ve got a game next [weekend].” A player being selected for the adults first team, how long they had been at the club, how experienced they were, and whether they were playing for another team also affected selection. Furthermore, one player was not selected for one

game because he was banned while another was not considered for selection until he had paid his club membership subscription fee.

Table 44

*Number of coaches who stated situational cues, and the number of training sessions mentioned in, included in the player cues category*

Situational cues	Number of coaches who stated cue	Number of training sessions cue mentioned in
Availability		
Fit	2	1
Injured	3	5
Availability	1	5
Training		
Training attendance	3	3
Game		
Game attendance	1	1
Player's playing history		
Number of games played	1	2
Didn't play last week	1	1
Time spent as a substitute	1	1
Number of games played in the first team	1	1
Years at the club	1	1
Experience	1	1
Another team		
Another team	1	2
Selection for upcoming game		
Not selected for upcoming game	2	2
Rules		
Ban	1	1
Membership subscription		
Membership subscription	1	1

#### *5.3.2.1.2: Coach cues.*

The head coach liking a player seemed to affect that player's selection, "I do [like you], you know I do." Sometimes, however, a player was selected simply because coaches wanted to. The head coach's winning mentality may have influenced his selection decisions, along with what he thought his players wanted and his team needs. Moreover, how the head coach perceived a player's position and happiness affected his selection decisions. The head

coach also selected a player based on his prior knowledge of that player, “I know he ain’t gonna give me shit.”

Table 45

*Number of coaches who stated coach cues and the number of training sessions mentioned in*

Coach cues	Number of coaches who stated cue	Number of training sessions cue mentioned in
Coach-player relationship		
Coach-player relationship	1	1
Desires		
Head coach	3	2
Goals		
Coach’s winning mentality	1	1
What they want	1	1
What the team needs	1	1
Perception of players		
Coach perception of position	1	1
Perceived player happiness	1	1
Knowledge		
Preconceived ideas	1	1

#### *5.3.2.1.3: Cues from other sources.*

##### *5.3.2.1.3.1: Other players.*

When coaches were deciding whether to select a player, the other players in the team would influence this decision. Coaches, for example, would compare players’ general game performances or rank players. The head coach would also combine players when selecting, “We can put...[player name] in at hooker...and still have [player name] on the back row throwing.” The backs coach suggested that who was selected to play with a specific player would determine what position he played, “If [player name] plays [player name] will go inside, if [player name] plays [player name] will be outside.” The head coach also selected a player simply because a different player was not available. The likelihood of a player getting injured during a game and a player’s aerobic fitness levels also influenced the forwards coach’s selection decisions.



Table 46

*Number of coaches who stated other players cues, and the number of training sessions mentioned in, included in the other sources category*

Other players	Number of coaches who stated cue	Number of training sessions cue mentioned in
Other players	1	2
Comparison to other players		
Performance comparison to another player	4	2
Ranking	1	1
Player combinations		
Combinations	1	3
Other player selections		
Other players	1	1
Other player's injury		
Other player's injury	2	1
Other player's availability		
Other player's availability	1	1
Other player's aerobic fitness		
Other player's aerobic fitness	1	1

#### *5.3.2.1.3.2: Team.*

What the team wanted to achieve (or what the head coach thought the team wanted to achieve) influenced selection decisions. How the team historically performed, and their past achievements, also affected selection decisions. The impact a selection would have on team performance also influenced selection decisions, as the forwards coach explained “The difference is now with this squad, I could take seven off that bench and drop seven into that starting team and it would...hardly make a bloody difference.” Furthermore, the number of players in the team and in a specific position influenced the head coach's selection decisions.

Table 47

*Number of coaches who stated team cues, and the number of training sessions mentioned in, included in the other sources category*

Team	Number of coaches who stated cue	Number of training sessions cue mentioned in
Team performance		
Historical team performance	1	1
Past achievements		
Past achievements	1	1
Impact on team performance		
Impact on team performance	1	1
Team goals		
What the team wants to achieve	1	1
Number in a position		
Number in a position	1	1
Number of players		
Number of players	1	1

#### *5.3.2.1.3.3: Other coaches.*

The forwards coach suggested that selection decisions were made among the coaches, “We pick the team between us.” Yet there were occasions where this was not the case. At times, most coaches (not the head coach) would make the selection decisions themselves. These same coaches, however, would also offer their input into the other selection decisions (rather than making the decisions themselves), for example the forwards coach stated “I wouldn’t take [player name] on the bench” Whether the assistant coach or forwards coach liked a player may have also affected selection decisions, the assistant coach explained “He don’t like [player name] does he? [Forwards coach name].”

Table 48

*Number of coaches who stated other coaches cues, and the number of training sessions mentioned in, included in the other sources category*

Other coaches	Number of coaches who stated cue	Number of training sessions cue mentioned in
<b>All coaches</b>		
All coaches	2	1
All coach input	2	2
<b>Assistant coach</b>		
Assistant coach	1	1
Assistant coach input	2	2
Assistant coach-player relationship	1	1
<b>Forwards coach</b>		
Forwards coach	2	3
Forwards coach input	2	4
Forwards coach-player relationship	1	1
Forwards coach perception of position	1	1
<b>Backs coach</b>		
Backs coach	3	3
Backs coach input	2	3

#### *5.3.2.1.3.4: Other sources.*

The club's physiotherapist influenced one selection decision, as the head coach recalled "[physiotherapist name] said 'no'". The players' parents may have also impacted selection decisions.

Table 49

*Number of coaches who stated other sources cues, and the number of training sessions mentioned in, included in the other sources category*

Other sources	Number of coaches who stated cue	Number of training sessions cue mentioned in
<b>Physio</b>		
Physio input	1	1
<b>Parent</b>		
Parent input	1	2

#### 5.3.2.1.4: *Situational cues.*

Team selection decisions were impacted by the nature of the forthcoming game. Under-17s cup games, for example, restricted selection decisions to the under-17s players. Furthermore, for one game, coaches selected every available under-18 players because it was their last game. Coaches seemed to refer to important games by the type of game (e.g., “we’ve got a big league game on Sunday”) but would almost always refer to the opposition (rather than the game type) in unimportant games (e.g., “next week we got [opposition team name]”). Coaches were forced not to select anyone in one case, however, as the opposition cancelled the game. The number of choices coaches had influenced selection decisions (e.g., between one player or two). The adult team, rules, and what coaches normally do or have done in the past also influenced coaches’ selection decisions.

Table 50

*Number of coaches who stated situational cues, and the number of training sessions mentioned in, included in the situational cues category*

Situational cues	Number of coaches who stated cue	Number of training sessions cue mentioned in
Upcoming game		
B game	1	1
[Opposition team name] game	1	1
League game	2	3
Cup game	2	1
Under 17s cup game	1	3
Opposition		
Opposition	1	2
Opposition cancelled	1	1
Number of choices		
No choice	2	2
Number of choices	1	1
Rules		
Rules	2	3
Norm		
What we do	2	2
Adult team		
Adult team	1	2

### **5.3.2.2: Word frequency analysis.**

A word frequency analysis (e.g., Solomon & Rhea, 2008; Yamauchi et al., 2011) determined whether the information the head coach claimed he used to make selection decisions in his (post-season) interview was different from what he stated in training sessions (across the season). As the data collected during observations focused on the head coach (the microphone was attached to the head coach's jacket), only interview and audio observation data from the head coach were used in the word frequency analysis.

Table 51 shows the number of themes, sub-themes, and cues in each category for the interview and observations, which remained relatively similar. This would suggest the head coach correctly identified in the interview what he stated across training sessions with regards to the cues that informed his selection decisions. The total number of themes, sub-themes, and cues from the interview to the observations did, however, increase. Additionally, when the number of themes, sub-themes, and cues for each category are taken as a percentage of the total number of themes, sub-themes, and cues, a different pattern emerges (see Table 52).

The information in Table 52 suggests that the head coach thought, based on the interview data, he relied on player cues for most of his selection decisions. According to the observation data, however, the head coach did not use player cues as much as he stated, instead relying less on player cues and more on coach cues, cues from other sources, and situational cues. Furthermore, somewhat more revealing is the number of training sessions each cue was mentioned in. The information in Table 53 suggests that the head coach may have been using cues to select for each upcoming game separately and not part of a long-term selection strategy. This is demonstrated by 70.00% of the total number of cues stated during training sessions being mentioned in only one training session. The only cues to be stated across all training sessions were a player's position and availability.

Table 51

*The number of themes, sub-themes, and cues from the interview with, and observations of, the head coach*

Categories	Interview			Observations			Comparison		
	Themes	Sub-themes	Cues	Themes	Sub-themes	Cues	Themes	Sub-themes	Cues
Player cues	7	20	51	7	24	53	-	+4	+2
Coach cues	1	-	3	5	-	8	+4	-	+5
Cues from other sources	3	4	8	4	11	17	+1	+7	+9
Situational cues	2	2	5	6	-	12	+4	-2	+7
TOTAL	13	26	67	22	35	90	+9	+9	+23

Table 52

*A comparison of the percentage of the total number of themes, sub-themes, and cues from the interview with, and observations of, the head coach*

Categories	Interview			Observations			Comparison		
	Themes	Sub-themes	Cues	Themes	Sub-themes	Cues	Themes	Sub-themes	Cues
Player cues	53.85%	76.93%	76.12%	31.82%	68.57%	58.89%	-22.03%	-8.36%	-17.23%
Coach cues	7.69%	-	4.48%	22.73%	-	8.89%	+15.04%	-	+4.41%
Cues from other sources	23.08%	15.38%	11.94%	18.18%	31.43%	18.89%	-4.90%	+16.05%	+6.95%
Situational cues	15.38%	7.69%	7.46%	27.27%	-	13.33%	+11.89%	-7.69%	+5.87%

Table 53

*The number (and percentage of the total number) of cues mentioned by the head coach across training sessions*

Number of training sessions	Cues	
5	2	2.22%
4	3	3.33%
3	8	8.89%
2	14	15.56%
1	63	70.00%
TOTAL	90	

### **5.3.2.3: Descriptive statistics.**

Descriptive statistics (e.g., LeCouteur & Feo, 2011) provide an overview of how the head coach spent his time across all five training sessions (training sessions lasted between 54 and 84 minutes;  $M=72.79$ ,  $SD=11.07$ ; aim [e] of this study, i.e., to investigate how the head coach spends his time during training). A total of 12 actions emerged from the data analysis (see Table 54), with the head coach spending most of his time talking to others (mainly the other coaches but also players, parents, and unknown persons) while observing (not coaching) training. The head coach spent more time doing nothing (e.g., walking around, standing, collecting balls and cones, and using his phone) than talking to individual players.

Table 55 shows the average time the head coach spent on each action across training sessions. Again, the head coach spent most of his time speaking to others while observing training. On average, however, the head coach spent more time doing nothing than talking to players (both individually and as a group).

The head coach, on average, spent less than nine seconds on each interaction with individual players (see Table 56). Taken together with the average total time spent talking to individual players, this suggests the head coach had frequent but short interactions with his players across training sessions. These results show the head coach spent most of his time talking to others (mainly the other coaches) while observing training, both as a total amount

of time and average interaction length, and a remarkably small amount of time talking to individual players.

Table 54

*The time spent (and the percentage of the total) on each action by the head coach across all five training sessions*

Action	Time	Percentage of total
Talking to others while observing training	01:06.16	23.50%
Observing training and coaching	00:57.23	20.35%
Talking to other coaches	00:44.06	15.64%
Talking to players (multiple)	00:26.05	9.25%
Listening to others talk	00:25.06	8.90%
Does nothing	00:23.45	8.42%
Talking to player (individual)	00:22.58	8.15%
Talking to coaches and players together	00:09.05	3.22%
Talking to researcher	00:05.06	1.81%
Talking to unknown person and coaches	00:01.00	0.35%
Talking to unknown person	00:00.57	0.34%
Talking to unknown person and players	00:00.11	0.07%
TOTAL	04:41.58	

Table 55

*The average time spent on each action by the head coach (across all five training sessions)*

Action	Average time
Talking to others while observing training	00:13.15
Observing training and coaching	00:11.29
Does nothing	00:09.45
Talking to player (individual)	00:09.36
Talking to other coaches	00:08.49
Talking to players (multiple)	00:05.13
Listening to others talk	00:05.01
Talking to coaches and players together	00:01.49
Talking to researcher	00:01.42
Talking to unknown person and coaches	00:01.00
Talking to unknown person	00:00.19
Talking to unknown person and players	00:00.11
TOTAL	01:08.09



Table 56

*The average interaction length (in seconds) of each action for the head coach across all five training sessions*

Action	Average interaction (in seconds)
Talking to researcher	51.00
Talking to others while observing training	39.56
Listening to others talk	20.66
Observing training and coaching	20.05
Talking to unknown person and coaches	15.00
Talking to other coaches	14.60
Talking to players (multiple)	13.29
Talking to coaches and players together	12.74
Talking to unknown person and players	11.00
Talking to player (individual)	8.97
Does nothing	6.20
Talking to unknown person	4.81

#### **5.4: Discussion**

The primary aims of this case study were to (a) examine which (and how many) cues rugby union coaches, working within the same coaching team, use to make team selection decisions, (b) discover the processes coaches go through when making selection decisions, and (c) investigate if the relationships among the coaching team impact team selection decisions. Coaches drew upon a large number and wide variety of player cues, coach cues, cues from other sources, and situational cues to make team selection decisions. Furthermore, the selection process was dictated by how important the upcoming game was perceived to be (i.e., important or unimportant), which led to a “the best or the rest” selection strategy. Power (dominance-submission) also played a role within team selection decisions as it impacted the relationships among the coaching team.

The secondary aims of this case study were to (d) compare and examine the differences (if any) in the selection cues the head coach stated in his (post-season) interview with those he discussed during training and (e) investigate how the head coach spent his time during training. Results revealed that the head coach discussed some selection cues with

others in training (e.g., other coaches, players, and parents) but not all and that most of the cues were only discussed in one training session (only two cues were discussed in all five training sessions). The head coach also spent most of his time observing training and more time doing nothing than talking to his players.

#### **5.4.1: Semi-structured interviews.**

Presented below is a discussion based on the results gained from the semi-structured interviews (i.e., cues, selection processes, power relationships among the coaching team, and the word frequency analysis) with the coaching team.

##### **5.4.1.1: Cues.**

Coaches reported that they mostly relied on player cues to make team selection decisions, which has been previously reported (e.g., see Chapter 4, p. 51; Ahmed et al., 2013; Iyer & Sharda, 2009; Johansson & Fahlén, 2017). Furthermore, the breadth and detail of the player cues were like that of the player cues reported by the coaches from the previous study (see 4.3.1: Cues, p. 58). Coaches in the current study reportedly used a number of appearance, psychological (similar as reported in Chapter 4, it is important to note that it was beyond the scope of this study to clarify shared meaning behind psychological cues, so these results should be interpreted with this in mind), ability, performance, behaviour, personal, management, and situational cues to make selection decisions.

Coaches reported using a player's size as a selection cue, as did the coaches from the previous study (see 4.3.1.1.1: Appearance cues, p. 58). Size is considered a desirable trait in rugby union (Howard et al., 2016) due to the high physical demands of the sport (Darrall-Jones et al., 2015). Again, like coaches in Chapter 4, coaches from the current study did not report taking any anthropometric measurements of their players. This means that these coaches may have also been relying on their "sight" (Fiander et al., 2013; Johansson & Fahlén, 2017) of a player's size, rather than objective measurements. The periphery coach

provided detail for this when he suggested that coaches chose to select bigger players over smaller players with better skills. This is a phenomenon documented in modern rugby union whereby it has become increasingly difficult for players with the prerequisite skills to successfully compete if they do not also have the necessary physical characteristics (Lombard et al., 2015). It is thought that this trend may be due to changes in the rules (e.g., greater policing of the breakdown; Duthie et al., 2003) and may be reinforced by the fact that teams with bigger players are more successful at Rugby World Cups (Sedeaud et al., 2014). Coaches in the current study, then, were adhering (consciously or unconsciously) to a scientifically documented trend within rugby union. This trend, however, can cause issues for players at the colts age group (i.e., under-17s and under-18s). The physical mismatch between players is a possible contribution to (sometimes catastrophic) injuries among teenage rugby union players (Nutton et al., 2012). As coaches were basing their selections on size, the players (and the opposing players) may have been exposed to a higher risk of injury. Furthermore, if coaches highlight the importance of size by only selecting those who are bigger, longer term players may begin to display maladaptive behaviours (e.g., the use of illegal muscle-building substances; Till, Jones, McKenna, Whitaker, & Backhouse, 2016) to modify their body sizes.

It has been previously reported that coaches, rather than selecting the best players, select the players who work best together (Johansson & Fahlén, 2017). Every coach in the current study, however, echoed coaches from the previous study (see 4.3.1.1.3: Ability cues, p. 61) when they stated that they simply selected the best players (for the important games). Again, like the coaches from the previous study (see 4.4.1: Content of the cues, p. 86), the coaches in the current study seemed to also follow a 'take-the-first' (TTF; Johnson & Raab, 2003) decision strategy whereby they were selecting the first player that came to mind because they have been repeatedly chosen as the best player in the past. Whilst there are

systems in sport that attempt to identify the best players (e.g., the National Football League draft: Boulier, Stekler, Coburn, & Rankins, 2010), it is unclear how the players from the current study became to be thought of by the coaches as the best. Some researchers seemed to have defined being the best in sport as those who win the most (e.g., Radicchi, 2011), yet two coaches in the current study described those being best as having the most ability. Whether coaches viewed ability from an incremental theory (i.e., an acquirable skill that is improvable through practice and effort; Mascret, Falconetti, & Cury, 2016) or an entity theory (i.e., a fixed gift or talent that is not easily modified by practice; Mascret et al., 2016), the belief that being the best means having the most ability may have something to do with the fact that rugby union is a team sport. In rugby union, the team, rather than individuals, win or lose (or draw). Coaches, therefore, cannot judge who the best players are based on who wins because individuals in rugby union do not win, so they base their judgments on a player's ability instead (although this is speculative notion that requires further research). Additionally, the achievement goal theory (AGT; Nicholls, 1989) may provide a framework to understand how coaches measure ability, and therefore who is the best, in rugby union. According the AGT, the motivational climate created by coaches can be either task-involving, where individuals are evaluated on personal development, or ego-involving, which promotes social comparison between individuals (Ames, 1992; Jaakkola, Ntoumanis, & Liukkonen, 2016). It is not clear whether coaches from the current study were assessing a player's ability by comparing them against themselves or each other (or against something else), but AGT offers a platform for future researchers to investigate this notion.

Coaches from the current study, similar to those in the previous study (see 4.3.1.1.4: Performance cues, p. 62) and in other studies (e.g., Johansson & Fahlén, 2017), reportedly relied upon performance cues more than any other cues to make team selection decisions. Considering that rugby union players require, among other qualities, speed, strength, power,

aerobic capacity (Duthie, 2006), and common and unique skills (Greenwood, 1997; James et al., 2005), it is not surprising that coaches use these cues in their selection decisions. The mastery of skills is even seen by some as a prerequisite for selection (Johansson & Fahlén, 2017; Oorschot et al., 2017). Coaches had access to, and reported using, objective performance statistics. The head coach even suggested that he exclusively selected players using the objective performance statistics for the league and cup games (although, according to the head coach, this may have occurred only three and four times). Performance statistics are often used to evaluate and monitor team and individual performances (Vaz, Van Rooyen, & Sampaio, 2010). In some cases, however, coaches were using these statistics to prove that a player should have been selected and to confirm that a player should not be selected in the future after having doubts about their selection in the first place. In both cases, coaches may have been seeking information from the objective performance statistics that supported their previously held beliefs, expectations, or desired outcomes (i.e., a confirmation bias; Jonas, Schulz-Hardt, Frey, & Thelen, 2001). These biased search processes could have led to the maintenance of the coaches' positions (i.e., a player should have been selected or a player should not be selected again), even if the objective performance statistics did not justify their positions (Johnston, 1996). Furthermore, by justifying or making selection decisions on a player's objective performance statistics, coaches were demonstrating that they used cues that arose from one player, rather than comparing players with alternative information (i.e., objective performance statistics from different players). Coaches, therefore, may have been ignoring the fact that some relevant information was missing from their selection decisions (Garcia-Retamero & Rieskamp, 2009).

There were also disagreements as to what were good and bad performances, according to the objective performance statistics. This phenomenon has been previously reported (e.g., Black & Holt, 2009) when it was discovered that coaches from the same club

are inconsistent when assessing their athletes. In the current study, when presented with the same 50% successful tackle rate (i.e., half of attempted tackle were made, the other half were missed) the head coach claimed it was “shocking,” whereas the backs coach thought it was acceptable. It has been noted that when provided with the same information, individuals can draw different conclusions (Macquet, 2013) because they use information selectively based on their beliefs and preferences (Korte, 2003). Rather than seeking confirmatory information (i.e., confirmation bias; Jonas et al., 2001), coaches may have also been selecting (not necessarily consciously) specific objective performance cues that supported or preserved their beliefs (March, 1999; March & Simon, 1993). The head coach also described using the objective performance statistics to infer how a player performed in other areas (i.e., reasoning; Blanchette & Richards, 2010). If a winger had a low number of carries, for example, the head coach inferred that they did not do much in the game. It was also concluded that a forward took the ball into contact too much if they made a low number of passes. In these cases, the head coach seemed to be generating new information (Glöckner & Betsch, 2012) by inferring how these players performed based on the available objective performance statistics (Coletti, Scozzafava, & Vantaggi, 2014; Zeithamova, Schlichting, & Preston, 2012). Again, however, prior beliefs can have an impact on how performance information is interpreted (Baekgaard & Serritzlew, 2016). By making these inferences, therefore, the head coach may have revealed some of his beliefs about players performances (i.e., wingers do a lot during games if they carry often and forwards carry enough if they make many passes). The objective performance statistics then confirmed these beliefs and led to the inference that the winger did not do very much in the game and the forward took the ball into contact too much.

Not every coach stated they used the objective performance statistics in selection decisions, yet every coach indicated they based their selection decisions on a player’s general

game performance. Coaches from a previous study (e.g., Johansson & Fahlén, 2017) also stated that their assessments of athletes' performances were of significant importance during selection decisions. During games, it has been reported that coaches spend just over 40% of their time in silence analysing both individual player and team performances (Smith & Cushion, 2006). Coaches from the current study were, however, making selection decisions after the previous game had finished (if coaches first discussed selection at training, it would have been four days since the game). They were, therefore, relying on their memory of player performances (coaches did not say if they used additional resources, such as notes, to help recall player performances).

Several studies (e.g., Connelly, 2013; Franks, 1993; Franks & Miller, 1986, 1991; Nicholls & Worsfold, 2016) have revealed, though, that coaches can only accurately recall roughly 40% of player performance information (and for some coaches with the use of notes; e.g., Nicholls & Worsfold, 2016). Furthermore, Jones, James, and Mellalieu (2008) reported that an elite head coach with 12 years' experience was only able to accurately report three out of 13 (or 23%) performance indicators when recalling their team's performance. Laird and Waters (2008) did, however, report that coaches can accurately recall 59% of critical performance events, yet still not a perfect recollection. Whilst every coach from the current study claimed to use a player's general game performance as a selection cue, in reality, limitations of their memory may have led coaches to only remember the key events of a match, which may have given them a distorted impression of how a player performed (Carling, Williams, & Reilly, 2005). This could also explain the broad terms coaches used to describe a player's game performance, such as "superb," "good," or "awful." Whilst failing to recall how a player specifically performed, coaches may have been describing a general feeling based on the key events they do remember (although further research is needed on this latter claim).

Similar to the coaches in the previous study (see 4.3.1.1.8: Situational cues, p. 70), a player's availability was considered during selection decisions and, in some cases, dictated selection decisions. The periphery coach, for example, stated that if the best players were available, they would be selected (for important games) irrespective of any other selection cue. If this were the case, some coaches may have only used two cues to select some players, the "best player cue" and the availability cue (this would only be accurate if coaches treated the "best player cue" as one cue). Furthermore, the head coach stated that when selecting for the unimportant games, he also reportedly relied on the number of games played cue and the availability cue (two cues). In both selection processes (i.e., important games and unimportant games), therefore, coaches revealed the importance of the availability cue. This is likely because this team were considered amateur (so players had other commitments, such as school) and the high incidence of injury in rugby union (Brooks et al., 2005; Hendricks et al., 2017; Yeomans et al., 2018).

Johansson and Fahlén (2017) revealed that coaches' selection decisions can be affected by how much time they spend with their athletes (if selection criteria were ill-defined). Some coaches from the current study (i.e., the forwards coach and the backs coach), according to the periphery coach, also seemed to be influenced by their relationships with some of the players (i.e., under-18s). One reason for this could be an intergroup bias, or the tendency to evaluate and treat in-group members more favourably than out-group members (Everett, Ingbretsen, Cushman, & Cikara, 2017; Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002). Both the forwards coach and the backs coach had been coaching the under-18 players for the past 12 years and had not coached the under-17 players at all. As such, they may have developed an in-group with the under-18 players and, as a result, an out-group of the under-17 players. Furthermore, as deliberation (which, according to the coaches, occurred during selection decisions) can cause increased intergroup bias (Everett et al., 2017; Ma, Liu, Rand,



Heatherton, & Han, 2015), the forwards coach and the backs coach may have favoured their in-group (i.e., under-18 players) during selection discussions.

Some coaches have a well-established style of play and physical and skill characteristics (e.g., body composition, aerobic fitness, position roles) of players in mind that fit their preferred style (Johansson & Fahlén, 2017; Ostojic, Mazic, & Dikic, 2006). Other coaches, though, evaluate what characteristics their players possess and then develop styles of play from those (Johansson & Fahlén, 2017). Coaches from the current study selected players based on the former, that is, they had a style of rugby in mind and specific characteristics they wanted their players to possess, and then selected the appropriate players. The periphery coach, for example, stated that players who had the better skill sets were overlooked in preference for players who were big. Other coaches reflected this view when describing what characteristics they wanted their players to have, which often related to size. Given the high physical demands of rugby union (Darrall-Jones et al., 2015) and the desirability of players with greater size (Howard et al., 2016), it is understandable why rugby union coaches would create a style of rugby that utilises big players. Selecting big players, though, can have disadvantages. Coaches working with young athletes, for example, may be selecting those who have matured (or are maturing) early at the expense of those who mature at a later rate (Malina, Eisenmann, Cumming, Ribeiro, & Aroso, 2004). As a result, late maturing athletes may be overlooked or excluded (Till, Cobley, O'Hara, Chapman, & Cooke, 2013) who, if not overlooked or excluded, can display superior performances as adults (compared to their early maturing counterparts; Pearson, Naughton, & Torode, 2006). By holding a well-established style of play and physical and skill characteristics of players in mind that fit their preferred style, coaches may have, again, been falling victim to a confirmation bias (Jonas et al., 2001). Coaches may have been seeking out specific player cues that fit their preferred style of rugby (e.g., size cues). If this was happening, however, coaches may have been making poor

decisions because other, potentially more relevant cues, were being ignored (Hernandez & Preston, 2013).

This also leads to the conclusion that luck seemed to have played a role in team selection decisions. For some players, it was lucky that they possessed the “right” characteristics the coaches were looking for (in the current study, size). For others, though, they were in the unlucky position that they possessed the “wrong” characteristics (in the current study, small and skilful). If these same players were coached by other individuals, their luck might have been reversed (i.e., small and skilful players preferred over big players). It is said that talent in sport is socially constructed (Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1993) by coaches who, because they are in contexts where they hold a dominant position, can define players as “talented” by their own tastes and classificatory schemes (Christensen, 2009). As a result, there is no agreed definition for talent (Larkin & Reeves, 2018). A similar situation may have occurred with the current coaches. They may have placed value on specific characteristics, subsequently basing their selection decisions on them, because of their own tastes. In other words, although the size of a player may not correspond to how “good” they are, coaches from the current study thought that the big players were the best, so big players were selected. Luck is an important factor in sport (e.g., Vine, 2016) and could also play a central role in selection decisions (although this requires further investigation).

Coaches stated they took other players into consideration when making selection decisions, which has been found in previous research (e.g., Johansson & Fahlén, 2017; see 4.3.1.3.1: Other players, p. 74). The head coach, for example, explained how he ranked players into two groups: those who will be considered for important games and those who will not. Whilst ranking can force individuals to make decisions (Vriens, Moors, Gelissen, & Vermunt, 2017), ranking athletes for the purposes of team selection can be limiting (Johansson & Fahlén, 2017). It may be further limiting if players are ranked into the groups

the head coach from the current study did. The head coach seemed to be excluding some of his players before the season had begun by concluding that they will not be considered for the important games. When utilised effectively, however, ranking lists can be informative as they can predict performances (Trewin, Hopkins, & Pyne, 2004).

The head coach and assistant coach stated that the reason why some players were selected was that other rugby union teams selected players like them too (in these cases, with reference to players' size, speed, and ability). This may suggest the existence of shared beliefs and attitudes within rugby union (or at least a belief by these coaches that shared beliefs and attitudes exist) which can result in the emergence of group norms (Patterson, Carron, & Loughhead, 2005). As a result of group norms, behavioural standards are expected of group members through the reinforcement of acceptable (i.e., select big, fast, and good players) and unacceptable (i.e., do not select big, fast, and good players) behaviours (Carron & Eys, 2012; Munroe, Estabrooks, Dennis, & Carron, 1999). Whilst it is difficult to conclude that group norms exist within rugby union from a single case study, these two coaches seemed to suggest there could be (although this does need further research). Rather than group norms within rugby union, though, the head coach also described selecting players because, as a team, they had always selected these types of players (in these cases, with reference to players' size and speed). This suggests that in their group, the socially accepted selection behaviour was to select those who are big and fast. It is unclear, however, whether the "group" included everyone within the team (i.e., coaches and players), just the coaches, or simply the head coach who may have believed that this behaviour was a group norm. Again, it is problematic to state that group norms exist from one individual so further research is required.

#### ***5.4.1.2: Selection processes.***

The selection processes reported here, whilst pertaining to the coaches from the current study, offer preliminary evidence and a visualisation of a previously unknown element of the coaching process. This goes beyond the “why” (or cues) of coaches’ team selection decisions and sheds light onto the “how” (or processes). The backs coach stated that the first step in the selection process was to focus on the type of game that was upcoming (e.g., A game, cup game, or B game). This would then dictate the quality of the side to be selected. Although in previous research coaches have concentrated on the upcoming opposition (e.g., Johansson & Fahlén, 2017), coaches from the current study only focussed on the type of game (it is worth noting that coaches did consider the opposition during selection decisions but not at this stage; see 5.3.1.1.1.7: Situational cues, p. 123). The type of game dictated the level of importance coaches placed on the game and the subsequent decision process. For an A game (apart from the special game, see 5.3.1.2.4.2: Special game, p. 136) or cup game, coaches followed the Important Game process (see Figure 6) and for a B game they followed the Unimportant Game process (see Figure 7). It is worth noting it is unclear if athletes also thought that these games were of similar levels of importance (or if they placed any importance on these games).

Discussions among the coaching team (usually at training) occurred once the importance of the game was established and, according to the periphery coach, what started these discussions was the head coach selecting a “draft” team (i.e., a temporary team that was subject to change). Communication among team members improves the decision-making performance of teams (Ceschi et al., 2014) so this is an important step in the team selection process. According to the backs coach, during these discussions he would have more input on the backs selection decisions whereas the head coach, assistant coach, and forwards coach would have more say on the forwards selection decisions because they were all forwards

orientated coaches. Utilising expertise among group members, an important resource, is key for groups to operate at their best (Bonner, Baumann, & Dalal, 2002). These discussions, however, were at times dominated by the coach with the loudest voice or who could be bothered to argue the most. Confident members often have greater influence on group decisions (Aramovich & Larson, 2013), so if these behaviours led the group to believe that the coach was confident in his decisions then they may have accepted it for this reason alone.

For games that were deemed important, coaches simply selected the best players if they were available (or the best available players if the best players were unavailable). One reason for this might be connected to a common notion in sport that success equals winning and failure equals losing (Cumming et al., 2007). The negative emotions (e.g., anxiety) experienced when contemplating losing the upcoming game may have caused coaches to reduce uncertainty by selecting low-risk, low-reward players (Lerner, Li, Valdesolo, & Kassam, 2015; Raghunathan & Pham, 1999). Selecting the best players would have been a low-risk, low-reward option as they offered the team the greatest possibility of winning, but it would have been unsurprising if they did win (so the coaches would have gained little praise for their selection decisions). Emotions have profound influences on the decisions we make (Paulus & Yu, 2012) so further research would highlight the part they play in coaches' selection decisions. The backs coach stated that some players were selected for the important games because it was "obvious." By stating that it is obvious that a player must be selected, the backs coach may have also been suggesting that those who hold the opposite opinion (i.e., the player should not be selected) will be rejected by the coaching team (Seery, Gabriel, Lupien, & Shimizu, 2016). To avoid rejection and to protect self-esteem, a coach, who may in private believe the opposite to the coaching team, may in public conform to the coaching team's opinions (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). The periphery coach's suggestion that up to seven positions were protected (i.e., certain players would always be selected) may be

evidence of conformity during selection discussions for important games, however further research would be needed to back up this claim.

There were two situations in which the best players were not selected: if they were unavailable or not performing to an acceptable standard. As the team was amateur, players were occasionally unavailable due to school commitments or injuries. Coaches would then select a backup player or, if none were available, identify a replacement player and support them (by coaching them to be able to perform the position). In one instance, a player was not performing to the standards expected by the coaches, so they began to seek evidence to confirm their doubts. As coaches were using the evidence (in this case, the objective performance statistics) to confirm that this player should not be selected again, they may have fallen for a confirmation bias (i.e., seeking information that support previously held beliefs; Jonas et al., 2001). Coaches, at times, also sought evidence when deciding between two players for one position. The evidence, however, was usually not rugby specific (e.g., behaviour in training or training attendance). If players could be separated by this information (e.g., a player behaved poorly in training or did not attend training) then one player was selected, but if no information could separate them then both players were selected (one to start and the other as a substitute).

For unimportant games, coaches selected the players who were not selected for the important games and available (except in the special game where only the under-18 players were selected). These players were not thought of as the best players which is why they were not selected for the important games. At times, though, the head coach highlighted he had to ask an A player (considered one of the best players) to play because there were not enough players for the upcoming unimportant game. By labelling the games as either important or unimportant, the coaches' selection strategy can be broadly described as "the best or the rest." Humans divide the social world into groups (Kinzler, Shutts, & Correll, 2010) to help

navigate a complex social world (Lieberman, Woodward, & Kinzler, 2017). These groups (or categories) can be based on a seemingly endless number of arbitrary factors, such as sports team allegiance (Crisp, Heuston, Farr, & Turner, 2007), and may occur automatically (Weisman, Johnson, & Shutts, 2015). Coaches, therefore, may have automatically divided players into two categories (i.e., the best or the rest) to simplify their complex social world. Further research is, however, required to investigate this notion.

Once the selection decisions have been made (though it is unclear if the head coach or a different coach made the selection decisions, see 5.3.1.2.5: Selection decision(s), p. 137) and if there was a tight call between two players, the coaches would privately inform the player who was not selected (if one was not selected). Being eliminated from a sports team can damage an athlete's self-esteem (Grove, Fish, & Eklund, 2004), especially if they have built part of their identity around being an athlete (Couturier, 2009). Although no athlete will be happy not being selected for a team (Couturier, 2009), given that athlete satisfaction increases because of interactions with their coaches (Myer, Beauchamp, & Chase, 2011), instigating discussions with athletes about why they are not selected for an upcoming game may be the optimal way for coaches to communicate selection decisions.

The final stage of the team selection process was to inform the squad who is (and by extension who is not) selected for the upcoming game. This occurred during training and was announced to the whole squad. Given that (according to the coaches) only those who were not selected during a close selection decision would have been previously (and privately) informed, most players learnt whether they had been selected at this point. Although there is no literature (to the author's knowledge) that has investigated the effects on athletes of publicly announcing the team, not being selected to a team can contribute to athlete stress and burnout (Cresswell & Eklund, 2007; Woods & Thatcher, 2009). Although these issues may occur irrespective of whether athletes are informed of team selection in public or private,

further research should be conducted to explore which delivery method is better for athletes to cope with.

#### ***5.4.1.3: Power relationships among the coaching team.***

When looking at how the relationships among the coaching team influenced team selection decisions, power (dominance-submission) seemed to play a crucial role. To have power is to have the capacity to produce intended effects and the ability to influence or control the behaviour of another person (Dunbar & Burgoon, 2005; Overall, Hammond, McNulty, & Finkel, 2016). In social settings, such as a coaching team, power determines how decisions are made and implemented (McDonald, 1980). Dominance, which is related but distinct to power, is a set of behaviours by which power is exerted and influenced achieved (Dunbar & Burgoon, 2005; Jayagopi, Hung, Yeo, & Gatica-Perez, 2009). As a result, dominant individuals are successful at dominating conversations and their outcomes (Jayagopi et al., 2009) and are met with submission from others (Rogers-Millar & Millar, 1979). Keeping or changing the focus of conversations and having one's way are examples of controlling behaviours displayed by dominant individuals in group conversations (Madsen, 2003).

To achieve dominance, coaches reported several attempts at controlling team selection decisions, other selection decisions, and coaching practices in general. Although the head coach claimed to make the selection decisions, for example, the forwards coach recalled controlling an interaction by overruling the other coaches which ultimately ended with his chosen player being selected. In this example, the forwards coach achieved dominance through non-negotiation (Fitzpatrick & Winke, 1979). There were also other examples of the forwards coach and backs coach, individually and together, overruling or undermining the head coach when it came to making selection decisions. The head coach did claim to have overruled the other coaches, yet only offered one example (in which he did not confirm that



his chosen player was selected). Additionally, when discussing which player should receive an end of season award, the forwards coach controlled the conversation again through non-negotiation (Fitzpatrick & Winke, 1979) with the other coaches until the player he put forward was selected. The forwards coach also claimed to take control of the general coaching practices (i.e., leading training sessions), which the periphery coach confirmed. The assistant coach, however, claimed to be able to control the forwards coach (although he offered no evidence of this).

To be powerful in social situations, a person must have the ability to influence or control the behaviours of another person (i.e., dominance-submission). Power, therefore, is the perception of one's own capacity relative to an interaction partner, not an absolute (Dunbar, 2004). Evidence of power over an interaction partner is the periphery coach's suggestion that the head coach submitted to the forwards coach (and potentially the assistant coach) and allowed him to make the selection decisions (or at least have more weight in the selection discussions and decisions than any other coach, including the head coach). One reason why coaches were attempting to dominate and control one another might be authority, which "refers to norms regarding who 'ought to' control different situations in a relationship" (Dunbar, 2004, p. 239). Norms are culturally accepted and based on status which both interaction partners adhere to. The forwards coach claimed authority of the team (and by extension the team selection decisions) because of the length of time he and the backs coach had spent with the team. Yet the head coach may have felt authority over the team (and team selection decisions) because of the institutionalised position he held (i.e., the head coach role). The perception of legitimate authority that both the head coach and the forwards coach felt they had over the team may have caused this battle for power and the resulting dominance-submissive behaviours. Further research is, however, needed to extend our

understanding of the potential role that power (and dominance-submission) has in coaching teams (especially with regards to team selection).

#### ***5.4.1.4: Word frequency analysis.***

When discussing the cues used to make team selection decisions, coaches demonstrated similarities on just under a third (32.35%) of the total number of cues. This means they did not show any commonality (or at least stated different cues) on over two thirds (67.65%) of the cues reportedly used. “Group decision-making is the process by which a collective of individuals attempt to reach a required level of consensus on a given issue” (Eliasz, Ray, & Razin, 2007, p. 236). It is difficult to see, though, how these coaches could have reached a consensus regarding team selection decisions if they demonstrated no commonality on over two thirds of the cues they claimed to use for these decisions. It is not clear why coaches did not demonstrate commonality on so many selection cues. Given that not selecting someone is costly (as the team would not be able to play in the upcoming game), one reason might be that some coaches who typically felt less strongly about their preferred player may have been willing to “go with the flow” and allow other coaches with stronger feelings to select their preferred player so a selection decision could be made (Eliasz et al., 2007). Alternatively, group members can be cooperative (by sharing information to reach high-quality group decisions) or competitive (by withholding information to do well personally; Davis, Laughlin, & Komorita, 1976; Toma & Butera, 2009) meaning that coaches may have withheld selection cues from each other. There may, however, have been issues with the coaches ability to fully verbalise the cues they used to make selection decisions (Jones, 2009; Shanteau, 1988; Svennberg, Meckbach, & Redelius, 2014), meaning that the level of commonality among coaches may have been higher if they could (further research is needed on this latter point of how coaches define each cue to add to our understanding of team selection). There were also only two cues that every coach reported they used in team

selection decisions, general game performance and best player. It has been previously found (e.g., see 4.3.1.1.4: Performance cues, p. 62; Johansson & Fahlén, 2017) that coaches mostly rely on performance cues when making team selection decisions. Johansson and Fahlén (2017) also reported that coaches highlighted their eyes as the most important tool in the selection process. Coaches have also stated that they select the best players (e.g., see 4.3.1.1.3: Ability cues, p. 61). As well as this lack of commonality among the coaches, there were more cues stated by one coach (58.62%) than by two or more coaches (41.38%). With the low level of similarity among the coaching team as to which cues were used to make team selection decisions, it begins to question how team selection decisions were made. A full and unanimous commonality among coaches is unrealistic in real life situations, so they must have reached an acceptable consensus level (Chiclana, Tapia García, del Moral, & Herrera-Viedma, 2013). But with coaches demonstrating similarities with each other roughly a third of the time, and only all stating two cues, this consensus level may be extremely low. In other words, coaches may not have had to agree with each other or agreed upon the selection cues for a player to be selected (presumably by one coach with his own selection cues). Although research is needed to discover the consensus level among coaches when making selection decisions.

#### **5.4.2: Direct observations (visual and audio).**

Presented below is a discussion based on the results gained from the direct visual and audio observations (i.e., cues, word frequency analysis, and the descriptive statistics) of the head coach.

##### **5.4.2.1: Cues.**

During the discussions the head coach had with himself, the coaching team, players, and parents across training sessions (regarding team selection), most of the cues mentioned related to the players themselves. This reflects previous studies (e.g., see Chapter 4, p. 51;

5.3.1.1: Cues, p. 114; Ahmed et al., 2013; Iyer & Sharda, 2009; Johansson & Fahlén, 2017), including the breadth and detail of the cues reported (see 4.3.1: Cues, p. 58; 5.3.1.1: Cues, p. 114). The head coach also discussed coach cues, cues from other sources, and situational cues during training.

During the interviews, the coaches stated that a player's size would factor into their selection decisions (see 5.3.1.1.1.1: Appearance cues, p. 114). The periphery coach even stated that smaller players with better skills were overlooked in preference for bigger players. The head coach, however, rarely discussed a player's size with anyone during training (conversely the only coach to discuss a player's size with the head coach was the periphery coach). The reason for this, though, may be because team selection may have occurred (or most of the decisions) before training (evidenced by the head coach selecting a "draft" team before training; see 5.3.1.2.2: Discussions among coaches, p. 131). If the head coach was selecting the big players and making these selections (or at least most of the selections) before training, then the coaches would not have to discuss a player's size at training because the big players have already been selected. Furthermore, coaches stated that, for some games (e.g., important games), they "knew" who they would select (see 5.3.1.2.3: Important games, p. 132). This implies that coaches may not have voiced their thoughts when making selection decisions, meaning they may not have discussed, for example, a player's size in training. Like a player's size, while being interviewed coaches stated that they selected the best players (for the important games) but they rarely stated this in training sessions (in conversation with the head coach at least). This may, again, be due to the team selection decisions being made before training, and therefore negating the need to discuss selecting the best players at training. These are, however, claims that require further investigation.

The discussions held in training sessions reflected the coaches in the interviews (see 5.3.1.1.1.4: Performance cues, p. 117) and previous studies (see 4.3.1.1.4: Performance cues,

p. 62; Johansson & Fahlén, 2017) whereby the players' performances were mostly discussed. These discussions, however, did not reflect the number of cues that were stated in the interviews. Whilst the head coach discussed players' gross motor, general, and position specific skills during training sessions, they were not spoken about often or consistently (most were discussed in one or two training sessions). The position a player could play, however, was discussed often and across every training session. In rugby union, playing positions require individuals to possess unique skills (Greenwood, 1997; James et al., 2005) and the mastery of these (and other) skills may even be a prerequisite for selection (Johansson & Fahlén, 2017; Oorschot et al., 2017). The head coach (and those who he spoke to) may then have viewed the ability to play a specific position, rather than individual skills, as a prerequisite for selection. During his interview, the head coach stated that he exclusively selected players using the objective performance statistics (for three or four games). Across training sessions, however, he barely spoke to himself or anyone else about them. Again, though, if he was selecting (most of) the team before training then he may not have needed to speak about how he selected players using the objective performance statistics. Every coach did discuss the players' general game performances, which they all suggested influenced their team selection decisions in the interviews (see 5.3.1.1.1.4: Performance cues, p. 117).

Coaches, like in the interviews, used broad terms to describe a player's performance across training sessions, such as "good," "fucking well," and "fucking awesome." This may again be a result of an inability to fully recall player performance information (Connelly, 2013; Franks, 1993; Franks & Miller, 1986, 1991; Jones et al., 2008; Laird & Waters, 2008; Nicholls & Worsfold, 2016). As a result, coaches may have been describing a player's general game performance when they discussed it with the head coach (rather than specific performance information).

Along with the position a player can play, their availability was also spoken about in every training session. During the interviews, a player's availability was reported as a crucial selection cue (see 5.3.1.1.1.7: Situational cues, p. 123), which is likely because the team is amateur, so players had other commitments (e.g., school).

Despite the coaches (including the head coach) stating that they had a style of rugby in mind, and specific characteristics they wanted their players to possess when making selection decisions, at no point did the head coach discuss these with anyone during training. If coaches (or the head coach) did have a style of rugby and specific characteristics that informed selection decisions, they may have, again, drawn upon these before training had occurred (like a player's size, ability, and the objective performance statistics).

During selection discussions, coaches took the other players into consideration, which has been previously reported (e.g., Johansson & Fahlén, 2017; see 4.3.1.3.1: Other players, p. 74; 5.3.1.1.3.1: Other players, p. 126). Coaches, for example, compared one player's performance against another's (although this mainly happened in one training session). These discussions, however, rarely contained any measurable cues that would have allowed for an accurate player comparison. Instead, coaches would offer broad, subjective opinions of performances (e.g., "probably just [player name] over [player name]"). Given that in team sports the real measure of a player's performance is "hidden" (Duch, Waitzman, & Amaral, 2010), coaches may not have been accurately or fairly comparing players' performances. Interestingly, coaches also stated that because two players may not be able to play the full game (because one had an injury, and another did not have the sufficient level of aerobic fitness), other players should be selected as substitutes to cover them. This means that coaches were selecting players they knew were unlikely to play the full upcoming game, and so were selecting some players for no other reason than to cover these players. Put another way, coaches preferred to select some players who were at a suboptimal fitness level rather

than others who were at an optimal fitness level. Playing with pain or injury can lead to further harm (Fenton & Pitter, 2010), which can cause a great deal of stress to players (Malinauskas, 2008).

When referring to the important games during discussions in training, coaches tended to mention the type of game (e.g., league game or cup game), whereas for an unimportant game coaches would discuss the opposition (rather than referring to these games as B games or friendlies). It is not clear why coaches did this, but it may highlight the importance different cues had in different scenarios. When facing an important game, for example, coaches placed a high level of importance on the type of game but disregarded the opposition. This suggests that for important games the opposition did not affect the coaches' selection decisions because they simply selected the best players regardless of who the opposition was (as has been previously suggested, see 5.3.1.2.3: Important games, p. 132). For unimportant games, therefore, coaches may have factored in the opposition when making selection decisions. It is worth noting that coaches may have not wanted to refer to unimportant games as B games if this was perceived to be a source of discomfort for the players selected (as coaches may have assumed every player wanted to play in the important games and not the unimportant games), meaning that the opposition was also ignored when making selection decisions for unimportant games (although this is a claim that requires further research).

#### ***5.4.2.2: Word frequency analysis.***

Whilst the total number of themes, sub-themes, and cues remained relatively similar across the interview with the head coach and the training observations, when taken as a percentage of the total number of themes, sub-themes, and cues, a different pattern emerges. When asked, the head coach stated that he used cues from the players themselves most often when making selection decisions, along with (to a lesser extent) cues from the coaches, other sources, and the situation. Observation data, however, demonstrated that he was influenced

by coach cues, cues from other sources, and situational cues more (and player cues less) than he recalled. This reflects previous studies that found that people do not fully know, or are unable to fully verbalise, their reasons for making decisions (e.g., Jones, 2009; Shanteau, 1988; Svennberg et al., 2014).

There were only two cues that the head coach discussed (either with himself, other coaches, other players, or parents) in every training session: a player's position and their availability. Along with the fact that the majority (70%) of cues were only stated in one training session, it could be argued that the head coach mostly selected for the upcoming game and did not have any long-term selection criteria (apart from position and availability). Whilst it is not known if coaches should have pre-determined selection criteria, what is known is that without any they are at risk of biased selection decisions (Bass, Wu, Schaefer, Wright, & McLaughlin, 2013; Calder & Durbach, 2015). Also, as selection (or most of selection) seemed to be made before training, the head coach seemed to have used training as an opportunity to fill in any gaps in selection by asking his players not already selected which position(s) they play and whether they are available for the upcoming game.

#### ***5.4.2.3: Descriptive statistics.***

The head coach spent most of his time observing training (43.85%). It has been previously reported that, during games, coaches spend just over 40% of their time in silence analysing both individual player and team performances (Smith & Cushion, 2006). The head coach, however, rather than watching in silence, spent roughly half of his observing time talking to others (23.50%) and the other half coaching (20.35%). This difference may be due to the environment (Smith, Quested, Appleton, & Duda, 2017) as training is a context in which coaches communicate their knowledge, experience, and expertise to athletes (Antonini Philippe & Seiler, 2006; Lorimer & Jowett, 2009a; Sagar & Jowett, 2012). The head coach spent the rest of his time either listening (8.90%) or talking (38.83%) to others (mainly



coaches) or doing nothing (8.42%). Worryingly, the head coach spent more time doing nothing than talking to individual athletes (in total across all training sessions and the average time in one training session) or to multiple players (the average time in one training session). Coaches have to interact with their athletes (Kristiansen, Tomten, Hanstad, & Roberts, 2012) and more frequent and positive interactions can increase athlete satisfaction (Myer et al., 2011). On average, however, the head coach spent less than nine seconds on each interaction with individual players. Coaches' communication with athletes can have a sizeable impact on several aspects of their sport experience (e.g., how well athletes perform; Kassing & Anderson, 2014). At less than nine seconds, though, it is difficult to conclude that the head coach could have had a positive impact on his players' sport experience. It is worth noting, however, that research examining whether interactions of this length are effective would allow for more concrete conclusions to be made, especially considering athletes interpret their coach's behaviours differently (Smith, Shoda, Cumming, & Smoll, 2009). Yet when it is considered that two cues were repeatedly mentioned by the head coach in training sessions (i.e., position and availability), nine seconds may have been long enough for him to gather this information from the relevant players. Additionally, as most of team selection seemed to occur before training, training may have been used as an opportunity to select players for the remaining positions by asking players what position they play and whether they are available for the upcoming game. Training is a crucial environment in which coaches and players work closely together (Lorimer & Jowett, 2009a) with the goal of training players to perform better in their sport (Wu et al., 2014). But if the head coach spends such a small amount of time interacting with his players, it brings into question whether his players were being trained in any meaningful sense (in defence of the head coach he was part of a coaching team, so the other coaches may have been coaching the players, which the forwards coach alluded to, while he took more of an observing role).

### **5.4.3: Strengths and limitations.**

This study provides crucial insight into how a coaching team operates, in relation to their team selection decisions, and builds upon the results reported in Chapter 4 (see 4.3: Results, p. 57; 4.4: Discussion, p. 85). Given the issues previously highlighted about relying on self-reported interview data (Bernard et al., 1984; Harris & Brown, 2010; see 4.4.3: Strengths and limitations, p. 100), this study strengthens the results described in Chapter 4 (see 5.3.1.1: Cues, p. 114; 5.4.1.1: Cues, p. 163) by utilising multiple, in-depth data collection methods that are not subject to these issues (Henry & Eggle, 2012). Furthermore, this study went beyond the “what” of team selection decisions (i.e., cues) and reported on the “how” (i.e., processes, see 5.3.1.2: Selection processes, p. 130; 5.4.1.2: Selection processes, p. 173). This is a facet of team selection decisions that has not been previously investigated, which is important for both expanding our knowledge and to help improve coaches’ team selection awareness and methods.

This study has revealed a number of key results regarding team selection decisions, however the limitations must also be acknowledged. A common concern about case study research is generalisability (Yin, 2014). Whilst caution should be taken when generalising the results from one case to an entire population (Gordon, Anthony, & Gucciardi, 2017), the goal of case study research is “to expand and generalise theories (analytic generalisations) and not to extrapolate probabilities (statistical generalisations)” (Yin, 2014, p. 21). Though the interviews were with the entire coaching team (i.e., all five coaches), the observations were only of the head coach (and those who he spoke to during training sessions) which the author repeatedly highlighted throughout this study (e.g., in the methods, results, and discussion sections). This was because the head coach claimed he made the final selection decisions and the practicality of one researcher only being able to observe one coach. Furthermore, it seemed that a lot of team selection decisions had been made before the observations took

place (i.e., before training). This means that some selection cues that were used to make team selection decisions might not have been captured during the visual and audio observations. Whilst data obtained from observing the head coach (and those who the head coach interacted with) offer important insights into team selection that built upon the results from the interviews with the coaching team, the results from observation data should be interpreted with these points in mind. Similar to the previous study (see 4.4.3: Strengths and limitations, p. 100), coaches may have had difficulty in distinguishing between cues (i.e., a single piece of information within an environment that holds meaning and is used to form a judgment; Cooksey, 1996; Dowding & Thompson, 2003; Wiggins, 2006; von Helversen et al., 2013) and inferences (i.e., a conclusion based on cues; e.g., Park et al., 2008) and the authors' experience and knowledge of rugby union may have been limitations.

#### **5.4.4: Future directions for research.**

The results reported here offer researchers an insight into why and how a rugby union coaching team, working within the performance sport environment, makes team selection decisions. Specifically, results revealed the cues these coaches used, the processes they undertook, how the power relationships among them affected selection decisions, the differences between what the head coach reported in his interview compared with what he stated during visual and audio observations, and how the head coach spent his time across training sessions. As this study was an exploratory case study, researchers are encouraged to build upon the results found to further our understanding of team selection decisions. There are a number of recommendations for future research opportunities above (see 5.4: Discussion, p. 162) but outlined below are some key areas.

Future researchers could focus on the communications (e.g., emails) among the coaching team before training sessions as it seemed from the current study that some of the selection decisions (e.g., draft team selection) were made prior to training. Regarding the

selection decisions, researchers are encouraged to further investigate “the best or the rest” selection strategy employed for important and unimportant games, respectively. Furthermore, as the observational data revealed that only two cues were discussed in every training session, researchers should explore if coaches regularly rely on a small number of cues and at times during the season rely on more (as a large number of cues reported from the observational data were only used in one training session). As coaches were relying on their memory of player performances, which is reportedly only accurate for roughly 40% of performance information (Connelly, 2013; Franks, 1993; Franks & Miller, 1986, 1991; Nicholls & Worsfold, 2016), researchers should also identify the accuracy of coaches’ memory with regards to player performances, and how it influences team selection decisions. Lastly, although luck has been previously identified as an important factor in sport (e.g., Vine, 2016), the results suggest that luck also plays a role in team selection decisions. Specifically, it was lucky that some players had the “right” characteristics the coaches were looking for while others were unlucky that they possessed the “wrong” ones. Exploring this notion can further our understanding as to why some players are selected and others are not.

### **5.5: Conclusion**

The results of this study suggest that coaches from the same coaching team mostly rely on player cues when making selection decisions (but also coach cues, cues from other sources, and situational cues). Of these player cues, cues relating to their performances (in training and games) were drawn upon the most. These results were consistent across interviews with the whole coaching team and observations of the head coach, although discrepancies did emerge (e.g., size was highlighted in the interviews as an important selection cue but rarely spoken about during observations). However, although coaches claimed to use a large number of selection cues in their interviews, there was little consensus across the coaching team as to which selection cues were used in team selection decisions.

Also, when discussing the processes coaches went through during team selection decisions, they may have (at times) reportedly only relied upon two cues. Selection processes were broadly split into important and unimportant games with coaches adhering to a “the best or the rest” selection strategy, respectively. It was unclear, however, why coaches labelled some players as the best. With regards to the relationships among the coaching team, coaches described the forwards coach using dominating behaviours which may have been an attempt to gain power over the other coaches (especially the head coach). He may have been displaying these behaviours to gain the authority (over the head coach) to make team selection (and other) decisions. These behaviours influenced how team selection decisions were made and which players were selected.

This study puts forth the notion (among others) that coaches mostly select their players using a “the best or the rest” selection strategy, depending on the upcoming game (i.e., important or unimportant game), which relies on a small number of cues (e.g., best player, number of games, availability). Whether some players were objectively better than others, or if these distinctions only existed inside the minds of the coaches, investigating what makes a player the best will further our understanding of one of the most crucial decisions coaches make. To summarise, we now further understand the cues rugby union coaches use in team selection decisions, the processes they go through, and what can influence them. But what does this mean for coaches? How can they benefit from this knowledge? And, more importantly, how can they access this knowledge?

## **Chapter 6: A Chapter for Coaches**

### **6.1: Introduction**

Following calls for empirical sports coaching research to have practical applicability (North, 2013; Taylor & Garratt, 2010; Williams, Alder, & Bush, 2015), it is necessary to discuss how the current research addresses this objective. The competitive nature of sport often means that coaches do not talk to each other and guard their policies and practices because they do not want to give away any secrets (Johansson & Fahlén, 2017; Wright, Trudel, & Culver, 2007). This study, therefore, offers coaches an insight into how their peers make one of the most crucial decisions in coaching (Côté et al., 2007; Couturier, 2009). Gaining insights from other coaches is an important part of the learning process (Wright et al., 2007) which this series of studies can offer. Whilst there are detailed discussions of the results found in the previous studies (see 4.4: Discussion, p. 85; 5.4: Discussion, p. 162), including the implications of what was discovered, below is a summary of this thesis designed for coaches who wish to simply read about what was found.

### **6.2: A Summary for Coaches**

This summary has been formatted to be similar to the RFU Touchline publication, the official newspaper of the RFU. This online newspaper contains news and stories related to English rugby union and is where an article similar to the following section will be submitted for publication. This article will also be submitted for publication in different sport's national governing bodies official newspapers or magazines (e.g., The Boot Room for the Football Association) as the information presented is relevant to team sport coaches beyond rugby union.

## Team selection: “The best or the rest”

Coaches play a crucial role in sport, including being responsible for selecting teams. For those players selected, their emotional wellbeing, vitality, enjoyment, life satisfaction, and physical and skill performances can improve, whereas players not selected may experience detraining, stress, and a loss of identity. Yet with regards to research, we don't know much about team selection. What information do coaches use to make team selection decisions? What processes do coaches go through when making team selection decisions? If there is more than one coach, does this influence team selection decisions? These are the questions I sought to answer with my research.

### What do we know so far?

After examining every piece of research ever conducted on team selection, I found that the academic literature does not yet have answers as to how team selection works. Although we know there are a number of things that may influence our decisions on other people in sport (e.g., referees penalise teams more if they're wearing black kits), we have little idea what information rugby union coaches use to make team selection decisions.

### My first study: Asking coaches themselves

In light of this, I interviewed six coaches (pre-season and post-season to also see the information changed) what information they use to make team selection decisions. They were all coaching amateur teams, were qualified (to a minimum level 2), and had several years coaching experience. I found that coaches had a large number of reasons why they did or didn't select a player, 258 reasons to be exact! Also, when I assessed what they said in their pre-season interview compared to their post-season interview, they only repeated 110 bits of information both times. This means that coaches couldn't fully

predict what information they would base their selection decisions on. Most of the selection information related to the players themselves (e.g., size, ability, general game performance) and specifically their performances (in training and games), but also information relating to the coaches (e.g., their style of rugby, game plan, winning mentality), other sources (e.g., other players, other coaches, parents), the situation (e.g., upcoming game, opposition, rules), and the environment (e.g., weather, pitch).

I also looked at how many bits of information coaches described in common. In their pre-season interviews, every coach said five bits of information (a player's size, ability, general game performance, availability, and opposition). But only three bits of information (out of 258!) were mentioned in their post-season interviews (a player's attitude, availability, and injuries) Furthermore, over half the information stated in pre-season interviews and two thirds of the information mentioned in the post-season interviews was said by only one coach!

Taken together, my results reveal that: 1) these coaches were unable to accurately predict which bits of information they would use to make selection decisions, 2) there are only a few bits of information every coach used to make selection decisions, and 3) most of the information used in selection decisions was only used by one coach. In defence of the coaches, however, because they were working with different players in different teams, they might use different bits of information.

### My second study: What about one coaching team?

That's why I next looked at one colts team being coached by five coaches: a head coach, assistant coach, forwards coach, backs coach, and periphery coach.

I interviewed all five coaches post-season to find out what information they used in team selection decisions, the selection processes they went through, and

how their relationships with each other affected team selection decisions. I also filmed and attached a microphone to the head coach in five training sessions through the season, so I could see both if his interactions with others in training influenced his team selection decisions and how he spent his time during training.

I found these coaches again said they used a lot of information (145 bits in total), although less than the coaches from the previous study (which was 258 bits). Similar again to the previous study, these coaches reported that they also mainly relied on information about their players (e.g., size, attitude, availability), mostly made up of performance information (in training and games), but also information from the coaches themselves (e.g., their selection requirements, fear of making a mistake, doubt), other sources (e.g., other players, other coaches, other teams), and the situation (e.g., importance of upcoming game, no selection choices, selection rules).

I also looked at how similar the coaches were to each other in terms of the information they used for selection. I discovered that roughly a third of the information the coaches used to make selection decisions was the same! This means that, in the same coaching team, two thirds of the information coaches said they used to make selection decisions were only used by one (out of five in total) coach! Also, there were only two bits of information every coach said they used, a player's general game performance and whoever they thought the best players were.

With regards to the selection processes the coaches went through, how important the game was made a big difference. For an important game, coaches simply selected the best players (if they were available, if they weren't, coaches selected the best available players). This seemed to be because coaches wanted to win these games and felt that the best players would give the team the greatest opportunity to win. When faced with an unimportant game, coaches would select the rest of the players who

weren't selected in the important games (or not the best players). The coaches did this so that these players could get some game time as they weren't being selected for the important games. I've called this selection strategy the "the best or the rest" (depending on the importance of the game).

I found that the relationships among the coaching team also affected team selection decisions. The reason for this was power. The forwards coach (who had been coaching the colt's team with the backs coach for 12 years) was trying to control team selection decisions (and other decisions and the coaching in general) because he felt he had the authority to do so (as he had been coaching the team for so long). The head coach, on the other hand, felt he had the authority to make the selection decisions because he was the head coach and it was part of his role. This power struggle affected team selection decisions because, for example, the forwards coach overruled the other coaches (including the head coach) when they were all discussing a selection decision which ultimately ended with his chosen player being selected.

After filming and listening to the head coach during training (by attaching a microphone to him), I discovered that he spoke about similar bits of information he spoke about in his interview. Like both the previous study and the interviews from this study, the head coach mostly spoke about player information (e.g., ability, where player lives, training attendance), the majority of which related to a player's performance (in training and games), but also information about the coaches (e.g., coach-player relationship, perceived player happiness, preconceived ideas), other sources (e.g., other players, other coaches, physio), and the situation (e.g., upcoming game, opposition, adult team). Although the head coach did rely less on player information (and more on the other bits of information) than he thought he did when discussing selection cues in his interview.

The head coach also only mentioned two bits of information in every training



session. These were a player's position and availability. Coupled with the fact that most bits of information were only reported in one training session, this suggests that there was no long-term selection strategy, so coaches were only selecting for the upcoming game. Additionally, coaches may have completed most of selection before training and used training as an opportunity to fill in any gaps (which begs the question, what is training for?).

The head coach spent almost half of his time observing training (of which he spent half this time coaching and the other half talking to others) and the rest of his time either listening or talking to others (mainly the other coaches) or doing nothing. Worryingly, though, the head coach spent more time doing nothing than talking to individual or multiple players! Additionally, he spent (on average) less than nine seconds talking to individual players! When we remember that there was only two bits of information stated in every training session (a player's position and availability), this nine seconds might've been long enough time to find out what the head coach wanted to know for his selection decisions (in defence of the head coach he was part of a coaching team, so the other coaches may have been doing the coaching while he took more of an observing role).

### So, what do we now know?

In summary, I tried to find out what information rugby union coaches used to make team selection decisions, the processes they go through, and if the

relationships among coaches influenced team selection decisions. I found out that coaches say they use a massive amount of information, employ a "best or the rest" selection strategy, and influence one another by trying to gain power (to such an extent that it affects selection decisions).

### What should you do then?

1. Stop and really think about selection! How do you select your players? What bits of information do you pick up on during training and matches? Are there any other bits of information you use? And how do these bits of information inform your select decisions and processes?
2. Come up with a selection strategy and selection criteria with your coaches, write it all down, show your players, and then stick to it! You'll make fairer and more objective selection decisions as a result (this can change at any point too, but start the process again!).
3. Talk about selection to your coaching team (trying to avoid any power struggles!), players, and parents. Research suggests that players are more satisfied when that have lots of positive interactions with their coaches, so speak to them about selection, be open with them, and encourage them to talk to you about their ideas for selection!
4. But most important of all, as one coach said, team selection "is not a black and white area," so make sure it's not hidden in the grey! Team selection is so much more than "the best or the rest"!

## Chapter 7: General Discussion and Conclusion

Team selection is one of the most crucial decisions a coach must make (Côté et al., 2007; Couturier, 2009). Individuals who participate in sport and get selected for teams may experience several benefits, including improved psychosocial functioning and emotional wellbeing, vitality, enjoyment, life satisfaction, reduced stress and distress, a sense of community (Eime et al., 2013), the maintenance and improvement of physical and skill performances (Caterisano et al., 1997; Gonzalez et al., 2013; Gonzalez et al., 2012; Scanlan et al., 2015) and an increased probability of becoming a successful professional senior player (Güllich, 2014). Players not selected, however, can face detraining (Caterisano et al., 1997), stress (Woods & Thatcher, 2009), and a loss of identity (Neely et al., 2017). Yet Chapter 2 revealed that current research had yet to fully understand the information coaches use to make team selection decisions (only one study has investigated coaches' team selection decisions; i.e., Johansson & Fahlén, 2017). Although there are some cues that we know coaches do use to make selection decisions (as they also separate selected and non-selected players, namely age, experience, and skills; Baker, 2017; Gabbett, 2009; Gabbett & Seibold, 2013; Thissen-Milder & Mayhew, 1991; Young et al., 2005) there are a wide range of alternative cues that coaches could use (see Chapter 3, p. 37). Nonetheless, by this point, coaches' team selection decisions were still not comprehensively documented.

Chapter 4, however, adds to our understanding of team selection by providing an insight into which cues rugby union coaches use to make team selection decisions and whether the cues coaches said they would use (in pre-season interviews) were different to the cues they reported using (in post-season interviews). Specifically, the number of cues coaches thought they would use for upcoming team selection decisions ( $N=213$ ) was less than the actual reported number of cues used ( $N=258$ ). Also, just under half (48.36%) of the predicted cues were not reportedly used in team selection decisions, suggesting that coaches were

unable to predict exactly which cues they would rely on to make team selection decisions. The coaches claimed to significantly rely on cues from the players (especially in relation to how they performed in training and games), but also on coach cues, cues from other sources, situational cues, and environmental cues. It was also reported that over two thirds (66.28%) of the cues coaches said they used (in post-season interviews) were only stated by one coach. In post-season interviews, the only cues coaches all reported they used to make selection decisions were attitude, availability, and injured cues.

Whilst Chapter 4 provided an important insight into coaches' team selection decisions, it could have been argued that because they all worked with different players in different teams, they would draw upon different selection cues. Using a case study approach, the study outlined in Chapter 5, therefore, focused on five coaches who were coaching the same team and investigated the cues they used in team selection decisions, the selection processes they went through, and how the relationships among the coaching team influenced their team selection decisions. This study also observed the head coach to see if there were any differences between what he stated in his interview and training regarding selection cues, and to examine how he spent his time across training sessions.

Like the coaches included in the Chapter 4 study, these five coaches also reported mostly relying on players cues (and, again, mainly drawing upon training and game performance cues), but also coach cues, cues from other sources, and situational cues. This was consistent across interviews and observations, although there were some key differences (e.g., size was highlighted in the interviews as an important selection cue but rarely spoken about during observations). Commonality among coaches on the cues used to make selection decisions was, however, relatively low (32.35%). Furthermore, almost two thirds (58.62%) of the information used for team selection decisions among one coaching team was only reported by one coach. Surprisingly, this is at a level not too dissimilar to the coaches from

Chapter 4 (66.28%) who were all coaching different teams. Also, the coaching team as a whole all only stated two cues when interviewed about selection decisions - a player's general game performance and the "best player cue."

Regarding the selection processes the coaching team adopted when making selection decisions, they followed a "the best or the rest" selection strategy (depending on the importance the coaches placed on the game). When the upcoming game was deemed to be important, coaches seemed to only rely upon the "best player cue" and the availability cue to select their "best" teams. For the "rest" in the unimportant games, coaches seemed to use the number of games cue and the availability cue. One outcome of the observations in Chapter 5 is that if there were any gaps in selection, the head coach seemed to rely on two cues, namely availability and position, to inform the remaining selection decisions. This is evidenced by being the only two cues repeated in every training session and the head coach speaking to his players individually for 8.97 seconds on average (potentially enough time to gather two cues worth of information). Additionally, attempts by the forwards coach to gain authority over the other coaches by using dominant behaviours to gain power influenced how team selection decisions were made and which players were selected (among other broader coaching decisions and practices).

### **7.1: Definition of a Cue**

Though it was stated that it is beyond the scope of this thesis to argue a precise definition of a cue (see 1.2: Concepts, Definitions, and Theories, p. 3), considering the cues reported it is necessary to comment on how they fit within the adopted definition. A cue was defined as a single piece of information within an environment that holds meaning and is used to form a judgment (Cooksey, 1996; Dowding & Thompson, 2003; Wiggins, 2006; von Helversen et al., 2013), suggesting that cues are the proposed link between the decision maker and the environment. Most of the cues reported in this thesis fit within this definition

(e.g., player cues, cues from other sources, situational cues, and environmental cues) because they can be described as bits of information from the environments the coaches were in (e.g., training sessions and games). Coach cues (e.g., desires, philosophies, goals), however, originated internally from the coaches themselves, not their environment (assuming the environment to mean the surroundings or conditions in which a person lives or operates; Oxford Dictionaries, 2019). This suggests that the adopted definition of a cue used in this thesis may be reconsidered so as to incorporate every cue reported so it needs to be expanded to incorporate this internal information. A new working definition of a cue, therefore, could be ‘a single piece of information, from the environment or internal sources, which holds meaning and is used to form a judgment.’ This is put forward to continue the debate of what is (and is not) a cue (Ernst & Bühlhoff, 2004; Martin, 2016; Lim et al., 2005; Rothkopf, Weisswange, & Triesch, 2010) but it does require further discussion and research to refine.

## **7.2: Strengths and Limitations**

This thesis provides important insight into a crucial, yet relatively poorly understood decision process that coaches must regularly undertake, and the methods utilised add robustness to the reported findings. The use of a longitudinal, season-long study design in Chapter 4 is rare within qualitative sport research (Petrovic et al., 2017). This is vital for the development of theoretical explanations of phenomenon (Cresswell & Eklund, 2007). Furthermore, the results reported in Chapter 5 were based on multiple, in-depth data collection methods that built upon that obtained from self-reported interview data. The use of multiple data collection methods meant that the results reported went beyond the “what” of coaches’ team selection decisions and also discovered the “how,” a key element that has not previously been investigated.

The author’s experience and knowledge could conceivably be a limitation of this thesis. Whilst there are strengths to having this knowledge and experience (e.g., building

rapport with coaches, detailed, informed follow-up questions during interviews, and researchers adhering to constructivism positioning themselves within their research; Berg, 2007; Petrovic et al., 2017; Sparkes & Smith, 2014), there are also potential limitations (e.g., assumptions made during the research process). Though it is worth noting that the author attempted to maintain a subjective self-awareness of his potential biases (Readdy et al., 2016) in order to preserve the integrity of the research process.

### **7.3: Future Directions for Research**

Researchers have been offered a number of future directions for research throughout this thesis (see 4.4: Discussion, p. 85; 4.4.4: Future directions for research, p. 102; 5.4: Discussion, p. 162; 5.4.4: Future directions for research, p. 188) which would increase existing knowledge of coaches' team selection decisions. Key recommendations are to examine the cues reported to verify that these cues are used in team selection decisions and the meaning behind the cues found. Specifically, the "best player cue" requires further research attention given that coaches selected some players using it and the meaning behind the cue remains unclear.

Conducting further research on team selection decisions with more coaches (including others within the coaching team, such as assistant coaches) working in different environments (e.g., professional, semi-professional, participation) and sports will broaden our understanding of how coaches make, and what influences, team selection decisions. A variety of methods should also be employed to obtain novel and insightful data, which would also triangulate individual data (Gorard & Taylor, 2004). These data could include, for example, email and text communications between coaches that occur outside of training sessions. Given the consequences of team selection on players, which can be both positive (e.g., improved psychosocial functioning and emotional wellbeing, vitality, enjoyment, life satisfaction, reduced stress and distress, a sense of community, an increased probability of

joining an elite developmental trajectory and becoming a successful professional senior player, and the maintenance and improvement of physical and skill performances during a season; Caterisano et al., 1997; Côté et al., 2007; Eime et al., 2013; Gonzalez et al., 2013; Gonzalez et al., 2012; Güllich, 2014; Scanlan et al., 2015) or negative (e.g., detraining, stress, and a loss of identity; Caterisano et al., 1997; Neely et al., 2017; Woods & Thatcher, 2009), researchers should also examine more systematically how team selection decisions affect players. This is especially important as players can interpret their coach's behaviours differently (Smith et al., 2009). Furthermore, given the influence parents have in shaping children's experiences within sport (Bhalla & Weiss, 2010), and their potential influence over selection decisions (see 4.3.1.3.5: Other sources, p. 79), parental views of coaches' team selection decisions should also be explored.

Given that coach success is often judged by the team's performance and achievements (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003), or whether the team wins (Cumming et al., 2007), this may offer future researchers an opportunity to use team performance data as an objective indicator of coach success in team selection. Whilst in specific contexts (e.g., at participation and developmental levels) success may not always equate to winning (Cumming et al., 2007), within the performance sport environment there is a focus on winning as an outcome (Lyle, 1999). Consequently, researchers may be able to use the outcome of a game or competition as a measure of how successful a coach's team selection decisions were. It is worth noting, however, that not all wins and losses are appraised and experienced in a similar manner (Cumming et al., 2007). Researchers should, therefore, consider the game closeness (i.e., how many points/goals the team wins or loses by) when using game outcome as an indicator of success as, for example, a narrow loss against a high-quality opponent may be perceived to be more of a success than a heavy defeat against a low-quality opponent. Furthermore, researchers could also base their measures of success on specific performance indicators that

have been found to occur more often in rugby union teams that win games (e.g., tries scored or lineouts won on opposition's throw; Jones, Mellalieu, & James, 2004).

Outlined below are some additional (albeit preliminary) results that emerged from, but were not the focus of, the current thesis. It was, therefore, deemed appropriate to briefly highlight them. Coaches seemed to be making selection decisions on a subset of available cues. Whilst rational models of decision making suggest coaches should consider all available cues (Payne & Bettman, 2001), the results reported in this thesis suggest that coaches were relying on heuristics (i.e., “a strategy that ignores part of the information, with the goal of making decisions more quickly, frugally, and/or accurately than more complex methods” Gigerenzer & Gaissmaier, 2011, p.454) to make selection decisions (evidenced by coaches using two cues to make selection decisions). Researchers are, therefore, encouraged to identify how many cues coaches use to make their selection decisions. Coaches also seemed to place different weight on various cues. Weighting refers to the degree to which individuals utilise each cue (Hammond, 1996). One coach, for example, said that if a player's ability was great enough, other cues would not factor into his decision. In this example, the coach chose to put more weight on ability cues compared to other cues (at times coaches were forced to weight cues differently, such as the injured cue, for practical reasons). Whilst seeking to discover the number of cues coaches rely on to make selection decisions, researchers should also attempt to examine the individual weighting placed on each cue.

#### **7.4: Practical Application**

This thesis offers both academics an opportunity to further their understanding of coaches' team selection decisions (as well as a possibility to build on this knowledge) and coaches an insight into why and how their peers make these decisions. This latter point is crucial as empirical sports coaching research needs to have practical applicability (North, 2013; Taylor & Garratt, 2010; Williams et al., 2015). Also, coaches are given an opportunity



to read about a topic that is often treated as a secret (Johansson & Fahlén, 2017; Wright et al., 2007). After reading this thesis (or Chapter 6), coaches are encouraged to specifically and regularly reflect upon and evaluate their own selection decisions and practices, especially as they have been presented with the consequences (both good and bad) of using certain cues in their selection decisions. One consequence of particular significance is the coach-athlete relationship. Athlete satisfaction, for example, increases with more frequent (and positive) interactions with their coach (Myer et al., 2011), while poor communication is linked with a poor shared understanding between coaches and their athletes (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). Not only are coaches, therefore, encouraged to communicate with their athletes regarding team selection, but athletes should also aim to start a dialogue with their coaches (something that coaches should encourage). With this latter point in mind, other stakeholders within sport aside from coaches, such as, players, parents, coach employers, club management, and national governing bodies, are given an insight into why and how key decisions in their sport are made, and the underpinning processes for these decisions. This can inform, among other aspects, discussions with coaches regarding selection decisions and coach education and development.

## **7.5: Conclusion**

Team selection decisions are one of the most vital made by coaches. These decisions, though, have consequences for players far beyond who will and will not play in an upcoming game, meaning an understanding of why and how they are made is crucial. As one coach highlighted, however, team selection decisions are “not a black and white area.” Nevertheless, the novel and significant research in this thesis has begun to shed light onto a relatively unknown, but extremely important, aspect of the coaching process, which is relevant to all coaches, at all levels, in all sports, who are encouraged to go beyond simply selecting “the best or the rest” players.

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## Appendix A

## Pre-Season Interview Guide

1. Describe how you select a team
  - a. So, is this one decision made at one point or do you continually think about it throughout the week?
    - i. For example, do you sit down and decide the whole team or do you pick individual positions throughout the week?
  - b. What exactly do you concentrate on when choosing individual players? What do you base your decisions on?
  - c. Would selection change during the season at all (e.g., beginning/end of the season)?
  - d. Would selection change depending on the other team (good/bad/similar; lost/won a lot against them)?
    - i. For example, if you were playing a good (bad) team would you try and limit your losses (maximise your gains) or the other way around?
    - ii. So would you ask yourself “how can I win?” or “how can I not lose?” when faced with different (good/bad/similar) teams?
    - iii. If you were playing a good (bad/similar) team, what kind of player (e.g., risky/consistent) would you likely pick?
  - e. Would your selection strategy change if the team won (lost) the week before?
    - i. Would you ask yourself “if I hadn’t picked him we would’ve won, so I won’t pick him again”?
  - f. Would anything else cause your selection strategy to change?
    - i. Do you remember a time when your selection strategy changed? Why did it change? How did it change?

2. Describe how you select individual positions
  - a. Is this process the same for players in different positions (with different skill sets)?
  - b. Do you take into consideration how a player previously performed against a team (or the previous week)?
  - c. Do you use the team from the previous game (or season) and decide to keep or reject players or do you start from scratch each game?
  - d. Was there a time when you had to make a difficult decision picking between two players?
    - i. Describe your thought process

(Specific questions relating to Solomon and Rhea (2008))

3. What, if any, physical aspects of a player do you concentrate on when selecting a team? How much do you concentrate on the physical aspects (e.g., sport specific skills, athleticism, speed, strength)
  - a. How important are these to you?
4. What psychological aspects (personality; e.g., hard worker, communication, mental maturity, honesty, confidence) do you look for when selecting a team?
  - a. How important are these to you? Compared with physical aspects?
5. How do you take an athlete's personal situation (e.g., maturation, family dynamics) into account when selecting a team?
  - a. Has there been a case where you've had to consider this?
  - b. How important would this be?
6. Do you take into consideration an athlete's knowledge (e.g., academic, tactical)?
  - a. How important is this to you?
  - b. Is there a balance between a good personality/athleticism and knowledge?



- c. Which would stand out for you?
7. Do you employ any outside help to choose your team?
    - a. If so (or not), why?
  8. Do you think you make mistakes (e.g., forgetting athletes will improve, relying on other's opinions, perception one can change athletes) when selecting a team?
    - a. Examples of when/how this happened?
  9. Of all these aspects, do you accept that you cannot change any of them or do you try to change them and then maybe change your selections as a result?

(Questions about predicting future success)

10. How well do you think you are at predicting future success?
  - a. Were you better at some bits compared to others?
  - b. Describe what you were (un)successful about

(Questions about what coaches want)

11. In an ideal world, what information would you use if everything was available to you?
12. What equipment/resources would you want?

## Appendix B

## Post-Season Interview Guide

1. How did your season go (successful/unsuccessful)?
  - a. Why do you think that is?
  - b. What were the players like?
2. Describe how you selected a team
  - a. How was selecting the team as a group?
    - i. What worked?
    - ii. Were there any issues you came across?
    - iii. How would you change it (if you wanted to)?
  - b. What exactly did you concentrate on when choosing individual players? What did you base your decisions on?
  - c. Did selection change during the season at all (e.g., beginning/end of the season)?
  - d. Did selection change depending on the other team (good/bad/similar; lost/won a lot against them) or the game type (league/friendly/cup game)?
    - i. For example, if you were playing a good (bad) team would you try and limit your losses (maximise your gains) or the other way around?
    - ii. So would you ask yourself “how can I win?” or “how can I not lose?” when faced with different (good/bad/similar) teams?
    - iii. If you were playing a good (bad/similar) team, what kind of player (e.g., risky/consistent) would you likely pick?
  - e. Did your selections ever change because of any rules (either team or RFU)?
    - i. When? Why?
  - f. Did your selection strategy change if the team won (lost) the week before?

- i. Would you ask yourself “if I hadn’t picked him we would’ve won, so I won’t pick him again”?
  - g. Was there ever a time when you wanted to drop someone but couldn’t because there was no one to replace them?
    - i. What did you do? Why?
  - h. Did anything else cause your selection strategy to change?
    - i. Do you remember a time when your selection strategy changed? Why did it change? How did it change?
- 3. Describe how you selected individual positions
  - a. Was this process the same for players in different positions (with different skill sets)?
  - b. Was there a time when you had to make a difficult decision picking between two players?
    - i. Describe your thought process
  - c. How did previous game performances affect selection (in 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> team)?
    - i. Did training performances affect selection? Did it have the same weight as game performances?
- 4. Do you pick positions in isolation or in combinations?
  - a. Describe a time when you did this
    - i. What kind of things did you have to consider (e.g., weak aspects of one player’s game)?

(Specific questions relating to Solomon and Rhea (2008))

- 5. What, if any, physical aspects of a player did you concentrate on when selecting a team? How much did you concentrate on the physical aspects (e.g., sport specific skills, athleticism, speed, strength)

- b. How important are these to you?
6. What psychological aspects (personality; e.g., hard worker, communication, mental maturity, honesty, confidence) did you look for when selecting a team?
- b. How important are these to you? Compared with physical aspects?
7. How did you take an athlete's personal situation (e.g., maturation, family dynamics) into account when selecting a team?
- c. Has there been a case where you've had to consider this?
  - d. How important would this be?
8. Did you take into consideration an athlete's knowledge (e.g., academic, tactical)?
- d. How important is this to you?
  - e. Is there a balance between a good personality/athleticism and knowledge?
  - f. Which would stand out for you?
9. Did a player's skills ever come into consideration when you were selecting?
- a. What did you do?
  - b. How important is skill to you?
  - c. Did you ever have to question a selection because of the style of rugby the team/player played?
10. How important is experience to you?
- a. When would you consider experience when selecting your team?
11. Do you think you make mistakes (e.g., forgetting athletes will improve, relying on other's opinions, perception one can change athletes) when selecting a team?
- a. Examples of when/how this happened?

(Questions about initial results)

12. Do you think your relationship with your athletes affects your selection?
- a. Has this ever happened? What did you do?

- b. Is this the ideal situation?
13. Did you ever use selection as a management tool?
- a. When? Why?
14. Do you think you have an 'instinct' when it comes to selection (e.g., best/amazing/magic)?
- a. When would you rely on this?
  - b. Has this ever let you down?
  - c. Would you change anything about it?
15. Was there anything in the environment that affected your selection (e.g., parents/weather)?
- a. Why?

(Questions about what coaches want)

16. In an ideal world, what information would you use if everything was available to you?  
What equipment/resources would you want?

## Appendix C

## Example Transcript from Post-Season Interviews from Chapter 4

Jeff Mantle (pseudonym)

Researcher: So sort of begin with, describe the process that you went through this season when you were selecting your team

JM: Yeah, so, we were, we were looking to, to, I guess to try, try and build something so we wanted to see where we're at, so our starting point was primarily looking, it was sort of a two pronged attack, we were looking for, for talent in each position umm but also characters, so people that would fit into a good team umm and guess as we've gone on through the season, there's been a few people that have, have probably lacked on the character side, where we've moved them out or they've moved on for other reasons and others have come through so I think that was probably our main, main approach umm other factors sort of getting involved were obviously sort of uhh attendance at training umm of which there are then issues around that because we've certainly found this season that umm you know there are some players that are probably very deserving of being involved but maybe don't quite have the talent to justify it so, you know some of them you would look at and go "yeah they're playing regularly second team, they're at training all the time, but they're maybe not quite that quality to, to go up on a choice, probably do a job for you if you have to but" so there's those sorts of issues coming into it, and then we were also trying to align that with potentially when there's choice around what sort of style of rugby we wanna play, so with our artificial pitch we've done quite well at getting to a point where out there we can play quite a fast paced game, quite a wide game, quite a creative game so as we went on through the season, it maybe wasn't our starting point when I spoke to you, we probably weren't thinking about it all that much because we were just looking for the right people and then seeing where that evolved

umm that come in, we've made several decisions based on well actually this guy fits in with our style of play more than the other guy, etc., etc.

Researcher: OK, so do you think, so it's changed essentially from when we last spoke?

JM: Yeah I think, I think it's evolved and I think, I just, I wouldn't say, you know it's not a major change I think there are those few key factors that are still behind everything but then we've maybe got to a point where we've been able to add and go actually there's some other questions we can now ask when we're in selection umm you know we're still not, it's quite nice that we're still, I think because of the way we've worked as a selection team we haven't had to make it too formalised, it hasn't had to be right tick this box, tick this box, OK, that's where we end up, we've been quite open and honest with our discussions umm and I've, and largely, obviously there's a few instances but most people are on the same wavelength so umm although people might have different viewpoints, generally we have all worked towards the same sort of goal which has been nice, so, so yeah we've progressed, I would say, yeah we've, yeah evolution not revolution quite so much, so yeah

Researcher: Yeah, so you mentioned then that some of the players maybe moved away from the squad, was it

JM: Yeah, we've had several, one, one major incident where umm a player was disgruntled at not being in the first team umm and when, initially showed that frustration by sort of storming out of training umm throwing his toys out the pram so then once he cooled down we started to talk to him, it became very clear that his motivation of playing was "I need to be a first team player" we were like "OK, but why?" It was all about status, that's what he needed and so when we, we went into it and went "OK well, where do you see, where do you think you fit in the first team? What position should you be playing? Where have we got it wrong?" And he goes "I should be starting 7" and straight away there was a disconnect because we

saw him as, probably a number 6 only and third or fourth on the pecking order, so there was a huge disconnect in terms of where he saw his ability to where we, and not just me, as a group everyone was kind of agreed that he was one of those players that, that won't let you down, will make his tackles, probably won't lose the ball in contact, but he didn't do anything exceptionally well, so he didn't like, he'd never carry for ten metres beyond contact, he'd never hit someone in a tackle so hard that he's knocking them backwards, he was never, never had an impact and I think my experience, if you've got, you've always got choices in the back row and largely people will have something they're good at. So I guess that, that comes back to another little selection thing, is actually what are peoples' strengths? You know what do they do well? Rather than looking, looking at the view point of...how great are their weaknesses? So you pick someone with less weaknesses, we go actually "what difference can that person make on the team because of their strength?" You know so we've got some guys, a couple of guys that are like well OK they have to be in the team because of their ability at the line out, to jump, and alright they might not be as good around the park but that's probably a priority so, yeah, so we've had a few people move on and I think, I think that will probably happen again next year but in terms of building a club and a squad, it's probably a positive if people don't wanna put the work in and be a second team player and push through, and that was the issue, was that really he didn't, just wanted to be a first team player without the whole work my way up, which doesn't really work so, yeah so we've had a few instances of that and umm we've had a few other players move on but mainly because we weren't offering them umm the right training environment which we've sort of amended cause we only really did sort of, when I came in first and second team training together umm we had quite a lot of new faces come in that needed sort of a more social, development style training so we've added that now so hopefully we can retain both sort of groups of players, but yeah



Researcher: Were there any cases where, so they were the players that left because maybe that had issues, were there any cases where players were selected over the people that were already in there? Not because those guys that are there had any issues, but actually because these guys were pushing through so much

JM: Yeah, not, not as often as we would want because umm we haven't had stability of training in our second team umm and potentially with our coaches that are taking the second team, they maybe weren't quite as much on the sort of reward selection that I wanted, they very much wanted to put out their best team every week, and there was a bit of compromise at times but there have been two or three occasions where yeah, someone's uhh been training well but performing in the second team, where actually we've put them in ahead of other people umm sometimes that's been based around the game, so there were maybe two or three games throughout the season where we would expect to do well, so we were like OK we can maybe make two or three changes here if we want because we feel the rest of the squad could cope so it was a nice chance to look at someone umm other ones were, yeah were literally just straight choices between who's gonna offer the most in that game, that might of come down to conditions, so you know if it was November through to February, it's gonna be a bit muddier, bit wetter, does that person play a different style of rugby that suits us compared to that person? Or, or just looking at it as a straight shoot out on form, who's actually performing better at the time? And one might have had a slight dip and etc., so we've had a couple of those instances umm and then, you know it's then difficult, it's then about, about rotating because sometimes those guys drop down onto the bench and it's how, how many times do we keep that player on the bench spot if they haven't moved up? So if they haven't, if an opportunity hasn't become available for them to go up, do you put them on the bench for that third week? Or do you say "go and have 80 minutes for the second team, we'll bring

someone else in" so it's balanced cause I think the key thing to remember is as much as guys want to get selected they're also here to play rugby

[Interruption]

Researcher: So you were saying then there's this idea then of actually, if players are on the bench for a couple of weeks it's actually thinking "right well maybe we should put them down in the 2s to get them the game time" so even though they were maybe selected and you thought "right they're good enough to be in that 1s squad" actually the idea of giving them game time

JM: Yeah I think so and I think that's just, it's a difficult conversation to have when you put anyone from, you're effectively dropping them whatever way you wanna try and, to word it because you're effectively dropping them but umm no it has to be that little bit of management and it, it hasn't happened all the time throughout the season cause we, we admittedly haven't had, I don't look across our 1s and 2s and go "OK anyone can step up and play" it's not that fluid at the moment, but there are one or two positions where we've got a little bit of strength where actually we can afford to do that and the person coming on to the bench is then not necessarily gonna be a weaker player and it's opportunity, so it's umm it's a difficult one to think of but sometimes just a, giving those guys that 80 minutes means that they're gonna keep their fitness up, that they're gonna, and sometimes they'll get a better opportunity to show what they can do if they go down to the 2s, have a good attitude and play well for 80 minutes than maybe coming off the bench for 20 minutes in a game that we might be losing or whatever it might be, so it might be, it's almost a bit, it might be harder for them to take but actually it might be a better opportunity for them so, so

Researcher: So it's almost this idea of looking at, you were mentioning then the replacements as well so actually the guys that you do move, depending on the game, the opposition or

whatever, it then comes down to who's behind them to come in and take their place, assuming that if there was no one that you thought would be good enough to come in, then that, regardless that you're play bottom of the league, whatever, that change wouldn't happen because there was no one else to come in there to fill that gap type thing

JM: Yeah it's always that, it's always that strength in depth, if we've got no one behind pushing then if you've got 18 players and they're fit and available every week and that's all you've got then a) you're very lucky that they're not getting injured but that's where you're sat with it really so umm it does very much depend on what you've got available, obviously umm the, the major reason we've made changes this year has been unavailability's, you know generally just players saying "I can't play this week, I'm at a wedding" or "I'm away on holiday" or whatever it may be umm we've tried to get ahead on the curve so that we know that quite far in advance, but actually that's probably been, 75% of our changes have probably been forced umm so either that or injury, although touch wood we've actually been very lucky with injury this year, we haven't, haven't had many long-term injuries, just the odd niggle so umm but yeah most of it's been enforced so actually I, we know a couple of months ahead "right on these dates, so and so's gunna be away, so what's our plan for that? OK maybe he plays all the way up till then, but we're having a look at this player in here, just" or we're lining it up and going to so and so, "we know that our fly half's gunna be away, what's your availability like up to here because there's gunna be an opportunity coming up?" so you can use it almost as a umm a motivational tactic at times, so if you're playing well in the 2s or whatever it may be, just, there is a natural opportunity coming up so, yeah

Researcher: So it's actually quite long-term then? It's this idea of, of figuring out, assuming then you've got say a squad that you think if these guys are fit and healthy and available, they're the ones that will get selected, and then it's those few positions on a few weekends that aren't there and then planning

JM: Yeah I think ideally, cause what we can take 18 on a match day, so 15 and 3 subs, we're probably looking at a squad of maybe 25, 26 people, in our thoughts that are, you know, that, you would ideally if everyone was fit that's what you would use, probably ends up going a bit more towards 30, 35 in an ideal world where you, you end up using those players but realistically if you could keep everyone fit, you know your players that are good quality and they're the group that you'd wanna, wanna work with all the time but it is very, it doesn't always work out, people aren't, not, aren't necessarily great at their scheduling and know what they're doing ahead of time or get things wrong but generally try and look sort of two months ahead fixture wise just to, cause then I think we, you can, you're in control of what you're doing, I don't, as a coach I don't like not, I'll try and control as much as possible or at least be ahead of the curve so if I can look at it two months down the line, if I know somethings coming up and I think "oh Christ right we're missing 10, 12 and 13 all on one week, what's our strategy for that? What...what are we gonna be looking to then? You know is it a team where that's gonna cause a big issue? And we might have to prepare for two weeks to change our style of play slightly or, or you know actually here's a months period where my starting kickers gonna be away so actually I change my training to work a bit more with our back up kickers to make sure they can step in, but I think if you know ahead as much as possible then it, then it can help you and you can go "well..." and it might, it might affect, so there are a couple occasions say we knew umm so we're maybe selecting for, for the next week and everyone's available but the following week someone's missing, so it might be well actually the one where he's missing is a harder game so let's bring that other person in early knowing that he's gonna be away so he's had a bit of time to acclimatise and therefore hopefully perform better in the other, the other game, so you, it's just trying to be smart with it at times and if that opportunity's available there then it's a, you know, and it might be that that person

who's not here comes onto the bench and go "well you're not here next week, we really need to have a look at this guy and check that he's, he's OK" you know and go in that way

Researcher: OK, so then that 75% was down to availabilities, what would you say that other 25%

JM: Well the other 25% is choice, so it's gonna be form of players umm it's gonna be tactical, so I don't, as a coach I don't, I don't particularly like looking at the opposition, every now and again there's a game where you really have to, but most of the time I like to focus on us and go "right what are we gonna do that gives them problems?" Every now and again there's a game, I think of us playing [opposition team name] away this year, pouring with rain, wet and mud, we've built a team to play out on that pitch, they're huge, so you can't just run through them, you know we're just looking at "OK well we might just have to bring in one or two players that will help us play that game" little bit more physical, maybe a little less skilful, but might just get you over the gain line or whatever it may be, so the other 25% is, is purely choice, ideally you want that to be well in the other scale, you know you'd want it probably to be...you'd want it, I'm not saying you'd necessarily want it the other way because you're not necessarily wanting to make a lot of changes but, yeah the changes that you do want you probably wanna be your choice, if it's all your choice it means, you might not choose to make any changes but it's in your hands and it means people are there week in, week out, just realities of life makes that almost impossible so, so yeah, so that's probably where we're at, at the moment, I think as you, as you experience a little bit more success that becomes a bit easier because people make themselves more available for more fixtures, so what you find I think when you're losing games it's easy for people to say "oh I'm not available this week, don't fancy that away trip" umm so we look at those things but yeah it's really, the planning for it is I guess an element of control, it's wanting to, to know well enough in advance that we can change training, that we can get in contact with players if we

need to that we can, talking to the second team coaches "alright we know this gaps coming up in three weeks, who are we looking at? You've had some options and you've been playing this guy on the wing but could we have a look at him in your centres for the next couple of weeks just to see how he'd fit? So if we choose to move him up he's there umm" and I hope, I hope going forward that as we hopefully recruit more players through word of mouth, etc., and retain more players, hopefully those decisions become a bit harder because you've got more strength behind, but, yeah

Researcher: So do you think then your, the way you've selected has been sort of a blanket team selection or have, do you think it's gone smaller in terms of positions or combinations?

JM: How do you mean? In terms of the criteria?

Researcher: Yeah so the criteria you've been selecting on

JM: I think it probably, I think it probably has become narrower, I think cause this was my first year umm when I first was selecting teams there wasn't a lot of knowledge behind it so umm although the other people in the room might have a lot of knowledge, it's then quite subjective, you're basing it on not a lot of facts cause you haven't seen a lot of, you go like my opinion, he looks like, as you go through the season you go well we know that guy isn't very committed so he's sort of moves to the only if necessary pile and, and as I said you find a style of play so we had an instance we were playing [opposition team name] so our closest rivals umm sort of middle of March so getting towards the end of the season, it was out here, we'd lost away to them, it was important that we had a win and our fly half was away umm we had one guy who's experienced, could play, good defender, but attacking wise, not as much flair that, our existing 10 is a 7s player so he brings a lot of pace and skill into the game, but we had a colt who although looked like a 12 year old was, you know, loads of skill, loads of pace, and you're like well let's give him a go in training just to be sure but actually

for the team this switch to the colt fly half would be less of a change of style and hopefully would be OK, so we bought him in, he was outstanding, he just fitted in really well umm so that has, that has, I think that, it's maybe not been something we talked about because I think the quality of players...it's probably very umm a subconscious sort of thing where we're talking about players, we know that certain players won't necessarily fit our style of rugby so you're always looking like for like or better than what you've got, so I think it has become narrower in terms of selection, I think we have been, I think the group of players that we're picking from naturally has become narrower umm and I think, yeah the reasons why we're selecting them become narrower because I think, when I said at the beginning that we picked a lot on character, actually, certainly come Christmas, you've weeded out all the guys that have got poor attitudes or lack of commitment or whatever so actually that's, that's not even really a factor, so you're actually then moving onto other things which is the type of player that you want, it's, and form, they're probably the two, two things that come into it, so, yeah

Researcher: Did you have a style of rugby? Because it sounds like that was an important factor, did you have that before you came in? Or did you look at the players and say "we can play this style of rugby" and then tried to keep that up if you see what I mean?

JM: I have a preferred style of rugby that I like to see but you can't come in and force that on a, on a side because you might, you might just not have the players, you might have no talent in the backs and a load of big forwards and you're like "oh we gotta play to our strengths" so it, I would imagine that I have had an influence on that in the way that we train, some of the skills that we put umm emphasis on, but it has suited the players that we've had and, and the pitch is a big influence on that as well, so you don't, you know come out on that pitch and play a narrow game, it attracts the players in so with the, some of the guys we've recruited are, you know few off the 7s circuit who are friends of friends who've looked at that and gone "I'd love to play on that pitch" and, you know the forwards that we get in tend to be ones that

are a little bit fitter cause, capable to run a bit more on the pitch so umm so I think, I guess it's a combination of, I certainly haven't come in and gone "we're gonna play this way" come in and say "these are some of my philosophies, some of the things I'd like to see, let's build around that and see where it takes us" I think, I think actually that probably has a bigger effect on us because when you're out there and you're training the balls not wet and muddy, it's not you know, it just means you, you adapt to play a certain style really so, yeah

Researcher: Can you think of any times maybe where you got the selection wrong? And you looked back and you think "well I selected him on this when actually I probably shouldn't have given what happened"

JM: Umm the, the ones I look back on are...I wouldn't say I was wrong on it because I'm, I still don't know where I sit with it but the ones that have been the hardest have been, we've got a prop that, think he's 40 years old odd, never been a first team regular but he's been at every training session, never misses a training session, played a bit at the start of the season, solid enough but not spectacular and it's maybe decisions where, where we bought back end of the season a couple of guys that maybe hadn't earn their stripes in training or played, who'd been a couple that had gone away from the club and come back that we've, through injury put straight back in just because we've kind of looked at it and gone "we should really be picking him, but long-term he's not really part of our plans and that's..." I don't think it was the wrong selection but it, it does sit with me a little bit of like, is that the right thing to do? Because really he should be rewarded but then, I guess because of his age and the fact that he's not outstanding warrants that, we'd, we're almost better to bring the guy in who'd gone away to bring him in and get him reengaged so we have him for next season and hopefully enjoying it, so that, that plays a part, and then other decisions where I've got it wrong...trying to think if there's anyone I've actually picked that I think was wrong...yeah there's, there's a couple, probably had a few, generally seems to be some of the older guys that are umm one guy



who's been a first team player here for sort of the last 10, 12 years umm but is probably dropping off a little bit in terms of commitment, we bought him back to sit on the bench when we needed him and actually he wasn't very good, his attitude wasn't great, I probably thought after that, we should have looked at someone else, it would have been better to put a youngster in there or someone less experienced, we would have got more out of that, they'd have been a better learning process for that player or umm and we've done that a couple of times, couple of times we've just thrown in, I've thrown in guys on the bench that just aren't good enough but, but actually thinking about it well it might keep them at the club for the next five, six years because they go "there is an opportunity for me here" or, you know or go, I think we took a young scrum half down to [opposition team name] and [opposition team name] on the 2nd of January because we were just completely short on players umm and although he knows he not a first team quality player, his dad came and watched, you know he's really proud of what he done, like he'd grown up playing at the club so actually that was probably a nicer outcome than just calling up some guy that hadn't been training that had maybe played a bit of first team before and probably a better player and gone "come have this game" so, did that and the bigger ones, the ones where I've got it wrong more often would be just umm positional selections, so we've maybe had the right players on the pitch but we've shifted them into, into different positions to do different things and it's maybe not worked as effectively umm I think of a couple of times we had a winger, he plays at [university name] umm fantastic player, he's big, he's physical, thought OK we're struggling in, in the midfield at the moment, let's put him in at 12 umm and he was woeful, couldn't tackle a fly, and you're like well you're big, you're fast, it shouldn't be an issue in theory, and that didn't work and that, that made us struggle, so it was then possibly just making poor positional selections, most of those however came on days where, where the selection was the, we didn't have choice, where we had a lack of choice so within that 75% we're maybe missing two or three

players, I don't think we had many instances where I would say we had good availability and we've made some wrong decisions, I think we could always justify what we did whether it would be that guy deserves an opportunity because he's been working hard and effort, you know, the points where we could make changes because maybe the game was less important or didn't mean as much umm yeah I think I'm, I actually think we've done reasonably well at it and I think we've got it spot on, it's probably helped again by the fact that our pool of players are, for where I'd like us to be, relatively small, so therefore, you know there's not 40 players knocking on your door that you could go "right, within a couple of months he could be a first team player" you know we are probably looking at, we've used around 56 players this year, had a look at 56 players umm second half of the season that was probably closer to 35, which I think probably a good place to be umm but realistically we've probably got a pool of 30 players that you look at and go, at the moment, they're in and around first team quality, and that makes it all easier because it doesn't take a lot, it takes a couple of injuries and a couple of unavailability's and there's, there's your squad plus, plus three or four so umm yeah

Researcher: So this being your first season with these guys, do you think coming in that helped or hindered in any way your team selection? The way that you went about selecting teams?

JM: Yeah I think umm I think it was a good thing because I think...I think people initially wanted to see where I was going with selection so they sort of listened and would, then would pipe in when they needed to but actually they kind of listened to what it was and I guess they were getting a feel for how I would take process and how I would judge players umm I think I, and I think I worked quite hard to involve the others in that process as well so very much umm you know I pretty much let my forwards coach pick our forwards, you know he works with them more than I do, and go "right what do you wanna see?" And then as that goes

through we might have a chat about one or two players and play devils advocate, you know, it might be "well what about him here?" Even if you don't believe it, just to get a bit of justification, a bit of thought provoking, so I think we've, the process that we've come up with I think it's been helpful coming in with a blank slate, I think, and I, I think coming in, and, probably doesn't sound like it's very clear but in my head you know I do, I do try and stick to some values, it's not always, you've been doing this for a year you know there's a lot of grey areas but actually, you know, I'm not looking to select out and out our best 18 players because, hopefully we will get to that but it's not "he's better than him, he starts" it's, you know that's not where we're looking to so it's, I think I've stuck to my values quite well, I think I've made the process quite open so people can feed it, but, whilst maintaining the sort of well, feed in but ultimately if I'm not comfortable with that decision we'll go with what I'm thinking of and, I'll go "apologies but this needs to be on me because I'm accountable at the end of it really" umm so, it's been, I think it's, yeah it's been nice coming into it the start umm and this being my second club where I've coached umm it's been a lot easier having learnt from those previous experiences so I'll go in and go "right, well..." I think once you, if you go in and you're not very clear of what you want in terms of selection, other people can railroad you quite a lot, or they can have too much of an influence or, you know you start, once you start picking on one thing, it's hard to then change that because the message to the players is different, so you're coming in clear, going "right what did I like about where I was last time? And what would I maybe change?" I could come in and go "right this is, this is the way selections gunna work, off we go" umm and so one of those things was that we had, you know I invited the first team captain to come sit in, I got challenged going "players have never sat in on this" but they're a really important thing because we might go "let's pick this player" and he goes "none of the players get on with that guy", could be, you know or it could be actually well, our captains our prop so he might go "ok he is a good second row but in the

scrummage I don't feel anything, there's no power there so actually I'd rather have him there as a player myself" so you get those little insights into it and I think that's been valuable as well because then, you know as a coach you see certain things but they might give you a different opinion that helps and ultimately you want the players to be happy and confident with what's been selected so, but I think...think you got to a point where I don't get challenged an awful lot and I'm not much of a bully so I don't think, I don't think it's because of that, hopefully it's because generally we're making, just making good decisions, I guess as you go through the season teams pick themselves a bit more anyway where they can because you go "well the guys are playing well" especially for us this year you know the guys have been playing well so just becomes easy really, there's not much to dispute, if people are playing poorly you can go "well he's not playing very well, he should be in" or, it becomes a bit more subjective I think so

Researcher: So through the season actually if they're playing well it's almost, if they finish well in the shirt type thing they're gunna

JM: It's hard to change teams when you're winning, it's difficult so, and it makes conversations even harder because they're going "well we're winning games" and then for you to go "OK but you're maybe not playing as well as you could" is quite harsh so it does become harder and if you've got a team that's winning and winning consistently then, then why change a winning team really? If you can, you know you might make a few tweaks every now and again but umm but yeah it does, I think it does become harder when you're winning, when you're losing umm as I said people drop out so they'll be more, more opportunities anyway and you know there's got to be a reason why you're losing games so you can always justify, go "we think this person will help us to, to get back onto winning form" or whatever it may be so

Researcher: Well I guess finishing fifth then you must have been pretty successful through the season so actually I guess, was there actually much change when you were successful?

Do you remember looking back

JM: No so we, we only lost one game at home umm we won away games when the weather was hard, the ground was hard, we started losing as soon as the rain came in, it put us off, just cause we, I don't know we didn't adapt very well off this pitch and we don't have the, the different types of players that we maybe could bring in, like a bigger second row or you know another ball carrying prop or a kicker uhh a 10 that's slightly more, got slightly bigger boot on him that can find touch, we didn't have those options so it was, I'm trying to think, we...second half of the season we didn't make many changes at all, only the ones really where it was enforced, you know someone was away, injury, trying to think if there was any other reason

Researcher: And was that because you were successful?

JM: Yeah I think, like I say people don't wanna lose their spot by making themselves unavailable and we don't wanna make any changes because we were playing good rugby, the first half of the season, I wouldn't say the changes were made cause we were losing, basically because I was still learning who the players were, you know and there were, trying to think of examples of things, so umm you know we had a flanker that came back in the middle of October because he'd been away travelling in Argentina so he comes back in, month or two to get himself fit and then it's like "oh OK he's actually possibly a better option than what we've got there" or, or what was more the case was we probably had...six, six or seven players across our back five that were all capable, so, you know, generally actually we had to do a little bit of rotation, I think someone got an injury so that went down a little bit umm and then actually you're at a point where, well, they might be rotating between the first team, starting

team and the bench but actually same players every week so you just do a little bit of rotation because there wasn't a lot of difference or effect on the team by them changing around, so, yeah you know it's, I would imagine if we went through...when we lost, we knew it wasn't, it wasn't cause people were playing poorly, it was because we needed more time to coach different things and, and generally that team needed to learn to play a different way away from home, and our away performances did get better so it was just having a bit of patience with them, I imagine next season, you know, if we went through a losing streak then we might have to, you just ask that question, you go "what is the reason that we're losing? Is it because these guys can't do it? Or is it, you know, is that person not performing? Or is it just a slightly wider issue that, OK, they play, that same team plays very well at home, just need to play, do some things differently" so

Researcher: So it's the nature of the loss almost?

JM: Yeah definitely, definitely, it's not just the fact that you lose, you have to look at it, sometimes, sometimes it's not the players fault, sometimes you go well actually you know we do just need a good two months of training on certain things that will get us to a point where we're hopefully we will be able to win away from home but, which is where we got to really and, and the age of the players makes a difference as well cause quite a lot of our players are young, or certainly in key decision making positions, so actually they in time will learn to play, play different styles of rugby umm and so try and stick with them and you go well "what does it do", some of your decisions are based on "what will it do to that players development?" Actually we, let's just persevere with him for a few weeks and hopefully see some improved performances cause dropping him might just dent confidence or, you know it's actually, if you've got a 30 year old fly half, potentially not a lot more learning for him to do or he's less, less receptive to learning potentially so, you know there's, there's hundreds of

factors and it's, it's I guess it's being smart enough or, or knowledgeable enough as a group to pick which ones are actually important at the time, yeah

Researcher: OK, important in what way? In

JM: Well based on the different circumstances so, you know, we might be looking at...that example that we just said is if we're losing away from home, we could go in and go "well he's not playing very well" but actually the solution to the problem might be that actually we're not, we're not playing the right kind of rugby in those conditions to allow him to play well, it might not necessarily be his fault, or it might be a winger uhh in wet conditions that hasn't looked very effective and he goes "well, we need to teach, it's our fault cause we need to teach him to go and look for ball in wet conditions cause it's probably not gonna get all the way through to the hands, to the wing to him so he can show what he can do, or it might be that we, we need to kick to different areas of the pitch for him so that he can become part of the game, then it's, I think on most things I would always first try and look internally, so I'd go "is it something we can change? Is he playing poorly because of something we're doing?" Or is it, you know if you feel you're doing everything you can, then actually you go "well yeah he's just off form" you know there's been a couple of guys that have been like that this season that one of our centres, yeah just wasn't, had a few games in a row where he wasn't particularly, he's not an out and out, he's not head and shoulders above in terms of first team, he's a good player when he's in there, but he, you know there's three or four of them that you'd go "OK they could all get into that mix" so he just wasn't, he had a couple of bad games and then I think you could see it sort of affecting his confidence so it's like "well, I'm just gonna put you down into the 2s for a few weeks where you get some slightly easier games, go score a few tries" you know and that's all it takes sometimes, just a couple of weeks with slightly easier rugby and he's looking confident again and you see that in training then you're like "OK great" then you're sort of back in, in the discussions for, for first team, yeah

Researcher: It's that managing the players essentially as well

JM: Absolutely, it's looking at the psychological elements, you know looking at them going "right well" yeah and maybe having that conversation so before selecting or, cause what we do is we meet on Tuesday night and do a general selection, with a few question marks, so it's like, yeah OK so...we go, we might stick with that person but we're gonna have a conversation with him so sometimes form might be because they got something going on at home, but yeah there has been a couple instances where you know one of the guys has gone "yeah my...you know my parents are going through, just about to split up" etc. so it's affecting, you know it's not necessarily him feeling bad about that, you know he's old enough to sort of appreciate it but he's got younger brothers and sisters that he's having to look after through the process so it's then deflecting away from his focus on his game so it's like well "you know you train when you can, don't worry if you're not here, if you wanna make yourself available for a game, great, but if not you just take your time and we're here for you and when you're ready to be 100% back in, there's the space for you" so it's, yeah there's an awful lot, lot of variables umm some of it's just talking with people I think as well, trying not to keep it all to myself because otherwise I think I would make bad decisions but having enough people to go, you know sometimes you go "I don't think he's playing well" and actually someone goes "well why don't you have a quick chat with him? See what's going on?" You know "how's your rugby going?" "Oh I don't think I'm playing that well" "OK why's that?" And then all of a sudden you go, you know "I don't think I play very well with this person inside me here" or, so you're making, you know it's...knowledge is power isn't it? You know and then you can make more effective decisions, and then hopefully your selections will be more correct than not, so

Researcher: Well I mean can you think of anything else over the season that would have affected or impacted the, the selection of the team at all?



JM: Yeah I think umm the other, the other major one has been, so we have uhh me and [assistant coach name] are first team coaches so obviously I head it up and he's the forwards coach and then we have [second team coach name] and [second team coach name] who look after the second team, now they, they very much wanted, being coaches rather than just helpers, they wanna coach a team of players, so they've wanted to coach a team of players, now what that means is they want to be successful in their own right, which is absolutely fine, I'd be surprised any coach that didn't, but that hasn't necessarily fitted in with when we've wanted to use the second team to develop players long-term, so sometimes I've maybe made decisions in selection which have allowed, maybe weakened us or maybe not allowed us to have the player that we wanted, particularly in terms of bench players, it's not necessarily starting players but, you know, your replacement back, it might just be actually well "I tell you what, we'll, we won't drop him, we'll keep him because it gives you a stronger player this week and", and it keeps them on your side otherwise you kind of, otherwise you're just taking their best players from them every week and it becomes and a bit demoralising so although I never, I've never sort of said to them that that's sometimes what I'm doing, sometimes just take it on the chin and go "well actually, it does them a favour, they'll have a stronger team, they'll be happier with it" and this guy we're gonna keep, he's probably not gonna let me down, it's probably not that much of a difference, I'll just swallow it at this point and go "OK well you guys have them" and try and keep them happier but admittedly those uhh both of them are potentially moving on as coaches just because, well one of them's got some work changes going on, the other one just became frustrated that a lot of the second team players didn't train so as a coach he felt he was just managing a squad on a Saturday as opposed to coaching, so you know we looked, hopefully that will give me an opportunity next year to bring some people in involve, and almost mould them in what we want, so next year we can maybe have a slightly younger 2nd team and go "do you know what? They might

lose a load of games but in two, three years' time, the majority of them could be ready to push for 1st team" and then actually we're in a stronger place, so, so that, that's probably the other factor is the rest of the coaching team and trying to think how that affects them so, yeah

Researcher: So it was almost like, you almost had two clubs, or two teams, as opposed to a whole sort of team of we'll put them down there to develop them, come back up, there's was, you wanted to do that but there was maybe less of it

JM: Yeah definitely I mean ideally I wanna get to a point where actually I have quite a lot of control over the second team selection as well and certainly more feedback on players coming, coming back through umm so that we have more flow, the challenge is that then, the more players you have to select from, the more difficult conversations you have to have with people when you drop them, or difficult conversations with players about why they're not being pushed up, and then you've got to somehow keep those players interested in sticking around so, yeah, but that, that played a big part in trying to, just occasionally, it wasn't every week but you know probably once a month at least where we we're like "OK well, see if we just keep hold of that player, [second team coach name]'ll be happier and they'll have a, you know they'll have a better team"

Researcher: And that was more with the bench?

JM: Yeah I think if we wanted, if a player was good enough to start, I don't think we'd compromise on that, we'd go "he's gunna start" but you know I think it was more, because sometimes there was progression going from second team, the natural progression is right you've played the second team, we'll try and get you onto the first team bench and then give you game time, see if you go in there umm cause in theory if someone pulls out of the starting team you've got three players, one of those should start, the gap becomes there, rather than that, it doesn't always work out like that but that's ideally the natural progression and

then sort of the same back down potentially umm but yeah, I don't, I don't know if that's pie in the sky that we'd ever get to some of these ideals but I guess time will tell, so

[Unrelated conversation]

JM: It just, I was thinking about it coming over and just going "OK what did we talk about before? OK and then it's" I don't think I ever really think about how many, as soon as you start talking about something, you think "oh there's this factor to take it, then this factor, oh and then sometimes we made decisions because of that" it's like, I don't know how we cope [laughs]

[Unrelated conversation]

JM: It's very psychological in terms of, you know the motivations of the coach as well as the psychological aspects generally of how a coach works with his players but yeah

[Unrelated conversation]

## Appendix D

## Example Raw Data and Coding from Data Analysis in Chapter 4

Table D1

*An example of the raw data which formed the cues included in the appearance cues theme  
(contained within in the player cues category)*

Cue	Original quote
	Physical appearance
Size	<p>“Big second row”</p> <p>“He’s a big boy”</p> <p>“Big lad”</p> <p>“You wanna a fly boy and you want a hard bastard”</p> <p>“I’d like to have that [a fast winger and a big winger] make up in the team”</p> <p>“I like that way [a fast winger and a big winger]”</p> <p>“Personally I like playing with a big winger and a speedy winger”</p> <p>“I like the big winger to be a little bit quick as well”</p> <p>“Biggest”</p> <p>“Some guys were very big and powerful but if they weren't, you could see their head wasn't in it, the way they move around the pitch”</p> <p>“Not physically very developed”</p> <p>“Scrawny”</p> <p>“One was substantially larger than the other, you know 6'2 and about 17 and a half stone, and by instinct I always put him in”</p> <p>“The other guy, who was much smaller”</p> <p>“They were changing, they were developing physically at that, some of them were hitting growth spurts”</p> <p>“Size”</p> <p>“Who's a similar build”</p> <p>“We only had under 17s, we had no older lads to bolster them, no larger lads, so they were always on the small side, so I may have leaned towards some of the bigger lads in less familiar positions”</p> <p>“Size can be a comfort blanket on selection”</p> <p>“Size can be a comfort blanket for selection, if you're unsure, the safer option is the bigger lad”</p> <p>“Looks like a scrum half, small”</p> <p>“You can be fooled by the look of a player, not just size”</p> <p>“He's big”</p> <p>“You're big”</p>
Athleticism	<p>“Athleticism”</p> <p>“He's more athletic he gets round the field better, he's less, less of a...hard rucking, mauling type player but more dynamic so again so I moved selection that way”</p> <p>“Very athletic”</p> <p>“We have put in a kid into the A team squad that is very able or a really good athlete”</p>
Young face	<p>“Very young in the face”</p> <p>“I think I judged him physically on how he looked, young in the face”</p>
How they look	<p>“When you first looked at him you thought “nah, nah””</p>

Cue	Original quote
	Physical appearance
	<p>“I remember those instances where I picked people for how they looked”</p> <p>“They look like a player”</p> <p>“The look of a player”</p> <p>“He looked like a 10”</p> <p>“Poise”</p>
	Age
Age	<p>“Younger”</p> <p>“48 years old”</p> <p>“If a guy is coming in who's older, you've then got to think about well which guy is not playing?”</p> <p>“There are key positions you have to have obviously, you know, if a, if a 52-year-old front row was available and we're struggling of course you've got to play your front row”</p> <p>“We only had under 17s, we had no older lads to bolster them, no larger lads, so they were always on the small side, so I may have leaned towards some of the bigger lads in less familiar positions”</p> <p>“He's 40 years old”</p> <p>“His age”</p> <p>“Older guys”</p> <p>“The age of the players makes a difference as well cause quite a lot of our players are young”</p> <p>“If you've got a 30 year old fly half, potentially not a lot more learning for him to do or he's less, less receptive to learning”</p>
Under 18	<p>“Everyone's like “whoa, but that lads under 18!””</p> <p>“We made sure all the 18s played”</p> <p>“I think it [being under 18] was to start with [player name], and I've admitted that”</p>

## Appendix E

## Example Transcripts from Case Study Interviews from Chapter 5

Head Coach

Researcher: Alright well, same as last time really, start with, describe the processes you went through then this season when you were selecting teams?

HC: Selecting teams umm like we said umm all those times back, do you need to record this or are you recording?

Researcher: Yeah, yeah it's already started

HC: Umm yeah basically umm again, you know, some of the guys I already knew, OK, as the umm the start of the season we had the new guys come in umm didn't really know them so everyone got a clean slate, and that's the one thing that myself, I've always done, you know especially the colt level, you know clean slate, just cause you were really good this year, doesn't necessarily mean you automatically get a starting place umm so basically we looked at training umm we had three friendlies before the season started proper, league umm looked at players and we could start then putting people in to positions as in we know, OK, those four of the back rowers out of that eight are really what we think are gunna be in and around our league side, cause we only had one team in the league in the end, at the start I remember when we were speaking we were having two but we only ended up having one because we didn't have enough players, we only 33 players. But some of the mind-set changed because within about two weeks training starting we got two players come in, both again, back rowers, one called umm [player name] who is a Fijian and he threw a thing up in the air umm and also another lad who joined us called [player name], again tough, uncompromising lad, so then we were like "bloody hell, that back row ain't gunna be what we think it is" I'm using the back row because that's always the hardest thing to pick whenever I've coached umm then

[player name] who was our captain unfortunately had a concussion which continued throughout the season, he came back, he got hit again, he then did the protocol, came back and [tat] we had to, so we had to really look at things but umm mainly in was all about you know what they do in training, their attitude and how they are within the, the general, you know, scheme of things, what we wanted was a cohesive unit within the whole thing, so we know that there's no I'm Billy big bollocks, you know, this lad here, take [player name] for example umm I don't know if you already know but he won players player and coaches player this year so, but [player name], no airs on graces, he would come and play in a B fixture, in a friendly if we needed him to and he was quite happy, he would say "[coach name] I'll go on the bench, it's fine, can I, can I help you guys run the line out?" And, and on the Thursday, you know, cause we always used to have our team runs with everyone who was playing on a Sunday, you know, and everybody else if you're not, even if you was A squad, A league game, you'd help out and [player name] then took it upon himself to, you know help the guys out, especially when we went on our under 17s cup run, he really worked with them because they're, the under 17s, because it's so mix and match, when we did have these cup games, with the under 18s cup game it didn't really matter because you just played your best side, if it was 18s or 17s, but with the 17s we were a bit bugged because you have to play, and they haven't played that much together so we had to do a lot more training umm extra sessions now and again just, and [player name] always used to come along so that was what I like, you know, and throughout the season, you know, [player name] besides being the best player, he also didn't have any airs and graces and help everybody out, and that's, if we're looking at a player that you want throughout your team, not just one person, that's the sort of player, quite happy to help the other guys to bring them on, you know, and, and it helps you know with the selection and everything like that. Front row we were a little bit stuffed with in the end, you know, we had two very good hookers umm [player name] and [player name] and

the props, we had four props basically, we had [player name], [player name], [player name] and [player name]. Now [player name] and [player name] were always in the A, you know, the league team, and it was always between [player name] and [player name], so sometimes and, you know, a couple of times I had to go up to [player name], say to him "look you haven't made it this time" and, and it's a fag paper, he just, you know, the one thing was his scrummaging was better but he didn't get round the park, and he's not a big lad, he's not fat, he's not a fat prop, but he just wasn't making himself known on the pitch, see, further now we look the, the analysis you've done and you've sent us, you, from your analysis actually cost a player his place in the team, but for us it was perfect, and that was a lad called [player name], big second row, basically three times in a row we picked him on previous, right, because [forwards coach name] would champion him because he was one of his original lads, whereas I would be "I'm not too sure" and I'd always have a back-up, and then your analysis came in in the [opposition team name] game and then the [opposition team name] game, and basically he carried once in each game, and made two tackles, and then the lad I brought on, called [player name], we played him on back row for 30 minutes, carried five times and made seven tackles, ish, roughly, so basically look, I just went [tap, tap] "there you go" cause he could also play second row, so it was like, do you see what I mean? So from my point of view that analysis that you brought in helped me out no end, and I can see how it helps, well of course it helps in the pro game, for definite, by then it definitely then got me thinking more "hang on, what's he doing?" And it also then twisted it with [player name] and [player name], although [player name] was a better scrummager, [player name] would carry more and I then used your information and showed [player name] "there you go, that's what you did when you played, that game that you started and you did it, that's what [player name] did" and it looked at it and he went "right, so I've got to carry more ball?" "Yeah, put yourself in a position to carry, you know, your tackling's fine, your tackling's up on his, but I need somebody to carry



ball, not just scrummage" I said "if I want somebody to scrummage I'll just go and get a fat lad from off the street and put him in there" and he was like "OK" he went off, trained, trained, trained, came back and, and was doing it yeah so it's, the whole thing through the season from the start, in my eyes, I've changed because I've had the information, whereas I hadn't had it, as you could imagine, I guess that's another thing that you're looking at, you know, when you've got the information, does your, do you think differently? And I've got to say yes, because then, rightly or wrongly, because I'd seen them two games where [player name] had done fuck all, completely changed my outlook to him, whereas I used to be like [forwards coach name] "yeah, he's doing, he's a big boy" you know, actually, what does he do?

Researcher: So what do you think you based that on before the stats then?

HC: Oh previous, previous form, I think, thinking he was better than what he is because I didn't have the information in black and white in front of me, because I, you, you, you know sometimes you look at a game and you think "oh he played brilliantly" but then you see the stats and you think "actually, he didn't" you know, three missed tackles, OK, he had eight tackles, four of them were missed, that's shocking innit? Let's by fair, if he had missed one, yeah fair enough, maybe two, but then you'd be talking about it, so yeah, it really, yeah it helped me, I thought it was brilliant to be fair, especially when it come to the big games, we just, we had uhh lots of conversations about selection after

Researcher: What after the stats came through?

HC: Yeah for the following game yeah

Researcher: How did it change then the dynamic then of that group of coaches?

HC: Didn't, oh the coaches itself umm [forwards coach name] was still adamant he wanted his guys, because you gotta remember [forwards coach name] and [backs coach name] have

been with these guys all the way through, whereas me being on the outside kinda thing, it didn't matter, I was just like "do you know what? It's there in black and white". [Backs coach name], I don't know what he said to you but he knew what I was going on about, he knew, he wasn't silly, he knew that I was making a sound, I was being a sound ball but I was also saying "look, it's there, we need to change it, we've got the information, let's bloody use it" you know, and it was like some of the back three, some of them, the same again, but it's, [assistant coach name] was, me and [assistant coach name] whenever we've coached we've only ever been one or two players out per 22, we're that in tune with it, well we've coached for 8 years together so umm but towards the end me and [backs coach name] were getting a bit more in tune and like I was getting to understand a bit more about the backs through him, you know I'm not gunna lie I'm a forwards coach you know, I know how to coach the backs but to me it's like "all right girls off you go" you know "paint your nails and I'll see you later" you know but it helped for me definitely within the forwards because the backs really picked themselves, if they were fit, they'd picked themselves, do you know what I mean? Umm if one of them was injured then we, we knew we had back up but they did pick themselves umm forwards was a lot harder, and that's where your analysis and your stats helped, but yeah it did change the dynamic of the coaches in a way as we didn't agree all the time, whereas before we did, but as it went on, I became more, I'll be honest I was reliant on your stuff, on top of what I was seeing in training, on top of what I was seeing in the game with my own eyes, if I had, if it was a case of "right, OK, it's between these two, let's have a look" and then we'd, we'd find them, "OK, [player name]" and mainly a lot of it was sometimes down for the subs, you know who can be the most effective off the bench? "OK let's have a look at what last time Matt did his stats, OK, [player name]'s there, OK, he played 20 minutes against [opposition team name] uhh lets have a look" because you came to the [opposition team name] game didn't you?

Researcher: Yeah

HC: Yeah "let's have a look at the stats then, right [player name] was on for 20 minutes, he made six tackles" I think I remember it, it was eight tackles, he missed two, made six, carried twice, the lad that was on before him had made four tackles, missed two, carried once, in six, in like fifty minutes do you know what I mean? So to me that was like "OK, you get to start next time" and everyone's like "whoa, but that lads under 18!" "Yeah but look at the stats" "oh but, you know, some of the, they might have brought on their weaker players" they didn't because they hardly made any subs, and neither did we because we had four players that didn't get on, so it was, in that respect it got a lot of peoples, you know, juices flowing and for me now, whatever I go into I'm gonna try and get somebody to be there to analyse the games, you know and I'll be honest, you know even if it's me getting someone to videoing it and then just looking you know, OK it's gonna be hard work but just, you know or again what you've done, get in touch with the local universities and say "is anybody doing any of the analysis work?" You know, like yours, or there's all different ways of doing this so you know and just say "look, does anybody wanna do it for experience?" Cause it's, honestly it is so informative and the way, now I don't know what will happen in the end when you go through everything and I think my views have changed over the season, but is it because I've become more reliant on that than what I've seen?

Researcher: What do you think you were reliant, so where you were reliant

HC: I think I was reliant on, more what the kid was like at training umm how, like I said to you before, I always found myself, I was like trying to be their friend, you know, wanna be personable, if they wanna come and talk to me they, they can, you know, "let's have a chat, if you wanna, if you don't like the decision come and talk to me and I'll explain it" umm whereas now, whereas before I had to really, really think, you know think "have I done that

the right way?" "Yeah OK this is the reason" now, when we're playing a game, if the following time there was a big game, didn't really use it for like the friendlies and all that, but those stats we definitely used for all the league games, league games and the under 18 cup games, it was like "there you go, bang, it's there" I remember one kid came up "why I don't understand?" I said "OK fair enough, you played for the As, duh, duh, duh, duh, there you go, that's what you did" and they're like "oh but I'm sure I did more than that" I said "look mate, there's the criteria" he said "oh I made more tackles than that" I said "nah, you made 14 tackles, you missed eight of them, you carried three times...passes, how many passes did you do?" "Well I'm a 7" "Yeah and? That's showing me, that you kept taking the ball in when you coulda probably, maybe passed" you know, and I used a lot of it for the wingers as well, to see what they were doing, if a winger only did one carry he didn't do fuck all, sorry, basically, do you know what I mean? He's doing any, he's not coming off his wing, you know, if we're in a game like umm and one of them was against [opposition team name], you know umm [player name] was playing, didn't come off his wing, [player name] came off his wing, scored two stunning tries, one of them I remember he, he came in, behind the full back, cut a line and absolutely destroyed, and him and [player name] did that little [passing noise] you know which is a great try when you see it, when I saw it on the video, you know and it's, yeah, I can see why in the pro game it's a lot easier for them to select players, when you think as a fan "why aren't he playing? He's brilliant" and then you look, and then you think "well hang on, I've had my mind changed from certain players" it was only those, I'll be honest it only probably about three or four, you know, but it got me thinking, you know "actually what does he do? Why are we picking him? Is it because of, he's the old guard? Or is it because he actually deserves to be there?" So, yeah

Researcher: So for the, you were saying then you didn't necessarily use it for some of the friendlies and things like that so the game type depended on what you used, but what sort of stuff, what sort of process were you going with the friendly games?

HC: Friendlies, in the end I'll be honest, it was whoever hasn't, say for instance we had a, an A league game, or an A, you know an A game, couple, basically everyone, we'd send all the umm Teamer out and say "right, who's available? Umm preference will be going to the guys that didn't play or were on the bench so please make yourselves available" long and short of it, I used to send a message out on our WhatsApp group "guys for the ones that didn't play umm that are not in this side, you will be needed for next week, I don't wanna hear any bullshit excuses" yeah umm I've got to go to see my granny's aunties dog, or, you know that kind of stuff, you know, "make yourselves available, if you don't, don't bloody complain when you ain't picked" because we've got A game, B game, A game...so

Researcher: So it was a way of, of essentially the kids that aren't getting the rugby for one reason or another, it's sort of bringing them in and giving them games

HC: Getting them games, yeah, it all, we run a squad, I think in the end we ended up with 36, which I don't think's bad for a colt, that's under 18, that's bloody good, cause I remember with a couple, with [assistant coach name]'s son umm we were running a squad of 21, that's it, if you rocked up you played, we were still very good, well we were very good at 15s and 16s but once we got 17s and 18s, we were a very small side, we were quick and compact but we were small, that was the problem, but as it progressed we got better and better, but, yeah it was uhh for the friendlies it was mainly whoever was available and then we'd just bring in if some of the A boys, you know the, were available yeah they played, that's where [player name] comes into it where sometimes I'd have to say to [player name] "[player name] look, we've only got two second row, can you come and bench and be the second row cover?" And

he'd be like "yeah, it's fine" and then you'd turn up "[head coach name] don't worry if I only get 10 minutes, just give me a, if you can just give me a decent 15 minutes, you know even if you put me on after half time and take me off 20, 15, 20 minutes later" he said "just so I can" and he said "and I'll just go balls out" he said "and just make a nuisance of myself and then pull me off" so yeah

Researcher: So you mentioned, [player name] was one of them and there was another back row as well

HC: [player name] yeah

Researcher: What sort of things then took them from sort of the new kid to actually we might wanna start them

HC: Well they're both, they were both under 17s so they're both the younger age group, now [player name] rocked up and he had a bit of a reputation because he was this ex-[professional team name] academy and all that rubbish, anyone can get into [professional team name] academy, I don't mean that horribly, you play a decent level at county, you down there and you pay your £190 you get into the [professional team name] academy because you get all the stash, alright umm he rocked up and to start with I thought "ah he ain't that good" he had hands like feet, alright, but over the ball and his tackle rate was frickin' immense, in training he would knock seven bells out of people, you know, [player name], another thing about [player name] turned up, very quiet boy, just rocked up pre-season, didn't know anybody, just rocked in, walked in, came straight up to the coaches "hi my names [player name], I used to play at [opposition team name], wanna give it a go here, I play back row, I know you got a good back row but I'm planning to make sure I get there or thereabouts by the end of the season" shook us by the hand, he said, and that was it, didn't really hear much, boo to a goose, he just put his down, got on with his work, but he is what I would class as an enforcer,

one of those gnarly bastards that were old school, he was old school but in a new lads body, you know, not dirty but just hard, and as he picked, you know he's not flash by any stretch of the imagination but when the chips are down and you're on your five metre line defending phase after phase after phase, you want him in your side because he'll, he'll get smashed, stop the tackle, back up, move across, he's got the brains to, bang, bang, and that's, and as the season progressed I remember round about November-ish, both of the boys spoke to me separately, said you know "this is the crack, what" and I'll said "well, you gotta just keep going, your chance will come" I said "I had this last year with [player name], [player name] and [player name]" I said "they all came to me in October, November, [head coach name] we wanna play for the A team" I said "right that's good, move them out the way then, play and train as hard as you can, make me turn round and say..." I said "cause at the end of the day the others will give me their input but I'm the one who picks it so if we lose it's my fault" so, and [player name] to be fair, towards the end of the season, he was, the only reason he would probably not start in an A game, i.e., the, the cup or the league, under 18s cup sorry, would be because we would wanna go a certain way with having two fast 6 and 7s which is [player name] umm [player name] umm because, because [player name], you've got him for 50 minutes, and he'll just run, run, run, but then he's gassed, he's done, he's fitness is gone, he's done, you get somebody else on, but then if we're enough in front that's when you bring on someone like [player name] because he's an out and out 6, great in the line out, whereas [player name]'s not, same with umm [player name], now those boys, when it came to the under 17s cup, were immense, best 6 and 7 partnership I've seen for a long time, you know, [player name] would do his charging off and, you know his uhh his elaborate stuff with the, you know running with the ball, you know lot of running, whereas [player name] would just do the dirty, dog, dog fighting stuff at the breakdown, and they complemented each other, so they, they did, they made us think you know and towards the end of the season, you know,

OK the [opposition team name] game was different because we made sure all the 18s played, with some of the 17s, but yeah, they, they, they were a credit to themselves and actually a credit to the club in the end because the club are in a stronger position next year and they're gunna have two very good, well very good 6 and a very good 7, to start but then I know in the under 16s coming up, they're gunna have competition again but that's what you want

Researcher: Yeah, were there any players that, so I guess [player name], [player name] fits into this a little, were there any players that you didn't think they were gunna do anything that season, you hadn't really given it a thought, and then all of a sudden something happened

HC: Yeah, yeah, well [player name], [player name] in a way umm another lad called [player name], very shy, he's a back umm played wing or full back and me and [backs coach name], I don't know if [backs coach name] said this to you, well me and [backs coach name] were like looking at him and we took him to the 7s and he was alright, and then I was thinking, I said to [backs coach name] "we needed a 10" cause [player name] was injured or whatever, we didn't have a backup 10 basically because [player name], who played 10 in the cup final, where you saw at [place name], he umm was at school, he's at [school name], "oh what's it fuck, we need at 10" he said "give [player name] a go " I said "nah" he said "nah give him a go" and he played, he didn't want to, but he did it and he uhh did very, very well and literally, you know you look at it and you think "shitting hell" you know he just kept going forward and forward and, you know he played one week, then he'd be out and then, he was always one of those lads that, when you first looked at him you thought "nah, nah" but my opinion of him grew because he basically took one for the team, didn't wanna play at 10, but actually when he started playing there he was actually pretty good, you know maybe not really for the standard of the, the A league, the top division umm but definitely you know within a friendly, etc., etc., he was definitely, and he, and you could see the confidence in him grew, do you know what I mean? As, as the time went along and umm yeah he was definitely a surprise umm



there was a couple of surprises that went the other way, yeah there was a couple of surprises that went the other way. One was a lad called [player name], who was an under 17, we had him in umm he played in the under 17s cup last year when he was a 16 and we, me and [assistant coach name] and [forwards coach name] were like "fuck, he's the nuts" umm unfortunately he didn't get a lot of time, he didn't get to play a lot because just didn't really show it in the end, and then he finally tells me for two months of the season to go that he can play hooker, so he started getting a few more games and we developed him that way but he went back. And the other one was [player name], I gotta keep saying it, and uhh you know he was living on reputation, and he was found out, and he knew he was found out...so, but he didn't do nothing about it, you know whereas, you know if I'd have said that to say [player name], [player name], [player name] who captained the under 17s, if I would have said "look, this is the crack, you need to do this, you know, instead of carrying once, twice, I need you to carry four times within the game and get over the gain line, you know even if it's just a metre, get over the gain line, you know give me something" but, you know and they woulda done, whereas [player name] was just like [whistles]. But yeah they were the only couple that I'd say that, yeah, that were a little bit of, disappointment's the wrong word umm a surprise that they didn't kick on, you know especially [player name], I thought he'd a kicked on and proved me wrong that why I was picking somebody else but it didn't work like that unfortunately

Researcher: Fair enough, do you, so you sort of briefly mentioned then, something I didn't realise but this, the idea that the under 18s, because they're the year older, do you think that gives them sort of a, a status over the other 17s, of "I'm the under 18 so I should be picked"

HC: Well, I, I think from certain coaches yeah that might be, whereas me it's not, I think it was to start with [player name], and I've admitted that, but then once the stats started coming in it was like "nah man, off you come", he was still, he was still the better option on the bench than anybody else and a second row cover but he couldn't start the second row

anymore, so that's when [player name] went in with [player name], you remember, he looks like Bart Simpson, big lad, big ball carrier, you know hard as nails, and umm yeah it was, that definitely, yeah without a doubt, I keep going back to [player name], I feel sorry for the boy but

Researcher: Nah it's alright, yeah, that was something that I didn't realise that that was that, sort of, I guess that would depend, like you were saying you have clean slates, I don't know whether the other coaches didn't have that because it sounds like there was, you and [assistant coach name] that didn't necessarily have the long relationship that [backs coach name] and [forwards coach name] did

HC: Yeah, I mean the others did, yeah, [forwards coach name] and [backs coach name] did yeah, but then the backs, like I said the backs really picked themselves you know and the backs, there wasn't much...there wasn't a lot of difference, there's not a lot of difference with any of them but you, we all knew who the top 15 were, it was just that, it was always the second row that caused the most conflict in the, I wanted to change [player name] a lot earlier, but [backs coach name] and [forwards coach name] were both "no let's keep going" "oh OK" so I sort of listened to them when maybe I should of said you know "fuck this, I'm doing it my way" but you know you have your other coaches and that's the whole point of it, you know you gotta have constructive umm conversations about it, and sometimes you've got to let it go to get the information to then say "up yours" kinda thing, in a, in a, in a sporting way, do you know what I mean? Umm and I think that was the thing you know and, I dunno it's weird you know sometimes you do look at it and you think "ah did I do that because of that? Or not? But..." well you'll hear from my thing, I'm always like, you know, chatting away and you'll hear a lot of [forwards coach name], you know because that was the whole point, you know [forwards coach name] was there he was bringing the plays and all that down from the first team because he's the team manager, that was the point of it you know,

you know and I'd be back and, you know, say a few things, let [forwards coach name] crack them, yeah that's fine, you know, the boys knew who the final say came down to, which was the main thing, so

Researcher: Did you ever override them? Did you ever sort of say "right, no"

HC: Yeah, couple of times

Researcher: Why, why were you picking one player when they were picking another then?

Why do you think that was?

HC: Because...

Researcher: Apart from [player name] I suppose because that was obviously, we've spoken about that

HC: Yeah that was umm because they had history

Researcher: So it's history again was it?

HC: Yep, yep, it was history, so, it was back row, I did a very contra decision, controversial decision and I dropped [player name] once, because he wasn't producing, this was in a friendly but he didn't produce in a friendly and then we had a big, two friendlies on the trot, when he should have done because the level of opposition we were playing, he should've just carved it up, but he didn't, he coasted, so I dropped him to the bench, and they couldn't believe I did it, I brought in [player name], and he couldn't believe I'd done it either, so

Researcher: And did it, did he come back from that? Did he come back and

HC: Yeah he come back from it, he come back from it and then he realised, I just took him to one side and said "mate, you don't just save yourself for the fucking big games, if you're playing, you play balls out like you would in a big A league game, big 18s cup game, you'd

do the same" I said "those two games you played" I said "I might as well put my son on the pitch" and he looked at me and "what do you mean?" I said "you coasted, you did the bare minimum" "no I didn't" I said "you did, where were your usual bullocking runs?" You know he's a, he's a great one for catching off umm a kick off or getting the tip off from somebody who's caught it, from a tip off and charging up, you know, he's quick, he's a big boy but he's quick you know his head goes back and he's, you know, straight back and he's pumping his arms so yeah he was one, that was one, that was the only one, they couldn't believe I did it, but it gave us, but when I did it, when he did come on in a league game when it was one that you didn't, I don't think did, it was the one that you missed

Researcher: The one where I went to the wrong bloody ground

HC: Yeah, my fault as well

Researcher: No that was my fault that one

HC: The umm yeah, he came on with 20 minutes to go, we were, and he basically tore it up, and afterwards I said "what does that feel like?" he goes "what you mean?" I said, he goes "well I was pissed off I weren't starting" I said "good, so when you play a friendly what are you gunna do?" He said "I'm gunna play the same as I played today" "there you go, that's what you gotta do"

Researcher: So do you think selection then is a motivation tool?

HC: Yeah, yeah because a lot, some of the lads, a lot of them it's about, it's cred, about being in that league team, whereas others, they're just like "yeah whatever". Some of them think they should be in it but, if they deep down they look at themselves, they know that, no come on, do you know what I mean? Whereas sometimes it's hard, you know sometimes it, you know sometimes it wasn't, but like definitely, I keep saying it but it did help with those, having those stats because we could come back to check on something

Researcher: It does sound that then, a lot of the thinking, like you were saying, you sort of, you knew your 15 really, if they were all fit you knew

HC: At the start of the season I knew yeah but as the season went on things cropped in you know, new players, you know the younger guys were coming through, other guys improved umm I've got to be honest, towards the end of the season, most positions it wouldn't have mattered who we put in, so to me that's a good thing because at the beginning of the season we would have, if we woulda had 40 players we could have picked an A and a B side quite easily, but towards the end of the season I'd say three quarters of the team, let's think, two thirds of the team you could slot with somebody and it wouldn't make blind bit of difference, because they know what we're doing, they know the plays, they know, you know, they're that sort of same player, I don't know if that's a good or a bad thing because it's sort of like strangling the uhh flair and the maverickness, I don't know if that's a word, of the player but for definite it was umm it proved to us that we brought kids along, you know boys along, you know we made them better players from what we were doing, so

Researcher: Right, cause it does sound that, like you were saying as you went through the season its, its, the big things that were changing your mind were performances, so there were game performances, performances in training, it wasn't necessarily, so say at the beginning of the season you might say "well this kids 6 foot 5, he's clearly gotta be on the pitch, he's huge" whereas actually those sorts of thinking, that

HC: Oh yeah that thinking went out the window umm to an extent because you looked at it and you think "OK let's see what he's doing in the game, what did he do last game, we got information on? Well he did nothing" so, you know, "what about this? What did he do? Well he's doing well in training, he's putting the effort in, he's helping the others out, he's", you know, so yeah it did, it did change the dynamic, well changed the dynamic of how I thought

umm not too sure about the rest of them but, you know [back coach name] only ever really needed to worry about the backs, if he, I never picked the backs, I'll be honest there, I knew what I thought I'd have, but it was always, the last say really on the backs came down to [back coach name], cause he give, you know, or he would give me his preference, we'd talk about it, you know I'd give him my view of what I thought, he would then counter argue or not, you know, and then we'd, you know we'd sort of agree to disagree in sometimes but not in a bad way, just looking at it you know, and like he'd be like "do you know what, it wouldn't matter if you put him A or B in the wing position because they're both the same player" he said "just don't have them both of the pitch at the same time, either wing because they're both too similar" because you wanna, you wanna a fly boy and you want a hard bastard, who's gunna punch through the centres if he needs to and come through the 12 and 13 channel, that's how we play, we always used to have a fly by and a brute force, an ignorance winger, still gotta be pace, so I don't know if you knew, noticed towards the end of the games is we moved [player name] from full back to wing and put [player name] to wing, to full back sorry, the older lad went to full back and one because [player name] had hands like feet and in a full back that ain't a bloody good, but you'll know from your stats for the weekend uhh for a, like we had a game umm one of the league games umm but yeah we was umm you know but the backs definitely it was, a lot to do with [back coach name], you know, and the thing is with [back coach name], like me I think he, after a few months of the season, he was like "do you know what? We gotta re-look at it and just do it on game stats, also training, you know who's listening" it's hard with backs training because they never frickin' well turn up training do they? It's always the bloody forwards, we used to get 22 forwards and four backs

Researcher: That's because it rains

HC: Well exactly mate, exactly, you know the Nancy, the fly boys they don't wanna know if it's cold and wet, but you know in that respect yeah, that's how we worked it

Researcher: Well can you think of anything else over the season that you sort of, bits of information that maybe you used or affected team selection in any way?

HC: Hmm I think I didn't use umm my friendships with the players as much as I would have done in the past umm because if they weren't doing the business and we had the proof of it from you umm it was like, you know "nah sorry, just cause you're, that ain't how it's gunna work" you know, I had to do it to [player name], [forward coach name]'s boy, there was a couple of games he was awful, I had to drop him, alright it was a friendly but it was a prestigious friendly, he thought he was gunna start and I had to drop him, you know "why are you dropping me?" I said "I'm not dropping you I'm putting you on the bench" "well that's dropping me" I said "it's not, it's putting you on the bench" "well there's only two bloody scrum half's [head coach name]" he said, I said "well if you wanna look at it dropping, so why am I doing it?" "Because I had two shit games" "there you go, so why are you asking me then?" He said "oh" I said "look", [player name] also works for me, and I was like, you know "you know what you gotta do, you're a better player than what, what you've been doing, get your finger out" and he did, fair play to him, he, he, but...there's nothing else I would say more than that you know umm don't get me wrong the analysis as I said to you earlier is definitely doing me a, well it's the information at a button innit? So it's, it's good, you know and we can look at it and think "shit, that's good" yeah that really helps so

Researcher: You mentioned there with the two wingers there, you were saying you like a fast one and a bit of a brute, did you decide that that's what we like because of the players that you had? Or did you think "I like a quick guy and a big guy, let's get, right he's quick and he's big" do you see what I mean?

HC: Umm yeah, I see what you mean yeah, I dunno, the thing with that is, yeah I like, I'd like to have that make up in the team, you know, I think if you look at most teams you have that umm you know take Wasps for example, they always have a big winger, but then they have Christian Wade, you know and I like, I like that way umm with the thing of, you also need then to have a decent full back because the quicker winger with the nimble feet may not necessarily be as good in defence, so you need to have that, so there is that, and sometimes umm I dunno, we did play a couple of times, I remember playing once when we had just three wingers that had never, no [player name], no [player name], no [player name], who were the normal starting 18, and we had to play three wingers all on the, you know two wingers and one full back, I think we, and when we did, actually no sorry we had a winger at full back, a winger on the wing, and then we had to put a flanker on the wing called [player name], this was in a friendly game, in the second half because we had injuries and this, that and the other, and uhh [player name] in 10 minutes scored a hat trick, and he was a flanker, so basically that then changed our mind, we had him then, when he used to, he used to get selected then for certain games because he could cover both flank and wing, you know, so it worked, it did work in that respect you know umm yeah I dunno, it's it was a weird one, but I like, personally I like playing with a big winger and a speedy winger, I like the big winger to be a little bit quick as well but, you know, depending on how we're gonna play and if we're gonna bring him in between 12 and 13 or 13 and umm 10 and 12, you know depends on which way you wanna play, I'd rather have, if you haven't got a big full back but you've got a big winger, I'd rather bring the winger through and the full back can just cover, and then you can see if you can punch it up the middle, bit, bit George North esc, but just not with two big brutes like Cuthbert and North, more like Cuthbert, more like North and Williams or something like that, so

Researcher: Fair enough, well I mean if there's nothing else that you can uhh you can think of



HC: No I don't think so

[Unrelated conversation]

Forwards Coach

Researcher: Simple to start off, describe the process that you went through this season when you were selecting a team

FC: Right umm I think...in the past umm [backs coach name], who you've met, [backs coach name] and I brought [player name]'s lot through from under, under 7s, under 7s yeah, so all the way through, my background is I've been here man and boy, so 40 years of stuff, I first played for [club name] when I was 15 umm and then through that I was club captain, first team, all sorts, and then I coached county under 17s, and then I was with the colts for a long, long time, like [professional player name], who played for [professional team name] when they won the European Cup, he was one of my colts, so umm and I'm still in contact with them, so my wife and I have been to probably about a dozen weddings of lads who, who I coached as colts, so, yeah I've been here man and boy and then through [player name]'s age group coming up to colts, there's no way [backs coach name] and I wanted to stop and just hand over to [head coach name] and umm you see a lot of the sessions actually that, if I was here then [head coach name] would let me take and umm because I'm also managing the first, I coach the second team, but I couldn't be here every Tuesday and Thursday, but we had a fantastic season because I really put the pressure on that if they didn't train, they didn't play, and I put, I put the captain in the thirds and all sorts so umm and then I couldn't continue with that, because I couldn't, if I couldn't be here on a Tuesday or Thursday through work, we can cover each other in the colts but the seconds there wasn't, effectively you can't keep missing

stuff, so that's why I do what I do with the first team because if I'm not here on a Thursday I can still manage match day stuff on a Saturday, so a lot of the stuff that we do in pre-season and stuff, I, like skills I would've taken directly from what [first team coach name] does, from Thursday, to take it down to colts umm our line out calls are the same, our defensive calls, our feet and in is exactly the same as the first team use, so we have a commonality, so the last game of the season, [player name], [player name], [player name] and [player name] played in the first team, so for me that was a very proud moment, you know, one, my son but secondly four other, four of the colts playing up there, so umm yeah so when it comes to selection it's a bit of a, by committee umm and when we got to player of the year, [player name] got, we knew [player name] had players' player, so [assistant coach name] is like being this nice, generous bloke saying "well if [player name] 's got that, then somebody else should get coaches' player" and I said "well that's bullshit, in my opinion, my opinion is that if you're the best player, you get it" and he said "yeah but so and so has played for the first team, so and so played, [player name] and played these games for the second team, he's played, my son was in county, was it South West under 20s squad, [player name] played for the South West under 18s" I said "well that's immaterial to me, what we're picking is the, the best colt out there this season, both on and off the pitch but what he does for the colts, not what he does for the first team or what he does for South West, it's the colts" so I argued that point fairly forcibly and the others backed me up and umm and [player name] got both, I said "we're not dealing with under 14s where you're sharing out awards or trying to be fair to everybody, we're recognising those who are the best players, life's competitive", but when it comes to the others, we would all, if it came to South West cup or league games, then we would pick strongest pack, and you might have a discussion on one back rower over the other back row or, or whatever umm but what it did do is reinforce your, your stats you did at [opposition team name], I mean I don't know if you know, [opposition team name] is a nemesis for us, we

had never beaten them through, until that game you came to watch, so for, for me and [backs coach name], not so big for [backs coach name] uhh for [head coach name] and [assistant coach name], but for [backs coach name] and I and those lads, at that age group, the older age group, that was massive, so last year when we came up to the colts, or when we came, bought my lot as under 17s in, you could go out there now and they'd be one group over there and one group over there, and one group would be the 17s and one would be the 18s, and they thought that umm and [head coach name] said the year before "oh yeah you're, the 18s will be the A team and the 17s will be the B team" I said "that's bollocks, absolute bollocks" so I went to see [director of rugby name] and I said, [director of rugby name], and I said "you need to have a say here as DOR on what's happening" and he said "no, if 15 of the 17s are the best players, they will play as the A team" which is how it should be in my opinion, so [head coach name] took that and then umm so for the league games we picked the strongest squads, and last year we had this, still had this us and them, and by the end of the year there were probably eight or nine of the younger lads were in the, were in the, were in the A team and they were South West champions last year, so umm and, and they got on alright, the club dinner at the end, they were all in there together, that's what we made a major mistake not inviting you to that because you could've observed them together actually, and then this year, I said to the older ones "we don't want what happened last year, happening this year, so it's up to you older ones to welcome this lot in" and they played together at school anyway, so this year we never, ever had an us and them, it was one big bunch, and then we picked on merit, and the stats you produced at umm against [opposition team name] resulted in us dropping [player name] for a game afterwards cause he, we noticed he was, he was just not putting the work in, and I had, I had my reservations about, always being in position at the edge of a ruck, but why is always on the edge of a ruck? Why is he not hitting rucks? So it, we did use it, we did use it in that respect but ultimately, if it, if I was running the colts, at some stage

somebody has to say "right I'm making the decision, this is what it is" ultimately when it was the 17s cup run, or the 18s cup run, we knew who we were picking really, and there would be a healthy debate about it, and it would be based on some things, some things, like [player name], we were gunna play my son, there, [player name] who's 15, but he's in [professional team name] academy, we were gunna play, we played him, I had to sign a parent disclaimer for him to play against umm the Irish team we played who are under 19s, and he played 10 and controlled the game, so we were gunna bring uhh in fact some of the games where [player name] played, [player name] is now at [school name] academy, I'll play him ahead of him any time, and that's not nepotism, that's, cause [player name]'s calm and controls the game, and out there in that game against [opposition team name], in the national cup, [player name] had another one of those games where he went AWOL, and I, for me it was our leaders, there's a core leadership group in that team, they didn't lead, including my son at, well [player name] had to go to 10 which didn't help, but those guys went off plot yet again and we, I guess that's one of the frustrations of the season, because they were quite capable of going all the way to the final, and [opposition team name] got the final...so that, yeah frustrating, so in terms of the, much of the selection would come down to whether they trained, definitely, and we definitely dropped people because they weren't at training umm [player name], the big, black lad who come up and play late on, early in the season him and I had a, not a nose to nose but I said "everybody for two years has been blowing smoke up your backside, you're massively overweight, you're out of condition, yes you're a big ball barrier but for like five minutes, and then you, you're lazy" anyway, he threw the toys out the pram uhh and went to [opposition team name], and, but he never actually played, although he told everybody he was, but he was never registered for them or anything, and then he came back, and I said "are you coming back and gunna be, act the big I am? Because that won't work" and to his credit he's, he's gone to [college name] this year, he's lost a shed load of

weight, you know he's a lovely, lovely lad, he's just had a difficult background, but I've had loads of them who've had difficult backgrounds and you can normally turn them round and point them in the right direction, I think that's as much as uhh, the umm satisfaction of doing it as, as the actual rugby, you know, I mean like [player name]'s got four lads coming over tonight and one of them I call him my community aid project, because he's always, he's just, a lovely lad but he's just stupid at times, and [player name], one of these lads, he's a gymnast, only been playing rugby a couple of years, he's a massive potential, his dad has never been to see him play, lives six miles away from him, and never comes to watch him play, so, like tonight he, [player name] said he's got eight or ten of them coming for a BBQ, and he said umm "[player name], but [player name] can't come because he can't, he can't get home tomorrow" I said "I'll take him home" his dad won't even come and pick him up, so it's not all just about, it's about what they put in as well for each other, I mean his lot are an outstanding group of mates, well so are [player name]'s lot umm so umm I don't know if I'm going off on a tangent here

Researcher: No it's alright, so you were saying training's quite important then when it comes into

FC: Yeah if they, they continue to miss training, and we always have this argument with public school boys, the captain last year was at umm...[opposition team name], trying to think of the public school up there, and umm he would swan up and then be captain on a Sunday, and I said "how can we have our captain, who's never at a team run? You know never at a team run" so in the summer I said if he's not there before the league games then he can't, he can't play, and his dad got, was the team admin guy, got upset by it but in the end we said "well what are we trying to do then? Are we gunna pick a team of the best players who never train?" Cause that's not what it's about either, it's about, and you can't, can't have a driving maul or a line-out, you know we put a, an awful lot of work into our line out, last year in the

national 17s, [region name], or the national semi-final, we won 14 out of 15 clean line outs, because we'd put work into it, so we had a turn of ball and [player name] ballsed it up, but then also, I think sometimes we're a bit soft, we played [player name] because he's our 10, where maybe we should've probably brought [player name] up or somebody up, and then we brought [player name] in, but he's at [school name] school and they won't release him, so you have those policies, so we say well they're club member, he's done all the pre-season, he's gone off to school, is that his fault? Do we want him to play at [club name]? Yes we do, so you have to give them some encouragement to, to come and play, you know, so it, it, I dunno it's a balancing, but what we also do as well, with this lot, is we, a lot of people think that when they come up from 17s and they get into a bigger squad, that they're gunna get less rugby, but they actually, the weaker boys actually got more rugby, so [player name] who played on the wing, he would never have got that many games had it just been an age group team because you wouldn't have had as many matches, and then it would just be league games and you'll play your, obviously, your strongest side, I mean we, the last game of the season we played, well the last colts game was at umm a league match and we went over to play [opposition team name], was it a league match? Can't remember, think it was a league match, and uhh we should've slaughtered them, and we picked...a team just of 18s, cause it was their last game ever an age group, so the emotional side says "yeah great" what we should've done was go out there with the best team, spank them, and then put on, so we finished with a team of 18 years olds, and we agreed afterwards we all messed up on that one, cause we should a won the game, that was the ultimate aim of the day and umm so they felt pretty let down as that, we did get another game for them to finish off with, but umm it's always difficult, you know, you'll have parents who think little [player name] is fantastic, I'm probably harder on [player name] at training than anybody, my son and, you know, he doesn't get any favours as a result, but if I'm not at training, and [player name] will say "ah waste of

time last night, cause you weren't there, cause everybody's pissing about" so...it's umm sometimes you've gotta give them a bit of stick and other times you haven't you know, but same with this lot, the first team guys, you know, you know when the bus is, needs to be cleaned, they clean the bus, cause we've had it with umm we have a coach from [football team name], from [bus company name], and they also do [football team name] football club, and we have a contract that our bus has to be of a certain standard, and they turned up on uhh...they turned up with one bus one day and it was [football team name] football clubs execs bus, so it's like tables all the way down it, I mean we have the four tables on our bus and stuff but this had Sky Sports and all sorts, and then the driver said "you have to understand, this is not to be, you're not allowed to drink on this bus" and I said "you have to understand it's in our contract that we can drink on the bus, but the bus will be left clean and tidy when we finish"

[Unrelated conversation]

FC: So when you're explaining to little Johnny why, and if they have been dropped and they're right on the edge, we, before we announced to team to anybody, [head coach name] and I, or whoever it is, will take them aside and explain why, what's happened, before we announce it, because the worst thing is being in the huddle and then being told, it's like first team boys are always told beforehand, so, that when they come to training they're not, you know, they know they've got, they're not selected or they're on the bench, so it's in, so they've accepted that fact hopefully before they come, because the first team boys get one, one fee for playing and one fee on the bench so it can hit the pocket as well you see

Researcher: Yeah, yeah, so then the, those standards then that you hold for sort of just generally being at the club, does that then transfer into team selection? There are these standards where players have to meet to be able to then be selected?

FC: Well I think if somebody was continually late, and they're always some people continually late, we'll say "right you're not starting now, right you're on the bench, so and so's starting because you're late, and when you're late you let everybody down" my [player name] is umm applying for university, and he has had issues with umm focusing on certain things, or time, attention span and, planning things so we've had him checked out and they, he's, and they think he's like not dyslexic but there's dyslexic things in there, so process and planning, so sometimes he will umm when he, last game of the season he's picked, and my, time keeping is probably one of the most important things to me, like I was shitting myself tonight because I thought I was gonna be late, I said to [player name] "if Matt can here on time from London then I'm sure as hell need to be on time from [place name]" and I got a gas bottle for this barby and I thought "I'll just check that regulator" and they've given me the wrong gas bottle so I, that's why I was in a bit of a tits, so he knows how important time keeping is to me, and nobody wants to stress when you're having a team meeting "where is he?" And he was late for the team meeting, driving from [place name], five miles away, so when we say to them, you know, "get your, get stuff done the night before, get a process of planning so you're not stressed out, where are my, where are my extra-long studs?" when it's wet or something, plan, so that you're not stressed so all you got to do is think about the game, I think that's why it works for the first term cause they come in, I'm in here about three, four hours before kick-off on a Saturday, so when they come in the changing room is everything's done, everything is done, so they have, they don't want for anything, but all it does is all they, their only excuse then is to focus on the game, so when, if kids are particularly late because their dad can't be arsed or they can't be arsed then we would, we would say "well you're not starting today" what else? ...umm we, we've never had a discipline issue with [player name]'s lot, we've never had it where we've had to say, I don't think we've had a sending, have we had a sending off? Well [player name] in that game, he got sent off at the end of the game when he levelled



somebody but the guy had hit him first, and we called him not so hard [player name] because, [player name], [player name], the hooker, [player name], he's umm five A star A-level student, so is [player name] the centre but he's in danger of going too much into himself, he's so serious about everything, and umm...[player name] will, [player name] will write after training "what did you think to my passing off my left hand?" Or something "well [player name] I'm watching 30 other lad's mates, not just your passing off your left hand" and he's almost, I would say [player name] is, [player name], my [player name] and [player name] are natural footballers because they've been down here since they were babies, so they've always had a ball in their hands and they've both got great kicking skills, they both pass off both hands, they both kick off both feet, and they're good at all other sports, [player name] is almost, to me, almost manufactured, does that sound right? It's like it's umm not robotic movements but stuff he's learnt, yeah, he's learnt, not what he's, so that's why he tackles like a train, cause all he's gotta do is hit a target, but if you gotta, say, use a, put a little chip in over the top or something then that takes him out, [player name] is...umm play, play, play, and sometimes you just say, that's why we play that rugby league in training, sometimes and then you say "go" or "turnover" and so they just play what they see, rather than playing by numbers, yeah, I mean the first team have three phases, and normally after three phases, if we can get past three phases you can start getting defences disorganised, and then spot the mismatches, and some of our lads will do that, and that's why they'll play national league rugby, some of them will only play social rugby from now on, because they won't, they're not capable of that step up, and I guess you call it playing intelligence, you know we say if we get a turnover, what we're trying to do in that, most of these games, is if we get a ball, [player name] just wants to take the first pass off the scrum half and run, and I say "your first job is to lift in the line out, scrum at scrum time, and hit rucks, your second" our back row, like [player name] is the best ball carrier we've got, I said "when we're coming round the corner

[player name] is our natural one to give it to because he's our best ball carrier, and then what we, in that game we got trapped into this one out, bang, and all they did was chop us and got over the ball, and so I said at half time "stop doing this, either we bang somebody up the middle, wider, and then we get round the corner and we stretch them, or we got two, we tip on and we start running at spaces, not continually at faces" and that's, the good ones can switch to that, and the, the not so abled players can't see it, like [player name] the black lad, when he comes round the corner, he doesn't even know he's doing it, he runs awesome lines and awesome timing, and he will be, if he goes to university and gets coached properly he will be awesome, but he's a late developer, [player name] the captain, we miss him because he's your old fashioned number 8, put a foot on the ball and control a game, and we had, we lost him long term with concussion, which was a massive loss, so I don't know what will be the result of him long term, but you see the, [player name] just got released from [professional team name], and we had his exit interview last week and umm he supports [professional team name] so he said "shall I wear my [professional team name] kit?"

[Unrelated conversation]

FC: Anyway, [player name], the scrum half, he got most, we gave him most improved player, and at the start of the season I said "do you know why [player name] starts ahead of you?" And he said "cause he's better" and I said "why, why is he better?" He said "oh he runs harder, he's a better kicker and umm he's a better passer" and I said "well I agree with all of those" I said "but do you know what makes him a better rugby player at the moment for me?" He said "what?" I said "cause he talks non-stop, and you don't talk at all, so our project for this season on you is gonna be box kicking, speeding up your pass, getting the ball away from the break down quicker, and number one priority is you are gonna bloody talk" cause he's quite a quiet guy but by the end of the season he's gobbing away at all the big boys, you

know, all the older ones and that for me is like a massive, massive improvement, cause, have you ever had the opportunity to watch a premiership side train? How loud is that?

[Unrelated conversation]

FC: So there's all, so it's really difficult just around selection, why would you pick somebody ahead of, if somebody would say "yeah he's a better talker" they would get picked for that as well...cause we want, I dunno you want leaders out there, so if you got 15 brilliant rugby players and no body speaks you're stuffed

Researcher: Yeah, yeah would that be something then, if someone maybe wasn't, their passing maybe wasn't quite as good or they're tackling wasn't maybe quite as good but they're talking, their leadership was well up there, that sort of trade off, would that ever happen at all?

FC: Yeah I think it would, well it happens in first team, [first team player name] our first team fly half umm his sister lives with [first team player name] so I better not let him hear, but [first team player name] 's wonderfully talented, massively overweight, wonderfully talented, and if he's got [first team player name] standing next to him, he can be awesome, game against [opposition team name] at the end of the season, [first team player name] didn't play, and [first team coach name] said to me "this is gunna go tits up because [first team player name] hasn't got anybody in his ear telling him what to do" and we played Spaniard, the Spanish guy, and because there's no communication, especially in D, like [first team player name] will take the line-up and [first team player name] will talk non-stop, very quiet person, doesn't say an awful lot in the changing room, when he has to, everybody listens, but when he's leading the defence it makes such a difference

[Unrelated conversation]

FC: And I guess in back rows you want a balance, so you want, you want a big ball carrier, you need another line out person, so if we played [player name] and [player name] and some of, and then we had, well the issue with umm you know umm [player name], who did his knee?

Researcher: Uhh oh yes, yeah

FC: Well I argued not to play him in the [opposition team name] game, or one of the things I argued against him was, because he's had four yellow cards for ill-discipline, not fighting, just stupid, late, you know, late, or repeatedly offside, and, and you can't afford to be continuing without players on the pitch, so that would come into it

Researcher: OK, so discipline on the pitch, giving stuff away

FC: Yeah I mean we, we haven't got an issue with, where somebodies gunna turn around and chin somebody, I mean some sides, or, [player name]'s age group, well I can you this once, I do [player name]'s age group as well

[Interruption]

FC: Yeah they lost one game, they lost to [opposition team name], an interception at the end of the game, and umm as I left, I was going over to [opposition team name], I said "I want him off the pitch" and that was the flanker

[Interruption]

FC: So I said "I want him off the pitch" and [player name]'s going to me "get, get him off" now we'd been to, and I never, I've never had this with [player name]'s age group, all the way through, because I think we've always ruled with a bit of an fist, rod, fist of iron, but we have, like a good, big crack, but we don't, you know, when [player name]'s lot, when you blow the whistle with [player name]'s lot, they run to the whistle, [player name]'s lot is like, they're all

talking and chatting and I said "just concentrate for an hour, then we can go" cause I don't believe in two hour sessions, I think it's...and umm this lad was over at [opposition team name], [opposition team name], and we played a league match, and uhh we put him in off the bench, and this was a game, we had two, he's a body builder, power lifter, and he's very arrogant, and his dad will never say "[player name], you know, wind your neck in" or anything, and umm if you don't pick him he sulks, he's like this in changing room, I said "[player name] if you wanna come next door and discuss it I'm perfectly happy to, but that's the team we picked, the three of us" so they'd say "[forwards coach name] why have you picked this" country community project, I call him [player name], I said "because [player name]'s the only one in the back row who actually chop tackles and gets over the ball" I said "[player name] got a big" we've got a big umm ball carrier but he's, he's not very aggressive, and I said "so" I took him off in one game, I said "you're not going, you can go back on at half time, but unless you show me some aggression and you wanna work for the team, it's not just about you ball carrying" but he came on in the second half and he was like, cause he was brilliant, but that's exactly the reaction I was trying to get off him and umm anyway [player name] and this guy's [player name] are very alike, they both wanna carry, they hand off, and they don't, they don't wanna do the dirty work, so, so have a mix and [opposition team name] were unbeaten all season until we went over there, anyway so we put [player name] on at half time, and umm then he started, the referee gave a umm decision which he didn't agree with, and then started off mouthing off to this ref, who was their, one of their coaches, but we'd all agreed it, and I have to say he did a great job in this game, and [opposition team name] coaches were great, there was no agro on the pitch until [player name] got on there and started all this posturing and stuff, so I took him back off, and he's like "what are you doing?" And I said "I can't have this [player name]" I said "I've been a member of this club for 40 years and I" I said "it takes two seconds to lose our reputation cause of acts from you guys so

you're, you're off" so we get to training the next week and I sat them all down and I said "boys I refuse to have our clubs name besmirched by actions like we saw last week" I said "there are always gonna be reactions where you don't agree" and I said umm but when he starts going off, I said "when you've got your team mates asking for you to be taken off the pitch, because they're not enjoying it, they're embarrassed, so it's can't happen" so the following week umm...there was another incident and yet again, oh it was out here, and umm the following week, and we put him on the bench and he's like [player name], the other guy, is a [professional team name] with [player name], and we played [player name], but he's at school with him and they're sometimes buddies, and they're like, cause we didn't start him he's like, making faces in the changing room, and I said "[player name] we've been through this before, you know the issues that go around this, it's a whole mixture" so we went out there, I left and I'd asked for him to be taken off but yet again he was in trouble there, mouthing off at the ref and threatening to send him off and everything, so the following week, read the riot act again, and I was, had to take [player name] to umm [region name] training so I couldn't go to [opposition team name], so this coach, this dad on the touch line was running the touch and typical Sunday morning gets chatting about what he did last night with somebody and missed whether this guy put his, did or did not put his foot in touch, so they reckon he might have put his foot in touch but [club name] won the game and yet again [player name] went up to the touch judge and he's like this in his face, posturing and everything else, so they rang me and [other coach name] said "do you know what? I'm not sure I wanna carry on coaching if this is what we have to deal with" so I said "well I've been here years, I know what to do, tell him to turn up to the club in a shirt and tie and we're gonna have a formal club disciplinary" I said, and when we done it, we suspended him then to the end of the season, so he missed a 10s tournament and the last game, and they said "can he

come training? We'll do it afterwards" I said "no, do it before training, he's banned, he's not" we have to set an example to these lads, two lads were warned as to future conduct

[Unrelated conversation]

Researcher: So I guess it's the, so would it be then the sort of behaviour, and the attitude, is it sort of the mixture of

FC: If they come to training, I'm trying to think who's, who's, who'd play despite him being an arse and there aren't any...you know we've had it with [player name]'s lot where, I remember my dad died eight years ago

[Unrelated conversation]

FC: So they have like a contempt for those people, so I think they get pushed away, cause we had 50 odd boys at [player name]'s age group at one stage...so umm yeah and then they whittle away because they realise it's too, it gets more and more physical every year umm they have other interests, they find girls, they find, some of them, some of, we've had it where some of them say "I'm not doing, I'm not playing this year cause I'm concentrating on my A-levels" which I find is the biggest crock going you know, [player name], [player name] will get five A stars, [player name] will get five A stars, [player name] will get five A stars, you know we've had it where [player name], somebody was put on there "sorry I can't come because I've got too much homework to do" the following week [player name] will say "it's all about prioritising your time" he said "and on a Thursday night your priority mate is here, not school work, get your life, get your time sorted out, you're letting everybody in the squad down" and it's much better when it comes from them then when it comes from us, but I just, I think everybody who's, who's focussed enough on their A levels can get what they deserve, and they shouldn't give up everything else just for it, you know

Researcher: Yeah, you mentioned before though, with the back row, you were talking about combinations, does that mean that when you're coming to select you're not necessarily picking 15 individuals, you're picking sort of pods of combinations going through

FC: Yeah, I mean if you've got some, if you've got somebody in, in the centres for instance, I just don't want two bangers, so I'd rather have a ball player that can set up a banger, or, you know, probably [player name] was, it's hard to pick out him but he, in the big games he's been dreadful, I went and watch [player name] play for [county name] under 20s and [player name], yet again, total capitulations, so how, like what [school name] see in him I really don't know umm so yeah, and if you've got, you can't just have a, obviously the biggest pack you've got just with big lumps, you know [player name] was in the As and then he lost all his confidence, his parents split up everything, I spent an awful lot of time on him, awful lot of time and umm he came up to me at the end of the season and said "you've been like my second dad" and I drive, and I would drive him hard on, he said "am I ready for first team yet?" I said "no you're not" but he got on at the end of the season, but he knows the work he's got to do to, to keep up with the likes of [first team player name] and [first team player name]'s and stuff and that's put on size at the moment, but he will get eighteen games at [professional team name] this year, they've told me that, so then if you've got [player name], he like a rangy, but he's not a 7, he is a 6, you know he's more covering blind side, making big hits, getting round the pitch and doing hard work, where umm [player name] is more of a ball carrier, I'm not sure where you define [player name] in arcitypal positions in the back row, because we've never had an out and out, over the ball 7, but [player name], and [player name]'s your mauler, you know, line outs that would come down, that was [player name]'s, and we missed that desperately, we missed that somebody to actually control it, [player name] is a bit of a, not a loose cannon, well [player name] was our very strong mauler, good line out guy, then he seemed to lose his mojo a bit this year umm where [player name] got



improved more and more, and then we played [player name], cause he's just all youthful aggression you know, [player name] is always gonna start at hooker, one because he never loses scrums, he's as strong as an ox, and umm his line outs are so good, and umm where we started messing around with line outs this year is when he started losing, his numbers weren't looking so good, but the big games, you know and we go to default ball, then he was always gonna hit them, and then [player name]...there's a big debate because I liked [player name] because he works hard, that he works very hard, and [player name]'s a big unit but he's fragile, so often he didn't, he came off because he just, he was knackered or, but he's probably got the pushiest parent out of the whole lot, and then [player name], I put [player name] out there before, he's had two scrums and I've taken him off, and he said "what's up?" And I said "well if you don't wanna scrummage it's pretty pointless having you out there" and then I put him on at half time and he's destroyed them so, but, but [player name] isn't very intelligent, that's uhh...he's not very intelligent

Researcher: How would you rate that then in the selection then, the sort of intelligence of players?

FC: Well as they get older, and if you see the systems written on the wall, that playing intelligence, I don't know how you define it, but if you can't grasp it, you're, you're stuffed, cause you have to know, we will have pre-defined patterns of play, and every team will have at a decent level and that, that isn't really to say right not many teams score off first phase ball, because defences are so good, so you've got to disorganise those denseness, so we will, our, our umm...analysis on a Thursday night will be, other teams line out, what was their plays off, shift drive on a maul or whatever, so, and if you can't understand that, I mean [first team player name], I don't know if you saw [first team player name], the one who's calling the line outs all the time, the yellow scrum cap, I mean he's off to [professional team name] now, but he would sit there doing the analysis work on the line out and then he's picking them

off at will in games because he knows, doesn't necessarily know their calls but he knows how they set up in their line out, and then he knows whether it's a faint to the front or whatever, and he keeps nicking balls, and that's because he's done his homework and he's intelligent, but, and [player name] would be like that if he was a forward, but he thinks too much in my opinion

Researcher: Yeah I've heard that [player name]'s uhh

FC: I mean he's sending YouTube videos out on, on humility and stuff and I said "mate you need to like just chew a few relax pills or something" because he will, he'll have a bloody nervous breakdown the way he's going, he, he's predicted these five a stars, he's got a place at [university name], not to, not because he wants to be a sport scientist, but he just wants to find out more about his body to improve him as a rugby player, I mean he's, he's, and he's in danger of going too far

Researcher: Yeah well he contacted me, yeah he wanted the uhh the uhh footage, over the year, I assume to probably look at himself and figure out what's going on

FC: Yeah but it's almost, he told me, he's been round my house and umm they went to the open [national team name] training session, [player name], [player name] and him went, and umm I said "well you might as well stay at our house after training" cause they're going up on a Friday, and I said "what time are you going?" and he said "well it starts and 10 so we'll leave at half 6" and I said "mate it's round the M25, even if it's busy it's only to the M3, up the 316, you're there" they were in Tesco's at 8 o'clock, and he said to the boys the night before, he said to [player name] "oh I meditate for half an hour every day" and [player name] said "what if you get interrupted then?" "Well I start again" and it's just like, the boys almost rip the piss out of him to be honest because it's almost too much

Researcher: Like a robot almost

FC: Yeah, and it's like, he said "take care of the process" I said "mate rugby is a game of process, it's also a game of emotion, you can't take the emotion out of it" I mean in there sometimes you just got to say, you know, parents and everything else, it's who you're playing for, you're not playing for me or [head coach name] or [assistant coach name] or anybody else, it's you, go out there and play for a gang of mates, and then sometimes they, I mean after a few years of it you run out of things to say I guess but, even in a first team game on a Saturday, there's still that emotion there, some are, some are pretty cool and calm, but there's still before they go out there they're...but you know some of them, it's like we dropped [first team player name], like if you look at it and you, if you have the video on every week as well you see people falling off tackles in the outside channel time after time, and you say we have leaked so many tackles through there, then, that'll definitely make a difference, because [first team coach name] will say something "oh so and so worked hard" and he said, and I said "well I don't think he did" and he said "check the video again, see his tackle count" and I watched the video and you're going "yeah fair play" and it's sometimes the unseen work they do

Researcher: Yeah, yeah, so performance, past performances, is that have, a big impact

FC: Yeah definitely, I mean if someone has one bad game I wouldn't throw them out for that uhh if [player name] had a nightmare because his girlfriend blew him out the night before or something that hasn't happened, but we wouldn't suddenly say "right get him off", you might take him off that day but you wouldn't

Researcher: Wouldn't drop him for the following week

FC: No, he's our best player, he's our best player, I mean people have shockers for England don't they? And they, they stick with him, same with cricket I guess, you know Compton, he's had three, well he got some runs this week, but he must think "shit I've got probably got one

more match" but then they're not gunna drop him after the first two failures, because they know he's a class, that's why they picked him in the first place...I mean we, we have huge, our, [first team coach name] will ring me on a, well Tuesday and I said "who are you thinking of?" And he's going with so and so, so I say "well justify so and so" he doesn't have to justify it to me because he's, it's his job, but umm and he'll say "why do you question that?" You know and it makes a difference I think where some of the injured players, the first team boys, you never see them when they're not, when they're injured, [first team player name], if you going to [opposition team name], [first team player name] would be here on a Saturday jumping on that bus with you, you know and that to me shows a level of...that they wanna, it's, it's not just because they're getting a pay check

Researcher: And, would that have a bearing, do you reckon that influences selection in any sort of way, these kids that are sort of

FC: I think some of them will, maybe play when they're injured, when they shouldn't be, I mean we are very, very strict on, I mean concussion has been obviously the, the buzz word this year, but [physio name], and that's, that's where it helps with me in the first team, because I can ring [physio name] on a Tuesday and say "I've got four boys who need looking at that" and they're beginning to get seen properly, if they go to the doc, if their parents take them to the doctors which is a total waste of time, so I can bring her down here and she does, like [player name]'s had concussion this year and she said umm shine a little thing in his eyes and she said "I'm not doing anymore umm there's no way you're doing anything, not even exercise at school, I don't even want you running the water out on a Saturday" and then she would, the following week she'll check him and start the return to play protocols, so we're very, and that, and we're very, very strict on it umm so we've never pressurised anybody to play when they're injured, [player name] missed a game with his thumb umm then he went and played for [county name], for [county name] with it strapped up and he had to come off

after twenty minutes, yeah and umm they still selected him on what they had seen, but umm...you know I think...I don't know how you measure a person's work rate but if they're not, if they seem to be standing around all the time, like [first team player name] there, he was [country name] county prop at the end of last season, toured [country name] and stuff with them, and he was playing for [opposition team name] in National one, he's a [club name] boy, and then this season he's umm he's, to me he's not conditioned enough, and now, you can see now they're working already, because they'll come down and train before we start touch, so umm yeah conditioning will definitely be a big factor, and we'll also pick, with the first team, if we're going to [opposition team name], we know what we're gonna get, we're gonna get a very hostile crowd, we're gonna get a massive pack of forward who are wanna kick the shit out of us, so there's no point in going down there and just taking fancy Dan's because you've got people, people who will stand up, first team have got two very different scrum halves, I don't know if you saw the county final on Sunday, [first team player name], the first team scrum half played for [opposition team name], and then we have [first team player name] who's salt of the earth but he's in [place name] in [town name], well [first team player name], rough part, he's hard as nails, but salt of the earth, I, I love the guy to pieces, but [first team player name] is also the heart and the, the soul of the bus, so he's always up, I've never seen [first team player name] down in the dumps, so he's pretty important to us, so [first team coach name] would say "well it's [first team player name] or so and so on the bench" and I said "well you gotta take [first team coach name]" and he said "why?" I said "we've got a six hour bus trip to [opposition team name] mate" he said "yeah good point, I'll go with [first team player name]" so, that's not gonna make the difference if it's a wide difference in, in ability, but if it's one who's, generates something to the team bus as well I think it makes, it does make a difference because you need that, you can't have people sat there with head phones on cause you've got no atmosphere on the bus you know, some will

sit down the front and shut themselves away, some will sleep the whole way, [first team player name] sleeps everywhere, he's like a cat, and some just talk non-stop

Researcher: So if those, if the abilities are the same then, you then start looking elsewhere and

FC: Yeah I think you would, I think reliability and...somebody calls off on a Thursday night and they're not doing the team run on the Thursday, they will not play on the Saturday unless there's a very special case, in fact if he's that pissed off he may bin them out of the squad completely...but then you see, if you've got [first team player name] our first team, who was our first team hooker the year before last, but he can also prop, so we would probably take another, maybe another hooker and a prop and [first team player name], so he can cover, and he does cover both, and that's when you'll mix and matching in your selection, and then you say well "if, if umm if we take [first team player name] on the bench" sometimes we're only allowed five on the bench, so sometimes we'll take a four one split, because [first team player name] effectively can play everywhere in the backs, that's a massive factor

Researcher: Oh right so the utility of players as well

FC: Yeah and therefore it gets a massive pack, I mean when we first started, two, two years ago, they brought in this new thing when it was ten interchanged in the game, and [first team coach name], [first team coach name] was switching and swapping like it was going out of fashion, I think we've learnt that doesn't work, so he might swap the props over a bit more before half time but very rarely does he change a scrum half just for sakes, so umm that definitely bear, has a bearing, and whether a back row boy is a line out guy or not, if you've got three heavy guys or, and they're not line out specialists, that will probably effect the mix on the, on the bench as well, cause [first team player name], we've got [first team player name], an Irish guy, he plays second row but he also plays back row boy, so that gives us a

balance, and then [first team player name], who was [professional team name] players of the year, he came last year, and he was, big reputation, nice guy, but didn't really do much, not a big, heavy ball carrier, and from then he's, he's

[Interruption]

FC: And then uhh...we put him in the second row in a game where we had no other second rows, and we played [opposition team name] who are second in the league, hadn't lost for ages, and we had, hadn't won for ages and we beat them, and it was just all out aggression, getting off the line and smashing them, and we denied them the ball, and he was a star part of it, well he was virtually a fixture the rest of the season then, so it's almost we found him by accident in a different position...and then I guess, you know, you got to have some leaders in the side, we've signed [first team player name], from [opposition team name], and he's six foot six, six seven, played full time for quite a few years, hard as nails, so he'll take on every enforcer that the other side have and stuff, and you need one, you know in our side we always knew that [player name] could take anybody, European kick box champion and, but wonderfully disciplined on the pitch, I've never seen him have a fight on the pitch, but he always let people knew that they better not mess with him

Researcher: Yeah, fair enough

FC: So I don't know if I've answered what you need

[Unrelated conversation]

FC: We had a guy come from [opposition team name], had a big reputation, scored 30 odd tries in the [opposition team name] team before they all went tits up there with the finances, he came here and he wasn't particularly great but god he had the biggest ego, and in the end I went to [director of rugby name], to uhh [previous director of rugby name] who was the DOR

before, I said "you've gotta get this guy out of here, he's just poisonous" yeah and we kicked him, we got rid of him

Researcher: See that's the thing, on paper, he probably would have been straight, straight in the squad, but

FC: Great player, and also when you're bringing players in from outside, you have a big call umm like with [player name] when he had been out injured for a while and we went to [opposition team name], and [assistant coach name] is saying "oh you've gotta play [player name], you gotta play [player name], he's terrific, [player name] hasn't played for three weeks" I said "who's the best player we've got, and he's, when he's fit, who's the best player? Who's the captain of the side?" And he said "well [player name] is" I said "[player name] has to play" and [player name] played and was outstanding, and, so, I see it at first team level, they're used to it because it's semi pro rugby but in the first team we'd have [first team player name], who was our player of the season, who was a 6, [first team coach name] said "oh we're a bit short this week I'm bring up [first team player name] from [professional team name]" who's a starting player in the [league name], [first team player name] plays and says "why are you playing me when you've got [first team player name] here? That's just fucking crazy" they're horse meat these championship players

[Unrelated conversation]

FC: So it is about, you know, also if somebody has been injured a long time or, but we had one lad, he was at umm he left [opposition team name] rugby club because they didn't understand him, and he's at [school name] school, always late for training and his mums quite precious...and umm she came up to me and she said "I want to know why when my son was at [professional team name], why he's not starting for [club name]?" I said "because in our opinion" I said "the pocket rocket, [player name] is here all the time, he's got a better pass,



he's quicker, he's intelligent, and he doesn't give me a load of shit every Wednesday night" anyway he came, we played a league game out there, against [opposition team name], or [opposition team name] who were a good side, and I went round and he was sulking away and I said umm "we're probably gonna put you on at half time so get ready" anyway before half time, I saw his mum taking him away and saying "come on we're not waiting if they're not gonna play you" so the boys just ripped the piss, because they don't want him here, so it, cause it effects them, and they're, they're close you know

[Interruption]

[Unrelated conversation]

Researcher: I mean can you think of anything else that would of impacted the way you selected your team this year?

FC: ...no if somebody was continually not available and then says, when it's a big game then "yeah I'm available" then we'd probably take that into consideration and, and not pick them, I mean, I think we've, we've been more than fair to the weaker ones, I mean [head coach name]'s frustration was that we would play in, some days we played [player name] umm and [player name] and [player name] in the seconds, which meant they're not allowed to play a full game on a Sunday, we went to [opposition team name] and we we're losing by about 20-odd points and we chucked [player name] on, and he changed the game on its head and umm [head coach name] was saying "well that's what we should be doing" and I said "well at the end of the season nobody really remembers who won that league" so we gotta say are we developing these lads as rugby players? Stretching them? What you don't wanna do though is chuck them in against [opposition team name] seconds and you put eight colts in there and they're cannon fodder, but I think we've managed that, next year the colts are gonna be part of the senior club rather than the oldest juniors if that makes sense?

[Unrelated conversation]

FC: Yeah I guess there's a bit of that as well

Researcher: OK, in what sense?

FC: Well if they really piss you off all the time

[Unrelated conversation]

FC: I reckon mentality is a good one, if you've got a kid who just rolls over if they're getting, if you're getting pumped, you know, I mean we don't get pumped but, you want kids who've got a bit of spike about them, a bit of balls about them I think as well

[Unrelated conversation]

FC: I mean we, we didn't pick [player name] last year in the uhh colts cup run because he couldn't defend his 10 channel, so [player name] could defend better as it was so he was, probably cost us the game because he generally had a shit game

[Unrelated conversation]

FC: I guess that affects it, if somebody won't listen to that, then you're gonna say, you know, "you can't play to our patterns and if we're playing a press and you can't get off the line, then we'll pick somebody who wants to get off the line"

Researcher: OK, so somebody who can play the way you wanna play?

FC: Yeah, you know and you've always gotta trust that person inside because if he goes up and then if we're going up and out and we're drifting, and we're trying to use that touch line, and somebody's saying "I've got him, I've got him, I've got him" then you can go up, you can drift out there, but you're not hearing it, and that comes back to that communication again, and I would say he never talks, that would be a reason for me not to pick someone

## Appendix F

## Example Raw Data and Coding from Data Analysis in Chapter 5

Table E1

*An example of the raw data which formed the cues included in the situational cues theme (contained within in the player cues category)*

Cue	Original quote
	Availability
Fit	<p>“When he’s fit” “Fit”</p>
Injured	<p>“Concussion” “Injured” “Max was injured” “We had some injuries” “Injuries” “We had to change it because of an injury” “Injury” “Injury” “Injury” “Obviously injuries” “Amount of injuries” “Injury” “For the friendlies it was mainly whoever was available”</p>
Availability	<p>“Available” “We put the best team that was available out” “Made himself available every weekend” “If that player’s available, that player will play” “Unless they were unfit...unable to play for any reason” “Availability”</p>
	Training
Late for training	<p>“If somebody was continually late”</p>
Training attendance	<p>“If there’s two people who are very similar and the fly half is turning up every week and is there on a Thursday” “Attendance to training” “If you got a kid who’s trained every week and is...a boarder line case you’d say “right boy, he’s trained every week...tick in the box”” “Whether they trained, definitely, and we definitely dropped people because they weren’t at training” “Continue to miss training” “[for] the...B team game, where someone hasn’t turned up to training” “I think we do reward people who turn up to training”</p>
	Player’s playing history

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Played there  
before

“You played there once before”

Number of  
games  
played

“I need to give these seven guys a game”

“Or is it...do we need to give everyone a game?”

“There’s a load of guys who haven’t played for three weeks”

“Whether there’s anyone we gotta fit in because they haven’t played for a few weeks”

“There were kids who haven’t played for two or three weeks”

“These guys haven’t played for three [weeks]”

“There were some people who hadn’t played for three or four weeks”

“Friendlies, in the end I’ll be honest, it was whoever hasn’t [played recently]”

“Preference will be going to the guys that didn’t play or were on the bench”

“The ones that didn’t play umm that are not in this side”

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He’s our 10

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He’s our 10

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“We played Max because he’s our 10”

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