Supporting Academy Football Coaches to Develop Psychological Attributes in Male Academy Players

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DECLARATION

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

Signed:

Date: 26.07.23

STATEMENT 1

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

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

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And to Hayley, my fiancé. Well, although I started this before we met (maybe I have been doing this a long time!), I now see this Ph.D. as yours, too. Your unrelenting support and recognition for the time and effort I have had to put in over the last few years has been incredible. It must be quite hard to acquaint yourself with someone who works all day, drives home, then works all evening - but you did, with empathy and humour. You knew when I needed to have a break and enforced this upon me when I probably didn't realise I needed one. I will endeavour to support you in kind as you accomplish your own dreams and ambitions. I cannot wait to have free evenings and weekends once again so we can enjoy our time to deliberately do nothing- together, without guilt!

Finally, I would like to dedicate an acknowledgement to my supervisor Dr Kieran Kingston who sadly passed away a few months before I submitted this thesis. Of course, I would much prefer to be writing a shorter acknowledgment to Kieran, with a quip or two about his golf, submit the thesis and then meet him at the pub for a celebratory pint … but that unfortunately won't happen. I owe so much to Kieran, for his supervision, mentorship, and friendship. Thank you for challenging me, for correcting me, for encouraging me, and celebrating my accomplishments. I achieved more than I ever thought I could academically under your tutelage, and I thoroughly enjoyed contributing toward all the publications we shared. I hope I have represented you well. This thesis is dedicated to you.

DISSEMINATION OF RESEARCH

Thesis Outputs

Wixey, D., Cropley, B., Kingston, K., & Shearer, D. (07 Dec 2023). Coaching
strategies to develop desired psychological attributes within academy soccer
players. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*.
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This manuscript combines studies 1 and 2 of this thesis.

Associated Outputs

Kingston, K., Wixey, D., & Cropley, B. (2021). Motivation in coaching: Promoting
adaptive psychological outcomes. In Z. Zenko & L. Jones (Eds.), *Essential of
exercise and sport psychology: An open access textbook* (pp.479-508). Society
for Transparency, Openness, and Replication in Kinesiology.
https://doi.org/10.51224/B1021

Kingston, K., Wixey, D. J., & Morgan, K. (2020). Monitoring the climate: exploring
the psychological environment in an elite soccer academy. *Journal of Applied
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used to develop a mastery motivational climate within a Premier League
soccer academy. *Journal of Contemporary Athletics, 15*(4).

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Wixey, D., & Kingston, K. (2023). Identifying the psychological characteristics desired of elite youth athletes: Towards an interdisciplinary approach to talent development. *Journal of Sport Behaviour, 46*(1), 93-109.

Glossary

Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP): A strategy to increase the quality of, and standardise, long-term player development within academy football in the English Football League (EFL) system. The Premier League published the EPPP in 2011 in readiness for its commencement from July 1st, 2012. A key premise of the EPPP is to audit and categorise academies based upon the resources they provide for talent development. The EPPP categorises academies from one-four, with category one considered the optimum talent development environment and thus receiving the greatest funding from the Premier League (The Premier League, 2011; 2022). The EPPP promotes the holistic development of players which encompasses their technical, tactical, physical, psychological, and social development (Webb et al., 2020).

EPPP Category One: The term given to describe the optimum development model in the academy system which offers a pathway from under five to under 21 years old (Webb et al., 2020). Category one academies have the infrastructure and resources that enable young players to access 8,500 hours of the highest quality of coaching and talent development services (The Premier League, 2011). Category one academies aim to produce Premier League players (The Premier League, 2022).

EPPP Category Two: The second tier of academy football that provides young players with up to 6,600 hours of coaching with access starting from under five to under 21 years old. Category two academies will offer a foundation phase, youth development, and professional development phase (Webb et al., 2020). This tier of academy will occasionally produce Premier League players (The Premier League, 2022).

EPPP Category Three: Considered an entry-level development environment that facilitates a player pathway for players from the age of five to under 21. Category three academies will aim to produce players for the football league (a lower level of competition than the Premier League) and offer players up to 3,600 hours of practice (The Premier League, 2011; 2022; Webb et al., 2020). Category three academies provide all three phases: foundation, youth development, and professional development (Webb et al., 2020).

EPPP Category Four: The lowest of the academy tiers and is considered a late-entry model due to the provision for the professional development phase only (The Premier League, 2011). This category of academy is expected to produce football league players who are late developers (The Premier League, 2011).

Foundation Phase: The first period of the talent development pathway in category one, two, and three football academies; supporting players from under five to under 11 years of age. Players can only be officially registered to the academy in the under nine age group (Webb et al., 2020).

Youth Development Phase: The second period of talent development within category one, two, and three academies that provides coaching for players from under 12 to under 16 years of age (The Premier League, 2011). With some exceptions, professional contracts are determined at the end of this phase.

Professional Development Phase: The final period of any academy that caters for players from under 17 to under 21 years old (The Premier League, 2011). Players in this phase will have a professional contract with the club they are registered to.

Four Corners: A holistic model of talent development that encourages the development of a players' technical/tactical, social, psychological, and physical

capabilities. This model is championed by the Football Association (FA) and is a fundamental part of the FA coaching qualifications (The FA, 2023).

Psychological Corner: One of the corners of the four-corner model. The psychological corner emphasises the promotion and development of a players' psychological qualities that could aid their performance or contribute toward their general wellbeing (The FA, 2023).

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Abstract

The overarching purpose of this thesis was to support academy football coaches to better facilitate the psychological development of young players. To achieve this purpose, three empirical studies were conducted, each with a respective aim. Study one (Chapter 3) aimed to first identify the key psychological attributes to develop within young academy players. Building on study one, study two (Chapter 4) aimed to explore the coaching strategies that can facilitate the development of each psychological attribute, and also to examine the observable behaviours that indicate that the attribute is developed. Finally, study three (Chapter 5) aimed to apply the knowledge constructed in study one and two by designing, delivering, and evaluating a sport psychology coach education and support programme at a case study football academy. Study one (Chapter 3) interviewed nine academy coaches who worked within a category one football academy, with eight psychological attributes constructed from thematic analysis of the interviews: commitment to develop, confidence, coping with the demands of high-level sport, drive to achieve goals, emotional control, resilience, self-aware and reflective, and strong work ethic. The findings provide greater direction for the attributes to develop in academy players but also indicate that current frameworks may not fully capture the key psychological attributes players need to develop in order to successfully progress out of the academy. Study two (Chapter 4) interviewed twelve, category one and two, academy football coaches to explore the coaching strategies used to develop each of the eight psychological attributes identified in study one. Fifty-two coaching strategies were constructed across the attributes providing academy coaches with a catalogue of user-friendly strategies to support their players' psychological development with. Study two also identified behaviours that indicated the successful development of each attribute, knowledge that can help coaches to observe, intervene, monitor, and assess the psychological development of their players. Study three (Chapter 5) involved the design, delivery, and evaluation of a 14-month coach education and support programme with a case study academy: Dock FC. Summary coach interviews indicated that the programme was well received and helped increase awareness and to some degree their application of strategies to support the psychological development of their players. An indirect approach to the programme was taken to reflect the landscape of psychological support in academies present at the time of the study. Summary player focus groups, along with the coach interviews and researcher reflections indicated that this approach worked well, offering a tangible approach for sport psychology practitioners to adopt, more readily, in football academy environments. The research within this thesis offers empirically informed knowledge which extends the extant literature significantly. The thesis provides novel information on: (a) the key psychological attributes to prioritise the development of in the modern-day academy football player; (b) coaching strategies to support the development empirically informed psychological attributes; (c) behavioural indicators of successful psychological development; and (d) the real-world application of supporting academy coaches to develop targeted psychological attributes in the modern-day academy football academy. The insights provided in this thesis may help improve the holistic development that young football players receive throughout their football academy journey.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Football (or soccer) is a game that captivates millions of people around the world, and for those participating in the elite youth tiers of the sport, many hold the dream of becoming a professional football player (Chamorro et al., 2019). For young players in Britain, the pursuit of that dream often begins when they join a professional football academy with the aim of making the coveted step into the senior first team, a transition that is recognised as the most difficult to make in elite sport (McCarthy, 2020; Stambulova et al., 2009). Committing to and thriving within a professional football club academy relies on an individual's technical skills, tactical understanding and expression, physical capacity, and psychological aptitude; with academies having responsibility to develop each of these aspects in every player (see the Elite Player Performance Plan, EPPP, The Premier League, 2011; The FA, 2023).

Recently, senior professional players have been more forthcoming in expressing the importance of the psychological aspects of performance and the support required to help them manage their personal and professional lives (Morris & Deason, 2020). For example, having reflected on the challenge of facing scrutiny leading to the European Championship 2020, England defender Tyrone Mings reportedly sought support from a sport psychologist (Sky Sports, 2021). Further, Davide Ancelotti, Real Madrid FC Assistant Coach, has stated, "At [Real] Madrid now, we have players with their own psychologists. Mental health and psychology are spoken about a lot more in society now, so the young players have a better understanding of it and how it impacts their performance" (Nassoori, 2022). Such examples emphasise the relevance of sport psychology and the importance of supporting the psychological development of young talented players. Thus, attention

should turn to ensuring younger players receive effective psychological support throughout their time in an academy to give them the best opportunity to progress into, and maintain a successful career in, the professional game (Chandler et al., 2020).

English football academies are high performance environments that are designed to produce professional football players (Adams & Carr, 2017; Saby et al., 2019). Young players may be signed to an academy for over a decade, working to develop their abilities from the age of eight to (potentially) the age of 23 (The Premier League, 2011). With the financial rewards of playing in the English Premier League making English football an attractive proposition for players globally (Deloitte, 2019), academy players will also face the challenge of outperforming incoming talent from other countries. Consequently, the modern academy player needs to demonstrate the ability to produce consistently high levels of performance[1] to progress into the highest tiers of the English game (Mills et al., 2014; Poli et al., 2019). In response to such challenges, and to improve the quality of home-grown talent nationally, the Premier League introduced the EPPP. The EPPP attempts to provide greater structure to the holistic development of young academy players, offering a framework to support clubs to develop each player (Jones, 2018). Since it began, the EPPP has encouraged the psychological development of academy players (Champ et al., 2020; European Club Association [ECA], 2017; Gervis et al., 2020; Pain & Harwood, 2004).

An athlete's psychological capabilities are a key contributor towards their sporting success (Durand-Busch & Salmela, 2002; Saward et al., 2019). Indeed, in

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[1] Performance is often measured both subjectively (e.g., a player's ability to execute a team's game plan; fulfil their roles and responsibilities; perceived attributes to cope with the demands of the game) and objectively (e.g., game statistics; physical performance measures).

their review, Dohme et al. (2019) identified 92 psychological characteristics and skills associated with youth development. Concepts such as resilience (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012); self-regulation (Jonker et al., 2017); confidence (Hays et al., 2009; Vealey, 2001); motivation (Keegan et al., 2014); and the ability to cope (Gould et al., 2002) have all been linked to a successful progression into elite adult or professional sport. A notable body of research in this area has been the exploration of the *psychological characteristics for developing excellence* (PCDEs) in sport (cf. MacNamara et al., 2010a; 2010b). PCDEs are characteristics that contribute toward an athlete's realisation of their potential, with several PCDEs suggested to support an athlete's talent development journey (e.g., imagery, coping with pressure, realistic performance evaluations; MacNamara et al., 2010a; 2010b; MacNamara & Collins, 2015). Further, specifically within elite youth football, the 5Cs (concentration, confidence, commitment, control, and communication; Harwood, 2008; Harwood & Anderson, 2015; Harwood et al., 2015); coping and reflection (Saward et al., 2019); discipline, resilience, and social support (Holt & Dunn, 2004) have been identified as examples of psychological attributes associated with the success of talented young players. However, the array of psychological factors associated to successful talent development has inadvertently contributed to a lack of clarity as to which key psychological attributes should be developed within academy players. For example, the EPPP requires academies to develop four psychological areas: stress management, lifestyle management, imagery, and focussing. Yet there is limited explanation as to why these are prioritised over other attributes previously cited within elite youth football literature (e.g., the 5Cs, Harwood, 2008). Given that the Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP) is the governing policy that directs the holistic

development of talented young football players in the UK, the decision to prioritise attributes with limited empirical evidence is questionable.

The multitude of psychological attributes espoused to support the holistic development of young football players can be explained, in-part, by the methodological approaches adopted by researchers in this area. A common approach within literature has been to pre-determine and then deductively assess the impact of certain attributes on talented young football players (e.g., Harwood, 2008; Harwood et al., 2015; Höner & Feichtinger, 2016; Saward et al., 2019). Although deductive approaches hold merit, for example the 5Cs (Harwood, 2008) provided an accessible framework to support coaches to integrate psychological development into their practice, the (researcher) proposed attributes may not fully capture the psychological needs of academy players (cf. Dohme et al., 2019). Indeed, Musculus and Lobinger (2018) argued that seeking the opinions of coaches would provide additional and relevant insights into the psychological attributes that should be prioritised and developed in young footballer players. Although limited examples exist, Musculus and Lobinger highlighted that previous qualitative inquiries with coaches have identified psychological attributes that may not have been captured on self-report questionnaires (e.g., dedication and willingness to sacrifice, Holt & Dunn, 2004).

Coaches can provide a different perspective to that of athletes and researchers. Informed by their experiences of working with a range of academy players, coaches can make "inter-individual" comparisons of players they have developed and observed (Musculus & Lobinger, 2018, p. 2). This offers valuable insights that can advance or corroborate understanding of the most relevant and beneficial psychological attributes for football player development and performance as reported in the literature. To date, there remains are limited examples of research

that has prioritised the views of academy coaches on this matter (i.e., Mills et al., 2012), and certainly none during the EPPP era (2012-present). Thus, there is a need to obtain the subjective views of academy coaches to provide a more holistic, and updated, understanding of the psychological attributes that will give a young player the best opportunity of progressing through the modern-day football academy and into senior, professional football. Once a fundamental understanding of the key psychological attributes has been established, attention can turn to identifying who is in an advantageous position to support the psychological development of academy players and how this might be done.

In their review of psychological support available for football players with long-term injuries, Gervis et al. (2020) identified that 26 of 29 participating British academies employed a part-time sport psychologist, an encouraging finding that indicates some progress given previous admissions about the lack of recognition or psychological support for youth players (i.e., Pain & Harwood, 2004; Stratton et al., 2004). However, despite this progress, Gervis et al. questioned the impact that part-time sport psychologists could have, highlighting the limitations of such contracts in the supporting of players with long-term injuries (e.g., *ad hoc* support from non-sport psychology practitioners and an absence of psychological screening). Despite the financial revenue that football clubs can make, there has been little change in the amount of money invested into a club's respective academies, a situation that is not forecast to change either (Deloitte, 2019; ECA, 2017). With the largest portion of an academy's outgoings being staffing costs, the employment of full-time sport psychologists (taking precedent over other roles, such as strength and conditioning coaches) appears unlikely (ECA, 2017). Without clear (or minimum) expectations of an academy's sport psychology provision (see the EPPP), the psychological support

(i.e., the employment of a sport psychologist) offered to young academy players becomes dependent upon the values and priorities of the individual decision makers within the academy, a situation that does not encourage a systematic and standardised approach to psychological development for young players (e.g., Crawley & Hills, 2023; ECA, 2017; Gervis et al., 2020; Nesti & Sulley, 2015). Thus, with full-time psychological support unlikely, there remains the need for other key stakeholders to concurrently support all players' psychological development throughout their academy journey.

Along with organisational barriers (i.e., funding), the challenges associated with integrating sport psychology into football academies, previously identified by Pain and Harwood (2004) and Stratton (2004), remain (Champ et al., 2020; Nesti & Sulley, 2014). For example, in Champ et al.'s (2020) ethnographic account of the first author's time as a practitioner at an academy in the English football league, it was highlighted that coaches were reluctant to integrate sport psychology provision within the hypermasculine culture of the academy. Champ et al. attributed this to the notion that coaches may have adopted (and thus perpetuated) negative hegemonic beliefs (e.g., that footballers cannot show feelings) associated with sport psychology. Further, Jones (2018) interviewed Heads of Education and Welfare, who have the default responsibility for the psychology provision within football academies, exploring how well equipped they felt in their role to support the psychological development of players. Participants reported that they could not effectively contribute towards this part of the role citing a lack of time, limited sport psychology knowledge, and administrative duties (from the EPPP) as factors that prevented innovative and proactive provision. Jones' participants also indicated that sport psychology was not the priority but rather that producing senior first-team players

was the core focus. Such findings attest to the lack of understanding that arguably exists regarding the role that sport psychology can have within youth academy football, either as a stand-alone provision or to compliment holistic talent development programmes (cf. Chandler et al., 2020). Crucially, Jones' findings highlighted that psychology was not a priority over players' technical, tactical, and physical developments, and raised issues concerning the enactment of the EPPP and the limited attention that sport psychology receives as a consequence.

Gaining insight into how coaching staff interpreted, experienced, and engaged with the EPPP, O'Gorman et al. (2020) interviewed 12 part time coaches who worked within a category three academy[2]. They found that coaches were passively compliant in the enactment of the EPPP policy also citing the administrative duties of the EPPP as distracting from the coaching role, with participants even indicating a change of their own identity, from coach to administrator. O'Gorman et al. discussed how compounding issues (e.g., increased administrative duties, lack of autonomy, change of job evaluation, the intensity of the policy enactment) led to coaches attending to EPPP regulations unwillingly, with coaches adopting a form of "impression and performance management" (Ball, 2003, p. 221). Fabricating information to appease the criteria of the policy appeared the norm amongst participants, with the delivery of the EPPP resembling an "enacted fantasy" (Ball, 2003, p. 222). Further questions can be raised, therefore, about how much change has occurred since the inception of the EPPP in regard to the psychological development of players within football academies. Indeed, adopting

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[2] In England, all EPPP accredited football academies are categorised from *one* to *four* following external EPPP audit that occurs every two years (see thesis Glossary). Categorisation is based on several criteria, including (but not limited to): the academy's facilities; the number and level of qualification of coaching staff; and level of access to sport science support. Category one is the highest categorisation. Funding from the Premier League is given to each academy based upon the category achieved. Category one academies receive the highest amount of funding.

an ethnographic approach to examine the organisational culture of an English football academy over a period of three seasons, Champ et al. (2020) concluded that the "EPPP appeared to have little to no impact on changing the beliefs and behaviours of these individuals [coaches]" (p. 161), indicating that the EPPP has not yet met its aim to improve and formalise the provision of sport psychology in academies. Further, Champ et al. reported that the academy staff still perpetuated the macho-masculine and brutal culture previously observed in youth football academies (e.g., Cushion & Jones, 2006; Parker, 2001); an environment not conducive to positive player experience or psychological wellbeing (Cushion & Jones, 2006).

Although the EPPP has provided some parameters for the provision of sport psychology, albeit minimal (cf. Crawley & Hills, 2023; Nesti & Sulley, 2015), researchers have suggested that provision continues to experience deficiencies (Champ et al., 2020; Cooper, 2021; Crawley & Hills, 2023; O'Gorman et al., 2019; Jones, 2018). In response to these ongoing issues, it is important to first identify the personnel who can concurrently support the psychological development of young academy players. With the Heads of Education and Welfare unable to provide effective psychological support to players (Jones, 2018), coupled with clubs often being unwilling to employ a designated full-time sport psychologist (ECA, 2017; Nesti & Sulley, 2014), focus should perhaps turn to supporting the academy coach to enhance the psychological development of players.

Coaches are believed to be in a primary position to develop athletes' character (Paquette & Sullivan, 2012; Gould et al., 1999; Harwood, 2008); support their wellbeing (Gould & Carson, 2008); instil life skills (Bowley & Cox., 2020; Camiré et al., 2011; Gould & Westfall, 2014); and enhance social development amongst their athletes (Conroy & Coatsworth, 2006). However, some have argued

that psychology is not the coach's responsibility, with it blurring the lines between two distinct stakeholders (i.e., the coach and the sport psychologist), in turn leaving coaches and athletes in vulnerable positions (Ellicksen & Brown, 1990). Critically, this reason alone does not negate the need for coaches to develop players psychologically, rather it highlights the need to clarify the parameters for their role in the psychological development of players. Within England, the Football Association (FA) assesses coaches on their ability to enhance players across four areas of performance: technical and tactical, physiological, social, and psychological (The FA, 2020). It is, therefore, within the remit of the coach to develop their players' *psychology for performance* (i.e., facilitate the development of the psychological attributes players require to manage the *on-pitch* demands of the game and to perform consistently in their respective roles). One-to-one psychological support (that typically focus upon "issues"), or specialist workshops must be delivered by a trained professional. The premise of the current Ph.D. is that the academy coach should be providing psychological support *for performance*. The challenge, however, is to support academy coaches to do this effectively.

Purpose of Thesis

Addressing issues and gaps in knowledge and practice, this thesis aimed to identify the key psychological attributes required to give an academy player the best opportunity to progress through the academy and into the senior, professional game, and investigate the coaching strategies used to develop each. Then, utilising this knowledge, to develop and deliver a coach education and support programme, with the purpose of improving academy coaches' knowledge and capabilities to support their players to develop each of the desired psychological attributes. These aims were met through the pursuit of several objectives:

(a) Identify the key psychological attributes that give players the best opportunity to progress through an academy and into the senior, professional game in order to provide updated knowledge on attributes and thus account for the demands of the modern game and talent development pathways.

(b) Explore the coaching strategies that can be used to develop each psychological attribute (identified in objective 'a'), providing explicit, user-friendly guidance for academy coaches to integrate the strategies into their practice.

(c) Examine the adaptive player behaviours associated with each psychological attribute to support academy coaches in their assessment and development of each attribute in their players.

(d) Obtain players' opinions of which coaching strategies they find most beneficial, enabling coaches to prioritise the deployment of strategies.

(e) Design a season-long coach education programme, informed by the knowledge acquired from meeting the preceding objectives.

(f) Deliver the coach education programme within a football academy through an applied, ecological case study approach.

(g) Conduct a critical review of the programme, considering its impact, through social validation interviews and focus groups with coaches and players.

Structure of the Thesis

This thesis will adhere to the following structure. Chapter Two will present a review of literature associated with three themes: (a) the psychological attributes desired of elite youth association football players; (b) how, and how well, psychological attributes are developed in academy football players; and (c) the academy coach's role in players' psychological development. The literature review will provide context and highlight current gaps in knowledge in relation to the aims

of the thesis. Following this, each study is presented as its own chapter and in the order it was conducted. Chapter Three presents the first of the three studies, which aims to identify the psychological attributes, and the associated player behaviours, that will give an academy player the best opportunity of progressing through an academy and into the senior, professional game. The second study (Chapter Four) aims to build upon the findings of study one through further qualitative exploration of the coaching strategies that could be used to support the development of the psychological attributes (and their associated behaviours) identified in the first study. Study three (Chapter Five), informed by the findings of studies one and two, presents the design, delivery, and evaluation of a coach education programme that focuses on supporting academy coaches to develop psychological attributes in their players.

Each of the three studies will be written and presented in peer-review format as it was my intention to disseminate my research as I progressed through this Ph.D. programme of study. This includes study specific critical discussions and references presented at the end of each study chapter. As a result of presenting each study in this way I have, at times, referred to we (i.e., the research team) when describing aspects of my research. To qualify, as the principal investigator, I have led the study conceptualisation and design, collected and analysed all data, and made sense of the findings independently. In accord with all Ph.D. research projects, I have worked in collaboration with my supervisory team who have also acted in the role as critical friends to help me engage in a more rigorous approach to research, challenging my decisions in a positive way to facilitate considered engagement in the research process. Further, this approach has meant that the introductions to each study chapter at times repeat some of the information presented in the thesis literature review. While I tried to avoid this as much as possible, the approach taken and the body of

literature relevant to my research meant that some repetition was inevitable. Finally, a general (thesis) discussion will be presented in Chapter Six with the thesis being concluded with a reflective epilogue (Chapter Seven) designed to detail my development as an independent researcher across the journey of this Ph.D. All chapters are formatted to APA 7th Edition style, with tables and figures sequentially ordered.

Philosophical Position of the Research

Knowing the lens through which a researcher views the world, and thus how they interpret meaning in data, is central to understanding how, why, and where knowledge comes from (Kivunja & Kuyina, 2017). A researcher's worldview, which can also be described in terms of a research paradigm, is a set of beliefs or assumptions that guide their research endeavours and their interpretation of results (Lather, 1986; McKenzie & Knipe, 2006). An interpretivist research paradigm was adopted for this current programme of research, a research paradigm aligned to the philosophical assumptions of the researcher. Interpretivists believe that the world is complex and within it, individuals (including the researcher) define their own meanings to the reality they experience (Jones & Wallace, 2005; Potrac et al., 2014). Interpretivism offers a framework to explore, capture, and communicate the subjective opinions of the academy coach, helping to meet the aims of the current programme of research.

Within each research paradigm there are four central components: ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Ontology is concerned with what constitutes reality, with the ontological assumptions of this body of work aligning closely to relativism. The relativist ontology assumes that there are multiple realities and that these realities can be explored through interaction

between researcher and participant (Chalmers et al., 2005). An underpinning belief is that reality and human experience are synonymous: reality is what an individual experiences, and what an individual experiences is their reality (Sparkes, 1992). Thus, relativist researchers explore the meaning of their own reality as they interact with participants (e.g., through interviews), as the participant simultaneously makes meaning out of, and communicates, their reality to the researcher (Potrac et al., 2014).

Epistemology refers to *how we come to know* and what an individual determines truth to be (Cooksey & McDonald, 2011). The current project is driven by the perspective that for us to know and then develop the desired psychological attributes of academy players, the values, interests, and subjectivities of academy coaches need to be explored. In short, without their subjective opinions, knowledge on this matter remains incomplete. As such, the researchers' epistemological position within this project can be described as *subjectivist*, where knowledge is believed to be socially constructed and is developed with the search for knowledge occurring in collaboration with one of most influential social agents in football academies (i.e., coaches).

A researcher's ontological and epistemological assumptions in turn drive the methodology of their work. This includes how their research is designed (and how aims are constructed), how data will be collected in relation to the design and aims of the research, and then how data will be analysed, interpreted, and presented. Within an interpretivist paradigm, naturalistic methodologies are often employed, which rely upon discourse of the observed world (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Common naturalist methodologies include participant observations, interviews, and focus groups (Potrac et al., 2014). The specific designs of each of the three studies that contribute toward

this Ph.D. project will be outlined within each of their respective methods sections (see Chapters Three, Four, and Five). Finally, axiology relates to the ethical considerations of a research project with interpretivist researchers trying to attain a balanced axiology whereby the outcomes will "reflect the values of the researcher, trying to provide a balanced report of the findings" (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017, p. 34). Thus, the process of *how* data is analysed is critical to the current programme of research and a rationale must be provided to ensure that the data analysis process is representative of the ontological and epistemological position of the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Different approaches to data analysis have been utilised within research conducted in the context of football academies through similar philosophical positions, namely: interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA; e.g., McGlinchey et al., 2022); grounded theory (GT; e.g., Holt & Dunn, 2004; Mitchell & Holt, 2006); content analysis (CA; Mills et al., 2012; Mills et al., 2014); and reflexive thematic analysis (RTA; e.g., Champ et al., 2020). IPA (see Smith & Osbourne, 2004) is a guiding framework to understand human experience and how an individual makes sense of the world. IPA centres around an ideographic approach, focusing upon the unique details of a case (i.e., individual). Although IPA is congruent with the relativist philosophy of this thesis, IPA demands a deeper interpretation of data, which in turn informs the recruitment of participants and the interview guide; a process that was not logistically viable for the current project nor necessary given the aims of the research (Braun & Clarke, 2021). GT (Charmaz, 2014) facilitates the development of theory based upon the data collected from individuals within a given social setting (Holt, 2017). Researchers using GT will conduct line-by-line coding followed by more abstract (or selective) forms of coding, which in turn will be

clustered for category development. Despite Charmaz's (2014) approach to GT

being aligned to a constructivist epistemology, the line-by-line coding forces the

researcher to interpret all aspects of data, removing the researcher's autonomy to

make sense of data pertinent to their research aims. Further, the role of the researcher

during the category development phase in GT is unclear, and thus it is difficult to

state, with confidence, that GT would align to the relativist philosophy of this thesis

(Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Another approach that is commonly used, yet sits outside of the relativist

ontology, is CA (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). Although CA is used to identify themes

from qualitative data it is often accompanied by the measurement of inter-coder

reliability in an effort to improve the accuracy of analysis, thus positioning CA

within the post-positivist paradigm (Braun & Clarke, 2021). CA is useful for coding

and categorising large amounts of qualitative data but, consequently, the analysis is

often descriptive (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Vaismoradi et al., 2016). A method that is

used to analyse larger amounts of qualitative data, whilst also guiding a deeper

interpretation and interrogation of the data, is RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2012). RTA is

considered to be an "easily accessible and theoretically flexible interpretative

approach to qualitative data analysis that facilitates the identification and analysis of

patterns or themes in a given data set" (Byrne, 2022, p. 1391). Further, in RTA, the

researcher takes an active role as they reflect and interpret the worldview of

participants leading to the formation of codes. Braun and Clarke (2012) provided a

clear framework for researchers to follow, directing their efforts to engage with the

data generated from naturalistic enquiries. RTA aligns closely to the philosophy,

ontology, and epistemology of this thesis and is thus deemed a suitable and effective

method of analysis to help meet the aims of this Ph.D. As such, RTA will be used in

Study One (Chapter 3), study two (Chapter 4), and study three (Chapter 5), with each chapter offering further explanation and rationale for its utility in that given study.

The following body of work has been conceived, constructed, and conducted with the view that individuals' subjective perceptions of the world create their reality, and that the social world is indeed what people believe exists (Smith & Sparkes, 2017). My research strives to understand the worldviews of academy football coaches through naturalistic inquiry, actively seeking truth. The subjective realities of academy coaches are prioritised throughout, driven by the belief that their subjective realities bear the knowledge to catalyse better psychological support for academy players, and in turn, contribute more effectively to their progress through, and out of, an academy into senior, professional football.

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Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The psychological capabilities of an athlete are recognised as an integral contributor toward their development and success in elite sport (Beauchamp et al., 2023). The systematic development of psychological attributes in young talented athletes, therefore, is critical in supporting their ability to progress into senior, elite levels of sport and achieve personal and professional success (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002; Dohme et al. 2019; Harwood, 2008). For example, the focused commitment that early specialisation environments require, demands sustained levels of motivation from the athlete as it becomes a key buffer against maladaptive consequences such as burnout or exiting the sport (Bartholomew et al., 2011; Kingston et al., 2020). Early specialisation is described as the intense involvement in training and competition within a single sport from a young age (Baker et al., 2009; Wixey et al., 2020). Akin to this, a key aim of the elite player performance plan (EPPP) has been to increase the number of training hours young academy players experience toward 10,000 hours of practice and thus accelerate the development of young individuals into expert players (Wixey et al., 2020). Under the EPPP, the academy system, therefore, incentivises early specialisation by requiring category one academies to deliver 4-8 hours of practice per week at the foundation phase (i.e., 8-11year olds), a situation further compounded by pre-academy programmes whereby children as young as four train multiple times a week as clubs race to register the best local talent at the earliest opportunity (Austin, 2022).

It is increasingly reported that early specialisation environments are psychologically demanding, requiring young athletes to develop a range of characteristics to be able to cope with often competing performance (e.g., expectations to engage in extended deliberate practice to enhance expertise; high

level of intra-team and inter-team competition), organisational (e.g., pressure to continually make sport-related transitions), social (e.g., parental and peer pressure), and personal (e.g., academic commitments) pressures (Coutinho et al., 2016). Academies in the English football system, therefore, require the systematic development of players' psychological abilities to give them the best opportunity to prosper within such an intensely competitive and demanding environment (Gervis & Goldman, 2020; Mitchell et al., 2022). Indeed, the National Governing Body (NGB) of association football in England, the Football Association (FA), include psychology as a "corner" of their holistic four-corner coaching model alongside technical, tactical, and physical aspects of performance (Chapman et al., 2020; Simmons, 2004; Towlson et al., 2019). However, despite the need for, and intention to, develop young (academy) football players psychologically, there remains two significant issues. First, perhaps due to the variability in club academy structures, philosophies, and values regarding youth player development, there is little agreement as to which psychological attributes should be targeted. Second, there is limited understanding of *how* to effectively develop psychological attributes within youth players within the context of academy football (Beauchamp et al., 2023; Mitchell et al., 2022). Each of these concerns are explored and addressed in the following section: a review of the literature concerning the psychological attributes associated with success amongst the youth athlete population more generally. This is then followed by a sharpened focus on the attributes associated with success in the specific environment of a professional academy in the English football system. Prior to this, attention will briefly turn to the clarification of key terms.

Key Terms

The following section will provide a conceptualisation for two key terms: *success* and *psychological attributes*. Clarity on these two terms is essential, not just for the purpose of this research, but to help situate this thesis within the sport and coaching psychology literature that this review is largely based upon.

Conceptualising the Term "Success"

Success in youth football can be defined in many ways, from the day-to-day successes (e.g., scoring, displaying positive performances, winning) to the longer-term achievements (e.g., contract extensions, progression into the senior team, international representation). Within the English football system, the EPPP has introduced a variety of measures for assessing the success of its accredited academies, such as: the number of professional contracts awarded by the club to youth players (77% of contracts in the Premier League and English Football League are held by home-grown players[3]; The Premier League, 2022); the number of first team appearances of players graduating from the academy (e.g., 11% of recent EPPP category one graduates have made 20 senior first team appearances; The Premier League, 2022); and academy player international representation (i.e., the creation of a larger pool of experienced players [more than 20 senior first team appearances] for international selection for England; The Premier League, 2022). The progression of a youth player into senior professional football is widely considered as a significant achievement for all stakeholders involved. For the player, this signifies the accomplishment of one of the hardest transitions to make in sport, whilst for the club it is seen as the successful development of a marketable asset for the club's own use or for financial revenue (Deloitte, 2019; McCarthy, 2020; The Premier League,

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[3] Home grown players refer to those players who were trained within an academy in the English football system.

2022). Given the significance of this progression, the description of success in academy football could centre around the progression from the academy to senior professional football. However, with the restructuring of the academy system (i.e., the EPPP in 2012) and the introduction of the professional development phase (PDP, see thesis Glossary) whereby players are, by definition, professional athletes already, the definition of success in this context needs to be updated and refined.

Extending on Mills et al.'s (2012) general description, success within this Ph.D. will be defined as: *the successful progression into professional football beyond the PDP stage of the academy*. This may take the form of progressing into the under 23 team or the senior first team attached to the football academy, a loan move to another professional club, or a transfer to another professional football team. It is well documented in literature (e.g., Collins et al., 2018; Collins & McNamara, 2012), and acknowledged in the recent EPPP report (The Premier League, 2022, p. 22), that there is "no one-size-fits-all" path into professional football. Thus, the above description of *success* is considerate of this and flexible in its ability to be applied to all players who make the progression from the PDP phase of the academy into the senior game.

Conceptualising the Term "Psychological Attributes"

Attempting to bring order to the *language games* developing within sport psychology literature, Dohme et al. (2017) conducted a systematic review on the different terms being used to describe psychological components of an individual. Twenty-one studies met their inclusion criteria with terms such as: "characteristics", "attributes", "qualities", "factors", and "mental skills", identified as being used interchangeably to describe psychological components of an individual. As a result, Dohme et al. (2017) coined the term psychological skills and characteristics (PSCs)

to capture the diverging terms being used within literature. However, psychological characteristics are "commonly defined as trait-like dispositions that can be regulated or enhanced through systematic development despite their relative stability" (Dohme et al., 2019, p. 261). This description does not lend itself to the perception that an individual's psychological components can be changed within the shorter timeframes afforded within football academy environments, but rather gives the impression that an individual's mentality is a more stable construct. For example, *self-efficacy* is a psychological component widely attributed to athletes' development and performance but is reported to be *state-like* as it is likely to fluctuate depending on several personal and environmental factors (Anstiss et al., 2020).

Arguably, Dohme et al.'s (2017) description is not conducive to the philosophy or aims of this thesis, which is focused upon the development of the psychological components of academy players' development and performance. Rather, the term *psychological attributes* is preferred and will be used throughout to describe the psychological components required by an individual to develop and perform (both personally and professionally). The term "attributes" has also been used previously in literature (e.g., Butt et al., 2010; MacNamara et al., 2010a; Mills et al., 2012), appearing in 11 of the 21 articles reviewed by Dohme et al. (2017). However, although the term has been used liberally, it has rarely been defined. For this project, psychological attributes are described as: *mental qualities that an individual possesses that facilitate adaptive cognitions, emotions, and behaviours to meet the demands of the environment*. This description considers the interaction between an individual's cognitions, emotions, behaviours, and the context in which they are situated, distinguishing it from the description of "characteristics" (as predispositions and trait-like) by emphasising the contribution that the environment

has upon determining what *is* an attribute (i.e., the *mental quality* is only as valuable as the situation defines).

An Overview of Research Examining Psychological Attributes

This section provides a review of literature that has informed knowledge within the discipline of sport psychology regarding the psychological attributes that have been positively associated with athletic performance. In particular, the attributes believed to contribute towards a successful progression from youth into elite senior sport are reviewed, starting with attributes across wider sporting contexts followed by literature relating specifically to academy football players.

Psychological Attributes Associated with the Successful Progression into Elite, Senior Sport

Knowledge regarding the psychological attributes associated with senior athletic success (e.g., development and performance) has grown considerably over the last few decades. The body of research that has aimed to examine the psychological attributes that support optimal performance at senior level has helped to provide greater direction for the systematic development of a young athletes' mentality (Beauchamp et al., 2023). For example, Gould et al. (2002) found, through a combination of interviews and questionnaires, that Olympic champions were characterised by several psychological attributes, including: the ability to cope, confidence, mental toughness or resilience, sport intelligence, focus, competitiveness, hard work-ethic, goal setting, coachability, high levels of hope, optimism, and adaptive perfectionism. Durand-Bush and Salmela (2002), who also employed a similar retrospective approach to that of Gould et al. interviewed Olympic gold medallists or World Champions regarding attributes that contributed to their development and maintenance of expert performance. Durand-Bush and

Salmela's (2002) inductive analysis identified self-confidence, motivation, creativity, and perseverance as the key personal attributes, findings that demonstrate overlap with some of Gould et al.'s attributes. Similarly, a plethora of psychological attributes have since been identified in the wider performance literature, some of which are analogous and some of which are unique to the context in which they were derived, for example: self-regulation (e.g., Toering et al., 2009); resilience (e.g., Butt et al., 2010); commitment (e.g., MacNamara et al., 2010a); motivational factors (e.g., Jones & Lavallee, 2009); hope for success (e.g., Höner & Feichtinger, 2016); and coping (e.g., Finn & Mckenna, 2010).

Focusing upon the salient psychological factors that contribute towards optimal performance, the exploration and application of the *psychological characteristics of developing excellence* (PCDE) has been a prominent avenue of research within sport psychology literature (e.g., MacNamara et al., 2008, 2010a, 2010b). This body of work has added to our knowledge surrounding the psychological characteristics that can maximise an athlete's capabilities throughout their talent development pathway; providing a useful framework for practitioners (Collins et al., 2018; MacNamara & Simpson, 2019). Interviewing seven ex-world-class athletes, along with a parent of each athlete, MacNamara et al. (2010a) identified several psychological themes (e.g., commitment to excellence, competitiveness, self-belief) that contributed towards the participant's development as a world-class athlete. Informed by previous psychological factors identified within the literature (e.g., MacNamara et al., 2008), MacNamara and colleagues (2010b) inductively and deductively assessed which PCDEs (i.e., commitment, focus and distraction control, realistic performance evaluations, self-awareness, coping with pressure, planning and self-organization, goal setting, quality practice, effective

imagery, and actively seeking social support) expert performers (athletes and

musicians) felt they required at different stages of their development. Within the

inductive portion of the interviews, the musicians identified a further three PCDEs

(social skills, distraction control, and focus) from those identified previously (i.e.,

MacNamara et al., 2010a), a finding that highlighted how the specific demands of a

performance environment (i.e., classical music) may require different PCDEs, or at

least, a differing ordering of PCDE development (MacNamara et al., 2010b).

MacNamara et al. (2010b) also found that, in athletes, PCDEs were commonly

emphasised around the age of 16 years only once they had committed to their

pathway for excellence. Additionally, participating athletes reported more 'ups and

downs' further along their pathway to excellence, suggesting that this coincided with

the athlete's reliance upon (natural) physical abilities in their early stages of

development. MacNamara et al.'s (2010b) participants were also able to provide

some indication of *when* different PCDEs were required. For example, *coping skills*

were necessary to help balance academic and employment commitments whilst

training; *ability to prioritise* became important at the age of 17 to help the athletes

respond to socialisation and the pressure of spending time with non-athletic peer

groups; whilst *realistic performance evaluations* helped athletes during "micro

stages and transitions" (e.g., injury, deselection, performance slumps, MacNamara et

al., 2010b, p. 75).

In their systematic review of psychological characteristics that facilitate

athletic development, Dohme et al. (2019) identified 92 psychological factors, which

in turn were analysed to produce 19 umbrella themes constructed of psychological

skills (e.g., goal setting, social support seeking, imagery) and psychological

characteristics (e.g., emotional control, self-confidence, focus). Through this review

Dohme et al. suggested a diverging landscape of psychological factors associated with success within sport, an array that potentially creates difficulties for the applied practitioner in knowing which attributes to prioritise and systematically develop in their athletes. Moreover, although the authors reviewed literature across different sports ($n = 34$), the participants were predominantly associated to football (soccer). Indeed, over 80% of the athletes in the review pool were football players, providing a good indication of the attributes associated to success in football but also highlighting the variety of attributes that could be associated to this sport alone.

The research reviewed in this section has contributed significantly to knowledge regarding the psychological attributes possessed by successful senior athletes and of the attributes to be prioritised at different stages of development for youth athletes seeking to progress towards and into senior sport (e.g., Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2004; Gould et al., 1993; MacNamara et al., 2010a; 2010b). However, despite these merits, this body of work has been informed by a range of athletes from different sports, making the findings more abstract and thus harder to apply, with confidence, to the specific domain of a football academy. Participants from studies included in the current section, although often sharing a similar 'Olympic' or 'world-class' status (e.g., Gould et al., 1999; MacNamara et al., 2010a; 2010b), were from different sporting domains, which may have specific (and different) psychological demands. For example, when discussing the preparation for a World Junior Championships, a participating athlete in MacNamara et al.'s (2010b) study reported, "I wasn't even training properly at that stage … I was just running". Even though MacNamara et al.'s (2010b) participant was preparing for a world championship event (and thus represented the highest level of youth performers in their respective sport), their unsystematic approach to training differs to the

systematic approach to development in the modern-day football academy, where eight-year-olds in EPPP category one academies would have "four rising to eight" hours per week of curriculum-based practice (The Premier League, 2011, p. 35; Wixey et al., 2021). There is a need to know, with confidence, the psychological attributes youth football players require, particularly in consideration of the unique contextual demands, to give them the best opportunity to progress within the specific domain of an English football academy.

Psychological Attributes Associated with Success and Optimal Performance in Youth Football.

There has been a burgeoning number of psychological attributes identified within elite youth football literature over the last few decades (e.g., Finn & McKenna, 2010; Holt & Dunn, 2004; Toering, 2009; Van Ypren, 2009), but with limited examples of attributes that emanated from research which focused solely on youth academies in the English football system. The current section will critically review the literature that centres around the psychological development of young, talented, football players more generally, before refining the scope to literature that has provided knowledge on the psychological attributes associated to players housed within an academy in the English football system.

One avenue of research that has contributed to the breadth of attributes associated with optimal performance in football has been to identify the predictors of future football success, often determined by comparing the performance outcomes of higher ability players to lower ability players over time (e.g., Forsman et al., 2016; Höner & Feichtinger, 2016). Höner and Feichtinger (2016) attempted to capture the psychological characteristics that predicted the future success of 2677 U12 German development centre level players making the progression into the (higher ability)

academy system. Their results found that self-optimization, physical self-concept, and hope for success were key psychological determinants of successful progression; with the latter giving a player a 2.65 greater chance of becoming an academy player by the age of 16. These results may not be too surprising given that the German youth football system offers players an opportunity for progression whether they are in an academy or not through attending one of the 390 national Deutscher Fußball-Bund (DFB) talent development centres across Germany (DFB, 2015). Höner and Feichtinger's participant sample were taken from these centres, which, given that the DFB centres are designed for the scouting of players, it was likely that participants were indeed more hopeful. Therefore, Höner and Feichtinger's findings may not be representative of the key determinants needed in a youth football system like that governed by the EPPP, whereby academies are the sole gatekeeper to a young person's progression.

In the Netherlands, Jonker et al. (2010) found that talented youth football players were more intelligent than their non-elite counterparts. The "elite" players also demonstrated more self-regulatory skills, self-monitoring, evaluation, reflection, and effort. Adding to these findings, Zuber et al. (2015) purported that individuals with an intrinsically stable achievement orientation were more likely to represent the Swedish National under 15 team. Motivation, and associated concepts, were also identified by Larsen et al. (2012) in their study on the important psychosocial attributes of elite youth football academy players. Utilising a multi-method (e.g., interview, reviews, observations) ecological approach aimed at uncovering the psychosocial skills developed in an elite youth academy, Larson et al. constructed ten key psychosocial skills through triangulation. Six internal attributes included: self-awareness, goal setting, motivation, self-organisation, hard work and managing

performance, whilst four external attributes were: team skills, appreciating family, utilising teachers as a resource and general social skills. Similarly, researchers previously indicated that academy players have a higher level of motivation in comparison to their non-academy counterparts and are higher in task goal-orientation than non-elite players (Kavussanu et al., 2011; Ward et al., 2007).

More recently, Benitez-Sillero et al. (2021) sought to determine the different components of mental toughness (negative energy control, attention control, visual and image control, motivation level) across different age categories from a professional team in the Spanish football league. Their findings found that age correlated positively to visual and image control, attention control, and motivation with the authors suggesting these findings may be useful in guiding future psychological support for players. However, although this knowledge, on what distinguishes an academy player from a sub-elite player or the psychological differences across age groups, is useful to the talent identification scout or sub-elite coach, critically, knowing the psychological characteristics that academy players possess is not necessarily going to contribute towards supporting players to successfully transitioning into the professional game (Saward et al., 2019). Rather, researchers need to turn their attention to understanding what an academy player *requires* to give them the best opportunity to progress.

Reviewing literature that contributed towards talent development in football, Gledhill et al. (2017) identified 22 psychological factors (e.g., commitment, grit, fear of failure, psychological wellbeing, discipline), findings that highlight the variety of factors associated with success in just the sport of football. Although Gledhill et al.'s and Dohme et al.'s (2019) reviews deliberately included a breadth of participants (e.g., males and females, different levels of performance, current elite and ex-elite

players, and participants from different countries) when seeking to understand the key psychological attributes desired of academy football players, the variety of psychological factors identified in the literature does not provide coherence or clarity. Indeed, currently it is challenging for the applied practitioner to navigate and decide which attributes to prioritise the development of in academy players. One framework that has provided some direction for practitioners amongst the milieu of psychological attributes, is the 5Cs framework.

The 5Cs framework (confidence, commitment, communication, control, and concentration) has been readily employed by researchers working in academies and adopted by the English Football Association (FA) to inform their coach education programmes, illustrating the value placed upon the framework (Chandler et al., 2020; FA Learning, 2020; Pain, 2016; Steptoe et al., 2019; Wadsworth et al., 2020). Although the 5Cs framework has helped to accelerate the integration of sport psychology within youth football (see Pain & Harwood, 2004), there is limited justification for the use and prioritisation of these psychological constructs over others. Indeed, the 5Cs are derived from the 6Cs of momentum, a theoretical framework that presents six psychological attributes that contribute toward momentum: commitment, cohesion, communication, concentration, control, and confidence (Higham et al., 2005).

Although it is not necessary for a framework to have a clear inductively informed conception, given that the 5Cs is the predominant framework utilised in academy football it is important to understand its origins and rationale. Critically, the 5Cs may not capture all the psychological attributes that should be developed in young academy players (Crawley & Hills, 2023; Mitchell et al., 2022). For example, in their review of a sport psychology coach education programme delivered to

academy football coaches, Godfrey and Winter (2014) were encouraged to use an expanded adaptation of the 5Cs programme, which developed ten themes: growth-mindset, emotional control, inner drive, confidence, communication, resilience, focus, self-awareness, team orientation, and performance lifestyle. Similarly, Mitchell et al. (2022) added resilience, presence, and self-awareness as attributes to develop alongside the 5Cs in their coach education programme in an EPPP category three academy. Godfrey and Winter's and Mitchell et al.'s work highlight that the 5Cs may not be a fully encompassing framework, indicating that there may be wider attributes required by young academy players given the contextual demands that they experience. Given that there is limited rationale, and no empirical evidence for the prioritisation of each of the C's over other psychological attributes, further research is needed to clarify the psychological attributes to develop in young academy football players (Gledhill et al., 2017). In short, the reliance on a single, albeit user-friendly model may have narrowed the focus upon the employment of coaching strategies to developing attributes of questionable foundation.

Confidence is a psychological attribute that has received further attention within youth academy football research. Greenless et al. (2021) attested to the importance of self-confidence for young (aged 10-11years) footballers playing in an EPPP category one football academy. The authors identified several sources of confidence inductively derived from semi-structured interviews with players, providing valuable guidance to coaches, practitioners, and parents. However, Greenless et al.'s rationale for exploring confidence centred around Forsman et al.'s (2016) previous research; a study that deductively assessed the psychological contributors to successful progression of elite youth Finnish players between the age of 15 to 19 years of age. Employing the Psychological Skills Inventory (PSIS-R-5;

Mahoney et al., 1987) to high-ability Finnish players, Forsman et al. (2016) aimed to identify the most significant technical, tactical, physical, and psychological factors that contribute to future football success. Alongside passing and centring (technical), and agility (physical), Forsman et al. (2016) found that motivation was the most significant psychological predictor of success; emphasising the multidimensional nature of football performance. However, the PSIS-R-5 only measures four areas: motivation, confidence, concentration, and mental preparation to determine the psychological contributors to successful progression in elite youth football, with little rationale for prioritising these four aspects over other psychological factors. While exploring (for example) confidence is important, basing research upon deductively derived methods highlight how such assumptions can contribute towards a diverging landscape of psychological attributes and proceeding sport psychology programmes and policies.

It is reasonable and not uncommon, for psychological attributes identified in one context, to then be asserted in another. This approach has contributed significantly to the development and progress of the field of sport psychology (Sly et al., 2020). However, it is important to be critical of the origins of attributes and to challenge the efficacy of psychological attributes proposed in literature to provide greater coherence and direction for practitioners. Attempting to apply the ten PCDE's to better understand progression within an English football academy, Saward et al. (2019) asked 111 players from two different football academies to complete the Psychological Characterises of Developing Excellence Questionnaire (PCDEQ, MacNamara & Collins, 2011). Of the six PCDE factors measured, Saward et al. found that *working on weaknesses* and *coping with performance and developmental pressures* were strong predictors of progression into the professional

phase of the academy (under 17 – under 23), with the authors recommending that academies systematically develop a blend of the PCDEs to support a young player's progression. Saward et al.'s results suggested that some PCDEs, such as imagery, decreased with age and thus were not as strongly associated to progression as other PCDEs (e.g., working on weaknesses). This finding could be explained by the lack of psychological support in academies and challenges associated to developing mental skills such as mental imagery in athletes (e.g., lack of specialised support, Nesti & Sulley, 2015). The PCDEQ can therefore help target psychological attributes that are not being supported effectively (MacNamara & Collins, 2011). However, Saward et al.'s participants may not have scored highly on the imagery item as they got older because it became a less valued and thus a less emphasised psychological attribute to develop. Consequently, the authors concluded that imagery was not a determining factor in progression for academy players, acknowledging that imagery had not previously been recognised as a key factor for progression in youth football across qualitative or quantitative studies (e.g., Gledhill et al., 2017; Ivarsson et al., 2020; Murr et al., 2018). Saward et al.'s findings highlight the potential issues in assuming the utility of PCDE's to all populations (i.e., imagery), and emphasises the need to first inductively identify the key psychological attributes that will support the progression of young players through and out of the academy.

As part of a study aimed at identifying factors perceived to impact the successful progression of academy players into senior football, Mills et al. (2012) provided one of the few examples of an inductive approach to the exploration of the psychological attributes desired of academy players. Interviewing ten expert academy coaches from top-tier (i.e., Premier League and Championship) football clubs, Mills et al. identified awareness, resilience, goal-directed attributes, and

intelligence as psycho-social factors that influenced player progression, providing clearer direction for those charged with the psychological development of players within academy environments. However, since Mills et al.'s study, the English youth football system has had a significant over-haul through the commencement of the EPPP in 2012, which may have placed new demands upon players (e.g., increased hours of deliberate practice, requirements for self-reflection). There is still a need, therefore, for researchers to explore stakeholders' perspectives of the key psychological attributes desired of the *modern* academy player to facilitate *success* within the nuanced contextual constraints created by developmental systems such as the EPPP.

To date, players have been the dominant participant population within research that has aimed to explore the psychological attributes associated with success in youth football. Although this is not a situation unique to football (Collins et al., 2018), Gledhill et al.'s (2017) review highlighted the dominance of the athlete's voice within this area of research, reporting that the participant pool of studies included 14, 977 players, reflecting 99% of total participants in the review. In contrast, only 81 participants in Gledhill et al.'s review were coaches (or others, such as teachers). Although there will be an expected imbalance due to player to coach ratios, Gledhill et al.'s participant pool still indicates that coaches' contribution to knowledge, generally, has been minimal. Therefore, seeking the opinions of academy coaches will help to provide a more rounded understanding of the psychological attributes to develop in academy players (Musculus & Lobinger, 2018; Nesti & Sulley, 2015). Further, once the desired psychological attributes have been identified, attention can turn to *who* is responsible for supporting their development.

Developing Psychological Attributes in Academy Players: An Overview

The following section reviews literature within which researchers have attempted to develop psychological attributes within the specific population of academy football players, commencing with a discussion on *who* is responsible for the psychological development of academy players in EPPP-governed academies. To explore the aims of this project, it is crucial that the context of the academy and its organisation of sport psychology is first reviewed, helping to identify the parameters for the project.

Developing Psychological Attributes in Academy Football Players: Who is Responsible?

Sport psychology has continued to experience a difficult integration into football academies (Pain & Harwood, 2004; Jones, 2018). Despite the attention the area has received, and recognition for its importance there remains confusion over *who* is responsible for the psychological development of players and *how* this aspect of performance should be developed (Mitchell et al., 2022; Nesti & Sulley, 2014). The EPPP governs and directs the holistic development of academy players in the English football system. Commencing in 2012, the EPPP provided an overview of how the academy system was to be organised and run. A primary aim of the EPPP was to standardise the holistic development of academy players to improve progression rates (i.e., from the academy to the professional team) by encouraging academies to provide a long-term development plan to support players technically, tactically, physically, and psychologically (The Premier League, 2011; 2022). However, regarding the psychological development of players, across academies there are different interpretations of who is responsible for the psychological development of players, a significant gap in the EPPP policy. For example, upon reviewing the EPPP's impact upon academy's sport psychology provision, Jones

(2018) relayed that there are no requirements for an academy to employ staff to support the psychological development of players (even in category one and two academies), with the role often falling to the head of education and/or Welfare Officers. However, Mitchell et al. (2022) suggested that category one academies are required to staff full-time sport psychologist to oversee the provision, an interpretation at odds with Jones' (2018). Indeed, neither Jones (2018) nor Mitchell et al.'s (2022) interpretations of who is responsible for the sport psychology provision in academies appear to be align precisely to the guidance of the EPPP. Specifically, in the EPPP, there is no mention of any requirements for sport psychology provision, nor any requirements to employ a full-time sport psychologist in category one academies, nor any mention that this provision falls under the head of education and/or welfare officer. Instead, sport psychology is briefly discussed under the sport science provision (EPPP, The Premier League, 2011). Without clarity over who is accountable, sport psychology becomes unsystematic and at worst, absent, a scenario that has been indicated by Gervis et al. (2020) who found that the academy physiotherapists were the main provider of psychological support for players with long-term injuries. The EPPP needs to provide greater clarity as to who is responsible for the psychological development of young players and provide specific guidelines for how sport psychology is to be embedded within each categorisation of academy (Crawley & Hills, 2023).

A recent review of the EPPP (i.e., the Premier League, 2022) ten years since its inauguration, reported higher rates of youth-to-senior progression, higher numbers of youth players representing their countries, increased number of international championship victories at youth and senior ages, and a higher number of graduates playing in the English Football League (EFL) or the Premier League.

The EPPP has, unequivocally, contributed to the improvement of academy football, increased the rate of player progression into professional leagues, and contributed towards success within age group national teams. However, arguably it has not fully supported the psychological development of players which, given the recognition and value this area of talent development has gained, is a missed opportunity. Although the EPPP may have intentionally been vague in the guidance given on psychological support to give clubs greater autonomy (see Dean et al., 2022), this may have inadvertently undermined and stunted the development of this provision. Autonomy over the sport psychology provision can give clubs freedom and opportunity for innovation and making this area work specifically for the club and its needs. For example, developed by the psychology, safeguarding and player care staff, Arsenal FC's academy introduced an online platform called "Academy Island" which is "an interactive tool designed to encourage an open conversation around health and wellbeing" (The Premier League, 2022, p. 40). However, an innovative approach like that of Academy Island can arguably only be capitalised upon by academies with greater financial backing or by clubs (and people in them) who prioritise sport psychology provision. Given the difficulties associated with integrating sport psychology into football academies (Champ et al., 2020), the lack of explicit guidance, financial support, and expectations is a risky strategy. Indeed, the lack of guidance and expectations placed upon academies has potentially undermined sport psychology and made it appear to be commodity rather than a fundamental element of talent development (Barker & Winter, 2014).

The lack of guidance or criteria for sport psychology is at odds with the four-corner framework of holistic development the EPPP and FA promote (Simmons, 2004). What remains, ten years on, from the introduction of the EPPP, is confusion

in the literature over where responsibility lies and a lack of observable progress in an area that plays a central role in determining a players' successful progression through the academy and into the professional game (cf. Jones, 2018; Gervis et al., 2020; Mitchell et al., 2022). Substantiating this critique, researchers have reported that most sport psychologists are only employed on a part-time basis in an academy and predominantly deliver counselling and one-to-one support for players, highlighting the potential detachment from the day-to-day practices of the academy (Daley et al., 2020; Gervis et al., 2020).

With the barriers and shortcomings of psychological support in academies (e.g., lack of finances, lack of incentive from the EPPP, ambiguity over accountability) attention should, arguably, turn to the academy coach to help inform and concurrently promote the psychological development of players. Given the caveats of the organisation of sport psychology provision within the academy system, the current thesis is deliberately focused upon the academy coach and their role in helping to support the psychological development of players. If academy coaches are effective in supporting the psychological development of players, there can be greater assurances that young players will receive some form of psychological support as part of their holistic development, regardless of any organisational issues (e.g., funding or accountability) that have to date undermined the sport psychology provision in football academies.

Developing Psychological Attributes in Players: The Role of the Academy Coach

Although recognised as being one of the greatest influences upon a players' psychological development, coaches have generally remained detached from sport psychology provision in academies (Daley et al., 2020; ECA, 2017; Gervis et al.,

2020; Jones, 2018). With the psychological provision for young academy players being recently critiqued (i.e., Crawley & Hills, 2023; Jones, 2018), it is timely (even overdue) to involve the coaches in the development and application of this provision (Champ et al., 2020; Chandler et al., 2020; Daley et al., 2020; O'Gorman et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2018; Nesti & Sulley, 2014; Voldby & Klein-Dossing, 2020).

According to Cassidy (2013), effective coaches will develop athletes psychologically alongside developing an athlete's performance related outcomes. Indeed, there is also a growing recognition and expectation for coaches to support athletes' wellbeing as part of their role (e.g., Bissett et al., 2020; Mazzer & Rickwood, 2015). To support the holistic development of athletes, the FA developed the four-corner coaching model, namely: technical/tactical, physical, social, and psychological. Credited to the work of Simmons (2004), the four-corner model espouses a multidimensional view of football coaching, encouraging a holistic and integrated approach to development (Chapman et al., 2020). Within England, coaches are educated on the four-corner model across all Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) coaching qualifications and assessed on their ability to promote each of the corners. Thus, there is an expectation that the qualified academy coach will develop these four areas within each of their players, and it is widely argued that coaches are well-positioned to address the *psychological corner* as equally as the other areas (Cassidy, 2013; Kingston et al., 2020; Mills et al., 2012). Nevertheless, the introduction of the EPPP and the increased "contact time" that it aimed to provide only adds further to this argument, with some players receiving up to 8,500 hours of access to coaches over their time at an academy (The Premier League, 2011). Although the increase in contact time could lend itself to greater psychological development, coaches must be effective in their deployment of

strategies to thwart potential deleterious effects of negative coach-athlete interactions (see Voldby & Klien-Dossing, 2020; Wixey et al., 2021). Effective coach education is, therefore, required to support a coach's application of techniques to improve psychological attributes within their players.

To date, formal coach education programmes that pertain to the psychological side of player development have been heavily scrutinised (cf. Adams et al., 2016; Freitas et al., 2013). Simultaneously, it has been suggested that academy coaches do not possess a good understanding of sport psychology concepts or strategies (Mitchell et al., 2022). However, despite suggestions that coaches lack an understanding of sport psychology, researchers have also indicated that academy coaches are indeed capable of informing psychological practices and should be encouraged to do so (e.g., Daley et al., 2020; Diment, 2014; Godfrey & Winter, 2014; Harwood, 2008; Mills et al., 2012). Regardless of understanding, a more consistent assertion is that coaches do *want* to learn and discuss sport psychology, which represents a positive shift from previous reports by Pain and Harwood (2004), and one that should be exploited (Brink et al., 2018; Harwood, 2008; Nesti & Sulley, 2014). Indeed, sport coaches are (encouragingly) voicing that they want to know more about the field of sport psychology and how they can implement it into their practice (Brink et al., 2020; Nesti & Sulley, 2015; Pope et al., 2015). For example, Pope et al. (2015) found that more experienced sport coaches independently used online resources to improve their knowledge of sport psychology; sourcing information on how to apply and then integrate concepts into their coaching, findings that also indicate a lack of information readily available to coaches (i.e., that they need to research this themselves). With coaches appearing to want more knowledge and support regarding the psychological side of talent development, coupled with

sport psychologists' views that coaches need to be more structured and systematic in their approaches to psychological attribute development the limited support for coaches is arguably puzzling (Harwood, 2008; Weinberg et al., 2016).

Developing an Athlete's Psychological Attributes Through the Coach

Despite the growing acknowledgement for the role that psychology has in the development of talented athletes, there has been limited attention given to supporting coaches integrate this into practice (Camiré & Trudel, 2014; Harwood & Anderson, 2015). This presents a potential gap within talent development programmes, particularly in high performance youth environments (such as a football academy) where the organisation and coaches have a duty to develop their players psychologically as part of their player's holistic development (Gervis et al., 2020; Nesti & Sulley, 2015; The Premier League, 2011; Simmons, 2000).

In their investigation into coaches' perceptions of a programme designed to improve youth development outcomes, Falcão et al. (2012) recruited six Canadian coaches from basketball and football to participate in workshops aimed to lead the designing of activities that promoted positive youth development (PYD). From here, participating coaches delivered the activities to their athletes with a summary interview taking place to review the programme. Falcão and colleagues identified positive psychological outcomes for players (e.g., personal growth, awareness of health, respect for other gender, confidence), the team (e.g., communication and cohesion), and improved personal development for the coaches (e.g., better understanding of players, learning, and relationship). Similarly, working with nine Canadian high school coaches, Camiré and Trudel (2014) aimed to support the integration and standardisation of psychological skills development into their coaching practice. Analysis of their semi-structured interviews suggested that this

was a successful programme, with workshops, specific sport psychologist support, observations, and academic articles contributing toward the success of the training. However, despite encouraging results, both studies promoted the development and delivery of activities that sat outside of the normal coaching practice. For example, Falcão et al.'s workshops led to the creation of four activities (practice with college athletes, healthy team meal, co-ed practice, and hope of health fundraiser), whilst coaches in Camiré and Trudel's study asked players to complete an evaluation sheet to develop their self-awareness, an exercise that took time away from the coaching session. Although all activities reported in these studies had merit, the development of isolated activities may not lend itself to the high-performance environment of a football academy where time is limited, deliberate practice hours are the priority, and additional administration duties would likely place further strain on coaches (Champ et al., 2020; Jones, 2018; O'Gorman et al., 2019). Rather, support for coaches to enhance the psychological development of their players through more integrated coaching practices would be of greater value to the academy football coach.

Supporting the Academy Coach to Develop Psychological Attributes in Academy Football Players

The 5Cs (Harwood, 2008) is one of the most utilised frameworks in academy football (e.g., Crawley & Hills, 2023; Godfrey & Winter, 2017; Steptoe et al., 2019). It was designed to be user-friendly and to support coaches' efficacy in the psychological development of players, features which have contributed toward its adoption by academies and national governing bodies (NGBs; Harwood, 2008). Although the conceptual premise of the 5Cs has been critiqued earlier in this literature review, the impact that the framework has had in applied settings cannot be dismissed. This current section will therefore begin with a review of the literature

surrounding the 5Cs and how it is has supported coaches to develop psychological attributes in young academy players.

Opting for an indirect approach to developing the psychological attributes of players, Harwood (2008) educated academy coaches on how to promote the 5Cs during their training sessions reporting an improvement in coach efficacy as a result. With the aim of providing academy coaches (and sport psychology practitioners) with guidance on how to support a player's psychological development, Harwood (2008) delivered a 4-month coach education programme to coaches from a British football academy. The programme included five workshops, with each being based on one of the 5Cs (e.g., commitment). After an initial baseline assessment, the four participating coaches then rated their own self-efficacy in developing each 'C' with their players and assessed their team's behaviours in response to the intervention throughout the coach education programme. Findings demonstrated an increase in coach efficacy and an increase in player's behaviour responses, suggesting the merits of a behavioural approach to developing psychological attributes in players. Building on this, Harwood et al. (2015) sought to assess the effectiveness of the 5Cs coaching programme with the addition of baseline measures and triangulated perspectives on the success of the programme. Five under-13 academy players participated in the programme, along with their parents whilst the coach of the under-13 academy squad participated in several workshops aimed at educating them on each of the 5Cs across the duration of the study. After each workshop, the coach then applied the coaching behaviours they had learnt about the specific 'C' in the proceeding training sessions. The coach, participating players, and their respective parents, then assessed the players' development of each 'C' after every training session utilising a questionnaire designed to review the demonstration of behaviours associated to each

of the 5Cs. Findings showed an improvement in each of the 5Cs for all players across the study, suggesting that the programme was a success and affirming Harwood's (2008) previous findings.

Extending this, Harwood and Anderson (2015) provided a 5Cs training curriculum that detailed practices designed to emphasise each 'C'. The authors provided example coaching practices (i.e., football drills) that could be used to inherently promote the targeted 'C'. They suggested that coaches should employ eight principles of developing psychological attributes through coaching, specifically: promotion of the attribute, role model the attribute, ownership over decisions, support the growth of the attribute, positive reinforcement when adaptive behaviours are observed, empowering peer support, praising the supportive teammates, and self-review (i.e., PROGRESS). Further, Wadsworth et al. (2020) aimed to improve an under-12 academy coach's self-awareness and integration of the 5Cs to support the psychological development of their players in an EPPP category one football academy. Each of the Cs was coupled with an element of the academy's coaching curriculum (e.g., control was coupled with 'playing in the final third'). The 5Cs were integrated into coaching sessions alongside interventions designed to promote the development of each 5C. Footage of training sessions was then watched and reflected upon by the participant and the lead researcher. Upon reviewing the process, both the participating coach and researcher suggested that the programme was successful in meeting its aims, highlighting the merits of utilising the 5Cs as a framework in which to help change coaching practice in a way that allows coaches to integrate player psychological development within their coaching sessions.

The body of work surrounding the 5Cs has been significant for the development of sport psychology provision in academy settings. For example, responding to a request from an EPPP category two football academy to enhance their psychological provision to meet the criteria required to be promoted to category one academy status, Steptoe et al. (2019) employed a three-month psychological intervention programme. Steptoe et al. reported that they utilised the 5C framework to support the weekly coach education workshops, to guide coaches in the design of training sessions to promote the desired behaviours of each 'C', provide parent education, and as a framework for individual player support. The body of work, resources, and knowledge that accompany the 5Cs enabled a quick response and effective intervention. However, crucially, the absence of other frameworks that support the psychological development of academy players makes the 5Cs a *go-to* framework (cf. Wadsworth et al., 2020).

Using and alternative approach to the 5Cs, Diment (2014) attempted to reduce the theory-to-practice gap through the integration of mental skills training within practice drills across nine football academies in Denmark. Guided by Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological approach, Diment (2014) worked with academy coaches to develop and deliver practices that were aimed at promoting seven mental skills (concentration, self-talk, communication, imagery, goal setting and constructive evaluation, and arousal control). Each practice was designed to emphasise each mental skill through promoting stressful situations within the drill (e.g., increasing physical demands). Diment reported that the programme was generally well received, attributing this to the use of football language rather than psychological terms, an issue previously highlighted as a barrier to sport psychology integration (Pain & Harwood, 2004). However, the attributes, or in Diment's case the

mental skills, were already predetermined with little rationale as to their prioritisation over other factors.

To date, there has been limited literature that has supported the development of psychological attributes in academy footballers through the academy coach (Mitchell et al., 2022). Of the limited examples, some guidance has been offered on how to develop predetermined attributes but with little rationale for prioritising them (Thelwell et al., 2006). Indeed, the psychological attributes presented in elite youth football literature to date have been largely popularised because of deductive approaches to research and the prioritisation of the athlete's voice; leaving a 'researcher-driven' field for practitioners to navigate.

Summary and Future Directions

The development of adaptive psychological attributes in academy football players is considered an essential contributor towards a successful progression into professional or elite senior sport (Beauchamp et al., 2023; Champ et al., 2020; Nesti & Sulley, 2014). Enhancing psychological attributes that can support players to progress into the first team or potentially more importantly to exit the academy and thrive, is a goal worth pursuing. This review has presented the current knowledge surrounding the psychological attributes associated with success in academy football contexts, highlighting key issues and gaps within this knowledge base. First, knowledge to date has been dominated by deductive approaches to research, whereby researchers dictate the psychological attributes, with little rationale offered as to why certain attributes were prioritised over others (cf. Ivarsson et al., 2020; Mitchell et al., 2022, Thelwell et al., 2006). The dominance of deductive approaches has contributed towards a diverging landscape of psychological attributes, which has potentially created challenges for the practitioner (sport psychologist, coaches, head

of sport science) to know, with confidence, which attributes to prioritise and develop in their players. Indeed, such deductive approaches have been unconvincing in their impact (see Ivarsson et al., 2020). Crucially, at the heart of this are the academy players, who as a result will receive unstandardised and unsystematic support for their psychological development; a situation conflicting with the aim to provide holistic player development (The FA, 2020; The Premier League, 2011).

Second, and following from the first issue, there is a lack of inductively driven research that has the sole aim of identifying the desired psychological attributes to give young players the best opportunity to successfully progress through and out of the academy. With rare exception (e.g., Holt & Dunn, 2004; Mills et al., 2012; Morely et al., 2014) there have been few attempts to empirically explore this. Thus, our knowledge and what we believe to be the 'true', has largely been shaped by post-positivist research enquiries, a contentious situation given that such research endeavours are largely dependent upon the beliefs, aims, and agendas of the researcher. Driven by a different interpretivist ontology, it is the aim of this thesis to offer a different perspective on what can be considered 'true'.

Finally, the absence of the coach within research in this area is potentially problematic. Very few studies have included coaches within their sample with even fewer asking coaches about their perspectives on psychological attributes (see Gledhill et al., 2017; e.g., Mills et al., 2012). Coaches are able to offer knowledge informed by their experiences working with previously successful and unsuccessful players, offering explanations for psychological attributes that currently exit in the literature or by contributing further attributes that may have been missed through deductive approaches to research (Musculus & Lobinger, 2018).

From an applied perspective, despite some attempts (e.g., Diment, 2014; Harwood & Anderson, 2015; Mitchell et al., 2022), the current review has highlighted that the field of sport psychology remains relatively detached from coaching practices despite it being a cornerstone of the FA coaching model (Simmons, 2004). Challenges associated to the enactment of the EPPP, for example a lack of time and insufficient training, have further compounded this issue (Jones, 2018; O'Gorman et al., 2021). Such challenges and barriers have led to a situation whereby very few football academies have a full-time sport psychology provision, with those academies of a lower EPPP categorisation likely to offer even less support for their players' than those of a higher category (cf. Gervis et al., 2020). Without this constant psychological support or guidance players have even turned to other staff (e.g., physiotherapists, Gervis et al., 2020), a disappointing situation that highlights the deficiencies in the psychological development of players; even with part-time support available. It would be realistic to expect academies to: (a) plan the systematic development of desired psychological attributes in their players, (b) provide effective support to systematically and positively develop the attributes in their players, and (c) monitor the development of targeted attributes across all players and provide interventions where necessary. To address the issues summarised in this section, the current project aimed to identify the key psychological attributes desired of players to give them the best opportunity to progress through the academy and into the senior, professional game, identify coaching strategies to support the development of desired attributes, and then design and employ a coach education programme to support academy coaches to develop the attributes in their own players. In attending to these aims, it was my intention to equip academy coaches with knowledge and resources to support the development of

key psychological attributes in their players. With a lack of direction and guidance for coaches, coupled with the limited and varied psychological support academy players receive, the outcomes of this Ph.D. may contribute significantly toward informing and upskilling coaches to support the psychological development of their players. By focusing on delivering sport psychology through the academy coach, this Ph.D. intends to provide a (realistic) framework for academies to adopt, not only mitigating many barriers that accompany sport psychology (e.g., funding, siloed provision, negative perceptions), but most importantly offering a means of providing consistent psychological support to young academy players.

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CHAPTER 3

STUDY ONE

Identifying the Psychological Attributes

Desired of Academy Football Players:

The Coach's Perspective

Abstract

The psychology of youth football players is understood to be one of the most important contributors towards their success within the game. However, there is a lack of consensus regarding the attributes that might be most important in this context. To address this, study one aimed to explore coaches' perceptions of the psychological attributes that give players the best opportunity to perform and progress through academies and into professional football. Semi-structured interviews with nine professional academy football coaches from category one academies were conducted. All participants held senior roles at the academy (e.g., assistant academy director, head of coaching, head of phase). Following reflexive thematic analysis, eight psychological attributes were constructed: commitment to develop, confidence, coping with the demands of high-level sport, drive to achieve goals, emotional control, resilience, self-aware and reflective, and strong work ethic. This study provided context-specific attributes to develop in academy players, facilitating greater direction for holistic development of the modern-day academy player. Our findings advance current understanding of the psychological attributes that can support youth athletes' progression into senior, professional football.

Introduction

In the UK, the most talented youth football players are typically registered with professional football academies, which are characterised by demanding environments designed for the primary purpose of producing senior, professional players (Adams & Carr, 2017). Given the wide range of performance, organisational, developmental, and personal demands young players experience within academies, their psychological repertoire to manage and thrive is regarded as integral to their successful navigation through, and out of, the academy (Cooper, 2021; Finn & McKenna, 2012; McCarthy, 2020; Mitchell et al., 2022). To support the psychological development of players, the Football Association (The FA) build their coaching qualifications around the four-corner model (Simmons, 2004), a multidimensional model that focuses upon the tactical/technical, physical, social, and psychological development of players. Research relating to the psychological development of academy players has continued to amass over recent years, contributing significantly to this provision (e.g., Gervis & Goldman, 2020; Harwood, 2008; Holt & Dunn, 2004; Mitchell et al., 2022; Steptoe et al., 2019). However, although the research attention is encouraging, it has created issues that have potentially stunted and misled the application of sport psychology within academy settings and consequently reduced opportunities for young players to develop the psychological attributes required for optimal and consistent performance and success (Champ et al., 2018).

One issue associated with the application of sport psychology within football talent development pathways has been a relatively limited rationale for the prioritisation of certain psychological attributes over others in both research and in policy (e.g., Gledhill et al., 2017; The Premier League, 2011; Thelwell et al., 2006).

For example, the EPPP indicates that academies should seek to support players'

stress management, imagery, lifestyle management, and focussing skills as part of

their holistic development. However, little rationale for such a focus over other

psychological attributes has been provided, particularly in consideration of

individual player needs at different academy phases (e.g., foundation 8-12 year olds;

professional 16-18 year olds). Popular conceptual frameworks, such as the 5Cs

(commitment, confidence, control, communication, and concentration; Harwood,

2008) or the *Psychological Characteristics of Developing Excellence* (PCDE,

MacNamara et al., 2010a; 2010b), have also been utilised within academy settings

(e.g., Godfrey & Winter, 2017; Steptoe et al., 2019). For example, Mitchell et al.

(2022) chose to prioritise the 5Cs, as well as resilience, presence, and self-awareness

as key psychological attributes to develop in academy players and supported coaches

to do this through a season-long coach education programme. Mitchell et al.'s

rationale to include the 5Cs due to the strength of existing work was understandable

as the 5Cs is now accompanied by a plethora of coach-ready resources; owing to the

applied focus of the associated body of work (e.g., Harwood & Anderson, 2014).

However, critically, there has been no empirical research conducted to verify the

prioritisation of the 5Cs within football academies, a critique supported by its

exclusion from Gledhill et al.'s (2017) systematic review.

Frameworks such as the 5Cs or PCDEs originated from different

environments (e.g., music) or other psychological concepts (e.g., momentum, see

Higham et al., 2005) and, therefore, may not capture the full extent of the

psychological attributes that will best serve a modern-day academy football player.

Indeed Mitchell et al. (2022) included presence, resilience, and self-awareness as

part of their coach education programme, indicating that the 5Cs did not capture all

psychological attributes the authors wanted to develop. Resilience or presence also do not feature in the growing list of PCDEs either, but as recognised by Collins et al. (2018) specific contexts may require different attributes. Accordingly, it might be expected that academy players may require a blend of PCDEs, 5Cs, or other attributes suggested in the literature (e.g., self-regulation, Toering et al., 2009, Saward et al., 2019). However, little is known about the combination of attributes that might best support a youth player through the context specific talent development pathways of football academies, and there have been limited empirical attempts to inductively explore whether there are further psychological attributes practitioners need to be aware of (e.g., Holt & Dunn, 2006; Mills et al., 2012). This is perhaps particularly problematic given the limited ecologically relevant insights into psychological demands published since the commencement of the EPPP in 2012 despite the evolving nature of the EPPP (e.g., increased practice hours, higher frequency of competition, introduction of full-time schedules) and the game (e.g., physical, technical, tactical demands).

Research that has been published in this area (psychological attributes of young talented football players) has been dominated by deductive research designs. Although deductive methods are not an issue in themselves, the extant number of deductively driven research has led to a variety of psychological attributes associated with success being highlighted making it challenging for practitioners to know which attributes to prioritise for the psychological development of the players with whom they work (Dohme et al., 2019; Gledhill et al., 2017; Kelly et al., 2022). Furthermore, through deductive approaches researchers risk overlooking psychological attributes that inductive approaches may capture. Knowledge pertaining to the most relevant psychological attributes that academy football players

require to navigate the demands associated with talent development pathways, progress into senior football, and perform optimally may, therefore, be deficient (cf. Musculus & Lobinger, 2018).

A further issue with the research in this area concerns the low representation of academy coaches in study samples, which could potentially been seen as a missed opportunity for helping progress and embed the field of sport psychology more thoroughly within football academy settings. Academy coaches can offer their subjective experiences that reference the psychological attributes of players they have observed or worked with, making inter-individual comparisons between successful and unsuccessful players (Musculus & Lobinger, 2018). Indeed, it has been suggested that coaches can add explanatory-power to previous research informed (predominantly) by self-report data from players, with qualitative approaches providing opportunity for the construction of more ecologically valid insights and the identification of important psychological attributes that may have previously been overlooked (Musculus & Lobinger, 2018).

Utilising inductive means, Holt and Dunn (2004) provided initial direction in understanding the psychological attributes academy football players require for success. Interviewing 20 Canadian youth international players, 14 English professional academy football players, and six English academy coaches, the authors constructed four psychosocial attributes attributed to football success: discipline, commitment, [effective use of] social support, and resilience. Applying a grounded theory approach, Holt and Dunn were able to compare the different data sets from both the Canadian and English participants, amalgamating codes that were similar and adding new concepts where codes did not fit, which provided both depth and breadth to their results. However, by intentionally trying to improve the

generalisability of their findings the authors may have diluted the context-specific findings that relate to academy football success in the English football system. Mills, et al. (2012) interviewed ten expert academy coaches of Premier League and Championship football clubs in England to identify psychological and environmental factors that influence the development of players and their progression to the professional ranks. In one of the few studies to solely prioritise the views of the academy coach, Mills et al. inductively identified awareness, resilience, goal-directed attributes, intelligence, and sport-specific attributes as key psychological factors. Mills et al. (2012) theorised that these psychological factors developed through an interaction with environmental factors (e.g., significant others, culture, provisions). Since Mills et al.'s (2012) study took place, the EPPP has commenced (in 2012), which significantly changed the environment of football academies (The Premier League, 2022). Given the impact the environment has upon psychological development (Mills et al., 2012), an updated understanding the desired psychological attributes of the modern-day academy football player, in EPPP governed academies. will be of significant value. To understand the demands and psychological requirements of the modern-day academy player, an inductive exploration, seeking the opinions of those immersed within the environment would provide a rich source of knowledge to better inform the field (Musculus & Lobinger, 2018).

To address the issues presented in this review, this study aims to identify the psychological attributes that are thought to give players the best opportunity to successfully progress through and out of an academy into a professional senior team. To achieve this, and attempt to provide context relevant insights, we sought the opinions of those with concurrent and specialised knowledge of the academy environment, the academy football coach. Given the academy coach's influence

upon player development and progression, specifically in relation to their successful transition into professional football, it is surprising that only a few researchers have captured their opinions on this matter (e.g., Mills et al., 2014). The academy coach's knowledge (i.e., understanding which psychological attributes are most important for a player to possess) is a crucial perspective to obtain, enabling the contribution towards, verification of, substantiation, and refinement of the findings of previous literature. It is thought that by attending to this research aim this study will provide updated knowledge on the key psychological attributes to target for development in the modern-day (EPPP) academy football player. Practitioners can use the findings of the current study to inform their practice, selecting psychological attributes to develop with greater assurances that these will contribute positively toward the holistic development of an academy player.

Method

Research Design

Underpinned by an interpretivist ontology, this study employed the qualitative method of semi-structured interviews to explore the psychological attributes desired of academy players. Interpretivist researchers suggest that there is no reality independent of perception (Smith & Sparkes, 2017), and currently, the academy coaches' perspectives on the psychological attributes to develop in their players have been rarely explored. Therefore, the method of this study had to capture and interpret coach's perceptions, providing information that represents *truth* as understood by the participants (coaches) and constructed through their experiences regarding the psychological attributes associated with success and optimal performance in youth football (Potrac et al., 2014).

Semi-structured interviews involve two individuals engaging "in embodied talk, jointly constructing knowledge about themselves and the social world" (Smith & Sparkes, 2017, p. 103). Semi-structured interviews give opportunity for participants (who we want to hear from) to share what is meaningful to them. This focused method of data collection allows conversation to flow from "doxa" (presenting opinions) to "episteme" (justification of opinions), providing opportunity for deeper exploration into participant's worldview and affording the flexibility to promote new knowledge (Smith & Sparkes, 2017). This flexibility facilitated further contributions and insights into the psychological attributes to develop in academy football players which have, to date, been driven by more rigid, predetermined affirmations of "knowledge".

Sample Selection and Participants

Nine male academy coaches, with an average age of 37 years old ($SD = 10.6$), were purposively sampled to participate. The criteria for selection included: qualified to Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) Advanced License standard; worked as a coach within either an English Premier League or English Championship club; the academy was categorised as being EPPP category one (the highest ranking of an academy, see The Premier League, 2011); had a full-time *senior* position at the academy (e.g., head of phase or head of coaching); and had coached within academy football for over two years. From the 12 coaches contacted initially, ten agreed and consented their participation. One of the ten was then promoted to the role of senior first team manager shortly after, leaving nine participants.

Senior positions of the nine participants included: lead professional development phase (PDP) coach (manages the U17-U23 age groups; $n = 2$), lead

youth development phase (YDP) coach (manages the U12-U16 age groups; $n = 2$), head of goalkeeping ($n = 1$), head of coaching ($n = 2$), and assistant academy director ($n = 2$). At the time of the study, each coach had worked in their position for an average of 3.6 years ($SD = 1.2$) but had worked in academy football (predating the EPPP) for an average of 7.7 years ($SD = 4.9$). Due to their senior positions held at the academy coupled with their coaching certifications and experiences, the selected sample were able to provide deep insights into the key attributes that support players as they journey through the academy, having all had the experience of being the gatekeeper (or contributing toward the decision) to a professional contract. Holding a senior coaching position in a category one academy was deemed an important criterion for addressing the aims of the study. Category one academies are recognised as the optimum talent development environments that give players access to the greatest amount of coaching (8,500 hours, Sly et al., 2020). Thus, category one coaches are likely to have had greater interactions with players than coaches at category two, three, or four academies and potentially have more intimate knowledge on the psychological demands and responses required from players. Furthermore, category one academies have produced the highest number of professional players, therefore the category one coach is more likely to have observed a greater number of successful players in comparison to coaches at other academies (see The Premier League, 2022).

The sample were deemed to be small enough to manage yet large enough to offer a new and richly textured understanding of the phenomena in question (Sandelowski, 1995). As a comparison to a study of similar design, this sample size is one less than the number of coaches who participated in Mills et al.'s (2012) study. However, Mills et al.'s interviews discussed several topics with coaches (e.g.,

influences on player development, environmental catalysts, factors that hinder development), whilst the current project focused solely on identifying psychological attributes desired of players. Therefore, this current study dedicated a greater amount of time to speak with coaches about psychological attributes, distinguishing itself from Mills et al. and previous qualitative literature (e.g., Holt & Dunn, 2004).

Interview Guide

The interview guide (see Appendix B) was designed to construct knowledge and, therefore, several open-ended questions pertaining to the aims of the study were asked to each participant. The guide was split into four distinct sections: (a) approach to coaching; (b) important psychological qualities for an academy player; (c) defining the psychological attribute; and (d) summary, which was used to enhance methodological rigor (e.g., is there anything we've overlooked? Did I lead or influence you in any way?). Questions were followed by non-directional probes to enrich answers and ensure a more complete understanding of participant's worldview was obtained (Patton, 2015). Following some introductory questions designed to encourage participant engagement and build interviewee-interviewer rapport, participants were asked "what are the key psychological qualities needed for the modern-day professional footballer (soccer player)?", with probes including: "why are the ones you mention particularly important?"; "how do you recognize each of these key qualities in the behaviours of players, what do they look like?"; and "how do they influence behaviours?" The interview guide was piloted with a matched sample participant to test the order, phraseology, and the general flow of questioning. The pilot study helped improve familiarity with the interview guide, further enhancing the flow of the interviews.

Procedure

Following institutional Ethics Board approval (Appendix A), coaches who met the sampling criteria were contacted through the sport psychologist or head of sport science at two EPPP category one football academies. Participating coaches were interviewed at a location of their choice, with all interviews taking place at the academy training ground of their respective clubs. The semi-structured interview was conducted by the first author, who had accrued approximately 42 hours of interviewing experience prior to the current study. An interview preparation booklet, which contained a series of statements (e.g., think about the players who have progressed through the academy and the attributes they possessed that helped them to succeed) designed to aid memory recall and facilitate an in-depth data collection process, was sent to each participant one week in advance of the interview (cf. Cropley et al., 2016). Each semi-structured interview was audio-recorded using a Dictaphone and lasted, on average, 63 minutes ($SD = 12.73$). Interview recordings were subsequently transcribed verbatim, yielding 143 pages of single-spaced text. Participants were given the opportunity to review their own transcript, with all participants approving its accuracy (Tracy, 2010).

Data Analysis and Methodological Rigor

Guided by the philosophical position of the research team, data were analysed according to Braun et al.'s (2017) reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) protocol with an experiential orientation (see Braun & Clarke, 2022). This approach was adopted as the research team were interested in understanding participants' sense making of academy football player psychological attributes and, thus, saw data (language) "as reflecting participants' contextually situated unique realities or truths" (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 8). Consequently, we used a combination of both semantic and latent coding (see Byrne, 2022). Indeed, RTA places the emphasis

upon the researcher(s) as a resource, playing an active role in the analysis of the academy coaches' subjective opinions through "thoughtful engagement with their data and their thoughtful and reflexive engagement with the analysis process" (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p. 594; Braun & Clarke, 2021; Byrne, 2022). The contemporary approach to RTA aligns itself more closely to interpretivist paradigm and a qualitative approach to data analysis with the researcher immersed in the analysis through the cyclical process of reading, reflecting, questioning, imagining, wondering, writing, retreating, and returning (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Byrne, 2022). This continued interrogation of the data to interpret the meaning of what the participating coaches communicated during the interviews was thought to contribute to greater, and potentially new, knowledge to the field.

Braun and Clarke (2021) presented a recursive, six stage process to support RTA: familiarisation, coding, generation of candidate themes, generating and reviewing data, naming themes, and writing the report. Initially, all recordings were listened to once before transcribing to allow for tone, volume, gesticulations to be remembered. Each recording was then transcribed with each transcript read and re-read multiple times to enhance familiarization with the participants' worldviews and to give opportunity for initial patterns within the data to be recognized in an inductive manner and preliminary observations to be noted. The first author (Ph.D. Researcher, Wixey) and the second author (Ph.D. Director of Studies) met up to discuss the interviews and to talk through each transcript and the first author's recollection of the behaviours of the participants throughout the interviews. This step facilitated our familiarisation with the transcripts. Second, segments of text were then coded with both semantic (descriptive) and latent (hidden) meanings within the text coded, a process that generated 553 raw data codes. Once again, we (the first

and second author) met to help sense check and offer further considerations and interpretations of the data. This process was not aimed at achieving a consensus, but rather to strive for deeper meaning behind what the participant communicated (Byrne, 2022) with many codes being changed and shaped throughout those meetings until it was felt the meanings behind the words had been saturated. The third phase saw the beginning of themes being created with codes organised into clusters of shared meaning. This process overlapped with other stages and began to occur during the stage two meetings between the first and second author. During this stage candidate themes were created, which were then reviewed and revised in stage four ($n = 32$). Candidate themes were recursively assessed with codes being included and excluded in a concurrent process of interrogation, leaving 292 codes interpreted to be of relevance to the research aims.

Patton's (1990) dual criteria for judging themes were then utilised whereby homogeneity within themes was first assessed and then heterogeneity across the data set was evaluated to help justify them as distinct themes ($n = 8$) and substantiate their boundaries (Byrne, 2022). This step was supported by discussions between the first and second author, where the boundaries of each theme were reviewed several times. This was an important step in the project as the themes generated in this study would be used to guide the focus and design of the second study in this Ph.D. programme of research (Chapter Four), as well as the intervention presented in study three (Chapter Five). The third and fourth authors acted as "critical friends" at this stage, offering their assessment and hermeneutic interpretations of the themes created which in turn helped to guide the fifth stage: the naming of themes to capture the interpretation and interrogation of data (cf. Smith & McGannon, 2018). The "final" phase, writing of the report, was a concurrently completed throughout the preceding

steps as to ensure it was not detached from the previous steps. This was an iterative process that took the form of note taking through to the complete documentation of the analysis.

Results

Data analysis resulted in the construction of eight themes representing the key attributes that facilitate the successful progression of youth football players through an academy and into senior, professional football: (1) commitment to develop; (2) confidence; (3) coping with the demands of high-level sport; (4) drive to achieve goals; (5) emotional control; (6) resilience; (7) self-awareness and reflection; and (8) strong work ethic. Presenting each of these in turn, we will start by defining the attribute based on the contributing sub-themes, describing the themes, and providing participant quotes to illustrate and illuminate the characteristics of that theme. Table 1 illustrates the thematic convergence of the codes, to sub-themes, to the construction of general themes.

Table 1

Psychological attributes that support the progression of academy players

Psychological Attribute	Themes	Sub-Themes	Example Code
Commitment to Develop	Consistency of adaptive behaviours.	Sacrifices made in order to commit to academy	Off pitch sacrifices made in order to commit to being an academy player
	Commitment has reciprocal relationship with confidence and preparation	Consistent habits of adaptive behaviours Commitment has reciprocal relationship with confidence and preparation	Consistently high standards of behaviours everyday Commitment and preparation have reciprocal relationship
	Commitment to own development	Commitment to own development	Committed players to be dragged off training pitch
Confidence	Confidence influences behaviours and psych attributes	Confidence an important attribute Confidence influences performance Confidence effects other psych attributes	Confidence positively impacts other psych attributes High confidence enhances performance Confidence influences how players communicate
	A lack of confidence inhibits risk taking	Fear inhibits risk taking	Fear can inhibit risk taking
	Confidence comes from different sources	Confidence comes from different sources (e.g. knowledge, feedback, preparation)	Knowledge is a source of confidence
	Best players have resilient confidence	Best players possess a resilient belief	The best players possess a robust inner belief
	Confidence needs to be combined with humility	Confident players need humility to be effective	Confidence needs to be combined with humility
Coping with Demands of High-Level Sport	Ability to independently cope with demands, expectations and setbacks	Players need to be able to independently cope and overcome setbacks Effectively cope with and manage demands and expectations	Players need to be able to overcome setbacks Players need to cope with external demands
	Strategy to cope with a setback	Successful players will endeavour to find a way to cope Positive responses to mistakes or setbacks	Successful players will find a way to cope Positive responses required of players post-mistake
	Pressure and setbacks originate from deselection	Pressure and setbacks originate from deselection	Common setbacks revolve around team deselection
Driven to Achieve Goals	Engaged and focused in pursuit of individual goals	Engaged and focused in pursuit of individual goals	Driven players are independently driven by their goals
	Players need to be driven	Players need to be driven	Players need to be driven

Psychological Attribute	Themes	Sub-Themes	Example Code
Emotional Control	Players need to manage a wide variety of emotions across situations	Players need to manage a wide variety of emotions across situations	Ability to manage a wide variety of emotions
	Emotional control promotes resilience to difficult situations (challenges)	Emotional control promotes resilience to difficult situations (challenges)	Emotional control helps players handle pressure
	Players need support in managing emotions	Players need support in managing emotions	Some players lack experience of managing emotions
Resilience	A key attribute which compliments and promotes other psych attributes (e.g. problem solving)	A key attribute which compliments and promotes other psych attributes (e.g. problem solving)	Resilience positively influences other psych attributes
	Positively and effectively responding to setbacks	Allows you to respond positively to mistakes/criticism	Resilience players don't dwell on mistakes
		Allows you to manage and handle setbacks effectively	Resilience is a positive reaction to a mistake
Self-Aware and Reflective	Self-awareness impacts play behaviours	Self-awareness impacts player behaviours	Self awareness impacts a player's behaviours
	Successful players more readily self-reflect and develop weaknesses	Successful players more readily self-reflect and develop weaknesses	Successful players will self reflect more readily
	Self-awareness an important psychological attribute	Self-awareness an important psychological attribute	Self awareness can lengthen a player's career
	Being present in all situations to maximise development	Being present in all situations to maximise development	Be constantly present and aware to maximise own development
Strong Work Ethic	Possess the right attitude to work hard	Possess the right attitude to work hard	Attitude to work is a key attribute to success
	Determination possessed by the best players	Determination possessed by the best players to prove others wrong	Possess a determination to prove others wrong
		Determination to remain in the professional game	Self belief fuels determination to remain in the professional game
	Serious approach to challenges and overcoming setbacks	A serious approach to challenges	A conscientious approach to preparation

Commitment to Develop

This attribute was characterised by *an athlete's demonstration of consistent, adaptive, behaviours that contributed to their own development*. This theme was informed by three sub-themes presented: (i) consistency of adaptive behaviours; (ii) the reciprocal relationship commitment has with confidence and preparation; and (iii) commitment to own development. For example, participant 3 outlined the commitment that academy players often make, "The commitment and the sacrifices they [academy players] have given you know they have to sacrifice their social life, their friends, family events." The participants also outlined the need for consistency of adaptive behaviours regardless of the situation, highlighting the level of commitment expected and illustrating the demands placed upon the modern-day academy player:

> It could be at the end of the game, you know you're showing the commitments of doing your job, whatever your job might be. If you've for a job to do before the session whatever it is. Your commitment might be like players now do the PMA and reflect on their performance and they do this to the highest level. (Participant 1)

> See an average trainer [player] will turn up to the session one minute before or late. You know, a poor trainer will turn up late. A top trainer will be out five-ten minutes before mentally preparing for the session you know, might be doing a little bit of passing just preparing for the session. (Participant 3)

The complimentary aspect of commitment with confidence and preparation was encapsulated by participant 4, "belief as well that if do everything right in the week then my performance will be consistent, and you start to get consistent performance from that commitment from all that work that you have." Participants also

emphasised the need for players to commit to their own development (i.e., not just the minimal requirements of being a player). For example, the value of completing self-reflections, which is an expectation for players as part of the EPPP policy was detailed:

> There are areas where they show unbelievable desire and commitment. I knew that all those eight players [who turned professional] used to do their reflections were like, you know as long what is on that piece of paper, you know every week if it were a Sunday, it would be done. They would watch the whole game and you can see how long they'd been on it. (Participant 5)

Confidence

Confidence was an attribute constructed from the interviews with academy coaches and was defined as *a player's self-belief in their competence, across different situations, such as training or competition with the best players possessing a robust belief that is stable across time and different situations.* The construct was recognised as an important attribute that had influence over player behaviours, performance, and other psychological attributes. Several themes contributed toward confidence: (i) confidence influences behaviours and psychological attributes; (ii) a lack of confidence inhibits risk taking; (iii) confidence comes from different sources; (iv) the best players have resilient confidence; and (v) confidence needs to be combined with humility. In total 51 codes contributed toward this construct.

As highlighted by the participants, one feature of confidence is the additive effect it can have upon behaviours and other psychological attributes. For example, it was highlighted how confidence influences performance-related behaviours, "it doesn't matter whose around you, what's around you, [when confident] you make your decisions quicker, time seems to go slower you seem to have more on the ball,

you seem to have more options, you connect with everything" (Participant 9).

Participant 6 also highlighted adaptive behaviours on the pitch, "You got to have some belief in yourself in this environment ... they [confident players] never stop wanting the ball. There is a belief, 'just give me it. You don't have to but give it me!'"

Participants also indicated that confidence has an impact upon players' attempts to try new technical skills, "I think they [confident players] then will try things that other players wouldn't have" (Participant 7); implying low confidence could inhibit creativity. A further feature of this construct was the importance of maintaining confidence despite the situation. For example, according to participants one role confidence had for an academy player was during times of challenge or setbacks:

> He [current Premier League player] knew in himself he was good enough for the 18s. So, there was his confidence. And he'd never experienced that trauma of playing down, because he'd always played up all the way through until he was 15. It was interesting to see him more determined (Participant 2).

Finally, participants discussed the sources of confidence for players citing preparation, success, working hard to prepare, coach's feedback, and experience coping with setbacks. For example:

> It's a case of as soon as you prepare for the game, you're confident, that you've done everything right Monday to Friday, you've trained hard you've worked hard, you've prepared you've physically done everything that's been asked of you, because you've done that, and you've trained well confident knowing that you've done everything well. I'm a strong believer that you train well Monday to Friday, Saturday takes care of itself. (Participant 3)

Coping with the Demands of High-Level Sport

The theme *coping with the demands of high-level sport* was conceptualised as *the ability of players to independently manage the varying demands associated with the football academy talent development pathway through employment of effective coping mechanisms*. It was underpinned by three sub-themes: (i) the ability to independently cope with demands, expectations, and setbacks; (ii) strategy to cope with setbacks; and (iii) the pressures and setbacks that originate from deselection. Learning from setbacks was considered as essential for a youth football player, with participants highlighting how not being able to cope with such setbacks (e.g., poor performances; conceding during competition; deselection or having sustained periods as a substitute; not being included in tournament competitions) could have dramatic consequences on the longevity of a players' career:

> Being able to deal with setbacks because that's the biggest thing, if you're not prepared to learn you're omitting yourself straight away. If you can't deal with setbacks, you won't last in this game for 2 minutes. (Participant 9)

Participants also discussed how being able to cope becomes more prominent with age. For example, Participant 2 acknowledged, "as a player gets older, so it becomes more around the psychological side of dealing with those mistakes" adding, "It is [the need to cope] starting to kick in because your 14-year-old is being judged on whether to offer them a full-time scholarship next year. So those pressures now start to kick in." Participant 2 also recognised that this coincides with the growing demands of a dual career, in particular the academic commitments young players have too, "what's the next step? I'm starting to fully develop I'm having the pressures from school homework … now its GCSEs. It's that next big development which kicks back in." Others, however, suggested that academy players benefited

from the need to cope with a dual career, "They [players] have got to be able to handle the football life their school life … certainly I see a lot of the boys who are in the system are quite socially psychologically advanced of other kids, maybe they go to the school with" (Participant 7). What also was prioritised by participants was a player's ability to cope through the employment of strategies. For example, Participant 3 emphasised the importance of having strategies to cope as an academy player, and its salience amongst the successful players, "he [player] will be able to cope with it [demand] because he's that intelligent, he will find a way, the best players find a way." The emphasis upon "finding a way" suggests a perseverance that the best players have, but also the focus on intelligence implies that coping is a cognitive process requiring higher-order thinking and strategizing from the player.

Similarly, being able to cope with the continuous demands of academy life (e.g., intense training schedule; relentless intra-team and inter-team competition; pressures of a dual-career; contract decisions; and performance pressures) was considered by participants as fundamental to a player's ability to "survive and thrive" in academy football. Indeed, participants emphasised, for example, the demand for players to cope with deselection, which was suggested to be a common and inevitable occurrence that players should be ready for:

> Dealing with setbacks whether that's a case of not being selected having to play down, playing well then, all of a sudden, you're out of the team for whatever reason, it could be being off at half time because they're not doing something right. (Participant 3)

Driven to Achieve Goals

Underscored by two sub-themes (*engaged and focused in pursuit of individual goals* and *players need to be driven*), the attribute *driven to achieve goals*

was developed through participant views concerning the importance of goal-driven behaviours, and was subsequently defined as *possessing a high level of acceptance, engagement, and drive toward achieving personal goals*. During the interviews, participants characterised the players they had seen and worked with who were engaged and focused upon achieving their goals, "you know it's their [players] way of life that they want to be what they are trying to be. And it's not 'flavour of the month', it's a consistent drive…" (Participant 6). Further, it was suggested that players needed to be accepting of their goals and the pathway toward their goals:

> They've [players] got this sort of what I've seen, almost an inner peace to themselves. Like ok that's happening, and that's happening, but I'm just going to carry on. I'm going to keep on keeping on. …. They are at peace with the business of football. They are just aiming to get better all the time. They just want to be better; they are engaged they are interested, and that drive may come from that. (Participant 3)

Indeed, participants remarked that players need to be driven, but as highlighted by one participant specifically, "trying to find the bits that you [the coach] don't see them doing, because that's the internal drive" (Participant 1).

Emotional Control

The theme *emotional control* was constructed through participants' beliefs that players must *manage* conceptualised as *a player's management of their own emotions during challenging situations*. Three sub-themes underscore this construct: (i) players need to manage a wide variety of emotions across situations; (ii) emotional control promotes resilience to difficult situations; and (iii) players need support in managing emotions. Participant 9 encapsulated the reason why emotional

control is important for an academy player to develop and also how a player should look to manage a wide range of possible emotions:

> The ones that keep in the middle ... We say to the players: don't get too high with the highs don't get too low with the lows, because that's how your journey is going to be, that's how your career, if you get a career in football, that is how it's going to be It's how do you deal with two extremes if you can [sic] stay here as much as you can you'll be able to deal with those. You don't get too excited [sic] because you know you're only a game two away, one mistake away, from going back down here. That's why I think its huge which again links into your resilience side of things, which is how you deal with it. (Participant 9)

Other participants also suggested that emotional control shared characteristics with resilience whereby players have the opportunity of being triggered by different stimuli. For example:

> Similar to resilience; things are not always going your way… a lot of things we do around that, the referees … You got not just other aspects in terms of that dealing with opposition players getting wound-up and things like that. (Participant 7)

Furthermore, participants also indicated that some players *will* require support with managing their emotions, for example, "the ones [players] that don't grow up quickly and don't mature struggle with some of things, like emotional control and resilience because they are immature and not had experiences of that" (Participant 3). Thus, participants emphasised the need for coaches to be aware and ready to support players develop this attribute in preparation for such inevitable situations.

Resilience

Consideration of *resilience* as a relatively stable attribute that gives a player the foundation to independently employ effective coping strategies (i.e., demonstrate *coping with the demands of high-level sport*) and demonstrate the behaviours required to maintain performance resulted in it being identified as a standalone attribute (see Table 1). Resilience was described as *facilitating a player's positive approach, and response to, setbacks and challenges of the academy*. Participants widely discussed the demanding landscape of professional football that youth players need to be able to respond to and deal with, emphasising the importance of developing resilience during their academy years. For example, Participant 9 stated, "you [player] got to be robust. You're going into a ruthless business environment that's cut-throat, that's unbelievably competitive and is so unreliable so you don't know what you're going to get from one minute to the next." Further, the non-linear path that becoming a professional player takes, and the role the player has in taking responsibility for their journey was outlined:

Not everything is going to go smoothly or the right way. There is going to be negatives, things are going to be negative that are going to happen, but you need to know that 'OK I'm taking responsibility' ... If you don't have the resilience to deal with taking responsibility and things might go wrong, you aren't going to get past that. (Participant 8)

Finally, participants discussed how resilience often underpinned players' development, and also helped promote other adaptive psychological attributes (e.g., confidence, communication). For example:

It's [resilience] an underbelly of their character. If they are resilient then they can communicate with the players and not be afraid to talk to players … 'that

didn't quite work but something else will'. So that resilience to carry on

otherwise because if you don't have that [resilience] it breaks the link, and

you can't develop further. (Participant 8)

Self-Aware and Self-Reflective

The attribute *self-aware and reflective* concerns a player's *ability to be*

conscious of their own development and to readily reflect upon their performance.

Four sub-themes informed this attribute: (i) self-awareness impacts players

behaviours; (ii) successful players more readily self-reflect and develop weaknesses;

(iii) self-awareness is an important psychological attribute; and (iv) being present in

all situations to maximise development. A key characteristic of this attribute is that

players need to be forthcoming and active in their self-reflections and ready to

develop their weaknesses:

They [players] need to find out information. Ultimately, it's not a one-way

street … they need to come and get information from us [coaches] and come

and communicate and ask us things: what do I need? Because [sic] you're not

communicating you might not get what you think you need. (Participant 8)

As well as being forthcoming, coaches expressed that players require

continued focus and a readiness to recognise relevant information and to develop: "I

think they [players] need to realise that every minute counts. Have that mentality… a

constant focus and awareness and presence" (Participant 6). One feature recognised

amongst players who have demonstrated this attribute was, as Participant 6

described, "there almost seems an urgency… yeah they [players] probably are seeing

the particulars in relation to the end goal I would guess." Participant 6 continued to

discuss the importance of being present, explaining the necessity for players to

absolve themselves of other thoughts and be living in the moment to facilitate their development:

> Being in the present …. not think too far in the future, to not think too far in the past but be in the present. Be there. "I'm not switching off now, I'm actually listening to what you are saying and processing things that link to what you say, to make myself better. (Participant 6)

Strong Work Ethic

Three themes constructed this attribute: (i) possess the right attitude and work hard; (ii) serious approach to challenges and overcoming setbacks; and (c) determination possessed by the best players. Recognised as an integral feature of a successful players' psychological repertoire, players with a strong work ethic have *a positive attitude toward working hard coupled with a determination to achieve and remain within professional levels of football*.

Possessing the right attitude to prepare to work hard was recognised by participants throughout the interviews. For example, "we [coaches] talk about determination you know it's just doing things right. It's about right kit right time right attitude" (Participant 3), and "attitude to work is probably the highest for me. You think in any walk of life if you've got good attitude to do things well you will succeed" (Participant 8). The participants' responses indicated that strong work ethic was a minimum expectation placed upon players and that it was demonstrated both on and off the field and in response to setbacks. Relating to the second and third sub-themes, participants detailed the importance of players having a strong work ethic so that they are able to see potential setbacks as challenges and work hard to overcome them. This is best represented by a story shared by one participant of when a player (who later became a professional and went on to represent England) was not given a

professional contract, illustrating how this player approached the challenge and overcame a significant setback:

> I think its determination so when Sammy [current professional player] was told that he was going to be on a non-contract he was probably really disappointed [sic]as in the back of the head probably knew he was good enough; but we didn't. We have had quite a few players like this, where a player thinks it's not fair: "you like him more and he's had better chances [huffing]," and that mentality of: "come on then bring it on!" (Participant 5)

Discussion

Prioritising the opinions of senior academy coaches, the current study sought to identify the psychological attributes that will give an academy player the best opportunity to progress through the academy and into the professional game. Through a process of RTA of interview transcriptions from nine participating coaches from category one football academies, we identified eight distinct attributes: commitment to develop, confidence, coping with the demands of high-level sport, drive to achieve goals, emotional control, resilience, self-aware and reflective, and strong work ethic.

Our findings consolidate, in-part, previous assertions of the most important psychological attributes to develop in elite youth athletes, with each attribute having been cited in literature previously, but to differing extents. For example, Dohme et al.'s (2019) scoping review of psychological characteristics within youth sport literature presented several attributes that resemble those identified in the present study (i.e., hard-work ethic, emotional control, realistic self-evaluations, confidence, and resilience), whilst other examples of inductive research have presented similar attributes to drive to achieve goals (e.g., Gould et al., 2002), commitment to develop,

and coping with the demands of high-level sport (e.g., MacNamara et al., 2010).

However, many of the psychological attributes outlined in the EPPP (e.g., lifestyle

management, focusing, imagery) did not explicitly materialise from the analysis of

our data. Although these attributes may have overlapping themes with the eight

identified in our current study, the absence of these terms would suggest an

incongruence between (and potentially a lack of value placed upon) the policy that

currently guides the psychological development of academy football players and the

actual psychological requirements for players in England. For those attempting to

enact the EPPP, they may be focusing upon attributes that are not as pertinent to the

psychological development of academy players. The EPPP provides autonomy to

academies over how an academy approaches the psychological development of their

players, an approach however that risks the omission of the most important

psychological attributes from a players' development (see Cooper, 2021; Green et

al., 2020). Given that the purpose of this project was to ascertain the key

psychological attributes required of academy football players, the findings of this

study may, therefore, help inform the EPPP as it adapts and aligns to the changing

psychological demands of the modern-day football academy.

The eight attributes we identified do offer some resemblances to those

proposed within the 5Cs framework, namely: commitment, control, and confidence

(Harwood, 2008; Harwood & Anderson, 2015). However, from our analysis, neither

communication nor concentration featured as a priority for the development and

progression of academy players. This is not a unique finding, indeed neither

communication nor concentration were identified in Gledhill et al.'s (2017) review

of the psychological factors associated with the talent development of young football

players. Although communication and concentration are recognised as relevant to a

young athlete's development more generally across sport (see Bowley et al., 2018; Dohme et al., 2019), our results would suggest that they may not be the priority to develop within academy football players. Similarly, of the eight attributes identified in the current study, five share overlapping characteristics with PCDE's previously identified in literature (i.e., belief you can succeed, realistic performance evaluations, self-awareness, coping with pressure, goal setting, motivation, commitment, and planning and self-organisation). However, crucially, several PCDEs do not share overlapping characteristics with those identified in the present study (e.g., competitiveness, social skills, imagery). As discussed by Collins et al. (2018), specific contexts may demand different psychological attributes of athletes, a point substantiated by Saward et al.'s (2019) finding that imagery was not prioritised amongst academy players as they got older. By adopting frameworks, which are generalisable and deliberately abstract by design (MacNamara et al., 2010b), practitioners run the risk of spending time developing attributes that, even if developed, may not give a young football player the best opportunity of progressing through and out of an academy given the specific demands associated with the football talent development pathway and subsequently the senior, elite game (Cooper, 2021). The identification of the eight attributes in the current study, therefore, generally substantiate the development of several attributes that feature as PCDEs or part of the 5Cs but challenge the utility of such frameworks in isolation. Indeed, universal approaches to identifying the important psychological characteristics required for success across sports have been criticized for not being malleable to the contextual demands of different situations (Anthony et al., 2018). Thus, up to date knowledge of the psychological requirement for players is crucial to providing current and contextualized support for them (Daley et al., 2020). The eight

attributes, therefore, provide greater direction for the psychological support within football academies potentially giving practitioners greater confidence that the identified psychological attributes will contribute positively towards a player's professional development and transition into the senior game.

Of the attributes that were identified, resilience has featured previously within youth academy literature as an important attribute for a player to possess (Holt & Dunn, 2004; Mills et al., 2012; Mitchell et al., 2022). In both Holt and Dunn's (2004) and Mills et al.'s (2012) studies, resilience was underpinned by a sub-theme relating to a player's ability to cope with setbacks; employing coping strategies to do so. Such a characteristic was further supported in the present study by coaches purporting the need for players to *positively and effectively respond to setbacks*. During a player's time at the academy, they may face a variety of setbacks, contributing to a non-linear pathway into professional sport. However, increased stress or experiencing setbacks is not unique and are indeed encouraged as long as sufficient support is available from the coach (Collins & MacNamara, 2012; Cooper, 2021; Fletcher & Sarkar, 2016). What does differentiate academy football from some other talent development systems (e.g., basketball, hockey, rugby) is the emphasis placed upon early specialisation, and the reality that young children are likely to remain within this high-intensity environment for an extended period (see DiFiori et al., 2017). Thus, a player's resilience appears pivotal, not only for their success as a modern-day academy football player but also in supporting and protecting their own mental health and wellbeing over long periods of intense training and competition and potentially when they exit the academy too (Chamorro et al., 2019). Furthermore, not only did the participants of the current study indicate that resilience was an important attribute to help navigate the inevitable setbacks of the academy,

but it was also recognised to moderate other psychological qualities too (e.g., problem solving). Researchers have previously suggested that psychological factors (e.g., motivation, focus, confidence) interact with resilience to support its promotion (e.g., Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012), with the findings of our current study indicating that resilience may also possess additive features. Therefore, practitioners may want to prioritise its development, not only to help a player manage the rocky road to professional sport, but to also facilitate the development of other adaptive psychological attributes (e.g., communication, problem solving, coping) within academy players; whether this serves to facilitate a successful progression or buffer the realities of exiting the academy (Collins & MacNamara, 2012; Gervis & Goldman, 2020).

The coaches participating in the present study also acknowledged the link between emotional control and resilience, a relationship described by the sub-theme: *emotional control promotes resilience to difficult situations.* The coaches in the present study recognised that players experience a range of both positive and negative emotions, highlighting the need for players to be able to manage these emotions. The need for an athlete to manage their emotions has been supported previously in literature (e.g., Jones, 2003), with Fletcher and Sarkar's (2012) findings suggesting that Olympic champions have stable emotions and develop meta-cognitive capabilities to perceive negative emotions to be adaptive; an appraisal process that underpins an athlete's resilience. Furthermore, c*oping with the demands of high-level sport* was distinguished from resilience by its focus upon a player's independent endeavour to manage on-going expectations and demands of the academy, whereas resilience was orientated towards supporting a positive response to isolated setbacks. The conceptualisation of psychological resilience that

has gained support in the literature considers it as a personal resource that influences an individual's ability to withstand pressure and maintain functioning under pressure; it is preventative in nature (Sarkar & Page, 2020). Conversely, *coping* is defined as, "constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person" (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 141). Thus, coping is both proactive and reactive, involves deliberate efforts, and has the function of regulating emotions and/or altering the demand that might be the cause of distress (Olsen et al., 2020). These conceptualisations provide a clear rationale for distinguishing the two attributes in the current study. Further, coping, more broadly, was identified as a PCDE associated with academy football success (Saward et al., 2019) findings that supported the decision for the EPPP to prioritise a player's ability to cope with pressure during the professional development phase (under 17- under 21) of the academy. Setbacks, coupled with the concurrent demands that players will face as a member of the academy (e.g., high-intensity training, balancing academia, sacrificing social ties), validate the importance placed upon a player's ability to cope within a modern-day football academy. In facilitating the development of this attribute, coaches should be mindful of the daily stressors that players face and support them to independently manage the demands of the academy (Cooper, 2021).

Although confidence has been previously identified within elite youth sport literature (e.g., Harwood, 2008), its conceptualisation has often centred around its development, and then specifically its maintenance during competition (e.g., Beaumont et al., 2015). The sub-theme [the] *best players have resilient confidence* identified in the present study suggests that the participants believed a player's confidence will be tested and challenged during their time at the academy, implying

that unwavering confidence can help to support a player through challenging experiences. The notion of "resilient-confidence" has been highlighted previously by Bull et al. (2005) as a theme that underpinned the concept of being a "tough character", a concept believed to contribute toward mental toughness within elite cricketers. Similarly, Thomas et al. (2011) contextualised "robust-self-confidence", describing it as "a set of enduring, yet malleable positive beliefs that protect against the ongoing psychological and environmental challenges associated with competitive sport" (p. 194). Given the continual challenges elite youth football players are likely to experience, possessing a robust confidence appears imperative for a talented individual to thrive within this environment. As previously suggested, the knowledge and promotion of personal (controllable) sources of confidence can contribute toward the development of this attribute within individual players (e.g., Beaumont et al., 2015; Hays et al., 2010). Confidence is an attribute that has continually been correlated to peak performance, with athletes demonstrating and observing higher skill levels, increased effort, persistence, and also mitigating against maladaptive outcomes (e.g., depression or burnout, see Hays et al., 2010). Supporting an academy football player to possess and maintain high levels of confidence should be a priority for practitioners, especially given the continued challenges and stressors that young academy players are likely to experience throughout their academy journey (Cooper, 2021).

Commitment has previously been recognised as an antecedent of success within elite youth football (e.g., Holt & Dunn, 2004), and notably, is one of the key constructs of the 5C's framework that has been targeted within football academies (i.e., Harwood, 2008; Steptoe et al., 2019). Commitment has previously been aligned to an individual's goals and described as the extent to which an individual is likely to

persist with these (Clough & Strycharczyk, 2012). However, *commitment to develop* differs from Clough and Strycharczyk's (2012) concept of commitment by placing a greater emphasis upon a player's *immersion* within their own development and their acceptance of being on that talent development pathway. This characteristic of commitment was also identified in previous research by Wixey and Kingston (2023) where, through interviews with multiple stakeholders in elite youth athlete environments (e.g., strength and conditioning coaches, national head coaches, sport psychologists), the authors identified *acceptant of commitment to pathway* to be a sub-theme of commitment to develop. The emphasis on players being immersed within their development is also reflected within the attribute self-awareness and reflection and the sub-theme *being present in all situations to maximise development*, indicating that these two attributes may complement one another.

Recently, self-awareness with reflection was cited as an important predictor of academy football player success (Saward et al., 2019). Under the description of *evaluating performances and working on weaknesses* Saward and colleagues found this to be one of two key predictors of youth to professional transition in football. The importance placed upon individual learning and development is an encouraging finding, as it indicates the presence of mastery features within a naturally competitive (and ego involving) talented youth sport environment and emphasises the growing recognition of the role that reflective practice can play in athlete personal and professional development (Huntley, 2023; Smith & Smoll, 2012).

Strong work ethic has frequently been recognised as an important attribute for young athletes to possess (Dohme et al., 2019). However, its inclusion in the findings of the present study may be as a consequence of the increased physical demands the EPPP places upon the academy player. Alongside this, the increasing

surveillance of players' physiological data (i.e., via GPS), or because of the growing imports of talented foreign players (European Club Association, ECA, 2017) who have previously been distinguished from their native counterparts by their *greater* desires to succeed and professional approach to their development, may have contributed to its inclusion and prioritisation (Elliot & Weedon, 2010). In either instance, there appears less "room" for players to loaf, and so a *serious approach* to their development was recognised in the present study as being fundamental to their progression.

Finally, while goal setting has been identified as a PCDE (MacNamara et al., 2010), the attribute identified as *drive to achieve goals* reflects, not just the act of setting targets (i.e., the technique of goal setting), but active engagement with achieving goals (Wixey et al., 2021). Participants in the current study discussed the importance of players' determination in pursuit of becoming a professional player. This attribute may have been emphasised in recent years given the use of centralised systems to coordinate player feedback and targets, for example, the weekly completion of the performance management application (PMA) was recognised by most participants as a sign that players were driven toward their goals. Striving for personal goals has recently been associated to greater changes in willpower and belief (Sieber et al., 2019). Academy coaches or sport psychology practitioners may wish to facilitate players in setting self-referenced and autonomous goals when using the PMA system to benefit from the (further) positive psychological outcomes associated to this (i.e., increased willpower, vitality, self-regulation; Sieber et al., 2019).

In the current study, we have outlined eight attributes that, if developed, would likely give a player the best opportunity of successfully transitioning into the

professional game. Although some themes have featured previously in the literature there are themes in this study that, within their construct, are novel, which maybe reflective of the changing environment of elite youth football academies in the UK. The recognition and understanding that the modern-academy environment places new demands upon the players is crucial to providing current and contextualised psychological support for players. Understanding what coaches recognise as key psychological attributes may give greater direction to the psychological development of players, and thus give a player a better chance of successfully transitioning to the professional game.

Limitations and Future Directions

Our qualitative exploration provided the opportunity for academy coaches to share their opinions on the psychological development of academy players, an opportunity seldom offered within this area of research (Gledhill et al., 2017). Although our findings may be useful to the academy coach, it is recognised that the findings do not hold a monopoly over all psychological attributes associated to youth football success. Indeed, while every effort was made to gather an informed, rich sample, we appreciate that our participants' experiences did not cover all contexts of youth football talent development pathways. To enhance the utility of our findings, researchers may wish to replicate our study across different academy environments or those of a different categorisation (see EPPP). This would be of particular interest to the category three or four academies who have significantly less allocated time for sport science (and thus sport psychology) support. With the limited contact time (time that players have with coaches) the lower category academy players have, it is critical to maximise the opportunity to develop the desired attributes within these players, and the first step will be knowing, with confidence, which attributes will

best serve this level of academy player. Researchers may also seek greater understanding of the additive or complementary effects of attributes on one another, which could help practitioners prioritize their development. Finally, linked to this, researchers may wish to align the attributes and their development to the different stages of maturation (or phase of the academy) and critical periods of transition within an academy to further refine their implementation.

Conclusion

The psychological capabilities of a youth athlete are recognised as being a crucial contributor towards a successful progression into professional sport (Daley et al., 2020; Holt & Dunn, 2004). This study has extended and added significantly to the literature in the area and toward our knowledge of the psychological needs of youth football players, identifying eight, contextualised, psychological attributes to develop within young academy players. This study also prioritised the opinions of academy coaches, a surprisingly underrepresented sample in literature that concerns football player's psychological development (Gledhill et al., 2017). The eight attributes constructed from interviews with senior category one coaching staff can be utilised by academies to direct their psychological support. However, further research is required to help direct the development of each attribute and to bolster the psychological development of young academy footballers.

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CHAPTER 4

STUDY TWO

The Identification of Adaptive Player Behaviours and Coaching Strategies to Support the Psychological Development of Academy Football Players.

Abstract

The psychological development of an academy player is regarded as critical to their holistic development but also as a significant contributor toward optimal performance. However, despite this, there is limited knowledge to support coaches in developing the desired psychological attributes in academy players. Based upon the eight psychological attributes identified in study one (Chapter 3) of the current Ph.D., study two aimed to identify coaching strategies that support the development of these attributes and the behavioural indicators of attribute development. Through semi-structured interviews with 12 professional academy football coaches, 53 coaching strategies were constructed alongside adaptive player behaviours that indicate the successful development of each attribute. Our findings advance current understanding for how the coach-practitioner can support the psychological development of academy players by offering conceptual and practical insights into the processes (coaching strategies) and potential outcomes (behavioural indicators) that can facilitate coaches' endeavours to develop the psychological performance of players. In doing so, our findings may act as a framework to remove previously reported barriers to coaches addressing the psychological development of athletes through their coaching practice.

Introduction

There is consensus that the psychological development of an academy football player is an integral contributor towards their successful progression into professional sport (e.g., Daley et al., 2020; Dowling et al., 2018; Harwood, 2008; Kelly et al., 2022; Nesti & Sulley, 2014; Towlson et al., 2019). The four-corner coaching model has attempted to formalise the psychological development of players, espousing psychology as one of the key elements for coaches to develop in their players (see The FA, 2023). Likewise, the EPPP (The Premier League, 2011), the policy that governs the modern-day academy system, also incorporates psychology into the holistic development strategy for players across the English football academy system. However, despite the inclusion of psychological development by two leading authorities within youth football development (i.e., The FA and The Premier League), there are significant deficiencies in its provision (Dean et al., 2022; Jones, 2018; Kelly et al., 2022).

Youth football players' psychological development during their time in football academies may have been hampered by several issues (see Feddersen et al., 2022; Champ et al., 2018). First, psychology has not received the same attention as other areas of sport science or player development (e.g., technical, tactical, physiology), with the extent of psychological support a player receives being determined by the professional football club and the motivations of senior staff within the academy (Crawley & Hills, 2023; Daley et al., 2020; Dean et al., 2022). Within the EPPP, the expectations for the provision of psychology is less emphasised than the expectations of the physical aspects of sport science where there is greater expectation for support (e.g., physiotherapy or strength and conditioning), whether this is through staff requirements or the minimum expectations of the

proposed sport science curriculum (Barraclough et al., 2022; see The Premier League, 2011). The lack of expectation and guidance leaves room for variability of services, but also it can be misconstrued to reflect the low value placed upon sport psychology and a lack of contribution towards supporting players to progress into the professional game (Webb et al., 2020).

Second, and linked to the above, there are deficiencies and inconsistencies in the resources available to support the psychological development of players (Dean et al., 2022; Nesti & Sulley, 2014). With no staffing expectations outlined in the EPPP, in practice, sport psychologists are more uncommon that other sport science staff, and, when sport psychologists are employed, it is predominantly done on a part-time basis (Daley et al., 2020; ECA, 2017; Gervis et al., 2020; Kelly et al., 2022). Within such a model, sport psychologists may have less time to understand the environmental demands and requirements to inform practice, opting to employ pre-designed frameworks to "hit the ground running" (Daley et al., 2020, p. 6) and to help demonstrate effectiveness and value (Nesti & Sulley, 2014). Aside from a few notable bodies of work (e.g., 5Cs, Harwood, 2008; MAC, Smoll & Smith, 2009; PCDEs, MacNamara et al., 2010a; TARGET, Ames, 1992), there is still limited guidance to support the academy coach to facilitate the psychological development of their players, with Nesti and Sulley (2015) previously suggesting that the field of sport psychology still needed to do more to support the psychological development of academy players.

Third, despite a decade under the EPPP policy, there is ambiguity over who is responsible for the psychological development of players in academies with the head of education, head of player welfare, and sport psychologists all cited as those responsible (Daley et al., 2020; Jones, 2018; Mitchell et al., 2022). The lack of

clarity has arguably contributed negatively to this provision, potentially diluting its presence and importance within the football talent development pathway (Daley et al., 2020; Jones, 2018). These, interlinked, deficiencies may have contributed towards the challenges experienced when integrating sport psychology into football academies (Daley et al., 2020; Jones, 2018; Dean et al., 2022). To navigate and combat these deficiencies, focus can shift to the academy coach to help concurrently develop adaptive psychological attributes in their players through the employment of context-specific coaching strategies. Coaches are well-positioned to work with players to develop the psychological attributes required for optimal performance for several reasons. First, coaches work with players within the competitive environments of training or inter-club fixtures, making their interventions and interactions more relevant. Second, the coach will have existing relationships with players that facilitate effective interactions regarding personal and professional development. Finally, linking the psychological corner of performance in the context in which they will be expected to perform (see the FA, 2023), is likely to improve the development as the importance of a given attribute becomes more apparent to the player (Crawley & Hills, 2023). Conversely, coaches are not appropriately placed to work with players through clinical issues and may require support from a sport psychologist to ensure that interventions are suitable and with some of the wider psych development activities.

Generally, the availability of sport psychology resources to help coaches support the psychological development of their athletes has been in short supply (Farhat et al., 2022; Pope et al., 2015; Reade et al., 2008). Indeed, Webb et al. (2020, p. 541) identified that some English professional youth coaches "perceive some talent variables, such as psychological characteristics, as being semi-static",

indicating that coaches may lack the necessary understanding of psychological development processes, even in relation to the context of performance. In earlier research, Reade et al. (2008) found that 50% of Canadian University coaches surveyed in their study had difficulty accessing material pertaining to sport psychology, whilst only 13.2% thought the resources they did find could be utilised suggesting that the importance of strategies being specific to their sport, rather than being too general or abstract. In recognising the need for specific coaching strategies, Wixey and Kingston (2021) interviewed academy football coaches to construct coaching strategies to support the fostering of mastery motivational climates during academy level training sessions. Literature had long purported the utility of Ames' (1992) strategies to promote mastery involving structures (i.e., task, authority, recognition, grouping, evaluation, time; TARGET, see Ames, 1992). As argued by Wixey and Kingston (2021), the guidance offered by Ames were generated from research within educational domains and thus may be too abstract to apply within elite youth sport domains effectively.

Recognising the importance of contextualised guidance, Harwood (2008) provided participant coaches with specific coaching strategies and behaviours related to each "C" of the 5Cs framework (e.g., communication: reinforcement of players who send information and acknowledge/receive feedback, p. 118). The essence of the 5Cs framework was to provide user friendly and applicable guidance to coaches; an intent perpetuated throughout the 5Cs body of work (e.g., Harwood, 2008; Harwood & Anderson, 2014; Harwood et al., 2015; Steptoe et al., 2019). The coach-facing intent of the 5Cs framework has contributed toward it being one of the most dominant frameworks utilised within youth and academy football in England to date (The FA, 2019). The primary flaw of the framework, however, is that the 5Cs were

not empirically constructed (Gledhill et al., 2017) and thus it may not be encompassing enough to help players manage and adapt to the demands of the modern-day academy environment. Indeed, the findings of study one of this thesis (Chapter Three) would suggest that only three of the five Cs are prioritised attributes to develop within academy players (i.e., commitment, confidence, and control [emotional control]). Thus, context-specific coaching strategies, to facilitate the development of empirically informed psychological attributes in academy players, can help to bridge the gap in knowledge and deficiencies that currently exist. One means to do this is to provide coaches with strategies that focus on affecting the observable behaviours of their players.

Behavioural coaching has been suggested to offer an accessible approach to integrating sport psychology principles into coaching (Theebom et al., 2014). By focusing upon the observable behaviours of athletes, rather than unobservable cognitions and attitudes, coaches (and athletes) can gain an accurate understanding of the behavioural expectations required in certain situations (Anthony et al., 2018; Musculus & Lobinger, 2018). Acute knowledge of behaviours can in turn help improve the competencies of the coach in identifying, recognising, and affecting behaviours associated to adaptive psychological attributes (e.g., confidence), leading to more frequent demonstration of desired behaviours (Passmore, 2007; Skiffington & Zeus, 2003). One recent example of the potential benefits of focusing on the behaviours associated with psychological attributes was presented by Anthony et al. (2018). Recognising there had been few advancements in the development of mental toughness, Anthony et al. delivered a coach education programme that aimed to increase the frequency of mentally tough behaviours amongst athletes. Through a series of workshops and observations spanning five months, Anthony et al.

supported coaches to identify and promote mentally tough behaviours in their athletes. Anthony et al.'s decision to get coaches to focus upon the observable behaviours rather the unobservable features of a mentally tough athlete was supported by the success of their own intervention and the outcomes of previous coach education programmes that focused on affecting the behaviours of athletes, highlighting the merits of knowing the behavioural indicators of developed psychological attributes.

Elucidating coaching strategies to successfully develop the psychological attributes identified in study one of this thesis (Chapter Three) may offer academy coaches parameters for their role in the psychological development of their players (Anthony et al., 2018; Fedderson et al., 2021). Further, such insights would help to ensure that coaches can fully integrate holistic player development (i.e., across the 4-corners) into their daily practices, interactions, and discourse; aligning psychological development with the perceived strengths of coaches (e.g., behaviour change) and reducing the widely reported discomfort felt by coaches in addressing the psychological "corner" (e.g., Daley et al., 2020; Harwood, 2008). Whilst evaluating their sport psychology coach education programme for a high-level fencing coach and a high-level football coach, Fedderson et al. (2021) found that the coaches struggled with knowing the parameters of their role regarding sport psychology, creating a barrier for its implementation. Specifically, the participating coaches were unsure when to refer athletes on to the sport psychologist and were cognisant of abusing trust within the coach-athlete relationship. Focusing upon the behaviours may, therefore, help reduce this perceived grey area for coaches and provide clear parameters for their role in the holistic development of the academy player (see The Premier League, 2011; Simmons, 2004). Thus, coaches may want to accustom

themselves with the coaching behaviours that promote desired psychological attributes from players but also any positive behaviours associated to specific attributes (e.g., emotional control; resilience) so that they can more readily provide positive feedback to players when the attribute is demonstrated in training and competition (Musculus & Lobinger, 2018).

The current study focuses upon understanding coaching strategies that can support the development of the eight psychological attributes identified in study one (Chapter 3) of this thesis (i.e., commitment to develop, confidence, coping with the demands of high-level sport, drive to achieve goals, emotional control, resilience, self-aware and reflective, and strong work ethic). These attributes are distinguished from, and prioritised over, other attributes or frameworks (i.e., 5Cs) due to their inductive construction from interviews within senior coaches to help inform them. Once again, this study places value on the opinions of the academy coach to help achieve its aims. Previous studies have prioritised the opinions of coaches to help inform knowledge on fostering adaptive talent development environments (i.e., Mills et al., 2014; Wixey et al., 2021; Wixey & Kingston, 2023). Specifically, Mills et al. (2014) interviewed academy coaches to understand how to establish an optimal talent development environment, with the authors presenting a conceptual framework to support other settings and practitioners (i.e., head of coaching, sport psychologists) to foster optimal settings for their athletes. From the field, authors have also reported including the coaches in the development of strategies during workshop sessions (e.g., Diment, 2014; Steptoe et al., 2019). The inclusion of the academy coach to help design strategies to support the psychological development of their players has several benefits, which arguably outweigh the reasons for excluding them (e.g., inability to articulate strategies, cf. Mitchell et al., 2022). Such benefits

include: (a) capturing the views of individuals who may have previously applied strategies, successfully, to different players; (b) garner knowledge on what strategies do not work; (c) relaying strategies in a language understood by themselves and other coaches; and (d) including coaches in an area they have been detached from may further improve the integration of sport psychology provisions into football academies (Dean et al., 2022; Kelly et al., 2022). Therefore, the primary aim of this study was to identify coaching strategies that can support the development of the eight psychological attributes constructed in the first study of this thesis and, secondly, to identify player behaviours that would demonstrate the successful development of each attribute.

Method

Research Design

As in study one (see Chapter 3), the current study was underpinned by an interpretivist ontology, and sought the perceptions of academy coaches to meet the aims of the study. At the time of writing, the opinions and subjective experiences of academy coach's development of psychological attributes in academy players had not previously been sought, and rarely had the behaviours associated with psychological attributes (e.g., how is a confident player expected to behave on the pitch?) been considered (Anthony et al., 2018). Rather, strategies to support psychological development in academy players have often been informed by researchers (e.g., Harwood, 2008; Mitchell et al., 2022). The qualitative method of semi-structured interviews provided opportunity for coaches to offer and substantiate their opinions on how the eight attributes can be developed in players, providing contextualised guidance for other academy coaches. Semi-structured interviews, on the topic of coaching strategies and related behaviours of psychological attributes,

moves beyond the considerations of the researcher and their experiences, helping to meet the aim of this study by providing time and space to hear and interpret the lived experiences of the academy coach (Potrac et al., 2014; Smith and Sparkes, 2017).

Sample Selection and Participants

We wanted a sample with the qualifications and contextually relevant experience to discuss in-depth how the attributes constructed in study one could be developed through coaching practice, as well as the behavioural indicators of attribute development. Thus, a purposeful sample (cf. Patton, 2015) of academy football coaches from three football club academies of category one or two status (see EPPP; the professional team of each academy were competing in either the Premier League or Championship tier of the English football pyramid at the time of data collection) were invited to participate in this study. We chose to include both category one and category two academy coaches due to (a) the shared aims of producing Premier League and English football league players; (b) similar coaching hours expected across the YDP and PDP phases; and (c) combined, category one and two academies account for 50% of the academies in the English football system (The Premier League, 2022). Criterion for inclusion included: the coach did not participate in study one; a minimum of four years coaching within a football academy across either the youth development or professional development phase (see the Premier League, 2011); qualified to UEFA Advanced Licence standard; and currently coaching full-time within an academy. This criterion was believed to sharpen the focus towards individuals who would have gathered appropriate experience applying, observing, and reflecting upon strategies that support the psychological development of academy players. In total, 12 coaches – who met the above criteria- were asked to partake with all agreeing to participate. Participants

were all male, aged between 26 and 54 ($M = 35.75$; $SD = 9.8$) with an average of 7.36 ($SD = 3.3$) years of coaching experience at an academy level.

Interview Guide

The interview guide (Appendix E) was organised around the eight psychological attributes identified in study one (Chapter 3). Following an introduction to the aims of the study and a reminder of ethical considerations (e.g., participant rights), discussions commenced with a description of the attribute for consistency across all interviews, helping to ensure the participants were discussing their approaches to the same psychological attribute as conceptualised in study one. In line with our interpretivist epistemology, each question was open-ended and followed by non-directional probes. For example, for the attribute *emotional control*, participants were asked: (a) "what importance do you as a coach place on a player being able to manage emotions for themselves?"; (b) "how do you help a player to do this (get players to manage their own emotions)?"; (c) "tell me how your support differs from on the pitch to off the pitch?"; and (d) "tell me what behaviours indicate that a player has developed emotional control?" Generally, unless identified as part of an attribute's construct, questions were not confined to strategies used on the training pitch or in competition. Questions remained open allowing for participants to freely discuss any strategies used across any situation, an approach more reflective of the coach's role in the holistic development of the modern-day academy football player.

Procedure

Following Institutional Ethics Board approval (see Appendix D), participants were contacted either directly or indirectly through a point of contact at one of three clubs. At the point of data collection for the current study, the lead researcher had

accumulated over 50 hours of experience conducting semi-structured interviews with elite youth athletes and coaches, at both professional club and international level; with 14 hours spent specifically interviewing coaches from football academies (i.e., Kingston et al., 2020; Wixey & Kingston, 2021; Wixey & Kingston, 2023). All twelve participants consented to volunteer, with each deciding a suitable location for the semi-structured interview to take place. Nine interviews took place at the participants' respective academies, while three took place in convenient public locations for the coach. All interviews were audio-recorded via Dictaphone, lasting for an average of 83 minutes ($SD = 13.46$), and were transcribed verbatim in their entirety yielding 215 pages of single-spaced text. As one approach to improving methodological rigour, participants were given the opportunity to review their own transcript, with all participants approving its accuracy (cf. Tracy, 2010).

Data Analysis and Methodological Rigor

Reflexive thematic analysis with an experiential orientation (RTA; Braun & Clarke, 2021; 2022) using a combination of both semantic and latent coding (see Byrne, 2022) was once again used to analyse the qualitative data of the current study. However, unlike study one of this thesis, interviews in study two were based around the eight psychological attributes ("topics", Braun & Clarke, 2021) thus a deductive-inductive-deductive approach was taken to analyse the data. Although deductive approaches are often associated to positivist paradigms, Braun and Clarke (2012) acknowledged that researchers may include both inductive and deductive means of data analysis but that, generally, one form will dominate the analysis process. Data analysis in this study was predominantly inductive, with the eight attributes acting as "topics" to be discussed within the interviews, and then themes generated inductively

during the RTA process being ascribed to one of the eight attributes during the *organisation of codes* stage (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Familiarisation with the data was achieved by the first author (PhD researcher, Wixey) through "active listening" to all twelve recordings, followed by the transcribing of each interview. The first and second (PhD DoS) author then met to discuss each transcript and the attitudes, actions, and behaviours detailed by each participant to inform richer interpretations of the data (Byrne, 2022, p. 1398). It was agreed that the experiences of the first and second author (both having worked within elite youth football environments previously) would help contribute towards to RTA process as they would be comfortable and understanding of the language used by participants. Given that RTA does not take place in a theoretical vacuum, it was deemed to be valuable for the first and second author to collaborate throughout this process, with the third and fourth author providing sense-checking throughout (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Smith & McGannon, 2018). One familiarisation was achieved, inductive coding of all transcripts took place, with the first author initiating this stage and the second author interrogating the codes. This, recursive, process shaped the 988 codes, which were a mix of meaningful semantic and latent codes (see Byrne, 2022).

The third stage involved the development of candidate themes. This remained an inductive process generated from the data from the interviews. Of the generated codes, 778 were associated to coaching strategies to develop the psychological attributes (topics) and the remaining 210 codes generated were behavioural indicators of an attributes' development. The 778 codes were grouped into 53 themes relating to coaching strategies to support the psychological development of players, while the behavioural indicators of successful development of each attribute were

collated into 33 themes. At this point (stage four), the sub-themes were deductively

ascribed to the psychological attribute (topic) they were associated with. Following

the recommendations of Smith and McGannon (2018) and Tracy (2010), throughout

stages three and four, the research team reviewed the data through open discussions

(interrogating, refining, redefining the themes) to enhance methodological rigour by

ensuring that data had not been misplaced, inappropriately coded and themed, and to

check any potential bias in the process. This continued through stage five of the RTA

process where the sub-themes created were labelled and defined. The report of the

analysis was written concurrently throughout the qualitative analysis process.

Results

The current study inductively identified 53 sub-themes that describe

strategies to develop the eight key psychological attributes in academy football

players. The thematic analysis of the coaching strategies is illustrated in Table 2

while the behavioural indicators in Table 3. The coaching strategies and behavioural

indicators identified for each attribute are also described below with example

extracts from interviews with the coaches also included to provide some insight into

their views and experiences. For the strategies, participant quotes are largely

included in Table 2, whereas support for the associated behaviours are presented in

the accompanying narrative. For reference, participant raw quotes are followed by a

pseudonym and indication of which academy phase (e.g., YDP, PDP) they were

working in at the time of the study.

Table 2

Coaching Strategies to Develop the Eight Psychological Attributes in Academy Players

Psychological Attribute	Themes	Example Codes	Raw Quote Example
Commitment to Develop	Actively encourage and reward players for consistently demonstrating positive behaviours	Compete and compare themselves to the top six premier league clubs in how they play, behave, and the environment Reward players and their families for consistently demonstrating positive behaviours	"Both at school and on the pitch and off the pitch, you've [player] been outstanding, we got a box for this game at the stadium…invite all the family." (Participant 5, YDP)
	Communicate with parents to help inform and support the players' ILP	Communicate with parents informally to feedback through or gain information from to inform future support for the player Get parents to see the value of their son's ILP [independent learning plan] and encourage behaviours expected by the academy	"Informal dialogue between me [coach] and the parents, it might be a quiet word if you like, in order to get your message through to the player we might go through the parent in a different way." (Participant 6, YDP)
	Foster an Academy Culture that has Clear Expectations of Player Behaviours	Non-negotiable actions such as replying to reviews promote commitment to development Use watered down principles of the 1st team to set the standards for academy players	"They [expected behaviours] are driven by the environment, by the culture of the Academy. What is perceived as good behaviour, what does good look like…being consistent with the messages to the players." (Participant 8, PDP)
	Give players individualised targets each session and advise them how to improve	Condition or set targets for players within sessions to develop their commitment to develop Highlight players super strengths and advise on how to develop it further	"Do they [players] know how to affect their super strengths? If not, set targets each session linked to those. Psychologically from that are they more confident, a bit more resilient, a bit more resourceful? If not, you've got to intervene to support them." (Participant 2, YPD)
	Provide Opportunity for Player Ownership	Listening and actioning player feedback can help their confidence in communicating to the coach Having individual learning plans is important for giving players ownership and so they are more inclined to commit	"The players have the option of coming in to training earlier to meet-up, get extra work in…it's up to them though, it's about getting their buy-in and it [early attendance] being their decision." (Participant 1, YDP)
	Use role models to challenge players further	Role models can be used to set players additional challenges Task players to watch video footage of role model players and set them challenges after	"For example, 'here's a video on Toni Kroos and his receiving skills, have a look at this, has few touches, his awareness' how might this influence your game?" (Participant 7, YDP)

Table 2 continued …

Coaching Strategies to Develop the Eight Psychological Attributes in Academy Players

Psychological Attribute	Themes	Example Codes	Raw Quote Example
Confidence	Emphasise previous accomplishments to players	Readily praise players using positive and considered verbal and non-verbal communication Remind players of successful performances	"Thumbs up or an arm around the shoulder or a pat on the back…. Certainly around constructive praise, realistic and constructive praise." (Participant 6, YDP)
	Encourage players to further enhance their strengths	Challenge players to play to and then execute their strengths in competition Make players aware of their strengths to increase their belief and sense of value	"Do what you're good at and keep trying to do that, have that something you can pull on to do." (Participant 4, YDP)
	Facilitate players to develop confidence by reducing pressures	Give players perspective of the bigger picture Players develop their own confidence with coaches playing a supporting role in removing pressures	"We [staff] have to get the stuff out the way that causes low confidence" (Participant 11, YDP)
	Increase player-led opportunities to practice	Allowing players play freely during practices reduces pressure and enables them to enjoy it Facilitate extra player-lead practice sessions at the academy	"Strikers in the older age groups do added activities called breakfast clubs on their finishing, but if, by doing that they know 'I feel like I've improved because I feel like I've spent time in a particular area'." (Participant 4, YDP)
	Know how best to support an individual's confidence	Obtain player's perceptions of how to best support their confidence Spend time building an understanding of and a rapport with players through one to one conversations	"One-to-one is powerful it's how well you know your players, which ones could benefit from being highlighted to the rest of the group, and which ones are quite happy just cracking on." (Participant 9, YDP)
	Orchestrate support networks	Build an effective support network around players Identify low confident players and ensure they know where they can get support from to develop their confidence	"We make sure they room with someone different so that there's an element of communication between the players who they might not know so much to maybe develop a confidence of talking to that person." (Participant 10, YDP)
	Set players challenging yet achievable targets	Provide fair and honest communication to players about failures or future challenges along with ways to improve Referring to players' process goals to develop a robust belief	"If we make players aware that they can work on it [performance] so they improve through tough goals we can create opportunities where you can help them in relation to what they need individually." (Participant 3, PDP)
	Support players' self-reflection to build confidence	Make players evaluate their confidence and talk about the consequences of it for them Players appear more confident when doing their reflective presentations	"We see confidence improve where we put players in front of the Coach and a camera to present. The first time they do it [present] compared to the next, they think 'this is not as bad as what I thought', and they progress that way, which is really positive." (Participant 10, YDP)

Table 2 continued …

Coaching Strategies to Develop the Eight Psychological Attributes in Academy Players

Psychological Attribute	Themes	Example Codes	Raw Quote Example
Coping with the demands of high-level sport	Consistently emphasise expectations of being an academy player	Elite cultures require players to meet the non-negotiable expectations Ensure the players have the correct kit informing them of the impact and explaining it through football metaphors	"The schedule is communicated to them [players], and within that schedule what we expect today – you're expected to be here at this time...make sure got your kit – I'm not having a go at players I'm just telling them how it is, how they need to be organized because at first team level players aren't given room for interpretation of rules." (Participant 5, YDP)
	Encourage a positive and autonomous team environment	Increase player autonomy by giving them opportunity to give feedback or lead meetings Provision of non-football related social events for players	"We just did a '*come dine with me*' the other week where the kids will cook for the parents... they could be away from their families from Sunday evening right through until Friday night." (Participant 1, YDP)
	Honest and calm conversations with players	Give players a rationale for decisions about selection and transparent explanations about how to improve Supporting players with a calm and positive approach during times of adversity	"We have six weeks reviews with them...they will present to us and we will feedback to them about where they are on a level and their level." (Pat, PDP)
	Manufacture challenge within training and competition	Manipulate training environments to force players to cope with situations or practices Organise squads and fixtures to promote competition within the academy	"More competitive football program...results driven floodlit cup tournaments, tours... has really helped prepare our players for a result driven industry." (Participant 6, YDP)
	Orchestrate the support system for players during times of adversity	Build a rapport with players Provide multidisciplinary support for players during adversity	"Support group ideally with the coach aware of everything that is going on and every conversation and strategy that's going on to help them [players] through that [adversity]. I think with the multidisciplinary approach that we are closer than ever to working to a higher level of support for players in difficult moments." (Participant 5, YDP)

Table 2 continued …

Coaching Strategies to Develop the Eight Psychological Attributes in Academy Players

Psychological Attribute	Themes	Example Codes	Raw Quote Example
Drive to Achieve Goals	Encourage players to independently review their performances	Players reflect upon video footage of performances Players that can reflect and draw upon previous experiences where a current situation took place are engaged	"Through conversation and analysis players take those experiences and it allows them to create the evidence they need to set their own goals relating to their current needs." (Participant 4, YDP)
	Learn about a player to inform coaching support towards those goals	Build rapport with players to be able to learn about players as people and the meaning behind their goals Coach needs to know the players end goal and to project manage them to that end goal	"Through conversations and getting to know what they care about and then getting to know them as people." (Participant 4, YDP)
	Objective measures and analysis of performance can help players to focus upon goals	Statistical analysis of technical tactical contributions in training or games can help focus targets for players and drive their attention to particular aspects of performance Technology is a powerful tool to use to show players for better understanding and then question them on the footage	"GPS data so we can look at physical performance…. That might focus a player's efforts." (Participant 4, YDP)
	Readily question players on their goals, performances, and challenges they may face	Coaches question players on why they are here today in relation to their long-term goal of being a professional player May test players on their HUDL footage but there is no punishment for not using it	"We ask [players] 'why are you here?'…. the main answer might be, 'I'm here today because I want to get better at this part'." (Participant 10, YDP)
	Support players towards longer term goals by maintaining focus on it over time	Frequently converse with a player about their longer-term goal Make reference to longer term goals by getting players to experience success in practice or performance	"Constantly trying to relate long-term goals to what players are doing now for perspective." (Participant 10, YDP)
	Encourage players to create their own goals and independently work towards achieving them	Players decide upon and present their goals to coaches at the start of the season Players required to identify their own super strengths	"Putting emphasis on self-reflection and using things like, 'what do you need to keep doing, start doing, stop doing?'" (Participant 9, YDP)
	Goals need to be realistic and idiosyncratic to the player	Players goals would be individual and realistic to them The players set and adjust their goals based upon positions, training, and feedback	"They [players] have their own goals that they will set for 6-week review … they're all realistic and individual to them." (Participant 6, YDP)

Table 2 continued …

Coaching Strategies to Develop the Eight Psychological Attributes in Academy Players

Psychological Attribute	Themes	Example Codes	Raw Quote Example
Drive to Achieve Goals *continued*	Prescribe goals and plans for players to work towards	Design a longer-term plan for a player Prescribe goals to players based upon what they need to work on	"We try to break down the long journey, looking at smaller goals. That helps to step things out and ensure that there's targets there for players to work towards." (Participant 3, PDP)
	Use role models to help players in the process of setting and pursuit of goals	Refer to role models when conversing with players Training with the 1st team or peers will help them identify extra work they need to do	"Watching their [players'] peers perform gives them ideas of where they need to be, what they need, and how they might get there … leads to extra work after training so they've identified something." (Participant 3, PDP)
Emotional Control	Encourage players to understand why they lose emotional control	Get players to understand why they are losing emotional control and the feelings they have and then guide players to be able to cope in the future Have a Q&A with the player and support staff to try and understand the mechanics that cause the emotional reaction in players and to try and come up with strategies	"Understand why and what sort of feelings they [players] have and then draw upon our experiences as coaches as practitioners to give that person guidance and rationality." (Participant 6, YDP)
	Foster Competition and Challenge	More experience competitive fixtures will help players develop emotional control Readily but not regularly bringing competition into training to see how players respond to different challenges	"Putting in some demands on the game or putting in some condition…might be a forfeit, might be little games to bring the competition element into game." (Participant 10, YDP)
	Get players to focus on their strengths and set goals during times of heightened emotions	Anchor players emotions by getting them to focus on what they do well rather than the issue that will cause them problems Provide technical input to give a player something to control	"We go to their [players] strengths…trying to help them focus on what they can control as opposed to what the issue is." (Participant 10, YDP)
	Give players the opportunity to calm down before supporting them through their emotional response	Allow players to calm down independently before intervening If an emotional player is on the pitch let the ball be a long way from them or out of play and give them few positive and constructive words	"Worse thing you [coach] could tell someone when they're angry is not to do something…They [players] will calm down, then its time to go and help, support and listen, then help them understand what has happened." (Participant 2, YDP)

Table 2 continued …

Coaching Strategies to Develop the Eight Psychological Attributes in Academy Players

Psychological Attribute	Themes	Example Codes	Raw Quote Example
Emotional Control *continued*	Provide considered and timely feedback to players about their ability to control their emotions	Opting to correct performance as a group rather than criticise individually to support emotional control Praise players when they demonstrate emotional control Recognise behaviours that suggests low emotional control in a player and intervene early if necessary	"As few words as possible…I think that is the key…it's really important for us [coaches] to be considered in the language we use…what's our tone, our pitch." (Participant 5, YDP)
	Use of appropriate communication and Tonality	Coach to remove their own emotion when communicating with a player after an emotional response Use metaphors with players in quiet moments to support emotion of players	"Withdrawing your own emotions and explaining the consequences of those behaviours." (Participant 9, YDP).
Resilience	Allowing players to respond independently to setback before intervening	Allow players to continue independently after a moderate setback Using -next- as a trigger word to get them thinking in the moment	"If you can ask direct questions that will help players remember what the problem is and how they might solve it and then they get the chance to go and practice that next time the problem comes along, they have built some resilience or built some tools to use." (Participant 4, YDP)
	An open and honest support system	Be available for players to have open conversations about stressors Delivery of criticism needs to be a well-considered, honest, and supportive process	"In training he's been excellent last few weeks and there's a chance now he will play tomorrow… He was upset he was caught in the moment a little bit, but he has handled the reasons why, because we told him, and he's reacted positively…so his resilience there to deal with that." (Participant 3, PDP)
	Exposing players to adversity	Expose players to adversity and challenge The review processes builds resilience through provision of feedback and setting targets	"Putting them [players] into environment that they are uncomfortable with, in situations that they are uncomfortable with I'm seeing what response they have to certain situations." (Participant 6, YDP)
	Foster a culture that focuses upon strengths of the players	Create culture where criticism is not the focus Players are recruited based upon their strengths and the players need to be aware of and replicate their strengths so it becomes habit during adversity	"Probably by being honest about the standard and quality of actions and non-effective actions, be quite consistent with that, so that they [players] know when they've not hit the standard it's not a big knock to them as people. Give them an understanding of what they need to work on and how their strengths can help them to work on it." (Participant 4, YDP)

Table 2 continued …

Coaching Strategies to Develop the Eight Psychological Attributes in Academy Players

Psychological Attribute	Themes	Example Codes	Raw Quote Example
Resilience *continued*	Use players who demonstrate resilience as role models	Make players aware of their negative behaviours comparing these to their ideal self Role model players who demonstrate good resilience	"You might show them [players] what good looks like or who is good at that [being resilient], nearly every professional footballer has a certain amount of resilience so you have to have that to progress to a certain level." (Participant 8, PDP)
Self-Aware and Reflective	A coaching style that promotes the development of self-awareness	Being honest transparent to players Discuss and remind players of their strengths	"If you're [coach] just on it too much all the time then you just blend into the noise… then at some point people just switch off because you're just noise. [Be the person who] when I have something to say people listen." (Participant 12, PDP)
	Design an individual player development plan for each player	Design development plan with targets with player ownership Player reviews	"Being aware of what some of their [players] weaknesses are…individual feedback coupled with an action so it can't just be a statement of 'this is your weakness', it is got to be 'this is an area of weakness, think about this or try this so there is a get out to improve upon that weakness'." (Participant 6, YDP)
	Design of practice sessions that encourages players to become more aware	Expose players to their weaknesses Training session designed to encourage self-awareness	"Sometimes just by putting players in the environment where they're going to have to just deal with it [difficult situations]. Like 'if you are obviously not comfortable on your left [foot] we're going to put you on the left side'." (Participant 9, YDP)
	Use players who show high levels of self-awareness as role models	Get players to observe other players' strengths during training to help one another Promote leadership qualities amongst players	"On the grass asking them [players] to watch other people, getting them to think about others' strengths and what they mean personally, getting other players to help them and stuff like that." (Participant 3, PDP)
Strong Work Ethic	Coach reinforces good work ethic demonstrated by players	Make players accountable for low work ethic and give rationale Positive reinforcement from coaches helps promote work ethic in players	"We [coaches] have to make sure that when it [good work ethic] does happen that it is encouraged and spoken about and praised."(Participant 1, YDP)

Table 2 continued …

Coaching Strategies to Develop the Eight Psychological Attributes in Academy Players

Psychological Attribute	Themes	Example Codes	Raw Quote Example
Strong Work Ethic *continued*	Engage players through challenging	Engage with players motivations Goal setting	"Put an end goal in which links certain constraints in the games or practices … for example, you have a three-goal lead that must be defended." (Participant 9, YDP)
	Facilitate player autonomy over their development	Extra practice provision Opportunity for players to take ownership over their academy experience	"There is a coach here on a Tuesday night that they can come in and work with." (Participant 10, YDP)
	Honest communication with individual players	Be transparent with players providing rationales Focus upon player strengths	"You'll just make it clear to them [players] that it's [TD] a bumpy road and the reasons why." (Participant 12, PDP)
	Practices designed to encourage players to work hard	Game-related simulations Maintain motivation in practices through competition, goals, intensity, time on the ball, relevant and enjoyable	"Ensuring sessions have tempo, intensity, goals and competition always keeps motivation inherently high and engages people." (Participant 7, YDP)
	Promoting self reflection to highlight areas of improvement	Player presentations to coaches Promotion of self-reflection	"In player presentations…. They will show us or demonstrate things they are doing outside of these four walls." (Participant 8, PDP)
	Reinforce academy culture of possessing a strong work ethic	Need to be patient with players with a low work rate as there may be reasons for low work ethic Promote academy's expectations of work rate	"We have a saying which is 'nobody works harder than us', it's one of our key fundamental principles." (Participant 2, YDP)
	Role modelling of players with strong work ethics	Finding out who a player's role model is as it may help explain their behaviours Give examples of previous players and their work rate within that particular session at their age	"How they [previous players] did it in this particular session is powerful to encourage hard work." (Participant 3, PDP)
	Support players to recognise the bigger picture as a rationale for working hard	Delivering workshops to players on underprivileged boys of the same age to emphasis their opportunity and prompt them to maximise their potential to progress Get players to recognise to work hard immediately in transition to save more work later	"We discuss how they can use the opportunity they've got to progress as far as they can." (Participant 4, YDP)
	Physical data to compare and monitor work ethic	GPS used as an objective measurement, tool for comparison, and platform for discussions Physical data promotes comparison and competition	"By the time you're 18, be able to cope with 12km in a match." (Participant 10, YDP)

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Table 3

Behavioural indicators of developed attributes

Psychological Attribute	Behavioural Themes	Example Codes
Commitment to Develop	Commit to extra training to improve	Player works hard on areas that they may not enjoy
		Players who embrace a challenge
	Communicates well with others	Players will communicate with coaches about meet times for games
		Showing leadership by recalling and relaying information to teammates
	Consistently works hard	Players that are consistent with their work despite performances
		Players who trust in the process will continue to do well even when the team dips in form
	Prepared for training	Being out early for training sessions not hanging around in the changing rooms
		Players who have the right kit at the right time and the right attitude consistently
	Readily gathers information to allow them to succeed	A player who actively seeks information on how to improve
		Those players become independent decision makers and make better decisions and less mistakes
Confidence (indicators of low confidence)	Less likely to communicate or demonstrate assertiveness	Low confidence can impact on players communication and become less inclined to ask questions and interact
		Low confidence effects players decision making, communication and assertive behaviour
	Less likely to take risks and be creative	A player recognised as a confident player only confident in his comfort zone and plays against weaker members of the team
		Low confidence players play it safe and will keep reducing their confidence as they face challenges over time
	Struggle to respond effectively to setbacks	Players with low confidence less likely to deal with mistakes and thus unable to get into flow
		Some players are more confidence than others who might linger on a particular failure
	Players' work rate reduces	Low confidence can affect work ethic as player feels the world is against them and externalises control
		Low confidence can undermine physical and technical capabilities
	Slower decision making	Low confidence effects decision making and makes players focus on weaknesses
		Low confidence makes players overthink things and delay decision making

Table 3 continued …

Behavioural indicators of developed attributes

Psychological Attribute	Behavioural Themes	Example Codes
Confidence (indicators of low confidence) *continued*	Will overthink simple tasks that leads to errors	Low confidence makes the simplest tasks difficult and players will try to overcompensate and it will spiral
		Players with low confidence may try too hard and run into the wrong places
	Will question their own capabilities	Low confidence players may start to question themselves and end up not trying to improve
		Players will often provide a negative before a positive which may relate to the expectations and nature of academy football
Confidence (indicators of high confidence)	Confident players will drive high standards from peers	Confident players drive standards of others
		Confident players may moan because they are frustrated at other players' lower performances
	Engage effectively with teammates	Players involve themselves with the group off the pitch
		Players who have a positive demeanour around the building and are interacting with others shows confidence
	Players that can be relied upon to perform well	Confident players more likely to score under pressure
		Players know what and how they affect the game and the regular refining of the tools they use to execute their strengths
	Readily communicate with coaches	Confident players communicate better and more readily with coach
		Confident players will buy in to what the coach is asking
	They are energetic and hard working	Confident players are enthused and sharp in the session
		On the pitch players want to receive the ball and work hard to regain possession
	Willing to be creative and not fearing of making mistakes	Confident players more willing to try new things and take risks
		Having a mindset that you are going to make mistakes and to keep practicing and applying skills in competition

Table 3 continued …

Behavioural indicators of developed attributes

Psychological Attribute	Behavioural Themes	Example Codes
Coping with the demands of high-level sport	Able to self regulates their own development	Players know how to work towards their own goals or the task at hand
		Players that are self-aware and actively remedy their weaknesses
	Capable of managing high ability competition	Players demonstrate good coping behaviours in competitive environments where they are driven to win and to deal with losing by exploring the reasons as to why
		Players that transition from attack to defence after losing the ball is impressive and a sign they can independently cope with setbacks
	Immerses and commits himself to meet the requirements and expectations of the academy	Engaged and immersed within the academy environment
		Players actively seek understanding and information from different resources
	Moves on quickly from setbacks	Players who can cope are not emotionally volatile and will move on quickly
		Players who cope respond quickly to setbacks and continue to work hard
Drive to Achieve Goals	Apply themselves towards their goals	Players who constantly apply themselves toward their goals
		Players who seek out information and readily uses the resources around them to learn and develop
	Players that will review their strengths and weaknesses	As players get older they should understand own strengths and weaknesses, set own goals, and have ownership over developing their weaknesses
		Players who complete the PMA reviews sharing their thoughts about the game and training
Emotional Control	Demonstrates control during moments of high and low emotion	Not getting too high or too low
		Player demonstrates good elasticity in emotional response when required
	Focuses upon goals during emotionally charged situations	Players think about what is to come not what has gone
		Someone who is more resilient will have more patience and recognise that getting to their end goal may take longer
	Independently regulates emotional responses	A player who changes their response when they are frustrated and is utilising self-calming strategies
		Players are more considered and can self-regulate their emotions and their responses

Table 3 continued …

Behavioural indicators of developed attributes

Psychological Attribute	Behavioural Themes	Example Codes
Emotional Control *continued*	Learns from setbacks	Facing setbacks and learning from them
		Players than move through a process of accepting then reflecting after a setback
	Views competition and challenges as an opportunities to develop	Players demonstrate emotional control by being positive in tough situations
		Players responding well to competing against the prospect of high quality opposition
Resilience	Responding well to mistakes within competition	Positive response to setback is reacting well after losing the ball by delaying opponents attack and getting into defensive shape
	Wanting to get on the ball after a mistake shows resilience	A player who keeps looking to receive the ball and keep looking to do the right things after losing it demonstrates resilience
		Even after mistakes keep offering for the ball and not hiding is an indicator of resilience
	Responds positively after general setbacks	Players changing behaviours after they get hurt from crying to loving the impact
		Coach observes less frequent negative responses to mistakes in games
	Continuing despite adversity	Players who have a greater resolve and are unaffected by things
		Resilient players show a robustness by putting emotion to one side and carry on
	Looks to Learn from Setback or Weaknesses	Communicates to coach rather than parents doing it
		Seeks ways to improve
	Overcome setbacks independently	A player that has overcome a situation independently or with some guidance that they previously experienced
		Resilient players are more independent and will crack on with what they need to do without the need to discuss with the coach
	Players are not disappointed for too long	Players do not have time to be out of the game or be disappointed for too long
	Work hard to improve after setback	After deselection a player worked harder, kept turning up, and competed with other players
		Being able to take criticism on board and reacting positively to that

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Table 3 continued …

Behavioural indicators of developed attributes

Psychological Attribute	Behavioural Themes	Example Codes
Self-aware and reflective	Aware of own emotions and able to regulate them	A player who was aware of his actions but unable to regulate them was able to reduce his frustration on the pitch with coach support and strategies
		Calmer behaviours demonstrate a player is developing their self-awareness and reflective attributes
	Demonstrates a change in behaviours over time	Over time a player improves their response to setbacks and becomes consistent in this behaviour
		Players who demonstrate change, whether positive or negative are becoming more self-aware and reflective
	Self regulates own development	Accepting of and actively tries to improve weaknesses
		Aware of Own Strengths and Weaknesses
Strong Work Ethic	Attending regularly and being early to training	Commitment to training by turning up early to practice and not missing training session
	Obsessive attitude towards improving	High motivation to become a professional player
		Players are obsessive about achieving
	Works physically hard	Driven players with a goal show coach's what they have been practicing and improving on outside of the academy
		Players with strong work ethic are able to work independently on areas of improvement during player-led periods during training

Commitment to Develop

Six sub-themes (strategies) to develop the attribute *commitment to develop* were underpinned by 51 codes, these included: *actively encourage and reward players for consistently demonstrating positive behaviours*; *communicate with parents to help inform and support the players' independent learning plan (ILP)*; *foster an academy culture that has clear expectations of player behaviours*; *give players individualised targets each session and advise them how to improve*; *provide opportunity for player ownership*; and *use role models to challenge players further* (see Table 2). Importantly, participants widely acknowledged the utilisation of video footage (that is easily accessible) as a useful way to make players aware of elements of their performance that they could develop and therefore also act as a catalyst for setting and pursuing goals. Further, opportunities for player autonomy were also highlighted by participants explaining the importance of giving players space to have ownership over their development (e.g., player led team talks, time for individual development).

Regarding behaviours, participants described how players who are *committed to develop* would be active in improving their performance, frequently communicating with coaches (and support staff) to gather information to help their development (see Table 3). For example,

> They engage on all levels really. Engage at training: "I want to be at training"; they train purposely; commonly ask questions; they work hard; they're not afraid to tackle when they've not had a good game; and then ask good questions after: "how can I get better doing this?" Or whatever. But it's just the engagement level… they demonstrate that to a very high level and

you know it's very consistent it's a behavioural trait that is always: "I want to

get and I want to get better, I want to get better." (Participant 1)

Confidence

Underscored by 117 data codes coaches provided eight strategies to support

the development of confidence amongst academy players: *emphasise previous*

accomplishments to players; *encourage players to further enhance their strengths;*

facilitate players to develop confidence by reducing perceived pressures; *increase*

player-led opportunities to practice; *know how best to support an individual's*

confidence; *orchestrate support networks*; *set players challenging yet achievable*

targets; and *support players to self-reflect to build confidence* (see Table 2).

Confidence is supported through the focus on previous accomplishments and

strengths alongside the provision of opportunities for frequent success and allowance

for player autonomy and freedom. Therefore, making players aware of and then

improving their strengths was recognised by participants as a key antecedent of

enduring self-confidence. Additionally, participants recommended that a players'

strengths are continually emphasised to create positive interactions between player

and coach. The participants did not just believe players should solely focus on their

strengths, however. They also discussed the importance of allowing players to try

new things without being inhibited by any fear of failure. According to participants,

at this point, the role of the coach is to guide players' exploration and to give them

opportunity to experiment before intervening.

Participants distinguished between behaviours that indicate a player has high

confidence, and those that suggest a player have low confidence. High confidence

behaviours included: *confident players will drive high standards from peers*; *engage*

effectively with teammates; *players that can be relied upon to perform well*; *readily*

communicate with coaches; *energetic and hard-working*; and *willing to be creative and not fearing of making mistakes*. In contrast, low confidence behaviours included: *less likely to communicate or demonstrate assertiveness*; *are less likely to take risks and be creative*; *struggle to respond effectively to setbacks*; *work rate reduces*; *slower decision making*; *will overthink simple tasks that leads to errors;* and *will question their own capabilities* (see Table 3). In relation to the distinction between high and low confidence behaviours, one participant described how high confidence players "play a lot more with freedom, without fear, off the cuff a little bit and belief in terms of certain things that will happen" (Participant 2). Conversely, participants indicated the characterisation of low confidence, summarised in the following quote:

> I think when you're low on confidence you think about things a lot more so rather than things happening naturally as the ball comes to you, people talk about know what you going to do on the ball before you receive it, you can always be aware of what might happen but until you receive it that picture can change all the time. It can bobble off the surface from where you can have a loose touch people pressure from a different angle that you thought it was coming from… if you're not confident you over think things that would delay your decision making. (Participant 6)

Coping with the Demands of High-Level Sport

The discussion on strategies to develop *coping with the demands of high-level sport* resulted in 154 raw data codes, from which five sub-theme strategies were identified: *consistently emphasise expectations of being an academy player*; *encourage a positive and autonomous team environment*; *honest and calm conversations with players; manufacture challenge within training and competition*; and *orchestrate the support system for players during times of adversity* (see Table

2). These strategy themes centred on the creation of a positive environment that challenges individuals, the importance of developing this attribute prior to any real-life setbacks, and the need to support players through adverse situations during and after they occur. To prepare players for the intense demands of, and setbacks associated with competition and youth talent development pathways, participants discussed how it was important to manufacture challenging situations (e.g., make it difficult for attacking players to succeed in training drills by overloading the defence) in a controlled manner, to give players the experience of managing adversity. Although creating challenges was deemed necessary to prepare players for first team football, participants were clear that they would differentiate their support for the players throughout any form of adversity, simulated or not. One strategy to support players through adversity (e.g., deselection) was to have honest and calm conversations with players. The participants outlined the importance of having emotionally controlled and frank discussions with players when supporting them through a particular setback (e.g., injury). Participants also highlighted the importance of providing players with clear actions to improve their performance and solve problems (e.g., how to return to the starting line-up if they had been deselected).

Four themes outlined the adaptive player behaviours that indicate this attribute is being developed: *able to self regulates their own development*, *capable of managing high ability competition*, *immerses and commits himself to meet the requirements and expectations of the academy*, and *moves on quickly from setbacks*. Participant 1 illustrated how high levels of dedication can facilitate a player's commitment to the academy:

High levels of dedication is: every week they are normally always on time, they know what they're doing, some players we've had financially struggle to get in if their peers parents can't give him a lift but they found a way whether that somebody else giving them a lift, or some other mode of transport, that's just a real drive to achieve, they want feedback: "how could I be better? What do you think of this?" So, yes they're all immersed and engrossed.

Drive to Achieve Goals

Strategies to develop a player's drive to achieve goals was informed by 68 raw data codes, resulting in nine sub-themes. These themes could be distinguished by strategies that supported the player to *set* goals or to help players *during the process* of achieving those goals. Four themes underpinned supporting players to set goals: *encourage players to create their own goals and independently work towards achieving them*, *goals need to be realistic and idiosyncratic to the player*, *prescribe goals and plans for players to work towards*, *and use role models to help players in the process of setting and pursuit of goals*; while five themes supported players in pursuit of their goals: *encourage players to independently review their performances*; *learn about a player to inform coaching support towards those goals*; *objective measures and analysis of performance can help players to focus upon goals*; *readily question players on their goals, performances, and challenges they may face;* and *support players towards longer term goals by maintaining focus on it over time* (see Table 2). Crucially, having knowledge of the player, and what matters to them, was highlighted by the participants as an important feature of developing this attribute: "Getting at meaningful things that drive them through relationships, through conversations and know what they care about… that is in conversation and that is in getting to know them as people" (Participant 7).

Several behaviours were highlighted as being indicators that the drive to achieve goals is developing in a player, these included: *able to recall the aims of the session or individual aims of the session shows a drive to achieve*; *apply themselves towards their goals*; *driven players will communicate effectively with team mates to achieve goals*; *and players that will review their strengths and weaknesses.* As portrayed by Participant 3, players who are active agents in pursuit of their goals were recognised as having developed this attribute:

> Those [players] who are proactive with what has been given to them. Receptive when we are communicating about certain things…. [they] seek advice towards achieving them. They might go and see a member of staff or coach they see someone in the analysis department and say I need to do this can you show me 10 clips of Eden Hazard [professional player] doing this.

Emotional Control

Seven sub-themes were coalesced from 51 codes: *encourage players to understand why they lose emotional control; foster competition and challenge*; *get players to focus on their strengths and set goals during times of heightened emotions*; *give players the opportunity to calm down before supporting them through their emotional response*; *provide considered and timely feedback to players about their ability to control their emotions*; *use of appropriate communication and tonality;* and *use role modelling techniques* (see Table 2). Thus, to facilitate the development of emotional control amongst academy players, participants in study two recommended strategies that require strong interpersonal skills. Coaches suggested that during times of duress (whether real or manufactured) a coach should use their knowledge of their player to provide them with calm, constructive, and considerate support to help the player become aware of their emotions and to

respond appropriately. Additionally, it was noted that in some circumstances players require space and appropriate distance from the demanding event before being given support, with the aim of lowering the intensity of a player's emotions from a heightened state following the situation that caused it. The dialogue with participants on this matter provided insight into how a coach needs to engage in continued reflection (i.e., determining the best approach) during situations of heightened emotion to master the art of supporting a player's development of their emotional control.

Behavioural indictors that a player has developed their emotional control that were constructed from participants' experiences include: *demonstrates control during moments of high and low emotion*; *focuses upon goals during emotionally charged situations*; *independently regulates emotional responses*; *learns from setbacks;* and *views competition and challenges as an opportunities to develop* (see Table 3). From discussions, coaches had an astute knowledge of what situations would test a player's emotions to assess the emotional control of players:

> Playing against [Premier League Club] they had a player playing left back and I noticed our right back when we were warming up doing prehab warming up, and he looked outside and emotionally you can see him go s***, he is here, the guy he is up against… I was just observing and wanted to see, because he's obviously nervous and he is anticipating a battle here. How are you going to respond? And his intensity, his focus within the dual, against this guy, I was quite impressed by his response to it. (Participant 7)

Resilience

For the attribute *resilience*, five sub-themes were constructed from 105 raw data codes: *allowing players to respond independently to setback before intervening;*

an open and honest support system; exposing players to adversity; foster a culture that focuses upon strengths of the players; and *use players who demonstrate resilience as role models* (Table 2). To enhance resilience, therefore, participants suggested fostering a positive environment whereby players are readily exposed to adversity but with the coach there to provide an open and honest support system when necessary. In particular, the participating coaches focused upon strategies that emphasised building the cognitive processes that would support a player to become more resilient and overcome isolated setbacks or challenges. Questioning techniques were thought to help players to problem solve during times of challenge or adversity. In other instances where questioning may not be appropriate, it was suggested that coaches will need to "give criticism to players". To buffer what could be a negative experience, it was recommended that giving players a rationale for the nature of constructive feedback on player behaviour is important.

Adaptive behaviours associated to a player who has developed their resilience include: *responding positively to setbacks in play*; *responding well to mistakes within competition*; *wanting to get on the ball after a mistake shows resilience*; *responds positively after general setbacks; change negative behaviours into positive ones over time; coach observes less frequent negative responses to mistakes in games*; *continuing despite adversity*; *looks to learn from setback or weaknesses; overcome setbacks independently; players are not disappointed for too long,* and *work hard to improve after setback* (see Table 3). The intent from players to continue to want the ball, despite a mistake, was recognised by participant coaches as a key indicator of resilience. Participant 9 highlighted how resilience within-performance is moderated by their confidence:

If the player keeps looking to receive the ball and losing it have they still got

the confidence and the resilience in which to manage go and get the ball

again and managed the ball again or keep making those runs or keep looking

to do the right things, that would be a positive way I would say you would

see that a player has got that resilience against failure.

Self-Reflection and Awareness

Underpinned by 111 codes, five themes constructed in relation to strategies

that support the development of self-reflection and awareness: *a coaching style that*

promotes the development of self-awareness; *design an individual player*

development plan for each player; *design of practice sessions that encourages*

players to become more aware; *task players to reflect on footage of previous*

performances; and *use players who show high levels of self-awareness as role*

models (see Table 2). Accordingly, participants suggested actively promoting

players' self-reflection and awareness through designing practices that involve

multiple stimuli and for them to be delivered in a style that incorporates questioning.

Participants also recommended the use of technology, such as the Performance

Management Application (PMA) and video footage, to prompt players to become

more aware of, and then reflect upon, their performance. How the environment is

structured, specifically the design of the training session, was viewed as an important

strategy towards the development of this attribute. According to participants the

practice must make players aware of their capabilities with reference to the aim(s) of

the session and concurrently give them feedback on their performance. In many

instances, it will be the coach who provides that feedback. Such one-to-one

interaction with players was a valued feature of a players' psychological

development amongst participants, recognised as an opportunity to strengthen their

relationship with the player and talk more freely (without judgement from others) about areas of development.

Three themes help relating to the behavioural indicators of improved awareness and self-reflection were constructed: *aware of own emotions and able to regulate them*; *demonstrates a change in behaviours over time*; and *self regulates own development.* Some of these adaptive indicators were captured by participant 3:

Just a well-rounded player who can communicate first instead of being prompted. He just comes over, and he starts as opposed to me starting the conversation. "We didn't do this well, or this very well, or I think we need to do a bit of work on this." They are the ones coming out and then being aware as opposed to it always being coach lead.

Strong Work Ethic

Underpinned by 135 raw data codes, 10 strategies were constructed regarding the development of a strong work ethic: *coach reinforces good work ethic demonstrated by players*; *engage players through challenging, facilitate player autonomy over their development; honest communication with individual players; practices designed to encourage players to work hard*; *promoting self-reflection to highlight areas of improvement*; *reinforce academy culture of possessing a strong work ethic; role modelling of players with strong work ethics; support players to recognise the bigger picture as a rationale for working hard;* and *utilise physical data to compare and monitor work ethic* (see Table 2). Developing a strong work ethic in players was thought to be supported by the delivery of physically challenging and engaging practices, and the reviewing and monitoring of physical data. In turn, it was highlighted that such practices contribute towards a culture that "prides itself on hard work". To create such a culture, participants talked about the

need for consistent messages, through the setting of expectations. It was suggested that setting clear expectations serves to uphold the quality of performance as well as some of the off-field traditions for academy players (e.g., cleaning rota) designed to maintain humility as they begin to gain financial rewards for their performances. In the modern-day football academy, it is commonplace for technologies to be used to support performance. The use of global positioning system (GPS) devices was recommended by coaches to facilitate effective monitoring and comparison of players' work ethic; objective (and therefore unbiased) data that players can benefit from knowing too.

The behavioural indicators of a strong work ethic were constructed as: *attending regularly and being early to training*; *obsessive attitude towards improving; sacrifices time outside of the academy to improve*; and *works physically hard* (see Table 3). In describing the importance of working physically hard, participant 3 discussed how a player's ability to transition within a game demonstrates their strong work ethic:

> Say something happens, and some players switch off and out the game for a
> few seconds and someone who just transitions really quickly and helps out
> their team mates straight away, doesn't turn their back, walking, their hands
> in the air. We are looking to see if a player can transition…. I think they are
> the ones who generally have the best work ethic.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the strategies that highly qualified academy coaches would use to develop desired psychological attributes in their players. Participating coaches identified 53 strategies thought to support the development of the eight psychological attributes identified in study one of this

thesis (see Chapter Three), offering academy coaches an understanding of how they may support their players' psychological development within their daily activities, interactions, and discourse with players both on and off the pitch. Alongside these coaching strategies, we explored the behavioural indicators that may suggest an attribute has been developed within a player. Based on participants' responses we constructed 33 themes relating to behavioural indicators of attribute development. It is believed that this information could be used help coaches regulate the psychological development of individual players by providing a behavioural framework that supports the integration and assessment of psychological attributes directly into coaching practice.

Within our findings, we have reported several developmental strategies per attribute, some of which have been cited before within the literature (e.g., facilitating goal setting, Mitchell et al., 2022; promoting or demonstrating model behaviours, Kitsantas et al., 2018), but others that extend our knowledge surrounding the psychological development of academy football players. However, it is important to note that the aim of this current paper was not to search for novel strategies *per se*, it was to prioritise, obtain, and present the academy coach's opinions on how to develop each attribute – thus presenting a contextually and ecological valid insight into attribute development through the academy coach. Although novel strategies can be considerable use and offer different ways of approaching the development of psychological attributes, at times, so too does the affirmation of previous literature findings, as it suggests that coaches may have a better understanding of sport psychology than previously indicated (e.g., Brink et al., 2019). To illustrate this point, participants identified eight strategies as means to develop confidence, several of which closely resemble the strategies that have been previously suggested as ways

to develop "robust" confidence by sport psychologists (see Beaumont et al., 2015). Identified strategies included: exploring sources of confidence; reflecting; modelling vicarious experiences; videos; working/with through coaches; relationship development; goal setting; and developing athlete's signature strengths (Beaumont et al., 2015) with each of which (or similar) were identified within the present study (see Table 2). Similarly, the participants in our study also provided strategies that aligned to Harwood and Anderson's (2015) eight principles of developing psychological attributes through coaching: promotion of the attribute; role model the attribute; ownership over decisions; support the growth of the attribute; positive reinforcement when adaptive behaviours are observed; empowering peer support; praising the supportive teammates; and self-review (i.e., PROGRESS).

The overlap of strategies between those recommended in previous literature (e.g., Beaumont et al., 2015; Harwood & Anderson, 2015) and those in the current study (informed by coaches) supports the notion that knowledge held by youth coaches is of value, reinforcing the argument that coaches should have greater involvement in the construction and implementation of psychological support in academies. Furthermore, by prioritising the coach's opinions and preserving the language they used we have presented contextualised guidance for other academy coaches, which may help application, and in turn, may contribute towards changes in coaching behaviour (cf. Anthony et al., 2018). Therefore, the findings of the current study not only can inform coaching practice but help towards enhancing the credibility of the coaches' opinions when matters turn to the psychological development of football players questioning their previous, deliberate, omission in sport psychology research (e.g., Mitchell et al., 2022; Musculus & Lobinger, 2018).

As expected from the population being sampled, strategies included performance-related (e.g., use of role models, honest and calm conversations, emphasising previous accomplishments) and organisational strategies (e.g., session design or organisation of competition) to enhance psychological attributes. Encouragingly however, suggestions also featured many strategies that focused on developing the player as a person. For example, a nuanced strategy provided by one participant 4 was to ask their players about a random act of kindness they demonstrated that week. According to McCarthy (2020), such strategies epitomise positive psychological interventions (PPIs) and help to promote the optimal functioning of individuals. Other strategies identified in the current study also appear to be aligned to PPIs, for instance: *encourage players to treat one another with respect*; *reward players and their families for consistently demonstrating positive behaviours*; and *highlighting players super strengths and advise on how to develop it further*. Such findings add to growing calls in the literature for coaches to focus on *individuals'* (rather than athletes') holistic development through talent development pathways to better prepare them for the consequences of both success (i.e., progression into the elite, senior game) or what might be classified as failure (i.e., exit from the sport; cf. Bowley et al., 2018).

When developing the attribute, *coping with demands* of high-level sport (an attribute that recognises the significant challenges that come with participation within an intense sport environment), participating coaches suggested that providing a rationale to players will help players develop this attribute. Providing a rationale has previously been highlighted as an important piece of discourse between coach and player (e.g., Becker, 2014; Bowley & Cox, 2020). Indeed, in describing the key qualities of a coach, Becker (2014) explained the importance of being *clear* when

providing athletes with a rationale for decisions, while Bowley and Cox (2020) highlighted that giving a rationale to players can be a platform to facilitate the transfer of life skills from sport contexts, a core element of positive youth development (i.e., an explicit focus on the development of young people's social, emotional, cognitive, and behavioural competence).

Despite the inclusion of strategies that carry the sentiments of positive youth development, coaches also discussed the tactic of simulating stress-inducing situations for young athletes to support their psychological development. One strategy identified in the current study, *exposing players to adversity*, has previously been recognised as a vital part of Olympic success and as a necessary aspect of preparation for professional football (Nesti, 2010; Sarkar et al., 2015). Researchers have previously indicated that a supportive environment that places athletes under performance-related demands could be a fertile setting to develop an individual's psychological competencies ready for elite sport (e.g., Beaumont et al., 2015; d'Arripe-Longueville et al., 1998; Nerland & Saether, 2016; Roberts & Kristiansen, 2012; Schaillee et al., 2017). The participants in this study indicated this to be a measured approach to enhancing *resilience* and facilitating improved *coping attempts*. Indeed, the strategies associated with building resilience recognised in the present study appear, in-part, to compliment Fletcher and Sarkar's (2012) model of resilience. Fletcher and Sarkar (2012) proposed that to develop a facilitative response to a stressor (i.e., an environmental demand), several psychological factors need to contribute: positive personality, motivation, confidence, focus, and perceived social support. In the present study, not only did the coaches recognise the importance of players experiencing adversity (stress) and so manufactured it themselves, crucially, the coaches discussed how they would support the player to develop their resilience

through the provision of social support, focusing the player upon their strengths, creating a positive culture where "criticism is not the focus", facilitating opportunity for independent resolution, and using role models to vicariously develop players. The findings of this study support previous research in the suggestion that demanding learning and performance environments are required for psychological development, but other strategies are required to accompany the induction of demands to scaffold players' development (e.g., Collins & MacNamara, 2012).

The findings of the project have several practical implications for the academy football coach. This deliberate attempt to prioritise the coach's opinions and preserve the language they used has resulted in contextualised guidance for other academy coaches, which may serve to help reduce the theory to practice gap that is often cited when attempting to change coaching behaviour (e.g., Diment, 2014, Stodter & Cushion, 2019). Coaches may wish to employ strategies while simultaneously engaging in a form of reflective practice, whereby through a process of observation and reflection, they generate a better gauge of which strategies are most effective for their players. Such an individualised approach would help the integration of strategies whilst also acting as a mechanism to further enhance their knowledge of their players' psychological development.

With the catalogue of strategies that the coaching participants provided, it may also be beneficial for coaches (and supporting sport psychology practitioners) to be aware of overlapping strategies; not only to help integration, but to encourage the employment of strategies that may be of the greatest impact across the greatest range of psychological attributes. It is also worthwhile noting that not all academies have sport psychology provisions, and if they do, the practitioner is not always involved in the coaching programme nor in the training of coaches (see ECA, 2017). It is

therefore recommended that academy coaches can employ the strategies constructed in this study where there is a deficit of formal psychological support. The overlapping strategies identified in Table 4 can further help coaches when there is a lack of psychological support. A coach may wish to initiate their integration of sport psychology through the utilisation of the overlapping strategies, removing the burden of knowing all nuanced strategies, while still having a potentially positive effect across multiple attributes.

Table 4

Strategies that contribute to the development of multiple psychological attributes

Overlapping Strategies	Psychological Attributes Associated to the Strategy
Role Modelling Strategies	Commitment to develop; drive to achieve goals, resilience; self-aware and reflective; and strong work ethic.
Simulation of Adversity/Fostering Challenging situations	Resilience; self-aware and reflective; coping with the demands of high-level sport; and emotional control.
Focus upon player's strengths	Commitment to develop; drive to achieve goals; resilience; self-aware and reflective; strong work ethic; emotional control; and confidence.
Player watching own game footage	drive to achieve goals, strong work ethic, and confidence.
Knowledge of player	Drive to achieve goals; confidence; self-aware and reflective; and coping with the demands of high-level sport.
1:1 conversation with players	drive to achieve goals; resilience; self-aware and reflective; coping with the demands of high-level sport; and strong work ethic.
Providing rationale to players	strong work ethic, coping with the demands of high-level sport, and emotional control.

Currently, academy coaches appear to be in an equivocal position when it comes to the psychological development of their players; available and willing yet lacking the direction and catalysts to drive their behaviour change. Arguably, many

coaches find themselves in this position, in-part, due to insufficient formal and informal coach education relating to the psychological development of youth soccer players (Freitas et al., 2013; Voldby & Klein-Dossing, 2020). The coaching strategies outlined in the present study can serve to negotiate the milieu of issues inhibiting academy coaches' learning and their abilities to develop their players' psychologically. For example, coaches can (a) review the psychological attribute(s) they wish to promote within their curriculum (e.g., *emotional control*); (b) integrate associated strategies within their session plans where applicable (e.g., *fostering competition and challenge* would require a practice with opportunities for success and failure); and (c) actively look for opportunities to, and readily apply, strategies to support the attribute during practice (e.g., *get players to focus on their strengths and set goals during times of heightened emotions*).

Elucidating coaching strategies to successfully develop the psychological attributes may offer academy coaches parameters for their role in the psychological development of their players (Anthony et al., 2018; Fedderson et al., 2021). For example, whilst evaluating their sport psychology coach education program to a high-level fencing coach and a high-level soccer coach, Fedderson et al. (2021) found that the coaches struggled with knowing the parameters of their role regarding sport psychology. Specifically, the participating coaches were unsure when to refer athletes on to the sport psychologist and were cognizant of abusing trust within the coach-athlete relationship. Focusing upon the behaviours identified in the present study may help reduce this perceived grey area for coaches and provide clear parameters for their role in the holistic development of the academy player (see EPPP). Therefore, coaches may want to accustom themselves with the observable behaviours associated with the attributes they intend to develop so that they can

more readily provide positive feedback to players when the behaviours are observed (McKay et al., 2021).

Finally, the knowledge of behavioural indicators that suggest a psychological attribute has been developed can support a coach in their observations and future employment of strategies. The capabilities of the coach and recruitment staff's accuracy in observing a football player's psychological components has previously been challenged within literature (Christensen, 2009; Reeves et al., 2018). Therefore, the profile of behaviours associated to player's who demonstrate the development of a given attribute is a valuable tool and can be used to help coaches more accurately define the psychological development of their players. This has become increasingly important in the modern-day academy whereby players are reviewed on a frequent basis across the course of the season, with their technical, tactical, physiological, and psychological attributes evaluated (see The Premier League, 2011). Knowledge of "what good looks like" can help the accuracy in reviewing the psychological components of a player in-action, potentially leading to a more meaningful intervention, discussion, or design of targets. According to Schön (1983), reflection-in-action is catalysed from a coach possessing tacit knowledge, demonstrated in their coaching behaviours. A coach, who is a novice in their psychological development of players, can accustom themselves with the behaviours associated to the attributes they intend to develop so that they can more readily provide positive feedback to players when they are observed. With repetition, this may in turn help the incorporation of the psychological corner into coach's tactic knowledge; alongside their tacit knowledge of technical, tactical, and physical development of players (Schön, 1983; Simmons, 2004).

Limitations and Future Directions

The qualitative approach taken to explore academy coaches' strategies to develop psychological attributes, and the behavioural indicators of attribute development, demonstrates a unique and timely contribution to a field, which has traditionally been limited. Nevertheless, regardless of the merits of the findings, it is important to critically reflect upon our approach and provide recommendations for future research. First, the coaches in this study were interviewed on the pre-determined attributes constructed in study one of this thesis. Although this was deemed appropriate and measures were taken to ensure participants understood each attribute (i.e., descriptions given for attributes during the interview), it would have been useful to gauge the opinions from this study's participants on the relevance of each attribute to help prioritise the attributes further.

Second, it would have been of great benefit to learn which strategies would be most appropriate for different age-groups across an academy (e.g., MacNamara et al., 2010b). To effectively do this, research could organise the 53 coaching themes into age-specific categories. This information would further help the academy coach in their selection and employment of strategies and mitigate against any maladaptive consequences of employing strategies designed for older players (e.g., physical punishments) to younger academy players.

Finally, researchers could look to assess the effectiveness of the coaching strategies suggested by reviewing coaches' efficacy in their application or by measuring academy players' psychological development in response to the employment of the coaching strategies (see Harwood, 2008; Harwood et al., 2015). With the challenges of embedding psychological support into football academies, both sport psychology literature (theory) and youth football academies (practice) would benefit from research that aims to apply the coaching strategies in situ.

Supporting coaches to apply strategies is integral to the psychological development of players and, although challenging, researchers should direct attention towards the academy coach's application of psychological knowledge within the contexts and parameters outlined by the EPPP.

Summary

The current study identified strategies that can be utilised by academy coaches during their daily on and off pitch activities to support the development of eight psychological attributes in players. Additionally, the study has developed an exploratory understanding of the profile of behaviours that would indicate a player has developed (or is developing) a specific attribute. We propose that these insights can give academy coaches a range of strategies to employ in attempts to deliberately affect the psychological development of their players, and then also to help them (and others) gauge the effectiveness of their strategies and their player's current psychological attributes through knowledge of the behavioural indicators. Although this knowledge is valuable, further research is needed, however, to substantiate the use of these strategies and the impact of these attributes being developed on player performance and success (i.e., progression through an academy and into the senior, elite game). Nevertheless, coaching practitioners are encouraged to employ the identified strategies to develop the psychological attributes within their own players.

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CHAPTER 5

STUDY THREE

A Case Study of the Design, Delivery, and Evaluation of a Sport Psychology Coach Education Programme in a Professional Male Football Academy.

Abstract

Several deficiencies in regard to the psychological development of academy football players have been raised over recent years (e.g., lack of guidance from National Governing Bodies, Crawley & Hills, 2023; the limited number of full-time practitioners employed within academy football, Gervis et al., 2020; a lack of coach-education or support for coaches to support the psychological development of their players, Freitas et al., 2013). To address, and navigate, some of the issues surrounding the sport psychology provision in academy football, the current study aimed to design, deliver, and evaluate a sport psychology coach education and support programme within a category two football academy. The design of the support programme was based upon the findings of study one (Chapter 3) and study two (Chapter 4) of this Ph.D., and thus focused upon supporting coaches to indirectly develop the eight psychological attributes, identified in study one (Chapter 3), in their players. Over the course of 14 months, I (Ph.D. researcher) delivered the coach education and support programme to Dock FC academy coaches, which consisted of workshops, observations, video clipping of best practice, written resource packs, lanyards with cue cards, and player-survey feedback. The programme was reviewed at the end through social validation procedures (e.g., coach interviews, player focus groups) and a summary of my reflections (as the researcher conducting the programme). Findings suggested that the programme was well-received by coaches, with the coach interviews indicating that they did attempt and felt they improved in their employment of strategies to develop certain attributes, with the player focus groups substantiating the coaches' efforts in doing so. The case study approach was a valuable framework, and lens, to deliver and review the coach education and support programme, helping to illuminate several findings: (i) Dock

FC and its coaches valued sport psychology and the intervention programme

delivered, (ii) the indirect approach to sport psychology may be a useful method to

use in football academies, (iii) players recognised the coaches' efforts to develop the

eight attributes, (iv) the programme was well-received by coaches, (v) coaches

wanted greater support from a sport psychology practitioner to support their

coaching practice on daily basis, and (vi) emotional control was an attribute coaches

and players found most difficult to develop. This study contributes significantly to

the literature and also to the applied setting of a football academy offering an

ecologically valid framework to support the psychological development of players.

The attributes, their respective behaviours, and accompanying coaching strategies

can provide clear guidance to academy coaches. Finally, the manner in which

coaches were educated and supported can be adopted by practitioners to enable the

effective integration of sport psychology into an academy setting.

Introduction

The psychological attributes of an athlete are believed to be integral contributors toward success within their sport (Dean et al., 2022; Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2004; Kelly et al., 2022), with coaches recognised as being in a primary position to help facilitate the development of such attributes within the athletes with whom they work (Fletcher & Brown, 2017; Keegan et al., 2014). Within the English football academy system, a lack of resources, finances, and stigma regarding sport psychology has unfortunately added to the challenge of integrating this area of sport science into the football academy talent development environment (Dean et al., 2022; Kelly et al., 2022; Nesti & Sulley, 2014; Pain & Harwood, 2004). Compounding these issues is the lack of guidance or expectation within the EPPP regarding the psychological development of academy players (Dean et al., 2022). With a lack of clarity over who is charged with overseeing the sport psychology provision in an academy, the responsibility must fall to academy coaches, not simply because of their role to support players' holistically (i.e., across the recognised "corners" of performance – technical/tactical, physical, social, and psychological; The FA, 2023), but because they are recognised to be in the best position to affect players' psychological development (Brown & Fletcher, 2017; Cooper, 2021; Keegan et al., 2014; The Premier League, 2011). Given that coaches will influence the psychological outcomes of players generally, and potentially have more success in doing so than sport psychologists (see Brown & Fletcher, 2017), it is important to educate and support coaches to ensure that those outcomes are not just positive, but also relevant to a young academy player and their successful progression through and out of the academy. Across all phases of development (i.e., FP, YDP, PDP) within an EPPP football academy, it has been suggested that coaches are perceived

by the players to be the most influential members of staff at an academy. Upskilling the coach (as the most influential agent) on how to support the psychological development of players is an appropriate solution to addressing some of the deficiencies of the sport psychology provision in football academies (Cooper, 2021).

A review of the impact of sport psychology interventions by Brown and Fletcher (2017) found that coach-led interventions had a moderately greater impact upon participants than if another practitioner led the intervention (e.g., sport psychologist). Thus, even though Brown and Fletcher recommended that the finding was cautionary, support is growing for the notion that coaches are potentially key, and influential, agents in developing the psychological attributes associated with performance in athletes. Indeed, a similar conclusion was drawn by Godfrey and Winter (2017) who reflected on the limitations of the sport psychology player workshops they delivered to EPPP Foundation Phase (FP) players at an English league football academy, suggesting that the involvement of the players' coaches in the programme could have facilitated greater application from the players. Indeed, a participant in Dean et al.'s (2022) exploration of sport psychologists' experiences of working within EPPP governed academies discussed how, as part of their role, they worked to "influence the staff, to influence the players, so we [psychologists] have an indirect impact", indicating that working indirectly through the coaches is a viable method to sport psychology support in academies (Dean et al., 2022, p. 7).

Whilst coaches are well-positioned to support the psychological development of players, there is often concern about the remit of their role in providing such support and an apprehension to do so given the lack of training to do this effectively (Fedderson et al., 2021; Freitas et al., 2013). Engaging with coaches to support the psychological development of athletes across a range of sports has been a

burgeoning area of research within sport psychology literature (e.g., Camire & Trudel, 2014; Harwood, 2008, Harwood et al., 2015). In many instances, researchers have reported successful (e.g., the programme being well received, perceived positive impact on players, quantitative analysis demonstrating positive impacts upon psychological attributes) interventions with coaches, demonstrating this through quantitative (Hassan & Morgan, 2015; Smith et al., 2007), qualitative (Camire & Trudel, 2014; Falcoa et al., 2012; Harwood et al., 2015) or mixed-method measures (Anthony et al., 2018; Harwood et al., 2008). Common features of successful programmes or approaches to developing coaches' application of sport psychology principles include workshops (e.g., Larsen et al., 2014; Lauer & Dieffenback, 2013); observations (e.g., Coatsworth & Conroy, 2006; Cope et al., 2021); video-based feedback and reflections (e.g., Partington et al., 2015); and user-friendly resources (e.g., Smith et al., 2007).

Within the specific setting of a football academy, a growing number of researchers have aimed to educate coaches on the integration of sport psychology principles, often aiming to support the coach in developing mental skills or develop attributes in their players (e.g., Daley et al., 2019; Harwood, 2008; Harwood et al., 2015; Mitchell et al., 2022; Steptoe et al., 2019; Wadsworth et al., 2020). However, to our knowledge, there have been few empirical coach education programmes conducted within an elite football academy environment, and certainly fewer within the EPPP era (i.e., since 2012). Access, methodological complexities, and lower importance placed on the area (i.e., within the EPPP) may have contributed to the dearth of research to date. Regardless of the reasons, there remains a limited offering from the sport psychology literature, formal coach education programmes (e.g., UEFA coaching qualifications), or the EPPP, to help guide and develop the

academy coach, or an academy's sport psychology provision. Consequently, thousands of talented young players may pass through an academy without the psychological development or support they require or deserve. Therefore, the purpose of this study (and indeed the Ph.D. thesis), was to provide a way to support the psychological development of players, regardless of the barriers that currently inhibit the provision, with the academy coach viewed as the best vehicle to provide players with the support to develop targeted psychological attributes. This approach is not intended to replace the effective work that professional sport psychologists do within academies; if an academy can hire a trained sport psychologist they should do, however it is to provide a viable solution to a problem that has persisted for nearly twenty years and one that adapts to the parameters and agenda of the EPPP (see Pain & Harwood, 2004). Therefore, there is a need to design, deliver, and assess the effectiveness of a sport psychology coach education programme to offer updated knowledge to help direct and guide academy coaches to support the psychological development of their players, particularly within the context of the modern game, which continues to evolve, altering the landscape of talent development pathways in the sport (Webb et al., 2020).

Informed by the findings of studies one (Chapter Three) and two (Chapter Four) of this thesis, the purpose of this study was to design, deliver, and evaluate an evidence-based sport psychology coach education and support programme for an EPPP football academy through a case study approach. Specifically, the (intervention) programme, delivered longitudinally in an ecologically valid, applied setting, aimed to help coaches acquire the knowledge and skills required to support the psychological development of the players with whom they were working. Further, it was our intention to facilitate the integration of player psychological

attribute (e.g., confidence, resilience, emotional control, strong work ethic, self-aware and reflective, commitment to develop, and drive to achieve goals – see Chapter Three) development into coaches' daily practices, interactions, and discourse (e.g., through integration of coaching strategies and attribute behavioural indicators – see Chapter Four). Thus, we aimed to create meaningful change for coaches (e.g., philosophies; practices) and their players (e.g., improved psychological attributes). In attending to the purpose of this study, we aimed to evidence a way to develop the eight psychological attributes within the real-world setting of a category two football category, offering an ecologically valid means to deliver the sport psychology provision in football academies (that may accompany other means, e.g., counselling). The feedback from coaches will provide novel insights into their practical experiences of participating a coach education and support programme tailored for academy football coaches, enabling practitioners to utilise and build on the strengths of the programme but also adapt and address any areas where the support could be improved. The findings of this study will provide a framework for an indirect delivery of sport psychology, an approach that navigates the barriers often associated to integrating the provision into the specific environment of a professional football academy and provides greater assurances for the psychological development of players where it has, previously, been absent.

Method

Case Study Design

Despite success stories (e.g., Steptoe et al., 2019), the integration of sport psychology provisions into football academy environments have generally been challenging (Barker & Winter, 2014; Champ et al., 2019; Crawley & Hills, 2023; Nesti & Sulley, 2014; Pain & Harwood, 2004). Although there has, undoubtably,

been progress since Pain and Harwood's (2004) review, we (as researchers) must ensure that research is in the interest and value to the setting, not just *for* science. This can be done through a well-considered study design.

Experimental or quasi-experimental research designs that seek cause and effect are, and will continue to be, of considerable value. However, this form of research, where variables are controlled, makes it challenging for practitioners in the field to replicate post-research, and inadvertently broadens the theory-to-practice gap between sport psychology and the setting (Ely et al., 2020; Petitpas et al., 2005). Given the inconsistencies of psychology provision within football academies, it is in the interest of all stakeholders (participants, the football academy, research team, and the field of sport psychology) to adopt an approach that will be effective in assessing a coach education intervention programme within the real-world context of an academy; fully subjected to the coercive, demanding, and assertive characteristics of *the field* (Geertz, 1995). One way to do this is through a *case study design*.

Case study designs involve the investigation of a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context (Yin, 2009). Case studies are not a method but rather a framework that incorporates different methods that facilitate the triangulation of different data with the aim of understanding human experience (Hellion & Walsh, 2002; Stake, 1995). One benefit of the case study design is its ability to facilitate deeper understanding of both positive and negative outcomes of intervention and education programmes. Indeed Petitpas et al. (2005) suggested that "case study methodologies should be considered when designing and implementing youth development through sport programmes so that the programme can evolve to best meet the needs of participants" (p. 72). With issues associated to the integration and employment of sport psychology provision in academies previously cited (e.g.,

Champ et al., 2019; Jones, 2018), it is essential that we learn of the associated challenges and issues to help coaches improve their abilities to integrate psychological development into their practices. In short, case studies are not used to prove, but are a framework to learn (Flyvberg, 2006).

One misconception is that the knowledge gained from a case study cannot be transferred and/or generalised. Flyvberg (2006) countered this point, arguing that formal generalisations are considerably overrated and are not a reflection of how knowledge is acquired and applied within society, highlighting that case studies have, and do, contribute more to policy changes than measures of abstract variables (Abbott, 1992; Flyvberg, 2006). With the efficacy of the EPPP recently questioned (i.e., Dean et al., 2022; Champ et al., 2019; Jones, 2018; O'Gorman et al., 2020), a case study design may help inform future changes and development of this policy regarding the psychological development of academy players.

The current study adopted a single-case study design where theory (i.e., the empirically informed coach education and support programme) was tested over a longitudinal period (Yin, 2009). We feel it is imperative to test this against a single case study to facilitate deeper and more meaningful application (and thus interrogation) of the coach education and support programme (the theory). Yin (2009) highlighted that either a case study's uniqueness or its representativeness can also be of merit and substantiate the use of a single case study design. In relation to the current case study, entry to the often difficult to access academy environment for an extended period makes it unique. This case study thus offers unique insights into the football academy environment, which in turn can also be assumed to represent a typical EPPP category two academy. Furthermore, Yin (2009) suggested that single-case studies may also provide revelatory insights. In the context of the current case

study, and the participating academy's adoption of a sport psychology coach education and support programme, we feel that this will offer greater understanding of a relatively rare practice in modern sport (e.g., the education of professional youth academy coaches to better integrate the psychological development of their players into their practices).

Participants

The current study included several participants: the football academy, the coaches, the players, and the first author as the researcher. While we attempted to sample the entire coaching and playing staff within the academy for the duration of this longitudinal intervention programme, inevitably there was a level of drop out. Coaches and players moved on from the academy, the COVID-19 pandemic restricted access, and the daily demands on potential participants took them away from the focus of the intervention. Thus, we sampled as many of the potential participants as possible to ensure a full and complete data set that would allow for appropriate and robust inferences to be made about the effectiveness of the coach education and support programme. The following section explains the role each of these agents played in the case study.

Context (the Club)

Football academies in England are intensely competitive talent development environments where young children from the age of eight compete for contracts to become a professional player (Wixey et al., 2020). The academy system brings its own psychological challenges as players try to successfully navigate their way through an intense and competitive environment for what might be over a decade (Mitchell et al., 2014; Wixey et al., 2020). However, compounding the natural challenges that arise from elite early specialisation settings is the vociferous and

volatile culture that has been observed within academies attached to professional clubs competing in the English football league system (Champ et al., 2020; Nesti & Sulley, 2014; Owusu & Gervis, 2016; Parker, 2001). Researchers have previously described academy environments as being macho-masculine and volatile (Cushion & Jones, 2006; Parker, 2001). Although these extreme descriptions are lessening, there still appears to be a legacy of this culture, with macho-masculine norms still observable in some academies (see Champ et al., 2020). Such masculine norms have been linked to the challenges associated to the integration of sport psychology within academy environments and the general resistance to sport psychology practitioners residing within the academy setting (Champ et al., 2020; Pain & Harwood, 2004).

The senior first team of the academy participating in this case study, Dock FC (pseudonym), competed within the Championship tier of the English football league at the time of the research and the academy itself had been classified by the EPPP as *category two* since the inauguration of the EPPP in 2012. The academy was (at the time of writing) split across two sites with the Foundation Phase (FP) and Youth Development Phase (YDP) training and playing at the academy site, whilst the U18 and U23s (Professional Development Phase; PDP) train at the senior first team training ground. Prior to the commencement of the current study, Dock FC academy did not have a sport psychology provision with coaches having received *ad hoc* and isolated in-house training-sessions on the area since the start of the EPPP (i.e., 2012).

At the time of the study, the COVID pandemic was occurring (Institute for Government, 2023). In Britain, several national and local lockdowns were observed, each of which directly impacted Dock FC academy. Throughout the lockdowns, players and coaches participated in online forms of delivery and support, with

players given individualised training plans to adhere to. Dock FC academy took the

opportunity to recommence training and fixtures when they were legally able to.

However, these opportunities came in small intervals as the country moved in and

out of lockdown throughout 2020 and 2021.

The Coaches

All full-time and part-time coaches at Dock FC academy were involved in the

sport psychology coach education and support programme. However, early into the

programme (post introductory workshops) the club's senior first team manager and

coaching staff were relieved of their duties, consequently leading to two participants

(coaches of the U23s) becoming Head Coach and Assistant Coach of the

professional first team. In turn, this led to several changes throughout the academy

with many staff moving to the age group above. Such changes are not uncommon

(i.e., see study one, Chapter Three) and are representative of the ever-changing

environment of elite sport and football talent development pathways. Furthermore,

two coaching personnel joined the academy mid-season. They were briefed on the

programme and tasked to review the recordings of the workshops conducted to date

and to read through the resources on each of the eight attributes. I then met with each

coach, face to face, to get them integrated into the programme. In total, 16 coaches

were involved in the programme to different extents, with nine full-time coaches

experiencing all elements of it, with seven of those nine agreeing to partake in the

social validation interviews at the end of the programme. Given that seven of the

participants did not complete the coach education and support programme, there

were missing data points for these participants and so they were omitted from the

final sample in order to make better sense of the efficacy and effectiveness of the

intervention programme itself (Cropley et al., 2021). All coaches were trained to a

minimum of a UEFA B Licence level. The participant characteristics and

qualifications of all coaches who has access to the programme are presented in Table

5. From the 16 coaches who participated, the mean number of years coaching was

10.5 years (SD= 5.7) with the average age of participants being 37.4 years

(SD=11.8).

Table 5

Profile of coaches involved in the education and support programme

Coach	Full or part-time	Years coaching	Highest UEFA Coaching Qualification[4]	Age	Position	Access all elements of programme?	Participated in social validation interviews?
Rich	FT	14	A	35	Head of coaching	Y	Y
Nick	FT	5	A	26	U12 coach	Y	Y
Jason	FT	12	A	32	U18 coach	Y	Y
Liam	FT	17	A	54	Head of FP	Y	Y
Mo	FT	9	A	29	Head of YDP	Y	Y
Leo	FT	10	A	34	U16 coach	Y	Y
Chris	FT	12	A	35	U23 coach	Y	Y
Mike	FT	16	A	56	U18 coach	Y	N
Adam	FT	3	B	22	U13 coach	Y	N
Matt	PT	2	B	24	U10 coach	N	N
Rory	PT	6	B	28	U13 coach	N	N
Connor	PT	24	B	63	U12 coach	N	N
Alister[5]	FT	14	Pro	47	1st team coach	N	N
Danny	FT	3	Pro	38	1st team coach	N	N
Jim	PT	6	A	34	Goalkeeper coach	N	N
Bob	PT	13	A	42	Head of goalkeeping	N	N

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[4] UEFA B, UEFA A, UEFA Pro license. UEFA Pro license is the highest certification.
[5] Alister and Danny were the U23 academy coaches but were promoted to the 1st team mid-way through the coach education and support programme.

The Players

At the time of the study, the academy had 174 contracted players ranging from eight years to 23 years old. All the players were indirectly involved in the study as a result of the coach education and support programme and the potential impact that it had upon coaching practices and proceeding interactions that coaches may have had with them. Players from the U12-U23 squads ($n = 126$) were invited to complete player surveys on four occasions throughout the programme as a source of feedback to the coaches to help inform their practice. Some players were also involved in the social validation player focus groups designed to gain the players' perspective on the impact that the coaching programme has had on their coaches, and in turn, their own psychological development. In total, three focus groups took place: an under 15s ($n = 7$), an under 16s ($n = 4$), and an under 18s ($n = 4$) group totalling 15 participating players. The participants were selected based upon their availability on the date of the scheduled focus groups, with the groups held at the academy training facility.

The Researcher

I, the lead author (Ph.D. researcher, who designed, led, and evaluated the coach education and support programme), have coached within EPPP category one, two, and three academies since the inception of the EPPP in 2012 and have held a UEFA B coaching licence for 12 years (at the time of writing). In addition, I previously led and contributed to qualitative research that has centred on coaches' understanding of athlete psychology and talent development, giving me an understanding of what might work in practice in the context of academy football when seeking to integrate research findings (e.g., studies one and two of this thesis) into an applied intervention (e.g., Kingston et al., 2020; Wixey & Kingston, 2021,

2023; Wixey et al., 2021). Finally, the current Ph.D. programme was conceived primarily because of experiences I had playing in a football academy as a child and later work as an academy coach (see Reflective Epilogue, Chapter Seven). My background gave me some degree of capital within the participating academy setting, helping me to gain entry, build trust, intervene with the coaches, interact with all stakeholders in accord with the cultural normal of the academy and football more widely, and navigate some of the micropolitics associated with intervening within an established organisation (e.g., staff conflict; cf. McCalla & Fitzpatrick, 2016; Mellalieu, 2017).

Procedure

The aim of this study was to design, deliver, and evaluate a coach education and support programme with the purpose of improving the psychological development of academy players through coach practice. Specifically, the (intervention) programme aimed to help coaches acquire the knowledge and skills required to support player psychological development. Further, it was our intention to facilitate the integration of player psychological attribute development into coaches' daily practices, interactions, and discourse. This section provides an overview of the intervention programme and its components followed by details on the methods of data collection and data analysis.

Preparation for the Programme

In preparation for the programme, the first author met with the academy's Head of Sport Science, Head of Coaching, and Head of Academy on three occasions to discuss the intention of the programme and its implementation. These meetings directed the delivery and features of the coach education and support programme, which also had to navigate the lockdown rules and regulations of the COVID

pandemic at the time. Ideas for implementation were discussed and agreed upon. A primary intention was that the programme must be realistic, fitting with the day-to-day practices of the academy and could be continued beyond the current programme of research (Ely et al., 2020). One example of such a discussion was on the integration of psychological attributes into the coaching curriculum[6] (see Harwood & Anderson, 2015; Mitchell et al., 2022; Steptoe et al., 2019). However, this was decided against as the Head of Academy did not want to be overly prescriptive in the planning of coaching sessions and thus it was decided that the emphasis should be on the participating coaches to integrate psychological attribute development strategies into their own planning and delivery. This allowed for a more nuanced application of the intervention programme in which coaches had autonomy to integrate psychological development in accord with the needs of their players.

The Coach Education and Support Programme

In designing the coach education and support programme, the intention was to strike a "balance point" between intervening for research and an intervention for real-world application (Ely et al., 2020, p. 13). Such consideration was deemed to be important to give the academy the best opportunity to continue the psychological support beyond the completion of the research project. We believed this to be an essential aspect of the intervention. Further, the components of the programme (e.g., workshops) were designed and delivered using the principles of basic psychological needs theory (BPNT) with the intention of positively affecting the participant coaches' self-determined behaviours (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Deci & Ryan, 1987). According to BPNT, the satisfying of the three basic needs: autonomy, competence,

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[6] An academy may have a documented plan for developing technical and tactical aspects of performance (e.g., passing, shooting, counterattacking). A scheduled plan for improvement is often referred to as the coaching curriculum.

and relatedness, will in turn lead to greater self-determined behaviours (Deci &
Ryan, 1985; 2000). Although the measure of coaches' self-determined behaviour and
psychological needs sat outside of the aims of the current study, it was still deemed a
useful framework to guide the design of the programme, substantiated by its
previous inclusion within coach education programmes (e.g., 5Cs, Harwood, 2008;
Empowering Coaching[TM], Duda, 2013). Therefore, in designing the programme, the
level of autonomy (an individual's ownership over their development), opportunity
for demonstrating competence (an individual's perceived capabilities), and
relatedness (an individual's sense of belonging) were considered (Bartholomew et
al., 2011; Deci & Ryan, 2000).

   Components and Procedural Timeline. The programme consisted of
several components: workshops, observations, observation feedback, player
feedback, and resources. Alongside the components of the programme, different
methods of data collection were also employed. Table 6 provides the timeline for the
programme and the introduction of each component and data collection.

Table 6

Procedural timeline of the coach education and support programme

	Workshops	Coaching session observations	Coaching session feedback	Player survey feedback	Player focus groups (social validation)	Coach interviews (social validation)	Other components/Data collection
April	Workshop 1						Packs available
May	Workshop 2						
June	Workshop 3						Meeting 1 RP* - Milestone 1
July	Off-Season	Off-Season	Off-Season	Off-Season	Off-Season	Off-Season	Lanyards available RP* - Milestone 2
August	Workshop 4						Meeting 2
September		▓		▓			RP* - Milestone 3
October		▓	▓				Meeting 3
November	Workshop 5	▓	▓				MDT Workshop
December		▓	▓	▓			RP* - Milestone 4
January		▓	▓				
February		▓	▓				Meeting 4
March		▓	▓				
April			▓	▓			
May							RP* - Milestone 5
June					▓	▓	
July	Off-Season	Off-Season	Off-Season	Off-Season	▓	▓	
August						▓	

*RP: reflective practice
Dark Grey Cell: Period in which the component of the coach education programme took place

Physical Resources. From initial discussions with the Head of Sport Science and Head of Academy it was apparent that the academy had very limited resources to support the psychological development of players, or to support coaching staff in attending to this endeavour (beyond that needed to obtain EPPP category two status). A secondary goal, to support the longevity of the provision, was to create tangible resources for coaches that could, therefore, be used beyond the research, becoming artefacts for the academy. Findings from studies one and two of this thesis (Chapters Three and Four) informed the creation of eight pdf *packs*, one for each psychological attribute (see study one- Chapter 3). Packs were 10-11 pages long and contained: the definition of the attribute, general strategies to develop it, specific coaching strategies to develop it, adaptive player behaviours which indicate a player has developed that attribute, and potential challenges in developing the attribute (see Appendix K for an example).

Prior to the creation of the packs, the lead researcher (Ph.D. researcher, Wixey) conducted three workshops with the under 12, under 14, and under 18 squads at the academy. The players were presented with the general coaching strategies to develop each psychological attribute, the description of each attribute, and the player behaviours that demonstrate its successful development. Players were asked to rank the coaching strategies in order of perceived effectiveness, from highest to lowest. The coaching strategies were then presented in the packs in the order according to the player's rankings, enabling coaches to employ strategies with greater confidence of potential impact (Appendix K). The packs were also stored on the Hudl platform (an online repository used by the academy) for immediate and "easy" access. The resource packs were continually referenced throughout the

programme (e.g., workshops, email communications, informal discussions, observation feedback).

A further written resource was provided to coaches in the form of *cue cards*. Four key coaching strategies for each attribute were presented on a laminated cue card (approximately the size of a business card). These eight laminated cards were then stored in a transparent lanyard wallet and given to coaches to take out onto the training pitch with them, to encourage "in-action" reflection and behaviour change (Schön, 1987).

Workshops. Workshops have been a common feature of coach education programmes (e.g., Harwood et al., 2008; Mclaren et al., 2015; Mitchell et al., 2022; Smith & Smoll, 2009). Workshops that have been well-received by coaching participants are characterised as being coach-facing, discursive, informative, and applicable (e.g., Diment, 2014; Larsen et al., 2014; Steptoe et al., 2019). Consequently, those delivered in the current study adopted features of previously successful workshops reported in the literature. The lead researcher's own experience as a teacher of ten-years within further and higher education also helped to inform the preparation and delivery of workshops.

All workshops were held online and delivered through Microsoft Teams. This was done for several reasons: (a) COVID restrictions that prevented face-to-face meetings at periods throughout the research; (b) to offer a remote version of support, owing to the current trend of part-time, rather than full-time, sport psychologists housed within academies; (c) to enable the workshops to be recorded for further viewing and as evidence to contribute toward any EPPP audit; and (d) to make them available to as many coaches as possible (i.e., not all coaches could, logistically, attend face-to-face meetings). Although a coaches' knowledge is often

gauged by the level of formal qualifications they have, much of their learning comes in informal situations (Cushion & Nelson, 2014). Learning in informal settings occurs through discussions with colleagues, in practice, experiential, or self-directed learning; with the absence of a curriculum (Cushion & Nelson, 2014; Leymre et al., 2007; Whitehead et al., 2016). Informal learning activities are suggested to be of higher impact than formal means of learning demonstrating their importance to a coach's lifelong learning and continued development (Cropley et al., 2015; Jones et al., 2004; Nelson et al., 2006). Thus, given that the workshops were to be delivered online, they were designed to facilitate informal modes of learning (e.g., mentoring, practical coaching experience, interactions with other coaches; Nelson et al., 2006).

Five workshops were delivered in total: an introduction to the programme; two workshops that introduced four attributes each; one on overlapping attribute development strategies; and a final workshop on sharing good practice. Each workshop lasted for approximately 45 minutes and was intended to be interactive. To maximise the interaction, coaches were asked to feedback to open questions using the 'thumbs-up' emoticon on the main screen or in response to written questions in the chat function, or indeed respond in writing in the chat. The coaches were split randomly into virtual 'break-out' rooms, a function on Microsoft Teams whereby participants will leave the main meeting and be moved to a smaller 'splinter-meeting'. Questions were then sent to all breakout rooms for the coaches to discuss. Coaches then returned to the main meeting to feedback on their discussions. They then went into a new breakout room to discuss a new topic with a new group of randomly assigned participants. Before recording, all coaches were asked if they were happy for the meeting to be recorded and with it being stored on the academy's

Hudl page. The breakout rooms were not recorded due to limitations in the recording function on Microsoft Teams.

Player Surveys. To help monitor progress, and to provide a concurrent source of feedback for coaches, all academy players were asked to complete a survey at three points across the season (see Table 6). The survey asked players to rate themselves across the eight attributes, rating the impact that their coach had upon developing each attribute and the coaching strategies that contributed most positively to their development. Players scored the coaches' impact on a scale of -5 to +5 to account for the potentially negative impact that a coach could have on a player's psychological development (see Cropley et al., 2020). The survey was sent to the parents of players under the age of 18 and directly to players over the age of 18 and a two-week window was given to complete it. Reminders to complete the survey were sent by the Head of Sport Science via email. In an attempt to reduce any biases, or feeling of pressure, coaches were asked not to remind players to complete the surveys. After the deadline closed, results were analysed and a summary of the squad's average score per attribute, along with the preferred coaching strategies, was fed back to the participating coaches (Appendix M). Responses were separated into clusters of age groups (e.g., U12, U13, U14 player responses were clustered together), to provide more age-specific feedback. Coaches were provided with a spreadsheet that summarised the anonymised responses with colour-coded responses which illustrated the perceived strength of the impact of their coaching strategies on the development of an attribute. For example, if a player felt that the strategy: *encourage you to further develop your strengths* had a "highly positive impact" on confidence it was coloured in dark green; enabling coaches to, quickly, view the most impactful strategies (see Appendix Q). A summary of responses were also

provided which provided age-group cluster average scores, highlighting two attributes to target amongst those players with actions. This then prompted further informal discussions between the coach and the lead researcher, and informed comments in the video analysis of a coach's session (using Hudl, see "Observations").

The player surveys were intended to be a component of the coach education programme giving feedback to coaches to inform their practice. The response rate for the surveys were relatively low (survey one, $n = 48$; survey two $n = 15$; survey three $n = 5$) and thus were appropriate to use as feedback for coaches only, rather than any measure of the coach education and support programme. There were two factors that, potentially, contributed toward the low response rate. First, the survey was completed online, which despite this being a common means of capturing survey data (Wu et al., 2022), the players had been subjected to an unprecedented amount of online learning or activities in response to the COVID pandemic, whether directed by their school or the academy. As such, the volume of online engagement may have thwarted their interest in completing the survey. Second, all-male samples typically have lower response rates than all-female samples, therefore the response rate was likely to be low for this survey (Wu et al., 2022).

Observations. Video-recorded coaching sessions (also containing audio of coach-player interactions) were observed and analysed to provide feedback to coaches on their integration of coaching strategies to support the psychological development of their players. Coaching observations have been a common, and well revered, means of supporting coaches to develop their practice (e.g., Cushion & Townsend, 2018; Wadsworth et al., 2020). The intention of the observations in the current intervention was to provide qualitative feedback to coaches to provoke

further reflection-on-practice (Cropley et al., 2018). As part of their normative practices and the EPPP regulations, the participating academy required coaches to conduct two video-recorded training sessions per season, which are assessed by the Head of Coaching. Unfortunately, due to the COVID pandemic, the observations were delayed, and the Head of Coaching's priority was to have one recorded observation of training per coach across the season. Consequently, these recordings were used as part of our coach education and support programme. In total 11 coaches were observed and given feedback by the lead researcher.

Video recordings were uploaded by the coach to the Hudl platform with the Head of Coaching, Head of Sport Science, and the lead researcher 'tagged' on the video for access. The lead researcher observed the session and clipped (for a maximum of one minute) instances within the session where the coach demonstrated behaviours that supported the psychological development of players. Each clip was supported with a comment explaining the coaching strategy and the psychological attribute it would help contribute towards developing. These clips were then 'tagged' by their psychological attribute (e.g., resilience) and then shared to all coaches, creating an archive of best practice clips for the academy coaches (see Wadsworth et al., 2020). Coaches were then able to quickly access clips on a desktop or mobile application, providing a user-friendly resource to coaches. The lead researcher also highlighted missed opportunities for coaches to influence player psychological development. However, only the coach and the Head of Coaching were tagged into those clips; helping to inform future coaching targets. In total 153 clips were created, shared, and utilised by participating coaches during the coach education and support programme.

Though previous research has opted for live observations (e.g., Kingston et al., 2020; Mitchell et al., 2022), the ability for the lead researcher to pause the video and reflect on the behaviours demonstrated by both coaches and players helped to provide comments of an, arguably, higher quality. All coaches received a one-page summary document outlining the extent to which they promoted each attribute within that particular session with two attributes being highlighted as areas to develop along with coaching strategies to support the development of these attributes in the players.

Organisational Changes. Ely et al. (2020) discussed how methodical designs of interventions may actually broaden the research-to-practice gap, with complicated, overly structured, under reported, and time-consuming methodologies contributing towards this. Thus, we endeavoured to provide user-friendly and realistic organisational changes to help embed sport psychology (as a provision) into the academy, and in doing so, support coach and player development. To do this, and to facilitate the coach-intervention, the Performance Management Application (PMA) system used by the academy was edited to include information concerning the eight psychological attributes identified in study one (Chapter 3). The PMA system was introduced with the commencement of the EPPP in 2012 and is a platform for planning, monitoring, self-reflection, and feedback (The Premier League, 2011; 2022). Coaches at the participating academy are required to plan sessions via the PMA. Therefore, a drop-down menu was added to focus their planning for the psychological development of their players and participant coaches would need to select the psychological attribute they aimed to target for that session. Similarly, drop down menus with the eight psychological attributes spotlighted through this programme of research and this intervention study were added to the

match day review template and six-week reviews of players. The six-week player reviews were part of the academy curriculum with players being tasked to present to their respective coaches on their performance over the last six-weeks, while coaches provide subjective scores regarding each players' performance across technical, tactical, physical, and psychological areas. The eight psychological attributes were integrated into this process and coaches were asked to review their players across each of the eight attributes.

Data Collection Methods

A case study is a framework in which different data collection methods are employed (Larsen et al., 2014; Yin, 2009). The current study intended to utilise qualitative means to assess the aims of the project which included: collection of artefacts, social validation coach experience interviews, social validation player experience focus groups, and researcher reflections.

Researcher Reflections. The lead researcher became an active agent within the case study adopting a role that can be aligned to participant as observer, whereby the "the researcher's observer activities, which are known to the group, are subordinate to the researcher's role as participant" (Mariam, 1998, p. 101). The lead researcher was positioned as *participant-as-observer*, rather than *observer-as-participant* (i.e., where research agendas are prioritised over their role as participant) to increase trust between himself and coaching participants in a bid to improve the working alliance with coaches (cf. Mitchell et al., 2022). In this way, the lead researcher was able to demonstrate that the programme was a priority over research to reduce the theory-to-practice divide that can come as a result of conducting a research study in applied settings (Ely et al., 2020).

In the role of participant-observer the lead author systematically reflected throughout the programme (see Table 6). According to Cropley et al. (2018) reflective practice facilitates the assessment of an individual's experiences, transforming those experiences into learning, which in turn, develops our applied practice. Reflective practice is recognised as an important feature in supporting sport psychology practitioners to develop practice-based-knowledge and thus helped support the delivery of the 14-month coach education programme in the current study (Cropley et al., 2020). Field notes on "anything that is meaningful…no matter how big or small" (Champ, 2018, p. 116) were made throughout the programme. This may have included the logging general observations, informal conversations, and formal meetings. In the first instance, a mental note was taken which was then written up into my field-note log within a few hours (away from the academy). In the initial write up of events, my field notes, (as best I could) did not include interpretations, rather I just described *what* had happened. The field notes were then reflected upon once the descriptions were saturated. Reflective practice took place concurrently throughout the programme and included with the lead researcher engaging in cycles of reflection mirroring the process proposed by Gibbs (1988): description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion, and action planning. Reflections were annotated within the field notes in the first instance (see Appendix N). To help manage the time pressures associated with administration of reflective practice, five "milestones" of reflection were scheduled in which the research team met and discussed the programme (cf. Champ et al., 2020). These discussions triggered greater, and deeper, reflective practice for the lead researcher who then recorded his own reflections in written format.

Social Validation: Coach Experiences - Interview Guide. In line with the ontological position of our study, the coach education and support programme was evaluated through qualitative semi-structured, social validation interviews (see Page & Thelwell, 2013). Social validation is a method that has been used previously within literature evaluating the success of coach intervention programmes (e.g., Cook & Fletcher, 2017; Downham & Cushion, 2020; Godfrey & Winter, 2017), and allowed us to explore the impact of our intervention programme on coaching practice and player development. Interviews were deliberately chosen as a method due to their interactive characteristics, which enable the exploration of an individual's worldview (Smith & Sparkes, 2017; Potrac et al., 2014). Of primary importance was the co-construction of knowledge regarding the coach education and support programme, with the intention to know the subjective experience of those participating to inform future and better psychological support for academy coaches (Potrac et al., 2014). Given the limited exposure coaches have had on the topic of sport psychology to date (Dean et al., 2022), interviews were seen as a powerful tool to understand what is meaningful to the coach; crucial information that may serve to bridge the divide between coaches and the field of sport psychology moving forward (Smith & Sparkes, 2017).

To explore and construct knowledge, the interview guide (Table 8) flowed from open-ended questions (*doxa*) to probes, aimed at challenging coaches to justify their opinions (*episteme*, Smith & Sparkes, 2017). Due to access and availability, seven coaches (out of the nine who fully completed the intervention programme) participated in the social validation interviews designed to critically evaluate the coach education and support programme they had participated within over the previous 14 months. Each participant had experienced all aspects of the programme

and were all full-time members of staff at the participating academy, their individual

profiles can be found in Table 7.

Table 7

Social validation: coaches' experience - participant profiles

Participants (pseudonyms)	Position	Coaching Qualifications	Age (years)	Interview Length (mins)	Years Coaching
Rich	Head of Coaching	UEFA A Advanced Youth Award	35	63	14
Nick	Lead U12 Coach	UEFA A Advanced Youth Award	26	68	5
Jason	Lead U18 Coach	UEFA A Advanced Youth Award ECAS[7]	32	68	12
Liam	Head of FP	UEFA A Advanced Youth Award	54	74	17
Mo	Head of YDP	UEFA A Advanced Youth Award	29	114	9
Leo	Lead U16 Coach	UEFA A Advanced Youth Award	34	98	10
Chris	Lead U23 Coach	UEFA A Advanced Youth Award	35	59	12

Supported by the creation of an interview guide, the social validation coach

interviews commenced with introductory questions aimed at gathering background

information on the coach (e.g., how many years have you been coaching in an

academy under the EPPP policy?). Four sections followed the introductory

questions: (a) the value placed upon sport psychology as a result of the programme,

(b) changes in coach behaviour and impacts on players as a consequence of the

programme, (c) the specific psychological attributes, and (d) an evaluation of the

programme (see Table 7). All questions were open to allow the participants to

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[7] Elite coaching apprenticeship scheme (ECAS). See https://www.premierleague.com/youth/coaching

discuss their subjective opinions and each was followed by a series of probes, facilitating greater elicitation of knowledge. The interview also included a task, which was to order the eight attributes from those they felt needed to be developed first, followed by attributes they felt should be developed later. The attributes were written on laminated paper and the coach was tasked to physically move the attributes into position. This task provided a platform for discussion during section C of the interview guide. All interviews were conducted in a one-to-one setting in a private room at the academy training facility, were audio-recorded in their entirety, and subsequently transcribed verbatim resulting in a total of 109 pages of single-spaced text.

Social Validation: Player Experiences - Focus Group Guide. Focus groups are an effective method to obtaining qualitative data from a group of individuals on a particular subject matter (Munroe-Chandler, 2005). This qualitative method facilitates the discussion of a topic area, helping to increase understanding and gain new knowledge (Gould et al., 1999). Player focus groups were conducted to triangulate the effectiveness of the coach education and support programme; getting the players' perspectives on each of the eight psychological attributes and the extent to which they felt their coach had developed these over the course of the intervention period (one entire football season).

Table 8

Social validation: Coaches' experience - interview guide

Section	Primary Question	Probes
Section A: Value Placed Upon Sport Psychology	Talk to me about the value you place upon the psychological development of players within youth football academies.	
	To what extent has the sport psychology programme increased the value placed upon psychological development of [case study] Academy players?	
	How has this programme contributed towards communication, between coaches, about the psychological development of players at the academy?	Between coaches and parents? Between coaches and players? players to player
Section B: how the programme has contributed towards a change in their coaching behaviours and impact on players	To what extent has the sport psychology coaching programme contributed towards any changes in your coaching behaviours related to the psychological development of your players?	How have you altered your behaviours towards a player in order to develop their psychological attributes?
	Can you provide examples of where you have developed (or adapted) your coaching practice in order to improve the psychological attributes of a player.	
	Tell me about which attributes you feel you have been able to develop in your players over the last season.	Why is this? Can you provide examples?
Section C: The Specific Attributes	To kick off this section, I would like you to rank order the attributes from the one that you felt you were able to develop the best in your players, to the one you felt you developed least in your players. starting with the attribute you felt you developed the most in your players, what factors contributed towards your successful development of this?	Did any resources from the education programme support this? Were you targeting this attribute as one to develop? At team level, or individual level?
	Moving to the next two attributes you have ranked, why did you feel that you also developed them successfully within players this year?	Did any resources from the education programme support this? Were you targeting this attribute as one to develop? At team level, or individual level?
	On the other side of this, you have the [insert attribute listed bottom] as the one you felt you developed the least in your players. Why was this?	
	You also felt that [attribute] and [attribute] were two attributes you did not develop as well in players. Again, why did you feel this was?	
	Finally, the remaining attributes [insert names of last two], you ranked in 4th and 5th place. Why was this?	

Table 8 continued …

Social validation: Coaches' experience - interview guide

Section D: Evaluation of the Programme	This programme was designed to educate coaches on how to develop desired psychological attributes in academy players. To what extent do you believe this aim was met?	Can you tell me about the elements you thought contributed towards this aim.
	What features of the education programme helped you the most as a coach to support the psychological development of your players?	Why was this?
	What elements of the programme were not as useful in helping you to support the psychological development of your players?	Why was this?
	Is there anything you would have added, or liked to have done more, during the programme to help you support your players' psychological development further?	

Table 9

Social validation: Players' experience – focus group guide

Section	Primary Question	Probes
Section A: Interactive task	As a group, could you put these into an order from the one(s) you feel you have developed the most this season, to the one you have not developed as much.	
Section B: Discussion of each attribute	Starting with the attribute you have ranked as the most developed, how have your coaches helped to develop each of these this season?	What things/behaviours/actions have you noticed your coaches do, which has contributed towards developing this attribute in you?
		What things/behaviours/actions has your coach done to develop this attribute in you?
		What things/behaviours/actions have had the biggest impact?
		When has your coach helped you developed this, at training, during games, or elsewhere?
		Can you provide examples of when your coach has discussed this attribute with you?
Section C: Summary	Is there anything that any of you wish to clarify or add?	

Each focus group commenced with introductions, with the researcher introducing himself and the aim of the session and then the players introducing themselves. The participants then completed an interactive task to rank order the eight psychological attributes from the ones they believed their coaches had developed the most in them that season, to the least (Table 9). Laminated print outs of the attribute along with its definition were placed on the table and the participants physically ranked each attribute. This task was designed to: (a) get the group talking and interacting, (b) as a basis to drive the remainder of the discussion, and (c) to reduce any potential tedium of focus groups. The lead researcher then asked the same questions for each attribute following the order ranked by the participants: (i) *tell me why you placed this attribute here?* (ii) *Can you provide me examples of when your coach tried to develop this attribute?* (iii) *What has your coach done that has worked the best?* Follow up-probes were used to direct attention to participants who had not had an opportunity to talk about a particular attribute (e.g., *[name], what are your thoughts?*). The length of the focus groups ranged from 21-35 minutes (M= 26.3; SD = 6.2). The timeframe to conduct the focus groups was governed by the academy's schedule. Focus groups were audio-recorded in their entirety and subsequently transcribed verbatim resulting in a total of 23 pages of single-spaced text.

Data Analysis and Methodological Rigour

All data generated from the social validation procedures (coach interviews and player focus groups), and the researcher field notes and reflections, were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) with an *experiential orientation* (see Braun & Clarke, 2022). This approach ties together our philosophical assumptions, research aims, and methods as it emphasises the illustration of the

multiple realities of participants by encouraging the researcher(s) to act as a resource, playing an active role in the analysis through a considered interaction with their data (participants' experiences) and engaging with the analysis process in a reflexive manner (Byrne, 2022). Data (e.g., researcher field notes and reflections) collected throughout the case study were analysed separately. The data analysis of the field notes and reflections occurred throughout the programme. Due to the field notes, and ensuing reflections, being handwritten the thematic analysis of these data was also conducted by hand. The social validation interviews and focus groups took place at the end of the programme, but the individual transcripts were analysed concurrently. Recordings of both coach interviews and player focus groups were transcribed verbatim and the NVIVO software was utilised to facilitate the thematic analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2021; 2022; Byrne, 2021). The aim of this study was to evaluate the sport psychology coach education and support programme delivered to coaches at the academy. Therefore, RTA was utilised for its facilitative role in constructing knowledge with the agents who experienced the programme directly (coaches and the researcher) and indirectly (players).

When analysing each of the data, Braun and Clarke's (2021) six steps for conducting thematic analysis were enacted: (i) familiarization with the data, (ii) generation of codes, (iii) searching of themes, (iv) reviewing of themes, (v) naming themes, and (vi) producing the report. The generation of codes for the interview, focus group, and researcher reflections data included both semantic level and latent levels of coding, whereby the authors identified and discussed the explicit and the implicit meanings of the data (see Byrne, 2022). This mobilised and facilitated the searching for, and naming of, themes in the data; a process that intends to evoke a greater narrative (Mihas, 2023, p. 302). This phase was crucial to informing our

knowledge on the coach education programme as we wanted to acknowledge and represent the implicit experiences of the programme to help better inform sport psychology provisions in football academies moving forward.

Methodological rigor was enhanced in two ways. First, and similar to the work of Champ et al. (2020), the analysis of the researcher reflections was shared with a selection of members of the Dock FC (the academy director and head of sport science), who were deemed to be able to offer a different, yet meaningful, interpretation of my reflections. For example, after one workshop I had noted that some coaches had joined on their phones and were in their cars (albeit stationary). However, my own inferences of this: *that the workshops were not valued and that those coaches were not as invested as others*, was adjusted after meeting with the academy director and head of sport science. They said that this was: (a) rather normal practice, (b) a good solution to the academy being split over two sites, (c) that they [the coaches] were about to leave for an over-night trip due to an away fixture, and (d) that the ability for a coach education and support programme to be delivered online is appreciated by coaches as it gives staff greater flexibility, and in-part contributes to a better work/life balance. The process of member reflections regularly challenged my reflections and provide greater meaning, increase credibility, and ultimately present more helpful information for practitioners (Tracy, 2010). Second, my supervisory team acted as "critical friends" throughout the data analysis of the researcher reflections and social validation coach interviews and player focus group (see Burke, 2017). This process occurred within the fourth stage of RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2021), the reviewing of themes. As outlined by Braun and Clarke (2021) the stages of RTA are recursive, and thus the (re)interpretations that occurred because of discussions with the critical friends led to the refinement of

codes and then themes. These processes guided the creation of a meaningful and credible account of the sport psychology coach education and support programme at Dock FC.

<div align="center">**Results**</div>

From an analysis of the data collected and triangulated within this case study, the coach education and support programme delivered in the participating academy was positively received by coaches. Further, findings indicate that the intervention had a positive impact upon coaching practice, with some aspects being identified as more impactful than others. Based on the triangulated data, a number of programme strengths and areas for development were constructed; knowledge that can support the delivery of sport psychology programmes in the future. As a way of managing the breadth and depth of data collected to evaluate the effectiveness of the coach education and support programme, this section will present the findings from the social validation procedures (e.g., coach interviews, player focus groups) and the first author's key reflections separately.

Social Validation: Coaches' Experiences

Through RTA of participating coach social validation interviews, three general themes concerning the effectiveness of the intervention programme were constructed: *strengths of the programme*; *challenges and barriers to the psychological development of players*; and *the current status of sport psychology* (at the academy) post-intervention. A summary of these findings is presented in Table 10.

Strengths of the Coach Education and Support Programme

The category, *strengths of the programme*, was underpinned by four themes: (i) workshops were productive and useful, (ii) resources supported coaches, (iii)

improved the player psychological development practices of coaches, and (iv) organisational and cultural changes made to the academy.

Workshops were Productive and Useful. The workshops were, generally, well received by the coaches with participants indicating the benefit of having a sole focus on psychology during the workshops with this approach recognised as being "more influential than being tagged on for some ten minutes at the end [of another meeting]" (Chris). Having *the workshops being solely around psychology was helpful* to the coaches was not only novel for the coaches e.g.: "when we had the workshops that were centred around the psych [sic] elements, it was good because we don't normally share ideas on psych only" (Jason), but the workshops (and use of breakout rooms) prompted greater collaboration and problem-solving amongst the coaching staff. For example, it encouraged them to discuss the psychological challenges players are, or have, faced in different phases of the academy: "as it gives you a better understanding about the barriers they are finding at the top end [professional development phase], [and] how we can better prepare them in my phase [youth development phase]" (Jason). Jason indicated the merits of having all coaches involved in the discussions, and indeed how having had the under 23 coach (who shortly after became the 1st team manager) in the discussion made it memorable:

> When we had the workshops, when we had other coaches sharing their experiences of the different attributes, I think that was good … I think the manager was in there at the time, do you remember that one? He was the under 21 manager at the time but obviously now [sic] first team manager. (Jason)

The decision to deliver workshops online (even beyond COVID lockdown restrictions), in an interactive manner driven by coach discussions, was recognized as merits of the workshops. Driving the workshops through coach discussion was appreciated by the participating coaches and it appeared to facilitate greater interest in, and willingness to, share approaches to support the psychological development of their players, for example: "it increased our awareness and our knowledge…I had a feel for what other people think… I think this is the best way to develop emotional control, can I speak to someone to see if I am missing something?" (Mo). The autonomy granted to coaches within the workshops may have contributed to greater self-determined behaviours (related to the psychological development of players) outside of the workshops. Indeed, Mo indicated that the workshops did catalyse further discussions on the psychological development of players in the staff room (without the presence of the lead researcher): "the conversations we are able to have with the [coaching] staff in the breakout rooms [on Microsoft Teams] extended into the office to be discussed in more detail".

Table 10

Themes constructed from coach social validation interviews

General Theme	Sub-Themes	*Codes*
Strengths of the coach education programme	Workshops were productive and useful	Workshop driven by coach discussions
		Having online workshop was beneficial
		Having a sole focus on psychology
		Workshops were timed well
		The workshops prompted more discussion in the staff room
		Lead researcher being part of staff helped relevance of workshops
	Resources supported coaches	Written documents were helpful
		Provided a framework for coaches to apply
		Hudl was a familiar and effective platform
		Access to an archive of good practice clips available to view
		Having someone designated to psych beneficial
		One to one conversation about observation valuable
		Useful and interesting to receive feedback from a psychological perspective
		Observation summary gave the head of coaching a new lens to reflect through
		Highlighting the psychological side in isolation hits home more
	Improved the player psychological development practices of coaches	Programme contributed to changes in coach behaviour
		Programme affected coach's focus and cognitions
		Players benefited from the programme
		Higher frequency of authentic positive feedback
		Attributes that coaches feel they support well
		Greater support for players during periods of challenge or adversity
		Coaches incorporate greater psychological support or focus into their discourse
		Improved interpersonal conversations with players
		Use of video analysis has improved attributes in players
		Coach uses practice design to develop psychological attributes
		More effective goal setting and support of goals
		General strategies that coaches have had success with

Table 10 continued …

Themes constructed from coach social validation interviews

	Organisational and cultural changes made to the academy as a result of the programme	This was the first-time psychology has been a focus at the academy
		Programme impacted playing up and organisation of mixed squads
		Psychology now features prominently on the PMA
		Programme influenced organisational changes
		Coaches assessing players' mentality
		Coaches discussing psychological development with players
		Programme has impacted the culture
		Stakeholders at the academy using the same language
		Increased expectations of psychological development
Barriers and challenges to the psychological development of players	Barriers and challenges to the programme	Coaches unable to learn all the material
		Lanyards were not appropriate to use
		Challenges with developing specific attributes
	General challenges to developing player mentality	Demands of the academy contribute towards psychological issues
		Complex and individualised player issues
		Priority is on the technical and tactical area
Status of sport psychology post-programme at the academy	The psychological development of players is valued	Psychological development important for wider life
		Coaches are open, enthused and accountable for psychological development
		Sport psychology support is important
		Psychology underpins technical tactical and physical corners
		The programme has increased value placed on sport psychology
		Players recognise importance of mentality
		Mentality key determinant of success
		Coaches want to learn more about sport psychology
	Gaps or further coaching development needs	Less developed attributes
		Lack of reinforcement or follow up from coaches
		Lack of knowledge
		Coaches not as confident in developing psychological attributes
		Want full time sport psychology support

Resources Helped Support Coaches. Resources were provided to coaches at the start of the programme (e.g., information *packs*) but also concurrently throughout the programme (e.g., lanyards; player survey feedback). Throughout the interviews coaches were clear that the resources provided to them at the start (e.g., information *packs*) and concurrently throughout the intervention programme (e.g., lanyards; player survey feedback) were beneficial in supporting: (a) their understanding of the relevant psychological attributes; (b) their ideas about how best to support attribute development; and (c) a more explicit focus on player psychological development. For example, participants acknowledged, "to see a member of staff I can relate to in an environment that I know, doing it [player psychological development] with a player who I also know. So, lots of context behind it, behind the examples… that was a real positive." (Mo), and " the booklets and the documents and everything I thought that was quite good" (Chris). Collectively, participants acknowledged that the resources *provided a framework to support the integration of psychological development into their practices.* Many of the participants highlighted the sharing of best practice through the Hudl repository of clips was particularly powerful in facilitating these outcomes. This is best summarised in the following quote:

> There have definitely been times where we have learned from each other. Like I said previously, I have looked at sessions and go yeah, I really like how you have challenged in there [during a drill], or I really like how you dropped that in there [when talking to players], I'm using that. Learning from each other, that's when they [the psychological attributes] start to embed. (Leo)

> I think that is where the coach support programme has been really effective

[sic] it is helping to highlight little anecdotes through clips, little moments

that we can go: "this is good for this" … that has been really helpful to try

and develop a library that you [sic] can go to. (David)

Indeed, participants indicated that storing these clips on a platform that they were

familiar with made the resource easy to access and utilise. While the visual resources

were considered as important support mechanisms to inform and prompt coach

behaviour (e.g., " having a set of criteria, it sounds very simplistic, but having set out

the criteria to structure things around." [Liam]), the coaches reported particularly

appreciating the player feedback via the *player surveys*. Specifically, coaches

detailed, " that was a real positive part of the coach education programme" (Rich),

and:

It came out in the player survey earlier in the season and they [under 15s]

were low on their confidence because they're second fiddle [to the under

16s]. We've got a squad of 34 players across the under 15 and under 16 so it's

a big squad. Of the 34, seven under 15s will play [in the under 16s]. But now

we try to get people to play across, we have 16 that play down and 15 is that

play up because then it shows that we are trying to say we see you as a

collective. (Jason).

I thought when you broke down the questionnaires [surveys] from the players

into more age specific targets, I quite liked that approach, so you knew where

the 15s, they were saying potentially there is opportunity here for emotional

control development. I think how we used that feedback was we tried to be

more bespoke in what we targeted in that age group. I felt this was quite

good. (David)

It was thought that receiving ongoing feedback was useful in helping coaches to ensure that they addressed the players' needs rather than following a scheme of work in systematic fashion. The example from Jason also highlighted how organizational-level changes (i.e., squad rotation) were informed by the resources provided as part of the sport psychology coach education programme.

Finally, coaches highlighted how they appreciated the coach observations and feedback to be conducted from a purely psychological perspective. For example, "What had the biggest impact on me was the filming and then the analysis of my own coaching practices …just look at it through that [psychological] lens…it was really powerful for me" (Mo). The coach observation and video clips of good practice appeared to be a refreshing perspective to the coaches as this exchange with Jason shows:

> Jason: There is being some positives impact in how you plan for player development… to reflect on their own delivery of some of those psych [sic] aspects as well.
>
> DW: And you've done that yourself?
>
> Jason: Yeah, I have, and obviously from the feedback from yourself, which I found quite interesting. Picking up on the things that, because I've obviously had a lot of coach mentoring from courses and through various heads of coaching here before, but it probably hasn't necessarily been from the lens of sport psychology…. I found that quite interesting because it gets you to maybe look at your coaching performance through a different lens.

Despite being one of the most certified coaches in the programme (UEFA A, Advanced Youth, and ECAS), Jason valued feedback from a sport psychology perspective and substantiated the researcher reflection that the academy coaches at

Dock FC were open to, and willing to invest effort into, the integration of coaching strategies to develop their players' psychological attributes. The programme appeared to further motivate Jason to continue to develop his practice, supporting his learning and development as an academy coach.

The positive feedback provided by participating coaches indicates that the sport psychology resources, and the way they were employed, in the coach education program are effective tools to utilize when supporting the academy coach to affect their practice of the psychological development in their players.

Improved the Player Psychological Development Practices of Coaches. The coach participants indicated that they had attempted to apply coaching strategies aimed at improving the psychological attributes of players, with coaches observing success after implementation. This theme was constructed from examples relating to greater consideration for methods to improve their players' psychological attributes ("I'm definitely more considered around you know no the way you intervene with certain players", Jason); increased interaction with players ("having more one-to-one chat with the players I think that was probably something I have looked out this pre-season and I thought have I spoken to everybody on a one-to-one basis?" Leo); greater and more authentic communication ("a lot of players will say I did this wrong I did this wrong but no find the good stuff so that's how we've done it and I think we've had some success with that", Mo); targeting of players to support individualised psychological needs ("actively listening to this child [who felt nervous] and then sort of going you need to feel it, feel it, make sure you feel the nervousness because this will be a chance to overcome it as well… that was nice", Nick); and changes to practice design to facilitate psychological development in

players ("it probably just opened up our eyes around that practice design…who goes where, how often do we mix, how often we keep them separate?" Rich).

The coaches felt they had made progress in developing their employment of coaching strategies to support the development of several psychological attributes with resilience, coping with the demands, strong work ethic, self-aware and reflective recognized as attributes being developed well amongst their players. Jason outlined how strong work ethic is a fundamental requirement of players at the academy, but also provided further insights into the value of developing this attribute in academy football players:

> We've been doing a lot of is a strong work ethic. So I think in terms of their behaviours that come and that we demand of the players like day and day out in every training session, that strong work ethic [is visible]. We know how important it [strong work ethic] is to maximising your development because you [a player] can have a lot of talent, you can have everything here for you, but without that strong work ethic I think it is hard for all of that to come together and for you to fulfil your potential. (Jason).

The coach education programme mobilized greater consideration and reflection amongst coaches in regard to the psychological development of players. However, coaches also indicated that they attempted to act upon their reflections too, indicating a positive intention to change their own coaching behaviours. For example:

> We looked at it and it is quite unique in that they [PDP players] can go out and play on loan. They go out on loan and then don't play for six months. So, we have to prepare them to be able to perform and it doesn't mean that they are always going to be brilliant, but it means that they have to be able to…
> You know you might come off the bench with 5-minutes to go and you might

have one shot. And so, can you make sure that that the one action you have, you do something…So we've tried to incorporate things, more stresses. We tried to do it at critical moments. We don't want to have a go at you [the player] over your behaviour on this, but let's put it into context. (Chris)

Indeed, during the interviews, coaches were not only reporting on what had happened over the course of the coach education programme, but were actively discussing how they are going to continue to develop their practice going forward, for example:

Yes … that is definitely a reflection from me in terms of going forward… I need to use pre-season…probably at the start leading into training, trying to pinpoint players and to speak to them on a personal level, during the session, before we've even started, just to learn a bit more about them and things like that. (Chris)

Organisational and Cultural Changes made to the Academy. Several organisational (i.e., systems) changes were made during the intervention to help embed the programme, and to make sport psychology part of the fabric of the academy. Coaches discussed how the coach education programme *was the first time psychology has been a focus at the academy* due to it having not been consistently prioritised previously, for example: "I think the psychological side of things was still not done enough or not enough emphasis is put on that" (Nick) and "we had different people talk to us about it but probably never had a consistent approach to it" (Rich). Rich even highlighted the club's previous use of the 5Cs framework and the challenges associated to that:

The common one is the 5Cs. It's all about the 5Cs. And there's nothing wrong with them, I'm not criticizing them for that [for being the dominant

framework used] but that is sort of the only thing that is ever stuck. I don't want to criticise every club but I will say, here, we never really got past that [the 5Cs] until now.

Rich's discussion on the 5Cs suggests that Dock FC previously had limited options to help frame the psychological support they provide to their players. The latter comment: "we never really got past that" is interpreted that the 5Cs were previously seen and thus all-encompassing at the time, but with hindsight (given the current coach education programme), it was potentially inhibiting as it did not fully capture the actual psychological needs for Dock FC players.

Participants outlined how, over the course of the education and support programme, psychological development had become a fundamental part of their integrated approach to coaching. This was recognized by participants during the interviews as coaches reported back on how the eight attributes had been integrated into the performance management application (PMA) system a platform used to communicate their match-day and review feedback to parents and players.

They are [psychological attributes] on a typical session plan, and each one looks the same now. You [coaches] have to fill in. [Coaches] Have [to] [sic] to fill in four corner objectives, so technical, tactical, psychological and social, and physical. What we did on that was create dropdowns so for all the themes but for psych specifically, so they [coaches] have to click on one of our attributes. What we did on that was create dropdowns for all the themes but for psychology, specifically… they have to click on one of our attributes and that I think what that does is encourage clarity [on what coaches want to develop]. So rather than click on eight attributes, you click one and think about what it is you are doing tonight and how can you influence it in your

practice. (Rich).

This intention (to plan in the psychological aims of training sessions or fixtures) was substantiated by Nick who described how he not only used the PMA to plan his development of certain attributes, but to ask his players to respond and feedback on their psychological performance each week. Nick highlighted how this was not done previously with this age group, indicating that this change was made as a consequence of the sport psychology coach education programme:

The age group I worked with did not do much PMA [performance management application; a platform for player reflections]. If you ask me what I am trying to do this year, these two would be at the front [self-aware and reflection and drive to achieve goals]. Drive to achieve goals is something I really want to work on this year and being a lot more explicit [with strategies] but then also the self-aware and reflective stuff. We are going to try and make sure that they [the players] do it every week, so the PMA reflections are done every week.

Alongside organisational changes, there was also indication that cultural changes occurred as a result of the sport psychology coach education programme. For example, coaches reported how they recognised and discussed players' psychological development with them:

He [player] has gone from crying and feeling nervous to then go on and play and doing really well against [the opposition] … I then to put that back to him and say "look at where you have come from [mentally] in a matter of three or four days it is huge" … just telling him where he has come from [mentally] to where he is now in three days was powerful. (Dean)

The summary interviews indicated, as a consequence of the programme and

the impact it has had at an organizational and cultural level, that Dock FC has a clear direction for the sport psychology provision at the academy, a finding captured by Leo: "if an auditor [EPPP auditor] came in and said what's your psychological provision I would say yeah this is what we do, this is how we do it, this is how it is. Yeah, it's been really good to give clarity around it."

Barriers and Challenges to Developing Players' Psychological Attributes

Accompanying the strengths of the coach education and support programme, the coaches discussed challenges they incurred in developing their players' psychological attributes. This general theme consisted of two sub-themes: *barriers and challenges to the programme*; and *general challenges to developing player mentality*, each with several sub-themes (see Table 10).

Barriers and Challenges to the Programme. This theme was constructed from two sub-themes that related directly to the implementation of the coach education programme: (i) coaches unable to learn all the material; (ii) lanyards were not appropriate to use, and (iii) challenges with developing specific attributes. Participant coaches highlighted the challenge associated with learning all of the material for each of the eight attributes. This finding is understandable given the breadth of attributes, the strategies linked to each, and the novelty of the programme. For example, "[If] we're trying to cover everything in the session [workshop], we are just taking little snippets of things and not everything in" (Rich). Additionally, the time pressures of being a modern-day academy coach may also have contributed towards this given the multitude of responsibilities coaches are expected to fulfil. Indeed, it was acknowledged that, "time is the biggest one [factor]… I focus on my sessions, I am so focused on that, I don't focus enough in reading [all] these psychological portfolios you have developed" (Nick).

One of the resources produced was a lanyard, which contained eight cue cards. Each laminated cue card was the size of a credit card and fitted into the wallet on the lanyard contenting the key coaching strategies to promote each attribute. Despite the intention to provide a resource that was user-friendly and would save time, it was reported that the use of such a resource in front of players could reduce their confidence in the coach. This is best summarised by the following insight:

> I've learnt my lesson before, so, when I'm out I'm not probably going to look at a lanyard … especially as they get older, players more sensitive to things in the environment. If you're stood there looking at a lanyard thinking: "how am I going to deal with Darren [player pseudonym] today, well I'll need to increase this or decrease this", I think it helps when they are 13 or 14 [years old] and you can have a quick look, but if they are older you sort of know they're watching as well, and players are looking for gaps in the fence and so if you give them to bigger gap in the fence, they'll take it. (Chris)

Finally, whilst the participating coaches reported the positive impact of the intervention on their knowledge and skills related to the development of players' psychological attributes, they also indicated that there were challenges associated with their attempts. From an analysis the social validation: coach experience interviews, there was no single attribute that all participating coaches struggled to develop, rather, coaches appeared to have specific attributes that they, as an individual, found more challenging to develop. For example, Mo described how "I don't think it's easy to show commitment to develop. You can reference it…but it's harder to develop commitment to develop as it's so wide ranging"; whereas Jason remarked: "I have lost count over the years where players are lacking confidence…they find it too challenging and want to try something different [i.e.,

leave the academy]; or Chris implied he found developing emotional control the most challenging: "when they lose that emotional control…it doesn't matter what you say to him all he can think about is the now". Although different coaches identified different attributes as challenging to develop, equally, all attributes were developed to some degree of success by coaches at Dock FC. With no identification of a single attribute that coaches struggled to develop (e.g., emotional control), the sharing of good practice and collaboration between coaches (e.g., during workshops or team meetings) would be a sensible approach to take: helping to resolve gaps in knowledge or application amongst coaches but simultaneously integrating sport psychology into the culture of the academy.

General Challenges to Developing Player Mentality. The social validation interviews also facilitated discussion on more general challenges the coaches encountered when attempting to develop players' psychological attributes. Whilst reviewing the education programme, the participant coaches readily spoke about the general challenges they have, and continue, to experience when supporting the psychological development of players. The coach's reflections are likely to have been prompted by their involvement in the sport psychology coach education programme and their attempts to affect the psychological development of players at Dock FC. As a consequence, three sub-themes were identified from the social validation interviews: (i) demands of the academy contribute towards psychological issues; (ii) complex and individualised player issues; and (iii) priority is on the technical and tactical areas.

Coaches indicated that the "natural" demands of the academy (e.g., pressure to perform), may have made supporting their players' psychological development more challenging. Coaches highlighted how the demands that academy players

faced (e.g., dual-career – academy and school), change with age, for example: "when you're younger you know you're going to get a 50% playing time…and then all of a sudden, things like start disappearing, and you travel 5 hours and not get on the pitch" (Chris), and, "you're being paid now to be here. You've got a lot more time in [at the training ground]. You know the demands of eating right, so you cannot go to Nando's every evening" (Leo). Chris explained the multitude of demands that an Under 23 player may face:

> Some are going to the first team, some have been dropped back down, some can't get back in the first team, no matter what they do. Some have got a year left, someone's got six months left, some of them have got injuries…and I think they are a lot more precious around that and I think that pressure is relative with things like age… the emotional sides [is] where that ties in. Eighteen is where your friends start going out and you start driving, all of a sudden you can go wherever you want at whatever time you want, you can actually go out, not condoning that but the options are there are. They get girlfriends you know, broken hearted, come out, that type of stuff. You know living on their own, living in digs. When we signed something from London and they come down then they live in digs, but they don't know that person, they don't know the area, and there's a lot of complexities around that. (Chris)

Such general challenges, along with others, were listed in the resource packs provided to coaches (see Appendix K). However, given the aforementioned challenges of time and large amounts of information to absorb, it may have been helpful for coaches to have received a bespoke workshop on how to manage the predictable demands that academy players will likely face and clearly delineate between the coaches' role and a trained sport psychologist. This may have increased

the coaches' preparedness to support the psychological attributes of players despite the natural demands of the academy.

Dock FC coaches also discussed how the academy (and football coaching certifications courses more generally) would prioritise the technical and tactical development over the physical and psychological, rather than seeing them as interrelated features of talent development, for example: "Is it [sport psychology] important? Yes. Does it at the full front of curriculum design or session planning, probably not. In essence it seems to be a football first model" (David). The prioritisation (and emphasis) of technical and tactical development, therefore, may have made it more challenging for coaches to be uninhibited and immerse themselves within the sport psychology programme; despite the value placed upon the psychological development of players. Nick provided an example of this imbalance whilst participating on a coaching course:

> With the [UEFA] A [coaching course] we spent a day talking about getting the play into the wide channels, and the psychological stuff it was done over two-hour zoom, twice. So, it was like, one, how many people are engaged in it because you look at the screen for hours. (Nick)

Practitioners can be aware of these deficiencies in the design of the sport psychology provision, capitalising on opportunities for informal (e.g., peer mentoring, informal conversations, observations) and formal learning (training or certifications).

Status of Sport Psychology at the Case Study Academy

During the interviews, in light of the coach education programme they had experienced, coaches readily shared their thoughts on the value they now placed upon sport psychology, and their perceptions of the provision and their own contributions to it at the academy. These findings, although not the aim of the social

validation interviews, are useful additions; offering updated insights as to the value academy coaches place on the discipline of sport psychology and also to offer greater direction for practitioners and leaders within academies in regard to enhancing the sport psychology provision in academies. As such, a final theme was constructed that represents the status of sport psychology at Dock FC academy. Two sub-themes contributed towards this general theme: (i) the psychological development of players is valued and (ii) gaps or further coaching development needs.

Dock FC academy coaches all discussed the importance of sport psychology, and the contribution that effective psychological development can have on an academy player's progress, for example: "the challenge is not me accepting it [sport psychology] because it's well documented how important this area of performances is. It was me more about me finding ways to apply it better, that was the challenge for me" (Mo), and "in the youth development phase more so and I think probably the biggest issues we deal with are lack of confidence within players" (Jason). Not only was it recognized as important, but Dock FC coaches were observably enthused by the coach education programme and the opportunity to develop their coaching, e.g., "How do I improve? And look at it [coaching] through just a psychological lens rather than getting interference from all the other areas [e.g., technical or tactical]. So that is where I see the benefits" (Jason). Liam described how another coach, Nick, was very enthused by being part of the sport psychology programme, and the role that the programme, reciprocally, played in catalysing Nick's motivation:

> The capacity for it [sport psychology] is significant in my belief anyway...so you had Nick in yesterday and you would have seen how enthusiastic Nick is and he is an open book, and you [DW] showed him trust

by analysing his session and you opened up the door. So, he wants to sit down and go through it and evaluate it. They [the other academy coaches] are all like that. That is the bit that we need more of. (Liam)

The second theme identified captured the coaches' thoughts on where they needed further support and where they felt the academy could improve in its provision for sport psychology. One are that the coaches were mindful of, and wanted continued support on, was the concurrent reminder of the resources available and reinforcement of the strategies learnt during the coach education programme, for example, "I think sometimes they are good resources when you look at them, but how utilise have they been probably not as much as they could have been" (Rich), "I guess a self-aware reflective one is very personal and for me personally is something I don't do consistently it's something that I need to work on" (Leo). Although not explicitly asked in the interviews, many coaches offered their reflections on what is needed to continue to develop the sport psychology provision in the future (post-research), again an encouraging finding and one that demonstrates an investment in the discipline from Dock FC coaches. This included further support with design of sessions, the development of a sport psychology syllabus, and on-pitch support to feedback on the integration of strategies.

In the younger age groups: a more rounded and general syllabus of all these [attributes] would be good. More towards the top end I think you could be a bit more bespoke with the individuals that you're really going after... so might be there's a certain individual that we are going to do some one-versus-one today and we're going to put him in this group so he's going to get stressed a lot and is going to find a high level of challenge. How are we going to promote resilience in these moments? So maybe towards the top end of the

YDP, into the PDP, it can probably be a bit more bespoke in terms of

individuals. (Jason)

Linked closely to this was the suggestion that the academy should hire a full-

time sport psychology practitioner to support the players and the coaches in their

practice.

From a physical point of view we employ sports scientist to do that, we don't

do it from a medical point of view, we don't go: "I think he has a tweaked

hamstring", we have specialists for that, and psychology is exactly the same.

We need specialists in it, and we need people, it be great to have someone in

my staff at the 16s to have a sport psychologist to be able to work with staff

and players. (Leo)

Coaches also suggested that a full-time sport psychology practitioner would be part

of the multidisciplinary team, informing the coaches on the psychological status of

players and offering guidance:

When we sit in the morning and with the [under] 18s, we have got probably

all of the disciplines in here bar from psychology. So you are getting that sort

of understanding of what they want to hit and the things they want to

measure and the things that they want to achieve, whereas I think if you had

someone from a sport psych [sic] background that was there to support you

more consistently, it's might just register a little bit more at the forefront of

your mind and it might you were going to a session with this is our intent for

today. (Jason)

The "request(s)" for a full-time sport psychology practitioner is an

encouraging finding and one that potentially reflects the impact that the sport

psychology coach education programme had on broadening the coaches' outlook for

the different role(s) that sport psychology practitioners can adopt within an academy setting. The following extract from Chris highlights the consideration for how a full-time practitioner could be utilized (e.g., being on hand to observe player behaviours and directing coaches to the right strategies) and the value that would be placed upon the role:

> I think the biggest thing is that: it's great we've got it [more resources], but because you're [lead researcher] not full-time, it's having that direct contact with you. [Players] might have an emotional issue because they're not confident and they're showing something else [demonstrating other behaviours] and it might fit into five different things [attributes] and then you're looking at the resources: "OK which one?". You've always been great at answering emails to us and that's been helpful, but sometimes seeing the behaviour and then seeing what we can see is more powerful. (Chris).

Although the coaches discussed the merits of the club hiring a full-time sport psychologist, this is not viewed as an evaluation of the coach education programme experienced. Indeed, the findings of the coach interviews indicate that the coach education programme was positively received by coaches, and that it contributed toward greater awareness and applied attempts to support the psychological development of players. Rather, the call for a full-time sport psychologist at Dock FC in the future, is interpreted as a positive byproduct of the programme.

Social Validation: Player Experiences

Focus groups with players considered their experiences of psychological development and the role that their coaches played in better supporting this aspect of performance. Through the RTA process we adopted, two themes were constructed: *the ways that coaches have supported the development of psychological attributes*

and *gaps in coach's development of psychological attributes*, each containing a series of descriptive sub-themes (see Table 11).

Table 11

Themes constructed from social validation: Player experience focus groups

Theme	Sub-Themes	Example Codes
Coaches have supported the development of attributes across the season	Coaches have helped improve and manage players' confidence levels	Coaches telling player to be confident when attempting goals was most helpful to develop drive to achieve goals
		Coaches have kept reminding player of what they are doing well
	Coaches provided reviews and clips of performance	Coaches use role models and video clips to develop drive to achieve goals
		Hudl clips develop self-aware and reflection
		Conducting reviews has helped
	Coaches constantly referred to role models	Coaches using past academy players as role models is more realistic
		Coaches given stories of ex-academy player's commitment
	Coaches have supported the development of attributes	Players have improved resilience over the season and had better performances consequently.
		Coaches provided general health advice to players to help them cope
	Coaches have organised the environment to develop the psychological attributes	The design of practices has helped develop attributes
		Provision of a challenging games programme
		Being chosen to play up age groups boosted confidence
	Interpersonal communication has supported the development of attributes	Coaches have supported players' mentality in one-to-one situations (coaches have worked with individuals to increase their commitment to development)
		Coaches have been effective in helping players handle setbacks
	Coaches have supported players' motivation	Coaches try to manage commitment to development and player burnout
		Coaches have tried to motivate players to try harder to achieve goals
	Coach discourse on the psychological attributes	Players know the value of developing attributes
		Coaches have spoken to players about controlling emotions
	Strong work ethic prioritised for additive qualities	Coaches have improved players strong work ethic
		Expectations of work rate in training is clearer

Table 11 continued …

Themes constructed from social validation: Player experience focus groups

		Coaches focus upon physicality helped improve players mentality
		Coaches constantly emphasised the need to respond positively after losing the ball
	Coaches supported players' progression	U23 coaches treat U18 players like any other player and praise where appropriate
		Players are prepared for the mental challenges they need to cope with
Gaps in coaches' development of psychological attributes	Want greater support and facilitation to achieve goals	Want more time to practice targets with coach
		Practice designs do not allow players to work on targets from individual development plan
	Players want fully transparent feedback and advice	Players would rather full transparency and clear feedback on why they are not selected
		Players accept criticism is there to help but that it may damage confidence
	Coaches have not developed some attributes	You can't just be told to have better emotional control to develop it
		No one for players to go to help develop emotional control
	Attribute not seen as a priority to develop by the players	Development of emotional control not needed
		Not readily developing emotional control as players rarely lose control

Coaches Have Supported the Development of Psychological Attributes

The players across all age groups recognised and were generally positive about the attempts made by their coaches to support the development of the psychological attributes: "you do notice a few things they [coaches] have done and they have been quite good with a lot of these things [developing the eight attributes]" (Joe, U18), and "I wasn't happy… but he pulled me aside after the game and he say said my head was down and he told me not to worry about it" (James, U15). The participating player indicated that some attributes had been developed to a greater extent than others, for example, a strong work ethic was a strong theme amongst all focus groups:

Joe (U18): They have been quite a lot harsher on us in a way, by making us work hard…in the 18s especially: the work ethic, we have had that drilled into us.

Will (U18): Yeah with the work ethic you can see the difference with the younger ones to the 18s where you know it's your first full-time [professional contract] and you could say we work harder than them in games … for example, with pressing you'd [now] get really tight, but then in a young boy's game you'd be five yards off and think that is okay.

Players also reported how coaches were actively attempting to develop their motivation aiding the development of drive to achieve goals and commitment to development, for example: "[at the start of training] write on the paper your challenge for the day… at the end of the day you would talk to [Coach] about if you've done it or what you have done well, towards it" (Dave, U14). Some of the under 18 players outlined how their coach used role models to motivate them:

The coaches do use a lot of examples themselves like [coach]… [he] tells us

about what they did and stuff like that…we had a meeting yesterday and they were saying about preseason and coming back fit and in the right attitude and they would use examples from last year of who was really good and stuff like that to motivate us. (Will, U18)

The players also acknowledged that their coach's discourse, and how they conversed with players, had changed during the season; often helping them to become more resilient, confident, and improve their emotional control:

DW: Have any of you experienced a time where your emotions have got too high or too low, and your coach has intervened?

Matt (U18): Yeah, I've had a few occasions where I've lost my head [lost control emotionally]. Basically, just things aren't going my way so I've taken it out, as in arguing back with Jason (coach) or something, or the opponents and shoved him as hard as I can, to take my anger out. And they've [the coaches] taken me to the side and just tell me to calm down a bit and told me some ways I could deal with it, because sometimes I'll let a mistake affect me too much.

Keith (U18): Yeah, I'm really similar to that like I've lost my head, I've got the nickname Bruce Banner.

Joe (U18): That's pretty much my biggest thing, if I nailed that, I think yeah the [other] stuff [areas of performance] will improve.

Matt (U18): Yeah Jason was saying to me and Keith, if we let the emotions get the better of us it will slow down our development as a footballer. So yeah, it has helped us a bit to be fair because recently I've not been as bad but like I still have moments, but yeh I have improved.

Players also indicated that their coaches have increased the utilisation of the

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video analysis platform (Hudl) that past season to support the players drive to achieve goals and self-awareness and reflective attributes: "we have this thing called Hudl which we can make clips and identify things we think we need to improve on… if we write a comment on the PMA they [coaches] will feed back to us on it."

Another strategy often used by coaches were effective player reviews, whereby players received feedback on their performance and targets were set. These reviews were perceived to be delivered well by players and contributed towards greater commitment to development:

I think the reviews are quite a big thing where we can talk about our weaknesses and then they've told me things that I can do to improve like turning up early and doing the bounce board with my left foot and that, and that is made me more committed to develop. Tom (U14)

Finally, participating players discussed how coaches have supported their confidence better this season. Matt (U18) explained how the coaches are now more engaged during games, which is a source of confidence for the players:

It is quite hard for a coach to give you confidence when you train because you can have a really bad training [session] and then play really well in games. It's just down to your attitude so on the pitch if you're getting praise [on the pitch], you know you're playing well, your coach will let you know. The coaches being engaged when we're playing rather than just sitting on the fence and watching and they did that for a while, but now they're engaged. (Matt, U18)

Findings from the social validation interviews with coaches suggest that the coaches at Dock FC appear to have become more aware of their actions and the implications it has upon player's psychological state, with clear attempts made

throughout the season to support the psychological development of their players.

Gaps in Coaches Development of Psychological Attributes

As part of the focus groups, players were asked to discuss areas where they felt their coaches could further support their psychological attributes. One notable discussion in the under 18 focus group centred around how coaches could treat them [players] more like adults and be forthcoming with clear guidance on how to improve. For example, "we need to be treated more like adults rather than being told how it is… they [coaches] should be telling us [what to do to improve], not waiting for us [to solve it], because time might run out and it might not happen" (Joe, U18). In doing so, the players suggested that coaches could deliver critique to them with greater brevity in a way that better supports their ability to coping with demands and their resilience. Specifically:

Will (U18): Our main coach now he gives me quite a bit of feedback…but I think sometimes, not that they lie to us, but they might sugar-coat it and I'd rather know what the reason is I'm not in the squad [sic]. So, I know.

Matt (U18): Yes, sometimes it's not clear.

Joe (U18): I think the coach is trying to treat you like kids almost, a lot of us would just rather be told how it is instead of have something said in a way with some excuses.

DW: Did you see that change at all?

Keith (U18): No not really. I still think that they focus too much on making everyone happy and sometimes that makes people unhappy. And I think that everyone knows not everyone could be happy, at the same time people want different things, so I think I would rather just be told instead of having some excuse.

A similar exchange arose when discussing how coaches attempted (or not) to develop players' *drive to achieve goals*:

DW: What would be the best thing in keeping you motivated towards your long-term goals?

Matt (U18): I think maybe it comes back to them [coaches] telling us [players] our goals. It's coping with the demands in a way but telling us what they want us to achieve and how they want us to do it. They should be telling us even if it affects our confidence. Conversations saying you should be here, even if they might not believe it, they should be saying: "start of the season you want to be doing 20 appearances and here's how you do it."

DW: Asking more critical questions of you?

Joe (U18): Yeah, and I think that's the way we need to be treated, more as adults…if they do really believe that we can play at that level then they should be telling us, not just waiting for us, because it might not happen.

The analysis of the focus group data identified some variability in the development of some attributes. For example, emotional control was not developed as readily in the under 14 and under 15 squads as it was in the under 18s: "Yeah when my head goes [lose emotional control] I just go around and just try and snap [intentionally foul/harm an opponent] someone." (Aaron, U14). Variability in the development of attributes may have occurred as a result of the individualised approach to their development at Dock FC (i.e., the under 14 coaches may have been focusing upon confidence, rather than emotional control), with coaches selecting when and which attributes to develop in their respective squads and players. A curriculum that schedules the development of psychological attributes throughout the phases at the academy may help further reduce variability in practice.

Overall, the social validation: player experience focus groups substantiated some of the findings of the coach experience interviews, emphasising the positive, indirect, impact that the sport psychology coach education and support programme had upon the Dock FC academy players.

Practitioner-Researcher Experiential Insights: Reflective Practice Data

Throughout the coach education programme at Dock FC Academy I, the first author, recorded descriptive field notes which in turn were reflected upon. The reflections were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The following reflections can be considered the themes that were constructed from the analysis of the researcher reflections.

Delivery of the Programme

Throughout the study, I was constantly mindful of how the programme was being perceived by the coaches. I was cognisant of being perceived as a "researcher" and assuming authority and some form of hierarchical power; I did not want to be seen in this light. I wanted to position myself, and the programme, as an aid for the coaches, integrated into their practice: developed from coaches, for coaches. I constantly referred to the roots of the programme (i.e., study one and two of this thesis), and how the information had come from academy coaches. I used the introductory workshops as an opportunity to remind coaches of who contributed toward this programme to emphasise that sport psychology is accessible, and endorsed, by academy coaches. I believe this helped to accelerate the buy-in I received for the programme. Indeed, I was surprised (maybe being slightly sceptical), but pleased, when the coaches readily referred to the programme as "our psych programme" so early on in the research. One coach even made the comparison

to the 5Cs programme: "we had the 5Cs given to us, and it was … fine, but it was never ours. This is ours."

One of the key features of the programme were the workshops. Knowing that coaches do not often get insight into sport psychology in their coaching qualifications, but also mindful not to monopolise their time (sport psychology is certainly not the be-all and end-all anyway!), I wanted them to be of high quality, to keep workshops 'punchy', and driven by the coaches. Therefore, I asked coaches to read certain PDF resource packs, which focused on each of the eight psychological attributes spotlighted in the intervention (e.g., confidence, emotional control), prior to the workshop that corresponded to a specific attribute to help better inform their discussions and kept each workshop to 45 minutes. I had numerous comments, be it in meetings, informal quips or conversations with senior staff or coaches about how they were enjoying the workshops and that they were "pitched just right". Coaches appeared to like the opportunity to discuss the attributes with other coaches in small groups of three or four (rather than be dictated to), citing reasons like: getting to talk to coaches I never get to talk to, and gain a breadth of viewpoints. Throughout the workshops, I led with the premise that most of the answers will be in the room (i.e., amongst the coaching staff), and actively encouraged other coaches to offer their insights to answer questions, rather than myself. My experience as a further education teacher certainly helped the delivery of the workshops as I effectively managed the timings, pace, groupings, discussion, and feedback within the session. Crucially, across the workshops, I felt that I was able to position the field of sport psychology as an integrated aspect of their role, rather than a 'bolt-on'.

Catalysing Organisational Change in the Academy

Several organisational changes occurred as part of the education and support programme, integrating sport psychology into the fabric of the academy culture at Dock FC. The organisational changes, although relatively simple, created cultural artefacts for the sport psychology provision at the academy, ensuring that the essence of the coach education and support programme was resourced and could be continued beyond the period of research too; reducing the theory to practice gap that often remains in the wake of research. Aside from the programme being successful, I did not want the programme to commence and then end with myself. I wanted the programme to become independent of myself, leaving a framework and the resources for Dock FC academy to continue to utilise as they development the eight psychological attributes of their players.

As a means to integrate the psychology programme into the culture and daily life of the academy, I requested that a few organisational changes were made at the academy: (i) the eight attributes were featured on the player management application system [PMA], (ii) that players were reviewed on the eight attributes in their 6 weekly reviews, and (iii) the sport psychology provision (and all accompanying resources) were migrated onto the new Hudl platform to provide a central, and user-friendly, location for resources. My requests were met with enthusiastic responses from the head of academy, head of coaching, and head of sport science, and I had the green light to make the desired changes. However, I did not have to do any of the leg work: the head of sport science quickly integrated the eight attributes into the six weekly review template and communicated that to the coaches, whilst the head of coaching liaised with their contact at the Premier League to adjust their PMA system to include all eight attributes in a drop-down list in the session planning section of the platform. These perceivably minor changes were significant, and that backing of

senior staff at the academy accelerated the organisational changes. The actions of the senior staff demonstrated a genuine care for, and desire, to develop the psychological provision at the academy; and I drew confidence that they wanted to do this with the theory and resources I provided as part of the coach education and support programme. Importantly, I felt that the senior leaders at Dock FC academy were invested in the holistic development of players and wanted to become an even better environment for developing talent.

It was an exciting (and a proud) moment when I observed coaches discussing and evaluating their players' psychological attributes as part of the players' six weekly reviews in the staff room. Not only was I happy that the theoretical work I had constructed as part of study one (Chapter 3) and study two (Chapter 4) was being readily referred to and applied, but that more importantly for me, I was not needed; the programme no longer hinged on me- it was now Dock FC's.

The systems change to the six weekly reviews led to a (positive) domino effect for the sport psychology provision: coaches were talking to one another about each attribute, coaches were assessing players in greater depth and using the behavioural indicators to provide feedback, players were receiving feedback on the eight attributes, and parents were made aware of the attributes as a consequence. The organisational changes contributed greatly to the indirect approach I was taking as part of the coach education and support programme, reducing my workload and moving me beyond the "buy in" phase. Furthermore, the six weekly reviews or the PMA entries, were monitored by the academy director and head of coaching as part of their roles. The integration of the education and support programme into systems that are surveyed by other (senior) members of staff across the academy contributed toward greater interdisciplinary development of players at Dock FC, and owed better

to their holistic development than if the psychological development of players was assessed and monitored by myself in isolation.

Utilising an Indirect Approach: Working Through the Coaches

A key aim of this programme was to work indirectly, through the coaches, to develop players' psychological attributes. This approach contrasted slightly to the more common approach of working directly with players, be it individually or at a group level. Indeed, this was what many coaches expected initially, and so I had to reinforce throughout the programme that I was working with the coaches, not with the players. Initially, I felt some coaches simply wanted to offload their 'problem players' to me, but it was quickly understood that my remit was to work with them as a coach to affect the player. This was evidently a shift for some of the coaches, who maybe just expected a counsellor, but I felt it broadened their perspective and in turn made them value the programme more.

My observations across the programme supported the decision to work *through* the coaches. From informal discussions, positive responses during workshops, critical conversations, or debates between coaches in the staff room I inferred that the coaches were generally appreciative of the opportunity to learn more about the topic and to be supported to try strategies and to target their players' psychological development in a more systematic way. The social validation interviews further reinforced this with coaches communicating an interest or passion for sport psychology, with coaches telling me about their undergraduate or postgraduate dissertation that was based around psychological concepts, or the elements of their recent coaching course (e.g., elite coach accreditation scheme, ECAS) that they enjoyed the most were related to the psychological development of players. Opting to work through the coaches harnessed this enthusiasm and provided

a vehicle (and catalyst) for the coaches to integrate psychological development strategies into their coaching.

Adaptability

Being flexible as a practitioner was integral to the delivery of the programme, not only to meet the aims of the research project, but to ensure that the coaches (and the academy) received support from a psychological perspective. Aside from the, expected, day-to-day changes (e.g., scheduling), there were two significant events that required considerable adaptability. The first was the COVID-19 pandemic (Institute for Government, 2023), which triggered a series of national and regional lockdowns throughout the coach education programme. The pandemic forced the workshops to move online along with a greater focus of online materials and resources (e.g., online PDFs, Hudl clips). Although this was not ideal, I took the opportunity to create a 'digital footprint' for sport psychology, which may help its utility beyond the study. In designing this online delivery of workshops, I worked closely with the head of sport science and head of coaching to ensure every element was meaningful and as interactive as possible. The academy was using Microsoft Teams already, which I had gained some experience using whilst remote teaching in my further education lecturing role. I readily utilised the chat function and 'thumbs up' emoticons within Teams to enable quick interactions with everyone (e.g., "on the scale in the chat rate the extent which you feel you developed resilience in your players by clicking the thumbs up icon on the number, 1-5"). I also capitalised on the 'breakout' room function to split groups up for periods of time to discuss questions I posed through the 'announcement' function. In preparing for using Microsoft Teams initially, I constantly ran through a series of 'what ifs' (e.g., what if they cannot get into the breakout room because they are using a phone), so I had quick solutions and

authority when leading the sessions. This, I felt, helped me build a rapport with the professional coaches I was educating, contributing to their confidence in me and, indirectly, the discipline of sport psychology.

The second issue I adapted to was the significant change in the coaching staff. This is not uncommon in football academies. Indeed, I had experienced it when recruiting for study one (Chapter 3) of this thesis, but nevertheless, it was one that needed to be adapted to quickly so that the coach education and support programme did not lose momentum. In short, two coaches who had accessed all aspects of the programme to that point were promoted to being the first team manager and first team assistant coach, resulting in several other coaches moving up an age group or to a different phase (e.g., YDP to PDP). Once again, I was cognisant of placing too much strain upon coaches during such a sudden period of transition (i.e., moving to a new team), so I pushed back a workshop to allow time for the coaches to settle and filled that void with several, short, self-recorded videos on certain coaching strategies (e.g., effective questioning) that I placed on Hudl. With such significant movement, I had to keep track of who had accessed what part of the programme, and also to alter my support for them in line with the new age groups they were coaching.

Did the Programme Work?

The sport psychology coach education and support programme aimed to develop coaches to, in turn, support the psychological development of their players. As part of this programme, I aimed to positively affect the culture and attitude toward sport psychology at Dock FC. Over the 14 months of the programme, I believe this was achieved.

Each day I visited the academy I was greeted with great positivity and friendliness. On many occasions coaches launched into a conversation with me about sport psychology before I had even broken out of their handshake! "Dan, you'll like this…" or "Dan, come and have a look at this powerpoint I am showing the lads…". I was always surprised (though happy of course) by the enthusiasm the Dock FC coaches showed toward sport psychology, and by extension myself throughout the programme. What I observed was a group of professionals who were innovative, wanted to improve their own practice, were enthused by sport psychology, but who wanted a bit of reassurance that they were on the right tracks in regard to their plans to develop their players' psychological development. To harness their enthusiasm, I was always encouraging to them and their ideas. I also signposted coaches to other coaches wherever I could, for example when Chris (under 23s coach) asked me about creating simulated setbacks to improve resilience *(and how much is too much?),* I finished my response by letting him know Liam (head of foundation phase) might be a good person to talk to as Liam was explaining to me recently how he is trialling the challenge-support model (of resilience) with his players this week.

Throughout the programme I constantly observed for cues in the environment that indicated that the programme was working, and that it was meeting its aims. From my reflections, there were several key cues I observed that substantiated this. First was my relationships with players, I did not know them. I deliberately positioned myself to work through the coaches and did not have any contact time with players. However, it was reassuring that during the social validation: player experience focus groups that the participating players were able to talk about the eight attributes, assessing the extent to which their coaches had developed those in them. This demonstrated the effectiveness of the indirect approach taken and

justified the internal battle I had to work *only* through the coaches. Second, it was evident from the observations I conducted that coaches were attempting to apply the strategies to affect the psychological development of their players. The intention-action gap is a difficult distance to bridge, but the Dock FC coaches had notable success on the training pitch, enabling me to create a large archive of good practice video clips to share amongst all coaches. Third, the changes to the PMA and six weekly reviews, whereby the coaches had to plan for and then systematically assess players using the eight psychological attributes, was a significant indicator (and contributor) to the programme achieving its aims. Fourth, the resources used as part of the programme were well-received by coaches (i.e., many commented on the usefulness of the resource packs and information within it), but also I found them user-friendly and easy to integrate into the academy as a researcher. Finally, the coaches observably engaged in more discussions regarding the psychological development of players as the programme went on, suggesting a greater integration of the provision but also greater efficacy amongst coaches in discussing what could be perceived to be a taboo or intimidating topic area.

Summary of Key Findings

The following is a summary of the key findings across all data collected during the sport psychology coach education and support programme at Dock FC:

- The coach education and support programme was positively received by coaches and contributed toward an improvement in their practice to develop psychological attributes in their players.

- The theoretical information constructed in study one (Chapter 3) and study two (Chapter 4) was useful to guide and support coaches to develop each of

the eight psychological attributes. It was also user-friendly and accessible to the coaches.

- The indirect approach was an effective way to deliver the support programme, providing sport psychology practitioners with a means to deliver the sport psychology provision in academies.

- The content, platform, and delivery of the online workshops was well received by coaches, with participants enjoying the ability to discuss their players from a, purely, psychological perspective.

- The video clip archive created on Hudl was a useful resource for coaches and was appreciated by coaches who had limited time to conduct peer observations.

- Organisational changes made at Dock FC Academy (e.g., the inclusion of the psychological attributes onto the PMA system) contributed significantly to: the indirect approach to the sport psychology programme, increase discourse on the topic of sport psychology amongst stakeholders (e.g., coaches, players, parents) at the academy, and a general positive impact on integrating sport psychology into the culture.

- Dock FC coaches valued sport psychology and were willing and enthusiastic about learning how they could support the development of the eight attributes in their players.

Discussion

Informed by the findings of study one (Chapter 3) and study two (Chapter 4) of this thesis, the current study set out to design, deliver, and evaluate a sport psychology coach education and support programme. Specifically, the (intervention) programme, delivered longitudinally in an ecologically valid, applied setting, aimed

to help coaches at Dock FC acquire the knowledge and skills required to support the psychological development of the players with whom they were working. Further, it was our intention to facilitate the integration of player psychological attribute development into coaches' daily practices, interactions, and discourse (e.g., through integration of coaching strategies and attribute behavioural indicators). Thus, we aimed to create meaningful change for coaches (e.g., philosophies; practices) and their players (e.g., improved psychological attributes). The case study approach, which included a triangulation of qualitative methods (i.e., interviews, focus groups, and reflective accounts), indicated that the programme was positively received by coaches and there were positive signs that coaches improved their application of knowledge to support the psychological development of their players.

A primary finding from the coach social validation interviews was that the coaches felt that the programme helped improve their own awareness and application of coaching strategies to support the development of psychological attributes in their players. Encouragingly, the players also substantiated this during the focus groups, articulating how their coaches had tried to support the development of attributes across the season, albeit to differing degrees of success. Given that the lead researcher did not work with any players prior to, or throughout the 14-month programme, the players' knowledge of the eight attributes can be assumed to have come from their coach, an indication that the programme was effective in its objective to work *indirectly* through the coaches to affect the larger population of players.

The players participating in the focus groups were able to discuss the attributes and ways in which their coaches had attempted to develop each one respectively. The players believed the coaches supported them with some attributes

(e.g., confidence, drive to achieve goals, resilience) to a greater extent than others, acknowledging that some attributes were harder to develop (e.g., emotional control). Congruent with the players' experiences, coaches also reported that they found emotional control a more challenging attribute to develop. Coaches indicated that they were able to create demanding situations for players in training to challenge their emotional control, but then found the follow-up (support) difficult to manage. For example, participants discussed how the range of maturity levels of the players in their squads made individualised support challenging. Simulating stressful environments is a useful strategy to promote psychological development of players, however a recent study by Cooper (2021) found that the academy experience could be *unnecessarily* stressful for players, therefore the simulation of stressful situations must be supported effectively to ensure a positive growth experience (Collins et al., 2016). Practitioners in academies (e.g., sport psychology practitioners or the head of coaching) should be aware of this gap-in-knowledge and prioritise it as part of professional development training for coaches.

Participating coaches indicated that the simultaneous focus (development) on eight attributes was too many, with difficulties in learning the breadth of information associated with each attribute. Supported by the lead researcher's own reflections, it would be advisable that programmes embed psychological attributes into the coaching curriculum (syllabus) and map out the promotion of the eight attributes over a longer period, to better facilitate their systematic development (Harwood & Anderson, 2015; Mitchell et al., 2022). In the case of Dock FC, the lead researcher was unable to persuade the academy manager, head of coaching, and head of sport science to embed the attributes into the coaching curriculum during the pre-programme meetings. Practitioners leading sport psychology programmes may wish

to use our reflections and recommendations to inform senior staff at academies of the benefits of aligning the sport psychology curriculum to the coaching curriculum directly as it would help coaches to narrow their focus regarding player psychological development.

Contributing to the success of the programme was the effective enactment of its components: the workshops, video feedback, player surveys, and resource packs. Workshops were well received by the coaches and thus were believed to be a primary contributor towards the positive assessment of the programme. Face-to-face workshops have been a key feature of many coach education programmes reported within literature to date (e.g., Camire & Trudel, 2014; Harwood et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2007). There is still limited knowledge, however, of the success and utility of online sport psychology workshops in academy football (Stoszkowski & Collins, 2016). Our workshops were delivered online, initially due to the COVID restrictions in place, but then continued because of the positive feedback received from coaches (i.e., ease of access, informative, opportunity to discuss). Workshops were well attended, and coaches engaged with the content and discussions, with many of the coaches attesting to this in the summary interviews. The workshops facilitated conversation between coaches who would not normally get the opportunity to do so, with the virtual break-out rooms reducing the opportunity for individuals to monopolise the session with their opinions. In this way, the workshops acted in a similar way to that of a *community of practice*, a method which has gained increasing recognition as an effective, less formal approach to coach education (cf. Culver & Duarte, 2022). The current study adds to the argument that that virtual learning environments could be a viable means to provide sport psychology education for coaches: reducing the financial and temporal stresses associated to

attending coaching courses, whilst maximising discussion and sharing of practice (Griffiths et al., 2018); a marked contrast to that cited in previous literature and the suggestion that a coach's lack of knowledge on sport psychology was the root cause of "coaches shying away from sport psychology services" (see Barker & Winter, 2014, p. 387; Champ et al., 2020; Owusu-Sekyere & Gervis, 2016; Pain & Harwood, 2004).

A final consideration was that many of the coaches who participated in the social validation interviews expressed, as a result of the coach education support programme (see Table 10), their desire to have a full-time sport psychology practitioner housed at the academy to support them in their coaching practice. This is an encouraging finding given that it was previously suggested that a reason why sport psychology services were not used was the perception that it is not needed (cf. Barker & Winter, 2014). Despite the notion of academy coaches wanting consistent support to facilitate the psychological development of their players, the situation is currently at an impasse, with progress governed by the perceived priorities of the EPPP, which gives the academy (and thus the Academy Manager) autonomy over their sport psychology provision (The Premier League, 2022). Although it has been recommended to educate academy managers (or the decision makers) to value and the recruit sport psychology practitioners (e.g., Barker & Winter, 2014), basing the extent of the sport psychology provision on the values and priorities of the academy manager is a questionable approach given the potential turnover of such staff (e.g., Dock FC had three Academy Managers during the 14-month programme). Nevertheless, the provision of sport psychology remains in this predicament, reliant upon the values and agenda of senior leaders across academies (cf. Crawley & Hills, 2023; Larsen et al., 2014; Nesti & Sulley, 2015). Arguably, until the provision sport

psychology is standardised, with increased expectations for the provision in the EPPP, coaches and players will likely continue to receive part-time support. In considering this, the approach taken in the current study, to work indirectly through the coaches (i.e., holding remote workshops, coaching resource packs, video observations, archive of best practice clips), offers a sustainable approach to sport psychology that can be adopted, incorporated and utilised by sport psychology practitioners across all EPPP categorisations (i.e., one, two, three, four) of football academies to help support their players' performance related aspects of their psychology development.

Recommendations

To support practitioners with sport psychology coach education and support programmes, and more widely the provision of sport psychology at academies, we have provided several recommendations.

(i)   Online Workshops. When conducting online workshops the sport psychology educator should adopt the role of facilitator, with input from the coaches used as the vehicle to drive the session. Although there will be a message the educator wishes to communicate to the participants, it is recommended that there are no "correct" or "incorrect" answers, but rather points to be discussed; as coach engagement remains a priority. The educator should be mindful of coaches dominating conversations and use 'break out rooms' to limit the risk of this occurring. It is our view that the length of the workshop should be approximately 45 minutes, long enough for discussion but short enough as so not to monopolise the coach's time.

(ii)   Resources. A central hub of resources will provide programmes or the sport psychology provision with a point of reference. It is important to ensure all staff can access these resources, with online platforms (e.g., Hudl) offering a central and continuously accessible option. User-friendly resource packs for each attribute (i.e., PDF) would be a recommended resource to store in a central location (Mitchell et al., 2022).

(iii)   Organisational/Systems Changes. It is important to affect the systems that are in place at an academy to increase the likelihood of sport psychology being embedded and becoming a normalised feature of player development. For example, practitioners should utilise the player reviews as an opportunity to include an assessment of the eight psychological attributes, with emphasis upon coaches rating players on attributes every six-weeks. Further, utilising the session planning aspect of the performance management a (PMA) system to populate drop-down lists with the psychological attributes. This will encourage coaches to consider specific psychological attributes during their planning of sessions. Finally, although not achieved in this study, it is recommended that the psychological development of players is aligned with the coaching curriculum (cf. Harwood & Anderson, 2015; Mitchell et al., 2022).

(iv)   Caddy. Conduct oneself as though a golf caddy, facilitating a coach's awareness and application of sport psychology principles into their practice. Sport psychology is not the authority, and thus the

practitioner should position themselves as part of the interdisciplinary team to support the coach.

(v) Plan for beyond the research. Any research designs should be considerate of, and plan for, post-intervention. The intervention programme should be realistic with measures and resources in place that can serve the academy post-research. The Head of Sport Science or the Head of Education and Welfare may become more involved as an intervention programme draws to a close to facilitate an effective handover and increase the likelihood of the benefits of an intervention, lasting.

(vi) Work indirectly *through* the coaches. The current case study provided support for working indirectly through coaches to affect the larger population of players (Godfrey & Winter, 2017). Furthermore, the current study affirms that there is value, and an appetite for, sport psychology practitioners working solely with the coaches in academy settings. Thus, regardless of EPPP criterion, we recommend that leadership teams consider the recruitment of full-time members of staff who can support the day-to-day psychological development of players through working with the coaches.

Limitations and Future Directions

The current study designed and delivered an evidence-based sport psychology programme to academy coaches over a 14-month period, which was largely well-received by the participating coaches. There were, of course, elements of the research that could be improved further to enhance and substantiate the findings of the current study. First, although there was an attempt to collect survey

responses from players throughout the programme, the response rate was too poor to draw any meaningful analysis from. Although this was disappointing, it is likely that this occurred due to length and demands of the survey. For example, players were asked to rate the extent to which a coach had impacted the development of that attribute and the impact of each coaching strategy across each of the eight attributes. Despite the value of the information gleaned from this survey, this was likely to be too time-consuming for players. In the future, researchers (or academies) may simplify player surveys to ask general questions about the impact that coaches are having upon the development of each psychological attribute, rather than the impact of each individual strategy. Similarly, the research was limited by a lack of opportunity to observe coaches' practice and code their behaviours on a regular basis across the duration of the study. Coding behaviours would have provided further, quantitative, evidence of behavioural developments. However, this was not possible due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, Dock FC coaches would normally receive two analysed sessions each season from the head of academy, but these were postponed due to COVID and did not recommence, properly, until the end of the coach education programme.

One potential limitation was the absence of a pre-programme interview in study three. Taking a baseline measure is deemed an important feature of coach education programmes to demonstrate the impact of the programme (Harwood et al., 2015). For example, in Harwood et al.'s (2015) study, the authors measured the same variables (i.e., the 5Cs) throughout the coach education programme, whereas in study three in the current programme of work, the participating coaches would have to be asked different questions at the start than they would in the summary interviews (because the summary interviews focused on evaluating the coach

education programme that had taking place), making any comparison challenging and potentially redundant. The decision to hold an interview at the end of the programme was also more palatable for coaches at Dock FC (i.e., less time consuming), with their effort and commitment to the research programme channelled toward the learning, and integration of, the principles of developing the eight attributes in their players.

Fourth, it would be beneficial for researchers to follow-up on a case study post-intervention to report on the longevity and resilience of psychological programmes without the researcher being present. For example, Larsen et al. (2014) reported that their sport psychology programme was disbanded shortly after their research due to a lack of financial support for the programme. Such information is important to know so that the initial design of programmes can safeguard against such eventualities (e.g., making the programme self-regulatory and without the need for financial input). Finally, it would be valuable for a full-time sport psychology practitioner to provide an empirical case study of their work within an academy to demonstrate the value and impact of their role. The case study approach in the current study has enabled further insights into an academy setting, and the thoughts, feelings, and emotions of those agents within it (i.e., the academy coach, Yin, 2009). If applied to an academy that utilises a full-time practitioner, a greater and richer understanding could be gained of what a full-time role entails and the impact it has on both coaches and players. As explained by Abbott (1992, p. 79), "a social science expressed in terms of typical stories would provide far better access for policy intervention than the present social science of variables". Thus, further case study research may help contribute toward the much-needed policy change on the provision of sport psychology within the EPPP.

Conclusion

This study was the summation of a body of work that aimed to support the academy coach to develop desired psychological attributes in their players. The purpose of this current study was to design, deliver, and evaluate an evidence-based coach education and support programme to academy coaches within a case study academy. The programme lasted for 14-months and included a variety of resources for the academy coaches (e.g., resource packs, observation feedback, a library of best practice clips). Summary interviews with seven of the full-time coaches who participated in the study indicated that the programme was well-received, and that their implementation of coaching strategies to support the psychological development of players had improved; a finding supported, in part, by the summary player focus groups. This study has provided greater affirmation that academy coaches are considerate of, and attempt to affect, the psychological development of their players, and that working indirectly through the academy coaches is a viable method of service.

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CHAPTER 6

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Introduction: Overview of Studies

The current programme of work consisted of three, interlinked, studies and aimed to identify the key psychological attributes required to give an academy player the best opportunity to progress through and out of the academy and into the senior, professional game (study one- Chapter 3), and explore the coaching strategies used to develop each (study two- Chapter 4). Then, informed by this knowledge, to develop and deliver a coach education and support programme at a case study academy, with the purpose of improving academy coaches' knowledge and capabilities to support their players to develop each of the desired psychological attributes (study three- Chapter 5).

The psychological development of young football players has commonly been an *ad-hoc* feature of talent development pathways within football academies, often hinged upon the philosophies and priorities of the decision-makers at the academy (Crawley & Hills, 2023; Jones, 2018; Nesti & Sulley, 2015). The Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP), the policy that governs the organisation and functioning of academies in England, contributes toward an unsystematic approach to sport psychology through a lack of explicit guidance on the requirements for the provision (Champ et al., 2020; Crawley & Hills, 2023). Although the lack of explicit guidance does enable academies to have greater autonomy over the provision (see Green et al., 2020), it simultaneously undermines the value placed upon sport psychology, making it a 'nice to have' rather than a necessity (Nesti & Sulley, 2015).

With little incentive for academies to employ sport psychology practitioners, attention should turn to supporting the academy coaches, who are charged with the psychological development of players as part of the four-corner model of holistic development of players (i.e., technical and tactical, physical, psychological, and

social, The FA, 2023; Simmons, 2004). From a performance perspective, coaches are in a prime position to affect the psychological development of players (i.e., improve the psychological attributes in players associated with performance and progression; Cassidy, 2013; Cooper, 2021), however, crucially, coaches need to be better supported to do so. There is a consensus that coaches value sport psychology and the role it plays in a player's progression, a positive change from indications that academy coaches held negative perceptions of sport psychology previously (e.g., Pain & Harwood, 2004; Stratton et al., 2004). However, coaches have not been effectively educated or supported to affect the psychological development of players, whether this is due to insufficient time spent on the topic area during formal qualification or the lack of value placed upon it by the governing bodies (Crawley & Hills, 2023; Freitas et al., 2013; O'Gorman et al., 2020). Regardless, if coaches are to support the holistic development of their players the need to have explicit understanding of the coaching strategies to do so (Wixey & Kingston, 2021). Therefore, the current body of work was designed to indirectly support the psychological development of academy players through the academy coach with each study contributing toward this overarching aim. Several objectives were set and accomplished throughout this project: (a) identify the key psychological attributes that give players the best opportunity of becoming a professional player; (b) explore the coaching strategies that can be used to develop each psychological attribute; (c) examine the adaptive player behaviours associated with the development of each psychological attribute; (d) obtain players' opinions of which coaching strategies they find most beneficial; (e) design a season-long coach education and support programme; (f) deliver the coach education programme to a professional football academy case study; and (g) and critically review of the programme through social

validation interviews and focus groups with coaches and players, triangulated by researcher field notes and reflections.

This chapter will first provide an overview of each of the studies before offering a general discussion on the theoretical and practical implications of this thesis. This chapter will then evaluate the strengths and limitations of the thesis, suggesting direction for future research, before concluding.

Study One (Chapter 3): Identifying the Psychological Attributes Desired of Academy Football Players: The Coach's Perspective

The progression from youth to professional sport is recognised as one of the most challenging transitions that an elite athlete will make (McCarthy, 2020; Stambulova et al., 2009). Within the realms of academy football, reports of as few as 1% of young players will make the coveted step from the elite youth ranks into the professional game, statistics that emphasise the monumental challenge young players face in realising their goal (Calvin, 2018; ECA, 2017). With the psychological development of a player understood to be fundamental to a football players' success, study one aimed to identify the key psychological attributes that will give a player the best opportunity of progressing through and out of the academy and into the professional game (Nesti & Sulley, 2015; Saward et al., 2019).

Nine senior academy coaches from two EPPP category one (see The Premier League, 2011) football academies in the UK took part in semi-structured interviews from which eight psychological attributes were constructed: *commitment to develop*, *confidence*, *coping with the demands of high-level sport*, *drive to achieve goals*, *emotional control*, *resilience*, *self-aware and reflective*, and *strong work ethic*. Although the attributes had been identified in previous literature (or slight deviations of them), the eight attributes challenged the psychological attributes proposed in the

EPPP and also the utility of the 5Cs, a framework that has arguably dominated and directed sport psychology provisions within football academies to date (e.g., Godfrey & Winter, 2017). Study one provided current and contextualised insights into (potentially) the most important attributes to develop players engaging in the talent development pathway of the modern-day football academy. Furthermore, the eight attributes were co-constructed with academy coaches, a population who have been relatively unheard in the literature surrounding the psychological development of players (Gledhill et al., 2017; Mills et al., 2012). The opinions of academy coaches were a valuable feature throughout this programme of study, helping to triangulate previous literature but also identifying nuanced attributes that will benefit the modern-day academy player. Further, the participating coaches in the current study worked within a category one football academy, which is considered the optimum environment for talent development (The Premier League, 2022). Thus, their opinions are a valuable addition to the literature and can help direct the psychological development of players across all academies that intend to be an optimum talent development environment, giving practitioners greater assurances that they are developing the most relevant and beneficial attributes in the time they have with academy players. The modern-day football academy has changed significantly in the last decade, and study one has provided the first empirical investigation with the sole purpose of identifying the key psychological attributes to develop within the EPPP football academy; knowledge that can better inform the sport psychology provision within a modern-day academy.

Study Two (Chapter 4): The Identification of Coaching Strategies to Support the Psychological Development of Academy Football Players

Study two was designed to explore the coaching strategies that could support the development of the eight psychological attributes identified in study one (Chapter 3). The intention of study two was to provide an integrated approach to sport psychology to and help guide academy coaches to develop psychological attributes through their coaching practices, in line with the expectations of the four-corner model of holistic development (The FA, 2023). To facilitate the development of psychological attributes in players, the behaviours that indicate the successful development of each of the eight attributes were also sought. The presentation of adaptive behaviours plus coaching strategies to support an attribute would enable the academy coach to assess, intervene, and monitor the psychological development of their players; information which, to date, has been limited.

Addressing the lack of guidance available for coaches in supporting the psychological development of players, 12 academy football coaches, from category one and two football academies, were interviewed to explore strategies to develop each of the attributes identified in study one (Chapter 3). Through thematic analysis, 53 sub-theme coaching strategies were constructed, as well as the identification of adaptive player behaviours that indicate the successful development of each attribute. Overlapping strategies, which developed multiple attributes, included: role modelling strategies, simulation of adversity/challenging situations, focusing upon a players' strengths, [having good] knowledge of the player, player watching own game footage, one-to-one conversations with players, and providing rationale to players. The findings of study two provide explicit and contextualised guidance for the academy coach to support their development of the eight attributes in their players. Study two offers coaches with observable behaviours that would indicate that an attribute has successfully been developed, an approach that makes the

psychological development of players more accessible given the merits of focusing on observable behaviours rather than implicit cognitions (Anthony et al., 2018). Knowledge of the adaptive behaviours can help to enhance and standardise the talent identification processes that occur within academies and support the talent development of athletes through more accurate measurement of their psychological attributes. The accompanying coaching strategies can be employed by coaches as they concurrently assess the psychological development of their players. Study two presents information that has previously been limited, extending the literature significantly but also providing user-friendly and application information for coaches to utilise in practice.

Study Three (Chapter 5): A Case Study of the Design, Delivery, and Evaluation of a Sport Psychology Coach Education Programme in a Professional Football Academy

Study three was the culmination of the current programme of study, and aimed to design, deliver, and evaluate a sport psychology coach education and support programme within an EPPP academy via a longitudinal case study approach. The general purpose of the intervention was to support coaches to develop the knowledge and skills required to better integrate the development of the eight psychological attributes into their daily practices, interactions, and discourse. Thus, study three aimed to offer a realistic approach to psychological support in academy football. Over the course of 14 months, I (Ph.D. researcher) delivered the coach education and support programme to Dock FC academy coaches, which consisted of workshops, observations, clipping of best practice, written resource packs, lanyards with cue cards, and player-survey feedback. The programme was reviewed at the end

through social validation procedures (e.g., coach interviews, player focus groups) and a summary of my reflections (as the researcher conducting the programme).

Findings suggested that the programme was well-received by coaches, with the coach interviews indicating that they did attempt and felt they improved in their employment of strategies to develop certain attributes, with the player focus groups substantiating the coaches' efforts in doing so. The case study approach was a valuable framework, and lens, to deliver and review the coach education and support programme, helping to illuminate several findings: (i) Dock FC and its coaches valued sport psychology, (ii) the indirect approach to sport psychology may be a useful method to utilise in football academies, (iii) an improvement in coaching practices to support the psychological develop of players, and (iv) that organisational changes can help accelerate the integration of psychological development in academies.

Theoretical Contribution and Conceptual Advancements

The following section provides a discussion on the primary theoretical implications that evolved as a consequence of the current programme of research.

The Psychological Attributes to Develop in Academy Football Players

Prior to study one (Chapter 3), there was limited empirical evidence as to the psychological attributes that should be prioritised for development within academy football players (e.g., Mills et al., 2012). By meeting the first aim of this research programme, study one (Chapter 3) was able to contribute significantly to the small, pre-existing, body of work, advancing knowledge on the key psychological attributes to develop within academy football players, particularly considering the evolving demands that modern-day academy players experience across the talent development pathway. Study one (Chapter 3) identified eight psychological attributes

(commitment to develop, confidence, coping with the demands of high-level sport, drive to achieve goals, emotional control, resilience, self-aware and reflective, and strong work ethic), there was limited overlap with attributes included within the EPPP's criterion for sport psychology topic areas (i.e., lifestyle management, imagery, and focusing; The Premier League, 2011), nor did the findings support the prioritisation of the 5C's framework (Harwood, 2008), which has been the predominant framework used within youth football domains in England (i.e., commitment, control, confidence, communication, and concentration). The 5Cs framework was derived from the 6Cs (commitment, cohesion, communication, concentration, control, confidence) framework to support the concept of momentum (Higham, 2000; Higham et al., 2005). However, despite its origins, the 5Cs has come to dominate the landscape of psychological development in youth football (Crawley & Hill, 2023; Mitchell et al., 2022; The FA, 2023). The eight attributes identified in study one (Chapter 3), therefore, challenge the utility of focusing on all of the 5Cs (see Godfrey & Winter, 2017), suggesting a reconceptualisation of the psychological attributes to prioritise and develop within academy football players.

The eight attributes were constructed from interviews with academy coaches in study one (Chapter 3), adding greater context to each of the attributes (Barraclough et al., 2022; Musculus & Lobinger, 2018). Indeed, the contextually sensitive attributes provided slight derivations of more psychological themes than have been identified in the wider talent development literature (e.g., Holt & Mitchell, 2006; MacNamara et al., 2010b). For example, study one (Chapter 3) identified *commitment to develop* as an attribute, bearing similarities to the more general attribute of *commitment* (one of the 5Cs). However, the inclusion of the words "to develop" is important to the specific role of that attribute for an academy player,

implying that an individual needs to immerse themselves into their development. The nuances of attributes were recognized by Holt and Mitchell (2006) who also found that academy players needed to demonstrate an "intense" form of commitment to become a professional player. In meeting its objectives, study one has provided this knowledge, offering context-specific attributes that are separated from the general population of psychological attributes espoused within literature.

Behavioural Indicators and Coaching Strategies to Support the Development of the Psychological Attributes

Fulfilling the primary aim of study two (Chapter 4), this Ph.D. was able to provide explicit strategies to support academy coaches to develop the desired psychological attributes identified in study one (Chapter 3), contributing substantially to the extant literature. Specifically, prior to study two (Chapter 4), there was a dearth of guidance to support academy coaches, and coaches in general, regarding the development of targeted psychological attributes (cf. Crawley & Hills, 2023).

Prior to understanding how attributes are developed, it is critical that practitioners know what they are aiming to achieve (develop) in their players. However, despite researchers often being preoccupied with determining *what* attributes to aim to develop (Crawley & Hills, 2023), very few have offered the behavioural indications of what these attributes look like *if* developed; leaving a significant epistemological gap for practitioners (e.g., academy coaches) to bridge themselves. Opting to provide information on observable behaviours, rather than implicit (unobservable) emotions or cognitions that define an attribute, is believed to be a more user-friendly and accessible means for coaches to incorporate sport psychology into their practice (Anthony et al., 2018; Harwood, 2008). Study two

(Chapter 4) provides the adaptive behaviours that would indicate the attribute (e.g., resilience) is developed, giving practitioners guidance to inform the assessment of the psychological development of their players. Theoretically, study two (Chapter 4) has provided a profile of the "ideal" psychologically developed academy player, facilitating greater accuracy of assessment and supporting a more standardised approach to talent identification and talent development (see Christiansen, 2009). These behaviours can facilitate more communicable goals and targets for players to demonstrate, which may prompt the academy coach to intervene with appropriate coaching strategies to support the development of the observable behaviours.

Study two (Chapter 4) aimed to explore coaching strategies to support the development of the eight psychological attributes which could be integrated directly into coaching practices, across training, competition, or off-the-pitch interactions with players (e.g., player review meetings). An integrated approach has been championed by several authors, notably in the body of work surrounding the 5Cs (e.g., Godfrey & Winter, 2017; Harwood, 2008; Harwood & Anderson, 2015; Mitchell et al., 2022; Steptoe et al., 2019). Integrated approaches differ to isolated approaches to the provision of sport psychology, whereby a players' psychological capabilities might be developed in situations detached from training or competition, for example in workshops or counselling sessions during ring-fenced time (e.g., Camiré & Trudel 2014; Gervis & Goldman, 2020). There are limited examples of empirical studies, focused on the specific environment of a football academy, that have inductively explored strategies to support the psychological development of players through coaching practices (e.g., Winter et al., 2019). As an exception, Winter et al. (2019) explored coaching strategies to develop commitment in football academy players, the only attribute (or derivation of it) identified in study one

(Chapter 3) to have previously received empirical attention on how football academy coaches can support its development. Winter et al. identified several strategies to support the development of the construct: role modelling, honesty, physical punishment, and video analysis; sharing some similarities with the findings of study two (Chapter 4) in the current programme of work (e.g., use of role models, individualised targets, behavioural expectations). Study two (Chapter 4) met its aims to examine the player behaviours that indicate the successful development of the eight psychological attributes along with exploring integrated coaching strategies to support the psychological development of players, providing a catalogue of ways for academy coaches to support the development of players, findings that significantly advance our theoretical knowledge on *how* to support the psychological development of academy players.

Working Indirectly Through Coaches

Study three (Chapter 5) was successful in its aim to educate academy coaches to, in turn, support the psychological development of their players. An indirect approach (i.e., working through the academy coaches) was adopted, primarily, to support the integration of psychological development into coaching practices, but also as a potential solution to the issues associated to the sport psychology provision common within football academies (Crawley & Hill, 2023; Cooper, 2021; ECA, 2017; Gervis et al., 2020; Jones, 2018; Nesti & Sulley, 2015). Academy coaches are not a substitute for professionally trained sport psychologists and the services that they provide to football academies. However, within their remit of coaching, coaches are charged with supporting the psychological development of players and thus must be adequately supported to do so (The Football Association, 2023). This Ph.D. created clear parameters for an academy coaches' contribution to the psychological

development of players, providing eight attributes to target, along with coaching

strategies and associated player behaviours to support an attributes development.

Study three (Chapter 5) was able to illustrate that the psychological development

(i.e., the development of the eight attributes) of players could be orchestrated

through the academy coaches, substantiated by coaches recognising improvements in

their ability to develop psychological attributes in their players as a result of the

intervention provided. The indirect approach created more opportunity for the lead

researcher to work with individual coaches but with the confidence that the coaches

were attempting to develop and assess the eight attributes in their players. Study

three (Chapter 5) can therefore provide assurances for the sport psychology

practitioner, supporting the notion to work through the coaches as part of the service

being delivered.

The decision to work indirectly through coaches is not novel, however within

academy football it is an underutilised mode of delivery (ECA, 2017). According to

ECA (2017), 54% of 96 member academies have a sport psychology practitioner, of

which only 38% work with the coaches (i.e., 20 out of 96 academies). The data from

the ECA (2017) report indicated that there is further opportunity for sport

psychology practitioners to work indirectly through the coaches as part of their

service (e.g., alongside one-to-one support), an approach advocated for its ability to

affect a significantly greater number of young athletes (Arthur et al., 2019; Nesti &

Sulley, 2015). Study three (Chapter 5) was designed to facilitate an indirect approach

to sport psychology in academies, with its content, derived from study one (Chapter

3) and study two (Chapter 4), deliberately aimed to be coach-friendly and its

implementation designed to be "academy-friendly" and repeatable (i.e., workshops,

observations, clips of best practice, online resources; cf. Ely et al., 2020; Pope et al.,

2015). Practitioners may wish to utilise the findings and reflections of this programme of study to inform and guide an indirect approach to psychological services within football academies.

Reductions in the Intention-Action Gap in Academy Coaches

The intention-action gap is a phrase used to describe the distance between an individual's motivation to act and the actual behaviour that demonstrates that action (Sheeran & Webb, 2016). Regarding sport psychology and coaching in academy football, the *intention* can be recognised as the coaches' goal to integrate psychological strategies into their coaching and the *action* is the actual employment of the intended strategies. Through meeting its aims, the coach education and support programme in study three contributed toward reducing the intention-action gap amongst coaches at Dock FC academy. The findings of study one (Chapter 3), study two (Chapter 4), and study three (Chapter 5) can be utilised to support other academies to reduce the intention-action gap in regard to the psychological development of their players through the coaches.

Although there have been indications to the contrary (e.g., Champ et al., 2020; Pain & Harwood, 2004), the intention of academy coaches to positively support the psychological development of academy players has been highlighted in the literature (e.g., Brink et al., 2018; Nesti & Sulley, 2015). This can be explained by an increased awareness of, and value placed upon, sport psychology in academy football (e.g., Barker & Winter, 2014; Crawley & Hills, 2023; Godfrey & Winter, 2017; Green et al., 2020; Mitchell et al., 2022; Winter et al., 2019). My "lead researcher reflections" from study three (Chapter 5) highlighted how the coaches at Dock FC demonstrated a continued awareness of the psychological attributes within players, with many coaches actively seeking support throughout the education and

support programme to develop the eight attributes amongst their players. Their enthusiasm for, and the value they placed upon, sport psychology appeared to grow throughout the 14-months too, and this was captured in the social validation interviews when coaches requested greater full-time support for themselves to further improve their support for players, a finding that somewhat conflicts with the experiences reported in previous coaching programmes whereby participating coaches demonstrated a low readiness to learn and an inertia to reflect critically on the impact of their practice (Knowles et al., 2015; Voldby & Klein-Dossing, 2020).

The reduction in the intention-action gap amongst Dock FC academy coaches in study three (Chapter 5) can further be explained by the design of the coach education and support programme. During the inception of the intervention programme, factors that contribute towards the "gap" were assessed and combatted. For example, minimal time spent on sport psychology during formal coaching qualifications (Freitas et al., 2013; Nash & Sproule, 2012); a focus on mental skills (Crawley & Hills, 2023; Nesti & Sulley, 2015); a lack of formal sport psychology certifications through the national governing body; the predominant focus on the athlete rather than supporting the coaches too (ECA, 2017); low incentive to develop player mentality (i.e., EPPP, The Premier League, 2011); and the general lack of, or *ad hoc*, sport psychology support in academies (Crawley & Hills, 2023; Nesti & Sulley, 2015). By recognising and then incorporating measures to counteract these issues (e.g., the lead researcher reminding coaches of the benefits to players who possess well-develop psychological attributes) the programme can be described as being resilient, enabling its successful completion without experiencing the resistance or barriers that contribute toward a greater divide between intention and action. The coach education and support programme helped to drive the intentions of

coaches further toward their actions. The success of the coach education and support programme in supporting a change in coaching behaviours regarding players' psychological development could be further explained to how the elements of the programme helped to satisfy participant's basic psychological needs. This was facilitated through the adoption of the basic psychological needs theory (BPNT) framework (Deci & Ryan, 1985). In the design and delivery of the programme the I aimed to positively affect the autonomy, competence, and relatedness of coaches, to make their behaviours more self-determined (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Greater levels of self-determined behaviour may help improve the likelihood that the coach acts upon their intentions to integrate the strategies provided into their coaching and support the development of the eight psychological attributes and creating a strong coaching climate that promotes positive youth development (Harwood et al., 2015). For example, autonomy, an individual's feeling of ownership in their development (Deci & Ryan, 2000), was promoted by the first author when prioritizing the coaches' perspectives and experience to drive discussion during workshops. Furthermore, the sharing of best practice, through discussions in the workshops or the creating of a best-practice video clips on Hudl, were believed to help improve the relatedness of the coach, which is an individual's sense of belonging (Bartholomew et al., 2011; Voldby & Klein-Dossing, 2020). Finally, a coach's competence, which is the belief in their capabilities, was also promoted through the clipping and sharing of positive coaching behaivours (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Although the assessment of the coaches' basic needs sat outside of the aims and objectives of this study, BPNT could provide a useful framework for sport psychology practitioners aiming to reduce the intention-action gap in the future whilst supporting academy players' wellbeing (Blake & Solberg, 2023; Cresswell et al., 2019). The findings of study three also indicated that

coaches did act upon their intentions, with coaches reflecting on their attempts to employ strategies to develop attributes in their players. This was, in part, supported by the players who suggested they recognised their coaches' attempts over the season to develop the eight attributes in them.

Summary of Contributions

The current programme of research has contributed to the sport psychology coaching literature in several ways:

- Study one (Chapter 3) is the first study to have the sole purpose of inductively identifying the key psychological attributes desired of academy players and doing so by prioritising the subjective experiences of the academy coach. The eight attributes identified provide academies and practitioners (i.e., coaches and sport psychologists) context-specific attributes to develop in youth football players; attributes that challenge the utility of deductively informed frameworks in academy football (e.g., the 5Cs, Harwood, 2008) or attributes suggested by the EPPP (see The Premier League, 2011).

- Study two (Chapter 4) provided explicit coaching strategies for academy coaches to employ to support the development of psychological attributes in players. There is currently a dearth of information on coaching strategies to develop psychological attributes in players, thus study two significantly adds to the literature.

- Study two (Chapter 4) also provided the behaviours that would indicate the successful development of a psychological attribute. These findings not only add significantly to the literature but also have applied implications: helping

coaches to more accurately assess and monitor the psychological development of their players.

- The programme of study provided empirical evidence that an indirect approach to sport psychology support is a viable and effect approach. The studies were designed to accrue knowledge (i.e., study one- Chapter 3, and study two- Chapter 4) to then apply the knowledge within a real-world setting (i.e., study three- Chapter 5). The construction of knowledge was steered by the end-goal to support the indirect approach to psychological development in academy players, through the academy coach. Study three demonstrated that the indirect approach is a viable option and helps to navigate the macro-level issues and barriers associated to the psychological development of academy players (e.g., the lack of incentive within the EPPP policy, Crawley & Hills, 2023).

- Organisational changes were made at the case study academy, Dock FC, each assisting in the delivery, and success of, the coach education and support programme. Changes to the PMA, six weekly reviews, and the addition of a sport psychology video archive (on Hudl) accelerated the assessment and development of attributes, along with catalysing greater discourse amongst key stakeholders (e.g., players, parents, coaches) at the academy in regards to the psychological development of players.

- Study three (Chapter 5) indicated that academy coaches not only *intended* to employ coaching strategies to support the psychological development of their players, but they did indeed attempt to *enact* this, indicating that the sport psychology programme delivered to Dock FC was pitched in a manner that

helped reduce the intention-action gap. The programme (and its elements) may, therefore, be a useful framework for other academies to adopt.

Practical Implications

Alongside theoretical and conceptual contributions, the current thesis offers several practical implications which are discussed in the following section.

Utilising The Eight Attributes in the Academy

Study one (Chapter 3) identified eight psychological attributes that, if developed, will give an academy player the best opportunity of progressing through and successfully out of the academy. Study three then demonstrated that the eight attributes can be endorsed and successfully embedded into an academy, at a systems level (e.g., via the player management a [PMA] system) and at a coaching level. These eight attributes offer academy players context-specific psychological attributes to aim to develop, informed by those who have experiential knowledge of what is required to successfully progress in an academy, in their language, making each attribute rich in its meaning and relevance to an academy coach and player (Diment, 2014).

The number of attributes also suggests that there is a greater breadth of attributes that need to be considered than indicated in frameworks such as the 5Cs (Harwood, 2008). For example, Mitchell et al. (2022) reported on developing eight attributes in a recent coach education programme in a category three academy. Their programme included the 5Cs along with resilience, self-awareness, and presence, supporting the notion that the 5Cs does not capture all the psychological attributes desired of players. Furthermore, the attributes identified in the current thesis (study one- Chapter 3) do not include mental skills (e.g., imagery). Integrating mental skills (e.g., goal setting, imagery, self-talk) into coaching practices has been an area of

contention and a grey area for whether this is the role of the coach or the sport psychology practitioner (e.g., Crawley & Hills, 2023; Nesti, 2010). The absence of mental skills may help the psychological development of players as the process is not impeded by the challenges that have accompanied the facilitation of mental skills training through coaches, e.g.: lack of knowledge on methodology, knowing or finding the right time to provide such support, and a general feeling of discomfort in providing such training to players without professional certification (Feddersen et al., 2021; Nesti & Sulley, 2015).

The eight attributes may be prioritized and developed at different phases across the academy, aligning the development of attributes to the values of the academy, maturation of athletes, the level of categorization of the academy, in line with the physical or psychological demands across an academy season (Diaz-Garcia et al., 2021; Nobari et al., 2021; Noon et al., 2015), or to prepare players for the predictable challenges they may face (e.g., dealing with the new expectations of being a professional player). For example, in the case of Dock FC, a core value of theirs was that they are hard-working, a value that represented the working-class community around the club that originated from the "tough life" of dock workers. Therefore, the prioritization of promoting a strong work ethic from the foundation phase, to run throughout the academy, was discussed by coaches in the summary interviews. Sport psychology practitioners should align the sequential development of the eight attributes to the context they are in, informed by the aims and values of the football club, and by gaining input from coaches and senior leaders in the academy (Green et al., 2020; Steptoe et al., 2019).

Coaching Strategies to Develop Each Psychological Attribute

There is limited literature that offers explicit, and contextualized, coaching strategies to support the psychological development of athletes (e.g., Harwood & Anderson). Wixey and Kingston (2021) highlighted this issue when discussing the challenges of employing Ames' (1992) guidance to foster mastery involving features within a sport setting, suggesting that the strategies are too abstract to support mastery motivational climates in a category two football academy. The 53 themes constructed in study two (Chapter 4) provide coaches with contextualized strategies to support the psychological development of academy players and indeed the sub-themes and raw data codes that informed the 53 themes provide more nuanced strategies that coaches may wish to adopt or try (Table 2). Furthermore, the coding and proceeding analysis of the study two (Chapter 4) interviews attempted to maintain the language that the participating coaches used, with the aim of increasing the user-friendliness of the strategies (Diment, 2014). By attempting to capture, and savour, the coaching-language, it may make it easier for coaches to understand, plan for, and then enact the strategies associated with each attribute. Exploring sport psychologists' views on whether coaches could develop mental toughness in athletes, Weinberg et al. (2016) suggested that coaches should ensure they are purposeful in their delivery of strategies to impact mental toughness, a feature which is sometimes affected by low confidence. The coaching strategies constructed in study two (Chapter 4), designed by coaches in a language *for* coaches, may buffer against feelings of low confidence, as the language is familiar, and in turn may make coaches more purposeful in their delivery.

During the coach education programme (study three - Chapter 3) the strategies were communicated to coaches via a PDF resource, with each attribute having its own pack. The pack was 11 pages long, but included the definition of the

attribute, adaptive behaviours, general strategies, a list of more specific strategies, and then challenges to be aware of. Although the pack size differed slightly from those used in other research (e.g., 4 pages, Mitchell et al., 2022), the resource packs provided a comprehensive archive of knowledge for coaches to access and offered a depth of applicable knowledge for them. Knowledge gained from study one (Chapter 3) and two (Chapter 4) was presented back to coaches in a succinct and consistent manner. To make these even more accessible, the resource packs were placed on the Hudl platform, increasing access and tying it to the coach observation clips, and an approach that facilitated coaches to be more independent in their preparation to support the psychological development of their players, "providing a source and resource for coaches who self-medicate their learning needs" (see Cushion & Townsend, 2018, p. 2; Stoszkowski & Collins, 2016). It is recommended that practitioners ensure that the sport psychology provision is anchored with tangible information and resources so that the provision is not solely based upon the sport psychology practitioner's presence.

Although not explicitly utilised in study three (Chapter 5), the COM-B model of behaviour change (*capability*, *opportunity*, *motivation*, and *behaviour*; Michie et al., 2011; Michie et al., 2014) could be a useful framework to support academies to develop the eight psychological attributes (see Chapter 3) in academy players. COM-B was based upon 19 pre-existing frameworks associated with behaviour change leading to the construction of three components thought to contribute toward effective and lasting change: sources of behaviour, intervention, and policy changes (Michie et al., 2011). Although somewhat intuitively, each of these components were affected to different extents at Dock FC during the intervention presented in study three (Chapter 5). Sources of behaviour includes the effecting of an individual's

capabilities (e.g., physical skills and psychological understanding), *opportunities* (e.g., social opportunity through cultural changes and physical opportunities via user-friendly access), and *motivation* (e.g., effecting the automatic/dispositional responses of individuals, and the reflective/metacognitive evaluations individuals conduct; Michie et al., 2011). In study three, I attempted to affect these sources of behaviour in several ways, for example: educational workshops that supported the *capabilities* of coaches; the provision of resources (e.g., resource packs and video clips) located on the accessible Hudl platform facilitating greater *opportunity*; and encouraging coaches' reflective practices through the programme (e.g., during workshops, video feedback, player feedback), which contributed toward *motivation*.

The second component, *intervention*, is underscored by several characteristics (e.g., education, persuasion, incentivisation, training, and modelling; Michie et al., 2011), each of which were again affected to some degree within the case study at Dock FC academy. Michie et al. (2011) suggested that *environmental restricting* is a form of intervention, which was demonstrated at Dock FC through the changing of the performance review systems (i.e., the PMA and player reviews) to include the eight psychological attributes. The final component, *policies* (e.g., communication, guidelines, service provision) were also affected in different ways throughout the sport psychology coach education and support programme in study three. For example, the characteristic *fiscal*, which refers to the financial costs of behaviour change strategies, were considered and informed the decision to adopt an indirect approach to players' psychological development (i.e., through the coach). Practitioners or leaders within an academy may wish to adopt the COM-B model to guide the effective integration of sport psychology (as a provision) into academies and to positively affect the behaviour change of those agents within an academy

(e.g., coaches) and to more effectively support the psychological development of players. This approach is important considering the need for practitioners/researchers to demonstrate the rigour of interventions through the integration of evidence-informed behaviour change models, particularly when models such as the COM-B have growing applied support (e.g., Willmott et al., 2021).

Observing and Acting Upon Adaptive Player Behaviours

The identification of observable behaviours that demonstrate the successful development of each attribute (study two- Chapter 4) can be crucial information to help the coach assess, target, and support the psychological development of players (Anthony et al., 2018; Harwood et al., 2015). Knowing what "good looks like" can facilitate coaches to assess the extent to which their players have developed each of the eight attributes. In their scoping review of psychological attributes that underpin success in sport Dohme et al. (2019) provided associated behaviours for each of the nineteen general umbrella themes (e.g., confidence). Although useful, the provision of specific behaviours displayed by academy football players from study two (Chapter 4) are likely to be more recognizable to the academy coach than the-arguably -more abstract behaviours summarized in Dohme et al.'s review. This was in part evidenced in study three (Chapter 5) when coaches discussed the integration of the eight attributes into the six-weekly review process whereby coaches rated each player on each attribute, using the observable behaviours as a gauge (Harwood et al., 2015; cf. Musculus & Lobinger, 2018). Thus, context-specific behaviours, and a coach's knowledge thereof, may contribute toward greater awareness of, recognition for, and then promotion of the eight psychological attributes to players.

In practice, coaches may use the behaviours to determine the strategies they could employ. For example, if a player observably focuses on goals during

emotionally charged situations (e.g., continues to attempt to perform the tactics provided by the coach), then the coach can assess the player to possess some emotional control. If a player is not presenting adaptive behaviours of an attribute, then the coach can determine that they have not yet fully developed that attribute, to which they can follow up with strategies to support that attribute. The behaviours may therefore mobilise coaches to reflect-in-action, an epistemology of practice and a possible prelude to behaviour change (Schön, 1983). According to Schön (1983) reflection-in-action is where an individual thinks about what they are doing, rather than demonstrating a tacit knowing-in-action, which does not require any preplanned intellectual function. From the findings of study three, it could be suggested that coaches at Dock FC were demonstrating a tacit knowing-in-action as they admitted to naturally prioritizing the technical and tactical features of development. Knowing (i.e., from the workshops) and then observing the ideal behaviours (i.e., from the Hudl archive) for each attribute may prompt the "surprise" (Schön, 1983, p.50) that instigates reflection-in-action in academy coaches, potentially instigating the integration of the strategies from study two (Chapter 4) into practice.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions

Upon review of the thesis, the following section will outline the perceived strengths, limitations, and provide suggestions and direction for future research.

Strengths

The first perceived strength of this programme of work is the significant contribution to knowledge it makes. Study one (Chapter 3) provided eight, contextualized, psychological attributes that offer a reconceptualization of which psychological attributes to prioritise and develop in academy football players. Study two (Chapter 4) explored and presented a catalogue of coaching strategies to support

each of the eight attributes identified in study one (Chapter 3), adding significantly to

the limited literature (and formal education, i.e., coaching courses, Freitas et al.,

2013) available to help academy coaches on the topic area. Study two (Chapter 4)

also provided behaviours that indicated the successful development of each attribute,

knowledge that extends the literature by creating clear parameters for what

successful psychological development looks like, facilitating talent identification

(e.g., scouting) and talent development processes (e.g., coaching). Study one

(Chapter 3) and two (Chapter 4) also prioritized the opinions of coaches to help

meet the aims of the project. Bar from a few notable examples (e.g., Mills et al.,

2012), the decision to focus on the coaches distinguishes this Ph.D. from the current

literature base which has been largely informed by the researcher or athletes

(Gledhill et al., 2017). Capturing the worldview of academy coaches is a significant

shift in how knowledge has been defined to date (Cooksey & McDonald, 2011),

offering a different perspective on the psychological attributes desired of players and

explicit information on how to develop each. Therefore, the decision to place

coaches at the centre of this research, to drive the design and development of a coach

education programme, represents a significant addition to the field.

Closely aligned to the first strength was the decision to adopt a relativist

ontology and subjectivist epistemology to meet the aims of the research. With a

diverging landscape of psychological factors, coupled with a limited number of

coaching strategies to support athlete's psychological development through

coaching, the literature base had become largely dominated by post-positivist

methodologies preoccupied with identifying the *what* rather than the *how*; leaving an

"epistemological gap" for academy coaches to cross on their own (Light, 2008;

Stodter & Cushion, 2019). The belief that knowledge, or truth, came from the

academy coaches, and the way to obtain that is through an interpretivist lens, distinguishes this research from a large portion of research that has been conducted previously. This programme of work has, therefore, provided a 'qualitative foothold' for knowledge pertaining to the psychological development of academy players, consolidating (e.g., coaching strategies to develop confidence, Beaumont et al., 2015), extending upon (e.g., Mills et al., 2012), challenging (e.g., 5Cs, Harwood, 2008), and providing a different perspective to inform the effective development of psychological attributes in talented football players.

A third strength is the ability to apply the theoretical knowledge constructed within this programme of work. An underlying aim of this programme of work was to provide applicable knowledge for coaches to support the psychological development of players. The authors were mindful of designing and implementing a coach education programme that was too detached from the realities of the academy (Ely et al., 2020). Therefore, the design of the project facilitated the practicality of the findings. For example, the savouring of the coaching language in study one (Chapter 3) and two is likely to have helped the application of the coaching strategies in study three.

Crucially, applied the knowledge gained from study one (Chapter 3) and study two (Chapter 4) in an *actual* academy setting to positive effect. The case study design helped demonstrate the utility of the findings from study one (Chapter 3) and two and offered insights into how to integrate that knowledge into a football academy. Study three, and its approach to real-world application, can also be considered as a strength to this body of work. The coach education programme was designed and delivered in a manner to reflect the parameters normally afforded to a sport psychology practitioner, i.e.: part-time and non-contracted (i.e., consultancy

based), positioning it as a programme that can be replicated by other practitioners to support their role in having a positive and wide-reaching impact at an academy, despite any contractual limitations. Moreover, without changes from the governing bodies in academy football (i.e., the FA or the Premier League), the provision of sport psychology will remain in a delicate position, hinged on the priorities of individual decision-makers within academies (Crawley & Hills, 2023; Nesti & Sulley, 2015). Thus, whilst the "field" of sport psychology remains in this predicament, the coach education programme constructed and delivered in this thesis offers a tangible, low cost, yet impactful framework for sport psychology practitioners to apply within football academies, arguably providing an applicable solution to a significant barrier. Furthermore, although not reported, the first author contributed to the EPPP audit at Dock FC academy, presenting the sport psychology provision to the auditors. This was well-received, and the auditors were complimentary of the approach and requested further details on the programme as a potential model for other academies who needed guidance/ideas on the enactment of the sport psychology provision. The organisational changes made within the academy (e.g., inclusion of eight attributes into the PMA) provided an evidence-base for the academy during their audit; communicating a systematic approach to developing psychological attributes at the academy.

Limitations

Alongside strengths, it is important to address perceived limitations of the programme of work. One limiting factor was the COVID-19 pandemic, which inhibited certain support mechanisms and data collection methods from taking place during study three. For example, the national lockdowns meant that the academy had to close for a short period, and then shift to a remote provision, before returning to a

limited version of academy football (e.g., reduced days in, limited time at the academy, limited travel to fixtures). Due to the missed time, the academy's priorities were to catch up the players and make amends for any missed development time. Consequently, the seasonal coaching observations did not take place as normal reducing the video footage available to analyse. A series of coaching observations, focused on coach behaviours, would further helped to triangulate the findings of study three.

Another potential limitation was the sample sizes of study one (Chapter 3) ($n = 9$) and two ($n = 12$). A greater sample size in study one (Chapter 3) may have provided further insights into the attributes identified providing even more assurances of their importance. Similarly, an increase of participants in study two (Chapter 4) could offer further strategies and greater substantiation of the behaviours. The coaching participants in study one (Chapter 3) and study two (Chapter 4) do however add to the small pool of coaches ($n = 81$) who have participated in talent development research in football (Gledhill et al., 2017). Based upon Gledhill et al.'s (2017) systematic review, although the sample of participants in study one (Chapter 3) and two (Chapter 4) could be greater these samples account for a significant increase in the number of participant coaches informing research, more generally.

It is also important to highlight that this Ph.D. focused upon male academy players and supporting coaches who coach within male football academies. Although the contextual sensitivity of the findings is a strength, it must be acknowledged that these findings may not be readily generalisable to female football academy set ups. First the psychological attributes identified may not be appropriate for the female talent development pathway, or indeed the strategies to support the development of

attributes be deemed as effective. Critically, the coach education and support programme, if replicated, may not obtain the same findings if conducted in a female football academy. This might be due to a variety of reasons such as the different cultures and organisational structures, different political structures, and the lack of experience the lead researcher has working within female football (by comparison). In elite gymnastics, Calmels et al. (2009) found that male and female athletes tended to prioritise the development of the same psychological characteristics (e.g., self-determination, commitment, self-confidence). However, what differentiated these populations was their sources for each attribute (e.g., social environment, the sport process, or family), the way in which they were influenced (social support, learning from models, maturity), and the period in which they were developed (e.g., earlier experiences or throughout career). Therefore, researchers should aim to understand the sources, influences, and period of development for psychological attributes for female academy players, to understand how they can be best supported. Indeed, researchers should not continue to simply transfer research findings from one gender to another (typically males to females in sport-related research) given the host of gender-based differences that make such transfer problematic (Emmonds et al., 2019). For example, it is well reported that females typically mature physically, emotionally, and cognitively quicker than males, the demands that female athletes experience are different to those experienced by males, and the approaches that coaches need to adopt to facilitate personal and professional growth in athletes differ across genders (Cowley et al., 2021).

Linked to there being an absence of female players, no female coaches participated in any of the studies in the current Ph.D. This is a limitation, as female coaches do work within male football academies. However, female coaches may

have different preferences for learning than males, with the environments of male academy football clubs potentially inhibiting their development as a practitioner (Knoppers et al., 2022; Lewis et al., 2018). Thus, it would be of benefit to obtain the views of female coaches, working in male football academies, as to further substantiate the effectiveness of the coach education and support programme.

Like the impact of gender differences, the impact that cultural (e.g., ethnicity) and societal (e.g., socioeconomic status) differences were not reviewed or considered in this PhD thesis. In Murr et al.'s (2018) review of psychological predictors of talented football players sixteen countries were represented in the participant pool, with 15 of those from Europe. Murr et al.'s findings highlighted 22 personality, psychomotor, and perceptual cognitive factors to be prioritised to support talent development; indicating that different countries may have different priorities for the psychological development of their players. Previously, Elliot and Weedon (2010) also reported that players who migrated to Britain to participate in academy football had higher levels of work ethic than the domestic players and demonstrated a higher 'need' to become a professional player, which may imply that British academy players could benefit further from a focus upon the development of a strong work ethic. However, the foreign players referred to in Elliot and Weedon's (2010) study may have demonstrated higher work ethic as a consequence of moving abroad and the pressure to perform or fear of losing their contract and thus their ability to play or work within the country. Regardless, Elliot and Weedon's (2010) findings highlight the potential, psychological, differences that exist between British and non-British players.

Knowledge of different cultures and their influence upon the psychological development of players would be of considerable value to the literature, especially given that young players will readily migrate to play for Premier League football clubs and their respective academies (Deloitte, 2023; ECA, 2017). Indeed, the overseas transfer market of players who moved into and out of the Premier League in the 2023 summer transfer window reached a record high of £550 million (Deloitte, 2023). However, despite this, there are few examples of research that has assessed the role that cultural (e.g., ethnic or religious) factors play in the psychological development of young football players. Gledhill et al. (2017) highlighted that only six of the 43 studies included in their review presented the ethnic backgrounds of participants, with the majority of participants presented being Caucasian males. As Gledhill et al. discussed, current knowledge of psychological attributes may, therefore, be biased to the needs and agendas of a particular ethnic group (i.e., Caucasians). Exploring the role of socioeconomic status on academy players' psychological development, Kelly et al. (2023) found that players with lower socioeconomic status (which could be indirectly impacted by cultural factors) were more likely to have higher levels of coping with performance and developmental pressures. Kelly et al. reasoned that this may be due to the concurrent setbacks and obstacles that those with lower socioeconomic statuses face. Kelly et al.'s research further highlighted the influences that social (and thus potentially cultural) factors can have upon the psychological development of young players. As a result, researchers should look to present the ethnicities of their participants, contributing toward a more balanced view of the psychological attributes to prioritise within athletes (Gledhill et al., 2017). Moreover, it is recommended that researchers explore the psychological attributes associated with successful progression in youth football

across different cultures; knowledge which may help academy coaches better support the psychological development of young academy players who originate from different countries.

A final potential limitation is the focus upon category one and two academies to inform the theoretical knowledge constructed. The prioritization of the top two tiers of academy was due to: (a) the greater number of hours, and thus commitment, category one and two players will train per week in comparison to category three players; (b) the aim to provide guidance at the echelons of the youth system; (c) the staff are likely to have higher qualifications and greater experience of coaching successful players in category one and two academies (see The Premier League, 2023); and (d) the assumption that category one and two academies would likely contribute on a greater scale, financially, to the academy, and thus would be more likely to employ sport psychology practitioners to utilize the knowledge produced. Although it may be of benefit for category three academy players to develop the eight attributes identified, due to the differences in outcomes, there may be slight deviations in what each attribute means or what the model behaviours look like in that tier (see Barraclough et al., 2022). For example, category three academies are geared toward producing league players whilst the category one academies aim to produce Premier League players, with these exit routes likely placing slightly different demands on the players (The Premier League, 2022). A wider pool of participants that included category three coaches may have helped provide a comprehensive overview of the different attributes to prioritize across categories, contextualizing the findings of the programme even further. Sport psychology practitioners in academy three academies are invited to utilize the findings of the

current programme of study, but to be cautious and to review the needs and necessity of each attribute before prioritizing its development.

Future Research Directions

It would be of value to academy coaches to provide age-specific behaviours and coaching strategies to aid the development of each of the eight attributes. The under 18 players participating in the summary focus groups (in study three) supported this suggestion when discussing how they would appreciate more direct conversations with coaches due to the limited time available to improve and progress, highlighting that they are now adult performers who can handle tougher conversations. Consequently, coaches may become more cognisant of utilising age-appropriate strategies, which may in turn contribute towards a more nurturing environment supportive of player well-being (cf. Green et al., 2020). In their review of psychological talent predictors in youth soccer, Murr et al. (2018) reported that only two studies examined attributes from populations below the age of twelve, highlighting a gap in knowledge for this particular age range (or the foundation phase of the academy, The Premier League, 2011). With academies offering provisions for those as young as four years old, it is important that the priorities for their psychological development at this phase of maturation is understood and carefully acted upon. Furthermore, knowing the observable behaviours of developed attribute for an Under 12 (e.g., emotional control) may also thwart the delivery of coaching strategies that are more appropriate for older players (cf. Owusu-Sekyere & Gervis, 2016), encouraging a more systematic, and scaffolded, approach to psychological development of players. Knowledge of age-specific behaviours and accompanying strategies would also support the academy coach to stretch the psychological development of players when required, similar to the physical act of

'playing up' an age group. Future research may utilize a delphi-poll technique to help categorise strategies into relative age bands, exploring this from a coach and player perspective (Goldman et al., 2021; Morely et al., 2014).

A second avenue of further research would be to integrate the eight psychological attributes through a wider selection of stakeholders, such as parents or the sport science team. Wixey and Kingston (2023) sought the opinions of different stakeholders working in elite youth sport environments to identify the salient psychological attributes across different disciplines (e.g., strength and conditioning, sport psychology, coaching, education). A similar approach could be taken to explore which of the eight attributes, if developed, impacts other disciplines the most (e.g., sport nutrition, strength and conditioning, education). If these attributes are then promoted through stakeholders across the multidisciplinary team, then this will serve to benefit the psychological development of the player and the discipline they are performing in (Wixey & Kingston, 2023). If embedded through the coaching and multidisciplinary team, the psychological development of players may become a feature of the culture of an academy, rather than being hinged upon the decision of leaders in that environment.

Finally, although this programme has provided a case study on the delivery of a sport psychology education programme (highlighting the ability to have a positive impact by adopting an indirect approach), it would be of benefit to the literature to hear, empirically, from a full-time sport psychology practitioner housed within an academy to offer greater understanding of the role and the methods to approach the sport psychology provision. Understandably, there is a dearth of empirical research (i.e., ethnographic accounts) from full-time practitioners in literature. However, there is a need for greater knowledge on a model for full-time

sport psychology practice within football academies to help better inform the governing bodies (i.e., the Premier League), funding (i.e., from the EPPP), coach education (i.e., how to work with sport psychology practitioners), and university or accredited courses to better prepare individuals for the role (Nesti & Sulley, 2015).

Conclusion

The present programme of research aimed to identify the key psychological attributes required to give an academy player the best opportunity to transition through the academy and progress into the professional game, identifying the coaching strategies used to develop each. Then, utilising this knowledge, the objective was to develop and deliver a coach education programme, with the purpose of improving the academy coach's knowledge and capabilities to support their players to develop each of the desired psychological attributes. Consequently, this thesis has provided the literature base with eight contextualized psychological attributes to develop in academy players, 53 contextualised coaching strategies to support the development of the eight attributes, adaptive behaviours that indicate the successful development of each attribute, and a 14-month coach education programme that applied the theoretical knowledge gained in the earlier stages of the thesis in a category two case study academy.

In meeting the aims of the thesis, several theoretical advancements have been made: (i) the inductive construction of eight psychological attributes that provide academies and practitioners (i.e., coaches and sport psychologists) context-specific attributes to develop in their players, attributes that challenge the utility of deductively informed frameworks in academy football (e.g., the 5Cs, Harwood, 2008); (ii) explicit coaching strategies and behaviours for academy coaches to employ to support the development of psychological attributes in players, (iii)

empirical evidence that an indirect approach to sport psychology support is a viable and effect approach in academy football; and (iv) the programme facilitated a reduction in the intention-action gap with academy coaches of Dock FC intending and employing coaching strategies to support the psychological development of their players. Alongside theoretical advancements, the programme of work offers significant contributions for applied practice regarding the utility of the eight attributes in academy settings, coaching strategies to develop each attribute, and the function and use of the adaptive behaviours that demonstrate the successful development of each attribute.

It is recommended that key stakeholders adjust their approach to better support the psychological development of players. First, National Governing Bodies (i.e., the FA and The Premier League) are urged to review and encourage the psychological development of players through a change to the EPPP policy to include greater, standardized, expectations for the sport psychological provision. Second, academy decision-makers should prioritize the psychological development of their players and find appropriate means to provide this for their players. Finally, it is recommended that sport psychology practitioners incorporate indirect approaches to psychological support, working indirectly through the academy coach to have a greater and wider impact (Arthur et al., 2019; Nesti & Sulley, 2015). At the core of this thesis is the motivation to support the academy player as they journey through an intense, competitive, and at times hostile environment, experiencing highs as well as lows. As adults in an early specialisation environment, it is imperative that we ensure the players become the product of the academy, not merely the survivors (Wixey et al., 2021).

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CHAPTER 7

Reflective Epilogue

Reflections on my Ph.D. Journey: My Development as a Student, Practitioner,

Peer, and Person

Introduction

As I begin to write this section, I can hear a metaphorical bell ringing as though I am entering the last lap of a marathon race. The marathon's terrain, however, was far more undulating than described on the sign-up sheet, and the route differed from that set out at the start. Indeed, I actually set out to do a half-marathon! Yet, despite the increased distance, the unknowns, and the hills that popped out of nowhere, I have loved, embraced, and cherished every stride of my doctoral "marathon".

This section will outline some of my own reflections, a highlight reel; communicating how this process has changed and shaped me to become an independent researcher, a better practitioner, and a better person. I will reflect on three general themes, weaving in the lessons I have learnt along the way. The themes that my reflections are based around include (i) how it started and reminding myself of that; (ii) publications: fuelling the fire; and (iii) striking a balance.

How it Started, and Reminding Myself of That

After completing my undergraduate degree in sport and physical education I was at a slight crossroads: do I apply for a PDGE or a masters in applied sport psychology? From the age of ten I was in a football academy doing a two-hour round trip three times a week for training and games. I remember being so proud leaving my primary and then second school in my kit (as there was no other time to change) before we high-tailed it east to another city constantly batting through the rush-hour traffic. I never really thought I would become a professional player, this notion was forced out of me at my second training session when the academy director told

myself and the other new signings that only one in a hundred would go on make it. It was very true. But maybe not what a ten-year-old needed to hear, and as a relatively switched on kid, I interpreted that spiel to mean I was simply on the road to inevitable failure. And, unbeknown to me at the time, a future England star was stood next me: so, he was the 1%. Nevertheless, it was where I felt I belonged, and I didn't want to let anyone down so for the next five years I honed my craft with this academy. I was, in my coach's words "a confidence-player, one day magnificent, the next not there", which was very accurate. But no one helped me with any psychological shortcomings. I wanted to leave around age 14 as I had been plagued by injuries and lost a lot of enjoyment, but the academy director sat me down and persuaded me to stay, and upon summarizing the meeting said: "your Mum is quite tall, so you're worth keeping hold of". Thanks. Anyway, fast forward two years and mid-way through the Under 16 season, having missed much of the U15 season due to a back injury, I received a letter through the post saying I was released. My overriding emotion was relief, seconded by guilt at the thought that I had let my parents, especially my Dad down, given his sacrifices. Over the years I reflected on my experiences at the academy, slightly resentful with my belief that they did not get the best from me and left me- mentally- in a poorer place than they found me. I chose the option to study for the master's degree in applied port psychology; I had unfinished business to attend to.

My Master's programme further fuelled my intentions to help affect the psychological development through coaching, with my dissertation centring around just that (Kingston et al., 2020). I enrolled as a doctoral research student at the University of Gloucestershire quickly after receiving my Master's degree with the intention of exploring the psychological development of players from an existential

perspective. However, I was just not invested in my own work from the outset, and after 18 unproductive months of toying around with my Ph.D. proposal and ethics documents I realized that my project was self-serving (as some form of therapy) rather than a proposal to affect and change the experiences of those housed within football academies. This realization came at the same time my supervisory team disbanded at the University of Gloucestershire, which was one of those critical moments academics talk about, and one that steeled my resilience, enhanced my patience, and made me a grittier person. I knew I could not be wasteful with the privilege of undertaking a Ph.D., and I could no longer "play" at being a Ph.D. student, I needed to immerse myself and commit whole-heartedly to this goal. I emailed Kieran to see if he was free to advise. One week later, Kieran was my supervisor, I had a new University, and a renewed and a sharpened focus for my project. More motivated, purposeful, and patient, rejuvenated in my aim of affecting change in academy football.

Publications: Fuelling the Fire

I failed my first piece of undergraduate coursework, 37%. I didn't deserve anything higher. I did not make the jump from tertiary to higher education quick enough, maybe thinking that I would be handed a degree in exchange for course fees. After drowning my sorrows at a fresher's night in Oceana Cardiff, I vowed it wouldn't happen again. My final grade at master's level was 77%. I was never great at writing, and it was something I had to work incredibly hard at, but I learnt to enjoy it. Publishing articles was not on my radar when I commenced my Ph.D., but the moment it was mentioned, I wanted to push on further and establish myself as a published author.

My first publication was one of the greatest lessons I encountered throughout my Ph.D. as I was pushed and challenged to an extent I had not previously been subjected to in academia. It humbled me and taught me the importance of patience. Kieran took me through an intense tutelage, with hundreds of emails batted back and forth as my master's research was shaped into publication form. I gained a deep appreciation for the English language: how less is more, how every sentence must hold meaning, and to "say it once, and say it well". Preparing for submission, and then the following resubmission, was intense and all-consuming. As part of this tutelage, I learnt quickly become thick skinned when receiving feedback on my written work. Kieran, and later Brendan, always provided feedback, which was communicated with brevity and precision, a method of feedback that I also quickly learnt to respect and adopt. Over time, the comments seemed to become more positive, or less negative, or they had stayed the same and I was just not perceiving them to be negative… either way, my writing was progressing, and I thoroughly enjoyed collaborating with established authors in Kieran, Brendan and David. I still have plenty of work to do, but I have reached a point where I am confident in my language and look forward to the challenge. Indeed, I sometimes now anthropomorphise "things" just to keep Brendan on his toes! Returning to my inaugural publication, Kingston et al., (2020), it superseded the achievement I felt when receiving my undergraduate or master's degree. I had realised a goal that I had not previously considered, and it catalysed further ambitions and aims, i.e., publishing again, being lead author, writing a book chapter, and acting as a reviewer for a journal, all of which were accomplished over the years thereafter (Kingston et al., 2021; Wixey et al., 2021; Wixey & Kingston, 2021; Wixey & Kingston, 2022). Writing for publication alongside conducting my research, undoubtably improved

and accelerated my development toward being an independent researcher as I appreciated the 'end goal' far more.

Striking a Balance

Throughout the entirety of this Ph.D. project I was working full-time in an FE college, first as a lecturer, then to a course lead, and the last few years as a Head of Faculty. Many people asked how I was able to cope doing both, or more pointedly told me I was "mad" for taking on both commitments. But it was not until the very that I perceived my Ph.D. to be a stressor in my life. For the majority of my doctorate journey I thoroughly enjoyed having something so different, so separate, from my full-time role. Although paradoxical, having these large commitments made me more effective in both, as I learnt be even more productive with my time, mastered prioritization, and- existentially – it gave me a greater identity than being "just" a lecturer, which helped me to cope with the tough times in teaching but kept me grounded during the good times.

I had to continually strike a balance between work, Ph.D., and 'play', but at no point was I able to create consistent ringfenced time for myself to work on my Ph.D., despite many, many plans! As the adage goes, no plan survives contact, and this was certainly true for any scheduling I attempted. Work commitments, family commitments, holidays, trips, COVID, participant availability, access to academies, are a few of the variables that constantly affected schedules and the intention to ring fence time. The completion of my Ph.D. was more of a juggling act than it was a well-planned and well-enacted operation. As a result, I became comfortable in the uncomfortable, and from it increased my bandwidth to work (with quality) in ad hoc moments and for bursts of time.

Words of Wisdom… Less the Wisdom.

As an educator it would be bereft of me to finish this thesis without offering some brief tips or words of wisdom to the [insert single figure digit] people who find my Ph.D. on google.

1. Feeling comfortable in the uncomfortable. This is one of the most important things I learnt throughout my Ph.D. journey. Stress or feeling stretched is important for growth, and a Ph.D. will certainly provide this without nudging. On countless occasions situations did not go as planned, but over the term of my research project I learnt to expect a bump in road and as a result I became more resilient: prepared for and able to respond positively to the scenario I was met with. Thus, the lesson here is to know that feeling uncomfortable is normal.

2. Patience. Linked to feeling comfortable in the uncomfortable is the second recommendation, patience. I was a relatively impatient person who wanted the outcome before I gave a situation my full attention and due diligence. This impulsion was quickly forced out of me: quality takes time, not shortcuts. The review process of articles, the development of the thesis, and the process of obtaining data, are all examples of situations that cannot be rushed, but they require patience and assuredness. I learnt not to sacrifice quality for quantity or volume, which enriched the successes I experienced along the way.

3. Return to the why. Do not lose sight of why you start your Ph.D. journey. Your Ph.D. may evolve of course, and develop new meaning and depth, but there was a reason why you started and that is something you should remind yourself of. For me, it was my experiences as an adolescent in an academy and the distinct lack of psychological knowledge to support my performance.

Thus, I wanted to help and support, on a wider level, the psychological support in academies.

4. Humour and not taking things too seriously. Brendan summed this up better than I can: "no one really gives a s*** about sport psychology, in the grand scheme of things its not important". My Ph.D., and sport psychology, is important to me, but that's all I can be confident of. Beyond my own aims and goals, who cares, really? This mindset, with hints of satirical tones, is important, to keep you grounded and realistic about what you are producing.

5. You can do it alone, but…I wouldn't. I was completing my Ph.D. in relative isolation for three years, which was fine, I knew no better. However, being amongst a Ph.D. 'team' for the latter years was a very important feature of my journey. I would recommend surrounding yourself with like-minded individuals with similar goals. Although you have your own projects, the perceived social support alone makes it worth it. Not only can you learn from your peers, but you can get some sense of satisfaction helping others out too. "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together" (African Proverb).

APPENDIX

Appendix A: Study One Ethical Approval

Ethical Approval from Cardiff Metropolitan University

Research Ethics Committee use only		
Decision reached:	Project approved	☑
	Project approved in principle	☐
	Decision deferred	☐
	Project not approved	☐
	Project rejected	☐
Project reference number: 17/6/01R		
Name: Jon Oliver	Date: 20/06/2017	
Signature:		
Details of any conditions upon which approval is dependant: The research can only begin once a senior member of staff at the participating football club provides a written statement that they are content for their staff to participate in the research. This letter must be appended to and uploaded with this ethics application		

Appendix B: Study One Interview Guide

Interview Guide – To identify the key psychological characteristics of players who become professional football players, and how these develop across the age groups. Thank you for taking the time to sit down with me today. The aim of this interview is get your opinions as to the key psychological characteristics that are ideally required for successful progression out of the academy and into the professional game. All information will remain confidential, but will be reported with identities protected, and used to help educate academy coaches in the future.

(1)   Can I start by asking you about your personal approach to coaching? How would you describe your personal view to another coach if they asked?

(2)   How is the philosophy you've just described linked to how young players learn and develop?
- How has this changed over time or how did it evolve?

(3)   Now I would like to discuss with you the important psychological qualities of players in academies and beyond. Firstly, can I ask what you understand by the phrase 'psychological attributes'?
- What importance do you place on the mental qualities of a player? (compared to physical capabilities, or tactical understanding, for example)
- How have you developed the knowledge of what psychological attributes players should possess in order to progress and fulfil their potential?

(4)   What are the key psychological qualities needed for the modern-day professional footballer?
- Why are the ones you mention particularly important?
- How do you recognise each of these key qualities in the behaviours of players – what do they look like?
- How do they influence behaviours?
- Are some more important in different situations than others, for instance in games rather than training?
- Of these you just mentioned [repeat], which do you believe is the most influential and why?

(5) You have identified that some characteristics are more important than others…To what extent do you think strength in certain areas compensates for less ability in other psychological characteristics? Can you give me some examples?

(6) How does the way you interact with players alter depending on which key attributes they possess? Can you give some examples?

(7) To what extent do you believe psychological attributes can be developed in an individual?
- Which can be developed?
- Can you explain how you look to develop them in specific sessions and over the course of the season (may need to list out the key attributes)
- What attributes take longer to develop?
  - Why might this be the case?
  - How are these developed/targeted?

(8) Most of the psychological characteristics appear to be able to be developed, are there any that can't be developed?
- Why not?

(9) Can you reflect on your use of coaching styles and how different styles may support or promote different characteristics:

- Do some players need certain coaching styles to develop these psych characteristics?
- Are certain coaches better at developing certain characteristics than others?
- Do some players respond better to some coaches than others because of this? Can you give me any examples?
- Do coaches need to possess these characteristics in order to develop them in players?

(10) Before I finish, I'd like to ask you about the circumstances that, in your opinion might slow down or are barriers to the development of certain key psychological attributes within your age group?
- Across training?
- Game situations?

Thank you very much for your answers, very much appreciate your time today. Just to finish, this is an opportunity for you to add anything that we haven't discussed.

Appendix C: Study One Example Transcript from Participant Coach Interview

Study One: To identify the key psychological characteristics of players who become professional football players, and how these develop across the age groups.

Thank you for taking the time to sit down with me today. The aim of this interview is get your opinions as to the key psychological characteristics that are ideally required for successful progression out of the academy and into the professional game. All information will remain confidential, but will be reported with identities protected, and used to help educate academy coaches in the future.

r[8]) Can I start by asking you about your personal approach to coaching? How would you describe your personal view to another coach if they asked?

c[9]) yeah ok no problems. so in terms of my original starting point as a coach would of pretty much been copying would've been copying off others and that's how we start, so there wouldn't of been the understanding of why i would've been doing something it would've just been doing something. so learning new drills learning new ways, watching others and going that's a good drill. that's a great mannerism ill get that in. so it was very fragmented initially. you start to understand the concept of the game but then you think that you know a lot about the game but its not until you journey 5 10 years in to the game do you start where you start realising how much is different and can change. so my philosophy before was very technical and tactical driven ehm probably more in the last 2 3 years for me its been more about for them to engage in the learning process and to get better there has to be a significant understanding of them, and its very, for me, there is lots of it, there is lots of it that its a bit of a theme and its a fad that you got to know the individual you got to do this, but to actually connect with them is more important than anything. if you connect with them in the right way, you'll get a return from it. ehm i think that's no different from teaching, i think consistently and behaviour from myself so you're never up and down you're very consistent with your frame of mind. you don't particularly over the top one day then negative the negative there needs to be a consistency, they need to know where they stand. i think that they can rapport with that a lot better than someone who yo yo's.

r) is that across all age groups?

c) i think that the idea behind the younger ones being more fun orientated is crucial but i don't dismiss that from even up to the 23s, i think it has to have that element in it will. it'll happen in the first team. so in my team there is a misconstrue from the younger ones that its fun and everyone's involved and that it gets more serious as you go on. that's only the interpretation of the coach, i think there needs to be an element of the individual taking responsibility for their own learning don't get me wrong but i think that if you go too mad too serious on it too quickly on the whole concept, I'm not sure you'll get the right return from them.

r) so your coaching philosophy its about learning, but the coach drives that learning, and the players engaging with it

c) 100%. it has to happen that way. now however the coach dresses that up in any format, it doesn't have to be to tell it could be a constraints based set up that the players learn from even failure or trial and error whatever it would be, whatever it would be. you need to engage them in thinking. As learning a process is only about once iv picked something up i can repeat a particular action or behaviour. if that situation arises again, what we, and probably me as a younger coach would've been fire-fighting. so what i mean i see a situation and i would tell them what to do in that situation, and so if a similar situation i would struggle. the idea behind it is: you're driving your car whilst learning to drive, you're coming to a roundabout, its bigger or smaller. if its a bigger once- what do i do? well you should know principles of where you need to go anyway and if i know those key things then i can adapt, address what is happening.

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r) and you said it took you several years... how long did it take you to reach this point?

d) oh, its evolving all the time. i start coaching 19 years ago. ehm and prior to that i was doing some teaching stuff as a young guy, a really young guy. so that's evolved over those 19 years 100%. ehm what i find in that is there, within that timeframe its probably odd doing this type of role where i get to see different coaches doing different things where i critique myself as well as them. pretty quickly, initially i would be quick to get out and see everything working but that was a when time became available.

r) and were you in FE?

d) nope straight into secondary so straight into key stage 2 3 4. loved it. i did it for nearly 12 years. so i was always coaching part while teaching, but having that impact on learning and understanding and understanding what learning is about- and you see guys who are just coming through traditional coaching routes into the coaching industry, which is great, but there are lots of holes. expected holes as well, but holes in terms of their understanding of what learning is. if they're good they learn on their feet and they adapt.

r) surprising how many teaching background in academy football. so in terms of you went from technical tactical in your philosophy, and you moved to learning... so what is the importance you placed on the mental side of the game for players.

c) i mean even more so. i mean originally if you too the four corner model if the fa would've branded you if you were a level 1 level 2 coach you learn about the physical. that interested me, that's what i studied. health and fitness was my foundation degree then i went and did an applied coaching science degree after. and so i had an understanding of the physical and obviously you get the technical and tactical stuff in every badge from level 1 through the a license. but probably what they don't really embark on very well is the social and the psychological characteristics. and when you think about what drives the body its very much that side of stuff. and from my experience now of being in this environment for a number of years. the players i see that struggle to cope with the demands of the game and the managers at 23 onwards is that its not... its not always that physical tactical or technical stuff. its more to do with fitting with environments, understanding others, understanding self, how they deal with setbacks, how they deal with a lack of confidence, how they deal with when it becomes boring. when it becomes mundane and they just got to get on with it. when its changing in weather, so there is lots of things that we probably initially to prepare them for. certainly at academy football. when i first came in at Fulham there wasn't a great deal of understanding of it. we tried to do a sport psych programme, running alongside. i don't believe there was many in the country being run like that and that was going back nearly 8 years. must have been one of the first... had a separate company come in that was run, and they used to do a workshop every other Saturday on different characteristics of psych. a lot of it was more, rather than developing a particular element, was more about visualisation, components of it. so it wasn't personal development it was understanding what techniques were out there to help them. particularly mental skills as opposed to any psychological development. so the difference where we are at today here is we now got coaches readily looking at characteristics of individuals we no where near where we need to be. i think as a sport, let alone in our club, but understanding that and i think we now got it identified as lots of different tests or things that we do, but I'm saying to them, you've got a kid like that brilliant: so as an example we did a workshop just 3 weeks ago. they had 4 coaches working, 2 age groups, had an hour and a hal to set something up, however they designed it, however they interacted with the kids, there had to be a purpose behind a psychological development. whether that was general or individual based. so we filmed them prior to doing anything, so they had a few hours before the plan it, then they ran this hour and a half session and we started afterwards- did it work, what didn't work. but it wasn't on a tactical emphasis, it was on a psychological emphasis. what did you want to get out of it and did it happen? and i think they got to a point where they really understood how they exposed it. we got kids who struggle with mentality who struggle when they're losing considerably and they don't have drive to pick themselves up yet. but there is a definite lack of, certainly research, but also actual information out there, if iv got this person that is deficient in there we have exposed them to it how do we then look at supporting that process, because its all well and good at

isolating that player as an example and saying: i told you he's got a temper, as an example. is then what then do i do to make sure in five years you're not displaying that characteristic...

r) that's brilliant, you're creeping into my second study! how did the coaches manage it in the end?

c) they did really well. we've probably been looking at this for about a year, mentioned, mentioned in meetings, so we are scraping the surface for identifying these things. but what surprised me was, i didn't want to give them any restrictions, it can be a training session whatever you want it to be and some really surprised me to how good it was, the set up and what they were doing any why they were doing it.

r) did it have an impact on the other corners, did the technical or tactical reduce? or did they all work well?

c) i think the majority of them... the design actually, like the tactical was taking care of itself or the technical element of it. and the physical would've been identified, we didn't specify that so there might've been ups and downs on it, but generally it was all going on. even for some it was making it so it wasn't too far-fetched.

r) moving into the psychological attributes... Now I would like to discuss with you the important psychological qualities of players in academies and beyond. Firstly, can I ask what you understand by the phrase 'psychological attributes'? And then can you tell me what the key psychological qualities needed for the modern-day professional footballer are?

c) ehm i mean its a long way isn't it. for an 8 or a 9 year old, there are different stages of how they are going through but i think as a psychological characteristic they got to have a bit of self-confidence, which obviously fluctuates, but i think its how, how is your confidence affected? so during that process, if they... there is going to be times when they are the best player, or the middle player or the worst player. they're going to move up or down, someone around them gets bigger, they get bigger, they move onto a new coach, the new coach likes them better. so how they believe people perceive them is quite crucial. because they're always looking for feedback kids, they're always looking for gratification on what's happening am i good, aam i not good. and they listen to that. and the different experiences they will go through across the time line that they are in they will go up and down, and having that ability, or you believe they are saying to you: you're not very good. do you go : oh ok, or do you go: actually no. and it doesn't affect them which is difficult at a younger age. so self-belief is definitely one of them. confidence, i think they got to have a passion for what they do. they also got to be driven. they got to be driven because ultimately its an internal drive, it cant be, its not an external drive and i don't think again with ourselves there are a lot of sports that put a lot of money into it, but again with the rewards that are so external based, we are not always getting the kids doing it for the right reason, i don't think. i think as a younger kid everyone plays because they want to play, but as they get a bit older i think there are a few players they're in the system because they don't know what else to do and their quite good at it, they're not excellent at it, but good at it, so they're still in the building but probably realistically never going to get into there [points to first team pitch], but probably they're not quite sure what else to do..

r) so they need to immerse themselves to really make it count...

c) absolutely. absolutely. so they need to be internally driven to want to be. i think wanting to be a footballer and needing to be a footballer is a phrase i have used before. cuz its always nice to want to be a footballer.

r) what do think are the reasons for those externally driven players?

c) it could be parents; it could be agents. ehm...

r) agents...

c) yeah it would've happened at Christmas. you'd of had a kid at Christmas whose 12 years old, they would've had the whole family around and talking: how's football going? when are you going to be a famous guy? and you're going to earn loads of money. and so there is almost a bit of pressure that they're started to receive here. as much as we can say - don't worry about that. we see the opportunity and tell the parents too. they don't mean any harm by it but that's just the environment. so we got 180 odd kids in this system who this

would've happened to all over Christmas, every age group, every kid. so ehm dealing with pressure is another one that comes into it. and how. and what that means, how you deal with pressure...

r) what do you mean by pressure?

c) its a perceived pressure, its what they believe. a lot of this runs off their own psyche, its not, sometimes what's outside its what's inside that affects them in terms of pressure. ehmm i mean they got to have some determination but i think that links into the other ones- your set backs one... ehm self belief...

r) so the set back attribute, coming back from failure? or something else?

c) it could be an injury, again it could be someone doesn't value them as well as another coach and that's something we have to work really hard on year on year. who is placed with who. do we generally... we had a coach that went with every age group this year, so they had somebody consistent and somebody new, ehm and that was really to do with getting a new eye on them but giving them some stability as they go through. we have not always planned for that in the past, but that has a bigger knock-on affect like things like psychological aspects.

r) so this stability... or ability to bounce back... is there a term you would use?

c) i think there are key words and throw at you, but I'm not sure how much i believe, i mean not don't believe in them, but you got resilience you've got bouncebackability. is it key? is it crucial? of course it is. but its more than that. i think some of those words are just - words. i mean a 9 year old, resilient? not really. i think with any of them... they've got to be able to bounce back from failure, but that leaks into self-belief and determination.

r) so overcoming setbacks i have put here, and dealing with pressure... these seem like behaviours from a younger age.

c) correct, and overcoming setbacks is an interesting one when it comes to kids who are either physically stronger and therefore always capable, and then certainly when kids catch up to a certain degree, and never being the same size or the same speed of them... but the moment they can stop dominating is easily as they can, or they're the best kid on the pitch, and people coming around them- they find that really hard. just through course have been very exceptional lower down. and especially if there is an individual that they perceive as being nowhere near them, and then over a summer break they've grown by so much and just found their coordination, their nervous system has just started to match in with what it should be. they're in a position where they can now compete. some kids find that hard and they all manage to display sulky tendencies and they give up easy. so ensuring that , using the cliche, they don't go without a bump in the road , you got to be able to provide some kind of fall backs that they have to overcome the set backs. its a topic of conversation what that means if you're the best player, because whether we like it or not, without the exceptional few those who break into a first team environment you're probably in a position where you might get straight in, and you might be out for a little bit, you might be back in, then out again; do you continue to work in the same way, using players here who would've gone into a first team position. and they're really still hard work but they would've never gone out there and never of had that same focus before in terms of development- so its almost like where does development stop? world renowned people like Ronaldo, through documentaries you can sense that he doesn't ever want to stop they want to get better and better. i don't always see it. you get distracted by cars and everything else that comes with it. they're not horrible people, they still come to training and work hard, but probably sitting down and how many of them sit down and watch themselves over and over again and be like: i need to get that right... I'm not so sure .

r) you said about knowing yourself, is that self-reflection process important too...

c) yeah yeeah yep. self-reflection, that ability to be self-aware. i don't think that myself have been aware as i had thought i would have been. only in the last year two year... all of my development time of coaching and teaching and coaching that I'm in a better place and I'm able to self-reflect a lot better. i think its something we need to with kids early on.

r) do you notice the more successful players do that more readily?

c) oh 100%. but i think there is a scale of that. i don't think its they either do or they don't. i think you got the exceptions where you got those that don't and you got some that float in between. but you've only got, realistically,2% who do the top end stuff. and then its at what age do they need to be doing that, if they're 12 13 do they need to be that obsessed with it? probably not so much.

r) returning to the timeline, because you said about the physical lads maybe not being as psychologically prepared ... have you recognised a pattern when there is a catch up point, and is there a psych attribute or element to the balance?

c) its a really good question. in thinking of different individuals, it has been different. ehm i think some of it doesn't catch up, its often so far gone that they struggle to to to adapt in this short period of time. football being quite quick on, not letting people go, but on standards and what's required. because everything starts to shrivel very quickly to whose jobs are available later on. if i think back to ehm some of the players, i think physically they have been able to go go go go, then they've just gone. so i think in that time frame we have not done them a justice as coaches to give them any development in those areas. certainly on setbacks and ... because suddenly it becomes a real set back.

r) and regarding those lads who are physically better but don't have the mental attributes that you ideally want; are those individuals protected or is there a leniency towards them?

c) yeah I'm aware.. yeah its an unintentional one as well, i don't think... its certainly not fostered for a reason it just happens organically and its something that now we are reflecting back on as a club and as an industry and people are aware of that far more. i think 5/10 years ago you wouldn't really have identified it. i think now, its those kids, they don't have to be big but are technically better than everybody and people become different. so, yeah there is a big, a different... trying to think of individuals..... if they've been better throughout...can you repeat the question again...

r) so a player has been recognised for their more physical prowess.... are they being protected?

c) yeh i think it is unintentional protection that goes on. and sometimes, its just oh they're the better kid we will keep them going. sometimes in coaching you're worried about what they havnt got rather than what they got. so the whole idea that we are getting the better ones better which is a good thing because it can only push the better ones higher, but you also need to have a stretch of everyone in the group. so id say they probably do it, it is an unintentional protection of them. and I'm just thinking of a couple of cases where you need to be able to manage that. on reflection we talk about how many players are always players that start every game at a younger age group. is there a similarity between those that start 1st or 2nd. so are we focusing on the wrong things in the development process?

r) so there could be a skewed element, an unintentional one...

c) absolutely. people think they are doing the best thing at the time.

r) and from a talent point of view, would you include psychological aspects in talent ID. so would you say this player is really talented because of their psychological attributes?

c) i would. 100%. the club have got a particular philosophy of how we recruit and one of them would be based on a spirit. type spirit. its very broad but it encompasses a lot of things: does he show energy? has he got the right attitude? does he give up when he shouldn't do? so that is a base criteria for our recruitment team at the club. so its absolutely fundamental, so the work we are doing with our sport psych he even talked about yesterday in terms of recruitment, is there a screening process from one of the sport psych team that do brief 10/15 minutes potentially to just get even a conversation, nothing official not sitting down with parents, even if he is introduced as one of the coaches at the start and then the guy uses his skills to try and unpick a few things, to see the responses and the answers are to feed that into the coach. yeah interesting. but it is very crucial. how you do it, i don't know at the moment. its recruitment as an industry has been unregulated for a long time as regards to qualifications as you need to do it. so talent id, what determines from one scout to another at the moment? there are some very good ones, then like every industry there are average or poor ones. but what skill set do they have? a lot of them use tasic knowledge and go : he looks a bit like someone iv got through before who was successful. which is great, but it

needs to be bigger than that. but if i wonder to a game ad hoc, do any of them go: corr look at that player there he's like best one on the pitch. he's on the losing team. he's the one that is still going now, its 4-0 down, he's leading the others around... i don't think they would.

r) difficult integrating the psych elements into that initial talent identification then...

c) i think moving forward it has to be. cuz there are plenty of kids.

r) just moving on. we have a few behaviours and attributes, what are the strategies that you use to develop these? for example you mentioned about interactions between coach and player...

c) i mean id probably be forced to be saying to you, oh we have a strategy for all of these, because really its a process of where we are at, we are identifying quite well. how we deal with it, a lot go to our sport psych ben and go we got this kid that does that. so then Ben would then be hauled in to go and work 1 to 1, 2 to 1. ehmm I'm sure the coaches would do what they can to try and develop to develop determination. so it might be how they organise the session, but again its more of an exposure thing rather than a fixed thing. its a bit harsh but i think they'll be a number of coaches in any club that will be quite happy to go: we are going to do this... look i told you he's like that [pointing at imaginary player]. so its that i told you so mentality a little bit. I'm right, and that's great, and that's probably where we are at. but your job is not to identify it, is then to support it to go forward. so they would do things within a session to expose sometimes that happens again. but sometimes its planned. sometimes its overcoming setbacks. some coaches do things where they operate a training session where the game finishes with the same teams playing with each other, and its who scored and who scores and its recorded week on week: oh you're in the losing team again, or you're doing really well you're in the winning team. so, kids are operated with that. and so is it, are some of these developed through pure exposure? don't know?

r) so some simulated trauma?

c) correct. absolutely. how they deal with things like the self-confidence. how you develop that, the coach would give them confidence. they're probably guilty of diminishing that confidence at times. not, again just through a lack of self awareness of how they act. so they wouldn't intentionally do it, but they might end up dropping in... something they say, they do, might be something indirect, like who I'm picking this week. but again i don't know if there is a support mechanism for that. we do a lot of individual workshops again lead by Ben that's normally for an age group, then he will go out and observe. but because there is only one of him, its about how we can upskill our staff to how we can support our psych development on a bigger scale, rather than him having to flee around and do what he can.

r) To what extent do you believe psychological attributes can be developed in an individual?

c) yeah. yeah i mean the coaches will. so the development programme here we have for staff is a lot about for self-awareness. its one of the biggest things for us. so there are video recordings that go on, there are sessions that are crypted to do with the amount of language they use, who they speak to, the type of language that is given. a lot of the results suggest there is a lot of general. some have more than others. and this is where we are with them. we say that your style will impact on a number of these things. so saying there is no right or wrong way to do it, but be aware if you have spoken with this player here 28 times and this player once, how does he look at that, but then how does he look at that? so there are results provided to the coach, not to say right or wrong, but to make them more self-aware of what they are having. do they go oh: i spoke to him that many times to affect his self-confidence. still probably not yet, that's our next stage to do that. so coaching behaviours or styles, no right or wrong, they are good moderators for any of these attributes at any time. and i think initially it is spontaneous, so not planned, and they just deal with what is in front of them, which is normal. its then having the ability to go back and look and go well, that was right for him today because i needed to say a lot to him because of the type of game and his learning, a new aspect or something. but just be aware of that. i said to them [coaches] it shouldn't look even across the board, but your behaviour will have an impact on all these types of things.

r) so coach reflection is an indirect driver of these?

c) yes absolutely.

r) and the education yourself and ben provide are too?

c) yes.

r) do players arrive here with these attributes, or do you develop it? maintain it?

c) its a good question. the more they're around the buildings when they get 15s and on they have more time here, in which case they have more resources available them. whether this is from the coach or via PMA or via video feedback whatever it might be. lower down we try to. there are lots of, lots of.. we spend a lot of time clipping for individuals. but I'm on the par of what do we do to improve that internal drive? is that something that is counterproductive for it? so we give them it, oh go look at your clips, but no it should be: the video is there of the whole game- go through it. and i think you'll tell the difference because i do i look at it on an ipad at home with mum and dad and my mates and go oo look at me, its all about me. or do i actually have, when no one else i around to go, have the determination to go right I'm going to sit in patience... pause it : ooops what did i do there... and i think that for me would be ... this can be supported and manufactured in a certain way. but we have to be careful we don't provide at times too much for them. so were in a position where they might have four sessions a week and instead of chasing them for 3 and never seeing them again. id be to the key of there is a reminder to the parent: ill just make you aware that the kid gets what they can from the programme. because you will see who is first one through the door. if you start chasing people then parents will start saying: you will be at training, you have been told. you don't know if they are eternally driven or not because outside influences are effecting it. there are ways to organise yourself to see who is a bit more internally driven or not.

r) and the player who is first through the door, what does the player who demonstrates these qualities here, what does it look like?

c) and that's hard because some will do it because they are a good kids. so packing up kit, bringing all the stuff in. oh he's a really good lad. doesn't mean he's going to be a good footballer. the difference between internally driven is somebody who would do the bits you don't see, is not the one who would be first through the door to stand up in front of you and say: yes sir what do you want done. every coach loves the guy who pleases the coach, how they operate, its just human nature. and we have some coaches who go, he's a great kid and you're like: ooook. and its not necessarily the kid who doesn't do that we are interested in, its trying to find the bits that you don't see them doing, becasue that's the internal drive. they're quite happy to sit at home and look at what they do, they are quite happy to do extra bits, we have kids go out and do extra bits because that's what the kids think the coaches want to see, and in order for them to secure the next contract they need to create the right image. and is that internally driven or another reason.

r) so away from here you have the PMA. do the coaches tell the players that they look and check?

c) some are a bit like that. i think all of them in a nutshell need support. you cant just stand back and go, he never does it. you then need to investigate: is it access? opportunities? they just don't understand? some of them don't have support from home? some of them write really detailed, but then it could be the dad doing it. so you got to be careful you don't take what you say as literal. but it is an indicator, of those who do do it and those who don't.

r) and the self aware athlete, what do they look like?

c) hmmmm. ehhhmm. probably moderate about their behaviour. how they interact with others. mistakes, do they repeat them on a consistent basis. self-awareness is all about, if someone tells me or i notice myself do i do anything about changing that. ehm so you might see somebody who repeats a particular behaviour that they understand or see is not right, whether they see it themselves or someone has nudged them. ehm, that's how i would summarise that one.

r) so just wary of time for you, can you place these in a hierarchy, starting with the most core ones at the bottom and any following important attributes. can you just talk me through your structure and why.

c) ok... ill put them in a rank order. so i kind of gone with, i think these two.. these are two key. at slightly more priority is the spirit of the individual and how they're internally driven.

one will affect the other and one is the other. i think that helps because at some stage in any game, they got to step over the line to deal with what is going on in front of them in any situation. and as they move into adult football you don't know who the manager is going be , the club they're going to be at, whether they will have any injuries, so they got to have something in here to be aware and start and keep them there. its one thing about making a debut, the most difficult thing is then how to make a career in the game. we are very keen in academies to say we made a debut, which is great , its a landmark. but there is a lot of stats to tell you when the next consistent run of games are whether that's with you or another club and something, and those don't read to well. so i think whatever happens, these have got to be quite high up because when they leave you they got to be able to cope with that. i think self-awareness becasue that is going to effect everything that you do. and self-confidence, i think self-confidence will help you get back into these positions, and self-awareness again is just, would probably keep you longer term, and id kind of put these all in one line. determination is key, but probably not as important as this. you got to be able to overcome setbacks, but if you are internally driven it will happen on its on. you got to be able to deal with pressure in any situation, but i think if you got the confidence to do it and aware of everything around you you'll probably be able to deal with it better. uhm, stable belief?

r) this was when you talked about having up and downs over the season you mentioned this... linked to confidence

c) oh yeah yeah of course. ok. ill keep it in there. its probably there though [sliding it upwards].

r) brill, and bringing these into the four corner model, the physiological, tech, tactical and psych. can you place these over which corner it has the most influence upon. for instance, determination does this impact phys the most, or technical? or purely psych? if its across multiple put it in between, or all 4 pop it in the middle.

c) i mean that one fits nicely across all 4. I'm going to put that one more to the technical side of it. so these four would be your psych, they would be your physical and your technical one, and this one is your psych.

r) Most of the psychological characteristics appear to be able to be developed, are there any that can't be developed?

c) understanding. practical application. so how you actually apply them and what you do. those two fit nicely together. i think it would be parent education, but then understanding what you are going to say to them. sometimes when the kids come in, they're obviously with us a certain amount of time, they're with home life social life for a significant amount of time. i don't buy that they're not with us enough for us to influence them, because i think wherever you can go you can have a significant impact with people, so I think that when they are with us they will need to do these types of things but to carry these behaviours across into other aspects of their lives there might be some parent education required to support them. ehm...

r) what is a bad parent, or a parent who is not facilitative of this [pointing to attributes]

c) we either have the ones who are very keen, who try their hardest who probably over do it, and find it hard. and then there are the others who would be completely anti it. but would have such strong beliefs in something else that they would impact on how useful it is on how they speak to the kid and how they impact, and how they... trying to think of the word... how they perceive these things. do they value these? and i think its parents influencing this. the kids will follow. so that will impact them. we got some parents who are just neutral who just go into , we got some parents who are honest, i don't have a lot to do with him, we just drop them is there anything we can do anything i can help with? they're also the good ones so they're not the necessary bad parents. every parents tries their hardest in what they do..

r) so a little bit of trust?

c) yes yes absolutely ....

r) Before I finish, I'd like to ask you about the circumstances that, in your opinion might slow down or are barriers to the development of certain key psychological attributes within your age group?

c) ehm they can be and it can take time to change. i think if we get players , and you're into a club generally you do what you can to impress, you do what you can to improve. there wouldn't necessarily be a player who comes in and goes, I'm going to do it just the way iv just been doing it before as he's with us for a reason as he's either been promoted or demoted to come into us. and if its the latter they're in no position to through some authority around anyway. but there can be different impacts from different cultures and they way clubs run that operate how do they really care about this. we, my philosophy on younger players and them becoming more serious, would be quite a normal stamp at other clubs: oh you're 13 14 now its got to be like this, it doesn't have to be. so they'll be conflicts and differences so that can be a barrier: a kid who has experienced different before. so that can be, for players who get brought into our environment are given time to adapt because they've never really experienced what its like at a football club, they might've just played for fun once a week and now being asked to play 3 times a week

r) is there an age where it becomes difficult to change this?

c) i think the experts would say there is an age, i believe that if someone wants to change and they are self-aware and they have a few other of these skills then they can. its going to be harder maybe once its ingrained later on, but then is that linked to how much they are really willing to change.

Thank you very much for your answers, very much appreciate your time today. Just to finish, this is an opportunity for you to add anything that we haven't discussed.

Is there anything you wish to add or clarify?

Is there anything we've overlooked?

And finally, did I lead or influence you in any way?

Appendix D: Study Two Ethical Approval

Ethical Approval from Cardiff Metropolitan University

Research Ethics Committee use only		
Decision reached:	Project approved	☑
	Project approved in principle	☐
	Decision deferred	☐
	Project not approved	☐
	Project rejected	☐
Project reference number: 17/6/01R		
Name: Jon Oliver	Date: 20/06/2017	
Signature:		
Details of any conditions upon which approval is dependant: The research can only begin once a senior member of staff at the participating football club provides a written statement that they are content for their staff to participate in the research. This letter must be appended to and uploaded with this ethics application		

Appendix E: Study Two Interview Guide

Study 2 Interview Guide with Academy Coaches

Thank you for participating in this interview. It will last approximately 60 minutes. Anything you say will remain confidential, as will the club and any players you may refer to. This interview is based upon eight identified psychological attributes identified as important to develop within elite youth footballers.

The psychological attributes identified are as follows: 1) ability to cope with demands of high level sport, 2) a strong work ethic, 3) being self-aware and reflective, 4) resilience, 5) confidence, 6) motivated to achieve goals, 7) emotional control, and 8) a commitment to their own development.

There might be the potential that you feel some repetition during the interview. However, all questions are different, so if unsure, do not hesitate to ask for clarification.

(opening/orientating Q)

I'd like to start by asking you to describe the role you play in developing the psychological capabilities of your players?

Coping with the demands of high level sport

(1) The first psychological attribute we will discuss is <u>coping with the demands of high level sport</u>. Coping with the demands of high level sport refers to a player's capabilities to deal effectively with expectations and demands of the academy.

Demands that have been suggested include: physical demands, coping with adversity, harsher environments to prepare for the 1st team, and contract decisions.

(a) Can I ask you to reflect on these and tell me, are there any other demands that you think your players have to cope with?

(b) Tell me about the sort of things you do to help your players cope with the general demands and expectations placed upon them as an academy player?

(c) Describe to me how you help them deal independently with setbacks i.e. manage their own thoughts and feelings, rather than be directly helped by coaches.

(d) How would you support a player to effectively cope with a setback, whether on or off the pitch? For Example: injuries, deselection, or poor performances

   (i) Can you provide examples of the actions you take to support players in each situation or others you can think of?

   - With examples, how might you support players both on and off the pitch?

(e) Can you tell me what behaviours or actions would suggest to you that a player might be able to cope with the demands of high level sport?

   (i) What examples do you have of players demonstrating this?

Before we move on, do you have any additional thoughts regarding the attribute: coping with the demands of high level sport?

Strong work Ethic

(2) Ok, so moving on, the second attribute we are going to discuss is: '<u>Strong work Ethic</u>' Strong work ethic is characterised by a player possessing the right attitude to work hard, demonstrating a conscientious approach to challenges and setbacks, and the determination to create and maintain a career.

(a) Tell me about how you instil a strong work ethic in your players?

   - can you provide examples of when you have done this

(b) Specifically, what are the ways you would develop a player to conscientiously approach, and then deal with, challenges they may face in the academy?

(c) Describe how you get your players to independently approach challenges, and take them seriously

(d) Tell me about how you develop a players' wider motivation to create a career in professional football?

(e) Describe how you would recognise a player who possesses a strong work ethic

Before we move onto the next attribute, do you have anything further to add regarding the current attribute?

Self-aware and reflective

(3) The next desirable psychological attribute identified was an ability to be <u>self-aware and reflective</u>. Self-awareness is where the player possesses present-moment awareness, through recognising and making the most of all opportunities to develop, whilst being reflective, on the other hand, relates to the players' capability to think about their strengths and weaknesses, and act upon their weaknesses.

(a) Describe the actions you take to encourage a player to recognise their own strengths and weaknesses

       - In what ways might these strategies change at training, during competition, or encouraging reflection away from the academy?

(b) How do you encourage players to independently recognise, and then develop their weaknesses?

       (i) can you provide examples of how this may occur during competition or training

       (ii) can you provide examples of how this may happen off the pitch

(c) With self-awareness relating to a players' present-moment awareness, can you describe to me the strategies you use to develop a players' self-awareness, during training or competition?

(d) Specifically, how do you help a players' awareness to recognise an opportunity for themselves to develop?

       - can you provide any examples you have used at training or in competition?

       - can you provide any examples you have used off the pitch?

(e) What behaviours would lead you to conclude that a player has developed this self-aware and reflective attribute?

Before moving into the fourth attribute, is there anything further you would like to add about the current attribute: being self-aware and reflective?

Resilience

(4) Moving on into the next section. The attribute we will now discuss is <u>Resilience</u>. This refers specifically to a player demonstrating positive and effective responses to setbacks. Setbacks, as mentioned, could be minor ones like deselection, or more serious ones such as a long term injury. Positive and effective responses include: be accepting of and not to dwell on mistakes, responding well to criticism, taking responsibility of setbacks, and to problem solve.

(a) Tell me about the ways you have supported players to independently develop resilient responses to setbacks?

(b) Please can you provide examples of when a player demonstrates that they respond positively to a setback, either on or off the pitch?

(c) Specifically, talk to me about how you help players to deal effectively with criticism?

       - can you provide any examples?

(d) Can you tell me what behavioural responses you expect to see from someone who has developed their resilience?

       (i) From a player who has developed resilience, what other psychological attributes may have developed further as a result?

Those are the questions I have on resilience, is there anything further you would like to add specifically relating to the attribute of resilience, before we move on?

Confidence

(5) Ok, we now will move into the fifth attribute, which is <u>confidence</u>. Confidence is a player's self-belief in their own competence, across different situations, such as training or competition. The best players possess a robust belief that is stable across time and different situations. A player's confidence can come from different places, and has a positive effect on other psychological aspects, such as communication and the ability to cope with setbacks.

(a) Talk to me about the role confidence plays for an academy player [general]

(b) Describe to me the consequences of a player having lower levels of confidence [general]

       (i) Tell me about the way low confidence affects a players' performance

       (ii) What is the impact of low confidence upon a players' creativity?

(iii) Talk to me about the impact low confidence has upon any other psychological attributes

(c) Tell me the methods you use to support your players' general level of confidence?

(d) Can you talk to me about the different reasons for a player being confident?

(i) As their coach, in what ways do you help give athletes confidence?

(e) What strategies do you use to help your players independently develop and manage their own confidence, both on and off pitch?

(f) Describe how you help them to develop a robust sense of self belief (belief that endures over time or from situation to situation).

(g) Tell me about how you support players in protecting their confidence during a setback or a stressful situation?

(h) What other psychological qualities are important in developing a confident athlete?

(i) How are confidence and resilience linked?

(ii) Describe the relationship confidence and humility has

(i) What behaviours would lead you to conclude that a player has developed this confidence?

Before moving into the sixth attribute, is there anything further you would like to add in relation to the attribute of confidence?

Driven to Achieve Goals

(6) The next attribute that we will discuss is termed: Driven to Achieve Goals. This attribute relates to a player proactively pursuing their own goals.

(a) Describe the actions you use to support a player in identifying goals and then pursuing them

(i) What ways do you develop players to identify and then engage with goals for themselves?

(ii) Can you provide examples of methods you use to get players to focus on their goals?

(c) For longer term goals, how do you support the players to engage and persist with targets that can only be achieved over a longer period of time (for example, progressing to the next stage of their career)?

(d) How do you recognise a player who is driven to achieve their goals?

Those are the questions for the attribute: driven to achieve goals. Is there anything further you would like to add regarding this attribute, before we move on?

Emotional Control

 (7) The penultimate attribute is Emotional Control. This is characterised by a players' ability to manage a wide variety of emotions, across a range of situations. Such situations may include setbacks related to deselection or any situation where the player is put under stress.

(a) What importance do you as a coach place on a player being able to manage emotions for themselves?

(b) How do you help a player to do this (get players to manage their own emotions)?

- Tell me how your support differs from on the pitch to off the pitch?

(c) Can you tell me, what behaviours indicate that a player has developed emotional control?

(i) Specifically, during difficult situations that the player may face, what behaviours would indicate that they have developed emotional control?

(d) Could you tell me how emotional control and resilience are linked?

Thank you for your responses to that section. Before moving into the final attribute, is there anything further that you wish to add on the topic of emotional control?

Commitment to Develop

(8) The eighth and final attribute we will discuss is identified as being the 'commitment to develop'. This is characterised by consistent positive behaviours, and (a players' own) commitment to their development as an academy player.

(a) How do you recognise a player that is clearly committed to developing?

(i) Are there any other positive behaviours you would expect to see from a player possessing a commitment to develop?

(b) What do you do to help them with their own commitment to develop?

(c) Tell me how you support players to consistently demonstrate these high standards of behaviour?

(d) Can you describe the ways that this commitment to develop can positively impact upon other psychological attributes? (I.e. what effects does it have on behaviours, actions, and the way they think?)

      - What kind of positive behaviours may come as a result of this development?

      - How might that relationship reflect in a players' performance?

Is there anything further that you wish to add regarding commitment to develop?

Thank you for your responses throughout. Before we finish the interview, is there anything further that you wish to add or clarify regarding any of the attributes discussed?

Is there anything you wish to add or clarify?

Is there anything we've overlooked?

And finally, did I lead or influence you in any way?

Appendix F: Study Two Example Transcript from Participant Coach Interview

Study 2 Interview Guide with Academy Coaches

R[10]) Thank you for participating in this interview. It will last approximately 60 minutes. Anything you say will remain confidential, as will the club and any players you may refer to. This interview is based upon eight identified psychological attributes identified as important to develop within elite youth footballers.

The psychological attributes identified are as follows: 1) ability to cope with demands of high level sport, 2) a strong work ethic, 3) being self-aware and reflective, 4) resilience, 5) confidence, 6) motivated to achieve goals, 7) emotional control, and 8) a commitment to their own development.

There might be the potential that you feel some repetition during the interview. However, all questions are different, so if unsure, do not hesitate to ask for clarification.

(opening/orientating Q)

I'd like to start by asking you to describe the role you play in developing the psychological capabilities of your players?

C[11]) Ability to cope with high level of sports, strong work ethic being self-aware reflective, reflective resilience confidence motivation to achieve goals emotional control and a commitment to develop . paragraph so just on the first one moving into coping with the demands of high-level Sport this is about. The demands and refers to a past capabilities to deal effectively with expectations and demands of the Academy, demands that have been suggested include physical demands, coping with adversity, harsh environments to prepare for first team and contract decisions

R) Can I ask you to reflect on these and tell me are there any other demands that you think your players have to cope with?

C) I would say all of the above that you have mentioned are definitely things that we will encounter quite a bit. Yes in my role physical demands is quite a big one because we get , I look after 12 to 16 year olds , and they'll be going through a growth during that time and so there's obviously a lot of considerations there, that do place extra demands on the player . other demands I guess, the harsh environment one might be , if I related that to us being playing players up, so I currently have quite a lot of lads in that from the end of 16 group playing in the under 18 group. they go from an environment where obviously were we are developing young footballers and obviously they are still in school so there are they are coping, the coping strategies of dealing with being a school boy so going to school everyday, training in the evening, obviously places a demands on the player and a different demand compared to an under 18 player who is here every day and is the program is designed for them to develop as elite sportsmen wear as a schoolboy it's for them necessarily design to support their education and to try and make progress in school boy football. So I think that's definitely for me at the main, that we see that causes the players some type of stress , that we have to try and manage and deal with. Like I said playing up is a big one for us I think in terms of that itll be to push them to play against boys bigger Stronger older a bit more experienced than them. And that always causes them I guess extra demands, so that would be one . Preparing for the first team I guess is more for us is, we try to follow their principles in terms of we tried to highlight key strategies key principles key ethics the team environment how they work all of those things are things we try and build on them and replicate, I guess without obviously come out without treating them like adults, treating them like children but recognising what do steps look like for them. And contract decisions which is a big one we recently did our 16s decision for next year. I have been doing it that role for

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[10] Researcher
[11] Coach participant

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[10] Researcher

[11] Coach participant

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4 years and I think I always think November is the hardest month because the players have got in the back of their mind that, because you make all the decisions in December. So the November month is very tough for them where they're not sure how to approach the game, how to, how much time to spend here vs how much to spend at school with GCSEs around the corner. So a real balancing act for them and for us to make sure that they get the right support the need. I do think those of the sorts of problems the issues I see quite a lot with the 16 year olds.

R) That's an interesting one with the academic balance , you think that's a big demand on the school lads question

C) I think yeah and I guess with the younger Day release programme, our under 9s and under tens and 11s come out school for one day a week. that is sort of attended about 92% of the actual amount so it's really high I obviously then look at the 12 to 16 and the Day release programme for the 12 13 and I think the current attendance is at 71% and then at 14 15 and 16 it is something like 41% . so significant drop off in the attendance of players to Day release , and from me the main factor in it is the Education, was the demands of education go up the demands of football go up , that ability to manage and cope with all of those with different stresses of: I've got to get my GCSEs because if I don't get a contract that's going to be important. And then in football it's I've got to get my GCSEs because if I don't when they come into us in a full-time capacity Scholar or Apprentice they have to have certain levels of education so if they haven't got a c in maths or seeing English they'll miss football to do functional skills will work like communication and numeracy, so that ability to manage their time from an educational and football background I think is a real demand . requires support from parent and play and School. the best players I find that we, that have seemed to come through are the ones with the best strategies to do that come out the ones that balance it the best. so you know we had two kids that come through that you know have been here everyday from the Day release, and we've had kids that come in and have Sunday release really maybe once a month maybe less than that but still progress so it's a real, it depends on the player it depends on there their education educational strengths as well . so The brighter lads tend to do better anyway at both so I think it's definitely, there's something in that we have to manage and cope with and how we do it I think it's each individual or individuals completely different I need school is different , will have one time table but we will work for each player in what fits for each player in terms of time table and making sure they don't miss key subjects things like that can be done as an extras here with us .

R) So that is a way you help them to cope with that particular demand. when does that start in terms of age group

C) I find our phase probably 12 to 16 is where we probably see the players and the parents particularly more mindful of the time they spend here vs the time they miss from school. and that's not to say that primary education is not important but primary education they are probably less worried about what they are missing whereas once they hit secondary school they become more anxious about what lessons you are missing and how do we catch that up . I think one of the strengths for us and potentially coping strategy what would we hope for is in secondary schools generally and there's a generic statements, I guess you're in a class of 25 to 30 people, where is if you are or you come to XXXXX and you study with our education team, you could be in a class of 6 where you get qualified teacher delivering to you , to a smaller group which is a little bit more specific and is more I guess more time spent with them on their Educational Needs rather than more generic approach therefore it can definitely help, I know one lad came here and did maths extra, so rather than paying for a tutor they did it when he came with us , one of our teachers is has that extra piece so that works for him and itll work for the parents because they were not having to to worry then about if he missed maths that if he missed maths then he wouldn't get opportunities to work here with it. So there are certain ways that we can work but it tends to be on individual basis.

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R) So there are structures in place

C) Yes

R) Can you describe how you would get them to deal with setbacks themselves, so to manage their own thoughts and feelings rather than directly be helped by yourself as the coach

C) Ok I think so , we sort of, build on the development of the growth mindset. we start it could be a bit more specific and proactive with setbacks so rather than a setback happening and then dealing with it we actually look for setbacks for players . so we go right well how can we set him back potentially? what's going to give him a challenge? what's going to maybe for some or an element of the stress for him that we can then see how he deals with it? so I think we are definitely being more mindful of that and like playing that is a general one, I think lots of players in our age groups Play across age groups playing up against all the boys, so that's sorted generic one but for me this this season all the last 18 months we're started picking squad for things. So dealing with not being selected as being an issue, I think the one thing we have had to manage there is and where we had to be mindful of it is, we do that on additional programs, so we may be playing in the national Cup which is an additional program that we've had to qualify for so we would then say where we are going to take a select squad and players may miss out . the normal games program that the Premier League games programme they gave us is always 50% for the player across the season . they have to have at least 50% of that program, so we are mindful of not putting too much stress in with you're not in any squad or you're not playing, they are playing they are practicing but they are getting these moments where they are left out. So that would be for a player that finds himself ,what we was classed as either struggling or developing in the group . they might miss out on that . for the Elite boys we have an elite group so the best kids from under 9s the best 3 from under 9's to under 14s have an extra training session a week. And that's selected on a six weekly basis and at the end of the 6 weeks the three players potentially so finally under 12 coach I got 3 and 12 in there I pick my next best three from the six weeks so it's not always the same over the year so I pick my next best 3 to go in against them then based on that we have a fall out, so maybe somebody replaced by somebody else and movement that way . I guess again how would we help them there? Were the elite groups extra it's not it's not taking away from anything that anyone else is doing it's in an extra session , it it's generally taken by the Under 18s coaching staff so they get to see the younger players coming through and support them by the other staff relevant to them. I guess the conversation will always be: if we are moving a player out we will call the parents first to inform them then we tell the player why we are pulling them up and even them out of that for this 6 weeks and give her a reason why ,what they expected to work on in their age group sessions then as results of it, and then there's that always because of that 6 week cycle there is always the opportunity to go back in. So it's, I think we have learnt lessons on this initially we were not getting a lot of movement . so when we first started the elite group We select the best 3 players just on opinion based stuff and we were not getting a lot of movement, so we were having the same kids generally in there quite a bit. And then this season we reassessed and we selected now the three players based on the best technical the best physically and the best in mindset so now the kids have three opportunities potentially to break the mould and break in because I might be the 5th best player but I might be the best physically. why do we do that ? and I would say that we felt like it turned into a technical group all the technical players will get in because as coaches at the first thing we see in terms of that . we wanted it to encompass players that can impact as well as have technical efficiency so you wanted that balance. And the main bits , the real reason for it was the mindsets box. We felt there were players in the group with what we would class as developing growth mindsets, so better mindsets so the better mindset lads we felt they were in that group being pushed from may be the better technical then we could extend them,

even show praise to replicates then like he doesn't give him or he's thought we might not be the best player but he does this really well , is a good leader and I think we wanted those traits to be transferred maybe to some of our technical lads . so really mindful of it, and so far I think it's been positive because the group is more dynamic as in its difference , as it's more different types of player . the quality is probably less than what we had originally because we probably don't have the best players in every , in it, but we definitely have the best physical player the best technical player and the best mindset players and on that thing because of the grouping, we have had more rotation because I think it's more likely for someone to show the improvement in mindset over 6 weeks than to show an improvement in technical ability because that is probably more of a long-term thing . and even on the physical aspect it's similar commerce someone can show a really improvement physically, quite quickly whereas again that technical box tends to be more long term. That's why we think it's been show beneficial we're just continually trying to assess it. and in terms of helping the players we could quite easily take it away and then I guess we wouldn't have anything for our better players any more than what they were currently practicing, this is a chance for the better players to be pushed come out to play against boys older . to the group is as it is you might have an under 9 and 9-year-old boy training within the training with an under 14s so there's an element of stress and demands so we have to manage that group appropriately and manage staff player to deal with it . one of the probably bigger problems is the older boys against the younger boys . how do we push them? because clearly they are physically dominant anyway, what do we give them that is going to enhance them by being involved with the younger ones? things like leadership and communication and responsibilities things that are falling out of it perhaps we are a bit more mindful about how now can we push them more. so that's still a work in progress.

R) It sounds good and would giving them an opportunity you create a controlled failure as well

C) Yeah

R) Which has been useful

C) Yes I think so . so since we've changed it to that we have been monitoring it, so one lad is likely to go back in after coming out so I had 6 weeks out then back in so this is exactly the type of response we want . so you know I think that those types of things are really important and I definitely think that the fact it's now more fluid is a positive for every player because players can see opportunities to get in whether that's there or somebody else. Players can see opportunities to fall out if you haven't really progressed as such . it hasn't been as plain sailing for you in the past 6 weeks: you are at risk falling out . and one of the kids doing it every Tuesday they're not always turning up as the best player now, in that sense. Because they might be better players in that session than them, so there is that continuation of I've gotta keep improving what I can do . so definite positive.

R) And you mentioned about the player you are as come back in, what are the behaviours or actions would suggest to you that a player might be able to cope with the demands of the Academy? What would show that they can cope?

C) I think , from me with the older boys I tend to find the ones that are quite comfortable at communicating with you, as a coach. They tend to be the ones that a more understanding and a bit more reasons as to why and there are more keen as to why . rather than the actual outcome it's the process of why am I not in it, or take it to any setbacks, why haven't I been picked for why is he playing head of me? or why am I playing in this position? the ones that are more open minded to the process I guess tend to cope better with that . the lads that I find struggle most with this are the ones that are a little bit quieter and a little bit more unsure and again I say from their 15 16s point of view, that's my daily teams, the ones that mums and

dads do a lot for in terms of contacting and communicating so if mum and dad is ringing me that tells me that the players probably not ready to cope in terms of, where as I do get, I probably a 50 50 split between 15 and 16 half of them are quite proactive communicators themselves and come to ask . and the others still want mum and dad to do that, or guardian to do that for them so that's definitely something I've seen that's an indicator as to whether I think they are ready for big or little setbacks [18:00] I think if they're playing well the more , more engaged for more challenge. have things have been going positively they seem to be challenged a little bit more? so I tend to see the better lads that are performing better at the certain moment in time, I probably pushed a little bit more and ask more of them maybe a series of challenges and things that we want . where is again somebody who isn't performing as well we are more mindful then of well does he need another setback Connor and then, basing it on this season alone the lads that are fully fit more often. The lads that pick up injuries, injured players tend to be more fragile, in all departments and a bit more anxious. because they want to get on the pitch they don't want to do anything with jeopardize it but they don't want to miss it too much because they're not seeing the coach on a coach isn't seeing then. And they are worrying in that sense. I think something we've definitely learnt this year because we have had probably more injuries than normal, which we expected we anticipated because we have ramp the programme up physically so we've gone to , we set a target of 80 games for every age, whereas we officially only get, Premier League give us 18 18, we set target for 80. show the goal was really to boost the program and go and pull a double game weeks call now we might play Saturday, Sunday . you might play Wednesday Saturday. I'm trying I'm sure you want to build robustness but we also want to manage them, but we knew as a result because this is quite a big shift from common we were having 23 games per player going to 80 or 57 last year and now 80 potentially as it's alright. That's a bigger RAM, so where we know we will have the injury thing the pit we have learnt we cannot treat the injured players just in isolation so we try and integrate them now more even if it's in their rehabilitation they're doing stuff on pitch with the groups or the warm-up they're doing that with the team but even though it might just be warming up to do some staged drills to return to play, there's that consideration of yes they got at least 20 minutes with the players with the team with the coach where they're not just cast into the rehab room and we don't see them . we have learnt that I think through certain players that we probably haven't spent, haven't done that , we are definitely more mindful of that now from coaching and medical corner and sport science and integrate that a bit more . so thats definitely been a positive to help us cope with those players coming back from injury for her again if we need to put a set back in place to make sure that they understand why

R) So it seems like you are able to predict setbacks and then they're structures in place to help

C) Absolutely

R) Is there anything further you'd like to you ads regarding coping with the demands of high-level sports?

C) I think the main the main question we ask ourselves and the bit that I think is the most important bit for us in football is we have to know what good looks like so what is the demands of high-level Sport? We have to know that . and you can't always even, and he's a children so we can relate and refer to first team , our first team we can relate to a Champions League first team European first team come up but we have to know what good looks like for us . so we are always mindful of when we push the players when we put setbacks in place there things that would be for me that might transfer in school or you know everyday life in the house, things that, if we're asking them to do something you will always try to relate it back to a real life situation where, is putting the balls away, it's doing the dishes, so it's trying to make rationale behind the reasoning rather than it being: we are doing this because that's what the first team do or what an adult does . we have to make it: we are doing

it because this is what you might do as a child that will help you when you become an adult . and we again probably made a small start on that but something I think I was being quite positive is trying to make sure the kids ,and how they were fit in their life currently and why it might be helpful to do something like that.

R) Moving into strong work ethic. This is characterized by a player possessing the right attitude to work hard, demonstrate a conscious approach to challenges and setbacks and have the determination to create a and maintain a career. do you try to promote a strong work ethic within your players?

C) Well firstly we always starts every team meeting ,every ydp we start every ydp meeting with a slide that is a photo of the team and the quote is from a course that we were on that came from another club that says , you gonna have an individual agenda in a football environment , everyone's here to become professional footballer and that's a individual agenda but you can't put your individual agenda before the team , the team comes first in all aspects . once the team is functioning then you work towards your individual agendas . so that is being something that we've done is in every presentation we do to the players and it's just to keep reminding them whilst they're here for themselves , that individual contract or registration, the team will help them to get it but it will be hard by themselves. so that's been a real positive for me I think the best groups of players we have had have had the best players in it . the groups that have not been as strong groups I've had less better players as result of that . I think good players pushed good players and the more good players are around the better, which is I guess our initial reasoning behind the group good players with good players will produce good players. So we really conscious of that and the other bits with the work ethic was we show a lot of video footage to try and engage them, so what is Cristiano Ronaldo think about his personal development, relate that back to Rio Ferdinand talking about Ronaldo , we've got videos of that and we show them and we take it away from football to . so we've got Usain Bolt as well , Serena Williams , individual Sports: Rory McIlroy and then some teams as well the British Lions . things that will inspire and engage them the little bit to show them what come again what does good look like, in terms of hard work . what is Mo Farah's training regime , I think it's a 7 mile recovery run on recovery day. We are saying like 7 miles that's not a recovery to us but that that's what hard work is he is running 14 miles in a day so that might not be what you need for a footballer but that's what hard work can look like . so we try and use that to motivate them the key bits I guess , we run an open policy where we encourage players to do catch up sessions . so if I miss a Day release there is a coach here on a Tuesday night that I can come in and work with on my own or maybe if there's three of us there's three of us I can come and do it. Quite proactive on that and we highlight that so when kids do it well tell everyone that they're doing it and we will be really mindful of it . since we've done that we probably seen more kids more often as a result. I think the other bit, which will probably linked to some the other stuff is we do a lot of goal setting with the players And and they have to produce that and they have to be mindful of it and then they have to put the plan in place for the goals. It then deciding when will I do that when will I work on this , I think that those bits are really important .

R) It seems that you give him an opportunity and then let them so when you said about promoting the lads who go off on do the extra bits, do you keep prompting them or is it scaled back and you just present them with the opportunity?

Yeah it's completely down to them, so they decide whatever they want coming in for the extra stuff. Pre-season is generally the busiest time because the kids go off they have their break and they get bored so they want to come in, so we get that. The strongest mindset in terms of ethical work rate are the ones that continuing across the season and there are some really good examples and there's some lads I would say some of the most driven I've seen since I've been here in terms of doing that now . I guess it it is mostly down to the player and to decide and engage with it and to continue it . probably the only other one I would say that

has been really pleasing this year is from our all my age group particularly , we now utilised gps on training and games which has been really positive for the players to reflect on again . and ultimately work comes in different forms on the football pitch so high speed running, total distance, whichever it might be to review and reflect on what did I do then we can use that to compatible stuff . We know XXXX XXXX covers 12 k and the first team and currently the 16 midfielder would probably get just about 10000 so we know that and we can , we are saying to the player you haven't got to do 12000 now but to get into the first team you will have to do 12000 so if you got a registration for the next 2 years can you buy the End, by the time you're 18, be able to cope with 12000 m in a match in terms of a 90 minute game . being able to utilise data I'm referring to has been really pleasing, and to see: yes this game you did this much work , in terms of physical work . so been able to quantify that a lot more and one of the team goals from team and the players picked that nobody would out runners this year . we can't say what the opposition have done but we can say what we have done and we can sort of, the way we have described it we play as this on high-speed running and set targets on high-speed running total distance for the team covers on average, and we know if we get to this certain amount we think we will be above the opposition . not always, but that's one of our goals so the team then, when we do a reviews reflections of the group we always refer back to where are we in now in that path , who is ahead of us and potentially who hasn't . so that's been really pleasing as well just managing that and getting understanding or physically what hard work is .

R) So it's an individual and team monitoring [31:52] Ok great and then you mentioned about the landlord to come in and awesome the best examples you've seen, how would you recognise that that player possesses that strong work ethic question mark

C) Obsessive. The one lad in particular I think he's obsessive . his intelligence first and foremost so that I think quite a good traits in he knows what he needs to do so that initial understanding of I know where I am and I know where I want to be so he's got that ability to to set goals and Stuff and to be mindful of what it is he needs to do and then the second one about being obsessive is for me constantly wanting more , so not afraid to ask not afraid to ring you and say I need this can I do something Tuesday afternoon . but those types of traits off the pitch, so I can see them transfer on the pitch. I guess perfectionist , not happy until it's exactly how it how we want it to be… I find that hard because its not perfection it's different, it's situational, it's reactive, so that's really tough for him and for me trying to work with him but I think he is definitely understanding that a little bit better now but still conscious of putting and doing more, I guess linking to all of them quite meticulously in that he is quite keen to know what other people are doing so he will ask about an under 18 because you might not see him all day . what did he do today? And you're probably catch him looking at the Board looking at how much did he run, definitely meticulous in his thinking , looking at where is that compared to others

R) Is that competitive or learning?

C) I think it's competitiveness for one but I think it's more for him just getting ahead . so there will probably be elements of why what have I got to do to do that . with it comes challenges so currently he's injured and I think that's probably the case of maybe going to hard too fast trying to do too much over growth rate. And you know that, so now there is a set back to him because he's missing time on the pitch and he's forced rated so there are those and he's not in the Youth Cup squad tonight because he's not fit full stop and that was one of his goals to play so if you seem go out tonight potentially doesn't achieve one of his goals this year so gain Linking it back, he is Reliant upon the team doing well to allow him to me to give him the opportunity to play later on in the competition- which is quite interesting but I think those are the key things I see . probably the only other one I say is independent as well , like can go and, we give the group during sessions like if they 2 hour session then they have a 20 minute window of what we call idp which is individual

development plans.they have 20 minutes to go and work on whatever they want to do , the kids there no the kids that have goals and the kids that know what they might need to do to achieve them work the most proactively in that time here there some kids which nothing wrong with , some kids would go and just kick a ball in the goal and just do shooting and it might be a centre-back he needs to work on other things . that tells me that probably they're not quite clear on the goal or the strategy or the long-term plan .s we tried to help them and we might go and from them but the more independent lads generally have an idea on a part of a game, and then they mostly just prompt for ideas , how can I go and work on this bit? And might give her a little bit then off they go and they go and just do it, so there's an independence about them I think that tends to push them more and on a bit further . that devotion to try and get better he's clearly there .

R) And that leads into the next attribute which is self-aware reflective .s of this attribute is identified as the ability to possess present moment awareness recognising and making the most of all opportunities to develop so you mentioned a few lads already he demonstrates that . and not being reflective refers two players capabilities to think about their strengths and weaknesses and acting upon their weaknesses. Can you describe the actions you take to encourage a player to recognise their own strengths and weaknesses?

C) So every player has to do a player presentation after 6 weeks of the season starting . so they have , we give him questions , leading questions for them to present on so it's what am I good at? What do I need to do to get to the next level? So that refers to the things that perhaps they are weak or on . how am I going to do it? And that is the hardest bit I think they are clear on what they do when what they struggle with, the bit they find hard is how they can do it. One of the questions is how can the coach help? So again probably lots of generic answers at the minute but we are getting some progress with then recognise him our role. The reason why that is so important is in terms of being self-aware is it almost tells them that it's not down to the coach, that actually it will actually be then that will be doing it and that the coaches the support behind it my greatest wish that parents might come in and say he's not got better at this because of you as the coach . while really the player has to do the work to me to make it better. The coach can support it and instigate it but the player has to do it . so I guess that helps us to make them more self-aware on that question and then the back end of it again which will probably come later is there a personal goal. Is it a personal long-term goal? how many after link obviously to the how am I getting to the next level ?. knowing what they might do to achieve them . so those happen after 6 weeks for each player, we film each player for doing that on their own so they come into the classroom they can use PowerPoint to present it and we will fill me at or they can just read off notes and they do that into a camera and that is only kept by the Coach and the player . to the player can take a copy and we use it as a reflective tool so when we do the mid-season review we will have elements of the video ready to discuss about right you said you were going to do this. Where are we? And that forms part of the review process with the player prom and the parents. It makes it probably clearer for us because we probably don't need to be so generic in what we are writing when we went really write a review when you write a review you write for a review, you get to review 5 and you end up writing what you wrote in with you for. Now we use what the players chose and and let the players plan and let them guide us through , and helps keep us on track because if we end up talking about other things , the way I learn today is when we're talking about something different we asked whether that should be in the plan . and if it's shared well what's it going to replace because you can't work on everything all the time . so it helps us keep a year and more of a clear strategy as well , and it keeps parents involved but in check with the players plan it's their plan they are responsible it's about the player, and if you want to replace them in as a player, you ask the player which one do you want to take out then? Because you can't do anymore. you might want to prioritise this one and leave this one until later on , we get them engaged that way I think is probably more beneficial to us from the coaching aspect and from a player aspect .

R) And you think this new platform helps players to independently evaluate and reflect upon their own performances and wider aspects?

C) The older lads obviously are probably looking at themselves a little bit more so probably a bit more manageable . again probably more independent whereas the younger lads need more support from parents whether that's to produce the presentation, then I tend to see more parental influence so there be less player leads stuff and maybe more parents-more ones. So we have to be mindful of the age whilst they do accept to do this presentation and the questions are the same, we are seeing more support needed with the younger ones . we encourage mum and dad's to be involved in it because they are as much of a part of the process as we are and they form an important cog, but they probably get more influence than in what goes into the plan , what goes into the presentation, which is fine we just have to manage that . in terms of them reflecting on staff so the kids have to do how much the reflection on every game they play . so if I played Arsenal on Sunday once the games finished I'll go on to our online platform and I'll write about the game from a players. so that's a reflection of the game and then the coach will respond and apply it back and replied back based on information that what the player has said . we tend to again try to relate it 2 the things they are prioritising and their needs. So rather than talking about the game in isolation we're talking about the game and how it relates to their or one of their target points. So might be in or something like that, and I've been a technical issue you know if you did really well at technical call me then they the coach me given that feedback so the player understands that. It makes it easier in some cases where The kids can pull it online and get it back that way, so it makes it easier. For us in terms of getting round everybody , because obviously it is hard to reflect with every player individually on a face-to-face one-to-one basis, so it allows us to make sure we do give them feedback . or so ill encourage the players to input so it's not just us writing. We cannot write unless the player writes. So the player has to input first before they can get any feedback from the coach, so the ones that and this is again something we have been mindful of if I have a good performance it's on there within a couple of minutes if I have a bad performance it might take a couple of days but that's fine .s but sometimes I might not put anything on . and if the player puts nothing on the player gets no feedback online, it doesn't mean he doesn't get feedback from the coach it just means he didn't get on the platform. So we had to try and work through that because parents probably are more mindful of if they write something that's bad and then we write something like that or to confirm that, that's online that's there forever, that's something that we could use potentially, but it isn't we don't use these in any way to make informed decisions even to feedback to the parents these are just match day reflections for the kids and the coach to give them some feedback on the games . we have had to make sure that not playing the down but that they understand they can be honest and it's not give me some that will get in the way .

R) terrific… moving into self-awareness this relates to present moment awareness can you just describe to me the strategies you use to develop players self awareness during training or competition?
C) I think that's really tough I think you're constantly reflecting and thinking about what you doing in a game as a player. And from what I see from when we talk to them during a game or during training is the engagement it's not always there because, whether that was a mistake or whether that was a good thing whether it was a, they're not always focused on that information. They are just focus on the situation they are in so I do find that players in terms of their self awareness they tend to just be in the zone and make their own decisions and go off what they want, particularly in the competition stuff that's why I tend to find it they are more narrow Focus in terms of they just do what they think is right and probably and I'm a little bit first to any other sort of feedback that comes in here and

R) Is that a good thing for the player to have or is that more of this distraction to the coach to do anything

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C) I think we always encourage them the coaches to coach but we never encouraged to take decisions, so their coaching is to guide as such, transport than from A to B so if it's a competition it's about winning a game so then yes then he might be there to win, so then it's right how do we put strategy in place to win? not how do we kick every ball for them to win so it's not that. It's the strategy that's more important . I guess we want them to coach but I do think the players tend to just get the goal by the game or the training session or the environment whatever it is so that , our ability to really affect them at those moments I think is hit and miss, what is the probably the best way I think that we do that is probably post match analysis video. We film ever every age , every kids gets individual clips so they will see everytime theyre inolved in the game . and that'll load online so they get that within 2 to 3 days of playing . a good reflective tools are a chance for them to be self aware of something maybe that they are not doing. It could be an emotional reaction could be a technical small thing . but I guess they get to see that but it's not present moment it's 2 or 3 days later when they're watching it back

R) Or is that informing their next reflection

C) Yes you are hoping that is something they can work towards and make them more considerate the next time they face that situation whatever it is . so that's a positive but it probably isn't… it is not instinctive there. I guess the only other one might be not so much with us but the younger coaches and some of our coaches we do try and keep our principles quite simple and we tried to approach the principles so there's lots of keywords and lots of first words that will be said that I guess we'll instigates a player or behave go back to certain way or act in certain ways. So that will help in certain ways and certain cases but generally theyre coach led stuff rather than player left to lead .

R) Before we move into the 4th attribute is there anything you want to add about page becoming self-aware and reflective?

C) No

R) The fourth one refers to resilience and demonstrating positive responsive to setback setbacks include minor one such as the selection or longer-term ones such as injury . positive and effective responses include being effective off and not dwelling on mistakes dealing with criticism taking dealing with setbacks and problem solve. Can you provide examples where players have demonstrated positive responses to set backs, either on or off the pitch?

C) I think I guess there are so many individuals , little things that happening games that you can come out I think back to last week our striker scores two goals gets a penalty for his hat-trick, missed . then last nights in the training session I seen him once since but the first time I saw him in training he asked me whether he be able to take penalties anymore . and I think of that and I think well do you want to ? and his answer was yes. But the players have told me I'm not taking them anymore , so I would relate that to being resilient in that he's asking me he could take them anymore and I guess rather than, and if he was, but I think little things like that would suggest to me that he is quite capable of responding to a setback like that given the context of the game; it was a big miss for him it meant we did not win the game but from a coaching position it did not matter to us too much, it's a game, it doesn't matter but for him it was probably quite important so I think it's that understanding of it . so It can be as small as that it can be as big as not getting picked , or getting taken off , being brought off the pitch. the players , there are certain players that can emotionally cope instantly and that can have a robustness in terms of their emotional state are able to just pull it to one side and carry on and there were other kids in our younger groups we have a crying endemic at the minute . our kids cry a lot in the younger groups . it could last 5 seconds it could last 20 minutes, I'll be honest we're finding that really hard to deal with just because it's a lot of situational staff results based so we would do lots of competitive stuff , we do

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loads of competitive training as well like we put lots of targets and things in place to try and make the training really competitive , to try and help them when it becomes a match day that they used to it . or when it comes important, but I think we do get those types of responses and the challenge I guess is , who needs what . who needs an arm around them and a bit more of a a quiet word , who needs a little bit of an urge to say come on it's not worth crying over, so it's really really tough that one but I think we are seeing a lot of it, so we are still working what good support looks like in that moment . and I do think it's individual but it does depends completely on the situation so that's something we have found hard in terms of them becoming more resilience

R) An interesting one to have a group like that

C) Incredible really and it almost boo boo carries off each other, someone might make a mistake and get a bit teary then the next mistake the next person instant responses react in a similar way come and we I like you don't need to react like that it doesn't matter it's not a big problem . and it's really strange because you can't really put on put a finger on what has made them like that because we wouldn't say they are treated any differently to any other groups which are we see less of it . weather it's just the actual makeup of that group, we've even looked into have we got loads of late births any bias are we late but I swear these kids are not as mature yet as what we think in terms of their age . so we've looked at loads of stuff think we've just got a grouper of cry babies

R) They don't go over that on you're a licence do you there

C) No no laughing laughing. We just try to laugh it we just try to manage it and be mindful of it and also the other challenge with that is instantly when we see tears we think we have got to be there . and if we do Mum and Dad's definitely think I need to be there I need to speak to them I need to reassure them I need to, I'll be honest in terms of them developing resilience I'm not sure we're doing the right thing all the time, not saying we just like our get on with it, but if we constantly allow them to do that then we constantly support all the time are we just making it alright for them to do it are we really helping them to understand it and almost be able to brush it off . I think then the challenge dealing with the parents as well because they see us not responding you can that they're waiting to speak to you at the end and so why did you let him cry why did you not put your arm around in and give him a hug and that type of stuff , which is natural parenting but I think we have got a lot of things to consider so it makes it really hard

R) So an indirect strategy, the younger players you do need to talk to the parents and evolve them?

C) Yeah definitely

R) And with players, how do you help them to deal with effectively with criticism?

C) I think we will always try and place any criticism that we give off the back of something we think has gone well, I mean that's not to try and wash behind it but we do it as they are children ultimately . so if we have ever got something we need to say that we think is probably gonna make them maybe a little bit upset and consider it be wrong, we will always tell them something that they have done well in within that but we think it helps. And i mean, I guess to deal with it is to show them or to talk about a solution, not always show them, but we will show him that we might need to talk about a solution as to why , why is going wrong and what needs to be done. I guess the biggest problem there is a player that potentially could get released from the system, you want to , you could teach them to not be at a level so there's an element of criticism but you don't want them to go away from the programme feeling like they're not capable in other areas, so that's a really minor chat and

they will consider that . making sure that we balance off anything we give them that might be deemed criticism with some positive stuff to work from as well, all trying to do that . and the older ones we would always give the criticism first and then give the positive after so we go : we would: if you're not getting a scholarship we will tell you not getting a scholarship but then we'll tell them there's a solution to how we get you a scholarship somewhere else and talk about strategies that way but we always give the criticism at front. If it was on the pitch if a part isn't good enough we will say without not good enough it probably needs to be this this type of pass so that will always be followed by something that they can work from as guys into what they need to do next. I guess that would be the best way that I would see it

R) And once you've helped them to cope without element, what sort of behaviours would you expect to see from a player who has developed their resilience?

C) Well. It's funny isn't it I think some kids ignore us . some kids generally can just brush it off a little bit and be like he's a dick to me there or is clearly not happy with something I've done , but they can almost brush it off and continue . there are kids I've seen that end, where that tells you resilience are ignorant , so I don't know but there are elements of resilience we see if they can just take what you said and just crack on and they don't need to feel the need to discuss it with you. They can just get on with it so that will be one trait I guess I think again the ones that probably react more independently , can take their own time , and responding themselves: I don't need any sort of extra support they tend to be the more resilient players . they're probably things I would see and I guess you get a feeling of confidence as well with the more resilient players where they're quite generally proactive and that tends to show elements of confidence that they are quite happy if you give them something they can deal with they can go and deal with it themselves

R) And that's quite a nice segway into the 5th attribute which is confidence [58: 58]

C) Self belief in their own competence in different situations such as training or competition . successful players normally possess over first belief that is stable across time and different situations . of players confidence can come from different places and has positive effect on other psychological aspects which you've already mentioned, such as communication and ability to cope with setbacks.

R) Can you talk to me about the role confidence plays for atom Academy player?

C) It's important, it's an important aspect . I think this based on the amount of time you spend here and the environments be an elite environment and elite environment for children ultimately but being around good players is probably means that the best way to describe this is if I'm the best player in my grassroots team I might be quite confident in that environments because I know I'm the best player and I can be effective maybe I have an element of leadership within that because of those skills I shown . if I then go to an environment that has players of a similar level or there a little bit better my confidence can potentially may be less inclined to be more forward more or take a greater role in that so I think we tend to see players that come into this environment that have become come from the big fish to the middle of the Road fish- now everyone is quite good and this takes a bit of time to adjust to a group environment the group Dynamics where they sit in there and how they perceive themselves amongst the group . that tends to, by the time they get to us then they generally have an understanding of where they fit within the group and then the Challenge for us to get confidence out of them I guess is to try expose them to different situations so much to try not just allow them to settle in an area in a group . so we tend to, I might be a small thing but as an example when the 16s travel an overnight stay we will make sure they room with someone different all the time just so that there's an element of communication between them the players who they might not know so much to maybe

develop a confidence of talking to that person promise develop that relationship a little bit better then we think that will help confidence as a whole

R) So comfort within the team environment

C) Yeah so I think that's important generally a lot of it is self motivated stuff I think you know kids that have a sort of more or less anxious more open-minded a little bit more free, they are the ones that tend to be more confident a bit more happy in the environment and less pressured

R) And in terms of those with low confidence how could their performance be affected ?

C) Ok . yeh we have seen that I think depends on the reasoning, so a low level confidence player might have physical demands , he might be returned from injury or not having played, not being used to it, could be because I haven't been picked for something . I think it depends on you, what I've come out of, that might relate to me having low self-esteem . but I think that the consequence of them on the pitch is it makes them underperform and less consistent . as coaches we have to be mindful and consider it but I wouldn't say we would not pick someone for not being confident . I think this is something that we hope payers can develop they go through the system have we got key things to work on with Confidence? I'm not sure, it's probably just a consequence of the environment of trying to be inclusive as much as we can but also push the more elite players and not the common we don't hide from that, we tell everyone that the better players get more attention so then in that sense you might find confidence does fluctuate between the player that get more attention than others . so it's probably a natural consequence of the environment but not sure how much we do or don't do that really affects that.

R) And in terms of developing a robust sense of come of belief a belief that enjoys overtime from situation to situation, how would you help there's develop that potentially ?

C) Probably just linked to their goals . like when they present and referring back to that and reflecting on that and the power of a goal is it doesn't, even though we set them all the time time is probably the most fluid in all of that , that is it doesn't matter so much as long as we constantly relate that back and say if you are working towards something then that's fine and if you understand where you are going to get to then that's fine as well , the process of doing it . so I think it's us constantly referring to the process rather than the outcome, probably more important than anything in that. and we try to do that , we measure the coaching on that, in our coach mentoring in our coach feedback we will record training sessions and theyll scored on how much they praise players, process praise, I guess we are aiming to be more process than outcome. It's helping this educate ourselves as coaches to make sure we do that as well and I think that helps the player from developing robustness but also developing that long term vision that long term thinking .

R) So giving them a bigger picture

C) Yes

R) In terms of Supporting players and protecting their confidence , if you recognise a player has got low confidence for instance, how would you go about go about protecting their confidence during a setback or a stressful situation?

C) I might be underdeveloped for my age so I might well be better off playing in the year group below me but if we think they're not in a great place and we don't but we don't think they are confident and we think that might be will my affect their confidence as they may see it as I'm not good in there so I'm going down so if they're not clear and we're not sure

they are mature enough to understand that reasoning then we would not do it . we would only do it if we felt that the player would be capable of understanding and embracing it . so we're really mindful of that and as such we probably do that far less than what we do with players playing up an even though there is a Reverse Effect there where playing at night be more difficult from a psychological aspect , dealing with older players , dealing with different strategies , different types of stuff I think that in itself has the ability to sort of become a stressful situation for the player . we have to be mindful of that and I guess we would only put them in those situations if we actually thought they can cope with that . and I guess we would tend to use three sort of stages ,we use stress , use coping, we use driving. and I guess we try and make sure the players have a balance of the more stressful moment they have stressful games they have coping moments , their stressful games where they find it manageable and games like that and then we have these excelling games where we know we can dominate , so part of the stress you there would be when we set the games program when we got these 80 games we will look for a balance between it all , so at least 1 games got a stressful game whether that a competition whether it's against a team we know are very good, where they are playing up an age group with older boys . and at least one game in that blocks got to be a thriving game so we might go and search for a local team to play where we know we probably might come out on top and we are quite confident of that but that allows for the player to develop confidence elements so you know you're going to be better than me kids you are going to be playing against so now as a chance to go and Express and show what you can do .

R) Similar simulated environments?

C) Absolutely. So we do lots of that now and we pinch that from Liverpool, so they do that and that's something we looked at so we started that and that's been really positive and we're probably got to a point where we are actually saying it's probably not the team that needs that it's the individual . so when we look at it from an individual perspective to say what as an example our best player or even our weakest player in the the age group, what does that look like for him? So a stress game for our best player and are a stress game for a weakest player are completely different so we try to manage that more individually, really tough because you, there are so many other sort of Environmental bits that effect that likely have got enough numbers to play up or we've got cup game so we need to play in his age group because that's an important game. There's so much to take into consideration but it's just trying to make sure we get the right balance so we just reflect on it every serve we so often and try and get the right balance across the years . so I think Liverpool work off a 40 or a 40 40 20 model 40 excelling for team and coping and then 20% stress . so we have try to be similar in our model , close enough to that it might not be exactly that but close to that.

R) And in terms of confidence what behaviours would lead you to conclude that a player has developed his confidence?

C) Well I guess better communicator . so maybe a bit more open-minded to come to the coach . performance is on the pitch sometimes you can see a little bit more accomplished a little bit more reliable. I might have a greater impact sometimes has there on the pitch. Maybe in the group environment the group dynamic you see them to be a little bit more as a leader or a bit more, not necessarily as a leader, but more included more involved morning involved in the group staff. Those are the things I see as their confidence having been developed or developing . and then I guess through the presentations as well through that we see confidence improve where we put them in front of the Coach and a camera and a present and the first time they do it compared to the next time they do it you yet or you tend to see them , this is not as bad as what I thought it was the progress that way. and that's been really positive from that point of view .

R) That's great we've got three attributes left to discuss . then the next one is drive to achieve goals this refers to a player proactively pursuing their own goals. Can you talk to me about how you support a player in identifying and then pursuing their own goals?

C) I think . the presentations the players obviously the players are setting goals they are thinking of how they might see them being worked on and what they might see as important goals for them. When they present we obviously have the opportunity to sit with them and maybe guide if a goal is probably maybe , no not specific enough or to specific or too far away , you know not real potentially because that can be the case and obviously we try and work with them to be more considerate of it I guess everyone in long-term goal is a professional footballer so we know that but we encourage it. There's a question we ask a lot which is and I do pop up every couple of months, why are you here? We asked that question a lot . and the real answer is to become a professional footballer but the main answer might be , I'm here because I want to be a professional footballer but I'm here today because I want to get better at this part . so to be a professional footballer as always there it's the bits of got to do in between to get to that point so we are constantly mindful of that with the players

R) So prompt the short-term goals that lead up to the longer term personal contract goals And for longer term goals how do you support players to engage and persist with targets that can only be achieved over a longer . of time ?

C) I won't say there's a specific Way We Do It , to keep them on track to keep talking to them as to where they are, where they are going . to be mindful of stuff changing for them sort of like a change of position I seen that happen which can really throw you off a little bit and through your goals off a little bit . he might go from being a more attacking minded player to be in a more defensive minded player that happens a lot so they have to be more mindful of that , but I think for the long-term goals. I guess constantly trying to relate it 2 goal ahead of them goals above around them , elite , elite the top players, where were they, where are they . to give him a good advert. talk recently about the World Cup around the world for instance jezeus cleaning the street before the world . going from painting the street. in the favelas to paying to the national team in the world cup, recognising from the player there's a pathway and trying to relay it to current situation is quite good for them , quite powerful for them to see .

R) Flying into the next attribute which is emotional control. As the penultimate emotional control is characterized by players ability to manage a wide variety of emotions across a range of situations . such situations may include setbacks relating to deselection or any situation where the player is put under stress can you talk to me about the role emotional control plays for an academy player?

C) It's really important and really tough to control because you are you are Reliant upon the player to be able to understand how that works and for young players, I think that's really tough we have a player I think here he finds it really hard to manage his emotions on the pitch in competitive situation in his own age group and ultimately this affect his performance , massively and he knows it affect his performance . you could ask him 3 minutes later after he's had a breakdown in this department , ill know and hell be like I can see why you took me off the pitch or whatever it is, and he'll know, but you know you putting back in there you'll get the same response and he knows . so it's really tough we are having a real tough time with what we do next for him . when we play him up that helps so around older players, less worry about everything else and more able to focus on his own game . I think that it's a real individual characteristic with this one player and it's something he finds something really hard to deal with and I think we've tried , we've talked about this a lot we've tried a number of ways we have tried the forceful way , if you can't control your emotions off the pitch that probably hasn't worked if I'm honest. We have tried the nice way alright we'll put our arm around you we will talk about it get you back out there hasn't really

worked so we're in a real situation where we don't know but we do know he's a young player 11 years old he's got a long way to go and he's a child in a very competitive environment but also very competitive environment at home. He's got older brother he's a football player in the system so loads of competition loads of this in is life all it all the time, and I think has been mindful of those things are good things but are we actually dealing with it, to be honest we still finding our way with it it's real tough . real tough

R) So sounds are you got a number of strategies with some trial and error

C) Yeah yeah

R) And you've gone from the soft to hard approach

C) Yeah I guess we worked on the hard approaches and we really don't know what to do ! honestly that's a real tough one to work towards you want your player to have it, is of key importance, it's a key skill for a player to control and set out. I think things that we have done that the more environment based stuff for instance we played 3 games last year at our Stadium under floodlights at XXXX Stadium and we got 500 people in to watch the game and try to replicate what's emotional control my look like in a first team . what does going out with 20000 fans look like come I know we had 500 people but it's in the stadium there's an environment change for him then . so those things have been good to test them to see where they're out to see how they cope and we can see players that can and find it much harder and that's good because they're getting that experience to it

R) So experiential learning is a key Factor?

C) Yeah definitely

R) And what sort of behaviour is wood help to determine that a player has developed their emotional control?

C) I think it's more a considerate consideration and I guess maybe level-headed and more calm of the word being controlled , but without trying to say that is what emotional control is but there's an element of self control can self regulate a little bit to say I don't need to either react or respond I don't need to, I can understand where I'm at . that's one thing I would look for.

R) so a bit of internal reflection?

C) Yeah

R) And the final attributes is the commitment to develop. This is characterized by consistent positive behaviours and a players own commitment to the development as an academy player how do you recognise a player that is clearly committed to their development question mark

C) Think it is definitely encompassing a lot of the other staff which we've already talked about all the work ethic and the self driven goals relate, , the ones that have meaningful goals I would say are the ones who are most committed because I think they have a plan, I think they know where they are going and whether that plan works or whether that Plan changes or doesn't work I think they are the most developed, the most committed to development because they are the ones that can process from start to finish

R) Is there anything beyond be on the goal setting I'm helping to set goals, that you think can help them with their commitment to develop?

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C) I think the stuff knowing what good looks like is important. knowing what is the standard above what you're aiming for, how do you set those goals that other stuff that you want to see and what does it look like on an elite scale you know making sure you reflect on that and refer to it but I think generally its a case that are the most committed are probably the ones that the most focused and the most driven and again I think have the plan and that's the bit for me, they've got a plan.

R) Tell me about how you support players to consistently demonstrate high behaviours high standards of behaviours over a longer period of time

C) It's a bit like what we said with we try and utilise some of the principles all the standards at set at first team level and try and drop those down to shorter elements through, so it might be the standard we, in terms of the way we leave our kits, way we set out the way we pack away all of those types of stuff, the way we eat , the way we dress all those little things I guess that we would gradually builds within the players to try and develop them for the future . every small elements to what contribute to the big elements . our standards are set by the players as well to see what does our code of conduct look like ? other players will do that at the start of the season commerce at their own little things and what they think they should do and shouldn't do try and engage them as much as we can . and the bit this year what you've been really pleasing is compare ourselves to others . so we set targets of playing the top 6 clubs so playing xxxxx, xxxxx, xxxxx, xxxxxx, xxxx, and xxxxx and we played them all and what do we look like on the pitch compared to them but also what do we look like off the pitch compared to them ? are our standards similar to there's or different and why the difference? So we've used lots to understand what does a different environment and his hours go in the right way question mark or similar ways? So that's been really pleasing.

R) Finally anything you would like to further add regarding commitment to develop?
C) Nope
R) Is there anything you wish to add or clarify?
C) No
R) Is there anything we've overlooked?
C) Nope
R) And finally, did I lead or influence you in any way?
C) No I think that's all good.
R) Anything further you would like to add regarding any of the attributes that all
C) No that's great thank you.

Appendix G: Study Three Ethical Approval

University of South Wales
Prifysgol De Cymru

15/08/2022

Dan Wixey
C/o Faculty of Life Sciences and Education
University of South Wales

Dear Dan,

Faculty Ethics Sub-Group Feedback – 'Reviewing the effectiveness of a coach education programme: The perspectives of the academy player.' [220702LR]

I am writing to confirm that on the 15th of August 2022, the Schools of Health, Sport and Professional Practice and Care Sciences Research Ethics Subgroup, approved your submission for ethical approval.

Please note:

i. Approval is valid for 2 years from the date of issue, you will be notified when approval has expired but you are expected to be mindful of this expiration. Upon the expiration of this ethics approval, you may apply for an extension.

ii. The approved documents are attached. If you intend on deviating from the approved protocol, research team, or documentation you will need to seek approval for any changes.

iii. This approval does not confirm that indemnity or insurance are in place for this project.

iv. This approval is for this study only, it does not extend to any future studies which may use the same methodology. A separate application is required for those studies.

Please confirm when your research project has closed. A one-page closure report highlighting any recruitment issues, adverse events, publications etc. should be appended.

Yours sincerely,

Kevin McDonald

Kevin McDonald
Chair of Faculty Ethics Committee

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Professor Julie E Lydon OBE, Vice-Chancellor
Yr Athro Julie E Lydon OBE, Is-Ganghellor

03/06/21
Professor Brendan Cropley
C/o Faculty of Life Sciences and Education
University of South Wales

Dear Brendan,

Faculty Ethics Sub-Group Feedback – 'A Coach-Education Programme to developing Psychological Attributes of Academy Soccer Players' [210207HR]'

I am writing to confirm that on the 3rd June 2021, the Chair of the Faculty of Life Sciences and Education Ethics Group approved your submission for ethical approval.

Please note:

i. Approval is valid for 2 years from the date of issue, you will be notified when approval has expired but you are expected to be mindful of this expiration. Upon the expiration of this ethics approval you may apply for an extension.

ii. The approved documents are attached. If you intend on deviating from the approved protocol, research team, or documentation you will need to seek approval for any changes.

iii. This approval does not confirm that indemnity or insurance are in place for this project.

iv. Please confirm when your research project has closed (a one-page closure report highlighting any recruitment issues, adverse events, publications etc. should be appended).

If you have any queries about the committee's decision, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Kevin McDonald

Kevin McDonald
Chair of Faculty Ethics Committee

Appendix H: Study Three Example Transcript from Summary Coach Interview

R) The first question regarding the programme, it would be good for me to know the challenges or any barriers that you faced in accessing it's elements?

C) I think the biggest thing is that, it's great we've got it, in we got more resources but cos you're not full time I'm it's having that Direct contact you know. And then we want to go we need to modify this or we need to do this and I cannot. One challenge trying to fit the… the challenge that we face is to fit the situation into one of the strands [attributes]. do you know, so within footballers, especially the older ones, You know they might have a an emotional issue because they're not confidence and it's showing something else and even though it fits but it might fit into 5 different things [attributes] and then you're looking up ok which one even with the similar strategies or which one is best for that particular individual, and I think like you've always been great at answering emails to us and that's been really helpful, but sometimes seeing the behaviour and then being like we can see it they can see it, but then what do we where does it fit in in?

R) Yeah it's a very good point. It is good to know there's a real needs and demand for it for someone in house. So it seems that there's a few more individualized and complex issues at the top end

C) Yeah I think players have different statuses of its, just staying or some are going to the first team and some have been dropped back down, some can't get back in the first team no the matter what they do. Some I've got a year left someone's got a 6 months left, some have got injuries but then injuries there now, not career ending, but it's taken up a large portion of their contract. and I think there's a lot more precious around that and I think that pressure is relative with things like you Age you know but they're about age as well wear the emotional sides wear that ties in with, 18 where your friends start going out and you start driving commerce all of a sudden you can go wherever you want at whatever time you want, you can actually go out, not condone in that but the options are there are. they get girlfriends you know the, broken-hearted, come out, that type of stuff. you know living on their own , living in digs when you know we signed something from London and they come down then they live in digs but they don't know that person they don't know the area and there's a lot of complexities around that and you know the football around that it's not easier but you sort of they get to an age where it's an underlying issue sometimes. 7 times the football cause is it, but often at this age I think it's caused by uncertainty. do you know when your younger you know you're going to get a 50% playing time you know you're gonna get off the bench you know like I don't start this week I might start next week or, and then all of a sudden, things like start disappearing see you to travel 5 hours and not get on the pitch . and I think , because they've all been a lot of our players are intertwined with the club since they were young they see that has a direct reflection of them personally so if I'm not playing it means that that they don't like me now don't respect me. I can't behave the way I want to behave because. My status in the group has changed because I'm not playing the

R) So the psychological experiences and maybe less performance-based but actually increasingly more person-based?

C) Yeah you still have the performance issues but I think the performance issues as you go through reviewing information so that you'd hope who are people who are more mature you know we're showing you this on video I'm sharing it you with my own eyes and I know you're going to work towards this, and then ok work towards this, and you'll have two people who always oppose this and it's easy not easier but it's a process that you can put in place

because it's easier because people should be more self-aware you know how we all have sessions filmed Games film so everything is filmed so like there for them

R) So moving into the first section which is about the value place acorn sports psychology, can you talk to me about the value you place upon sports psychology and the psychological development of players within youth football academies

C) I think Talent will take you to a certain place but then then the mentality side probably determines your level. I think you can see it more and more often, people talk about good people and great characters and you want one in your dressing room, and as I've worked with more players and I can see it and I'm going this he's probably not technically as good as him but the influence he has makes everybody else better. so I actually think it is something that, especially as people get older, and it starts to be an opportunity to be a job you know so from 13-14s probably as important as the other stuff

R) A differentiating factor then?

C) So unfortunately if you had someone who was really good but a bad character, and someone who was really good but a good character you know you are only picking one of them. unfortunately, the odds are stacked against them. So they is one player with talent he had a bad attitude, there is one player he has a good attitude, and it might just not be especially when they're older they get to appoint well people start going to get players from elsewhere. While one year younger it's generally more localized program

R) And regarding the value placed upon sport psych at the Academy, to what extent do you think the program has helped to increase the value placed upon psychological development of XXXXX academy players?

C) I think it's quite a lot more awareness which I think you know people [players] have always had low confidence and emotional control but I think it's created more awareness and more knowledge of application of how to apply things. so I think it's made people think about it more, how can we build in this so we can try and drive confidence, or work on resilience? Or whichever attribute you want to work on. But I think it's made people more aware of something that they knew is there yeah but actually how they work into sessions.

R) How has this programme contributed towards communication, between coaches, about the psychological development of players at the academy?

C) I think at different ages probably it is spoken about in different context. so I think as they get older I'll always talk about the right mentality to go and play, can you go and be a good teammate, that kind of thing where is I wouldn't say the players would say I would do it loads more, but actually it is probably… if they're actually showing the processes they will be like ok they would understand it

R) And in terms of communication between coaches, do you feel there's an increase in the amount that sports psychologist spoken about with it's generally or that specific players?

C) I think there is definitely, when you're looking at players, there's definitely more: like it is spoken about. Like it might not always be spoken about it in terms of the terminology but it is spoken about more. It's like Is he settling? So there's more chat around like mindsets you know where are they today? Where's his energy? Is he bouncing in or is he dragging himself in that type of thing…

R) And then after that to find yourself more readily trying to support their psychological development?

C) I do think you're more aware of it it's not all intentional behaviours but it might not necessarily be in the sessions so if you see someone dragging their feet on the way in, so you think I always come in a bit late he's not playing the other day or is not playing well, that's all it might be over. Then, it is a case of maybe having a chat before, just a little things where's it might not be too formal and a connection rather than sometimes to go in a session: "are you alright?" etc you know sometimes I think if you're highlighting an issue , that person can also be self-conscious about it it and if they are low on confidence and your going "XXX is the magic man [cannot be tackled] today" it doesn't matter, know you can put pressure on people without realising it.

R) Great, we will move into the second section, it's about, which you've already slightly commented upon, it's about how the program has contributed towards any changes in your you're a coaching behaviour and maybe the impacts on players you have observed. To what extent has the program contributed towards any changes in your coach and behaviour?

C) I think probably a lot of the biggest things is giving us strategies but probably from talking about it it you always know you're not going to change, oh you know you wouldn't change of behaviour overnight. so right it's all going this is now the main focus of what we do with this player uh that is going to be a constant thread of information to this player to see if there is a change. I say that's one of the biggest one is because it is allowed people to be more consistent.

R) Have you reflected on and behaviours that you tried to be consistent with and examples to provide?

C) So one incident we have is a boy who showed disappointment. And he would jump and throw his arms up. so we went through filming him all the time I'm not showing in him all the time because it's one of those you don't want to see stuff you're doing wrong all the time, but it's going: "look" then reframing it in instances that we want him to do it. Like almost as examples and then showing him in him when he does it correctly. And I'm just making him more consciously aware of it and then sometimes going "right this what the sessions going to be o and we will be on top of you today so you better you know as this is you or IDP [individual development plan]. This is for you [the session is for you], not in front of the group, but this is, so if we are on you today this is why". Then over time just being forming it as a generalised theme.

R) How did the player react to that?

C) I think the biggest thing is, it's the test, especially if we get to our age [U23] , sometimes you preempt them and they go I don't care are they're still find it tough and I don't like doing their split then 7 times we've gone as well right we won't preempt it today because we want to see if there has been any change with the reality of the situation because you could go to the first time especially words where we are in the 23s, the first team come over, the reality is that if you go down there you might not get a second chance… you know even if we have to drop in scenarios, or you know we won't tell him today, or telling him to play in that position or is not, play him out position until, we get to it and then he's got to realise "ok I just got to get on with it", you know, little things like that sometimes you do it, sometimes you don't because it depends on how I think they're week is going. If they're having a really good week we won't preempt him, where's if he's having a really tough week I might go "right we might need to because he's on his knees".

R) There seems to be a lot of consideration going into it?

C) Yes lots of consideration

R) Brilliant did you follow it up with a player afterwards if you don't preempt them?

C) Yeah I think, not immediately because I think what we find especially with the group of men around that age is a high emotional level and a high of you know half an hour later they're fine. So if we put restrictions and we did one finishing drill where we have to earn your next shot and if you don't finish and if you don't hit the target on your first shot, you are back of the line, if you hit your target on your first one you get an additional two. And then we had one boy who scored on his first one, so he had three, then he has 0 then 0 then 0 and then he just completely fell apart: "I'm s***!", everything was stupid everything was bad. Half an hour later we were reviewing with him the reason why and hes actually gone: "yeah yeah I see it but, in the moment". And I think that's where the hardest part is in that moment, that it gets managed , because you don't want it to turn into a negative situation which isn't really a negative situation

R) Have you had examples where you once you have chatted to them and they reflected, and overtime have got better in those moments?

C) To a degree they know now. I think sometimes it's just when there is adversity, like that red mist and I think that's the part we're finding is hardest for people, they know they shouldn't react because they come in, apologise afterwards, but they can't they can't quite grasp it in the moment.

R) Do you think those drills you are creating help that?

C) I think we looked at , is quite unique in that they can go out and play on loan they go out on loan and I don't play six months, so we have to prepare them to be able to perform and it doesn't mean that there was going to be brilliant but it means that they have to be able to you know a time to turf and they haven't played two games coming to training and be positive, and do things right, and so then then over trying to put in place. You know you might come off the bench with 5-minutes to go and you might have one shot and so can you make sure that that the one action you have you do something with the manager that the manager thinks oh yes well, and then next game you're in. so we've tried to incorporate things , stresses, so we tried to do it within as critical moments you know we don't want to have a go at you over behaviour on this but let's put it into context

R) Do you feel this message getting across?

C) I think people look back after that 6 months or after you know two weeks and I like you I see why you do it, you know we get it a bit it now, you don't see the fruit of the training you know something's happened further a few months down the line and then they go "ah right I see".

R) Dealing with men you are dealing with you know… mortgages!?

C) Yeah so you know some of them I've got contracts were if they don't win they don't get as paid as much so you know if you're making mistakes you're going to have 15 unhappy people. People will cut you some slack once or twice but then slack quickly runs out what's the reality of it hits. And the other thing we gonna know is they've almost got a timer on them because there comes a point when people say they're too old not too old but you've been here a long time you haven't quite made it. so no contract up in the summer and

R) What is the time line?

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C) It depends. you know they might get there year or two years after 18s (under 18s) but then that contract renewal might be based upon how they've done where they've been on out on loan how was their loan success, have been injured? or not? have they been up at the first team? Is there people above them question mark are there people who are younger than them who are potentially going to be better? Are there people who are older who are in their way and you're not going to move them? are you just keeping him round really? because we tried to do what's best for the kids as well, if we just keep him round but we know he's never going to breakthrough because he's got 5 people in front of him then that's not fair on him either

R) And what's your role, what impacts or in input to you have to them getting a first team contract?

C) It will be a committee decision from us and then probably sit down with the first team because it depends on their age as well so if they're 21 they fall into the first team squad rather than the e so then a first-team player not u 21s so then they first team player and it was in the first team budgets there's more decisions around that.

R) And could you tell me about which attributes you feel you been able to develop in your players over the last season.

C) I probably say confidence, if we looked at them it would be what it'll be confidence, resilience, I think emotional control I think is one that fluctuates but we're trying to be better at it. I think resilience is one that we're making progress but it's hard to measure resilience because if you get beat 1 nil in the last minute then are you not resilient? and going it becomes a case of and without experience of not being resilient, how do you know if you can be resilient? so is resilience losing the ball and then getting in the ball again? or is that just doing the job? is it someone hiding? Does that mean he's not resilient we could suggest that but what to say to say the one that we've done on a more individual basis I would say the little things is getting the boys more confident in presenting to each other, so like in the units and trying to help each other. so we're trying to get some resilience and confidence and some emotional control, which are like a major factors for us.

R) It's a good point about resilience and what is resilience and how it changes as you get older

C) So yeah so is resilient like just about keeping going? I think it's very contextual, more context specific. You know where yeah I think you could be extremely confident on the ball but not very confident for going for a header, and I think you'll notice that more when they're older.

R) Do you think your players have been able to develop a robust self-confidence so they are more confidence across different situations?

C) I think they are confident in their strengths, confident in that they back themselves, but there will be areas where are they are not confident about certain things so there'll be areas that I think or not great at this.

R) How have you approach those as a coach education and support programme?

C) First it's not to shy away from them, we need to get better at this, all of us. and having that vulnerability around as well, this is why you know sometimes we take the pressure off them for different things but it's allowing them, they have to be able to practice what they are not good at as well. Knowing it doesn't look great until they master it. yeah I think the individual plans help with that and they have got a present two attributes and then they got to

show us one to one. They do their clips and then we can write back so if you write on Hudl sometimes that is easier than a conversation. So you know with covid we got to know it in locked down, as we did lots of zooms. But with the door you can kind of pull someone and you're just constantly writing to them every week and then we're just in the process of sort of setting that that individual meeting 4 for 5 people each and every week which we think is needed and just little things with individuals like for example we have one [player] who tells us another fact every day, because he wasn't very confident to speaking with the group. So he comes and tells us a fact and we score out of 10 on it and then he goes and tells the team. but he's got more, much more buoyant, walking around because he's almost got something to do or be.

R) And how do the other players receive that?

C) They just laugh, it's not just a massive formal thing but because he's quite a talented player we have said you no go and tell the first team and will say you know. "XXXX have you told everyone your fact today?" and he just tells it and then it generates conversation, will it just been quite valuable.

R) Great so linking into all that will move into the next section, here are all the psych attributes [listed out on laminated cards on the desk]. Would you be able to rank order the attributes that you have developed the most to the ones that you think you've had developed the least, and then walk me through why you place them where you have.

C) So for commitment to develop and drive to achieve goals probably falls I'll probably falling under the same umbrella for us common because we leave them to their IDP. coping with demands I have put around strong work ethic because again for us, it's demands but it's demands of the environment you know anything about the first time they got to cope with it and they're going to the one that will probably come I won't say we work and he left on them but I think the ones that I find the hardest to work on our resilience and emotional control , because I think they've got emotional control one which I mentioned before when we try and stress them my, it is really difficult for them to then show resilience to hit a level of emotion that they can't see the woods through the trees. so sometimes you put them in in will if you concede you're team I've got to do a forfeit by got an extra player so it's set up for them to maybe, for the other team to achieve a goal or them to achieve a goal but the teams have got up against it haft to try and find a level of emotional control where they know they are just started against them stacked against them, but workout away. that it's almost like half you still have to do you know what the situation is, but you can only control what you can control in that situation.

R) And you said that's one of the tougher ones to develop?

C) One of the problems we have is they will do it and it will be going well but then when that emotional control, when it goes… so when someone goes moaning and then every time he gets it, you can just see, I call it a head last moment, and you look at them and you think: "he's gone now". it doesn't matter what you say to him because all he can think about now now: "is it's not fair", you [the player] almost falls into victim mentality… its his fault, it's not my fault, and then it's one of them, and I think that's one of the hardest ones is to get that into practice. It is easy to talk about, you know your body language is like this but we show you the video when you do everything, but in the exact instant it happens, to change it, to flick that on his head flick that on his head you can make him aware of this: "you know we're we are at now, you didn't become a bad player because you missed the last 5 passes or because you were beaten", a lot of people we know tend to have negative self-talk to themselves: "I'm f-ing this f-ing that!"

R) Explicitly out loud?

C) Yeah to the point where that is not helpful and we said to them like: "if you keep telling yourself that it's not working and it's probably not going to work". So we got a lot of that and that happens as soon as this happens

R) Your bound by quite a tight timescale, do you think you can affect that in the timescale you have or are you reliant upon the youth development phase to get them to a good point?

C) I think it's tough because a lot of that will come with pressure and Performance if you're playing really well U12 generally don't get too upset with things as often and I think sometimes it's when they come to us and there's a bit more pressure, because inevitability is they might get off the bus and they're going somewhere else. and I just think even though we try and do things like we trust you to play and they know that, there a at an age as well it's were there quote hormonal, and having coats all the way through the Academy this is the most hormonal age where hormonal where things can flip from brilliant to bad quickly. or from bad to brilliant in no time at all and you'll be like how is that going from that to that. And I think the complexity of the Challenge reflects that stop and if they are challenged and you explain it to them and they know the support, but they know where they are the ones doing it so that support , letting them know how you get success from the challenge whatever it might be. but when someone else is demanding on you, at our age as a competition, so it does get quite heated quite quickly. and I put resilience Down there because even though we do a lot of that you know reacting to mistakes and things like that. if you looked at reactions from mistakes it is probably highest 1, so that is something that we really have spent and probably talk a are about more about than anything else that actually resilience to What I would say like nerves, when someone does something wrong and then someone says some things to them like "XXX you should have been tighter there", and they're like . and there's two reactions: to hide into their shell or they turn around and argue. And what I would say to them individual resilience within the team. so when it's not going well, we have got a few people who thrive on a doing really well, but when they're not doing well get really stuck nothing goes right for them

R) And going back to coping with demands that is obviously one that you're trying to push, how have you developed that over the course of the programme?

C) Yeah a physical ability so from the GPS and then technical and tactical and over the years I've seen a lot of Managers say yeah but he didn't talk enough. you know no we could have excellent players in the past we've gone up and they haven't been a comedy haven't stayed there because they didn't let people know they're in the session in terms of being vocal and acting like that imaginary checklists that people want to check off so we had some go out with the first team pre-season this year and a lot of the feedback was they were great, but when they were around the environment they were really, they are big characters now environment but really shy and their environment which is to be expected . and it wasn't a derogatory common on them, but also to let them know, do you know no you have to be quite consistent with your behaviour, you can't be the big voice here [in the U23] and you go there [1ST team] are quiet. We expect you to be a bit quieter, but because it is your job now you need to do it. What we try to remind them is like Jude Bellingham is like 18. So if anything that's the hard part, it's not age you know. One of the lads [U23s] he's playing up for [international team] and he's playing in the first team

R) Has that type of role modelling helped the players develop psychologically at all?

C) For some people, I think some people can't relate to it. some people relate to it and say "yeah" I see what you're doing and after I'll try it but some people are what they don't see the relevance: "oh yeah well he plays for Liverpool, yeah but he plays for Liverpool

because of this. so I think they all see the point, but there are different degrees of how effective it is.

R) Is there a strong club culture that you see coming through?

C) Yeah and when they get to a certain level You can be talented but if you don't work hard you're probably not going to get through so I think that's probably been pushed into them. you probably will get one or two I think he will try to shirk certain things like the gym, it might be good on the pitch but not very good in the gym. but I think a lot of it like I mentioned earlier is is a lack of identity

R) It sounds like you'll be quite transparent with a 23 is about all this?

C) Yeah we do a lot of testing, when they get tested again at Christmas if you are bottom of the group it shows up on the table that your bottom of the group or shows you as a percentage change, so you're from your last test to your new one, so if you've gone up at 1 at percent and everyone else 50% have you been doing as much as everyone else? so that's how we doing it, individualised, but there is also a case of me and you both playing centre-half there is a chance that there probably be only one contract that will be giving out.

R) And talk to me about developing the attribute self-aware and reflective over the course of the programme.

C) Yeah so Hudl we are doing a lot of comments on that and I think they're starting to appreciate what they do while I'm what they didn't. you know the group now was stand up and present which are their what they did well and what they didn't and that's very self-reflective.

R) And you see the benefits of Hudl?

C) yes because they would write things down they wouldn't necessarily say. I need always get the the clips that they pick up might not be the clips that you pick out because they might be really unsure about this situation but you might take things on board you just guessed right . in is saying his guests right but but he's done well, but definitely parts in that and the group work, they do their IDPs and unique things around that I think it is quite good for them at this age

R) Brill and the next task is if you can reorder them my in the order in which you think there should be developed in XXXX academy players

C) So I probably say the first one of the younger ages for me is commitment to develop and confidence because I think when you're 8 or 9, as long as you want to get better and you are playing with, doesn't matter if I make a mistake, then none of this is the end of the world at any age but they cannot live in fear. I have to make mistakes. Then Foundation going into the younger YDP… strong work ethic because I think it's important but when they're aged 8 or 9 getting them to work hard is not necessarily the be all and end all, but it needs to be part of it before. I think that you can start to bring in around 12-13 years and about being self-aware. and when I say drive to achieve goals I think around 14-15, its about getting the kids are thinking about it being a job, and he might do the IDPs before it, and that is fine because you might want to get better at shooting all over it is but think at 13-14 years you're starting to go: "well I'm am I serious about this now? or am I not?"

R) ok so it goes from shorter to longer term goals

C) It goes from playing football for fun I'm being good at it to playing football because this could be my career. so there's not a massive change but they're just has to be a shift in how you view it, it doesn't mean you make it serious, it doesn't mean that it's do or die it is just it's a start of looking at it ok I'm starting to get to 5 years time I'm I could pay for the first team comedy at the 5-years but it's the realisation of it. I would say resilience words former parts of them realising it because you know when you're younger, your lose tournaments you're lose games, your lose tournaments even if it doesn't really matter just starts to build a case for it. so I think resilience would be around 14-ish, it becomes more important because when you get to your peak heights people do just seem to lose… not lose their ability, but over a few months they can't control the ball and then how they view themselves and their identity is massively affected by that

R) So seems like this is quite reliant upon growth and maturation?

C) Yes yeah. yeah for me so then as you get past that then coping with the demands, is when you get to 15-16 years emotional control comes into there as well so more is expected of you. You get offered an early scholarship at 14-15 years and all the sudden you got a bit of pressure on your shoulders and there's a bit more expected of you as a bit more, it's becoming a job. I don't think, it doesn't need to be professional, do you know it doesn't you don't need to have early professionalisation, you gotta be here 24/7 and everything like that, that is almost a case of you are starting to get closer to a point you need to, what you do has more consequences.

R) So how you've ordered them seems to prepare them for these for the professional development phase?

C) Yeah and it's different for its person might have some who would fast track because of ability or physicality so there's might look slightly different. this harder to put work ethic into someone later, you know if they've managed to cook coast through on ability and then you've got someone at 15 that they got to run and work hard and do extra and they just sort of don't know why. so yeah, I would go along with that. and they would all obviously tie in, it wouldn't finish at 16, they [the attributes] will tie in, like coping with demands resilience emotional control gets harder as you get older because you play all the time when you're younger, and then he had longer-term injuries so when you're young you are very unlikely to be out for several months with something but you are more likely when you get older.

R) So these would picked up around 15-16 and then to make them context-specific as they keep on moving through

C) Yes

R) Great so that takes us into the last section which is the programme, which you've already talked about a couple of prose and a couple of challenges and things that would be better, but to summarise the aims of the program was designed to educate coaches on how to develop the 8th desired psychological attributes. To what extent do you feel that the aims were met?

C) I think it gave everyone a good awareness and gave everyone some strategies to put in place. I know it's feedback on the strategies and things so as an evaluation as a base it was good. I think there is more to come as that was more like the structure or structurally how you might do it where as, I think it needs to be structured, and then next stage is probably more individualised. so you need to get the team better to react into mistakes but you need to get Billy better at not jumping through his hands in the air and things like that…

R) And where would you see the input would it be to the coach or to the player in your view

C) I think it depends on age. so the coach H4 younger , and then as they get slightly older, there might be issues that are elsewhere affecting them . and I think that can have they might then need someone else as well. I think it's good if they've got the coach you can help them but the footballer easy parts but as I said earlier as they get older their behaviour comes as I was out of the stuff away from football

R) In terms of developing is attributes what aspects of the Education programme did you find most beneficial to help you to develop these within your players?

C) I think it was probably the actual meetings as opposed to the information you know. I found a break up rooms and the questioning, that probably made me think more than the lanyards and things. because sort of when you're like talking about it, you get other people's input on other people's ideas and things like that because normally whenever CPD it's about football or about whatever, but because that was specifically about psychology and things he was more influential than being tagged on for something 10 minutes at the end.

R) And the timings of the worktops workshops and how they worked, was that appropriate?

C) I think the times were alright because it's just enough time, I didn't feel like you were just going on and on but it was quick tasks 5-minutes each and people feedback on that's on that it was quite… it never got boring. You never thought: "I would be doing this now for ages".

R) And what aspects of the program were not as used for, you mentioned the lanyards for instance the written resources/

C) You know I found like the lanyard and things I've learnt my lesson before so when I'm out I'm not probably going to look at a lanyard thinking, I think it's quite especially as they get older players more sensitive to things in the environment, if you're stood there looking at it thinking how am I going to deal with xxxx today: "well I'll need to increase this this or decrease this". I think it helps when they are 13 or 14 and you can have a quick look but probably is there older you sort of know, they're watching as well. People are looking for gaps in the fence and so if you give them to bigger gap in the fence I'll take it

R) And so in terms of the written resources and coaching strategies, to what extent were these useful to have to calibrate to cross reference?

C) Like all the strategies on it were really helpful. You know for me when people have mic'ed observation and things I always think that is not real because people know their mic'ed up and I think they talked differently, and when you get the feedback through, like you could watch that, I never thought is quite the same because I don't think you see the same behaviour from people so I'm not quite sure how effective that is but then the other stuff on the booklets and the documents and everything I thought that was quite good. So in terms of observations having someone more pitch-side and having a less formal approach, because when you put the camera there and put the mic on, it becomes really formalised. Because it's you know some of the psychologists I've seen they've just been watching the session and then just gone over: "did you think about this, did you realise you said you not ask?" so like change the dynamic without really meaning to.

R) And that's moves us into the final question which is anything you would like to have added or liked to have done more, during the programme to help you support your players' psychological development further?

C) I think it is developing the individualised things, the case studies of people, because we've got two or three who we need to help, but how we go about helping them, we are

unsure. We've asked the players how they'd like to be helped but he's unsure because they don't know how, so it's sort of trial and error and we think sometimes if you have, well it's never going to be exactly the same, but what constraints like if this behaviour happens. It might not be emotional control but how are we going to perform that because we're going to get into a point where they're stressed and then they're gonna go [lose control] and we know he's going to go, so what is the consequence of the action when it goes?

R) Thank you for all of your responses. Is there anything you wish to add or clarify?

C) No

R) And finally, did I lead or influence you in any way?

C) No

Appendix I: Study Three Social Validation: Player Experience Focus Groups-

Interview Guide

Player Focus Groups

Interview Guide and Instructions for Interviewer

Duration: 30 minutes.

Introduction

As you are aware from the information form sent out, this focus group is about your mental development and the role your coaches have had in your psychological development this season.

This study aims to evaluate the coach education programme. This part will look to gain the opinions of Cardiff City FC Academy players on their psychological development over the last season.

Although you are probably aware already, I will quickly run through some important features of this research related to confidentiality, anonymity, and your right to withdraw.

- Your name will be replaced with a number.

- Your coaches (and other staff) will not be given information on who participated in the focus groups

- All information you and other players give will be mixed together. So you will not be identifiable.

- All information collected (recordings and written recordings) will be saved on a password protected computer and be seen by only the researcher.

- You can withdraw yourself at any point, now, during the focus group, or even afterwards. If it is after, you simply let me know you are withdrawing and I will delete any information or data related to yourself.

In terms of this focus group, we will focus on a few key aspects: coping with high demands of elite sport, confidence, commitment to develop, strong work ethic, resilience, emotional control, drive to achieve goals, self-aware and reflective *[provide laminated print outs with a definition of each]*.

Questions

Task: **As a group, could you put these into an order from the one(s) you feel you have developed the most this season, to the one you have not developed as much.** [A4 print outs of each attribute, and their definitions, are presented to the group]

1. Starting with the attribute you have ranked as the most developed, how have your coaches helped to develop each of these this season?

Probes:

- What things/behaviours/actions have you noticed your coaches do, which has contributed towards developing this attribute in you?

- What things/behaviours/actions has your coach done to develop this attribute in you?
- What things/behaviours/actions have had the biggest impact?
- When has your coach helped you developed this, at training, during games, or elsewhere?
- Can you provide examples of when your coach has discussed this attribute with you?

Appendix J: Study Three Example Transcript from Player Focus Groups

Social Validation: Player Experiences- Focus group U18s

R) Thank you for agreeing to participating in this focus group. This discussion is about your psychological development over the last season. I would like your opinions on your psychological development and whether you've thoughts on whether (a) you have developed these and (b) how your coaches have developed them over the last season. Before we do move into the discussion, please know that none of this will go back to your coaches. Your answers have no bearing on contracts or game-time; and we're just trying to identify what is going well and what there needs to be more support on. I'll be speaking to other age groups in the academy as well.

You don't need to talk about any particular coach you can just be general about coaches. Is that okay with everyone?

All) Yes

R) Excellent, so let's makes a start. As a group, could you put these into an order from the one(s) you feel you have developed the most this season, to the one you have not developed as much. [time given for the completion of ordering laminated cards with each psychological attribute listed on].

So you mentioned that they might be developed to different extents for all of you, which is a great point. We'll start on this end though and I'll fire out some questions about each one. So for strong work ethic what things have you noticed your coaches have been doing that has helped promote that attribute?

P1) running and training all yeah, doing the basics really well and our quality will then make us better and that's what they're saying to us

R) Do you think that is happened?

P4) yeah, they push us every day to work harder

P1) yeah everything we do on and off the pitch, the front three there they do demand quite a lot , as in to be to keep going even in whatever team you're in or wherever we train however many there are, they are always saying you need to do these 100%

R) And is that just through saying it, or is that through the practices you do?

P2) yeah so like you might have punishments, one v1s on a Thursday's pretty tough and I think all of these come into that because we're working for a certain amount of time that's a 10-20 seconds so it gets quite tough so that impacts all of these really

R) And off those you have mentioned what is the coaching strategy that has had the most impact?

P1) probably the messages from the coaches because they're drilling it into us every day, so its like they're saying it in training and when you are walking around the building they're always telling us to work hard and just run basically

P3) I think resilience is there because that's a top one, that's there because…

P4) yeah I think we've all had set backs

P3) yeah setbacks like the results the results haven't been the results of the team haven't really gone our way we've had a lot of chop and change in the team and we lost quite a few games and each week we come back better than the week before it's just those little moments where we switch off so that's why I think that's up there

R) So moving into resilience one of your coaches done to improve that one in you

P3) I think when you are being told that you're not in the starting lineup, for me personally, it comes into a bit of both of those, being resilient and having that emotional control so I don't show it then in the session, do not show where the people you're feelings

R) And how has that helped you?

P3) it's in my mind but I struggle to nail it

R) do you reckon you've developed it?

P3) I don't know I think, it's kind of stayed like that

R) and what about yourselves?

P4) yeah yeah

R) Has that been? how have you experienced that?

P1) yeah I had a period where I was in the squad for like three four weeks I think so that was a massive setback because I got told I was playing but then there was three weeks then that I was in the squad so that was a massive setback

P4) you just lose confidence more

P1) So you just keep going really until you're back in the squad

R) And how have the coaches Supported you to develop that attribute?

P1) they have always help me, sometimes they put in arm around me just to give me a bit of confidence as well and sometimes when I slowed down

P4) like when you take a foot off the gas

P1) yeah so when I slowed down a bit they keep telling me to keep going

R) So they keep telling you to keep your work rate up?

P1) yeah

R) And in terms of putting arm around you and did they do anything else for instance today provide you feedback?

P2) our main coach now he gives me quite a bit of feedback, that is maybe the reason why I've gone to the squad full-start but I think sometimes not that they lie to us but they might sugar coat it and I'd rather know what is the reason I'm not in the squad so I know. so maybe then

P1) yes sometimes it's not clear a

P4) I think the coaches trying to treat yourself kids almost, a lot of us would just rather be told how it is instead of have something said in a way with some excuses. we were just rather than why wouldn't would not there and then we can go and do it

R) Do you see it change at all

P3) No not really, I still think that they Focus too much I'm making everyone happy and sometimes that makes people unhappy, and I think that everyone knows not everyone could be happy at the same time people want different things, so I think I would rather just be told instead of having some excuse

R) So you all quite accepting that this is the level you are at now and you were just rather know

P2) yeah I mean we're trying to get into the first team and we may not even get any information so we're nearly men now so we need to just be treated more like that

R) So you appreciate the transparent approach?

P2) We guess yes, yes just being straight up. so not being told that I'm not in squad but also how I can get myself there?

P4) yeah so it's about being told what you've done wrong

R) And in terms of these first two attributes have your coaches mentioned and use the terms

All) yes

P1) they say it basically every day whether it's a training . when sticks comes in and speaks to us he talks quite a lot, he's always mentioned in these three things and staying on top and working hard every day. I think they mentioned those rather than they don't really mention four stop that's team and that's more personal but you don't really hear too much of that one

P3) yes its quite split

R) So coping with the demands, you've mentioned about the coach coming in and talking about it, is there anything that the coach does that you think contributes towards improving your commitment to develop?

P4) sometimes people have had, when they're in preseason and not reaching their speed or reach, they make individuals do more than the squad so they will tell you that you are not doing enough and you'll do extra runs, and it'll make you realise that you need to do more which I found was quite good for me

R) So, they talk to you about why you're doing it and the benefits?

P4) yeah they said I was slow laughing they obviously come out so they said I was slow and then maybe do more running but now I've improved

R) Have any of you experienced that?

P1) yeah I had a few days right to do more running not speed, but just distances because I wasn't meeting the distances, like the rest of the boys were meeting theirs, so I would have, I would do a few end to ends after training just to get up with the rest of the squad to match everyone else

R) And in terms of this attribute do you think that you have developed this over the last season, being out to cope with demands

P1) Yeah towards the end of the season definitely been out to cope with things better

P4) I was obviously going to say this our first year being proper full-time footballers so it's taken a while for us to start to get used to it but now I think we're sort of on it now and we cope with it well

R) And the coach has had an impact on your developing that?

P1) yeah definitely we

P2) yeah and our pre-season and our physical movements making a small powerful and explosive so being physically prepared, it was tough

R) So that transition to full-time, going to the gym to make sure you are ready to compete with men asset, how have you found that?

P1) yeah decent

P2) yeah it was tough but obviously the more exposure you get you improve more from it

P4) I don't think we're a massive squad in terms of physicality I don't think that's a strong point you know and you're coming up against the northern and London clubs they are generally a lot bigger than you so it's all as a physical challenge

R) So we move on down to emotional control in terms of this attribute, what have your coaches done over the last season to help you develop this?

P1) I don't think they've done anything to develop it they just talk to us about it being able, it's hard for someone you know just to say oh you gotta have emotional control, I don't think it's that easy, you've got to be better at managing your feelings before stop

P3) it's easier to say than it is to do

P1) yeah when it's your life it's hard,

P4) yeah it's really personal in that you know when I did psychology at school it was always doing stuff yourself and not telling other people and you've got a deal with it on your own and that's what I found that in school and coming here as well I don't feel, I got people to talk to but there was no one really to help you out in a way, because the coaches always busy and so it's quite frantic

P1) yeah we don't have a sport psychologist so we don't really get to see this

P2) yeah that'll be a good thing to have one

R) so in the game or training do your coaches speech you individually?

P4) yeah if I've made mistakes then oh I've let that mistake spiral into a few others then they're taught to us to try and forget about that, and talk to us about not being a perfectionist and so helping our emotional control and not worrying about that first mistake

R) Has that helped you?

P4) maybe a little bit…

P1) I feel that they're trying to make a team, so I think they try and bring teammates or get teammates to bring you through it. and I think that does work but you've got to know how to deal with it with that individual when it happens you know when something isn't going there way. yeah I think as a team they do Drive us to be a unit together but some people just don't want to do that I won't mention names but that's just what happens

R) So if any of you experienced times your emotions you've got too high or too low and coach of intervened?

P1) yeah I've had a few occasions where I've lost my head basically just things aren't going my way so I've taken out as in arguing back with XXXX or something or either of them or the opposition shoved him as hard as I can to take my anger out and they've taken me to the side and just tell me to can't down a bit and told me some ways I could deal with it because sometimes I'll let a mistake affect me too much

P3) yeah I'm really similar to that like I've lost my head come out I've got the nickname Bruce Banner

P4) that's pretty much my biggest thing if I nailed that if I f****** nail that I think yeah the stuff will improve

P1) yeah XXXX were saying to me and call them if we let the emotions get the better of us it will slow down our development as a footballer for stop so yeah it has helped as a bit to be fair because recently I've not been as bad but like I still have moments by having proved yeah by having proved yet I have improved yet

R) So XXXX as approach has been appreciated

P3) yeah he's a good coach we've got a good relationship with him and that helps you know a lot of the coaches you don't have quite as good relationship, but he's there on an individual level

R) And from that approach, you can see there's some improvement in these things

P3) A little bit yeah it's not overnight it'll take time

R) So we'll move on to commitment to develop, in terms of your it is about immersing yourself in football and you're all full time now as you've said commerce so what to coaches do to promote this in you ?

P1) I have found that they tend to lay off the extras now that's my opinion

P4) yeah after training some of us will stay out like I know the strikers will do finishing or midfielders would take corners or de-free kicks or something like that and they were say two minutes and you've got to go in, so I think we could have longer out on the field to do extra after because it's not like anyone goes on the field after

P2) I can remember when XXXX was our age and an under 14s and I remember seeing him out after like a long day release or a long training session and he I think they try and shy away from that a bit now

P4) yeah I think because we're full-time now we do a lot of training so they're trying to look after us to stop injuries but most of us will probably do a bit extra so we because obviously we're trying to push to be better, we don't just want to do the bare minimum you know if you want to get to the top you've got to do a bit extra on the other boys

P2) yeah the coaches do use a lot of examples themselves like XXXX's have a certain player and to try and make as one of the better and tell us about what they did and stuff like that so we had a meeting yesterday and you know they were saying about preseason and coming back fits and in the right attitude and they would use examples from last year of who was really good and stuff like that to motivate us

R) So is that within the squads or older players

P3) They were in our shoes last year

R) How do you find coaches talking about role models doesn't have a positive impact, having role models from the year above the

P3) it's realistic

P4) yeah it's better because they've been in our position so it's a lot more realistic

P1) yeah you don't want to hear it because you know it but you know it's true and they're in a better place now because of how hard they worked so I think it's good

R) Has that changed this season have you seen more of that

P1) I think we've been exposed to it more: about how good players are being pushing into 23s then into First Team

P3) yeah seeing XXXX get the first team job you know some of the boys we've trained with him so it makes it clearer that there is a pathway for the Academy, and they have done it a lot this year this year

R) so you can see that pathway then this year

All) yes it's a lot clearer

R) and what things do you think the coaches have done to help improve your confidence

P2) it's that exposure with the 23s, it's like a lot of us has trained with them and train with them as a group I spent a few weeks together and that helps a lot with your confidence you know the more exposure you get the more confident you get and you play your own football and starts played better, yeah that exposure to the 23s is done a lot for my confidence

R) And then when you're in the 23s what's the feedback with the 23s coaches

P4) I think they sort of treat us as any other player, they give us praise when it's needed but they also give us feedback and discipline when it is needed also can't mess so it's a bit of both really

are there any things that they say coaches have said that would damage confidence

P1) yeah it's fair. yes you need that that bit of criticism there's also help here

R) Would you all agree?

P2) yeah it does help especially from an under 23 coach

P3) yeah I trained with them a few weeks ago and then I bumped into them the Monday after and they said it was positive and it is good for the confidence

P1) yeah when you get pushed up to the end of 23s it's an automatic confidence boost because you know you're doing something right

R) Did any of you play up when you were younger?

All) yes

R) So similar to that then…

P3) yes but of course they're actually pro footballers, so it's not like under 12 to under 14, It's men you are playing against professionals who it's their career who are just playing down. it's good

R) And what strategies have helped the most in terms of confidence Is there any other ways that the coach help support this. And what was the best thing

P1) is quite hard for a coach to give you confidence when you train because you can have a really bad training and then play really well in games it's just down to your attitude so on the pitch if you're getting praise, you know you're playing well your coach will let you know so the coach the coaches always being engaged when we're playing rather than just sitting on the fence and watching and they did that for a while, but now they're engaged

R) And moving on to the last two self-aware and reflective and drive to achieve goals. these are making you aware of your a weaknesses and also your strengths, what things have they done to help you develop this

P3) IDP meetings and our IDP development on the pitch, that's the two main things

P1) we have huddle as well so we've got clips of our games so then they report back so we will comment on things that we have done could have done better or have done well and they will agree or disagree

R) Are they helpful?

P1) yeah

P4) yeah I don't enjoy doing it. I think it's different for different players but I'm not the biggest fan of doing individual clips, I know how I've played and I want to know, I want to know how they thought I played instead of doing individual 10 second moments

P3) yeah I get that we know how we've played after a game realistically. you know from a coach perspective it's more of a group message

R) Do you think that would be more helpful?

P4) 100%

P2) yeah and like in our IDP meeting they say what we need to improve on and they're clear about that but for me like I want to work on my head in because as a striker that something I've got to work on to get to the next step and they bang on to me about that quite a lot which I know I've got to improve on but They don't give me enough exposure anywhere near enough exposure on this on the training field but I'll never really work on my head in say my attack in headers. to their tell me what I've got to improve on but not really helping me improve on the pitch near paragraph

R) So the practice doesn't link up to your individual goals?

P3) yeah that's right, sometimes

R) So if you had time dedicated to working on your targets?

P3) yes but it's sort of both of us like the coach and myself, I suppose it's myself as well I should be going to the Coach and asking maybe after the session asking to do this stuff, ask him to go through it but so I suppose it's sort of both but in the train and I don't really get it

R) Brill when we move on to the last one which is drive to achieve goals. what have your coaches done over the last season to really push you towards your goals?

P2) I don't think there's a lot you can actually do to actually achieve your goals you know you've got to be really special player to break into the under 23s or breaking to the first team, you've got to be unreal to do that for stop but I think in our IDP meetings and stuff they do say at the start the season what do you want to get at the end of the season and they agree it and give us their opinions and what they think we should do and then for the rest of the seasoners not really much to help us to achieve those goals. you know I've set stuff myself based on over performance

P3) yeah I'd like to reiterate that because they are there at the start this season at preseason and there you goals but then when the season actually starts they forget about it really and we don't really go over it, so that is something I would want to do more

P4) yeah it's quite a personal thing how you play So a coach can't capture all of it so you have to kind of do it yourself, you know when you play it is down to you so but you know to know that you are performing your goals like you should you need them

R) What would be the best thing in keeping you motivated towards your long-term goals

P4) I think maybe it comes back to them telling us, which is coping with the demands in a way, but telling us what they want us to achieve and how they want us to do us how they want to do it come out they should be telling us even if it affects our confidence conversation should be saying you should be here, even if they might not believe it they should be saying you know start the season you want to be doing 20 appearance is well you're not and here's how you do it

R) So asking more critical questions off you

P4) yeah and I think that's the way we need to be treated , more adults rather than just being told how it is and then if they do really believe that we can play it that level then they should be telling us not just waiting for us , because it might not happen you

R) do you agree lads?

All) yes

P3) Yeah yeah because if we set at the season we want to be in the 23s or something and we're halfway through and all three quarters way through or near the end and then should they should be asking us why have you not got to this where are you with this?

P1) and even telling us you know how do you get to the next stage

R) So A clear path forward

P1) yeah

R) We've been trying to work behind the scenes for the last 14 months to help coaches promote these, and it seems like these have been promoted more than these ones, generally in terms of your mentality how well has that been developed over the last year? do you think you've improved mentally?

P4) I think you look back and you do notice a few things they have done and they have been quite good with a lot of these things and there have been quite a lot harsh on us in a way by making us work hard you know in the 18s especially they've the work ethic they've had that drilled into US

P2) yeah with the work ethic you can see the difference with the younger ones to the 18s where you know it's your first full-time and you could say we work harder than them in games but before example with press in you'd get really tight but then in a young boy's game you'd be five yards off and they think that is okay So it's like doing that extra bit

R) So in terms of your mentality have the coaches help to improve that over the last year

P1) they've tried to , unsure whether it is worked or not

P4) I think some people's mentality is quite a negative like the whole season minus being quite negative in a way because of certain things and the group, you know it's not how the coaches want us to be, I don't think so our fault , coaches can't make us get along

P1) I think you know the start of the season you know people moaning it everyone and

P2) yeah bitchin

P1) yeah and it just set the tone for what we were in for for all of us and it was quite draining, really draining. that's what I think as second is next year we just have to be more of a unit and we know what we've got a be like and not be like what they were like this year because they were nightmare four stuff it was s*** honestly

R) Thank you very much for your answers. Is there anything else you wish to add or clarify?

All) no

Appendix K: Coach Education Programme- Example of Resource Pack

Coaching Strategies Resource Pack
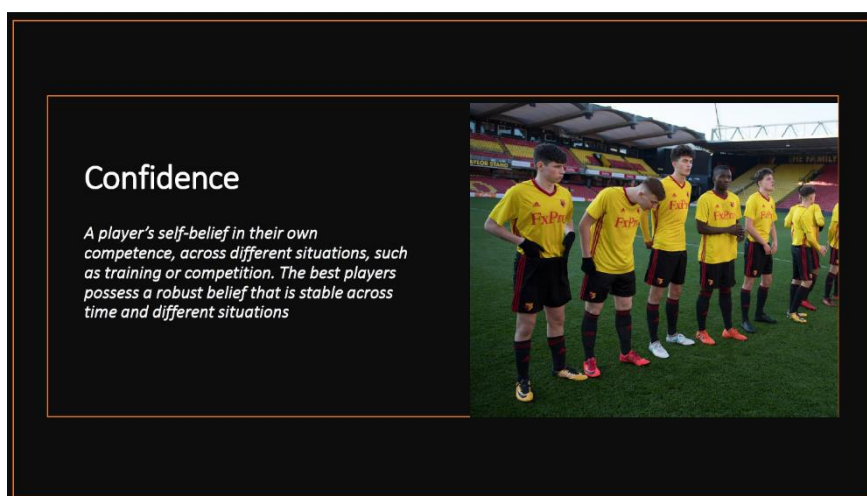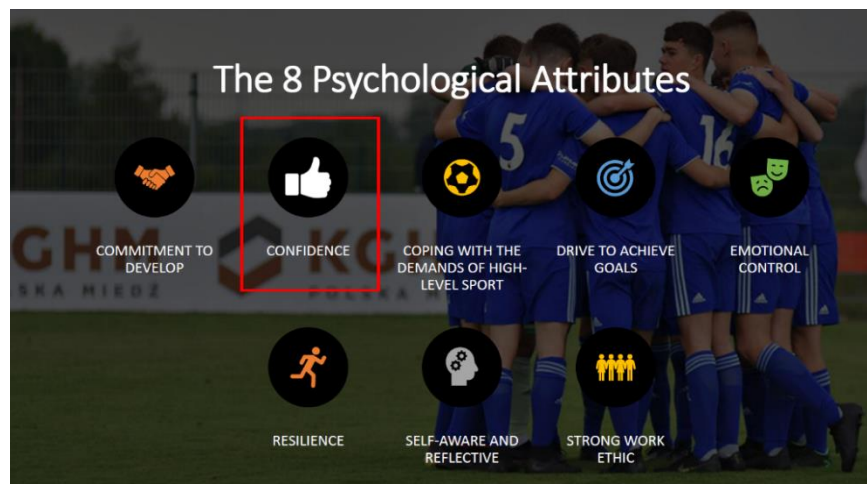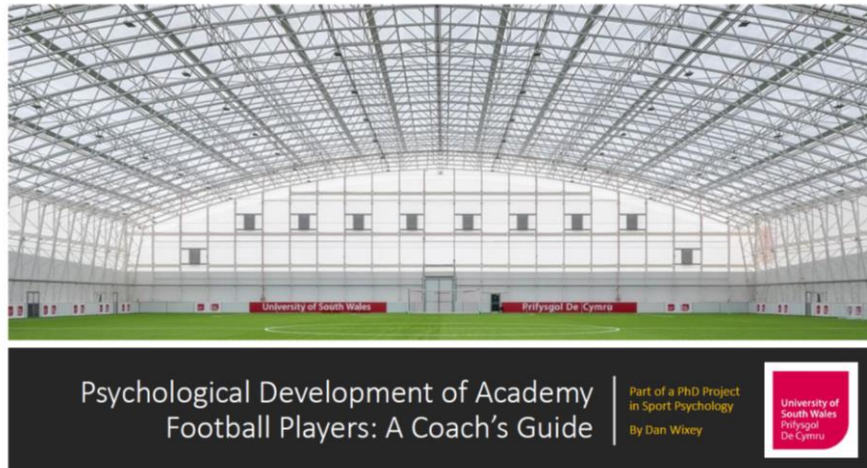
Behaviours that Indicate High Confidence in Players

- ✓ Confident players will drive high standards from peers
- ✓ Engage effectively with teammates
- ✓ Players that can be relied upon to perform well
- ✓ Readily communicate with coaches
- ✓ They are energetic and hard working
- ✓ Willing to be creative and not fearing of making mistakes

General Coaching Strategies

1. Encourage players to further develop their strengths
2. Set players challenging yet achievable targets
3. Knowing how to best support a player's confidence
4. Keep reminding players about their previous successes and accomplishments
5. Support and encouraging players to self-reflect
6. Helping to remove the pressures placed on players
7. Organise different people to support your player's confidence (e.g., sport science, parents)
8. Give players opportunities to lead parts of training
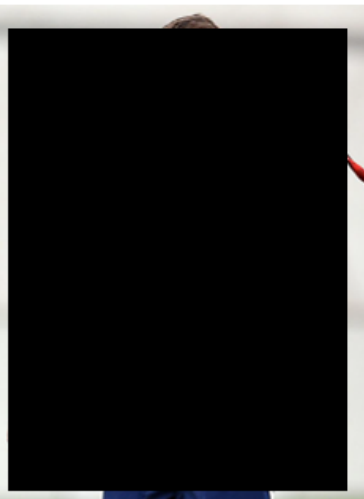
General Coaching Strategy	Specific Coaching Strategies
Emphasise Previous Accomplishments to Players	• Provide realistic role models for players to help build belief and develop performance • Readily praise players using positive and considered verbal and non verbal communication • Remind players of successful performances • Re-watch game footage to remind players of previous success
Encourage Players to further enhance their strengths	• Challenge players to play to and then execute their strengths in competition • Encourage players strengths and relate it to having a realistic longer term career in football • Make players aware of their strengths to increase their belief and sense of value • Players' understanding of themselves and their super strengths is really important
Facilitate players to develop confidence by reducing perceived pressures	• Give players perspective of the bigger picture • Players develop their own confidence with coaches playing a supporting role in removing pressures
Increase player-led opportunities to practice	• Allowing players play freely during practices reduces pressure and enables them to enjoy • Facilitate extra player-lead practice sessions at the academy
Know How Best to Support an Individual's Confidence	• Know a players preferences in developing their confidence • Obtain player's perceptions of how to best support their confidence • Spend time building an understanding of and a rapport with players through one to one conversations
Orchestrate Support Networks	• Build an effective support network around players • Facilitate player to player communication to build confidence • Identify low confident players and ensure they know where they can get support from to develop their confidence
Set players challenging yet achievable targets	• Appropriately challenging players during competition or practice to build confidence • Match a players confidence to the demands of training or competition • provide fair and honest communication to players about failures or future challenges along with ways to improve • Referring to players' process goals to develop a robust belief
support players to self reflection to build confidence	• Make players evaluate their confidence and talk about the consequences of it for them • Players appear more confident when doing their reflective presentations

Challenges to be Aware of

- Getting a contract next season will be in the back on the player's mind
- Older players' confidence is negatively impacted by off pitch situations like contracts agents and comparing themselves to other players
- Coaches unable to help low confidence of players who do not have goals or a work ethic
- Confidence is a term thrown around in football and sometimes a way of a player saying its the coach's *fault*
- Players may say they are low on confidence to protect themselves from being made aware of their weaknesses
- A lack of social skills reduces player confidence when playing up an age group
- A player's failure can affect other players' confidence, and their confidence in him as a player, so may not play the pass to him lowering confidence further
- Confidence can take a hit if they are left out of squads at significant times before contract decisions
- Coaches not recognizing or acting upon low confidence
- Parents' opinions can interfere
- It is a hard balance for parents, but the player should go to the coach at u18s to be educated rather than parents
- Parents can have a negative effect on player confidence by "battering" them with criticism after a game
- Convincing the player that they are of value is the hardest thing
- Hope that players will just develop confidence as a natural consequence of an elite environment

Appendix L: Online Resources (Hudl)

Appendix M: Coach Education Programme- Player Survey Results

(a) Individual Responses Collected from Player Surveys (each row is an individual player, and cells are colour-coded to illustrate the impact that the strategies had upon them)

(b) An overview of player survey results. Darker green means the strategy had greater impact on developing that given attribute for that player. White/no colour mean there was no perceived impact. Responses were broken down into age group clusters (e.g., U12, U13, and U14). Coaches could quickly view which strategies had the most impact.

(c) Responses were summarised further for coaches and separated by age-groups.

U12 - 14 Attribute	Average Player Score	Average score for how much coach impacts on this attribute (-5 to +5)	Actions
Confidence	6.8	4	Continue to employ strategies across all players in the squad. Look for the most beneficial in 'U12-14 Tab'
Strong Work Ethic	8.9	4	Continue to employ strategies across all players in the squad. Look for the most beneficial in 'U12-14 Tab'
Self Aware and Reflection	8.6	5	Continue to employ strategies across all players in the squad. Look for the most beneficial in 'U12-14 Tab'
Resilience	8.4	4	Continue to employ strategies across all players in the squad. Look for the most beneficial in 'U12-14 Tab'
Commitment to Develop	9.3	4	Continue to employ strategies across all players in the squad. Look for the most beneficial in 'U12-14 Tab'
Emotional Control	9.1	4	Continue to employ strategies across all players in the squad. Look for the most beneficial in 'U12-14 Tab'
Drive to Achieve Goals	8.8	4	Continue to employ strategies across all players in the squad. Look for the most beneficial in 'U12-14 Tab'
Coping with Demands	9	4	Continue to employ strategies across all players in the squad. Look for the most beneficial in 'U12-14 Tab'
U15-16 Attribute	Average Player Score	Average score for how much coach impacts on this attribute (-5 to +5)	Actions
Confidence	6.5	2	Enhance Employment of Strategies
Strong Work Ethic	9	3	Continue to employ strategies across all players in the squad. Look for the most beneficial in 'U15-16 Tab'

Summary   U12-14   U15-16   ALL results   +

Ready   Accessibility: Investigate

Appendix N: Study 3- Example of Field Notes and Reflections

11/11/21

where I created the 1st breakout rooms & sent an 'announcement' out to steer their discussions - eg
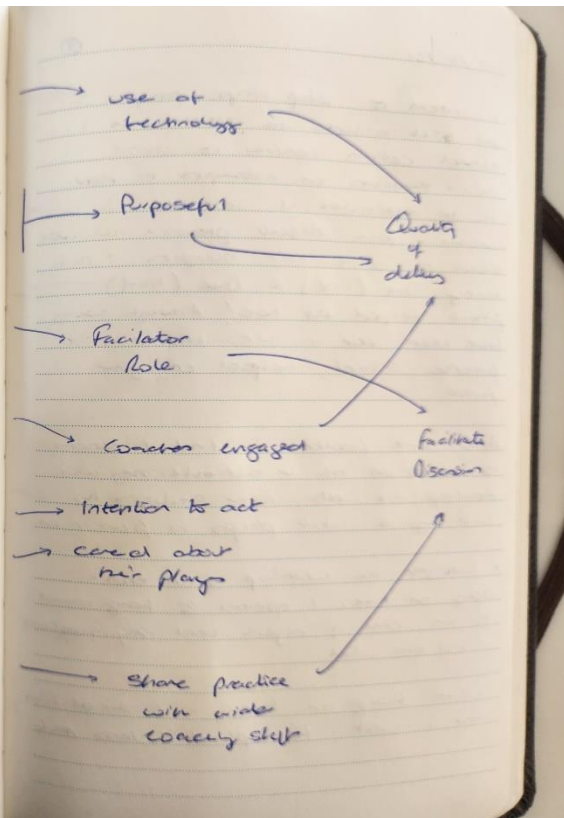" • focusing in on resilience & confidence
" • what plays have improved?
" • what have you done to improve?

I then joined the BO groups & listened into their discussions - I deliberately didn't interject - I just listened & made hand written notes on good things I heard.

All coaches were discussing the athletes he'd got - & it struck me the care & intentionality to support their players.
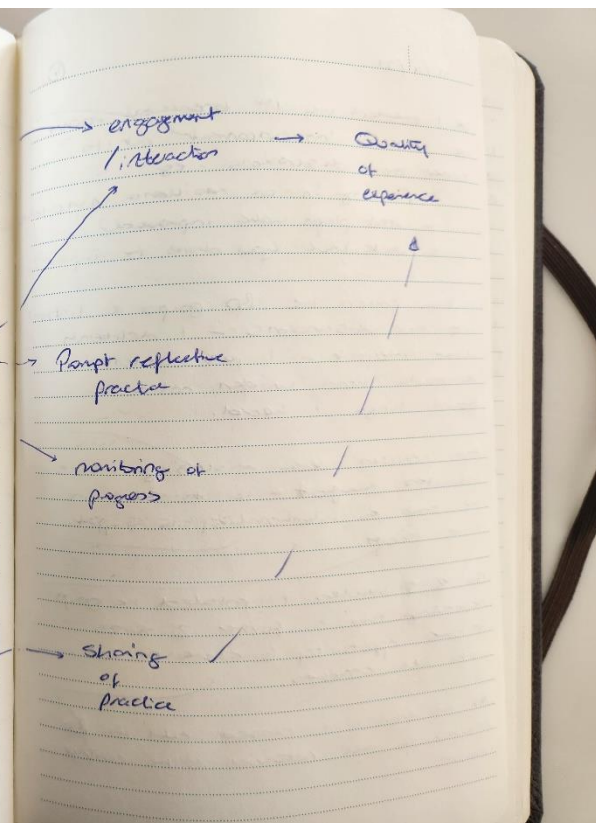
On every 8 minutes I rotated the groups repeating this a further 2 times to give opportunity to share practice with all coaches.

At the end - I closed out the BO rooms & all returned to the central room

→ use of technology
→ Purposeful   Quality of delivery
→ Facilitator Role
→ Coaches engaged   Facilitate Discussion
→ Intention to act
→ cared about their players
→ Share practice with wider coaching staff

11/11/21

As always - I kicked off the workshop with an interactive starter. Using the chat I asked the coaches to rate how successful they thought it had been in the last month in developing / applying strategies to the attributes. I wrote out the attribute in the chat, followed by 1, then 2, then 3, then 4, then 5. I asked coaches to rate themselves as I punched in the attributes to the chat. I then cycled back to the top and quickly reviewed where everyone thought they were - it was a mix; some 2's, 3's, 4's, but some 5's too. work ethic, resilience, self awareness were particularly strong. I encouraged the coaches to share what was going well within the breakout rooms. I provided the instructions for the tasks / BO rooms - highlighting that they were to discuss 2x attributes for 8 minutes before I reshuffled them into another group - repeating this 4x in total.

→ engagement / interaction   → Quality of experience

→ Prompt reflective practice
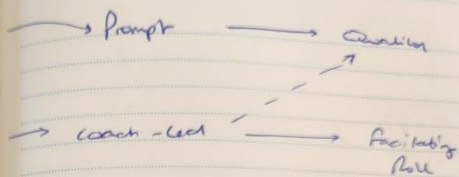
→ monitoring of progress

→ Sharing of practice

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I wanted to keep things prompt - but still include the coaches so I asked certain coaches to share their thoughts on attempts to dev. the 4 attributes. I selected 3 coaches - from different phases - all were keen to share their thoughts. I think having One (HOC) & One (HoY) present helped out here! Although coaches have been keen in their absence - their presence certainly helped engagement further.

After some feedback - I asked coaches to reflect on the 4 attribute they will develop me with, what strategies they will try, & what plans to focus in on.

I brought the workshop to an end - bang on time. I offered to hang around on the call if anyone had any questions - no one did.

Whilst hung on briefly - I asked him how it went - he replied 'class mate'

Prompt ⟶ Question

Coach-led ⟶ Facilitating Role

Support from senior staff helped

Prompted reflective practice ⟶ RP

Appreciation ⟶ Valued