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Citation:

Cowburn, I and Mitchell, T and Lara-Bercial, S and Gilbert, W (2024) Editorial Digesting the ISCJ Digest—A Decade in Review. *International Sport Coaching Journal*. pp. 1-4. ISSN 2328-918X DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1123/iscj.2024-0089>

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Document Version:

Article (Accepted Version)

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Digesting the ISCJ Digest – A Decade in Review

Ian Cowburn, Thomas Mitchell, Sergio Lara-Bercial, & Wade Gilbert

Introduction

The research article summaries in the Digest are intended to direct International Sport Coaching Journal (ISCJ) readers toward research, authors, and organizations that may be of interest given the mission of the journal. The summaries are carefully sourced, pertinent, recent coaching and coach education/development articles from a range of sport related journals which may be of interest to coaches and scholars who read the ISCJ. It has been a feature of the ISCJ from the very first issue, and while the sources and focus of the Digest have evolved over the last 10 years, the mission to broaden awareness of coaching scholarship has remained. In this short editorial, we will provide an overview of the Digest across the last decade in line with a trend in recent years of examining historical coaching scholarship within the ISCJ (Hirsch et al. 2023) and across the field of sport coaching (Campbell et al. 2023). In doing so we will highlight the contribution of the Digest to the ISCJ, consider the implications of the sources/topics included over the 10 years, and provide a call to action for the Digest moving forward.

Editors and Institutions

Starting with Dr. Wade Gilbert as inaugural editor of the Digest and journal at Fresno State, the original vision for the Digest section of ISCJ was to direct readers to pertinent coaching-related resources beyond the material published in ISCJ. Resources were identified by Dr. Gilbert and his coaching science graduate students. The scope of potential resources was deliberately broad, including materials such as articles from other journals, books/biographies/autobiographies, websites, and videos.

In 2014, once the Digest was established, Dr. Gilbert handed over the editorship to Dr. Sergio Lara-Bercial as the liaison between the journal and the International Council for Coaching Excellence, based at Leeds Beckett University in the UK. The intentions of the Digest section remained the same, yet its scope was broadened slightly due to the eclectic expertise of the wider team at Leeds Beckett University. As such, the Digest started to incorporate a small number of articles that, whilst not fitting the scope of ISCJ, were deemed relevant to coaches and coaching researchers.

Most recently in 2019, Ian Cowburn and Tom Mitchell, who were regular contributors to the Digest at Leeds Beckett University, were invited to take over as co-editors of the Digest.

Initially, there was an intention to perhaps widen the Digest to include an article or two in each issue from a guest contributor in a different field (e.g., nursing, aviation) that would have relevance for coaching. However, this did not happen as finding such examples was more time intensive than initially foreseen. When Dr. Bettina Callary became the editor of the ISCJ in 2020, there was a focus on articles from other journals on coaches and coaching aligned to the renewed journal mission of understanding the coaching process, coaching environment, coach education and development, coaching practices, and coaching profession.

Compiling the Digest

Each issue of the Digest is compiled by a group of volunteer academics. Volunteers are assigned a journal (or journals) from sport and exercise sciences, sport sociology, coaching, and physical education, aligned to their research interests and expertise. Each volunteer then reviews issues of their assigned journal in the previous four months, plus ahead of print, for those articles about coaches and coaching that would be of interest to the readership of the ISCJ. These articles are then summarized in approximately 150 words, approximately 2-3 per volunteer, and shared with the Digest editors. The editors review and edit the summaries before submitting to the ISCJ editor for final review and publication in the ISCJ. For the two special issues: (1) global perspectives in coach education; and (2) coaching delivery and education in online/digital environments, the search process was more focused on the topic at hand and was able to look beyond the usual journals and most recent issues, with final decisions being made by the special issue editors.

Consequently, it is important to provide the caveat that the Digest is not a catch-all for coaching research in other journals, indeed it has always been, and will likely continue to be, a production of the contributors (e.g., their knowledge, expertise), the Digest and ISCJ editor(s) (i.e., reviewing article summaries, determining which are to be included/excluded), and available journals and articles (e.g., relative strength of some fields and more journals to review).

For this editorial, the Digest co-editors downloaded the Digest from each issue of the ISCJ for the first 10 years and conducted simple descriptive analyses (mode, mean, total) of the contributors, summary type (e.g., peer review), journals cited, article titles, and article authors. A copy of the data sheet is available upon request from the lead author.

Overall Digest Numbers and Source Types

In the first 10 years there have been 30 Digest articles comprised of 395 summaries, averaging 13 per issue. This total includes two duplicates that were included ahead of print and then again when in print, making for 393 unique articles summarized. There have been 29 contributors to the Digest, where 27 have been from the Carnegie School of Sport at Leeds Beckett University, and two from Fresno State University. The current Digest co-editors have contributed to over half of the total number of Digest issues so far, as shown in Table 1.

Overwhelmingly, peer reviewed articles are the majority of the Digest, accounting for 384 (98%) of the summaries, and all of the summaries from the second volume of the ISCJ onward. The initial volume of the journal also included a policy document (ICCE International Coaching Framework), a project report, a position statement, three webinars, a newspaper article, and two magazine articles. The second volume onward coincided with the move to Leeds Beckett University and a deliberate intention to include more peer review content, as seen in the sources and journals review, below.

Table 1. Most Frequent Contributors to the ISCJ Digest

Contributor	Number of Issues	Institution
Tom Mitchell	18	Carnegie School of Sport, Leeds Beckett University
Ian Cowburn	16	
Kevin Till	14	
Jason Tee	9	
Sergio Lara-Bercial	9	

Sources and Journals Included

A total of 32 sources have been included in the Digest, made up primarily of 27 peer-review journals (see Table 2). Of these journals, seven are sport psychology journals, contributing 151 (38.4%) summaries to the Digest. Seven are sport coaching and/or physical education journals (and a magazine), contributing 111 (28.2%) summaries. Ten are sports science or multi-field journals, contributing 88 (22.3%) summaries. Four are sociology of sport journals, contributing 37 (9.4%) summaries. Finally, four are other sources, contributing 6 (1.5%) summaries.

Clearly, there is a heavy influence from sport psychology journals and those representing sport coaching and physical education. As per the caveats discussed earlier, the distribution is likely due to the heavy influence of sport psychology on the field of coaching, going back to some of the earliest research linked to coaching (e.g., Lacy & Darst, 1985), and the interests and expertise of many of the volunteers contributing to the Digest. Similarly, it is

unsurprising that sport coaching and physical education journals are represented highly given the nature of the ISCJ and Digest. However, the relatively lower contribution sociology journals, particularly in relation to broader sport science journals is perhaps a concern, particularly as many governing bodies, clubs, and coaches across the world (e.g., The Whyte Review; Whyte, 2022) are currently engaged in reviews of ethics, culture, and safe sport. Thus, the Digest should look to increase representation in this area.

Table 2. Sources and Frequency of Articles Included in the ISCJ Digest

Source	Number of Articles	Field	Number of Articles
Journal of Applied Sport Psychology	53	Sport Psychology	151
The Sport Psychologist	42		
International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology	28		
Frontiers in Psychology	12		
Journal of Sport Psychology in Action	7		
Psychology of Sport and Exercise	5		
Journal of Sport Behaviour	4		
International Journal of Sports Science and Coaching	59	Sport Coaching and Physical Education	111
Sports Coaching Review	30		
Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy	16		
Olympic Coach Magazine	3		
Journal of Coaching Education	1		
American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance	1		
Measurement in Physical Education and Exercise Science	1		
Journal of Sport Sciences	21	Sports Science / Multiple Fields	88
Quest	19		
Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research	15		

Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport	10		
Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health	6		
International Journal of Performance Analysis in Sport	6		
Journal of Athlete Development and Experience	4		
Strength and Conditioning Journal	3		
Sports Medicine	3		
Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education	1		
Sport Education and Society	24		
International Review for the Sociology of Sport	7	Sociology of Sport	37
Sport in Society	4		
Sociology of Sport Journal	2		
International Council Coaching Excellence	2		
TED / TEDx	2	Other	6
Human Kinetics Webinar	1		
New York Times	1		

Titles

A table of the most frequently occurring words in the titles of articles summarized for the Digest can be found in table 3, organized into total across all 10 years as well as by individual years. Similar words were group together (e.g., coach and coaches, sports and sport) and non-technical words were removed (e.g., A, of, and). A choice was made to leave some words separate due to ambiguity over how they may have been used. For example, we did not combine athlete and athletes as they may represent different methodologies (i.e., individual and team), nor did we combine training and practice where practice both might represent practice of a sport/coach and practice by an athlete/coach (i.e., practise). Unsurprisingly, coach is the most frequent word, while coaching (kept separate as the actions of coaches) also features high up the list. Additionally, sport, youth, elite, athletes and athlete are frequently used. As per the

above, the limitation of looking only at single words means something like ‘development’ could represent that of athletes as well as coaches, and we are unable to delineate further.

When initially planning to examine the titles, it was hoped that there might be some obvious trends in particular topics that might provide insight as to how coaching scholarship was evolving over time. Perhaps due to the nature of the journals examined, how some people define coaching as performance related (see Lyle, 2002), or what is financially possible and feasible as research, there is a consistent representation of youth and/or performance-based research. Despite this, some words are represented more in particular years, linked to special issues or potential trends in the literature. For example, ‘online’ and ‘life’ feature in 2023 linked to the IS CJ special issue.

Sitting below these most frequently occurring words, which typically locate the research within a context and participant group, there are a cluster of words represented 10 or more times that perhaps speak more to the areas of study covered, including: learning (29), team (27), training (24), experiences (22), role (21), practice (21), education (21), relationship (18), social (18), physical (18), psychological (14), skills (14), talent (14), rugby (13), and female (13). Again, we see no clear and obvious trends with any of these topics, generally having a few inclusions per year.

Table 3. Most frequently occurring words from article titles.

Word	Total	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Coach	190	14	14	27	20	17	14	23	19	23	19
Sport	121	12	15	9	19	15	10	12	7	10	12
Youth	75	6	7	4	14	15	5	8	8	6	2
Coaching	68	5	7	7	9	8	7	5	5	11	4
Development	56	3	4	6	8	9	4	5	6	4	7
Elite	53	7	7	3	7	7	6	3	4	5	4
Athletes	49	4	9	4	5	6	4	4	4	6	3
Perceptions	37	0	2	3	8	3	5	7	3	4	2
Soccer	31	2	4	2	4	7	4	3	0	4	1
Players	31	1	4	6	3	6	6	3	0	2	0
Performance	31	2	4	4	3	8	5	2	1	0	2
Learning	29	2	4	3	3	4	3	2	3	2	3
Team	27	2	3	0	4	8	3	3	1	2	1
Athlete	25	3	0	1	1	4	1	4	5	2	4
Training	24	2	3	3	3	1	6	1	2	3	0

Conclusions & Call to Action

The Digest represents research with implications for coaches and coaching in fields adjacent to coaching scholarship, that may not meet the mission for the ISCJ. Consequently, the Digest serves an important role in providing readers of the ISCJ and coaching scholars links to literature that can support their own practice and research endeavors. Given that the remit of the Digest is to find and share coaching scholarship in other fields and journals to share with the readership of the ISCJ, these brief analyses demonstrate a general breadth of journals and topics which coaching scholars can refer to when completing their own work. Further, the data set can be made available (upon request) where this may be helpful.

Despite offering a generally broad view of fields related to coaching, it is possible to identify areas in which the Digest can be stronger (e.g., sociology) to better represent how coaching as a field of research and as a practice. This increase in breadth can be achieved by expanding beyond the current set of journals, and so we put out a call to action for interested parties to join the Digest team, particularly where they have interest and expertise beyond the journals currently summarized. If you are a coaching scholar that can help advance the Digest, please contact Ian Cowburn as the corresponding author.

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