

The following document contains notes taken from the UK Coaching Applied Research Conference. This took place in February 2019 and was a hotbed of information for coaches and practitioners working at all levels of sport, across a whole range of sports.

These notes are compiled from five different coach's reports and as such have various view points on often similar subject areas. If you want to follow up on some of the points made please contact the regional talent officer via kevin.pickard@swimming.org who can put you in touch with the coach directly. Reports below are from:

James Freezer – City of Cambridge

Ben Negus – City of Peterborough

Adam Parfitt – Watford Swimming Club

Dan Pilbrow – West Suffolk Swimming Club

Kevin Pickard - Swim England East Region



Shaping the Future of Coaching Conference Notes – James Freezer

Coaching Pill

This workshop was mainly based on the statistics and research that had been collated regarding coaching, volunteering and the happiness and wellbeing gained from being involved within sports clubs.

Volunteers

- Have 10% higher self-esteem and emotional wellbeing and resilience
- Are 15% less likely to worry
- Are 28% more likely to feel what they do has importance
- Are 18% more likely to feel proud of themselves

They looked into the relationship of mental and physical health

Active Coaches

Excellent/Good Mental health - 53%

Excellent/Good Physical health -40%

Inactive Coaches

Excellent/Good Mental health - 43%

Excellent/Good Physical health -32%

Never

Excellent/Good Mental health - 45%

Excellent/Good Physical health - 24%

Effectively making the connection that people who are actively coaching were more likely to report a higher level of mental and physical health.

Mindfully STRONG
Integrated Mindfulness and Physical Activity
Twitter @dwhembro

This workshop started off with the Journey of Dave Hembrough through to Olympic weightlifting coach and the development and growth of the Mindfully STRONG programme that has grown and developed in the last few years. His passion for the programme and how he is trying to educate and engage people within coaching and assist participants taking part in sport.

The Programme
Finding Focus
Feeling Physical
Finishing Flourish

As a group we were put through our paces with some physical activity and asked to perform some squats and tricep dips and then breathing exercises alongside some meditation techniques to assist us with feeling better, refreshed and ready for the next activity / session.

Coping & Wellbeing Amongst Sports Coaches

A Systematic Review

Many different methods and many factors that influence, such as Training, Education, Motivation Mentor, Skill Development, Support and Knowledge.

Many factors that can cause a coach stress

- Organisational – SEER-County-Club
- Performance – Athletes & Coaches
- Intrapersonal – Expectations of ourselves
- Interpersonal – Time Management-family Time-Support
- Contextual – Experience- Learning

Coping Methods for different stressors

- Pre and post competition routines(Mindfulness)
- Psychological skills (Positive self talk)
- Problem solving (Adapting)
- Escaping a stressful environment (Exercising / hobby away from work)
- Social Support Network (4 types)
1-Informational 2- Emotional 3-Appraisal
4-Instrumental (Tangible)

Need to look after your Psychological Well-being - Coaches PWB decreases significantly throughout a season, with symptoms of burn out increasing over a season. The higher the coach PWB the more autonomous the environment for the athletes.

Coach Wellbeing – A happy and healthy coach has to ensure they are not only looking after themselves, but ensuring those around them are looking after themselves to ensure positive impact is felt in all relationships

Wellbeing Panel (Pippa Grange – Liz Burkinshaw – Alan Currie)

- Coaches and staff need to have balance within work schedule – Hours-Admin-Coaching
- Remember why you started and became involved with the sport and coaching.
- Look after your coaching team and staff – Duty of Care, need to keep happy/motivated as this will mean they are more productive.
- Be active – Club should support and & encourage this.
- Well-being should be integrated into the structure and culture of the club.
- Set high standards but be needs to be sustainable. Reflect & analyse objectively both if results are or are not being met.
- Do not change your outlook due to result whether good or indifferent.
- Be present in what you are doing and have good self-discipline when working and analysing.
- Important to manage your energy as much as time.
- It is vital coaches have time off – Coaches need REST.
- Think of the athlete as a person first.
- Coach is a role, embrace it.

Shaping the Future of Coaching Conference Notes – Ben Negus

Great coaching is

Person centred

Empowering

Organised

Positive

Learning

Engaging



Principles of effective coaching in British Tennis

Set some common principles of effective coaching - Guide less experienced and newly qualified coaches to fast track

Methodology

Stage 1

- spoke to 25 coaches with a mean of 23 years coaching experience
- Probed for a coaches view on player learning and what effective coaching was
- The data was used analysed by theme. What are the data themes
 1. Coaches thought principles were universal across all domains, but dependant on delivery based on what age or standard was in front of them
 2. Too much concern on how to coach, needs to be more on developing the intuition of coaching
 3. The results if the study gave them 6 principles

Stage 2

Did on online coach survey, level 2 – 5 coach, total of 65

Explained the outcome of stage 1 and asked if they agreed with it

Asked these coaches to rate the importance of the coach characteristics

6 key principles:

1. Looks and feels like tennis
 - Effective coaching pays attention to home-based demands and designing practises linked to the game
 - “I’ve never seen a 100 stroke rally”. Training ground strokes, when the average match court situation is 5-6 strokes. Training the wrong focus
 - “if you are getting asked, “when are we going to play tennis” then you’re not making it feel like tennis”
2. Maximises activity
 - Maximise engagement and playing opportunity as opposed to curing up to a very stop-start session
 - Focus on being physically and mentally stimulating. Optimal activity requires coaches to design practise that maximises players time on the ball
 - Change your environment to increase exposure. For example out more nets up (2 or 3 in one court space) to get more work at the net than can be done with just one net on one big court
3. Engages creativity
 - Thinking outside the box to develop the skill before the drill
 - What is the skill we are after developing, rather than just doing a drill for the sake of it
4. Creates space for learning
 - Create an environment for players to learn through practise
 - Give them more independence and more opportunity to make decisions
 - Coach roles is to clarify not direct all the time
5. Provides challenge
 - Provide challenge at the appropriate level to explore their game
 - Find the see-saw point between what a player can do and can’t, just pushing them to the breaking point occasionally for learning
6. Collaborative
 - Involve players in their own learning
 - Some players think they are just passengers on the court. A good coach will encourage the athlete to be the driver of their journey
 - Sell this to the parents as it sometimes comes across to parents as a lack of investment. When it’s challenging the athlete to develop a growth mindset

Using online learning for the masses...much like off the blocks (British Swimming).

Princess Ann address

“Confidence; difficult to define, hard work to foster and easy to lose”. Coaching is essentially a game of building confidence in athletes

Well-being panel

- Coach wellbeing – happy, healthy coach has to ensure they are not only looking after themselves, but ensuring those around them are looking after themselves to ensure positive impact is felt in the relationships
- Learn something new to build creativity and to take your mind away from the inherent focus on work
- Practical – look at daily schedule and build in a wellbeing hierarchy of needs. Time for exercise, gym, personal time, connection with others, connections with family, rest, sleep
- When you are at competitions 24/7 factor in time away from the environment
- Self-criticism is a fast track to poor mental health. Have a better way of feeding back to yourself with perspective
- Building cultures that have parameters that mean we don't work stupid hours or let coaching hours surpass in to areas that will effect wellbeing. Mental wellbeing is a performance factor. Sustaining a good weekly balance will mean you approach work with a clearer more focussed mind set, leading to a more confidence based outlook
- Once you become too results focussed, you are more likely to move into a command and control style and lose autonomy with the athletes, which will in turn lower the athlete outlook on results
- Coaching has a positive effective on coaches mental health, especially for those volunteering to help...GOOD FOOT NOTE FOR OUR VOLUNTEER POSTERS
- A lot of the challenge with dealing with mental health is that there's a lot of fear about dealing with something that's clinically complex, but it's actually about offering practical support
- As a coach you have a role to model as and when to use phones, how to use phones and data. Only use data and spend time on data that you are really going to use
- App called **headspace** to help manage personal management
- Look at what else gives you energy. Look at exercises that gives you renewed energy, avoid tools that continue to drain energy
- Physiological adaptations are made in REST, psychological adaptations are the same. Give your mind a break as part of the daily time-table

MindfullySTRONG - Integrated mindfulness and physical activity

- 3 stage meditation – 1, close eyes, adjust posture (feet in contact with floor, tall spine and hands relaxed in clasp or on knees, 2, focus on breathing rhythm and increasing range and depth, 3, focus on the whole body being part of that breathing and addressing any physical issues and accepting them, say that it's okay to recognise those stressors
- Hallam barbell vision – build a stronger Sheffield, physically, mentally, emotionally, socially
- Personal development comes become physical development in their plan
- Use 'social contracting' to direct people on their goals and hold them to account
- Mindfulness is the present moment of awareness. Being able to detach yourself from the past or future issues
- The programme –
 1. finding focus - 20min chat opening up a conversation on a them
 2. Feeling physical – work out in a gym to classical music...coaching people to scale up or down the work out to the way they feel
 3. Finishing flourish – cool down and meditation and home practise assignments

He used the exercise to raise the energy and positive flow of the body...2mins of 'relaxed squats and dips can change the body physical being in that moment. Linking the meditation to the exercise

Set up a referral pathway for the club - who is the coaching team's referral, who's the athletes referral?

Sam Harris podcast

Self-awareness and managing coaching stressors - Dr Luke Norris

- Training, mentoring, skill development, support, knowledge – unique be a use of the multiple tasks that to with the occupation
- Stress -
 1. Organisational – admin etc
 2. Performance- performance of the athletes; have the got the most out of the training session? Did they get the performance of competition? Coaches like control, they can control training delivery, but not competition performance. Internal pressure of performance – the self-reflection with tough questions
 3. Contextual – age and experience helps. Younger coaches are more likely to feel the stress. Experience is key to actual management and delivery
 4. Interpersonal – personal relationships, family demands – work/admin demands in the day followed by coaching in the evening lead to very poor relationship balance. Coaching team balance
 5. Interpersonal – expectations we have on ourselves. Guilt for Not doing what we perceive should be right for the team

Coping mechanisms

- Mindfulness pre and/or post competition routines
- Psychological skills – positive self talk , visualisation
- Problem solving – adapting a training activity
- Escaping the stressful environment exercising or going to the pub, going to the cinema. Breaks away can be helpful
- Social support network – create a network of people around you
Types of social support – informational support (get info from others), emotional support (have a moan), appraisal support (external feedback on evidence of your capability), instrumental support (shopping, cooking, paying bills – perhaps what your partner takes care of to help you)

It's well known that a coach's psychological well-being will lower over the course of a season. It can get worse dependant on the management of those variables in front of us.

What are the stressors? What are the coping strategies? Have a planned practise or action for potential stressors. Use social support network to support that or give you external perspective on it



Shaping the Future of Coaching Conference Notes – Adam Parfitt

Tony Strudwick – Head of athletic development Man United

Creating Optimal Talent Development Environments

- Culture
- Relationships – Whole team
- Winning mentality – Buy In
- The “i” generation – Next generation coaching by in
- Ability to translate science into practice
- Coach is King – Creator of the environment and performance driver
- Context Coaching - How and why we deliver content to athletes?
- “i” generation – Bored Easily, Tech savvy, want immediate results
- What is the daily experience for athletes?
- No single pathway to success
- Late maturation vs. Late Skill Developers and Vice Versa
- Highly supportive environment
- One Club Culture
- Consistent Messages from **ALL** staff
- Highly competitive – Focus on organised culture e.g. equipment, time keeping etc.
- EVERYONE feels valued
- What messages are you sending to your team? E.g. Untidy, always late, culture
- What do highly stressful situations look like? Can we create that in training? = Resilience
- Performance playgrounds – Athletes want to have fun
- World Class athlete’s – WANT to be challenged and evolve

Creating a performance environment is COACH led and sustained. The values instilled within a team need to come from the head coach. Once this environment is created it allows athletes to flourish and develop better relationships with staff and team mates.

Expectations need to be high and consistence for all athletes and staff – What do we stand for as a club and organisation. What are our values?!

Improving Coach Well Being

- Creating Inclusive and equal opportunity Coaching opportunities will improve well-being within your organisation
 - What do coaches in your sport look like? (Swimming)
1. Level 3 - Full Time, former swimmers pro and amateur, more men than women
 2. Level 2 – Full / Part time, former wwimmers & parents, more men than women
 3. Volunteers – Part time, parents, some former swimmers, equal men and women

Diversity within your organisation

- Measure and record
- Qualifications
- Opportunities
- Understand where the gaps are
- Research proves more diverse organisations are happier work places

How this relates to Coach well-being

- Inclusive Culture = A happy culture
- Careers are a labyrinth
- Women come in and out of employment through having children
- How does this effect the career ladder?

Psychological well-being within Coaching

- Purpose
- Meaning
- Happiness
- Reasonable demands
- Community

Women Coaches well-being (Research shows)

- Employment status is more important than qualifications
- Sense of purpose
- Goals

Effected by....

- Poor work / life balance
- Low levels of job security
- Lack of involvement within the organisation

Successful Strategies – Process

- Engage with work force – Mentors
- Contact – See different people and mix with others within the organisation not just one department
- Social Accountability – Diverse workforce
- Strong leadership – By into Inclusion

Companies have a responsibly to create an inclusive environment within their originations not just from a moral point of view but also from well-being and productivity point of view. Inclusive environments will create a happier work force and a far more productive environment to recruit and retain the best staff.

Technology Enhanced Coach Education

Coach education is....

- Not impactful

- Hard to access
- Expensive

Technology Can Help

- Filmed Coaching sessions: Coaching behaviours and philosophy
- Peer Reviewed
- Easily Accessed

Issues...

- People still like a personal touch
- Young people are already technology saturated, Instagram, snap chat, Facebook etc.
- Are we making assumptions that “i” generation coaches want to access digital content? Online coaching blogs etc.
- Can we merge both?
- Personal touch in the digital world

Technology in sport has the ability to enhance coach and athlete learning but we cannot make the assumption that the “i” generation will choose to access coach education online. Careful thought and research supported content needs to be delivered in the right way to maximise the technology available.

Empowering Coaching for Sport

Coach Created Climate

Empowering

- Continued Participation
- Well-being
- Enjoyment
- Motivated

Disempowering

- Extrinsic Motivation
- Unhappy
- Ill Health
- Drop Out of Sport

Coaching Strategies

- Voice & Choice
- Equal Inclusion
- Communication for Growth

Autonomy, Belonging, Competence

Creating an empowering climate within sport will ensure participants enjoy, return and thrive. Empowering climates are coach facilitated and allow for greater levels of inclusion and growth. All coaches should look to create this environment within their sessions, with the goal being intrinsic rather than extrinsic rewards.

Coach well-being panel

- Establish Care pathways within your organisation for athletes and coaches
- Balanced working week
- Self-awareness of own well-being
- Happy coaches = Better Coaches

Practical steps

- Follow the “5 ways to well-being” – Online resource
- Connect outside of coaching
- Look after yourself – Sleep, diet, exercise etc.
- Set high standards without self-criticism

Build a sustainable working culture. Ensure communication is open with staff and find out what works best for their well-being.

Build a culture where rest and well-being is supported by all members of the organisation.

Benefits of healthy minds – Athletes and Coaches

- Sustained performances
- Self-discipline – Turn things off at night (phones, lap tops etc.)
- The coach has the responsibility of when to communicate – Sets the standard e.g. sending out team sheets 23:00 Friday evening
- Being present – Productivity
- Manage energy not time
- The **PERSON** first not the **COACH / ATHELTE**

To ensure coach well-being is maintained coaches need to have self-discipline in managing their own energy levels and self-expectation within the workplace. Employers also have the responsibility of creating an environment that allows for coaches to manage their own well-being. Happy coaches = productive coaches. Productive coaches = happy team.

UK Coaching – Applied Coaching Research Conference – Dan Pilbrow

It is always great when the opportunity arises to listen to and learn from some of the latest and best information out there in the world of coaching and the 2019 UK Coaching conference, held at the Derby County Football Stadium, did not disappoint with what they had to offer earlier this month.

As delegates, we experienced a variety of work-shops that focused on one of three sub-themes:

1. Innovative Coaching Practice
2. Coach Experience & Well-being
3. Contemporary Learning Solutions

The Coaching Pill:

After missing the first session due to a delayed train (can we ever rely on public transport?), the first session that I attended was titled 'The Coaching Pill'. This was a 30-minute session focusing on the five ways to well-being. It is so important that as coaches, we take the time look out for and look after ourselves. The five things that we can do that positively impacts our well-being are:

- **Taking notice** – Be aware of the little things around us. It is far too easy nowadays to totally immerse ourselves into certain things and lose sight of what is going on around us.
- **Connecting with others** – Whether this is different friendship groups, networking with other coaches or something else, it is important to take the time to connect with other people on a regular basis.
- **Learning something new** – Whether it be learning how to sew, taking up a new sport, learning a new language can help to build your confidence. Take the time to try something new, stepping outside of your comfort zone and taking some time to do something for yourself.
- **Giving** – Even small acts of generosity can activate the reward sensor in our brains and help to reduce our stress levels. Sign up to help at local events once a year.
- **Being active** – Moving around has so many benefits, when you're active, your body releases chemicals in your brain which make you happy – helping you concentrate, feel better and also enabling you to sleep better.

Short 2-minute video on Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yF7Ou43Vj6c>

Panel Discussion on well-being (a few quotes):

"Self-criticism is a fast-track to poor mental health."

"Being a coach can sometimes make you feel isolated. You need to have resilience (which comes from relationships) in order to succeed and if you run into problems, you need to have a confidante or someone that can help you when trying to reach the next level."

"Schedule personal-time sessions each day, so that you are able to take yourself away from your job and have some mental freedom from your job."

"It starts with the simple things: don't drink too much, go to bed on time and look after yourself."

HRH Anne, Princess Royal:

Introduction speech on confidence - Quote of the day:

"Confidence – difficult to define, hard work to foster and easy to lose"

Coaching is all about building the confidence in our coaches.



Mindfully STRONG:

The MindfullySTRONG programme is a unique programme. Hallam Barbell in partnership with Sheffield's 'Centre for Mindful Based Life Enhancement' run an integrated mindful and strength programme. The core belief is that being healthy includes both body **and** mind. Standard fitness and strength programmes aren't for everyone and so Mindfully STRONG is for people who want to learn about training and become physically and mentally stronger and healthier.

Each session starts with a mindful movement warm up (think tai-chi / yoga) which helps to chill you out and prepare for stress free exercise. They then run through some strength circuits which are carried out and coached mindfully. This is basically the opposite of 'high intensity training' but still really effective. They finish each session with some mindfulness practice and a gentle cool down and stretch.

During this session, we carried out a couple of different ways to help take our mind away from our current thoughts, as well as carrying out a few different exercises (squats on chairs etc) – things that we can all do, even when sitting at our desks at work! You don't have to go to the gym to carry out these exercises.

Empowering Coaching for Doorstep Sport:

In partnership with the University of Birmingham and StreetGames, "Empowering Coaching for Doorstep Sport" is a collaborative project which was funded by the Coca-Cola Foundation between 2014-2016.

This is a theory and evidence-based approach to coaching, which maximises the development of every young person. It is all about creating a supportive, intrinsically motivating and enjoyable environment in sport sessions. By creating this empowering climate, as coaches, we are then able to acknowledge each young person's thoughts and feelings; encourage young people to try their best and develop at their own pace; offer choices for young people through giving them opportunities to learn new skills and offer different ways of working with each other; valuing each young person and getting to know about them and their lives outside of their sport.

When coaches empower young people, they feel as though their participation in sport is more fun and more engaging; they feel motivated to keep coming back to sessions and that their health and life skills are promoted.

This was a 30-minute snap-shot into the one-day training programme that is offered by experts in sport motivation and youth development.

Young people need to feel encouraged to share ideas with the group and have the confidence to demonstrate leadership.

Having an empowering coach is associated with a number of positive outcomes:

- Feeling of competence
- Intrinsic motivation
- Increased engagement
- Feeling of personal energy (well-being)
- Encourages positive feedback towards others

A more empowering climate also gives young people the ability to demonstrate lower levels of physical and verbal aggression, with them less likely to experience no motivation.

UKC Research Conference – 2019
Regional Talent Officer – Kevin Pickard

It's the first time I've been to a football stadium for a conference which in itself was quite interesting. The whole venue oozed stories of its home team and brought a different energy to the day from the off.



I found the whole event really insightful and it certainly challenged me in some areas and signposted some areas for further reading and discussion. Tony's talk kicking off the day was so interesting about the principles we all see day in day out but applied within such a prestigious performance environment through Manchester United Football Club. He talked about developing a coaching toolbox for the 'i' generation, which made me think if we all looked at our coaching toolboxes, how many of us can genuinely say we are in tune enough with the modern young person, their world, their language and their behaviours, that we actually get the best out of them? He used a Darwin quote stating "it is not the strongest who survive, but those that have the ability to adapt to change" – again, the world is changing so fast, and as coaches are we moving with it?

Dave Hembrough talked about the Powerbelle programme and its links with Sheffield Hallam University. From a swimming perspective I looked at the principle (engaging women in activity and dispelling the perception of 'weightlifting is for men') and wondered how many clubs have links within their networks to integrate lifting programmes with the youth sections of their club to retain more girls in the sport. The method of utilising music, doing it in pairs so it's not a solitary experience and creating a whole social group around the programme is something I think would go some way in keeping youth level athletes engaged in the sport. To find out more visit <https://www.facebook.com/PowerbellePerformance/> and follow Dave on twitter @dwhembro – a great idea if you're struggling to retain girls in your club and can look at this model for inspiration. Bear in mind we are not talking about young athletes lifting huge weights. This could be modified and adapted for the age groups we work with.

Peer to peer learning – This was a FA project designed to fill the void between coaches who complete their UEFA B license and their UEFA A – similar to the large number of level two 'swimming coaches' who don't then go on to take the senior coach (level three) certificate. It partnered up new coaches with experienced ones, utilised Whatsapp groups to bounce ideas around, identified competencies and development areas, broke down barriers between club coaches and ultimately brought an answer to the question, who is a coach developer? Well – we all are. Everyone has a skill or competency to bring to the game and everyone has areas to develop. This project really utilises social media to share ideas – check out @UEFASupport on Twitter – 12,900 coaches sharing information! From this I wondered in your local area, could you network with four or five coaches? Have a Whatsapp/Facebook group? Share session plans? Share a stress? Make a connection in what can sometimes feel like a lonely world.

Wellbeing Panel – This was made up of some industry experts and invited some interesting questions from the floor. What stuck out most for me was the notion that we are not always all the time. It's a sliding scale between the good days and the bad. That's a human thing and not exclusive to coaches. What's important is that the peaks and troughs are managed through planning, self-management and through your support network. From a swimming point of view, it jumped out as a huge issue as it's certainly a widely spread issue in coaching from both a physical and mental health point-of-view.

Swimming is not an easy sport and the pressure put on coaches (paid and volunteer) is often too much and inappropriate. Simple things like texts/calls being made to coaches at 11pm at night. It would be unacceptable in an office workplace so it's unacceptable for us. Clear communication around the expectations of the club as to what is appropriate – email/phone contact guidelines for parents, as coaches should not be on call 24-7. There's a much bigger piece here around governance though, as although coaches should take some responsibility, there should be clear guidelines from the top of all sports downwards to

outline what sports clubs should have in place to support their coaches. In my experience I work with some coaches who manage things exceptionally well and are very disciplined to ensure they maintain good mental-being and I see the flip side where out of control situations arise which often lead to poor working conditions and subsequent health issues arise. Going forwards and following on from an outstanding British Swimming workshop on mental health (separate event) there are some great discussions taking place on how we as a sport can better support our club coaches.

The use of deliberate play – Follow Richard Cheetham MBE @twowheelprof on twitter – The final talk for me was again fascinating. Here we had staff from GB Para and Slalom Canoeing talking about how to make training environments fun, engaging and varied. There was some simple delegate exercises ranging from ultimate Frisbee to creating your own sport specific practices with a tennis ball and tube. The jump out technical blurb from this was:

“Deliberate play encapsulates developmental physical activities that are intrinsically motivating, provide immediate gratification, and are specifically designed to maximize enjoyment. We add that it is not about ‘play for the sake of play’ but more about using play principles in order to develop or even accelerate the development of skills”.

Again the takeaway here for me was, ‘how do we go about integrating *play* into a club environment?’ and the answer actually came about pretty simply. As coaches think in your clubs how often we have a swimmer/group of swimmers not getting something or just not quite making that skill acquisition despite our best efforts. Couple that with attention spans of nanoseconds and you have to ask is there another way I can get my message to sink in? Young people are extremely creative and harnessing this collective ability to try things differently could actually accelerate learning curves.

So let’s take a practical swimming example I’ve tried since attending this event. I was running a camp that included about 45 minutes of transitions themed work. 30 minutes in, I stopped the session, re-emphasised the key principles we were working on (outcome objectives/session parameters) and then said to each lane, “divide into two groups and off you go – help each other to get better and go and play with your own ideas.” The coaches on deck anticipated carnage, but what we got was something truly incredible. Athletes working in peer to peer learning groups looking underwater, on the surface, from the side, trying different things (all within the boundaries of what is safe and appropriate) but with the key message that “you have permission to try whatever you can think off to achieve that objective”- and it worked! Learning occurred AND the swimmers had more fun – tick and tick!

A bit out there most certainly, but our cultures in our clubs are not centred around us as coaches, it’s about the swimmers and if we have alternative ways we could try that will solve problems for our swimmers, by not doing them, we’re holding swimmers back – just a thought! Since attending the conference I saw this; <https://twitter.com/WatfordSC/status/1110910178315194373> which is a direct example of play with a purpose in action.

Summary – All in all, a highly informative day. Some hard hitting take away messages basically alluring to the fact “we must evolve to keep with the pace of the world, and if we do not, as professionally we will simply fade into the background and become less and less effective”. As always with these events there’s so much to follow up on but I hope the above notes from the coaches have helped give everyone some flavours of the topics discussed. Get in touch, ask more and be curious – kevin.pickard@swimming.org

The next UK Coaching Conference is in July in Loughborough it will certainly be a worthwhile event for clubs to consider sending at least one coach to if funds allow. <https://www.ukcoaching.org/events/our-conference>

Thank you to all the above coaches for getting involved and sharing their learnings with everyone else.