

U.K COACHING RESEARCH CONFERENCE – FEBRUARY 2020

This was the second year running that I have attended the UK Coaching Research Conference, with another year of some fantastic speakers lined up.

The conference got underway with a Keynote speech from Donna Fraser, the GB 200m and 400m runner, who made the podium at European and World level through the first decade of the millennium – also finishing 4th in the Olympic Games in Sydney in 2000. Donna spoke about ‘Maximising Potential through Coaching’ and covered a number of stories from her career, being coached by the late Ayo Falola. Coaching is a way of life. Noting that the coach/athlete relationship is instrumental in helping the athlete to achieve success in their sport, Donna recalled her coach experimenting with so many forms of training – helping her find ways to maximise her potential and giving her the confidence to believe that ‘nothing is impossible’.

Exploring Humility in Coach Behaviour:

The talks were all bitesize sessions of 30 – 40 minutes long and covered a variety of topics that we were able to choose from. My first session following the keynote was ‘Exploring Humility in Coach Behaviour’. As in the title, this session looked at how we as coaches can use humility in our approach to coaching and mentoring the next generation of athletes and fellow coaches. Paul Garner (University of Gloucestershire Senior Lecturer) is collecting research for his ongoing PhD in the field of behaviours that build trust in expert coaches and instructors and coach developers in alpine skiing. Paul talked about transformational leadership, which is the process by which leaders transform followers into leaders.

Individualized Influence > Practice what you preach

Inspirational Motivation > Believe in your athletes

Intellectual Stimulation > Involve the athlete in the coaching process

Individualized Consideration > Taking a person-centred approach

Ideal influence came through humility, with a scale of behaviours ranging from self-degrading to humble and all the way up to arrogance.

The initial findings so far were that coaches are clear on their intentions (purposeful in their behaviour), but that athlete-centred coaching is poorly understood. Could humility help to provide the framework that we need?

Promoting More Empowering Coaching in Archery GB:

Empowering Coaching is based out of the University of Birmingham and they have been running a tailored program within Archery GB for that past 12 months. It is a theory-informed and evidence-based training programme that has been proven to make sport more engaging and enjoyable for the participants. The session was delivered by Dr Paul Appleton (Uni of Birmingham) and Archery GB Head of Coach Development – Hannah Bussey and Archery GB’s Lloyd Brown. They looked to develop a greater awareness of the implications of empowering and disempowering behaviours and what they look like. Other take home questions were:

What is the motivational health of your sport?

How important is it to tailor coach education?

What does good coaching look like? – what coaches do and say and how they organise and communicate to try and help have a positive impact on their athletes. Why, when and how coaches provide feedback - both positive and negative.

Coaching efficacy - the extent to which coaches feel confident in their ability. To improve athlete's technique, tactics, attitudes and motivation.

The coach needs to create the environment, where athletes want to challenge themselves!

After a chance to network with fellow attendees over lunch, the second keynote speech of the day came from Dr Steve Ingham ('Supporting Champions' podcast). Steve spoke about 'Maximising Potential: Insights from High Performance' and looked specifically at his work with Jessica Ennis (Hill) in the lead up to the 2012 Olympic Games in London.

Steve spoke about his role in the whole support team for Jessica and how they could ultimately work on improving the smallest change that would result in the biggest difference come the Olympics. What is your focus, in order to be at your best – daily!?

A question, worded differently that provokes thinking:

Can I perform at a higher level? VS How can I perform at a higher level?

This was a very engaging talk looking at the risk vs return, that they looked at in helping Jess Ennis to win the gold medal in London.

To hear more from Steve on a variety of topics, listen to his podcast on Spotify or Apple Podcasts, where he has a discussion with a number of different athletes, coaches and experts in their field. One of the more recent ones is Lizzie Simmonds (retired GB swimmer).

Sketchnote Challenge:

This was a look at 'sketchnoting' (another name for visual note taking) and how it could help your practice. Sketchnoting is for you and your own learning, about the ideas that you have and not about being an artist. It is also something that you will get better at with practice.

This is something that can be done to help you reflect on your practice, summarise chapters in books or a way to collect new ideas. For further insight into sketchnoting, check out the following links (5 minutes each) on YouTube:

What is sketchnoting? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ltcHag3agE>

Getting started with sketchnoting https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y_fn2fpO5cU

Understanding and Developing Athlete Decision-Making through Coaching Practice:

Michael Ashford (Graduate Teaching Assistant at Leeds Beckett University) has been researching within a Rugby Union context to 'define the role and development of tactics and decision-making in the sport'. We looked at how a competitive situation shapes and influences athletes decision-making behaviour, theoretical perspective's implications for coaches when planning and designing training sessions and for us to recognise the implications for the development experiences that we design and facilitate for athletes.

