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# AN EXPLORATION OF THE COACH-ATHLETE RELATIONSHIP IN WOMEN'S SEMI- PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the  
requirements of the Manchester Metropolitan  
University for the degree of  
Master of Arts (by Research)

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## ABSTRACT

From a conceptual and theoretical basis, the relationship between coaches and athletes is often represented in a cognitive manner focusing upon the internal thoughts of an *individual* rather than from a *relational perspective* (Smith, 2013). This is important, as Smith (2013) has criticised this work for remaining cursorily *individualized* and *asocial*. Therefore, the aim of the research project is to explore the relational, temporal nuances and complexities of the coach-athlete relationship within a team environment. This work specifically aims to explore how relationships are built and sustained and change over time because of the interactions of a number of people coming together in a relational manner within a specific coaching context.

In building upon the work of Poczwadowski et al. (2002a) who conceptualised the coach-athlete relationship in a dynamic, interactive and interpretive manner, Blumer's (1969) version of symbolic interactionism provides a theoretical framework to guide enquiry within the present thesis. Such an understanding is underpinned by a social *relational* view (as opposed to a cognitive or behavioural theoretical focus) about what relationships are and how they are formed and maintained *in* and *through* interaction, rather than something possessed within the individual (Smith, 2013). An ethnographic methodology was employed within the thesis, drawing upon a combination of semi-structured interviews guided by observations and field notes. Six participants – two head coaches and four players – were selected from a semi-professional women's football club, Athletic United Women's Football Club (pseudonym), to explore the relationships and interactions that occurred within the team over the course of a full playing season (10 months).

The findings from the thesis highlighted that the main factors that influenced the coach-athlete relationship over time were the nature of the interactions between the coach and athletes during the season and how each individual interpreted these interactions. Specifically, they were how the coach and athletes spoke to each other, how they interpreted the level of closeness within the relationship, conflicts and disagreements between the coaches and players

during the season, the athletes' satisfaction with performance in training and matches, and finally the results of the team. Moreover, following these results, it is suggested that the topic of the coach-athlete relationship should be integrated more explicitly into coach education courses; that is, courses should include information regarding how to build and manage relationships and the different factors that coaches might face that influence the coach-athlete relations (i.e. internal politics within football clubs, pressures to meet club targets, results, and context within which coach-athlete relationships are initiated). This would better equip coaches with the knowledge and skills to understand the many ways that their interactions and decisions might influence their relationship with the athletes that they work with.

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I would like to thank my family and close friends for their unconditional support throughout my university journey. My Mum and Dad deserve a special mention, alongside my sister and best friend, for their emotional and financial support, advice and motivation that they continued to show me throughout the duration of my university life, especially the last two years. To finish, I wish my final thank you and acknowledgement to be for my late Grandma. She always believed in me, even when I did not, and I wholeheartedly appreciate everything she did for me and the encouragement she showed me throughout the years of my life and university education.

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# CONTENTS

<b>1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>9</b>
1.1	Background .....	9
1.2	Research Problem .....	11
1.3	Research Aim .....	12
1.4	Research Questions .....	12
1.5	Organisation of the Thesis .....	13
<b>2</b>	<b>LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>14</b>
2.1	Introduction .....	14
2.2	The Coach-Athlete Relationship: Alternative Research Perspectives.....	14
2.3	Systematic Review of Coach-Athlete Relationship Literature: Method and Procedures .....	18
2.4	Articles and Database Search Terms.....	19
2.5	Table 1. Database Search: Title Search Term: Coach Athlete Relationship OR Coach-Athlete Relationship OR “Coach-Athlete Relationship”; Publication Type: All and Peer Reviewed Academic Journal and English; Date Range: 2009-2015.....	19
2.6	Systematic Review Discussion: Methodology.....	21
2.7	Systematic Review Discussion: Conceptualisation of Coach-Athlete Relationship .....	23
2.8	Systematic Review Discussion: Measures of Relationship .....	24
2.9	Systematic Review Discussion: Key Findings .....	26
2.10	Chapter Conclusion .....	31
<b>3</b>	<b>METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>33</b>
3.1	Research Paradigms.....	33
3.1.1	The Interpretivist Research Paradigm.....	34
3.1.2	Paradigmatic Commitments Within the Present Thesis .....	35
3.1.3	Theoretical Perspective Within the Present Thesis: Symbolic Interactionism .....	36
3.2	Participants and Context.....	37
3.3	Ethics .....	40
3.4	Methodology: Ethnography .....	40

3.4.1	Participant Observations.....	42
3.4.2	Field Notes .....	43
3.4.3	Interviews.....	44
3.5	Data Analysis .....	46
3.6	Judging the Quality .....	47
3.7	Chapter Conclusion .....	49
<b>4</b>	<b>RESULTS.....</b>	<b>50</b>
4.1	Introduction .....	50
4.2	Kelly's Positive Start – Pre-season and the First Three Matches of the Competitive Season ....	50
4.2.1	Kelly's Aims and Targets at the Start of the Season .....	51
4.2.2	Developing New Relationships .....	52
4.2.3	Commitment .....	55
4.2.4	Behaviours.....	57
4.2.5	Closeness.....	61
4.2.6	Trust, Respect and Belief .....	66
4.2.7	Incompatibility, Disagreements and Power Struggles .....	68
4.3	Kelly's Poor Results – Fourth to Ninth Matches of the Competitive Season .....	70
4.3.1	Developing New Relationships .....	70
4.3.2	Commitment .....	71
4.3.3	Closeness.....	72
4.3.4	Trust, Respect and Belief .....	74
4.3.5	Incompatibility, Disagreements and Power Struggles .....	77
4.4	Kelly's Sacking – Tenth to Thirteenth Matches of the Competitive Season .....	78
4.4.1	Commitment .....	78
4.4.2	Closeness.....	79
4.4.3	Trust, Respect and Belief .....	81
4.4.4	Incompatibility, Disagreements and Power Struggles .....	82
4.5	New Management – John's First Three Competitive Matches and Two Friendlies .....	84
4.5.1	John's Aims and Targets for the Remainder of the Season .....	84
4.5.2	Developing New Relationships .....	86

4.5.3	Commitment .....	88
4.5.4	Behaviours.....	91
4.5.5	Closeness.....	92
4.5.6	Trust, Respect and Belief .....	97
4.5.7	Incompatibility, Disagreements and Power Struggles .....	99
4.6	John's Mixture of Results – Fourth to Ninth Matches of the Competitive Season.....	101
4.6.1	Developing New Relationships .....	101
4.6.2	Commitment .....	102
4.6.3	Closeness.....	103
4.6.4	Trust, Respect and Belief .....	106
4.6.5	Incompatibility, Disagreements and Power Struggles .....	109
4.7	John's Positive Finish – Tenth to Thirteenth Matches of the Competitive Season .....	110
4.7.1	Behaviours.....	110
4.7.2	Closeness.....	111
4.7.3	Trust, Respect and Belief .....	113
4.7.4	Incompatibility, Disagreements and Power Struggles .....	114
<b>5</b>	<b>DISCUSSION .....</b>	<b>115</b>
5.1	Introduction .....	115
5.2	Symbolic Interactionism as a Theoretical Framework.....	116
5.3	Building Relationships Between the Coaches and Athletes .....	117
5.4	Importance of Respect and Likeability.....	121
5.5	Influence of Disagreements and Managing the Coach-Athlete Relationship.....	123
5.6	The Impact of Results on the Relationship .....	127
5.7	Chapter Conclusion .....	130
<b>6</b>	<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>132</b>
6.1	Introduction .....	132
6.2	Summary of Key Findings.....	132
6.3	Implications for Coach Education .....	132
6.4	Suggestions for Future Research .....	133
6.5	Reflections On the Research Process.....	134



<b>7</b>	<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>138</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>APPENDICES.....</b>	<b>149</b>
8.1	Appendix 1: Systematic Review Table .....	149
8.2	Appendix 2: ESS Ethical Approval Form .....	167
8.3	Appendix 3: ESS Information Sheet for Participants.....	171
8.4	Appendix 4: ESS Informed Consent for Involvement in Interviews Form.....	176
8.5	Appendix 5: Ethnographic Field Note Examples .....	177
8.6	Appendix 6: Interview Guide for Coaches .....	181
8.7	Appendix 7: Interview Guide for Players .....	191
8.8	Appendix 8: Key Data Analysis Themes .....	200

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background

The desire to undertake this thesis was stimulated by the research I conducted in my undergraduate degree project. The project was an autoethnographic examination of my relationship with my head coach at the football club I was playing for during his final season (2013/2014). Autoethnography is a methodology that allows for an alternative or 'truer' understanding of sports coaching and enables a representation of people's life experiences (Gearity, 2014). This method was selected because it is self-reflective, and narrative research allows for a simpler understanding of society as it is more personal to the individual (Gearity, 2014). Within this work, the autoethnographic approach that I undertook enabled me to display the relationship in a rich and realistic manner and to use theory to explore the link between my *personal world* and my *wider social context*. I found that storying my experiences in this way provided a *truer* account of the experiences I faced as an athlete when compared to the de-personalised and often sterile representation of the coach-athlete relationship found within existing literature. Specifically, the methodology helped to link the everyday micro-realities of coaching to my thoughts, feelings, values and behaviours, which affected the relationship I had with the coach in positive and negative ways (Gearity, 2014; Jones, 2006).

The central focus of my undergraduate work hinged around the issues that I faced at the time in balancing my university work and playing semi-professional football, during a period where I suffered from an anxiety-panic disorder. The anxiety I experienced at this time was particularly debilitating and affected my studies and playing, as during this time I required additional support to know that I was able to control my environment against the threat of an anxiety attack. The first step in overcoming this issue was to speak to both my tutors and coaches to make them aware of the issues I was facing and to seek their understanding and support to be excused from class and to travel separately from the football team. Within my role as a player,

speaking to my coach was particularly difficult as I did not want to be treated differently from other players or for other players to know about my condition. To this day most of the players are unaware of the anxiety that I faced, and still manage and face on a daily basis. As the season progressed my relationship with my coach can best be described as being dynamic. Typically, issues such as dealing with my anxiety, playing in the starting line-up or being on the bench, receiving positive support at times and not at other times, changes in decisions and communication from the coach, and my interpretations of these events greatly affected the quality of our relationship at different points in the season. This was something that I found to be underrepresented within the coach-athlete relationship literature.

Indeed, one reason for undertaking my undergraduate work was the dearth of research regarding the coach-athlete relationship within semi-professional women's football and a desire to contribute to a more complete understanding of the social complexities of the environment within which I practise. One of the key findings of this work for me was the dynamic nature of the relationship between the coach and me. Importantly, this was an area that had remained previously undisturbed within the empirical investigation of the coach-athlete relationship. Through my own analysis in my work, I came to realise that our relationship was not positive or negative but ebbed and flowed dependent upon our behaviours towards each other and how we in turn interpreted these behaviours. That is, relationships are dynamic and not static and fixed in their nature.

Whilst the autoethnographic exploration of my own thoughts, feelings and emotions made me more aware of the impact of the coach's behaviours (and my own behaviours) upon our relationship, the wider social sphere of the influence of other players within the team environment was missing from this work. Therefore, a broader understanding of the social environment in semi-professional women's football, in which fluctuations in interconnected relationships are examined, remains unexplored. This is important because, as a player and coach, there remains a lack of research focused upon developing a deeper understanding of the

contextual nature of the coach-athlete relationship, which may be used to better underpin coach education to improve the experiences of athletes in sport.

## 1.2 Research Problem

From a conceptual and theoretical basis, the relationship between coaches and athletes is often represented in a cognitive manner focusing upon the internal thoughts of an *individual* rather than looking at it from a *relational perspective* (Smith, 2013). This is important, as Smith (2013) has criticised this work for remaining cursorily *individualized* and *asocial*. For example, Smith (2013) highlighted the work of Baldock and Jowett (2010), which described the coach-athlete relationship through the constructs of closeness, commitment and complementarity, as a by-product of independent individuals coming together rather than interpretations emerging from *social relationships*, as a prime example of our limited conceptual understanding. Specifically, Smith (2013:145) highlights that:

...it is tempting in this sense to therefore suggest that research on coach athlete relationships should be more accurately described as a coach/athlete *dualism* rather than as coach-athlete *relationships*.

Furthermore, as Jowett et al. (2012a) have highlighted, from an empirical basis little research exists which explores the nature of the coach-athlete relationship from a longitudinal perspective (i.e. the impact of interactions and interpretation over time). Therefore, a temporal dimension to our understanding of the coach-athlete relationship remains elusive. Methodologically, this problem exists because most of the existing research relies heavily upon retrospective interview data with individual coaches and athletes gathered in a 'snapshot' manner. Indeed, few if any studies currently exist which examine relationships between coaches and athletes that are presently *ongoing and relational* (i.e. the relationship is current, dynamic and evolving). Finally, there remains a dearth of research exploring coach-athlete relationships within dynamic group

settings (Jowett et al., 2012a); therefore, a broader understanding of the social environment and the wider social sphere of team environments is absent from the literature.

### **1.3 Research Aim**

Therefore, the aim of this research project is to explore the relational, temporal nuances and complexities of the coach-athlete relationship within a team environment. This work specifically aims to explore how relationships are built and sustained and change over time because of the interactions of a number of people coming together in a relational manner within a specific coaching context. The findings of this work will add to our conceptual and empirical understanding of the complexity of sports coaching to better inform future coach education programmes, by making more visible the complex and relational nature of team sports environments.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

The research questions are framed to explore a nuanced and temporal understanding of what the relationships between coaches and a group of athletes are, and how and why they change over time:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): Over the course of a full competitive season, *what* events, interactions and behaviours occurred in the coach-athlete relationships?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): Over the course of a full competitive season, *how* did these events affect the relationships between the coaches and the group of athletes over time?

Research Question 3 (RQ3): Over the course of a full competitive season, *why* did the coaches and the group of athletes perceive that the relationships had changed over time?

## **1.5 Organisation of the Thesis**

Chapter 1, Introduction, highlights my personal experience of the changing and fluctuating nature of the coach-athlete relationship throughout a competitive season within women's football, using an autoethnographic approach to indicate why I desired to continue the work on the coach-athlete relationship and complete this project. Chapter 2, Review of Literature, includes an introduction to the coach-athlete relationship, a systematic review of the coach-athlete relationship and a discussion of it, and a brief summary of the key findings of the chapter. Chapter 3, Methodology, includes an introduction to the participants, the research paradigm and the theoretical perspective utilised within the present thesis, along with the data analysis procedure. Chapter 4, Results, presents verbatim data from both the coaches and the players that explores the relationships throughout the full competitive season. Chapter 5, Discussion, situates the findings of the thesis within the literature reviewed in the thesis. Chapter 6, Conclusion, provides a summary of all the key findings and the implications of these findings for coach education programmes. The chapter ends with some personal reflections on the research process and provides suggestions for the future direction of research examining the coach-athlete relationship. Chapter 7, References, provides a list of the resources that have been used throughout the thesis. Chapter 8, Appendices, provides additional information to contribute towards the thesis. Appendix 1 is Systematic Review Table, Appendix 2 is ESS Ethical Approval Form, Appendix 3 is ESS Information Sheet for Participants, Appendix 4 is ESS Informed Consent for Involvement in Interviews Form, Appendix 5 is Ethnographic Field Note Examples, Appendix 6 is Interview Guide for Coaches, Appendix 7 is Interview Guide for Players and Appendix 8 is Key Data Analysis Themes.

## **2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The main aim of this chapter is to provide a systematic review of the key findings, methodologies and theoretical approaches utilised when examining the coach-athlete relationship. To achieve this, the literature is divided into five sections. Section one outlines a brief introduction to the study of the coach-athlete relationship and its relevance within the field of sports coaching. Section two provides an overview of the methodology and procedures of the systematic review. Section three outlines the key findings of the systematic review in relation to the research questions posed within the thesis. Section four presents a themed analysis of the key findings within the coach-athlete relationship literature. Finally, section five offers a summary of the key findings and directions for future research.

### **2.2 The Coach-Athlete Relationship: *Alternative Research Perspectives***

The coach-athlete relationship is an essential feature within sport, due to the relationship having a crucial role in the development of athletes' physical and psychosocial states (Jowett and Cockerill, 2003; Jowett and Ntoumanis, 2004; Lyle, 2002). Moreover, the coach-athlete relationship is fundamental in sports coaching because it can operate as a means of expression for both the coach and athletes in an attempt to fulfil their needs and aims (Balduck et al., 2011; Jowett and Cockerill, 2003). The interactions between the coach and athlete can form the basis of their relationship; therefore, the interactions between them both can determine the quality of coaching that the participant receives, which contributes to the athlete's perceptions of whether their sporting experience occurred in a positive or negative manner (Jowett and Cockerill, 2003; Jowett and Ntoumanis, 2004; Lorimer and Jowett, 2009a; Lorimer and Jowett, 2010). Similarly, interpersonal processes have been highlighted to be a crucial influence on the

relationship and can have an impact on the quality of experience and on the overall performance (Poczwardowski et al., 2006). Interpersonal relationships are the shared interactions between two people which influence the factors that impact on the coach-athlete relationship (Poczwardowski et al., 2002b). It is crucial when examining interpersonal relations that interpretation and meaning are taken into account because individuals can give a different perspective on the same interaction and experiences which, once analysed, can indicate the understanding they have for each other (Lorimer and Jowett, 2013; Poczwardowski et al., 2006). Thus far, research in sports coaching has tended to portray the complexity of such relations in a simplistic and sequential manner; however, Poczwardowski et al. (2006:125) have previously stated that interpersonal relationships between individuals are frequently 'complex, dynamic, multifaceted and reciprocal'. Jones (2009) concurred that the coach-athlete relationship is a multifaceted area and that research often fails to display the personal and social aspects to coaching. A number of scholars, such as Blumer (1969), Goffman (1959), Homans (1950) and Maxwell (2004), regard interpersonal relationships as 'a dynamic product of social interaction in which interpretations and meanings are actively negotiated by social actors' (Poczwardowski et al., 2006:130). Examples of interpersonal factors that contribute towards a strong and positive relationship are mutual respect, trust and good communication; on the other hand, aspects such as mistrust, power struggles and a lack of respect between the coaches and athletes can have a negative impact on the relationship and become a hindrance to the effectiveness of their relations (Lafrenière et al., 2011). Moreover, Lorimer and Jowett (2009b) have highlighted that there are many factors that are unknown and contribute to a positive sporting relationship between the coach and athlete.

The interest in and around the coach-athlete relationship has become more of a focal point in recent years; however, there is still a scarcity of interest surrounding the role and function of coach-athlete relationships within a group or a team setting (Jowett et al., 2012a).



One of the most recent studies regarding a team sport and the coach-athlete relationship was by Jowett et al. (2012a:66). The aim of the study was to investigate whether:

...collective efficacy can mediate the association between (a) coach-athlete relationship and athlete satisfaction and (b) team cohesion and athlete satisfaction.

The results of their research highlighted that the ‘...athletes’ beliefs of whether the team is competent can potentially influence levels of satisfaction...’ and the areas that it impacted on were aspects such as athlete satisfaction, coach-athlete relationship and team cohesion (Jowett et al., 2012a:76). However, even though this study is looking at a team setting it does not examine and present the coach-athlete relationship in a fluctuating fashion nor does it analyse the coach’s and athlete’s perceptions and interpretations of how their relationships may impact on the individuals and the team. As a result, due to the importance of taking into consideration both the athlete and the coach within the research, to enable a comprehensive and deeper understanding of what the coach-athlete relationship is and how it impacts on all personnel involved within a team culture, this study will investigate both the coach’s and athlete’s accounts of their relationship in a team sport (Poczwardowski et al., 2002a).

Poczwardowski et al. (2002a) highlighted that the coach-athlete relationship in sport has been examined through numerous theoretical perspectives (e.g. psychodynamics and personality, behavioural, cognitive, social psychological and interactional approaches). Poczwardowski et al. (2002b:99-100) stated that psychodynamics and personality studies look at:

...coach’s and athlete’s personalities, needs, previous experiences, and other issues (e.g., unconscious motives, transference and countertransference) that contributed to a person’s dispositional tendency toward interpersonal behavior...

The behavioural approach focuses on how both the coach and athlete behave towards one another, whether that is verbally or nonverbally, whereas a cognitive approach looks at ‘...the

athlete's and coach's perception of each other in such areas as liking/disliking, effectiveness of coaching behavior, and recalling behaviors...' (Poczwardowski et al., 2002b:100). The social psychological approach examines what influences the relationship other than the individual's personality and behaviours, for example, the coach's role and leadership style and their support networks outside of the sporting culture (Poczwardowski et al., 2002b). Finally, interactional approaches look at the situation and personnel involved in the interactions, and Poczwardowski et al. (2002b:100) have argued that the three factors to analyse are:

...(a) cognitive, behavioral, and emotional characteristics of both the athlete and the coach; (b) some major features of the situation in which they had contact (e.g., group dynamics); and, (c) the interaction of these factors.

However, a limitation of such approaches is that they do not examine how relationships are 'managed in interaction' between the coach and athlete; rather, relationships are considered to be *characteristics that people possess* (Smith, 2013). Poczwardowski et al. (2002a:137) also suggested a couple of aspects that should be researched in the future; they are:

...(a) the mechanism of the interpretation and meaning the athletes and coaches make with regard to their relationship, and the major factors they take under their consideration in this process and (b) the dynamic nature of the interpersonal relationships.

Therefore, this study will focus on meaning and interpretation within the coach-athlete relationship and aim to explore the temporal nuances and complexities of the coach-athlete relationship longitudinally and solely within a team environment.

### **2.3 Systematic Review of Coach-Athlete Relationship Literature: *Method and Procedures***

A systematic literature review is a '...review of research literature using systematic and explicit, accountable methods' (Gough et al., 2012:2). In addition, Smith (2010:205) defined a systematic review as:

A research strategy that involves the identification, evaluation and interpretation of all available research (i.e. primary and secondary evidence) relevant to a particular research question, topic area, or phenomenon of interest.

There are a few crucial areas when reviewing research systematically. They include 'mapping' out the research through identifying the relevant research and then describing the research, 'critically appraising research reports in a systematic manner, and bringing together the findings into a coherent statement' (Gough et al., 2012:5). The basis of the review is pre-determined and recorded for future reference and in case the study ever needs to be replicated by the same or different researchers (Smith, 2010). The result of the systematic review provides a synopsis of existing coach-athlete relationship research and literature, and it enables the identification of research gaps which can help to suggest future research studies and topics (Smith, 2010). On the other hand, the problematic areas that can occur with a systematic review include a lack of access to electronic databases, a limited number of variations of the databases and the efficiency and quality of the databases (Jesson et al., 2011). Furthermore, reviewing literature systematically can be more time-consuming than a more traditional methodology for a literature review and can also be costlier (Jesson et al., 2011; Smith, 2010). Due to the reliance on electronic sources and the range of databases, the results are restricted to those that have been published, only articles that have been peer reviewed and other sources of academic work (Jesson et al., 2011). However, the majority of articles were accessible through the online databases, and the articles that were reviewed had to be published and peer reviewed to coincide with the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

## 2.4 Articles and Database Search Terms

The purpose of the systematic review was to identify any key themes and findings in the research literature regarding the coach-athlete relationship in sports coaching. The search dates were limited to between 2009 and 2015 to keep the results relevant and recent. The two electronic databases of SPORT discus and Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC) were used for the search because of the practicality of using the English language. There were three initial key search terms that were used with the two electronic databases and they were *coach athlete relationship*, *coach-athlete relationship* and “*coach-athlete relationship*” (see Table 1).

**2.5 Table 1. Database Search: Title Search Term: Coach Athlete Relationship OR Coach-Athlete Relationship OR “Coach-Athlete Relationship”; Publication Type: All and Peer Reviewed Academic Journal and English; Date Range: 2009-2015**

Database	Search Term	Source Type	No. of Returns
SPORT discus	Coach athlete relationship	All	742
		Peer reviewed academic journal	302
		English	
ERIC	Coach athlete relationship	All	29
		Peer reviewed academic journal	18
		English	
SPORT discus	Coach-athlete relationship	All	717
		Peer reviewed academic journal	288
		English	
ERIC	Coach-athlete relationship	All	12

		Peer reviewed academic journal  English	10
SPORT discus	"Coach-athlete relationship"	All  Peer reviewed academic journal  English	81  64
ERIC	"Coach-athlete relationship"	All  Peer reviewed academic journal  English	7  6

(Conducted 6<sup>th</sup> January 2015)

In addition, another aspect of the systematic process is the use of inclusion and exclusion. Gough et al. (2012:13) highlights that inclusion and exclusion require criteria to limit the results from the search. The areas can include '...the topic focus, the method of primary research and the quality of research'. The initial inclusion criteria for the systematic review were: (a) if the term coach-athlete relationship appeared in the title, as a key word, or there were multiple references to the coach-athlete relationship in the manuscript; (b) if the manuscript focused on the coach-athlete relationship in team sports; and (c) if the manuscript was published within the last five years. The five-year period was selected as an important time period following existing reviews of the literature by Poczwadowski et al. (2006) and Jowett and Lavalley (2007).

Table 2 (see Appendix 1) presents the final articles that were systematically reviewed and it also shows how the twenty-four articles were analysed through the use of headings which included author/s, date, title, sport, participants, design, conceptualisation of coach-athlete relations/measure of relationship and key findings. Below is a discussion section, which analyses

the articles through their methodology, conceptualisation of coach-athlete relationship, measure of relationship and key findings.

## **2.6 Systematic Review Discussion: Methodology**

The systematic review has highlighted that the most popular method used in the twenty-four articles is a questionnaire. There were several variations of questionnaire; however, the Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire (CART-Q) and its variations (e.g. Balduck and Jowett, 2011; Balduck et al., 2011; Davis et al., 2013; Hampson and Jowett, 2014; Jowett, 2009; Jowett et al., 2012a; Jowett et al., 2012b; Lorimer, 2009; Lorimer, 2014; Lorimer and Jowett, 2009b; Lafrenière et al., 2011; Rhind et al., 2012; Riley and Smith, 2011; Vella et al., 2013; Yang and Jowett, 2010) was the one mainly favoured by the articles and occasionally was the only source used to collect their data. The Athlete Satisfaction Questionnaire (ASQ) (e.g. Balduck et al., 2011; Davis and Jowett, 2010; Jowett et al., 2012a; Jowett et al., 2012b; Lorimer, 2009; Lorimer and Jowett, 2009b; Yang and Jowett, 2010) was highlighted as the second most popular questionnaire to be used. In addition, the Collective Efficacy Questionnaire for Sports (CEQS) was found in the articles by Hampson and Jowett (2014) and Jowett et al. (2012a) whilst the Barrett-Lennard Empathy Scale was used as the method in articles by both Jowett et al. (2012b) and Yang and Jowett (2010). Furthermore, a number of different questionnaires were referred to once in a number of projects and these were the Self-Presentation in Sport Questionnaire (e.g. Lorimer, 2014), the Group Environment Questionnaire (GEQ) (e.g. Jowett et al., 2012a), independently self-administered questionnaires (e.g. Lafrenière et al. 2011), demographic questionnaires and the Components of Attachment Questionnaire (CAQ) (e.g. Davis and Jowett, 2010). Nikbin et al. (2014) used a questionnaire in their research; however, it was not specified which particular questionnaire it was, whether it had been used previously or if it was a questionnaire which had been validated.

Moreover, another method which scholars used in their projects was to interview the participants. Interview techniques included one-to-one (e.g. Rhind and Jowett, 2010), phenomenological interviews (e.g. Becker, 2009) and semi-structured interviews (e.g. Gucciardi et al., 2009). Also, two different inventories were used in three articles: the Quality Relationship Inventory (QRI) (e.g. Davis and Jowett, 2014; Jowett, 2009) and the Differentiated Transformational Leadership Inventory for Youth Sport (DTLI-YS) (e.g. Vella et al., 2013). Lorimer and Jowett (2009b; 2010) utilised recordings and video footage for their data collection and used self-reports, which Davis and Jowett (2010) also favoured for their research. Furthermore, Lorimer and Jowett (2009b) used an unstructured dyadic interaction paradigm with their variation of methodologies, whereas in their research in 2010 they assessed empathy using an experimental laboratory-based protocol they had developed. Additionally, two methods used by Davis and Jowett (2014) to gain information from their participants were the Coach-Athlete Attachment Scale (CAAS) and the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS). PANAS was also the method used by Lafrenière et al. (2011). In their earlier work Davis and Jowett (2010) applied the Experiences in Close Relationships Scale (ECR) and the Investment Model Scale (IMS) as their methodology. The methods Riley and Smith (2011) opted to employ were the Sport Friendly Quality Scale (SFQS), the social acceptance subscale and perceived autonomy subscale, the Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (IMI), the Need for Relatedness Scale and the Sport Motivation Scale (SMS). Finally, the other methodologies used in the articles are the Leadership Scale for Sports (LSS) (e.g. Hampson and Jowett, 2014), autoethnography (e.g. Jones, 2009), an adapted version of the Passion Scale (e.g. Lafrenière et al., 2011), the Youth Experience Survey for Sport (YES-S) (e.g. Vella et al., 2013), the Sport Interpersonal Relationships Questionnaire (SIRQ) (e.g. Blom et al., 2010) and the number of accumulated points during a season.

## **2.7 Systematic Review Discussion: *Conceptualisation of Coach-Athlete Relationship***

There were a variety of methods conducted to conceptualise the coach-athlete relationship; however, the most commonly used method was the 3Cs model which highlighted closeness, commitment and complementarity (e.g. Balduck and Jowett, 2011; Balduck et al., 2011; Hampson and Jowett, 2014; Jowett et al., 2012a; Jowett et al., 2012b; Lorimer, 2009; Lafrenière et al., 2011; Rhind et al., 2012; Riley and Smith, 2011; Vella et al., 2013). A variation of the 3Cs model was used that focused on direct closeness, direct commitment and direct complementarity, meta-closeness, meta-commitment and meta-complementarity, whilst Lorimer (2014) utilised the meta-closeness, meta-commitment and meta-complementarity aspects. Another method which is similar to the 3Cs model is the 3 + 1C model. This model looks at closeness, commitment, complementarity and co-orientation (e.g. Lorimer and Jowett, 2009b; Rhind and Jowett, 2010; Yang and Jowett, 2010). Additionally, other methods that were utilised by a few articles are attachment theory (e.g. Davis and Jowett, 2010; Davis and Jowett, 2014; Davis et al., 2013) and the integrated research model (e.g. Jowett et al., 2012b; Lorimer, 2009). Riley and Smith (2011) used a number of different methods and they included self-determination theory, interdependence theory and interpersonal theory, and they also looked at friendship and peer acceptance with their project to conceptualise the coach-athlete relationship. In addition, there were a variety of methods used once to conceptualise the coach-athlete relationship within the articles; for example: perceived justice (e.g. Nikbin et al., 2014); actor-partner interdependence model (e.g. Davis et al., 2013); collective efficacy (e.g. Jowett et al., 2012a); team cohesion (e.g. Jowett et al., 2012a); the dualistic model of passion (e.g. Lafrenière et al., 2011); evaluation models (e.g. Blom et al., 2010); social role theory (e.g. Lorimer and Jowett, 2010); empathic accuracy (e.g. Lorimer and Jowett, 2009b); coaching behaviours (e.g. Becker, 2009); grounded theory (e.g. Gucciardi et al., 2009); autoethnographical method (e.g. Jones, 2009).



## **2.8 Systematic Review Discussion: *Measures of Relationship***

A number of scholars measured the relationship using variations of 'perception'. These included: perceived justice and perceived performance (e.g. Nikbin et al., 2014); athletes' perception of their coaches' views of the quality of their coach-athlete relationship (closeness and commitment) (e.g. Lorimer, 2014); athletes' perceptions of collective efficacy; athletes' direct perceptions of interpersonal feelings, thoughts, and behaviours; athletes' perceptions of team cohesion and athlete satisfaction (e.g. Jowett et al., 2012a); perceived autonomy, perceived competence, perceived relatedness and self-determined motivation (e.g. Riley and Smith, 2011); athletes' perceived relationship quality and athletes' happiness (e.g. Lafrenière et al., 2011); coaches' and athletes' perceptions of the strategies they use to maintain relationship quality, conflict management, openness, motivation, positivity, advice, support, and social networks (e.g. Rhind and Jowett, 2010); athletes' perceptions of their coaches' socio-emotional behaviours (e.g. Blom et al., 2010); meta-perception (e.g. Lorimer and Jowett, 2009b). Additionally, Gucciardi et al. (2009) measured coaches' perceptions of how they can both facilitate and impede the development of key mental toughness characteristics, the coach-athlete relationship, coaching philosophy, training environments, specific strategies, and negative experiences and influences. Additionally, the quality of the coach-athlete relationship was measured (e.g. Davis et al., 2013; Hampson and Jowett, 2014) and similarly, Rhind et al. (2012) examined the fundamental differences in how athletes from team and individual sports viewed the quality of their relationship.

Other aspects used to measure the relationship were closeness, commitment and complementarity (e.g. Balduck and Jowett, 2011; Balduck et al., 2011; Jowett, 2009; Vella et al., 2013); however, Balduck and Jowett (2011) also used athletes' satisfaction and peer relationships viewed by the coach and by the athlete in their project. Yang and Jowett (2010) measured the relationship using direct closeness, direct commitment, direct complementarity, meta-closeness, meta-commitment and meta-complementarity. The scholars also looked at respect, empathy,

unconditionality, congruence and the athlete's satisfaction with individual performance, training and instruction. Davis and Jowett (2010) considered these factors for measuring the relationship: the pervasiveness of the three main functions of attachment within the context of the coach-athlete relationship, the associations of athletes' attachment styles with such important variables as satisfaction with the relationship and satisfaction with the sport, and the process by which athletes' attachment styles and satisfaction with sport are associated. Moreover, including the methods previously stated, Vella et al. (2013) also used team success and positive developmental experiences, individual consideration, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, fostering acceptance of group goals and promoting teamwork, appropriate role modelling, contingency reward, personal and social skills, cognitive skills, goal setting, initiative, and negative experiences. Davis and Jowett (2014) used parent-athlete attachment bonds, coach-athlete attachment bonds and sports friendships as attachment bonds. Hampson and Jowett (2014) used level of collective efficacy and the type of coach leadership, whereas Vella et al. (2013) used transformational leadership to measure the relationship.

Furthermore, the other ways of measuring the relationship were commitment and trust (e.g. Nikbin et al., 2014), self-presentational concerns (e.g. Lorimer, 2014), attachment styles (avoidant and anxious) and relationship satisfaction (e.g. Davis et al., 2013), the coach-athlete relationship (e.g. Riley and Smith, 2011; Vella et al., 2013), the linear associations between personality, relationship quality, perceptions of coach empathy and satisfaction with training (e.g. Jowett et al., 2012b), friendship quality and peer acceptance (e.g. Riley and Smith, 2011), coaches' passion for coaching, coaches' autonomy support and coaches' controlling behaviours (e.g. Lafrenière et al., 2011), impact of a coaching intervention on athletes' satisfaction, enjoyment, self-confidence and intrateam attraction (e.g. Blom et al., 2010), differences in the empathetic accuracy of coaches and athletes in relation to the gender of the dyad (e.g. Lorimer and Jowett, 2010), empathic accuracy and satisfaction (e.g. Lorimer and Jowett, 2009b), social support (provisions of support), depth (significance of relationship) and interpersonal conflict

(expressions of anger and uncertainty that accompany conflict) (e.g. Jowett, 2009), association between coach satisfaction and coaches' perceptions of the quality of their relationship with their athletes (e.g. Lorimer, 2009), coach attributes, the environment, relationships, the system, coaching actions and influences (e.g. Becker, 2009), and caring in the coach-athlete relationship and nurturing (e.g. Jones, 2009).

## **2.9 Systematic Review Discussion: *Key Findings***

A number of the findings were related back to closeness, commitment and complementarity, which also linked with trust. Nikbin et al. (2014) suggested that all three dimensions of perceived justice were positively and significantly related to commitment and trust, and commitment was significantly related to individual performance and team performance. There was also a positive relationship between trust and the three dimensions of perceived performance (Nikbin et al., 2014). In another study all self-presentational concerns were negatively associated with increased perceptions of closeness but positively associated with increased perceptions of commitment (Lorimer, 2014). Furthermore, Rhind et al. (2012) highlighted that athletes who participated in individual sports felt closer, more committed and complementary to their coach, and they perceived that their coach reciprocated those feelings more strongly compared to those athletes who represented team sports. The results in Balduck et al. (2011) supported the multidimensional nature of the coach-athlete relationship with the Belgian athletes, which was replicated using the 3Cs. The findings by Jowett (2009a:34) identified variables such as 'support from [the] coach, significance of the relationship (depth), and the level of conflict experienced in the relationship'. In addition, the results highlighted the efficacy of the CART-Q as a tool of assessment concerning the quality of the coach-athlete relationship (Jowett, 2009). Another aspect that the findings highlighted surrounded the quality of relationship. Lorimer (2014) identified that the athletes appeared to perceive their coach as a potential source of self-presentational concerns and that these concerns were associated with inferences about

their coaches' perception of the quality of that relationship. Lorimer (2014) suggested that a coach needs to be aware that how an athlete perceives the coach's perception of the quality of the relationship can potentially impact on the concerns experienced by that athlete. Davis et al. (2013:156) found:

...a) actor effects for coaches' and athletes' avoidant attachment styles on their own perception of relationship quality and coaches' and athletes' perception of relationship quality on their own perception of relationship satisfaction, and (b) partner effects for athletes' avoidant attachment style on coaches' perceptions of relationship quality and for coaches' perceptions of relationship quality on athletes' perceptions of relationship satisfaction.

Therefore, attachment styles can help in understanding the 'formation and maintenance' level of quality of the coach-athlete relationship (Davis et al., 2013:156). Results from another study indicated that developmental experiences have a reasonably positive link with the coach transformational leadership behaviour and the coach-athlete relationship (Vella et al., 2013). Also, the study found that developmental experiences and team success had no correlation and '...a combination of coach transformational leadership behaviour and the quality of the coach-athlete relationship...' is the best predictor of developmental experiences (Vella et al., 2013:549). Jowett et al. (2012b) highlighted that through the utilisation of the coach-athlete relationship there was a relation between personality and empathy. The study also indicated that 'agreeableness' can have a negative or positive impact on the development, maintenance and quality of the relationship (Jowett et al., 2012b). Additionally, the findings imply that athletes' level of satisfaction with training is influenced by the quality of the coach-athlete relationship (Jowett et al., 2012b).

Some key findings were all associated with the coach-athlete relationship. Riley and Smith's (2011) findings highlighted that coaches and peers can shape the sport experience of young athletes by engaging in positive interpersonal relationships with coaches and teammates,

and these connections may at least serve to fulfil the important psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness. In some circumstances such connections also could shape sport motivation, such that it is undergirded by self-determination. It is within this type of social climate that young participants can expect the potential benefits of sport involvement to outweigh the potential costs. Davis and Jowett (2010:112) highlighted that the majority of athletes' views of the coach saw them as a '...secure base, safe haven, and proximity maintenance'. The findings indicated that athletes' attachment styles of avoidance and anxiousness linked to a negative relationship satisfaction and sport satisfaction (Davis and Jowett, 2010). The results also implied that '...athletes' satisfaction with the coach-athlete relationship may be a process that links athletes' attachment styles with levels of satisfaction...' (Davis and Jowett, 2010:112). Furthermore, Lorimer's (2009:2) findings showed the quality of the relationship '...was a significant predictor of variance in coach satisfaction, [and] different elements of the relationship influenced satisfaction to varying degrees'.

In contrast, Hampson and Jowett's (2014) exploration of efficacy found that there was a difference in team efficacy due to the perceptions of coach leadership and the coach-athlete relationship. The findings also suggested that the quality of the coach-athlete relationship added to the perceptions of collective efficacy more than it would have done if compared to behaviours of leadership alone (Hampson and Jowett, 2014). Moreover, Jowett et al. (2012a:66) found:

...that dimensions of collective efficacy have the capacity to explain the association between the quality of the coach-athlete relationship and athlete satisfaction as well as between team cohesion and athlete satisfaction.

The dimensions of collective efficacy of unity, preparation and ability had the most impact on athlete satisfaction. The links found between athlete satisfaction and collective efficacy highlight the important positive impact that collective efficacy may have for athletes' positive sporting experiences.

Empathy was another area with key results. Yang and Jowett (2010) highlighted that the association between the direct perspective of the coach-athlete relationship and satisfaction with training was partially mediated by the athletes' perceptions of their coaches' empathic understanding, suggesting that the athletes' satisfaction with training and instruction is closely linked with the level to which they view their coach as being empathic. The association between the meta-perspective of the coach-athlete relationship and satisfaction with performance was not mediated by athletes' perceptions of coaches' empathic understanding, suggesting that athletes' perceptions of their coach's empathy may not necessarily be important to feelings of satisfaction with individual performance. Lorimer and Jowett (2009b:201) highlighted that there is 'an association between members' meta-perceptions or judgments that their partner is positive about the athletic relationship and increased empathic accuracy'. Additionally, their findings also highlighted that increased empathic accuracy showed a link with greater levels of satisfaction within the relationship (Lorimer and Jowett, 2009b).

The key findings were not categorised with other scholars' research. Davis and Jowett (2014) indicated that the athletes' avoidant and secure attachment styles were related to aspects of the coach-athlete relationship quality, which included social support, relationship depth and interpersonal conflict. Additionally, the study demonstrated that interpersonal conflict was crucial to the athletes' positive affect and negative affect. The study also illustrated that, from a practical perspective, a resource to help the quality of the relationship was an understanding of conflict management (Davis and Jowett, 2014). Balduck and Jowett's (2011:84) results highlighted that '...athletes and coaches exhibited interpersonal relationships to a different extent to coaches/athletes and peer leaders'. The findings also highlighted that the athlete's relationship, perceived closeness, commitment and complementarity were greater with their peer leaders than with their coaches; however, even though the coaches felt more committed to their athletes, they perceived that their overall relationship with their peer leaders was superior (Balduck and Jowett, 2011). Moreover, Lafrenière et al. (2011:144) indicated '...harmonious

passion for coaching positively predicted autonomy-supportive behaviors toward their athletes, while obsessive passion for coaching positively predicted controlling behaviors'. Additionally, the athletes' greater quality coach-athlete relationship and general positive happiness were predicted through autonomy-supportive behaviours (Lafrenière et al., 2011). Blom et al.'s (2010) results indicated that the athletes' feelings of self-determination, positive emotions and sport satisfaction were impacted in a positive way by their coaches' supportive interpersonal style. Overall, it was suggested, '...athletes perceived an increase in caring behaviors from coaches who were trained, which resulted in increases in positive psychosocial experiences' (Blom et al., 2010:online). Lorimer and Jowett's (2010) study demonstrates that the coaches' and athletes' perceptions of each other's thoughts and feelings are influenced by gender and the roles that they both play within the coach-athlete relationship. The findings also highlighted that female coaches were more accurate in empathic accuracy than male coaches and female athletes working with male coaches showed the most accuracy, whilst female athletes working with female coaches showed the least accuracy (Lorimer and Jowett, 2010). Rhind and Jowett's (2010:119) study established that:

...certain relationship maintenance strategies may be common across different relationship contexts (i.e., romantic and sport). Moreover, evidence indicated that relationship maintenance strategies may be unique to the specific relationship context (e.g., the importance of motivational strategies in sport).

The findings also helped to understand the processes for maintaining the coach-athlete relationship through improving on current knowledge surrounding interpersonal dynamics (Rhind and Jowett, 2010). Becker (2009) indicated that to gain a more comprehensive understanding of what a great coach is, it is important to focus on the athletes' experiences rather than specific coaching aspects. The athletes' experiences helped to highlight what a great coach is through highlighting '...who their coaches were, what they did, how they did it, and how it influenced them' (Becker, 2009:112). Gucciardi et al. (2009) identified that the coach-athlete

relationship was a frequent source that influenced mental toughness and its development. The study implied that there were several strategies and mechanisms that were vital to building a foundation and maintaining a positive coach-athlete relationship, which also influenced a number of crucial ‘...mental toughness characteristics’ (Gucciardi et al., 2009:1490). Finally, Jones’ (2009) autoethnographical approach highlighted how important caring is in the coach-athlete relationship and emphasised how ‘...actively nurturing such an ethic to realise the potentialities of others’ is key (Jones, 2009:377).

## 2.10 Chapter Conclusion

The results from the systematic review showed that the most popular method was a questionnaire, and specifically the CART-Q and its different variations. Following a questionnaire, interviews were used, with alternatives such as the one-to-one and semi-structured interviews. The most common method to conceptualise the coach-athlete relationship was the 3Cs model of closeness, commitment and complementarity, whilst the very similar 3 + 1C model, which included co-orientation, was also used. The relationship was mainly measured by the use of deviations of ‘perception’ which included justice, performance, coaches’ views of the quality of their coach-athlete relationship, interpersonal feelings, thoughts and behaviours, and other factors. Another aspect was utilising closeness, commitment and complementarity to measure the relationship. Predominantly, the main key findings from the systematic review linked to closeness, commitment, complementarity and trust.

However, to date the existing research that has explored the coach-athlete relationship has tended to be represented in a cognitive manner focusing upon the internal thoughts of an *individual* rather than being from a *relational perspective* (Smith, 2013). Importantly, Smith (2013: 145) has criticised this work for remaining cursorily *individualized* and *asocial*; indeed, it is perhaps better understood more accurately as a ‘coach/athlete *dualism* rather than as [a] coach-athlete *relationship*’. Additionally, previous research has tended to be limited to a ‘snapshot’



understanding of the coach-athlete relationship, typically represented through simple relatively stable concepts. Therefore, an understanding of the temporal dimensions of relationships and how relationships might fluctuate over time remains unexplored. Indeed, the systematic literature review has further highlighted the need to explore the temporal nuances and complexities of the coach-athlete relationship in order to delve deeper into the inner workings of a relationship (Jowett et al., 2012).

The findings of the current study will look to add to the understanding of the complexity of sports coaching, to better inform future coach education programmes. The significance of this work is to help future coaches to become reflexive about the impact of their interactional practices upon the coach-athlete relationship.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

This chapter will highlight the methodology that was employed for the project and the reasons why the specific methods were used during the research process. The chapter opens by discussing the broad research paradigm of *constructivism* that underpins the project, and more specifically *the interpretivist approach*, and how the theoretical perspective of *symbolic interactionism* is aligned with interpretivism (cf. Potrac et al., 2014). In addition, ethnography is introduced as a salient approach to exploring the research questions posed within the thesis with participant observations, field notes and semi-structured interviews. Details of the participants, procedure, data analysis, ethics and judging the quality of the work are also outlined within this chapter.

#### 3.1 Research Paradigms

Prior to undertaking the research process, the philosophical commitments (i.e. ontology, epistemology and methodology) that underpin the project should be clearly articulated (Smith et al., 2014). Whilst *ontology* is concerned with the nature of reality and how reality is viewed (i.e. single reality [positivist view] or multiple realities [constructivist view]), *epistemology* considers how knowledge of reality is going to be achieved or what can be known (i.e. knowledge is objective [positivist view] or subjective [constructivist view]). In line with these commitments, methodology is concerned with the alignment of data collection methods (i.e. questionnaires, interviews, lab-based test) with the ontological and epistemological position of the research project (Smith, 2010).

### **3.1.1 The Interpretivist Research Paradigm**

Interpretivism is a concept that can be defined as a major paradigm (Atkinson, 2012). A paradigm is a belief system that gives an individual a basis for how they see and understand the environment that surrounds them and it can also operate as guidance towards how people think and act (Atkinson, 2012; Smith 2010). An interpretivist paradigm is suggested to study the meaning of interactions, provide a certain belief structure that an individual follows and also to see how reality is constructed by the researcher's thoughts and views. This, in turn, influences how they approach and conduct their research (Atkinson, 2012; Potrac et al., 2014). In addition, Wellington (2015:26) indicates that '...reality is a human construct...' and that the interpretivist researcher seeks to explore these realities within different perspectives and 'shared meanings' whilst developing insights into the situations that have been experienced. This particular paradigm is not new; however, in recent years within the sports coaching environment there has been an increase of application surrounding the interpretive approach (Potrac et al., 2014).

The interpretive perspectives foundation expresses that the social world is complex and dynamic and that within this 'people' subjectively define their own meanings within their settings, whether socially, politically or culturally (Jones and Wallace 2005; Markula and Silk, 2011; Potrac et al., 2014; Purdy and Jones, 2011, 2013). The 'people' within this thesis who define their own meanings include the head coaches and athletes, whilst the researcher also incorporates their own individual interpretations into the findings (Potrac et al., 2014). Interpretivism proposes that it is the 'mind' of the individual that impacts and affects how they interpret the actions, engagements and communications that they experience and that also influences the comprehensive 'meaning' that is allocated to the intentions and motivations of themselves or the person/group they interact with (Potrac et al., 2014; Smith, 1989). Furthermore, drawing upon the work of Biesta et al. (2011) and Goodson et al. (2010), Potrac et al. (2014:33) suggest that:

...the meaning that an individual attaches to episodes in the social world is open to revision, as he or she may revisit and re-interpret their own and others' behaviours in a variety of different, sometimes contradictory, ways...

The experiences that an individual goes through impacts on how they make sense of the social world and the reality that they live in; this also depends on their 'sense-making' capabilities (Potrac et al., 2014). Within sport and coaching, an interpretivist does not look to 'develop objective truths' or calculate theories about what coaching is or what it should be; rather the researcher investigates the experiences of the coaches and any other individual who plays a crucial role, which in this case is the athletes at the chosen club that the coaches work with (Potrac et al., 2014).

### **3.1.2 Paradigmatic Commitments Within the Present Thesis**

Therefore, this thesis is aligned to a constructivist paradigm, more specifically grounded in the interpretivist tradition which provides a 'radical alternative' to the (post)positivistic orthodoxy that has traditionally dominated in the sport science literature base and is characterised by:

...an internalist-idealist/relativist ontology (i.e., there is no reality independent of perception), a subjectivist epistemology (i.e., knowledge is subjective and socially constructed), and an idiographic methodology (i.e., the focus is on the individual case) ... (Potrac et al., 2014:32).

Following on from the philosophical commitments of the constructivist and an interpretivist paradigm, a theoretical framework can be utilised as a way of thinking about the phenomena under investigation (Agee, 2006). Charmaz (2006:20) suggests that broad research questions such as 'what's happening here? ...what are the basic social processes? [and] what are the basic

social psychological process?’ can serve to help a researcher refine the research focus’. Indeed, Agee (2006:432) highlights that ‘qualitative research questions, then, need to articulate what a researcher wants to know about the intentions and perspectives of those involved in social interactions’. Within the interpretivist approach, the interactionist theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism will be utilised to shape the interest and focus of the research project (Potrac et al., 2014).

### **3.1.3 Theoretical Perspective Within the Present Thesis: *Symbolic Interactionism***

Symbolic interactionism is also utilised within the study due to the link it has with the interpretivist perspective. Poczwadowski et al. (2002b) suggested that it is crucial to examine and gain a deeper understanding of the thought process within relationships as people can perceive the same interactions in a different way, and they believed an interpretivist and symbolic interactionist approach would do this. Symbolic interactionism can be determined as both a theoretical perspective and a method of collating data regarding the ‘social world’ (Blumer, 1969; Manning and Smith, 2010). Symbolic interactionism is about ‘the self’ and the ‘...ongoing intentional interaction with the social world...’ (Baird and McGannon, 2009:385; Blumer, 1969). Within the phrase symbolic interaction, Denzin (2004: 81-82) states that the term *symbolic*:

...refers to the underlying linguistic foundations of human group life, just as the word *interaction* refers to the fact that people do not act toward one another, but interact with each other.

In this regard, people are not just actors within the social world but they are also ‘inter-actors’ (Blumer, 1969). Therefore, symbolic interactionism suggests that people do not just react to events that take place but they interact with others and the world because ‘reality’ can be

objective or subjective in a social construct and human interaction is one of the main constructs (Baird and McGannon, 2009; Blumer, 1969; Denzin, 1969). Mead suggested that the personal development of an individual could be classed as a social process, as could the meanings that individuals assigned to things/objects (Brown, 2013). In addition, Mead also stated that individuals can change through different types of interactions and that as humans they assign meanings to things/objects which in turn determine how they act in certain situations (Brown, 2013). Similarly, Blumer separated symbolic interactionism into three: (1) people act on the meaning they have given to an 'object', (2) humans give meaning to things/objects based on their social interactions, which means the same thing/object can have a different meaning to different people, and (3) the meaning they give something is not permanent, as it can change due to everyday life (Brown, 2013). These three tenets can help to explain how aspects of society can change, just as they are created and recreated by social interactions (Brown, 2013). Overall, the interpretive-interactionist perspective specifically focuses on how people interact with and interpret the objects with which they engage; therefore, this approach will help to further enhance the knowledge and understanding surrounding the dynamics of the coach-athlete relationship (Denzin, 2001; Poczwadowski et al., 2002b). Furthermore, the use of an aligned interpretivist and symbolic interactionist approach has previously been applied by Poczwadowski et al. (2002b) in their study 'The athlete and coach: their relationship and its meaning.' Poczwadowski et al. (2002b) highlighted the importance of exploring and understanding the cognitive factor within the coach-athlete relationship, especially as coaches and athletes can interpret and perceive their interactions in a similar way or frequently in a contrasting way.

### **3.2 Participants and Context**

Athletic United Women's Football Club (AUWFC) (pseudonym) is a semi-professional women's club based in the Midlands, England. AUWFC play in the third tier of women's football

in England whilst also competing in the County Cup, League Cup and The Football Association Cup competitions. The club was selected because of the access available to the principal investigator who had played at the club as a junior and senior player from the age of thirteen. As the principal researcher, I held the dual role of participant (player) and researcher within the context. All participants were aware of my dual role and no data was collected using a covert research approach. The previous immersion within the context allowed me initial access to the gatekeepers within the club, and to utilise my previously developed rapport with the participants to assist me in my research role. It also allowed me to have a deeper level of understanding of the context under investigation.

Six participants (two first team managers/coaches and four players) were purposefully sampled from AUWFC to explore the coach-athlete relationship over the course of a full competitive season. During the 10-month season, two first team coaches (Kelly and John) were employed at separate stages of the season because of a managerial change following poor results, whilst the four players (Laura, Claire, Emma and Marie) played for the full season under both Kelly and John. Details of the participants in the thesis research are given below.

Kelly was thirty-two years old. She had been coaching for sixteen years and began taking managerial roles approximately three and a half years prior to the 2014/2015 season with AUWFC. Kelly was the first team coach for seven months before being relieved of her duties in December 2014. Kelly's highest coaching badge is The Football Association Union of European Football Associations B Licence (UEFA B), which is the equivalent to United Kingdom Coaching Certificate Level 3 (UKCC Level 3). Kelly also has other qualifications such as the FA Modules 1 and 2 with a number of context specific coaching badges that she has accumulated over the years of her coaching career.

John, forty years of age, was assigned the role of first team manager/coach at the beginning of February 2015, with the intention of completing the remainder of the season, which finished in the middle of May (four months), and staying on for the

following season. He has been a football coach for approximately twenty years and has been managing for nearly half of those. John's highest coaching qualification is his FA UEFA Advanced Licence (UEFA A) but he also has coaching badges that include the Youth Module 2, the Speed, Ability and Quickness (SAQ) Level 1 and Futsal for Beginners.

Laura, at twenty-seven years old, had been playing football since she was twelve and the 2014/2015 season saw her play her fifteenth season for AUWFC. During the season, she was appointed vice-captain by Kelly and was kept on by John when he joined the club. Laura had no previous relationship with either Kelly or John before they joined the football club and took up the role of coach; however, she did participate in a training session John delivered whilst Kelly was in charge.

Claire was twenty-four years old, and had started playing football when she was six. She has played for AUWFC for around four years. She did not know Kelly prior to joining AUWFC and only briefly encountered John when he took a couple of training sessions.

Emma, eighteen years old, began her football career approximately six years ago and shortly after joined AUWFC, equating to nearly five years at the club. Emma had no previous relationship with Kelly or John, and her only experience with John were the two training sessions he took when Kelly and the interim coaches were in charge.

Marie, at twenty-six years old, had played football for eighteen years and the 2014/2015 season was her first season at AUWFC. She knew Kelly roughly two years prior to signing for AUWFC because she had been coached by her at a previous club; however, she did not know John before he gained his role with the club, other than participating in the two training sessions.



### **3.3 Ethics**

To enable the project to take place, ethical approval had to be granted by the Head of Faculty Research Degrees at Manchester Metropolitan University (see Appendix 2). Permission was approved following completion and acceptance of numerous documents that outlined the vision of the study and how it was to be completed. The first step in gaining entry to the selected environment was by identifying and contacting their 'gatekeeper'. Gatekeepers are the personnel who control access to the other group members, group activities and sources of information which are needed for the research (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Krane and Baird, 2005; LeCompte and Schensul, 1999). Achieving the desired entry for the project was easier than might be the case for other projects because there was already a good rapport and relationship with the gatekeeper and the football club. However, even though the gatekeeper can grant access to the group, it also has to be discussed with the participants and members to gain their consent (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Prior to the interviews, the first team coaches and athletes were asked to read an 'Information Sheet for Participants (ISP)' and sign an 'Informed Consent for Involvement in Interviews', which highlighted the nature of the interview process (see Appendices 2 and 3). This document also aimed to confirm that they agreed to be interviewed as part of the research project, and that they gave permission for the interview to be audio recorded and, if required, that any extracts from the interviews could be used and published within the thesis.

### **3.4 Methodology: *Ethnography***

The project was underpinned by an ethnographically inspired approach. Cushion (2014:172) indicated that ethnography can be:

...described as an umbrella term (Krane and Baird 2005), as a tool (MacPhail 2004), and as both a process and product (Wolcott 1990; Tedlock 2000) because ethnographers' lives are embedded within their field experiences.

This approach enables the ‘...study of human societies, institutions and social relationships...’ (Wellington, 2015:26). Therefore, ethnography is used for social research and helps to present an account of a society that has been observed for a particular duration of time (Atkinson, 2012; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Sparkes and Smith, 2014). The term ethnography can be divided into two: ‘ethno’ refers to culture, human interaction and people whilst ‘graphy’ can be defined as the process of the research, which in this case is a written account (Ellis, 2004; Patton, 2002; Sparkes and Smith, 2014). Ethnography’s main aim is to gain an understanding of a selected group’s culture and its members’ personal perspectives within their world (Krane and Baird, 2005; Tedlock, 2000; Wolcott, 1995). Moreover, this methodology allows for a ‘...detailed and in-depth description of the everyday life and practice of a group of people...’ (Atkinson, 2012:67), which in turn allows the researcher to gain an understanding and express their findings through an ‘...insider’s point of view...’ (Atkinson, 2012:67). Krane and Baird, (2005:88) suggest that the group culture helps to provide an insight into a number of aspects, such as the members’ behaviours, motivations, emotions and mental state, whilst also providing ‘...a comprehensive awareness of their experiences’.

The role of the researcher is to immerse themselves within the environment for a certain time period, which can vary from one year to several years, whilst they learn about the culture and world that they surround themselves with (Atkinson, 2012; O’Reilly, 2012). When infiltrating a new environment and field setting, it is important to understand that every situation is different and the initial steps of meeting the participants and building a good basis for the relationship(s) can sometimes be down to luck rather than the researcher’s skill (Bryman, 2012; Sarsby, 1984). Additionally, Atkinson (2012) suggested that it may be easier for the researcher to gain participants’ respect and trust after achieving initial entry by immersing themselves within the culture and being willing to be a part of their ‘team’ from the outset, because this will enable the researcher to gain a deeper understanding by being a functioning member of their culture. Once the researcher has established a role in the team setting or sporting environment, it is crucial

that they are actively engaging within the field, and also with the people on a regular/daily basis over a sustained period of time (Atkinson, 2012).

### **3.4.1 Participant Observations**

Observations have been highlighted as being a core and crucial aspect of the ethnographic research process (Ely, 1991; Krane and Baird, 2005; Taylor and Bogdan, 1988). Smith (2010:39) described observation as:

...any technique, associated procedure and data recording instruments that allow for the systematic recording of observable behaviour of individuals or groups...

The observer has to be aware that a number of interactions may be occurring at once and they must be vigilant in listening and asking questions (Krane and Baird, 2005; Taylor and Bogdan, 1998). Furthermore, Krane and Baird (2005:94) state that the use of observation allows researchers to ‘...gain broad description and understanding of the workings of a social group...’, which also impact the field notes and recordings. There are a variety of observations that can be conducted; however, the type of observation used for the project was participant observation (Atkinson, 2012; Krane and Baird, 2005; Sparkes and Smith, 2014). Participant observation is where the researcher is immersed into a social setting to observe and record the behaviours, interactions and activities of the participants (Smith, 2010). In addition, Atkinson (2012:67) also stated that the term participant observation ‘...represents the dual role of the ethnographer in that one is both a participant in the culture, and at the same time an academic observer’. The role the researcher adapts for this type of observation means that they join the teams’ culture and study their activities whilst paying close attention to the participants’ personal experiences (Bryman, 2012; Taylor and Bogdan, 1998). Butts (2001) suggested that to represent a culture in its multifaceted state, participant observation was the only way to truly portray it. In the dual

roles of being a participant and also an observer, it is crucial that certain characteristics are practised by the researcher as the roles require patience, skill and the ability to handle both roles sufficiently (Krane and Baird, 2005).

### **3.4.2 Field Notes**

To complement the observations, field notes are used within this methodology. It is crucial that the notes recorded are descriptive, detailed and clear so they are easy to follow at a later date (Bryman, 2012; Cushion, 2014; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Krane and Baird, 2005). Moreover, it is recommended that the field notes record the date the observations were made, who was present, what social interaction/s occurred and any key events, and that they also indicate the members' behaviours (Bryman, 2012; Cushion, 2014). The projects observational notes were recorded in a research diary either during or after a training session (see Appendix 5), match day or club social event. The notes were revisited shortly after being recorded and this was to add any further details that had been recollected following the observations, highlight a link between certain incidents/interactions or add comments to help with the understanding of the notes (Cushion, 2014). Cushion (2014:175) proposes that with additional methods of data collection '...the diverse sources of information and data give a fuller picture of the wider context of the coaching process...' following further analysis. Furthermore, the use of ethnography also allows the opportunity to use interviews to gain deeper and richer data, due to the questions being specific and structured around the experiences and events that the members of the culture have gone through (Atkinson, 2012; Rubin and Rubin, 2005). A semi-structured interview approach was applied once the field notes had been collected.

### 3.4.3 Interviews

The interview method utilised for the thesis was semi-structured interviews. Pre-planned questions are used to construct semi-structured interviews; however, the nature of the method allows for flexibility whilst interviewing and enables exploration of additional information that may emerge during the discussion (Purdy, 2014). An interview guide is produced prior to the meetings and it outlines the main topics or questions to be discussed (Purdy, 2014). An advantage to semi-structured interviews is that the questions can be adapted or rephrased if the situation requires it or if the interviewee does not understand them (Kajornboon, 2005; Purdy, 2014). Furthermore, this type of interview offers the opportunity to react to the current circumstances and does ‘...not restrict the interview to a fixed agenda...’ (Purdy, 2014: 162). On the other hand, a disadvantage of this method is if the researcher is inexperienced and lacks interview skills and the knowledge of when to prompt for relevant information and how to recognise key opportunities for greater data to be obtained (Kajornboon, 2005).

An in-depth interview guide was produced (see Appendices 5 and 6), and the guide acted as a prompt to gain deeper information alongside the observational notes that had previously been recorded (Atkinson, 2012). In addition to the observations and research diary helping to create the interview guide, three main articles were used as references and inspiration for its production: Jowett’s (2003) ‘When the “Honeymoon” Is Over: A Case Study of a Coach-Athlete Dyad in Crisis’, Jowett and Cockerill’s (2003) ‘Olympic medallists’ perspective of the athlete–coach relationship’ and, finally, Jowett and Ntoumanis’ (2004) ‘The Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire (CART-Q): development and initial validation’. These articles contributed to both the coaches’ and athletes’ interview guidelines and were an instrumental source of reference throughout the data collection process. The interview guide was quite long but this was to ensure that all areas were covered and hopefully no crucial information was left out, for better quality data would allow the analysis and the results to be of a higher standard.

The average length of each interview was an hour and the average number of meetings with each participant was two. The length and number of the interviews allowed for rich information to be discussed and explained in finer detail. Also, it enabled the participants to express themselves, and allowed their personal accounts of the season to be discussed. In an attempt to encourage each participant to feel comfortable and relaxed, the time and location of the interview was influenced by them personally and conducted to suit each individual best (Purdy, 2014; Sparkes and Smith, 2014; Tracy, 2013). Each interview was audio recorded with the consent of the participant prior to the interview commencing. Utilising an audio device allows for greater accuracy when recording the interview compared to a written account because little or nothing of the conversation will be missed. Audio recording gives the interviewer time to listen and engage fully with the participant whilst writing down only crucial fragments of information for later reference (Opdenakker, 2006). It is important to take notes during the interview even when using an audio recorder because they can act as a backup source if the device malfunctions or they can operate as a prompt if the interviewer has noted that they want to ask a different question or investigate the subject further (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). It was also important that the interviews took place in venues that had as little background noise as possible, because high levels of disturbance can affect the quality of recording (Merriam, 2009). It was imperative for the participant to feel comfortable with the interview being recorded, which was why it was reiterated on several occasions that everything was confidential, and the process of the data collection and analysis was explained (Purdy, 2014). Prior to the interviews beginning the participants were also informed that they could stop the interview at any point and could discuss any areas 'off the record' if that made them feel more comfortable (Amis, 2005; Purdy, 2014). Following the completion of the interviews, they were all transcribed verbatim and they are used as reference in the Results chapter (see Appendix 8).

The aim of the interviews was to gain a deeper understanding of what the relationships are between coaches and a group of athletes and how and why they change over the course of a

full competitive season. In specifically addressing RQ1 (see page 12), the interviews explored *what* events, interactions and behaviours led to changes in their relationships. In addressing RQ2 (see page 12), the interviews explored *how* the events affected the relationships between the coaches and the group of athletes. In addressing RQ3 (see page 13), the interviews explored *why* the coaches and the group of athletes perceived that the relationships had changed over time. Therefore, the interview approach enabled the exploration of the participants' experiences throughout the football season.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

The aim of the data analysis was to uncover if the interview transcripts and observational notes contained quality information surrounding what impacted on the coach-athlete relationships (i.e. events, interactions or behaviours), how it influenced the relationships and why the coaches' and athletes' perceptions of their relationships changed. Therefore, due to the perceptive influence and interpretive process, the analytical standpoint used as the framework was symbolic interactionism (Poczwadowski et al., 2002b). Firstly, interviews were verbatim transcribed and key extracts from the *reflexive observation diaries* were typed into a Word document. The transcription of the interviews and write-up of crucial observations allowed for immersion in the data and helped to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' interpretations and perspectives of their relationships (Chesterfield et al., 2010; Sparkes, 2000). Following this, the transcripts were re-read to become familiarised with the data whilst potential areas of interest to explore were clearly highlighted. A meeting then occurred with the supervisory team to discuss potential narratives and focus within the data. This meeting allowed the identification of key *instances* in the season to be highlighted in a narrative manner (i.e. 1 - Kelly's positive start, 2 - Kelly's poor results, 3 - Kelly's sacking, 4 - new manager, 5 - John's mixture of results and 6 - John's positive finish), followed by the identification of *theoretical concepts* within each *key instance*. This resulted in fourteen initial themes being highlighted; however,

following further discussions the key themes were reduced to eleven (i.e. 1 - team aims for the season, 2 - building a relationship, 3 - commitment, 4 - motivation, 5 - behaviours, 6 - closeness, 7 - trust, 8 - respect, 9 - belief, 10 - communication and 11 - incompatibility, disagreements and power struggles). A secondary analysis of the managers' transcripts to highlight additional specific data relevant to the eleven themes was conducted (see Appendix 8). This allowed draft sections of the Results chapter for Kelly to be produced and then discussions took place with my supervision team surrounding the data that was included. Further reductions to seven themes and adaptations of the key themes within each narrative took place before a draft of John's Results chapter was produced. A comparative process occurred where crucial information from both coaches' transcripts was identified, and compared and contrasted with the players' data that had been highlighted. Throughout the production of the Results chapter *theoretical memos* were noted to make links between the data and theory. Finally, following a couple of drafts of the Results chapter for both Kelly and John, it was highlighted that there was too much data and some needed to be removed to make it more precise. The chapter was completed once more data had been removed which was not considered important or influential enough to the coach-athlete relationship, to allow for the concentration and focus on greater quality within the Results chapter.

### **3.6 Judging the Quality**

A common position in sport coaching for judging qualitative research is the parallel position (Sparkes 1998, 2002; Sparkes and Smith 2009, 2013). It has been argued that judging the quality of research is dependent on whether the research is qualitative or quantitative; therefore, different criteria are required for each research method. The criteria for quantitative research mainly focus on validity, reliability and generalisability, whereas the criteria for qualitative research typically utilise Lincoln and Guba's (1985) work. Smith et al. (2014) state that Lincoln and Guba's (1985) trustworthiness criterion still remains the 'gold standard' for judging the



quality of qualitative research within sport. However, Lincoln and Guba's (1985) parallel position has been critiqued by Sparkes (1998, 2002), Sparkes and Smith (2009) and Smith et al. (2014). There are three main criticisms. The first one is that the suggested techniques to achieve aspects of trustworthiness are not appropriate for the logic of qualitative research. Additionally, it is stated that their work is 'philosophically contradictory' due to Lincoln and Guba utilising ontological relativism and epistemological foundationalism; however, the two beliefs combined are incompatible. Indeed, Lincoln and Guba altered their viewpoint in the late stages of the 1980s (Guba and Lincoln, 1989) and indicated that they did not believe in their 1985 proposals anymore (Smith et al., 2014).

Whilst a parallel method is still embraced within sports coaching, alternative positions have been produced following the critiques (Smith et al., 2014). Drawing upon on the work of Sparkes (1998, 2002) and Sparkes and Smith (2013), Smith et al. (2014:194) describe one of the stances as the 'letting go' perspective, and they suggest the researcher in sports coaching needs to let go '...of traditional views of validity that privilege techniques as the only way to guarantee trustworthiness, and calls upon other more relevant and appropriate criteria to judge the "goodness" of a qualitative study', in favour of a relativist perspective that is dependent upon '...time- and place-contingent lists of characteristics...' when judging the quality of the qualitative research.

Therefore, I would ask the readers of this thesis to judge the quality of the work based upon the relativist criteria of *substantive contribution*, *impact*, *width*, *worthy topic*, *rich rigor*, and *resonance*. The first criterion is *substantive contribution*. Here, a number of aspects need to be considered; for example, does the work further the understanding surrounding social life and is there a clear demonstration of '...a deeply grounded (if embedded) social scientific perspective? How has this perspective informed the construction of the text?' (Smith et al., 2014:195). Secondly, does the thesis make an *impact*? Does it affect the reader in an emotional or intellectual way? Are new questions or actions generated (Smith et al., 2014)? *Width* is another

criterion that should be considered. Is the work comprehensive and is the research of a substantial quality that is supported by strong evidence? Also, is it a *worthy topic* and is the research 'relevant, timely, significant, interesting, or evocative' (Smith et al., 2014:195). Another criterion is *rich rigor*, so does the thesis display findings in an adequate, profuse, suitable, data rich and complex theoretical manner? The final criterion that I would invite readers to judge this work by is *resonance*; in particular, does the research influence some readers '...through aesthetic merit, evocative representations, naturalistic generalizations, and transferable findings' (Smith et al., 2014:196)?

### **3.7 Chapter Conclusion**

In summary, the research paradigm and overarching theoretical framework which is adopted within the thesis is an interpretive-interactionist approach, specifically, it is underpinned by an interpretive symbolic interactionism which aims to highlight the following: (1) Human beings act towards things on the basis of meaning that they have for things; (2) Meaning is derived from and arises out of social interaction; and (3) Meaning is handled by and modified through interpretive processes (Poczwadowski et al., 2002). Therefore, the interpretive paradigm also provides a way to investigate how the coaches and athletes understand and respond to the interactions depending on the individual or surrounding setting (Potrac et al., 2014). The thesis will focus on exploring Kelly's and John's relationship with the athletes during the 2014/2015 season in relation to their interactions at training, games and social events. The thesis will also explore how the relationship between the coaches and the athletes changed over time in relation to key incidents over the course of the competitive season. Ultimately, in making theoretical sense of the data collected from the coaches and athletes at AUWFC, and linking the findings of this work to broader social issues, this thesis will build upon the work of Potrac et al. (2012) and Poczwadowski et al. (2002) by considering not only the 'life world' of the coach/es but also how interactions with their athletes shape *meaning*.

## **4 RESULTS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The following section provides rich verbatim examples of the coach-athlete relationships throughout the season within AUWFC. The first section starts by exploring Kelly's (first team manager/coach) aims and ambitions, and her perceptions of the relationships she had started to build and manage with players at AUWFC. Following this, the views of the players are represented and contrasted in relation to Kelly's views to demonstrate the relational nature of the coach-athlete relationship over time. The narrative further reflexively explores the impact of results upon this relationship until the point at mid-season when Kelly was sacked by the club. Following Kelly leaving the club, the story of the season continues by exploring John's (replacement first team manager/coach) process of building and managing relationships with the players until the end of the season at AUWFC. Due to the large amount of raw ethnographic and interview data collected over the season, extracts from the research diaries are not included in this Results chapter. Instead, the chapter focuses upon the data collected from the interviews with the participants, which were informed by the participant observations and field notes. However, examples of the field notes are presented in Appendix 5.

### **4.2 Kelly's Positive Start – Pre-season and the First Three Matches of the Competitive Season**

Kelly had a two-month pre-season period prior to beginning the competitive season with AUWFC. The first three competitive matches were very positive, with three wins out of three. The results were: North Side Football Club (North Side FC) [pseudonym], away league match, won 3-6; Association Football Club Ladies (AFC Ladies) [pseudonym], home cup match, won 1-0; and Feds Women's Football Club (Feds WFC) [pseudonym], home league match, won 5-3.

#### **4.2.1 Kelly's Aims and Targets at the Start of the Season**

When discussing her main aims at the start of the season, Kelly highlighted the importance of 'personally establishing myself within the club, within the setup, with players, and to be an effective coach at that level and manager at that level'. She further highlighted that 'there was some club priorities on impact and the culture that was at the club already. On results and being successful but also then developing the club off the pitch. So improving every angle of the club really, not just the on-pitch performances...'. To achieve these aims she described a process of working:

Starting at the club there were discussions with committee members and with the director of football to discuss what the club wanted to do. I wouldn't say they were written in stone, hard targets to meet but more ideas about how the club wanted to move forward. And then bits of those, discussed with the players, not necessarily sitting down going through everything but hopefully then having an understanding of where the club wanted to go. (Kelly)

Specific targets that Kelly was working towards with the team included:

Thinking about results and improved league finish. Previous seasons I believe had been seventh the year before so an improvement on that, a realignment or an improvement in the culture at the club, so the training culture and making sure more players attended training, perhaps worked harder at training, working more towards the philosophy that had been put together before I arrived, making sure that was integrated and instilled. (Kelly)

From a personal perspective, Kelly highlighted that she was working towards:

A positive relationship with players, a development, more of a professional approach and setup so bringing in additional support. Additional physio support if needed, additional

fitness work, additional coaching and one-to-one technical work to help players improve, to be successful, as the club wanted to improve on the league position from the previous season. (Kelly)

However, during the interviews with the players there was a consensus with all of them that the specific aims for the season were not passed onto the players by Kelly or the committee board:

I wasn't aware of them. She never made it clear to me as a player...I think it wasn't well communicated with the rest of the team...I didn't think we knew what was going on a lot at the time. (Emma)

Claire mentioned that she hoped it would be 'promotion or top three finish' and even though Marie stated 'there was a lot more behind the scenes stuff going on', she could assume:

Obviously ambitions to do well in the league but I suppose primarily it was more short-term focus, i.e. this is your fitness coach, these coaches are going to do this, and this is how we're going to set up for games. (Marie)

#### **4.2.2 Developing New Relationships**

Kelly discussed that at the start of the season she felt very positive about the up-coming season, highlighting that 'Obviously not having coached in that league before but having been around women's football in the area, watching it, playing it, coaching it, and knowing a lot of players in the league, a lot of clubs in the league, felt very positive that we could be successful.' She was, however, aware that:

Like any club, things that perhaps you don't see from the outside that once you're inside it are completely different to perhaps how you expect them to be. I think there was always

a lot of challenges and a lot of difficult things to overcome but didn't ever think that any of them were going to long-term impact the success. (Kelly)

In addition, Kelly highlighted that she felt that players could have pushed themselves and each other more; however, she also had to deal with the politics of the club and balance this against being cautious of the image she wanted to portray of herself:

I think there's definitely times players could have done more...I think players could have self-regulated within the team better, during pre-season I think they could have pushed each other more. And I think it wasn't so bad in pre-season because we had the group without too many injuries, but again I think being brutally honest there was a lot of politics in that club, more than in other clubs that I have seen. I think that sometimes negatively impacted what we were trying to do. That is part of football, we deal with it and try and get the best out of it and you try and do the right thing. I think again I probably could have called people a bit more on that and asked people to be a bit more honest and reflecting of themselves. I think sometimes that again comes from my nature as a coach, is sometimes players need to hear stuff they are not going to want to hear. But I don't always want to be the bad guy. (Kelly)

In highlighting the strategy that she employed to overcome such difficulties at the start of the season, Kelly stated that she was assisted by her 'style' and 'approach', in that:

I like to think I am quite an approachable person by finding out about them and talking to them about where they played before in previous seasons...having little chats about jobs and what people are doing so trying to build relationships with players. (Kelly)

Specifically, Kelly made an effort to find out about the players' personal lives, such as their occupation status and length of time at the club. Kelly further employed strategies to develop a positive relationship with her players through her coaching interactions. For example, she highlighted these strategies:

Through the coaching style on the pitch, so trying to put on sessions that enabled players to contribute and to put their ideas across. Having conversations about tactics and about individual performance and try and set some targets and work with individual players to try and pinpoint things they wanted to improve. (Kelly)

Three of the players, Laura, Claire and Emma, had no previous relationship with Kelly and expressed a similar approach to building a relationship via communication and interaction, whether that was in a group environment or one-to-one. Claire expressed that she tried to get to know her 'as a friend as well as a coach'. On the other hand, Marie had the basis of a relationship with Kelly of one to two years due to Kelly coaching Marie at a different club. Marie stated, 'I wasn't like really that close to her beforehand, it was just she'd coached me...' However, Marie said their relationship did help her with her confidence personally and getting back into football. When discussing some of the difficulties she found with building relationships with the players, Kelly highlighted how she found it hard to develop relationships with those players that were injured. Within the following example, she refers to me as an example of an injured player:

And it is difficult as well, I mean particularly for somebody like yourself who was injured, and if you like the injured [player], it's very difficult for a manager or coach, if you are always thinking about the players that are injured that you really want to be available then you are bypassing what's happening there...you'd send yourself crazy if you were always thinking 'oh, I wish so and so was fit and I wish so and so was fit'. So you have to try and keep them involved in the group but actually you have to focus your time on the players on the pitch...So I think it's always difficult as well to build those relationships with players when they are not involved regularly in what you're doing. (Kelly)

When discussing the important roles of the sports scientist and physiotherapist in assisting her with managing the injured players she highlighted that:

They [the assistant coach, the sports scientist and physiotherapist] develop those relationships and they've got a strong relationship with them that hopefully feeds back to the management team as a whole, but I think it is a real difficult juggling act to keep those players, keeping building those relationships with those players whilst focusing on players that you have because those are the ones in front of you and are fit and able to work with. (Kelly)

Three of the players mentioned the coaching staff and their roles. Laura stated that during pre-season the training sessions would be divided between Kelly, Nathan [pseudonym] and Becky [pseudonym]: '...Nathan would do the fitness side of it, Becky did [most of] the coaching.' Marie felt as though she had a positive relationship with Kelly due to 'the person she is'; however, she felt that Nathan and Becky contributed towards that in a positive way due to their strength as a coaching team. Emma believed she had a greater closeness to Becky than Kelly and this was evident due to Emma feeling more comfortable conversing with Becky about personal information:

I know that's weird...just talking about things that were going on. Like, how's school? It was always Becky who I had that conversation with, never Kelly. (Emma)

#### **4.2.3 Commitment**

When describing her commitment towards the club at this time Kelly highlights that she was:

...very committed from very early on. I am quite an ambitious person and I like to try and do things right...I think it's quite natural with most people that you want people to think you're doing a good job... I put a lot of time into it and there was a lot of time with players and then meetings with committee and other staff behind the scenes. So it was a lot of



time invested in it so I would have said quite early on I think I was very committed to it.  
(Kelly)

When discussing how committed she felt the athletes were towards her as the coach she highlighted different levels of commitment within the squad:

...I think different players, different levels of commitment and I think that always takes time and I think that's always different for every player. Some players are difficult to read, some players are difficult to know whether they enjoy what you are doing and other players aren't. Some of the players, whether that's through what they say or through their body language, it is quite obvious with some players and it's quite difficult to read with others...I was only there a short time and I think that was something that, certainly at that level, is something that probably takes time to build. And I think it happens at different rates with different players. (Kelly)

However, during the pre-season period Kelly highlighted that overall she felt that the commitment of the players was very good:

...I think other than holidays people would seem to be generally committed. I think because as well you get new players in and I think people always want to establish themselves and establish themselves with a group that I think over pre-season, and if you've got people that work in education or perhaps are not at work during the day and actually have more time to commit during pre-season. Weather is nicer, light evenings, I think it all contributes to people being more available and more committed to training and things during pre-season... (Kelly)

During the player interviews the players expressed their commitment to the club and Kelly. Laura stated she could also see Kelly's commitment through her actions:

She put a lot of time and effort in, on and off the pitch, at training and on match days...I think she was committed towards the club in terms of putting things on social media and her personal accounts. (Laura)

On the other hand, Emma expressed the view that she felt Kelly's commitment levels towards the players may have varied slightly depending on the individual:

...it was obvious to me from the start that she had people that she'd known previously, and I understand that, but I think that differentiates between favourites and maybe people that she didn't maybe spend as much time with. That's just my opinion personally, but I found that became more obvious as the season progressed. (Emma)

In addition, even though players had said they were committed to Kelly, Marie voiced a slight concern about a small group of players:

I think there were groups with different views and obviously being someone completely new into the club and obviously it's difficult because I don't know how they would have acted prior to that, but obviously there were coaches and stuff that people seemed to have strong bonds with prior to Kelly coming so there were mixed groups around the club of varying levels of commitment. I mean on a grand scheme of things I think it did develop but I still think there were bits that were maybe not quite right. (Marie)

#### **4.2.4 Behaviours**

Kelly viewed her behaviours towards the players at the start of the season as being 'generally quite good'. Specifically, that:

I was really keen and still learning about what I was doing as a manager. I had done a lot of coaching but I only had a limited amount of experience as manager...So trying to have those conversations, like the two-fold then as players and improving them as players and

finding out their motivations as players but also off the pitch. Being quite a question and answer coach, trying to find out their knowledge on the pitch, trying to find out why they are doing different things in training sessions, rather than dictating... My behaviours would perhaps be more inviting a bit of player input, a bit of player ownership around what happens on the pitch, but also trying to encourage self-management within the group, so trying to encourage the group to take responsibility and to ensure their peers take responsibility, their teammates take responsibility so actually it is not me or the other coaches or the other staff setting rules, actually players will call players out if they feel that they need to. (Kelly)

Kelly also highlighted that she found a difference in the players regarding the way that they would or would not interact with her. She highlighted that she believed that confidence was a big factor in players feeling comfortable in approaching and speaking to her:

I think most players want to impress a new coach or manager because they want to be playing, they want to be successful. So I think certainly in that period you get a really good response from players. Again such as the nature of different players, some players like to have lots of conversations and like to talk to you a lot and find out feedback, and others don't, or don't want to, or aren't confident to perhaps have those conversations. (Kelly)

Laura expressed that she felt a sense of responsibility at the beginning but also felt that Kelly was very approachable:

I've been at the club a long time, I think it's my duty to try and welcome her in and all the other players. Just make sure that everyone got along and felt like they wanted to be there to be honest...I could speak to her about anything really, regarding football. (Laura)

Additionally, Claire also believed Kelly was 'quite approachable' but also felt that there could have been more communication and interaction between the two of them: 'We had the odd

banter and stuff at training and match days. But maybe just a little bit more.' Marie also indicated that she felt Kelly was approachable and felt it was easy to have conversations with her:

Before a game it would be very much selfish 'what do you want me to do today?' speech. Afterwards if I got chance I do like to learn...about what I need to do better as well, so I'm quite happy to have a one-to-one conversation. (Marie)

However, in discussing some of the problems that she faced regarding the behaviours of the players Kelly highlighted that:

Some didn't always come prepared; whether that is the nature of the level that we are at, whether they have come straight from work and haven't eaten, so actually then that impacts their training and the level they can put in. I think there's always, and there certainly was then, some element of some players don't push themselves as much as they should. But as a group, as a whole, good. (Kelly)

To manage this situation Kelly highlighted that:

You can be very, draw a line: if you don't do it, you don't play. But I think that's not my style. It is more about rewarding those that do but also giving those that don't a chance because as well in a limited squad, if you turn off some of your best players by having a go at them when you are still learning about their characters and how they respond to that, and particularly as a new manager at that level, you could very quickly find yourself with a very small team. So it was a kind of like testing the water situation of how to deal with those sorts of things. (Kelly)

Kelly also expressed that she felt a 'positive vibe' and 'coming together' from the players and staff following the encouraging results at the beginning of the competitive season. Additionally, the players mentioned how Kelly portrayed a very calm and positive nature, which Marie specifically highlighted: '[she was] always looking for the better in things even if sometimes

maybe some people didn't welcome it'. Marie also believed Kelly's positive behaviours could be infectious to some players and especially to herself:

I mean it falls down to she's a passionate person, obviously think that was a step up for her as well so she was again trying to prove something for herself and everything...I respect her and I think I would be committed and would be driven and try and do stuff because obviously I could see from her point of view that she was very passionate about it herself, and I think if you see someone passionate about something you want to help them and make that work for them. (Marie)

Emma also discussed Kelly's behaviours as being 'happy and jolly'; however, Emma felt her young age may have impacted on their relationship and felt there was a level of awkwardness between the two of them on occasions:

I think people underestimate how much it does...not they don't treat you with the same respect, people aren't quite sure on how to approach you as a person. (Emma)

In addition, Laura expressed the view that Kelly's behaviours could sometimes come across differently depending on the individual or group of players:

I think she had her favourites. I think the players that she brought in, I think she obviously knew them better than us old ones that have been at the club for a while. So I think her behaviour to them was a little bit different to us lot. (Laura)

Marie indicated that there was very little negative behaviours from Kelly:

There's never really any anger in Kelly, I've never seen that in my life...I think she'll always do what she can to avoid that [confrontation] and minimise any conflict, it's just her as a person. (Marie)

Claire discussed a similar opinion about Kelly and felt she could come across as being too nice when it came to team selection:

I felt on match days, she had too much of a big heart and she wanted to play everyone, if she could. I don't think she always played her strongest team. (Claire)

#### **4.2.5 Closeness**

During the pre-season period Kelly highlighted that she viewed the closeness between herself and her players in the following way:

There's nobody I didn't get along with. I obviously built relationships with some players, because partly of how they responded to me or what they gave and again I like players to talk to me, I like players to be interested in what we are doing and if they do I will then automatically give them more of my time. Alongside that, there was obviously a small group of players that I gave lifts to training that I obviously had more time in the car to chat about what they've been doing during the day, or generally not talk about football but talk about university or work or those sorts of things. So that meant I probably built the relationship with some players quicker than others which is natural. Again players that are injured and not around the group as much or travel from further, so perhaps only train once a week and things. Certainly always develop those relationships a lot quicker with some players than others. For me, personally, I would certainly say that, and whether this is right or wrong, I think it is probably human nature, I like players that respond and that want to have chance to have those conversations. I undoubtedly, consciously or subconsciously, probably give them more time than I do other players. (Kelly)

Similarly, when reflecting upon whether she felt that the players liked her at the start of the season Kelly articulated how this can be complex when working within a team sport:

...I would like to be liked by players and I'd like to have that relationship but it's not the be all and end all...when coaching kids, it is probably more important. Genuinely some

players are so difficult to read that I would genuinely have no idea if they like me or not. And there's probably some that I thought did and then perhaps didn't, and probably some that I thought didn't and perhaps did, just...because of how they showed it...I didn't have a go at people necessarily. Not that you do anything that much to turn people off but that might in turn make people think 'oh, you should be doing it this way or that way'. But I generally think I might be wrong, that the way I coach and the work and effort that I put in and the time and...I think people could see that and I think that's probably endearing whether you like the person or not...I wouldn't go home and cry about it if I thought somebody didn't like me but I would be disappointed about it because, like I say, that's part of the way I coach, part of my style is I want players to want to work for me, because I want them to work for me because they want to, not because they are scared not to...I don't think any of them particularly disliked me but there was obviously some that preferred me than others. (Kelly)

Three of the players, Laura, Emma and Claire, all indicated that they prefer a professional relationship with their coaches. Laura highlighted that she favours this type of relationship rather than becoming more like friends because she believes she may become complacent and lose her focus and concentration on football. Laura also stated that she felt she had a positive relationship with Kelly; however, due to inconsistency with team selection some players' relationships with Kelly varied:

...the relationship was better with the players that she brought in, rather than the players that have already been at the club for a while. (Laura)

Claire also highlighted that she believed both she and Kelly liked one another; however, Claire stated, 'I think she wanted to make everyone happy', which led to team inconsistency. Additionally, Emma believed there was a mutual liking; however, due to the lack of closeness compared to other players' relationships with Kelly, she found this to be difficult:

That communication barrier really started to emerge right from the beginning, and I think obviously it developed more over the season...I've always got along with her but when she came in I started to get to know her but then as pre-season came to an end and we started playing the games, I felt like we didn't have that closeness that a lot of the other players did have with her. (Emma)

Marie believed that even though she knew Kelly on a personal level prior to joining the club, she kept her relationship professional at football:

I got to know her more, and with me and her I felt personally that I managed to keep things as in like friendship and then football, like keep it completely separate, and I guess maybe she allows that to happen because of her non-confrontational approach to things, whereas if that were to be a different coach and they were a bit more angry towards you because of something, it would probably make it a little bit difficult off the pitch but I've never found that an issue with her. (Marie)

Whilst Kelly was generally positive about developing new, close relationships with the players at AUWFC, she also highlighted some minor frustrations that she experienced in this role:

I think it can always be a lonely place because everyone looks to you. So I think that can be difficult. But it is also an opportunity and why I do it. I think sometimes it is frustrating when you want to put so much into it and you put a lot of time and energy and effort into it, and you look at some players and think you could be doing more. I think that's frustrating. (Kelly)

When further discussing if there were incidents that had made her experience anger at the start of the season she highlighted that:

It takes a lot to get me angry; I am not particularly aggressive or angry person. Might have been frustrated, might have been disappointed with the way certain things went, maybe



have been disappointed if we did some fitness testing and some players I don't think worked as hard as they should have. But I don't know of any incidents that would have made me angry. (Kelly)

During the player interviews, they struggled to recall many instances when Kelly showed frustration; however, Marie felt a sense of frustration from Kelly when players brought their personal issues to football:

...obviously she's a very calm and collected person and very good to talk to and good to help out and things like that...and I don't know if this just because I'm close to her but you could sense a bit of, I don't want this at training or around football, this should be kept elsewhere. (Marie)

When discussing if she felt that the players had experienced similar emotions, Kelly highlighted that:

I think players often show their frustrations in training if they are not playing well, and annoyed or frustrated with themselves, possibly don't enjoy the session you put on, might not be specifically geared to them, might be about other players or other units. But I think players will show differently, some will show that physically, their behaviours. (Kelly)

Emma and Claire expressed that they did not feel frustrated at the beginning of the season, but both discussed occasions later on when they did. Emma stated that she found training frustrating when it was 'very stop-start':

Often when she had a point it wasn't shared amongst the whole group; it was to that person. Everyone wanted to hear it because you might be in that position some day and you might not know. (Emma)

In addition, Claire felt frustrated about match days due to the inconsistency of team selection: '...after we've won the week before, she would change the team or sub you or something'. Claire

understood that during pre-season coaches rotate the team to look at options; however, she felt at times it was unnecessary and 'a little annoying'. When discussing whether she felt as though she was getting along with the players at the beginning of the competitive season, Kelly responded:

I think when you're winning games it's always easier, people are happy...I think it was quite a natural selection on the pitch as well and the players on the bench, I think it naturally fitted quite well in those few games. I think the players were very positive about what we were doing. (Kelly)

When asked if she believed the players liked her more and felt closer towards her due to the positive start she commented:

Probably just enjoyed football more because we were winning. Did that affect me? Maybe I got a few bonus points because we had done all this work in pre-season and first few games had gone really well...maybe that brought some more belief in me, maybe that brought some more respect. If we hadn't won, if we'd lost all three then probably that would have negatively impacted that. If there'd been a mixture of results I am not sure that would have made too much of a difference from winning...it was still about building that closeness and that relationship was still very early days...football is probably the most dynamic sport, so many factors and so many things affect it and so much luck involved in it that, but I think we were developing a good group, a good environment. (Kelly)

Two of the players mentioned how winning the first three matches of the season helped the team morale. Laura stated that she did not necessarily feel closer to Kelly but said, 'I think the team probably gelled slightly', and Marie agreed:

...it was obviously more of a happy environment...I suppose maybe there still might be the few people who are not quite buying into it but as a whole, we're winning and people are generally always happy when [we] win. (Marie)

#### **4.2.6 Trust, Respect and Belief**

When reflecting upon the trust that existed between herself and the players and her perceptions of trust in the players, Kelly highlighted that:

...it is that initial stage to a relationship. I think you probably are still sounding each other out. So there was nothing that made me distrust players. Looking back on it, probably should have declined some of the information I was given by other people and made my own opinions but I was given a lot of information by other people in the club about different individuals and how they responded to things and what sort of players they were, what sort of people they were, and probably on reflection I probably didn't need to know that...and maybe that might have influenced how I treated players, it may not have...I think that...people wanted to do the right thing and they wanted to help me and they wanted me to understand the group, but I am not sure that was always helpful looking back on it. (Kelly)

When reflecting upon the respect that existed between Kelly and the players at the start of the season and if she believed that the players respected her, Kelly stated that:

...I think when you look for respect through how you work rather than through fear it takes longer. But I'd always prefer it that way. I think showing your knowledge, showing that you care, showing that you can do a good job builds respect. But it doesn't build it as quickly as shouting at people and doing very strong punishments and rewards. That's the way I prefer to work. (Kelly)

When asked to reflect upon whether she thought that the players believed in her abilities to be a success as the new coach of AUWFC, Kelly highlighted that she thought the process that the club went through gave her a sense that the players believed in her abilities:

...I would like to think that they understood the process that the club had gone through, that I believe from what I was told the players had some input into the recruitment process and at least some of them, whether it...was all of the players or not ... having some conversations from players, I know that some of them were asked about the coaches that they'd seen on the recruitment process and that some of them had told me that they had given feedback that they prefer me to other coaches. So that gives you a little bit of information about whether they believe in you. I also think automatically most of the players had a lot of respect for the director of football and that they realised that he'd brought somebody in that they should follow, that that's the right person for the job...but then it is up to you as a coach or manager to make sure that you fulfil that...I'd like to think there's not something in particular that they wouldn't have believed in me. (Kelly)

Laura began the season a little unsure about Kelly; however, she felt '...I have to believe in her because there wasn't much point me being there [if not].' Furthermore, Laura thought the three wins at the beginning of the season had a positive impact on the team's belief in Kelly:

I think even coming up to the first game of the season, I think people were still a bit optimistic about how it was going to go...I think winning the three games did help with people believing in Kelly a little bit more. (Laura)

Emma also agreed with Laura, stating her belief grew because 'she was creating a winning side'. However, even though the players interviewed, and Marie herself, express belief in Kelly, she questioned some of her team-mates' belief in their coach:

If we're talking as a group, I think it is a bit of a mixed bag again because of people's attitudes towards her and their respect levels, whether they gave a hundred percent, I don't think that's the case. (Marie)

Kelly also believed that the players felt comfortable about approaching her if they needed to; however, she did state that the 'less confident younger players' may have found it more difficult but did not believe it was due to anything she displayed towards them. Furthermore, Laura felt that due to Kelly being approachable and easy to communicate with, she had a good basis on which to build their mutual trust, respect and belief. Claire said she did not always approach Kelly but felt as though she could have if she needed to, whereas Emma did not feel as though there was open communication between her and Kelly and felt there was a boundary between them:

I always felt like it was very difficult to approach her in a lot of ways. I felt like if I were to share it, it wouldn't get looked upon, or really thought about what I was saying because I was young. (Emma)

#### **4.2.7 Incompatibility, Disagreements and Power Struggles**

When discussing her views about the honesty that existed between herself and the players, Kelly highlighted that:

...some are difficult to read and I think that is difficult when you are wanting to get information from them but you are not always sure if you are getting their honest opinion or whether you are getting what they think; [that] is always a concern and always a concern for some players. But also, then, was what they were saying to you the same as what they were saying [to others] ...and I think often seeing them behave one way and then telling you something else, you can see the two differences. That can be really difficult and I would say within the club in particular that was probably more challenging than has been in other clubs that I have experienced. (Kelly)

Kelly felt that there are always going to be disagreements about tactics and formation generally in a team environment; however, she believed that the conversations she had with players about

them became something positive and 'a little bit of problem solving of how to still make things better.' When asked about the impact of disagreements on her relationships and whether she felt there were any power struggles she stated:

...I don't think there's any instances that affected the relationship negatively in those first three games. I think it was all about if there were things we needed to discuss improving for the benefit of the group...I think in general there may have been some small power struggles but because results were good I don't think that was an issue as such, but I don't think it was smooth in the same way. (Kelly)

The players interviewed all believed they did not have any power struggles with Kelly; however, they felt that other members of the team did. Claire stated 'it was out of her hands' and Emma believed Kelly's power struggles were with the more senior players of the team:

...especially the players that have been there a bit longer or quite experienced and actually know a lot who didn't take into account what they were saying enough. (Emma)

Marie also believed Kelly experienced some power struggles:

...I think this, again, is related to those people who were maybe closer in groups at the time and maybe certain players were playing that maybe shouldn't have been playing and that got spotted by other people in the club and caused a little bit of a rift. (Marie)

Emma expressed that witnessing the power struggles may have impacted negatively on her relationship with Kelly:

May have put me off, that is part of it. I really didn't want to be part of any power struggle. I knew that because obviously she had more power in the club than me and that is just how things are. (Emma)

### **4.3 Kelly's Poor Results – Fourth to Ninth Matches of the Competitive Season**

The middle stage of the season for Kelly was more negative than her previous three games. The team lost four matches and drew two. The results were: Park United [pseudonym], away league match, lost 1-0; Borough [pseudonym], home league match, lost 4-0; Wanderers [pseudonym], away league match, lost 4-1; Olympic Ladies Football Club (Olympic LFC) [pseudonym], away league match, drew 2-2; Hill United [pseudonym], home cup match, lost 0-4; and City Ladies [pseudonym], away league match, drew 4-4.

#### **4.3.1 Developing New Relationships**

When discussing any critical moments from her middle six games, Kelly highlighted that at the beginning she was still finding difficulties with selection:

...because of holidays and availability, and individuals' approach to the previous game...one of those games where you know the opposition's quality, but you feel like you can compete at periods within the game...different players in and out again...and playing players in some of their first games...it's even harder to integrate new players when so many of the older, more experienced players who have been there longer are unavailable through injury or holiday. (Kelly)

Kelly believed that the time period of her seventh to ninth matches '...was probably one of the most important periods...for the time I was there'. Throughout the matches she felt the team '...showed an ability to fight...' when they may not have before, but failing to convert chances in front of the goal has its downfalls and a lack of concentration and desire when leading has a negative impact on the result. Furthermore, during this period of the season availability and selection were affected by the 'don't train, don't play rule'. This appeared to be a problem throughout Kelly's time with AUWFC. Kelly believed that this period '...showed that we didn't

have enough leaders...' and the team during this time did not have enough players that stepped up, but she felt it was negatively impacted due to the injuries to the squad. In addition, Kelly reiterated her perceptions on the matter when she suggested:

...on the back of the poor results, the then frustration that, actually, the results weren't as bad, but relating that to the games and the ability to disappear for periods again was probably an indication of not enough leaders in the team at that point. (Kelly)

#### **4.3.2 Commitment**

The good start to the season was followed by two draws and four defeats. Kelly felt that even though the results were not in their favour, there was '...an engagement to want to do better and to make results better and get back to where we had been earlier in the season...' from all of the staff and players. During this period, she felt that there was:

...a clash of, not commitment, but a difficulty for some individuals to manage their commitment to what we were doing, with their lack of confidence or their additional concerns related to the opposition, certainly in the Borough game. So, I think that affected some individuals negatively and their commitment to what we were doing, but as a short-term concern, not a longer-term concern. (Kelly)

During the interviews, three of the players expressed views that during this period their commitment levels did not change; however, Emma explained that her commitment levels did begin to decrease:

I think I didn't play for about three, four games in a row so those three losses, the ones afterwards we lost, and I lost my commitment at that point, like what's the point of me turning up, am I going to play. She didn't speak to me about it either, she didn't explain to me why she was doing what she was doing. (Emma)



Kelly also felt as though during a ‘...key point...’ of the season, other aspects impacted on the players' commitment to ‘...pulling in the same direction...’, due to ‘...the politics of it, and the complexity of...relationships, ex-relationships, marriages, length of time at the club, new players, old players’. However, Laura felt that some of the players’ commitment decreased due to being ‘complacent within the squad’ because of the three wins at the beginning of the season. Laura also believed this impacted on their commitment to coming to training and their effort level when at training.

#### **4.3.3 Closeness**

When discussing whether both she and the players liked each other, Kelly said:

I liked the majority of the players. I think by then there was no reason to not like people...I don't think anybody had displayed necessarily particularly strong characteristics that I didn't agree with...with certain individuals there's always things that you would rather they didn't do, or you try and work on, but I'm very much of the mind of, I'm not going to dismiss somebody or make decisions about players very early and dismiss them because of something they do, or a characteristic they show. That is my job to improve them and to develop them. (Kelly)

Kelly was asked about her closeness to the players:

I think it's always easier when you're winning, I think everyone would admit that...so we'd gone into three defeats in a row, I think as a coach or a manager...because you want to make things right and you want to do things well...you start to perhaps worry about that a little bit more. But I'm not sure it had a big effect, I think I still felt relatively close. I think I was developing those relationships with players that I didn't get to see as often, if I was only with them at training. And I think by that stage then as well...my assistant coach had

started to take more responsibility, which enabled me then to have more...conversations with individuals and spend a bit more time, stepping back and having a look at how people train, and then having little chats and conversations with them. I mean before that I think it was really important that I took the lead role; one, so that players could see me and what I do and how I work and what I expect, but two, so that there could be that clear picture of who was doing what. (Kelly)

Following three losses and a draw, Kelly felt as though her closeness to the players did not change 'drastically', but their experience of fighting back to earn a draw in one game helped with the closeness in a positive way. However, she did feel the closeness was impacted negatively:

I think the closeness a little bit was affected by some players not being able to play every week...I think the closeness was affected by having the different eleven on the pitch every week. I think closeness would have been better if we'd have been having a bit more consistency in the team. (Kelly)

Kelly was asked during this period of the season whether any players showed anger or frustration towards her. She stated, '...I could certainly pick some individuals that perhaps showed some frustration towards the circumstances, but not towards me.' When questioned if she ever exhibited anger or frustration towards her players, she said it was mainly frustration '...with not delivering what some players should'. Kelly was asked how she felt the working relationship was with her players:

...I think reflecting on starting to see things creep in...I think there were some warning signs that not everything was great. But when you don't win games that can be more evident. It could be there when you are winning games but you just don't notice it as much. (Kelly)

Kelly felt in the second part of the season that the relationship between her and the group was still working but '...was more strained...'. During the player interviews, two of the players felt

similarly to Kelly. Claire indicated that even though she did not feel that close to Kelly in the first place, following the three losses she began to distance herself. Additionally, Emma also did not feel close to Kelly:

I suppose at this point I was starting to lose it a bit more so of course that trust was going, so I still respected her but...we were becoming more and more mutual, because she didn't really speak to me much at all at this point; like I don't even remember her saying hi to me at training sessions and things like that, which was difficult. (Emma)

However, even though two of the players did not feel close to Kelly, Laura discussed that she felt a little closer to Kelly during this period, '...because now I knew she believed in me and obviously gave me the vice captaincy'. Even though Laura felt close to Kelly, she wanted some aspects to improve:

Frustrated, probably the words I'd use, just because of her mentality towards the games we lost, and not really picking up on the negatives, trying to think, oh, we did this, we did that well, but...we lost three games so we need to work on something because obviously it was going wrong. (Laura)

Marie always stated she had a close relationship with Kelly and results did not impact on that:

I mean [I was] obviously disappointed about the losses but I never put that down directly to her...I think it was a mixture of a lot of things. (Marie)

#### **4.3.4 Trust, Respect and Belief**

When asked whether she perceived there was trust between her and the players during the poor run of results, Kelly felt that one of the matches where they changed the formation during the game and there was a good response from the players showed a positive indication

of what the team was trying to do and the mutual respect. Following two more draws and one defeat, Kelly was asked whether she trusted her players and she believed that their first draw in that period showed '...a real clear example of how important that trust relationship was...' because:

....there was an incident that happened before it, that meant a player was playing out of position and had a negative approach to the game because of it, and had a really poor first half. After the half-time discussion, had an absolutely brilliant second half. I think that showed the importance of that communication, information, respect, of actually going, when they are clear with their roles and responsibilities, they trust and we can see the impact of that. (Kelly)

When asked about respect Kelly stated:

So if you don't train, you won't play, and there were certain rules. Although that hindered us in a lot of ways with getting the players that we needed on the pitch together, I think that was required to instil that respect for not just me and the work that me and the other coaches do, but also respect for each other. (Kelly)

Kelly believed that there was a good level of mutual respect between herself and the group but thought there was not enough '...respect for each other within the group'. Kelly was asked about the mutual belief between herself and the players:

...looking back at how some of those games went, that belief, I think, was starting to be cut away at but was enough there still for players to go out on a match day, believing that we would get a result. I don't think there were players that went out thinking we're not going to get a result today. I think the belief was there in what we were doing. (Kelly)

During the player interviews, Marie and Laura said that they trusted, respected and believed in Kelly; however, Laura was looking for a reaction to the poor results:

It was, for me, to see as well how she bounced back from the three defeats. So I was quite intrigued to see what her mentality was going to be like. (Laura)

Emma discussed her respect for Kelly during the interviews:

I was still very respectful of her and her position and what she was doing because it's just as hard for a manager just as it is for the players, and at times I did feel sorry for her because some players weren't performing to the best of their abilities. They were going on there and they just didn't look like they wanted to play...it was so demotivating, and in the end I could see that she was starting to get a bit lost, like what do I do, but I still respected her and I would like to think she respected me still. (Emma)

Emma also felt that Kelly may still have respected her; however, she stated, 'I think she didn't value me as much as she maybe could have done.' Also, Emma thought that Kelly's belief in her had faded:

...she didn't speak to me about it at all and that's what bugs me...I didn't know but I assume she stopped believing in me a little bit...because she just wasn't playing me enough and obviously this is going to make me believe in her less. (Emma)

Claire shared similar views to Emma, stating that she still respected Kelly and '...what she wanted to do and how she wanted us to play...'; however, she began to lose belief because '...it just gets to you when you're not doing so well...'. Claire also thought that Kelly's trust and belief in the players may have reduced slightly due to the poor results. On the other hand, Laura felt Kelly still believed in her and the players, but that may have been more towards certain players in the team:

I think she was still trying to work out her best formation and her best team. And like I said before, as well, I think she had certain players she wanted to start anyway. It was, you had to fit around those players she had in mind. (Laura)

#### 4.3.5 Incompatibility, Disagreements and Power Struggles

Following the four losses and two draws, Kelly felt as though some complications were beginning to show regarding power struggles:

There was potentially between players, but I don't think there were power struggles between [myself and the players], I think it was an interesting situation because of the complexity of the relationships already within the group...I don't think there was necessarily a power struggle as such there. I think there were some individuals that were difficult to manage and almost tested that relationship. Not wanting more power necessarily, but because it was new, kind of testing that relationship, seeing how far they could push it. (Kelly)

Marie believed there were no power struggles between herself, Kelly or the other players during this period; however, even though Laura, Claire and Emma also did not feel they had any personal power struggles with Kelly, they did recall power struggles between other team-mates and Kelly. Laura believed one player had a power struggle with Kelly and stated:

I think that player just got even more complacent to be honest. I think the players that she brought in were also complacent because they knew they were going to start. (Laura)

Emma also said '...there was one obvious one for me...' but did not specify who. She also felt it affected her and Kelly's relationship:

Not massively, but in a way it's because I looked up to those players so I was like, 'oh, they think that'. Like, that must be the way it is. (Emma)

Laura also felt that Kelly did not effectively deal with the power struggles she had, which impacted on their relationship because '...as a manager you want her to be a manager and not have that [friendship] relationship'.

#### **4.4 Kelly's Sacking – Tenth to Thirteenth Matches of the Competitive Season**

The latter stage of Kelly's time at AUWFC saw the team lose all four matches. The results were: Ladies Football Club (Ladies FC) [pseudonym], away league match, lost 4-0; Town Football Club (Town FC) [pseudonym], away league match, lost 2-1; Rovers [pseudonym] home league match, lost 1-3; and Olympic LFC, home league match, lost 2-3.

##### **4.4.1 Commitment**

Kelly suggested that her levels of commitment never altered during her brief time at the football club:

I was doing a lot of work behind the scenes with promotion. I was...putting things on the website and social media and...attending committee meetings and trying to help organise things, as well as all the coaching stuff...obviously I felt frustrated and down about the results, but I don't think my commitment levels ever changed. (Kelly)

When asked about the players' commitment levels to training, matches and the club in general she said:

We actually started to get more at the Thursday night session and continue the numbers on a Tuesday night...I think that continued reasonably well. There were still players that were unavailable for selection through injury, through courses, through holidays, which impacted that commitment from there. (Kelly)

On the other hand, even though Kelly expressed that Thursday night training sessions had improved, Marie still felt they were not great:

I think Thursday training was the lower levels of attendance yet I would still be there. I think people were maybe getting a little bit sick of the training being repetitive, but I think

from the coaching front and from a personal point I was still committed. They were still committed. They were there every Tuesday and Thursday. (Marie)

Laura discussed an increase in commitment to try and change the results the team were getting; however, Emma felt the opposite:

This is when it [got] low – got a bit dire [about] the whole thing, because I just was like, ‘oh my word...what is going on?’ Especially after the game against Ladies FC and Town FC...I played Ladies FC and I remember that was just a horrible game. It just wasn’t working. And Town FC, like what is going on here?...I was totally annoyed about the whole thing. My attitude had changed towards football at that point. (Emma)

#### **4.4.2 Closeness**

Due to a number of injuries and absentees, players from the reserves had a longer stay in the first team, which meant relationships had to be built and closeness was impacted:

[The relationship was] good but strained because of the frustrations that everyone shared...almost like trying from scratch to build some relationships with players. So players that you perhaps expected to come in for the odd game, from the reserves, actually realising that because of the long-term injuries or the additional injuries we were picking up, that actually having to build stronger relationships with those players because they were going to be more involved and more of them more regularly...when really we should have been focusing on moving the team to the next level, we were almost back at square one and having to build from the start again. (Kelly)

When asked whether Kelly liked her players she stated:



...I don't think there was any point where I disliked my players. I mean there was always times where you're frustrated...There were always times where I think some players could have been more positive about what we did...I personally prefer players that are going to engage with me and going to offer opinions in a right way...around this point we had a team meeting which probably wasn't as successful as it should have been. (Kelly)

Kelly believed that the meeting was beneficial for some topics of discussion; however, she thought it could have been more constructive:

I think lots of things were said but not always in the right way. I also think that not all the group were good at listening. They were good at talking but not listening and understanding, putting their feet in other people's shoes...that comes from emotion and from care for the club and wanting to improve, the frustrations and stuff...and as well there was some stuff that was left unsaid between players and between the group, which probably didn't help. (Kelly)

Kelly felt that following a few more matches the closeness between her and her players varied:

In some ways closer because we were all sharing the same frustration...and wanting to be in the same place. And other times not close because...it's your job to pick your players up after defeats, but there's not always somebody that picks you up and you have to do that yourself...week after week was quite difficult to remain positive when you don't see a change in things. (Kelly)

Kelly felt that even in the situation the team was in there was no anger but maybe frustration:

...probably did start to show more frustration because of wanting us to be successful and it not coming off...trying to keep it in all the time is difficult. I don't think anger as such...even when you're trying to tell players that they're not doing the right things, I don't think that necessarily comes with anger. (Kelly)

She also felt the frustration was not just one-sided:

Frustrations generally, but I don't think they were necessarily directed at me, other than if they'd been dropped and didn't agree with it. (Kelly)

#### **4.4.3 Trust, Respect and Belief**

Even though there was a run of four losses, Kelly still felt there was a level of trust within the group:

...because of the run of results some players might have started to question what we were doing, but I do genuinely believe that the majority of players looked around at what we were trying to combat and realised that it was going to get better. When you've got your first team squad of up to twenty players only available for half your league games, then I think everyone gets that. But then that sometimes can be clouded still by emotions and things. (Kelly)

Kelly believed during this time she showed her players respect and that it was reciprocated:

...for the Rovers game that I wasn't at, I made some changes to the line-up that day and dropped some players and...I made sure that I made phone calls to them in the morning of that game, so that even though I wasn't going to be there, they understood what was happening. I think that contributed to that, and even though they would have been disappointed about being dropped, I think they would have respected the fact that I'd picked up the phone and had that conversation with them on the morning of the game. (Kelly)

Kelly was asked about belief during this struggling stage:

I still believed in the players. I think the majority of them believed long term it was going to be alright. I think some of them probably around this time struggled to believe on a match day that everything was going to be alright. (Kelly)

#### **4.4.4 Incompatibility, Disagreements and Power Struggles**

During Kelly's time the main disagreement that occurred was due to a decision about the Rovers match. Kelly remembered one particular player showing their dismay and said there may have been more but no one else voiced their opinion as strongly. Kelly explained:

...because of injury, because of unavailability, I had to select a different captain. And I discussed that with all of the management staff and I don't think the choice was popular, well, clearly the choice wasn't popular with everyone. And it was a really difficult choice but it was one that was supported and even championed by some of the staff, without me even...saying first, and there were maybe four players under consideration for it. And it was chosen to try and in some ways get a reaction from that player, to step up. And I think some other players didn't understand that. And maybe I didn't explain that well enough...it comes back to we didn't have enough leaders, there wasn't a huge amount of people putting themselves in a position to do that. Now I get that that was potentially an unpopular choice, but it also was a popular choice in some ways. It maybe didn't work, it may be over a longer period, if I'd stayed it may have been better. (Kelly)

Laura indicated that one of the main disagreements she had with Kelly throughout her management was the captaincy choice for the Rovers match. Laura had also highlighted that she felt Kelly had a power struggle with one particular player throughout her time and was confused when that player was made captain for the match:

Obviously that player became captain, so this was after Kelly had spoken to our captain, me as vice-captain, [and] Stacey [pseudonym] [assistant manager], on our opinion on this player being captain. And she went against all of what we said and still made her captain. (Laura)

Additionally, Emma indicated that she felt a sense of disagreement with Kelly from some of the players about her captaincy decision:

I think there were a fair few disputes about that one because I think there was someone else that people wanted to be captain – I can't remember who that was...But there was obviously some disagreement between her as management and the rest of the squad, and that's never good within the team. (Emma)

Overall, Kelly did not feel that the disagreements impacted negatively on her relationships:

I think they probably still just disagreed with it...I probably didn't dwell on it too long because there's no time to do that...So you can't spend too long worrying that one person disagrees with a decision you made, because, let's be honest, as a football manager there's very rare times where...everyone's going to agree...It's very rare that you're going to keep everybody happy...If you dwell on the fact that people disagree with some of your decisions...you're not going to spend the time doing what you need to do...it would have concerned me because I want people to think I do a good job...So if people disagree with things that does eat away at me a little bit, but it also can't be my main focus...There are other things that, conversations, incidences, things to deal with, pressures, and they don't have all the information...You can't share that information with everybody and you don't need to and there's more important things to focus on. (Kelly)

On the other hand, during the player interviews Laura highlighted that the disagreement regarding the choice of captain for the Rovers match negatively impacted on her relationship

with Kelly and also on other players' relationships with her. Laura said, 'I'd lost a lot of respect for her', and felt it impacted on the other players' relationships because:

...everyone knew what this individual player had been like from pre-season. So players couldn't believe that she'd actually been made captain of the club. (Laura)

#### **4.5 New Management – John's First Three Competitive Matches and Two Friendlies**

Due to the disappointing first four months of the season with Kelly in charge, AUWFC decided to remove Kelly from her managerial role. Following two months with an interim coaching team (i.e. two youth team coaches), John was subsequently offered and accepted the role of manager at AUWFC. John began his time with three losses and two wins; however, two of the losses were friendly matches against opposition in higher leagues. The results were: Sporting United [pseudonym], home friendly match, lost 0-8; Albion United [pseudonym], away county cup match, won 0-12; Rovers, away league match, lost 2-0; Harriers Ladies [pseudonym] home friendly match, lost 0-5; and North Side FC, home league match, won 3-0.

##### **4.5.1 John's Aims and Targets for the Remainder of the Season**

John became the new coach at the beginning of February. He met three times with the board to agree objectives and aims to ensure everyone involved was happy. The position when John took charge of AUWFC was eleventh, second from bottom, which meant there was only one main aim:

A very clear objective from the Chairman was to stay in the Premier League, escape relegation...whether it's third from bottom or top. (John)

John brought in his own coaching staff, along with an assistant who he had worked with for a number of years. The two of them had different views on the remainder of the season:

It's quite interesting because I was quite optimistic; I looked at the remaining fixtures and felt that Athletic can stay up. Matt [pseudonym], my assistant, was pessimistic...He's not convinced and it was a big risk for us to take it on because as a duo we've never been relegated, we've only once been in a fight to escape relegation before, so it's brand new, never come into a club mid-way through a season either, so it was apprehension coming into the season, a little bit of excitement, a new challenge that I'd never experienced before...I saw that as a positive. (John)

During the player interviews, three of the players mentioned that they undoubtedly knew that the aim for the remainder of the season was '...to stay in the league...'. Laura explained the process that John went through:

He had a meeting with him [Chief Executive] first and then he sat with us and asked us what we wanted to do. And then he said what he wanted out of the rest of the season as well. (Laura)

Marie also highlighted that she felt:

...at that point it was pretty hard not to be able to be crystal clear what the aims were, get out of relegation zone really as much as possible. (Marie)

Claire discussed similar thoughts to Laura and Marie and stated, 'he just made us aware of what was happening...it was a lot clearer once John came in.'

#### 4.5.2 Developing New Relationships

John and his team came into an unfamiliar situation to what they were used to by joining the club mid-way through the season. This meant a different approach to building a relationship with the players was required:

I asked many of the players what was good and what was bad, some individual and some as a team – ‘tell me the good things, tell me the bad things’ – and then I worked on what they felt needed to improve and started to work on them and things that were good, we tried to continue those things...so it was pretty positive from the start and I think the players responded pretty well to that and I think it reflected later in games as well. (John)

During the player interviews, Laura highlighted that her approach towards a new coach when building their relationship did not change:

[I] just worked hard in training. He kept me as vice-captain as well, which was good, but nothing majorly different from what I've done before. (Laura)

Emma discussed her confusion about their relationship when John first took charge:

I remember it was a bit strange at the beginning. I didn't really know what was going on because, he didn't play me for the Rovers game and then he didn't play me for the Harriers Ladies game. I think I came on for 20 minutes at the end and I was like, 'oh, God, the same thing's going to happen again.' And that annoyed me a lot...this is so upsetting. (Emma)

John discussed his first official encounter and competitive match with the players:

I remember Albion United being the first game and getting players' names wrong, telling everyone what number they were...everyone was like 'you want me wear that number?',

not realising everyone had a squad number...They went out and it was obvious they were going to win and it gave me an insight to a lot of the players instantly. (John)

Laura also highlighted this incident during her interview:

We turned up quite early so we could discuss set plays and obviously he discussed with us what we had done previously under Kelly with set pieces, et cetera, so he was understanding what we were doing before. And then he changed it all. [Laughter] I think he came in with an attitude of 'I'm manager and this is what it's going to be like.' So he changed squad numbers, set pieces. But obviously it was against a team lower than us so we were expected to win. (Laura)

Laura indicated that it was not a major issue for her:

For me, personally, I was quite happy with it and nothing really changed for me anyway. I kept my same squad number shirt, but I think a few players were a bit disheartened and a bit miffed that he's only just come in and this is what we used to do and now it's, well, I don't do that anymore, so I think people were a bit apprehensive of what he was going to do for the rest of the season. (Laura)

She also explained that John reverted to the players choosing their squad numbers:

I think he did realise that some of the players have had the squad numbers for years. So I think he went back to that. Obviously over the next few games he changed the squad numbers back to the original ones, but I think at the beginning he wanted to stamp his authority down. (Laura)

Due to three competitive matches and two friendlies against Sporting United and Harriers Ladies, training was impacted:

There was hardly any training and I somehow wanted to try and get a structure in the shape and individual work with players, which I couldn't do because it was game after



game after game. Despite the club really wanting the games at Sporting United and Harriers Ladies, it was a big thing for the 25-year anniversary, it was something I just didn't want to do. I'd rather somebody else have taken those games and I'd just watched. It was great for the club but it wasn't something I was really interested in because I thought it was detrimental to Athletic staying up. That's how I thought about it. (John)

John indicated his approach to building a relationship had to be slightly different:

I probably had to be a lot sterner and more aggressive than I would normally be in terms of building it up. (John)

Two of the players commented on John's approach to the remainder of the season. Claire hoped that it was not different to how he would approach a season if he began it as the coach, whereas Laura felt his approach was different:

...because obviously he was under pressure. We weren't looking great in the league so I think there was a lot of pressure on him to deliver and keep us in the league. (Laura)

#### **4.5.3 Commitment**

John explained his commitment towards the club:

One of the things I said to the Chairman and why I brought in Matt [and] Alex [pseudonym]...I'd said from the very beginning 'I have a young family, I have a 50-hour-a-week job and I'm doing a degree distance learning that requires a lot of time. So I cannot be at training all the time and may not be able to be at games all the time; however, whenever I'm there I'm fully committed', which sounds a bit strange and that had to be explained a little bit. Phil [pseudonym] [Chairman] took that on board but the goalkeeping coach [Stacey] understood that, and I think passed on that to players to say, 'look, John's

fully committed but there will be times when he's not going to be about because of these things', and that happens and I think that seems to be okay but I wouldn't do the job unless I felt I could achieve something...I have to be hundred percent in achieving, it's not just a social thing for me, it's winning. (John)

John felt fully committed towards the players straightaway:

I mean I had to make up my mind about players pretty quickly, positions, their commitments, how they worked, and I'm not afraid to say I got some of them wrong. I think I got some of them spot-on correct but by the end of the season I think I'd learned quite a lot, who's who and what they do and what they were all about. (John)

All four of the players mentioned that they believed John was committed to the players at the beginning. Laura felt John was 'completely' committed and Emma agreed:

He came in; he was like, okay, new club, new objectives. So he was very committed...He wanted to get the best out of the team and out of the club. (Emma)

Claire also felt strongly that John was committed:

I think I got that from the first time I met him and when he spoke to us about what he was looking to do for the club and he made it quite clear. (Claire)

Even though Marie believed John was 'really committed', she still questioned him due to his history at previous clubs:

He wanted to get us out of the relegation zone but I think for me at the time I recall having this thought process of, like, why has he gone through so many clubs? What's the deal here? Is this completely selfish motivations as in, like, I'll come and rescue the day and then I'll bugger off again, so I was very much, a bit dubious. (Marie)

John indicated he felt little commitment to him from the players:

I felt it at the very beginning but I'd just started getting into the norm and the honeymoon period's over. It was a little bit the players wanted to do it their way instead of my way and that took a long time to embed in...So I wouldn't say they were committed to me in any shape or form and it wasn't probably until the end of the season when they looked back and they said 'actually that was quite an achievement that we had'. (John)

Three of the players specified that they felt they had good levels of commitment to John. Emma stated:

I felt pretty committed at this time because I was like, okay, it's a new start. Let's make a good impression. (Emma)

Claire expressed a similar outlook:

I was still committed, still fairly high. Definitely up for the challenge and seeing what us and John could do for the club. (Claire)

However, again Marie expressed concerns about John:

I felt committed in the sense he had authority over us and there was a lot more of a strict setting and that the training was more focused and driven and everyone seemed a bit more switched on...but then at the same time, what they were trying to do with formations and things like that, I didn't buy into it at all at the time, to be completely honest. So I guess I was a half and half, like not really believing it yet but I'll give it a go because I love playing football and I'll try and win but not necessarily believing that that was the way you're supposed to do it. (Marie)

John suggested the players' commitment to the club varied throughout the team:

At Athletic I think there's a mixed bag. I think there's a core Athletic crew within the club that are Athletic through and through regardless, and they can be really down but committed to Athletic, then there's the others that treat it as 'it's just football' and want

to play and it's quite social. In my opinion there's not enough that want to do it for Athletic and treat it as a serious ambition. (John)

Two of the players described their commitment to the club:

I think the commitment at the start when John came in, as a whole, from everyone, improved, because the training previously had lapsed on the Thursday whereas everyone seemed to be making Thursday training somehow. From a personal point of view there was no change really. (Marie)

Laura indicated an increase in commitment:

I think I felt even more committed because I wanted the club to stay up in the league. I'm going to do my very best to help that. So I was probably more committed than I've ever been to Athletic. (Laura)

John was asked whether it impacted the team in any way:

It's the norm for this level of the league, so every team in this league will have something similar in their ranks. If you win the game or have two or three wins on the bounce then it's great, two or three defeats on the bounce, then everyone turns, and it's a really fine balancing act between managing that, because the players can turn the dressing room individually and then there's a difference between a rotten egg and a bad apple can appear and you've got to deal with that...So it's down to results because they ended up being pretty good last year because we were winning games. (John)

#### **4.5.4 Behaviours**

John felt the players' behaviours were positive towards him at the beginning:

...because I chose the team on what I thought was right, regular players were suddenly on the bench, so there was an essence that they've got to do something to get their place back, so they responded quite well to that, the majority. I thought it was pretty positive in their response of trying to do the right thing, per game, and it was a game at a time rather than looking to the end of the season and what we can achieve, it's 'in this game, can you do this?'. (John)

Claire agreed with John regarding the players having to fight for their starting place:

I think a few of us didn't really know John so [there were] places to play for, so just proving yourself to John really. (Claire)

John expressed again a different approach in his behaviours towards the players:

I was probably more aggressive than what I normally would be because I'm not normally a 'throw a teacup around the changing room' or shouting kind of person in the dressing room but I probably had to be a little bit more. I certainly had to get a little bit more motivation into them about scrapping for a game instead of playing football, which was the hard bit for the girls to understand, but they did it, they got the results from it and I think afterwards they went 'yes, we don't like it but it's getting results'...It's got to be done... 'so let's just get on and do it'. (John)

#### **4.5.5 Closeness**

John believed he got along with the majority of the players:

I don't think there was anybody that were really disgruntled bar one who moved on, which in hindsight actually was more than disgruntled with me, it was issues behind the scenes, nothing to do with football actually, but other than that I felt the players and I got

along...if we didn't...it's not that we didn't enjoy each other's company but there was respect there. (John)

During the interviews, the players described varied levels regarding whether they got along with John. Emma again voiced concerns about her age and lack of playing time at the beginning, and Marie mentioned the lack of friendliness:

...there was still that element of fear or whatever you want to call it so it wasn't as friendly and it was a lot more, this is football and that's it, that's all there is to it, but it wasn't necessarily a bad thing. It was just different. (Marie)

However, Laura felt that she and John got along quite well:

I think when he first came in, he was quite easy to get on with. He had quite a bit of banter about him, amongst players and that. And obviously with him coming in he didn't really know any players so he was literally quite fresh and he just saw us on face value. (Laura)

Claire also expressed similar views to Laura:

I got a really good vibe from him from the get go really. So I was looking forward to the next few weeks working with him. (Claire)

Even though John believed he got along with the players, he felt as though the players did not like him, However, he believes respect is more important than likeability:

...it's one of the things as a manager, it's nice to be liked but it's something I have to realise that some players won't like me and I have to deal with that, and I don't mind if players don't like me as long as they respect me and the club and what we're trying to achieve. As soon as respect goes out the window it's lost. (John)

Laura and Claire both stated that they liked John. Although Marie and Emma were unsure at the beginning, Emma felt as though she could get to like him:

I didn't really know him. But he seemed nice; he seemed personable. He seemed like quite a professional manager, which is what I wasn't used to, as such, with Kelly. The professionalism wasn't quite there at times. So that was quite nice – refreshing. (Emma)

Marie was slightly more negative:

I wouldn't say we were best mates and I wouldn't say we hated each other. It was just a very much a mutual, 'okay, well I'll have to respect you because you're a bit scary and that's all there is to it.' (Marie)

John stated he did not feel as though he knew the players:

I felt I was going into a room of strangers. I hadn't got a clue of personalities and that was the biggest thing, the dressing room personalities and the cliques, as people call it, or the gossip and things like that, that you just don't know what you're going to get and I didn't know any of the players' personalities or what they're going to...be like, so I had no idea. All I knew was that there will be people that wouldn't like me, there'd be people that would love me, there'd be people that would gossip, and you just have to try and work out who they are and then work out what motivates them and what gets them on your side. (John)

He did not feel close to the players:

I've never been that close to players, I don't think it's right to be. That's where, again, my assistant is closer but the goalkeeping coach, she's obviously a lot closer to the players and what I like to have is a person like Stacey who is in between the players and myself...Because if the players start to see you too pally with other players they start to make judgements, normally incorrect, but they make misconceptions about what's going on and why this and she's his favourite and she's been picked because of this and I don't like that...So I try to stay out of that but I have other people that's in between that I gain

an understanding of what's going on without actually sometimes directly talking to them.  
(John)

Three of the players highlighted that they did not feel overly close to John due to their relationships being at the early stage:

Not really that close but there hadn't been that time period of X number of months or anything beforehand to get used to him [because] there wasn't that pre-season stage so those first few games were part of pre-season effectively...I know that from my own point of view, it takes me a bit of time to get used to things like that so I think that's just a work in progress. (Marie)

Emma also mentioned a lack of closeness:

I think there were other players who got close to him quicker...some of the players who maybe had a bit more of a reputation within the club, he immediately meshed with. Me not so much, I think, because I was a new one as well. (Emma)

However, Emma did comment that she felt closer to John than she had to Kelly at the beginning: 'I think that was maybe partially because I'd had male coaches in the past.' Claire also said she felt '...as close as can be...' to John following a short period of time getting to know him. John stated that he liked to keep his relationships professional:

...keep a distance and keep it professional so then I'm not falling into a trap of people misjudging me. (John)

John indicated he did not feel angry or frustrated with the players during the first three competitive matches:

First three games was [for] learning, it was to go... you can't get angry or frustrated over something you don't know they know and they've not understood it, they haven't had time to take it all on board, but when you're six, seven games in and you're saying 'play



forward, play long' and they're...trying to square it across the back, then you do get angry and frustrated because they're not listening. Well, they are listening but not actually taking it on board and doing it, so you do get angry and frustrated. I can assure you, when I show my anger and frustration, it's only a small percentage of actually how I feel. If you're ever on the bench, you'll hear me mumbling and swearing under my breath but not out loud, so people on the bench will clearly hear that I'm really displeased about things but I then have to be diplomatic and talk about it in a different manner than actually just shouting about it, it doesn't resolve anything. (John)

The players did not recall many instances when John showed frustration towards them during this period. Two of the players, Emma and Laura, highlighted the Rovers match as the stand-out occasion:

I remember on the bench he was very frustrated that game. Because the game was on; the weather conditions were awful. I think that was the first time I saw it and I was like, 'ooh, this is strange. Why is he getting angry?' I don't think that was at the team; I think that was more at the weather and the ref and things like that. (Emma)

Laura supported Emma's views:

Obviously with the Rovers game, we lost...it shouldn't have been on in the first place, but I think he was frustrated at the fact that we shouldn't have lost the game. We worked so hard as a team, which we haven't done for a long, long time. So, maybe frustration on the loss, but not at the players. (Laura)

John recalls instances when players showed anger and frustration towards him:

They showed it towards me but it was probably aimed at actual players. So I can remember in the dressing room at one game, it was the North Side FC game, and somebody going... saying out 'if you're not going to work hard and you don't want to be

here, just get off the pitch, don't come back' and it was quite aggressive in nature, it wasn't directed at anyone but everyone in that dressing room knew who it was about...And players do get angry and frustrated and it's then how you deal with that. So I can go two ways, I can agree with them and try and bring it up or I can actually say it's unfair and, depending on the player and their nature is how I will react. And I know with that particular player and later in different circumstances, I've got quite angry against them back, to pipe them back down but other players, I might say '...not right, I understand what you're saying but I don't agree'. So you have to be diplomatic and it depends on the personality of individual players, which I didn't know at that point; now I do. (John)

#### **4.5.6 Trust, Respect and Belief**

John felt that he trusted the players from the beginning:

I'm the type of manager that puts trust into the players to go and do it first, and then if they don't do it then changes might have to be made but you have to trust your players and I had to trust the players that they were going to do the right thing. I always give them options to try things, it wasn't 'do it this way or you're out', it was 'try this and let me listen to your opinion and then we'll go from there', but you have to trust them and fully trust all the players. (John)

Two of the players indicated that they believed John trusted the players, with Claire stating, 'I think he had a lot of trust for us'. Laura agreed:

I think he had to because obviously we were the players that he had to work with to get us out of the mess so I think he had to trust us completely and vice versa. (Laura)

On the other hand, the other two players felt a lack of trust from John:

I don't think he really thought much of me to begin with, because I was the young one on the team. So he wanted to play the girls who had more experience, understandably, as any manager would. But I think he learned to trust me as the season progressed. (Emma)

Marie discussed a similar feeling:

Not to the same level as from Kelly. Because at this point I was still a bit unclear on what he was trying to get out of it. (Marie)

During the player interviews, Laura and Emma highlighted their positive levels of trust in John. Laura stated she trusted John because 'I had no reason not to...' and Emma stated:

I think I immediately trusted him. I think that's strange but as a manager he gave off quite good vibes. (Emma)

Emma felt like this because:

I think it was predominantly his reputation. It was like, 'my God, this guy must be good at what he does'. And then he came and obviously his presence...and the fact that he was bringing the first team and the reserves together more, because there'd been a massive divide. (Emma)

However, Marie did not feel as though she trusted John:

...that was just down to me not really buying into what he was doing and in terms of how we were supposed to win these games. (Marie)

John previously mentioned that respect was important to him, and during the player interviews Marie stated, 'I think it was there to a degree. It needed to be worked on...' Laura also agreed:

I think it had to build. I think there's an instant respect because obviously we wanted to stay in the league so I think it was built up quite quickly. (Laura)

Claire also highlighted that she respected John:

I respected him...it's tough being a manager and...coming in mid-way when the club is not doing well, and I think it shows the person he is. (Claire)

John felt the belief between the group had to be built but it gradually grew with the results:

I think once we got that first league victory and once we started to get results, they wanted to believe but didn't believe in us until we started getting results. Where we scrapped out results and formations, which we'd never tried before, actually worked and that was a gamble on my part because if it didn't I could have lost the respect of players and trust of players, but it worked, so they did believe and that was a big motivation and why we escaped relegation because unless they believe in that, they're not going to try hard. (John)

During the player interviews, Claire discussed an increase in belief:

I think he probably believed in us more than what we did when he first came in. I think he brought that out of us again and got everyone's confidence back up. (Claire)

However, Marie showed hesitancy again:

I think he obviously believed in us because he said that he was going to come and get us out of the relegation zone so there must have been some belief there, but I think there were bits that mainly doubting when he was talking about new players and we're kind of going back to playing Sunday league football, rather than playing proper football, that maybe the belief wasn't quite there, and because it was so scripted that maybe someone's not really trusting you to just play football how you know to. (Marie)

#### **4.5.7 Incompatibility, Disagreements and Power Struggles**

John indicated that he felt the relationship with the players felt unbalanced:

I think there were certain players that shared their opinion and disagreed with my views and philosophy...I could name a few that wanted to do it a certain way, which I disagreed with, and had to try and coach them round to just do it and sometimes I had to say 'look, just do it, you can worry about that next year when we're high up the league or whatever, worry about it then but for now just do it. It's up to you, you can either do it or bail out, it's up to you.' (John)

John felt he did not have many power struggles or disagreements at the beginning with the players:

Probably only the one, the opinionated player and did her own thing, even following the instructions only did fifty percent, a little bit of mine, did a lot of her own stuff and I had to balance that out of what she contributed but in the end, fine. (John)

Three of the players felt there were no power struggles or disagreements with John during this period of time. Emma stated:

He came across as quite a powerful figure and quite secure, and he wasn't favouritist, and that for me was quite refreshing because I think we'd had that quite a lot previously. (Emma)

On the other hand, Marie felt she had a slight disagreement and power struggle with John:

Just over what he was trying to do. That was it really and just maybe the way he went about doing it. (Marie)

John explained that if he had disagreements or power struggles with any player, he did not allow it to negatively influence their relationship:

...I always take it that that's their view and opinion, whether we agreed or not is another thing, but I've had many disagreements with several players. In fact our relationship with one is much stronger now because of that, because we both aired our views and opinions

and got it off our chests, got it out there and then she had her way, I had my way and said 'my way is the way we're going to do it, so just deal with it, it's up to you'. So I've had that with a few players but it doesn't cast my opinion on the player because that's their view and opinion...It's emotions of the game, emotions of training. You don't know what's going on behind the scenes for me or the players, so whatever argument, whatever celebrations you have, you've got to bring it back down to a neutral position somewhere along the line, so it never changes my mind about the player. (John)

However, Marie felt her disagreements with John affected their relationship:

It starts it off on a little bit of a negative footing if you don't really agree but at the end of the day he's a football coach, he's not my best mate, so I can't say I'm really that bothered. (Marie)

#### **4.6 John's Mixture of Results – Fourth to Ninth Matches of the Competitive Season**

During the middle stage of John's season with the club, they experienced three losses and three wins. The results were: Saints Women's Football Club (Saints WFC) [pseudonym], home FA cup match, lost 0-3; Wanderers, home league match, lost 0-2; Street Football Club (Street FC) [pseudonym], home county cup, won 13-0; Hotspur City [pseudonym], away league match, won 2-3; Borough, away league match, lost 6-2; and Town FC, home league match, won 3-2.

##### **4.6.1 Developing New Relationships**

The relationship with the players was still quite new and faced some tests:

I remember there was, what I think was a turning point of defining the shape of the club, being in the dressing room at a training ground, talking about the shape of what we were

going to do going forward and I started it by allowing the players to have an opinion, hoping they would come through to the same way as I was thinking, and there was one or two that disagreed and it was starting to turn the rest and I got quite aggressive and said, 'that's how we're going to play...Like it or not, you've got a choice, either we play that way or I walk away now', and it was quite stubborn....And the attitudes then reflected back the other way, there was more in support of me than against and from then on more worked with me and it just drove those two or three that were against. (John)

John also felt the Hotspur City match helped to build his relationships with the players:

...that was the game we decided beforehand we are going to play three, four, three here onwards, and that was the game if we had lost might have turned out different for the rest of the season, and because it needed to gain the confidence of the players, and I think in the manner we won, because I think we went one nil up, two one down and then won, three two...Well, when everyone came off the pitch I remember buzzing, how well they had won the game, probably not expected to because Hotspur City were doing all right and it really worked out, and there was suddenly, I wouldn't say an over-confidence, but just a little bit of belief that this maybe is the right way to go and more players that maybe weren't quite on board after that came on board. (John)

#### **4.6.2 Commitment**

John felt very committed to the matches and training sessions and believed that there was a similar feeling amongst the players:

...I felt it was based around the Hotspur City game, so we arranged a minibus which cost the club a bit of money that they didn't want to pay, but [I] insisted on having a minibus and bringing everyone together...And I think that actually helped. There was a cohesion

between the group of players that maybe hadn't been seen before, travelling together, and that showed throughout the game and afterwards, so that was important. (John)

However, John felt the players' commitment to him was still divided:

I think there was half the group with a big question mark, let's see how this works out, and...to be fair to the players I think they had come in with the attitude we will give it a go, we will give it everything we have got and then see afterwards, and because we won and in the manner that we won, there was that new-found belief that actually this is probably right. (John)

During the interviews, Marie and Emma suggested that prior to the Hotspur City match they were committed, although they were still uncertain about what John wanted them to do. Emma then stated, 'little did I know he had plans...to change the whole thing'. Marie also identified the Hotspur City game as a 'turning point':

...ok, maybe this is working for us; even though we don't agree with it entirely, it's doing something right. (Marie)

Following the Hotspur City win, Emma said, 'I was so committed to this. I was like, this is going to work. We're going to do it.' Additionally, Claire stated she was 'highly committed' and Laura agreed:

I think more than ever because obviously with the new formation and everything that was going on, I think I felt more committed to be at training so I could work on things. (Laura)

#### **4.6.3 Closeness**

John believed he was beginning to get along with the players slightly more during this period:



I think there was a little bit more openness after the Hotspur City game in particular because they have gone 'yes, we are on to something here', and there were a few more questions and answers. It wasn't always well done, so pat on the back and everything else, it was genuine what if this happens, a concern, because they want it to work but could see where it might not work, so the fact they are asking questions again, it was good. The players responded good overall. (John)

He also felt the players began to like him a little more or were more accepting of him and his plans:

I think there was a change of attitude towards me. I think there was a little bit more, yes we want it to work, and if it's going to work we are going to have to work with him whether we like it or not. Some players'...body language told you I am going to get on with it, others were like yes, they were more open towards me and a bit more conversation...there was a bit more cohesion between myself and the players. (John)

John felt the relationships were still developing at this point of the season:

...I felt probably a little bit closer but not as well as I do in longevity...but I felt I got to know them a bit better because they were open to me and asking questions; you got into discussions which meant you felt you got closer to them...Because they opened up, I could answer questions and get in to interact with them, then we both drew closer together rather than one to the other. (John)

During the player interviews, Marie discussed how her relationship with John was still 'relatively new' at this stage of the season:

...I think he takes time to get to warm to players, and you could definitely see that at the time he was very much he has got a job to do and that is what he was going to do. (Marie)

Marie stated she felt ‘...closer but still not as close as I could be...’ to John but described her increased liking for him:

I think I liked him more because I was starting to think ‘maybe you do know a little bit about what you are talking about’. (Marie)

Emma suggested that she wanted more from their relationship during the stage of the season when they played Saints WFC, Wanderers and Street FC:

I was getting along with him...I think there was a little lack of communication. He wasn’t quite explaining to me why he wasn’t playing me. And I was like, but you’re telling everyone else...I think he realised that I clocked onto that. I don’t think he did it intentionally; I think he just forgot, which often happens. You get pushed aside a little bit. But you make it clear and then he changed it. (Emma)

Following the conversation, Emma had more opportunities to play and felt their relationship grew:

...I felt he trusted me as a player. Because he was playing me and I was playing well because I had that trust behind me and I think that’s all I ever needed. (Emma)

John indicated that he regularly felt anger or frustration towards the players during the matches:

Every game [laughs]. There would always be an element of frustration and anger that I would reflect, not often out onto the pitch but under my breath on the side-line and to Matt and maybe to Stacey...but [it] is a little bit of self-reflection and not necessarily showing it. I then have to step back and say right, I am frustrated with what has happened, how do I get them to do what I want them to do rather than just yelling and whatever else, because I know that won’t work. (John)

The players saw different levels of frustration from John. Laura felt it was too early in his role to show his true frustration:

I don't think he could have done to be honest, because obviously we were still quite fresh with him and it was still quite new so we were trying to work out his ways of training and playing. (Laura)

However, Marie believed there was frustration from both sides but there needed to be an acceptance of John's philosophy:

I think even though there have been the frustrations earlier on with all the players and the formation, I think that at this point it was the way that things were being done was getting embedded into the club and people were just at the point of we need to accept this now as this was the only thing to do. (Marie)

Additionally, Emma also witnessed frustration from John:

It was on the sidelines...I think that's just the kind of manager he is. When we lose, he wants to win. He's competitive...He just wants to get the best out of people as well, and I think that maybe doesn't come across too much – but I know that's what he wants. (Emma)

#### **4.6.4 Trust, Respect and Belief**

John felt that he trusted his players and it showed with the change of formation:

You have to trust the players, but you also have to answer their questions...I have never done the formation before...So I had to study and research it myself on how I think it should work at this level and then you have to get that message across to the players, which is not easy, so you have to trust them in effect that they are going to try and do it. (John)

Following the crucial match against Hotspur City, the players then showed more trust after the winning result:

After the game they trusted me more. Before the game they were apprehensive, I think there was an element of, 'well, we will trust you for this game', that's what it felt like, and then after the game it was like 'yes, now we trust you. Now we get what you are on about. Now we get what you are trying to achieve and what you are trying to do.' So I think from there onwards, right to the end of the season, there was trust back to me for sure. (John)

John believed there was respect shown by both the players and himself:

I think trusting them is respecting them and listening to them, trying to answer those questions...I had to bring players from the reserves in. I remember Sharon and Verity being on the bench at Hotspur City, and I think they had both got on for about one or two minutes to wind the clock down and they had travelled all that way and played one or two minutes, and I had to explain to them tactically why I did it, and they were very understanding, and you have to respect those players for that, and I think there was respect from both ways. (John)

John's belief was always there for the players:

I always thought they could do it. It is actually getting the best out of the players that was the tough bit, because if they don't trust me or don't respect me then that's going to be tougher to get them to do tasks, but because they did find that within themselves, I thought they responded decently. (John)

John felt the players believed in him following the win over Hotspur City after playing a new and unfamiliar formation:

I think they did beforehand to a degree but apprehensively; they wanted to believe in me but didn't until after the game...none of this is verbal to me but in body language and cohesion between the players and team spirit, morale. (John)

All four of the players recalled an improvement in their trust, respect and belief in John following the win at Hotspur City. Laura believed the respect grew and it showed through an increase in communication:

I think after that Hotspur City game he spoke to me a bit more before match days. And obviously I was captain as well during those times [due to availability]. (Laura)

She also agreed with John that the minibus to the Hotspur City match helped:

...it's always tough to go up to Hotspur City. I think the minibus helped massively in terms of team morale...So it was a great idea to get us all together. (Laura)

Claire felt that her trust, respect and belief levels for John were good and were growing due to the three wins. She also felt a change within the team:

...the way we were playing [and] the atmosphere. I think the girls were a bit more chirpy, livelier during training, so it was positive really. (Claire)

Marie agreed that there was an increase due to the results; however, still felt there could have been an improvement personally:

I don't think it was as good as [it] could have been...but I think it definitely improved from the previous games and that was purely based on the results really and the way the team was and how we were bonding. (Marie)

#### 4.6.5 Incompatibility, Disagreements and Power Struggles

John stated that there were disagreements prior to the Hotspur City match and felt relationships were not working. A team meeting was called on the 17<sup>th</sup> of March to discuss the formation change and it did not go the way John was hoping:

...by the time we got to the point where I felt right, we needed to play a certain way, do a certain thing and at that point...they either had to buy into it and work with me or if they were insisting in doing their thing, I would have walked away that night...It was that close...So at the beginning it was tough because I really had to convince them to do something different to what they're used to doing and in the end the relationship really did work. (John)

Following the win over Hotspur City, John felt he experienced minimal power struggles with his players:

There were a couple of players that thought they were big time Charlies, but from my perspective if they weren't performing at the level I wanted, they wouldn't have been in the team, I would have been on top of that. There are a couple of players that expect to play and think they will play every week in, week out, but I don't like that kind of attitude, the arrogance of that at the time...apart from before the Hotspur City game and changing the formation, there was a little bit of a power struggle at that point but not at this point; now going forward to the end of the season is fine. (John)

The players discussed disagreements and power struggles during their interviews. Claire believed there were no power struggles at this time of the season; however, Laura felt there may have been one with a player and it showed during the team meeting:

...obviously we didn't like the formation and he gathered that we didn't. And in that meeting, the player that I'm on about, she voiced that she didn't like it and she didn't

think the team was good enough...And she played in the Hotspur City game and we won, so I think she had to eat a bit of humble pie. (Laura)

Emma also recalled the meeting and highlighted the same player as Laura:

There was a meeting and there was one particular player that I can remember was very 'no, no, no, no, no. Why are we doing this? It's not going to work'...It was quite awkward but I was like, 'come on – let's give it a go. And if it doesn't work, he's the one who's going to be paying for it.' (Emma)

Additionally, Marie still believed there were disagreements within the group but felt the winning results helped to limit them:

...still a little bit in terms of how we were playing and how we were expected to play but I think most people had quietened down because we were doing better and I think we were on our way...out of the relegation zone. (Marie)

#### **4.7 John's Positive Finish – Tenth to Thirteenth Matches of the Competitive Season**

The last four games of the season saw John and his team win all four matches. The results were: Ladies FC, home league match, won 4-1; Football Club County (FC County) [pseudonym], neutral county cup final, won 8-0; Park United, home league match, won 2-1; and City Ladies, home league match, won 2-1. AUWFC's final league position was sixth, which is the highest the club has finished in its history.

##### **4.7.1 Behaviours**

During this period, positive behaviours began to show more:

There was less, I wouldn't say criticism, but there was less concern about future games because we are coming towards the end of the target we are set to achieve, has been achieved, and we set ourselves new goals in saying actually if you win this game today, we are actually going to beat last season...So that was amazing to say you can come in for nine league games and end up being better than the season before, so you always try to set new challenges, which was well respected by the players. (John)

He felt as though the players reciprocated the positive behaviours:

...because they were on a high they were motivated, they were moving forward, quite happy now to play the formation and keep that going, better understanding of it game by game and continued. (John)

#### **4.7.2 Closeness**

At the end of the season John felt as though everyone was getting along better:

Because there were a few more smiles and there was less pressure, I felt there was a little bit more banter, a little bit more fun about the camp. (John)

John has previously expressed his desire to keep his relationships with the players professional; however, he did feel a little closer to the players on a personal level at the end of the season:

I think I have always encouraged and always wanted to do social gatherings which is not your typical just going bowling or something, so someone suggesting a night out is a difficult thing, for me as a manager, because should I be out on a night out with the players drinking? As a manager is that my responsibility? How does that look to other people and how does it look to the players? So you have to judge that, but I also know that when you go out and socialise with those players if everybody is invited and everybody is coming



out, you end up getting into quite a few conversations that don't come out in the dressing room or at the game day...and then you have to maintain your professionalism even when you have had a few drinks and not let the cat out of the bag or any secrets...you understand players a little bit differently. What you learn about the players is more their personal lives and personal things that they don't let on, that in a relaxed and different environment they tell you a bit more, which helps you understand them when you get back to the football field. (John)

He also believed the social event helped the players feel a bit closer to him:

...I think they saw I was human. Until that night out and they saw that I was willing to go out and have a few drinks and have a few shots and not be stupid or do anything daft, I felt that they realised that actually he is human, he is just another person, and I think it has made it easier going into the next season and following games to be a bit more approachable. (John)

All of the players expressed an increase in closeness towards John during the last four matches of the season. Marie stated she felt closer '...because we were winning'. Additionally, Laura felt her and John's closeness had grown due to the results and because '...[we] started winning as a team and morale was high'. Laura also discussed the social event:

Obviously when everyone goes out everyone's a bit more relaxed. It was probably good to see everybody in a relaxed and happy environment where we've not had that probably all season. So, it was probably a really good thing to do on John's behalf. (Laura)

Claire believed everything was 'very positive' during this period of the season and Emma expressed positivity towards John:

I did like him very much...I thought he was really a good manager and what he was doing was fantastic. (Emma)

Emma also felt her relationship with John had grown:

Never unprofessionally close but close enough where...I could look up to him and I could respect what he was doing and his ideas and themes. (Emma)

John felt there was little frustration and anger shown during the last four matches:

Only what might be the norm of where they weren't doing their task I might have asked them to do and then we share a little comment on the pitch. (John)

All four of the players agreed with John that there was a lack of frustration from John or the players. Emma stated:

Because we were winning, we were doing what he'd been saying, we were playing in very much a way that was defensive – so it was get the ball, play it long. And I think that got us through that last bit of the season. That's what we needed to do. We had no other choice; we couldn't play football. That happened in spurts but it was never going to be pure football, because we didn't have time to develop that. (Emma)

#### **4.7.3 Trust, Respect and Belief**

John felt there was a mutual trust, respect and belief between the players and himself: '...definitely between the players, because of the results we had gained and how high we felt...'. The player interviews highlighted an increase in trust, respect and belief in John from all four of the players during the last four matches of the season. Marie indicated:

It was a bit of like 'ok, you were right, I was wrong', but it was good, it was good that everyone entered into it and what was required and actually paid off. (Marie)

Additionally, Emma believed 'it was going really strong' and stated:

I think he trusted me a lot because he was playing me every game [laughter] and it was paying off in a lot of ways. So it was really good – really positive. (Emma)

#### **4.7.4 Incompatibility, Disagreements and Power Struggles**

John indicated that there were no disagreements or power struggles at the end of the season and all four of the players interviewed agreed. Emma stated:

I think all power struggles had been blown off...everyone accepted what he was doing because it was working and everyone seemed happy. (Emma)

Also, Claire believed there was a lack of power struggles and disagreements because they needed to act as a team:

I think at this time we needed to just stick together and just get along and just go through this together. (Claire)

## 5 DISCUSSION

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to provide a theoretical analysis of the data in the Results chapter, which focused upon the relationship between the two participant coaches and the four players over the course of an entire competitive playing football season. Particular attention will be paid to the three research questions posed within the thesis Introduction:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): Over the course of a full competitive season, *what* events, interactions and behaviours occurred in the coach-athlete relationships?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): Over the course of a full competitive season, *how* did these events affect the relationships between the coaches and the group of athletes over time?

Research Question 3 (RQ3): Over the course of a full competitive season, *why* did the coaches and the group of athletes perceive that the relationships had changed over time?

In an attempt to address these questions an analysis and the subsequent interpretation are offered. They follow a symbolic interactionist stance (Blumer, 1969) which is principally concerned with how the participants' experiences are shaped by their understandings of the interactions that they take part in (i.e. meaning arises *in* and *through* interaction). In addition, the chapter will also highlight the link between the data presented and the existing research analysed within the Literature Review chapter, not only to position the findings of the present

thesis within the existing literature but also to highlight how the novel findings of the thesis move beyond our current understanding of the coach-athlete relationship in sport.

## **5.2 Symbolic Interactionism as a Theoretical Framework**

Blumer's (1969) version of symbolic interactionism provides a theoretical framework to guide the discussion chapter. Such an understanding is underpinned by a social *relational* view (as opposed to a cognitive or behavioural theoretical focus) about what relationships are and how they are formed and maintained *in* and *through* interaction, rather than being something possessed within the individual (Smith, 2013). This view builds upon the work of Poczwadowski et al. (2002b) who conceptualised the coach-athlete relationship in a dynamic, interactive and interpretive manner. Therefore, this thesis followed a similar theoretical approach to the one that Poczwadowski et al. (2002b) utilised within their study (i.e. interpretivism and symbolic interactionism). In providing a detailed account of the main premises of Blumer's work, Nelson et al. (2016) highlighted that Blumer used 'three basic premises'.

The first of Blumer's premises was that '...human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them...' (Blumer 1969:2). Handberg et al. (2014:2) highlighted that interaction occurs for individuals and in groups and also indicated:

...they do not respond directly to objects but attach meaning to them, modify that meaning, and act on the basis of that meaning.

For example, these can include aspects such as physical objects, human beings, institutions and other people's activities (Nelson et al., 2016). Blumer's (1969:2) second premise was:

...the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows...

Therefore, Blumer suggests meaning is created through social interaction and formed from the way others act and ‘...their shared understanding of meaning in their environment’ (Handberg et al., 2014:3; Nelson et al., 2016). For the final premise, Blumer (1969:2) specified:

...these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters...

Thus, Blumer proposed that a process of interpretation occurs to form meaning (Blumer, 1969; Nelson et al., 2016). Therefore, following Blumer’s premises, the use of an interpretive-interactionist perspective will help to demonstrate the temporal and relational aspect of the coach-athlete relationship.

### **5.3 Building Relationships Between the Coaches and Athletes**

Surprisingly little research exists which examines how coach-athlete relationships are initiated and developed over time. However, Poczwadowski et al. (2002a:122) highlighted that:

Practically speaking, if a coach wanted to build a relationship with an athlete, she or he needed to interact with this athlete and vice versa.

According to Poczwadowski et al. (2002a), such interactions typically consist of coaches and athletes talking, listening, asking questions and providing answers. In this regard, one of the main research findings was the difference in how the two coaches initiated and built the relationship between themselves and the players. At the start of the season, Kelly highlighted that she tried:

...finding out about them and talking to them about where they played before in previous seasons...having little chats about jobs and what people are doing so trying to build relationships with players.

Kelly saw these small interactions as an important way to build a relationship with the players, whilst also as a coach having:

...conversations about tactics and about individual performance and try and set some targets and work with individual players to try and pinpoint things they wanted to improve...

Three of the players (Laura, Claire and Emma) identified a similar approach to building a relationship with Kelly through communication and their interactions with her, whether that was in a group environment or one-to-one. Claire also said that she tried to get to know her 'as a friend as well as a coach'. However, Emma believed there was an initial and temporal element to her lack of closeness to Kelly compared to other players, which she found to be a difficulty in their relationship:

That communication barrier really started to emerge right from the beginning, and I think obviously it developed more over the season...I've always got along with her but when she came in I started to get to know her but then as pre-season came to an end and we started playing the games, I felt like we didn't have that closeness that a lot of the other players did have with her.

Emma also highlighted that over time she lost trust in Kelly because she failed to communicate with her and explain her selection decisions as the season progressed: 'because she didn't really speak to me much at all at this point like I don't even remember her saying hi to me at training sessions and things like that, which was difficult'. Specifically, Emma stated that:

I think I didn't play for about three, four games in a row so those three losses, the ones afterwards we lost, and I lost my commitment at that point, like what's the point of me turning up, am I going to play. She didn't speak to me about it either, she didn't explain to me why she was doing what she was doing.

and interaction were also key elements of John's approach to building a relationship with the players. For example, John asked:

...many of the players what was good and what was bad, some individual and some as a team – ‘tell me the good things, tell me the bad things’ – and then I worked on what they felt needed to improve and started to work on them and things that were good.

However, John did not understand that the players had squad numbers and not match day starting eleven numbers and this lack of communication upset some of the players in the early stages of the relationship. Here, Laura said, ‘I think he came in with an attitude of “I’m manager and this is what it’s going to be like”.’ Interestingly, because of the position John found the team in when he joined he highlighted that:

I probably had to be a lot sterner and more aggressive than I would normally be in terms of building it up [the coach-athlete relationship].

John’s more aggressive and authoritarian approach contrasted Kelly’s which looked to slowly build a relationship with the players, this was evident to the players as Laura discussed:

...obviously he was under pressure. We weren’t looking great in the league so I think there was a lot of pressure on him to deliver and keep us in the league... I think he did realise that some of the players have had the squad numbers for years. So I think he went back to that. Obviously over the next few games he changed the squad numbers back to the original ones, but I think at the beginning he wanted to stamp his authority down.

Laura felt that this influenced how he behaved and interacted with the players at the start of the relationship. This highlights that the start of the relationship between the two coaches and the players was contextually dependent, and the approach taken by each coach reflected their assessment of the time available to build a relationship and to make effective changes to the team performances within a given temporal constraint.

Here, John highlighted the temporal nature of the relationship building phase with the players, which he felt took from the middle of the season (the start of his appointment) to the



end (a period of four months). John felt that the change in the team results played an important part in this change to a positive coach-athlete relationship:

I felt it at the very beginning but I'd just started getting into the norm and the honeymoon period's over. It was a little bit the players wanted to do it their way instead of my way and that took a long time to embed in...So I wouldn't say they were committed to me in any shape or form and it wasn't probably until the end of the season when they looked back and they said 'actually that was quite an achievement that we had'.

Furthermore, John highlighted that over time he was able to build a closer relationship with the players through his communications:

I felt I got to know them a bit better because they were open to me and asking questions; you got into discussions, which meant you felt you got closer to them...Because they opened up, I could answer questions and get in to interact with them, then we both drew closer together rather than one to the other.

Poczwadowski et al. (2002a) highlighted that behaviours aimed at enhancing sporting related effectiveness are task-orientated whilst behaviours aimed at enhancing team cohesion have a maintenance-team orientation and behaviours aimed at improving interpersonal relationships have a maintenance-relationship orientation. The findings of the present thesis highlight that the temporal constraints upon building a relationship for both coaches played an important role in determining the predominant orientation utilised by each coach. For example, whilst Kelly had time and a pre-season period to build a relationship with the players that included both task-orientated and maintenance-relationship-orientated behaviours, an authoritarian task-orientation was the predominant form of coach-athlete interaction displayed by John during a shorter period of integration with the team. The findings of the present thesis highlight that each of the participants had a different and individualized relationship (i.e. between the coaches and athletes), each of which was largely shaped by past experiences and the interactions that they

had with each other, and importantly their subsequent interpretation of the meaning of interactions for themselves (Blumer, 1969; Poczwadowski et al., 2002b).

#### **5.4 Importance of Respect and Likeability**

The findings highlighted that both coaches favoured the players respecting them over liking them. For example, Kelly stated ‘...I would like to be liked by players...but it's not the be all and end all...’. Kelly further highlighted:

I wouldn't go home and cry about it if I thought somebody didn't like me but I would be disappointed about it because, like I say, that's part of the way I coach, part of my style is I want players to want to work for me, because I want them to work for me because they want to, not because they are scared not to...I don't think any of them particularly disliked me but there was obviously some that preferred me than others.

John also emphasised ‘...I don't mind if players don't like me as long as they respect me...’. John believes respect is very important for the relationships and ‘as soon as respect goes out the window it's lost’. John further highlighted:

...it's one of the things as a manager, it's nice to be liked but it's something I have to realise that some players won't like me and I have to deal with that, and I don't mind if players don't like me as long as they respect me and the club and what we're trying to achieve.

From a player's perspective, Claire also highlighted that she believed both she and Kelly liked one another; however, Claire stated, ‘I think she wanted to make everyone happy’, which led to inconsistency. Similarly, both Laura and Claire highlighted that they liked John. Interestingly, both Emma and Laura stated that they felt it was obvious Kelly was personally closer to some players that she knew, that this made it appear that she had ‘favourites’ and that this became more obvious over time. Emma stated that:

...it was obvious to me from the start that she had people that she'd known previously, and I understand that, but I think that differentiates between favourites and maybe people that she didn't maybe spend as much time with. That's just my opinion personally, but I found that became more obvious as the season progressed.

Laura stated that:

...I think she had her favourites. I think the players that she brought in, I think she obviously knew them better than us old ones that have been at the club for a while. So I think her behaviour to them was a little bit different to us lot.

John highlighted that this was something that he specifically sought to avoid:

I've never been that close to players, I don't think it's right to be. That's where, again, my assistant is closer but the goalkeeping coach, she's obviously a lot closer to the players and what I like to have is a person like Stacey who is in between the players and myself...Because if the players start to see you too pally with other players they start to make judgements, normally incorrect, but they make misconceptions about what's going on and why this and she's his favourite and she's been picked because of this and I don't like that.

The different interpersonal approach employed by John seemed to be supported by Emma, who found John's interactions led to reduced feelings of favouritism and inequality within the team, and subsequently reduced disagreements:

He came across as quite a powerful figure and quite secure, and he wasn't favouritist, and that for me was quite refreshing because I think we'd had that quite a lot previously.

Yang and Jowett's (2012) study suggested that respect at the beginning of relationships is due to 'moral obligation' and respect levels may be influenced by authority, reputation and knowledge. However, when the relationship becomes more established over time the respect between the

coach and athlete becomes more 'mutual' than an obligation due to '...opportunities that enable coaches and athletes to interact, exchange information, and simply get to know one another' (Yang and Jowett, 2012:41). Within the existing coach-athlete relationship literature the concept of closeness has been used to understand personal feelings (like and trust) and generic feelings (belief, respect and intimacy) between the coach and the athlete (Jowett, 2003). Within the present study the findings suggested that the coaches viewed generic feelings of respect to be more important than personal feelings of liking in the development of an effective coach-athlete relationship within performance sports, although both coaches identified that the athletes liking them was a positive, although not always essential, element of their relationship with the athletes. Research with Olympic athletes by Jowett and Cockerill (2003) found that mutual liking, respect and belief are important in the development of a successful coach-athlete relationship. Within the present study, differences were evident in the behaviours and interactions and in the importance placed upon relational factors (i.e. like and respect). Here, each participant held their own interpretation of the importance of such relational factors in an effective coach-athlete relationship (Blumer, 1969; Poczwadowski et al., 2002a). Similar changes in the coach-athlete relationship over time and following critical reflection were evident in the work of Toner et al. (2012) who explored an athlete's relationship with his golf coach and his subsequent interpretations of both his own behaviours as an athlete and his coach's behaviours. This further demonstrates support for how interpersonal relationships can be interpreted (and re-interpreted) over time based upon the meaning that is attached to interactions.

## **5.5 Influence of Disagreements and Managing the Coach-Athlete Relationship**

Disagreements between the coach and the athletes were found to hinder the development of the relationship, and both Kelly and John experienced this in their roles. Kelly highlighted a specific example where a decision she made had led to feelings of conflict within the team:

...because of injury, because of unavailability, I had to select a different captain...clearly the choice wasn't popular with everyone...Now I get that that was potentially an unpopular choice, but it also was a popular choice in some ways. It maybe didn't work, it may be over a longer period, if I'd stayed it may have been better.

Similarly, Emma indicated that she felt a sense of disagreement with Kelly from some of the players about her captaincy decision:

I think there were a fair few disputes about that one...But there was obviously some disagreement between her as management and the rest of the squad, and that's never good within the team.

Laura highlighted that the disagreement regarding the choice of captain for the Rovers match negatively impacted on her relationship with Kelly and her understanding of other players' relationships with her. Laura said, 'I'd lost a lot of respect for her', and felt it impacted on the other players' relationships. Here, the players felt that the new captain had developed an overly close personal relationship with the coach, whilst not developing a close personal relationship with the other players.

Furthermore, towards the end of Kelly's tenure as head coach she highlighted a number of negative signs which led to a breakdown in the relationship between herself and the players. Here, she stated that:

I think lots of things were said but not always in the right way. I also think that not all the group were good at listening. They were good at talking but not listening and understanding, putting their feet in other people's shoes...that comes from emotion and from care for the club and wanting to improve, the frustrations and stuff...and as well there was some stuff that was left unsaid between players and between the group, which probably didn't help.

Therefore, a lack of communication within the group and a combination of negative behaviours and interactions were detrimental to the coach-athlete relationship. During this time, Marie highlighted that:

I think Thursday training was the lower levels of attendance yet I would still be there. I think people were maybe getting a little bit sick of the training being repetitive...

Similarly, Marie felt she had disagreements and a power struggle with John because of his authoritarian approach and his tactical view on how he wanted the team to play. She highlighted that this was 'just over what he was trying to do' and 'maybe the way he went about doing it'. Marie felt that this disagreement affected her relationship with John:

It starts it off on a little bit of a negative footing if you don't really agree but at the end of the day he's a football coach, he's not my best mate, so I can't say I'm really that bothered.

Philippe and Seiler's (2006) study highlighted the importance of communication and resolving disagreements for the development of a strong coach-athlete relationship. This work highlighted that disagreements could be discussed with an aim of achieving 'common ground'. However, if common ground could not be achieved the individuals would retain their opinion but an attempt to resolve the problem would be positively recognised (Philippe and Seiler, 2006). The importance of communication and resolving problems was highlighted when John discussed how during a team meeting he required the players to agree with his way of thinking, and he had to persevere until, over time, the players were on the same page. John stated:

...we needed to play a certain way, do a certain thing and at that point...they either had to buy into it and work with me or if they were insisting in doing their thing, I would have walked away that night...So at the beginning it was tough because I really had to convince them to do something different to what they're used to doing and in the end the relationship really did work.

It has been found that conflict, disagreements and power struggles negatively influence relationships, and aspects such as lack of trust, respect and belief have been shown to indicate an ineffective relationship and to cause interpersonal conflict (Jowett and Cockerill, 2003; Jowett and Meek, 2000; Jowett and Ntoumanis, 2004; Poczwadowski et al., 2006). For example, Emma highlighted that the two matches against Ladies FC and Town FC were critical turning points in her view of her belief in the team and the overall dynamics within the group:

This is when it [got] low – got a bit dire [about] the whole thing, because I just was like, ‘oh my word...what is going on?’ Especially after the game against Ladies FC and Town FC...I played Ladies FC and I remember that was just a horrible game. It just wasn’t working. And Town FC, like ‘what is going on here?’...I was totally annoyed about the whole thing. My attitude had changed towards football at that point.

Both Kelly and John highlighted that they did not allow disagreements to negatively influence their opinion of the players or their relationships. Kelly stated:

...let’s be honest, as a football manager there’s very rare times where...everyone’s going to agree...It’s very rare that you’re going to keep everybody happy...If you dwell on the fact that people disagree with some of your decisions...you’re not going to spend the time doing what you need to do...it would have concerned me because I want people to think I do a good job...So if people disagree with things that does eat away at me a little bit, but it also can’t be my main focus.

John shared similar views:

...I always take it that that’s their view and opinion, whether we agreed or not is another thing...but it doesn’t cast my opinion on the player because that’s their view and opinion...It’s emotions of the game, emotions of training.

On the other hand, Laura and Marie indicated contrasting views to their coaches when they highlighted a negative influence on their relationships. Specifically, Laura expressed a loss of respect for Kelly near the end of her time due to a disagreement over the captaincy choice in the Rovers match. This indicates that the coach-athlete relationship is temporal, dynamic and open to multiple interpretations, and is likely to change over time with disagreements influencing the relationships during different stages of the season (Blumer, 1969; Poczwadowski et al., 2002b; Toner et al., 2012).

## **5.6 The Impact of Results on the Relationship**

The findings of the thesis highlighted that individual results of matches and a combination of results directly impacted the coach-athlete relationship in either a positive or a negative manner. When the team was winning matches, it was more evident that it had a positive influence on their relationships compared to a circumstance of a mixture of results or a run of losing matches. Aspects such as closeness, belief, trust, respect and disagreements were all impacted by the match results.

Alternatively, Trocado and Gomes (2013:993) found that:

...the winning and non-winning teams did not exhibit significant differences in regard to the more socially oriented leadership dimensions of personal respect and personal support. Because failure to win did not appear to compromise the personal relationship between coaches and athletes, it is not surprising that the two groups did not differ in coach-athlete compatibility, and winning or not winning did not reduce athletes' satisfaction with aspects of coaches' leadership...

However, the findings from this study showed that players' thoughts and feelings about each coach fluctuated over the course of the season depending upon the outcome of the matches. For example, Kelly's positive start to the season, with three wins, provided a good base for her



relationships to grow and for her to build on because she believed the players 'probably just enjoyed football more because we were winning'. She also highlighted that losing the three matches would perhaps have had the opposite effect and would have hindered the building process of the relationship at an early stage. Additionally, the players also highlighted that team morale and the environment were good due to the positive results, whilst the three wins contributed to increasing their belief in Kelly because '...she was creating a winning side'.

Conversely, following a mixture of defeats and draws, regarding the closeness of her players Kelly highlighted that '...it's always easier when you're winning, I think everyone would admit that...'. However, she still felt as though the relationship was in the stage of being built. Marie, who she had coached before, expressed the view that the results never impacted on their relationship and she felt that was down to a number of reasons. On the other hand, the other players showed that results impacted on their relationships when they stated that they began to lose belief in their coach. Kelly also mentioned that during the final stages of her time she started to notice warning signs with their relationships, and felt:

...when you don't win games that can be more evident. It could be there when you are winning games but you just don't notice it as much.

Therefore, Kelly was aware that when a team is winning there may still be problems with some aspects of the coach-athlete relationship; however, they may not be as apparent or prevalent during positive periods, and good results might negate negative responses compared to stages of the season when there are mixed results or a run of defeats.

The two head coaches experienced a different pattern of results at different stages of their appointment as head coach. Kelly began the season well and then the results progressively got worse (a negative winning trajectory: good-bad results), whereas John had a mixture of results at the beginning and then began to win the majority of his matches (a positive winning trajectory: bad-good results). The different winning trajectories of the head coaches impacted

their relationships with the players in different ways. For example, the win over Hotspur City with the new formation was the major turning point for John and his relationships with the players until the end of the season. Prior to this result there were a lot of disagreements with players on how John wanted them to play and the disagreements continued following this match. However, due to winning and climbing out of the relegation zone, relationships seemed to improve and the negative aspects of their relationships were highlighted less.

Following three consecutive wins during the middle stage of John's time, the players, especially Claire, indicated an increase in trust, respect and belief in John due to the results. They felt the team had benefited, suggesting the atmosphere within the group was better. However, even though Marie agreed it had improved '...purely based on the results...', she still felt their relationship could have been better. This indicates that results do influence the coach-athlete relationship; however, they are not the only aspect that has an impact and other factors should be considered.

Similarly, Kelly highlighted that although she believed there were still disagreements because the team were winning few players expressed negative opinions. Equally, John felt that because of positive results the behaviours of the players improved and '...there was less concern about future games...' because of the wins, which highlights the importance of winning in sustaining a positive coach-athlete relationship in performance sport over time. Finally, throughout the findings the coaches often stated that '...because we were winning' was an important indicator of an increase in closeness, a lack of frustration, mutual trust, respect and belief, which all contributed to a greater coach-athlete relationship. Surprisingly this key finding is somewhat lacking in the existing literature, and may related to the methodological reliance on 'one-off' retrospective interviews (Jowett et al., 2012a; Poczwadowski et al., 2006). Specifically, future research might consider how athletes' perceptions of team strength mediate positive and negative interpretations of the win-loss record and the coach-athlete relationship.

## 5.7 Chapter Conclusion

The key findings from the present thesis are underpinned by an understanding of a coach-athlete relationship that is dynamic, temporal and open to multiple interpretations (Blumer, 1969; Poczwadowski et al., 2002b; Toner et al., 2012). Specifically, when viewed over the course of a full competitive season a number of events and interactions led to changes in the coach-athlete relationship between both Kelly and John and the players. For example, in the initiation stage of the relationship Kelly and John took different approaches because of the context of their appointment. Kelly favoured a slower, personable maintenance-orientated approach to building her relationships with the players, with a view to developing longevity (Poczwadowski et al., 2002a). However, given John's mid-season appointment, he adopted a more aggressive task-orientated approach to building the relationships because he felt he needed to build the relationships quickly, and he came into the club at an unusual time compared to a normal season (Poczwadowski et al., 2002a).

In addition, the different behaviours of the coaches towards the players can be understood by the importance each coach placed upon how they interacted with players and how important it was to them to be liked by the players (Jowett, 2003). Whilst both coaches agreed that it was more important to be respected than liked, Kelly's behaviours towards the players placed a greater importance on a personal feeling of closeness and getting to know the players whilst John was more concerned with generic feelings of respect (Jowett, 2003). However, a number of the players felt that Kelly was closer to some players than others, which caused disagreements and placed a strain on the coach-athlete relationship. The behaviours of the coaches towards the athletes was interpreted in different ways at different periods of the season, and it was also dependent upon disagreements between the coach and players and the results of the team. This was a complex mix of both social and task related elements of the coach-athlete relationship. These temporal changes can be characterised by an initial positive relationship between Kelly and the players at the start of the season that become more negative

as the season progressed, as results were poorer than expected and training was viewed to be boring and repetitive. In contrast, because of the interactional approach John took to developing his working relationship with the players, the players were more cautious and did not develop an immediate sense of closeness to him on a personal level. The players highlighted that John's behaviours were professional and that he appeared to be likable but that he was not as close to some of the players as Kelly had been, which was viewed as a positive change to the dynamics within the team. However, John was viewed as more 'authoritarian' and more 'scary' by the players than Kelly had been. The following chapter, Conclusion, will provide an overview of a summary of key findings, practical implications for coach education, suggestions for future research and, finally, reflections on the research process.

## **6 CONCLUSION**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The thesis ends with an overview that includes the summary of the key findings and the implications of the new understandings and how they may help to contribute to future coach education programmes. Following this, suggestions for future research directions will be discussed. The chapter concludes with some personal reflections on the research process.

### **6.2 Summary of Key Findings**

The main factor that influenced the coach-athlete relationship over time within the present thesis was the nature of the interactions between the coaches and athletes during the season. Specifically, these interactions were how the coaches and athletes spoke to each other, how they interpreted the level of closeness within the relationship, the conflicts and disagreements between the coaches and players during the season, the athletes' satisfaction with performance in training and matches, and finally the results of the team. Therefore, in addressing the initial three research questions posed at the start of the thesis, the findings of this work have illuminated some of the social complexities of the *what*, *how* and *why* behind the relational nature of the coach-athlete relationship over time within the context under investigation.

### **6.3 Implications for Coach Education**

Currently, the educational curriculum of The Football Association (FA) and its Level 1 to Level 5 coaching awards do not include the coach-athlete relationship as part of its courses (The Football Association, 2016). The five main 'core coaching qualifications', Level 1 to Level 5, are: The New FA Level 1 in Coaching Football (launched 1 August 2016); The New FA Level 2 in Coaching Football (launched 1 August 2016); The FA UEFA B Licence; The FA UEFA A Licence; and

The FA UEFA Pro Licence (FA, 2016). However, the coach-athlete relationship is not a topic that is explicitly covered within any of the coaching awards and their course content. Given the importance of the coach-athlete relationship within sport and that:

sports directors and managers, the media and coaches and athletes themselves have directed public attention to the significance of the coach-athlete relationship, this is a strange omission for the courses. (Jowett and Poczwardowski, 2007: 4)

Although it is possible that some elements of the coach-athlete relationship are discussed in other areas of the courses, following my research I believe we need to educate coaches about the importance of the coach-athlete relationship and how it is temporal and mediated by social interactions with athletes (Blumer, 1969; Poczwardowski et al., 2002a), and about how coaches and athletes can interpret the same interactions in different ways (Toner et al., 2012). Specifically, coach education courses should include information regarding how to build relations and manage relationships and about the different factors that coaches might face that influence the coach-athlete relationship (i.e. internal politics within football clubs, pressures to meet club targets, results, and the context within which coach-athlete relationships are initiated). This would more explicitly equip coaches with the knowledge and skills to understand the many ways that their interactions and decisions might influence their relationship with the athletes they work with.

#### **6.4 Suggestions for Future Research**

I believe that this research has built upon existing work within the field and is assisting the existing work move beyond a cognitive understanding of the coach-athlete relationship, which recognises that coach-athlete interactions are co-created, relational, temporal and open to alternative interpretations dependent upon previous experiences (Smith, 2013). However, an area that I believe needs further exploration is how individual and collective results and

performance impact on the coach-athlete relationship; specifically, what factors mediate the influence of negative team and individual performance and results on maintaining a positive coach-athlete relationship. A number of potential factors that could be further explored include the importance of trust, respect and closeness in developing a resistance to a sub-optimal or negative relationship. There is a noticeable paucity of research in this important area, which I found that the athletes saw as an influential factor in whether they considered their relationship with the coach to be positive or negative. Additionally, it would also be important to understand the impact of the duration of the coach-athlete relationship in mediating the performance and results (e.g. short-, medium- and long-term relationships).

Moreover, the results highlighted the importance and influence of trust and distrust on the coach-athlete relationship. Purdy et al. (2013: 309) also hinted at how trust helps to develop and maintain a ‘...meaningful working relationship...’. However, there is still a lack of in-depth research focusing on this area, especially regarding distrust, therefore I believe it is an area of interest to further explore. Additionally, resulting from the research an area to focus on is way in which gender potentially impacts the coach-athlete relationship. In particular, the research could explore whether the interactions and athletes’ expectations differ due to the coach’s gender and if they change when the players’ gender matches that of the coach.

## **6.5 Reflections On the Research Process**

When reflecting upon the research process that I undertook, I identified a few complications that could have potentially impacted on my project. These difficulties included a managerial dismissal during the season, a new coach coming in, a reluctance by participants to specifically discuss key instances with identifiable individuals during their interviews, being a participant-researcher, and the large amount of interview data collected in my attempt to understand a number of different participants’ experiences of the same situation over different time scales.

Firstly, Kelly's dismissal from her managerial role at the beginning of December was a concern for me because I was worried I might not be able to complete my thesis without her involvement. The club had not dismissed a coach during a season before, so it was an unknown experience and one that many questioned. A few questions arose regarding how the club would handle the situation: would a permanent coach be appointed quickly, would an interim coach be selected for a short period of time or until the end of the season, and would the players know the new coach or would they have no previous experience within the club? Additionally, on a personal note, I questioned whether I had built a strong enough relationship with Kelly for her to be willing to give up her own time to be interviewed and also to be honest about her experiences at the club. I was unsure about the strength of the relationship because, during Kelly's time, I completed the pre-season stage but I was then injured at the beginning of the competitive season and only returned shortly before her departure. On the other hand, throughout Kelly's spell at the club I felt our relationship was good and we had no problems, which I felt would help when asking her to take part in my project. Furthermore, following the appointment of John, similar questions arose at the beginning because he was completely new to the club. For example, the questions were whether I could build a good relationship with him quickly and during his time, and whether at the end of the season it be strong enough that he would be willing to be interviewed.

Another issue that could have impacted negatively on my thesis was that during the participant interviews overall there was a limited number of times that participants would name people. This made it more difficult to connect social events, antecedents and consequences because what people were saying was sometimes generalized. Also, the participants may have been speaking about the same person and I could work out who they may be talking about; however, there was no confirmation, meaning I cannot be specific with data and include finer details in the Results chapter.



An additional problem that occurred was because of the large amount of data that was collected in an attempt to understand multiple perspectives in a longitudinal manner. This has resulted in a long Results chapter in an attempt to illustrate the depth and complexity of the data, although additional collected data has been left out. Here, the decision was made with my supervisors not to include the research diaries and observations with the thesis, but instead to use the observations to shape the focus of the interviews. Again, due to the number of participants, the number of interviews for each participant and the duration of each interview, a large corpus of data was collected, therefore extracts and data from the observational diary could not be included in the Results chapter.

Finally, an issue that I considered that could have affected the data collection was my dual role as a participant and a researcher (Purdy and Jones, 2011, 2013). This could be seen as a potential problem for a number of reasons. Firstly, due to being a player I have friendships within the team and some of them are quite strong; consequently, regular conversations regarding football would occur with many of them following each match and training session. Individual and group conversations would happen, especially with players who were sharing the same car as me, and they would reflect on our thoughts and emotions concerning aspects such as the result of the game and incidents and decisions that occurred during training sessions and matches, and sometimes regarding the coaching staff. Moreover, being a participant-researcher meant that I had to interview my current coach, John, because he was continuing as the coach for the following season. I was worried that John would not be completely honest and would try to protect the players because he was going to continue a relationship with them following the interviews. However, I found John to be very open and authentic throughout. Gaining access within such an environment is highly dependent upon existing relationships between the researcher and the participants. Whilst an external researcher may have produced different findings, my existing relationship with the coaches and players allowed me to develop a rapport and trust, where the participants felt comfortable to talk freely about their experiences. Indeed,

often during the interview process the participants were able to refer to specific incidents that had happened in my presence. Therefore, this could be viewed as a strength of the thesis as the *depth, quality and realness* of the data is increased (Athens, 1984).

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## 8 APPENDICES

### 8.1 Appendix 1: Systematic Review Table

Appendix 1 is Table 2. Systematic Review of the Final Academic Articles Using the Search Term “Coach-Athlete Relationship”  
From the Two Electronic Databases SPORT Discus and ERIC

Author/s	Date	Title	Sport	Participants	Design	Conceptualisation of coach-athlete relations/Measure of relationship	Key findings
Davis and Jowett	2014	Coach-athlete attachment and the quality of the coach-athlete relationship: implications for athlete's well-being.	Individual sports and team sports: netball, football, volleyball, basketball, tennis, ice skating, gymnastics, and swimming.	192 athletes: 122 males and 70 females. Athletes' ages ranged from 16 to 32 years.	Coach-Athlete Attachment Scale (CAAS), Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) and Quality of Relationships Inventory (QRI, sport version).	Attachment theory.  Parent-athlete attachment bonds, coach-athlete attachment bonds, and sports friendships as attachment bonds.	The athletes' avoidant and secure attachment styles were related to aspects of coach-athlete relationship quality (Davis and Jowett, 2014). Interpersonal conflict was crucial to the athletes' positive affect and negative affect (Davis and Jowett, 2014). The study also found that, from a practical perspective, a resource to help the quality of the relationship was an

							understanding of conflict management (Davis and Jowett, 2014).
Hampson and Jowett	2014	Effects of coach leadership and coach-athlete relationship on collective efficacy.	Soccer.	150 sport performers: 112 males and 38 females.	Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire (CART-Q), Leadership Scale for Sports (LSS) and Collective Efficacy Questionnaire for Sports (CEQS).	3Cs model: closeness, commitment and complementarity.  Level of collective efficacy, the type of coach leadership, and the quality of the coach-athlete relationship.	Perceptions of both coach leadership and the coach-athlete relationship predicted variance in team efficacy. Overall, it is suggested that the quality of coach-athlete relationships added to the prediction of individuals' collective efficacy beyond what was predicted by coaches' behaviours of leadership alone (Hampson and Jowett, 2014).
Nikbin, Hyun, Iranmanesh and Foroughi	2014	Effects of perceived justice for coaches on athletes' trust, commitment, and perceived performance : A study of futsal and	Futsal and volleyball.	161 athletes.	Questionnaire.	Perceived justice.  Perceived justice, commitment, trust and perceived performance.	All three dimensions of perceived justice were positively and significantly related to commitment and trust (Nikbin et al., 2014). Commitment was significantly related to individual performance and team performance (Nikbin et al., 2014). There was a positive relationship between trust and the three dimensions of perceived

		volleyball players.					performance (Nikbin et al., 2014).
Lorimer	2014	Coaches as a potential source of athletes' self-presentational concern.	Athletes in a range of sports.	199 athletes – 85 males and 35 females – were recruited from a range of sports.	Modified version of the Self-Presentation in Sport Questionnaire and the meta-version of the Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire (CART-Q).	Meta-closeness, meta-commitment and meta-complementarity.  Athletes' perception of their coaches' views of the quality of their coach-athlete relationship (closeness and commitment) and self-presentational concerns.	All self-presentational concerns were negatively associated with increased perceptions of closeness and positively associated with increased perceptions of commitment (Lorimer, 2014). Athletes appeared to perceive their coach as a potential source of self-presentational concerns and that these concerns are associated with inferences about their coaches' perception of the quality of that relationship (Lorimer, 2014). A coach needs to be aware that how an athlete perceives the coach's perception of the quality of the relationship can potentially impact on the concerns experienced by that athlete (Lorimer, 2014).
Davis, Jowett and Lafrenière	2013	An attachment theory perspective	Individual sports: swimming, gymnastics,	107 female and male athletes and 107 female	Direct and meta-perspective	Attachment theory.	Attachments styles can help to understand the processes involved in the formation and maintenance of quality



		in the examination of relational processes associated with coach-athlete dyads.	tennis, badminton, ice skating and athletics. Team sports: football, hockey, ice hockey, volleyball, basketball and rugby.	and male coaches forming 107 coach-athlete dyads were recruited for participation in this study.	Versions of the Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire (CART-Q).	Actor-partner interdependence model.  Attachment styles (avoidant and anxious), relationship quality and relationship satisfaction.	relational bonds between coaches and athletes (Davis et al., 2013).
Vella, Oades and Crowe	2013	The relationship between coach leadership, the coach-athlete relationship, team success, and the positive developmental experiences of adolescent soccer players.	Soccer.	455 adolescent athletes aged between 11 and 18 years.	Differentiated Transformational Leadership Inventory for Youth Sport (DTLI-YS), Coach-Athlete Relationship (CART-Q) and Youth Experience Survey for Sport (YES-S). Team success was measured by the total number of competition	3Cs model: closeness, commitment and complementarity.  Transformational leadership, coach-athlete relationship, team success and positive developmental experiences.  Individual consideration, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, fostering acceptance of group	Coach transformational leadership behaviour and the coach-athlete relationship were shown to have a moderate positive correlation with developmental experiences (Vella et al., 2013). Team success has no relationship with overall developmental experiences and the best predictor of developmental experiences is a combination of coach transformational leadership behaviour and the quality of the coach-athlete relationship (Vella et al., 2013). The most influential

					points accumulated during the season.	goals and promoting teamwork, appropriate role modelling and contingency reward. Closeness, commitment and complementarity. Personal and social skills, cognitive skills, goal setting, initiative and negative experiences.	leadership behaviours are individual consideration, intellectual stimulation, and appropriate role modelling (Vella et al., 2013).
Jowett, Yang and Lorimer	2012 b	The role of personality, empathy, and satisfaction with instruction within the context of the coach-athlete relationship.	Rugby, golf, gymnastics, football, cricket, martial arts, cycling, athletics and field hockey.	178 athletes aged 18 to 38 years: 90 males and 88 females. 60 competed at international level, 74 at national level, 19 at regional level and 25 at club level.	Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire (CART-Q), Barrett-Lennard Empathy Scale and Athlete Satisfaction Questionnaire (ASQ).	Integrated research model.  3Cs model: closeness, commitment and complementarity.  The linear associations between personality, relationship quality, perceptions of coach empathy and satisfaction with training.	Jowett et al. (2012b) highlighted that through the utilisation of the coach-athlete relationship there was a relation between personality and empathy. The study also indicated that 'agreeableness' can have a negative or positive impact on the development, maintenance and quality of the relationship (Jowett et al., 2012b). Additionally, it is implied that athletes' level of satisfaction with training is influenced by the quality of the coach-athlete

							relationship (Jowett et al., 2012b).
Rhind, Jowett and Yang	2012	A comparison of athletes' perceptions of the coach-athlete relationship in team and individual sports.	Individual: athletics, archery, martial arts, rowing (sculling), solo-sailing, squash, swimming, tennis, bowls, triathlon, trampolining, equestrian, etc. Team: basketball, cricket, football, hockey, rugby, water polo, netball, baseball, rugby union, volleyball, American football, etc.	699 athletes from team (N = 199) and individual (N = 500) sports.	The direct and meta-perspective versions of the Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire (CART-Q).	3Cs model: closeness, commitment and complementarity.  Fundamental differences in how athletes from team and individual sports view the quality of their relationship.	MACS analyses indicated that a 3first order factor model representing the 3Cs was invariant across the two groups of team and individual sport performers (Rhind et al., 2012). Latent mean differences between the groups suggested that individual athletes felt both closer and more committed to their coach (Rhind et al., 2012). Furthermore, athletes who performed in individual sports also perceived that their coach felt closer, more committed and complementary than athletes who performed in team sports (Rhind et al., 2012).
Jowett, Shan-mugam	2012 a	Collective efficacy as a mediator of	Football, basketball	135 Greek-Cypriot athletes: 77	Collective Efficacy Questionnaire	Collective efficacy.  Team cohesion.	Dimensions of collective efficacy have the capacity to explain the association

and Caccoulis		the association between interpersonal relationships and athlete satisfaction in team sports.	and volleyball.	males and 58 females. 117 athletes were coached by males and 18 were coached by females.	for Sport (CEQS) and Greek Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire (GrCART-Q), Group Environment Questionnaire (GEQ) and Athlete Satisfaction Questionnaire (ASQ).	3Cs model: closeness, commitment and complementarity.  Athletes' perceptions of collective efficacy; athletes' direct perceptions of interpersonal feelings, thoughts, and behaviours; athletes' perceptions of team cohesion and athlete satisfaction.	between the quality of the coach-athlete relationship and athlete satisfaction as well as between team cohesion and athlete satisfaction (Jowett et al., 2012a). Unity, preparation and ability were dimensions of collective efficacy that appeared to be the best mediators, and the links found between athlete satisfaction and collective efficacy highlighted the important positive impact collective efficacy may have for athletes' positive sporting experiences (Jowett et al., 2012a).
Riley and Smith	2011	Perceived coach-athlete and peer relationships of young athletes and self-determined motivation for sport.	Basketball.	211 athletes, 12 to 15 years old. The athletes had been involved in the sport for an average of 7.6 years and had been on	Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire (CART-Q) and Sport Friendly Quality Scale (SFQS). The social acceptance subscale, perceived	Self-determination theory.  Interdependence theory.  Interpersonal theory and friendship and peer acceptance.	Coaches and peers can shape the sport experience of young athletes by engaging in positive interpersonal relationships with coaches and teammates. These connections may at least serve to fulfil the important psychological needs of autonomy, competence and

				their current team for an average of 2.2 years.	autonomy in the sport context, Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (IMI), Need for Relatedness Scale and Sport Motivation Scale (SMS).	3Cs model: closeness, commitment and complementarity.  Coach-athlete relationship, friendship quality, peer acceptance, perceived autonomy, perceived competence, perceived relatedness and self-determined motivation.	relatedness (Riley and Smith, 2011). In some circumstances, such connections also could shape sport motivation, such that it is undergirded by self-determination (Riley and Smith, 2011). It is within this type of social climate that young participants can expect the potential benefits of sport involvement to outweigh the potential costs (Riley and Smith, 2011).
Lafrenière, Jowett, Vallerand and Carbonneau	2011	Passion for coaching and the quality of the coach-athlete relationship: The mediating role of coaching behaviors.	Gymnastics, volleyball, soccer.	103 coach-athlete dyads.	An adapted version of the Passion Scale, the Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire (CART-Q), the positive affect subscale of the short Positive and Negative Affect Schedule	The dualistic model of passion.  3Cs model: closeness, commitment and complementarity.  Coaches' passion for coaching, coaches' autonomy support, coaches' controlling behaviours, and athletes' perceived relationship quality	Harmonious passion for coaching positively predicted autonomy-supportive behaviours towards their athletes, whilst obsessive passion for coaching positively predicted controlling behaviours (Lafrenière et al., 2011). Moreover, autonomy-supportive behaviours predicted a high-quality coach-athlete relationship as perceived by athletes that, in turn,

					(PANAS) and independently self-administered questionnaires.	and athletes' happiness.	positively predicted athletes' general happiness (Lafrenière et al., 2011).
Balduck, Jowett and Buelens	2011	Factorial and predictive validity of the Belgian (Dutch) athlete version of the coach-athlete relationship questionnaire (CART-Q).	Study 1: field soccer, indoor soccer, volleyball, handball, korfbal, power ball, rugby, ice hockey and water polo. Study 2: field soccer, indoor soccer, volleyball, handball, basketball, korfbal, power ball, rugby, ice hockey and water polo.	Study 1: 401 athletes; study 2: 400 athletes.	Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire (CART-Q) and Athlete Satisfaction Questionnaire (ASQ).	3Cs model: closeness, commitment and complementarity.  Closeness, commitment, complementarity and athletes' satisfaction.	The predictive validity of the Belgian CART-Q was demonstrated when the 3Cs of the CART-Q were associated with satisfaction variables in a conceptually coherent manner (Balduck et al., 2011). The results supported the multidimensional nature of the coach-athlete relationship with Belgian athletes, as reflected in the 3Cs (Balduck et al., 2011).

Balduck and Jowett	2011	An examination of the interpersonal relationships of the coach-athlete-peer triangle.	Soccer and volleyball.	460 athletes: 74% males and 26% females.	The Belgian (Dutch) version of the Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire (CART-Q).	3Cs model: closeness, commitment and complementarity.  Closeness, commitment and complementarity. Peer relationships viewed by the coach and by the athlete.	Athletes and coaches exhibited interpersonal relationships to a different extent to coaches/athletes and peer leaders (Balduck and Jowett, 2011). The athlete's relationship, perceived closeness, commitment and complementarity was greater with their peer leaders than with their coaches; however, even though the coaches felt more committed to their athletes, they perceived their overall relationship with their peer leaders was superior (Balduck and Jowett, 2011).
Rhind and Jowett	2010	Relationship maintenance strategies in the coach-athlete relationship: The development of the	International ice skater, competed at many international youth sport events, rower, women's soccer, field	6 coaches and 6 athletes who worked independently.	One-to-one interviews were conducted to gain in-depth data about the strategies used to maintain the quality of the	3 + 1C model: closeness, commitment, complementarity and co-orientation.  Coaches' and athletes' perceptions of the strategies they use to maintain	The study and the COMPASS model expanded the knowledge of the interpersonal dynamics between the coach and the athlete by promoting an understanding of the processes necessary for maintaining the quality of the coach-athlete

		COMPASS model.	hockey and karate. County level soccer, archery, trampolining and squash.		coach-athlete relationship.	relationship quality, conflict management, openness, motivation, positivity, advice, support and social networks.	relationship (Rhind and Jowett, 2010).
Yang and Jowett	2010	An examination of the psychometric properties of the Chinese coach-athlete relationship questionnaire (CART-Q).	21 Olympic sports: archery, athletics, badminton, baseball, canoe/kayak slalom, diving, football, gymnastics, hockey, judo, sail boarding, shooting, softball, swimming, table tennis, tennis, volleyball, water ballet, weightlifting and wrestling.	246 elite Chinese athletes.	Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire (CART-Q), Barrett-Lennard Empathy Scale and Athlete Satisfaction Questionnaire (ASQ).	3 + 1C model: closeness, commitment, complementarity and co-orientation.  Direct closeness, direct commitment and direct complementarity. Meta-closeness, meta-commitment and meta-complementarity. Respect, empathy, unconditionality and congruence. Athlete's satisfaction with individual performance, training and instruction.	Association between the direct perspective of the coach-athlete relationship and satisfaction with training was partially mediated by the athletes' perceptions of their coaches' empathic understanding, suggesting that the athletes' satisfaction with training and instruction is closely linked with the degree to which they view their coach as being empathic (Yang and Jowett, 2010). The association between the meta-perspective of the coach-athlete relationship and satisfaction with performance was not mediated by athletes' perceptions of coaches'



							empathic understanding, suggesting that athletes' perceptions of their coach's empathy may not necessarily be important to feelings of satisfaction with individual performance (Yang and Jowett, 2010).
Blom, Watson II and Spadaro	2010	The impact of a coaching intervention on the coach-athlete dyad and athlete sport experience.	Soccer.	93 male players, representing 9 Mid-Atlantic high schools. The 9 coaches had been the head coaches of their current teams for an average of 9.7 years.	Demographic questionnaires and the Sport Interpersonal Relationships Questionnaire (SIRQ).	Evaluation models.  Impact of a coaching intervention on athletes' satisfaction, enjoyment, self-confidence and intrateam attraction, and their perceptions of their coaches' socio-emotional behaviours.	Positive changes occurred for the athletes in the educational group, as the athletes reported increases in their coaches' caring behaviours and improved feelings of self-confidence and intrateam attraction when compared to the feedback and control groups (Blom et al., 2010). Feedback alone was not demonstrated to be enough to change athletes' perceptions of their coaches' behaviours or improve their sport experience (Blom et al., 2010). Coaches who use a supportive interpersonal style have been found to positively influence their

							athletes' feelings of self-determination, positive emotions and sport satisfaction. These findings are harmonious with the results of the present study as athletes perceived an increase in caring behaviours from coaches who were trained, which resulted in increases in positive psychosocial experiences (Blom et al., 2010).
Davis and Jowett	2010	Investigating the interpersonal dynamics between coaches and athletes based on fundamental principles of attachment.	Individual and team sports (e.g. swimming, athletics, gymnastics, figure skating, tennis, badminton, golf, hockey, rugby, lacrosse, European football and volleyball).	309 British student athletes: 150 males and 159 females, between 18 and 28 years of age.	Self-report, Experiences in Close Relationships Scale (ECR), Components of Attachment Questionnaire (CAQ), Athlete Satisfaction Questionnaire (ASQ) and Investment Model Scale (IMS).	Attachment theory.  The pervasiveness of the three main functions of attachment within the context of the coach-athlete relationship, the associations of athletes' attachment styles with such important variables as satisfaction with the relationship and satisfaction with the sport, and the process	Athletes saw the coach as a secure base, a safe haven, and proximity maintenance (Davis and Jowett, 2010). Bivariate correlations indicated that athletes' avoidant and anxious styles of attachment with the coach were negatively correlated with both relationship satisfaction and sport satisfaction (Davis and Jowett, 2010). Mediation analysis revealed that athletes' satisfaction with the coach-athlete

						by which athletes' attachment styles and satisfaction with sport are associated.	relationship may be a process that links athletes' attachment styles with levels of satisfaction with sport (Davis and Jowett, 2010). The findings from this study highlight the potential theoretical and practical utility of attachment theory in studying relationships within the sport context (Davis and Jowett, 2010).
Lorimer and Jowett	2010	The influence of role and gender in the empathic accuracy of coaches and athletes.	Team ( $n = 32$ ), and individual sports ( $n = 24$ ).	56 coaches and 56 athletes, forming 56 coach-athlete independent dyads.	Recordings of training sessions. Empathy was assessed using an experimental laboratory-based protocol developed by Lorimer and Jowett (2009a).	Social role theory.  Differences in the empathetic accuracy of coaches and athletes in relation to the gender of the dyad.	The coaches' and athletes' perceptions of each other's thoughts and feelings are influenced by the gender and roles that they both play within the coach-athlete relationship (Lorimer and Jowett, 2010). The findings also highlighted that female coaches were more accurate, and female athletes working with male coaches showed the most accuracy whilst female athletes working with female coaches showed the least accuracy (Lorimer and Jowett, 2010).

Lorimer and Jowett	2009b	Empathic accuracy, meta-perspective and satisfaction in the coach-athlete relationship.	Individual sports: gymnastics, athletics, combat sports. Team sports: rugby, football, hockey, cricket.	120 coaches and athletes, forming 60 independent coach-athlete dyads.	An adaptation of Ickes' unstructured dyadic interaction paradigm, Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire, Athlete Satisfaction Questionnaire, video and self-reports.	3 + 1C model: closeness, commitment, complementarity and co-orientation.  Empathic accuracy.  Empathic accuracy, meta-perceptive and satisfaction.	An association between members' meta-perceptions or judgements that their partner is positive about the athletic relationship and increased empathic accuracy (Lorimer and Jowett, 2009b). Increased empathic accuracy was in turn associated with higher levels of satisfaction (Lorimer and Jowett, 2009b).
Jowett	2009	Validating coach-athlete relationship measures with the nomological network.	Athletics, badminton, basketball, canoe slalom, cricket, cycling, football, golf, gymnastics, hockey, lacrosse, martial arts, netball, rowing, rugby, swimming,	Involvement with the specific sport ranged from 5 months to 19 years. A total of 192 athlete-students –73 males and 119 females – from a large British university.	Direct and meta-perspective versions of the CART-Q and Quality Relationship Inventory (QRI).	3 Cs model: direct closeness, direct commitment and direct complementarity.  Meta-closeness, meta-commitment and meta-complementarity.  Interdependence theory.  Social support (provisions of	The 3 Cs were found to be related in a conceptually coherent manner with such outcome variables as support from coach, significance of the relationship (depth) and the level of conflict experienced in the relationship (Jowett, 2009). The results contributed further evidence to the utility of the CART-Q for the assessment of the quality of the coach-athlete relationship in

			tennis and volleyball.			support), depth (significance of relationship) and interpersonal conflict (expressions of anger and uncertainty that accompany conflict). Closeness, commitment and complementarity.	student athletes (Jowett, 2009).
Becker	2009	It's not what they do, it's how they do it: Athlete experiences of great coaching.	Baseball, basketball, football, soccer, softball, volleyball, and water polo.	Elite level athletes: 9 female; 9 male; ages ranged from 22 to 42 years.	Phenomenological interviews.	Coaching behaviours.  Coach Attributes, The Environment, Relationships, The System, Coaching Actions and Influences.	By focusing on athlete experiences rather than on any specific aspect of coaching, the results revealed a more comprehensive picture of the factors that underlie coaching greatness (Becker, 2009). This reinforced the notion that great coaching cannot be solely determined on the basis of win-loss records or media attention.
Lorimer	2009	Coaches' satisfaction with their athletic partnerships.	Team and individual sports.	120 coaches working in the United Kingdom: 102 male, 18 female. Coaches'	Athlete Satisfaction Questionnaire (ASQ) and Coach-Athlete Relationship	Integrated research model.  3Cs model: closeness, commitment and complementarity.	Relationship quality was a significant predictor of variance in coach satisfaction; different elements of the relationship influenced satisfaction to varying degrees (Lorimer,

				performance level: regional, national and international .	Questionnaire (CART-Q).	Association between coach satisfaction and coaches' perceptions of the quality of their relationship with their athletes.	2009). Whilst relationship quality is evidently a factor in coach satisfaction, it is a complex, interdependent association that needs further exploration (Lorimer, 2009). Coach satisfaction remains an under-explored area and an important line of future enquiry (Lorimer, 2009).
Gucciardi, Gordon, Dimmock and Mallett	2009	Understanding the coach's role in the development of mental toughness: Perspectives of elite Australian football coaches.	Australian Football League and Western Australian Football League.	11 male participants.	Coaches from a previous study –Gucciardi, Gordon and Dimmock (2008) – were re-interviewed, using semi-structured interviews.	Grounded theory.  Coaches' perceptions of how they can both facilitate and impede the development of key mental toughness characteristics, coach-athlete relationship, coaching philosophy, training environments, specific strategies and negative experiences and influences.	The coach-athlete relationship was a frequent source that influenced mental toughness and its development (Gucciardi et al., 2009). There were several strategies and mechanisms that were vital to building a foundation and maintaining a positive coach-athlete relationship, which also influenced a number of crucial mental toughness characteristics (Gucciardi et al., 2009).
Jones	2009	Coaching as caring (the smiling gallery):	Soccer.	Boys – national age group.	Auto-ethnography – self narrative.	Autoethnographical method.	An autoethnographical approach as an alternative, pertinent means through which to research and

		accessing hidden knowledge.				Caring in the coach-athlete relationship and nurturing.	represent coaching (Jones, 2009). It is important to care in a coach-athlete relationship and emphasise how actively nurturing such an ethic to realise the potentialities of others is key (Jones, 2009).
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## 8.2 Appendix 2: ESS Ethical Approval Form

Appendix 2 is the Ethical Approval Form that was completed and accepted to begin the process of the research project.

### Department of Exercise and Sport Science

#### Application for Expedited Ethical Approval (Form E1).

<b>For use by Reviewers only</b>	
Reviewed by name	Recommendation Select
Required Action:	

<b>Section I: Project Details</b>	
1	<p>Project title: A narrative biographical exploration of the coach-athlete relationship in women's elite football</p> <p>Project start date : 17/09/14 Project end date : 01/02/16</p> <p>Please outline your research project rationale and a short description of your proposed methods and procedures (circa 250 words).</p>



The aim of this project is to explore the relationship between coaches and athletes within a women's elite football team. A narrative biographical interview approach will be used to gain an alternative perspectives and a deeper understanding of the *interactions* between the participants and the *meaning* they give to these exchanges. Data will be collected using a research diary to record the observations (field notes), thoughts and feelings of the researcher along with semi-structured interviews with the participants. The field notes will record *how* the coaches and athletes interact with one another (Research Question 1). These interactions will then be examined utilising interviews to explore what *meaning* the coaches and athletes attach to these interactions (Research Question 2), and why the coaches and athletes interpret their interactions in this particular way (Research Question 3). The interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The participants for the present study will be two head coaches and four players. All participants will be over eighteen years of age. Players will be selected for interview depending on the interactions observed during training and match days. Participation in the present study will require the coaches and athletes to complete 3-4 interviews lasting around thirty to forty minutes each. The respective club will agree in writing that the researcher will be granted access to the coaches and players for the purpose of the present study, and ensure any safeguarding issues are considered and reviewed (see attached).

#### Section II: Applicant Details

3	Principal Investigator	Hannah Ward
4	Email address	11055177@stu.mmu.ac.uk

#### Section III: Prior Approval

5	Is the study part of a staff-led project that has already received ethical approval? If yes, provide the application number here	<b>No</b> <b>number</b>
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#### Section IV: Ethical Approval Checklist

6	Will the study involve NHS patients or NHS employed staff ? (If <b>YES</b> , you will also have to gain IRAS approval prior to Departmental consideration of the application). Go to <a href="https://www.myresearchproject.org.uk/signin.aspx">https://www.myresearchproject.org.uk/signin.aspx</a> for details of this process.	<b>NO</b>
7	Does the study involve strenuous exercise testing of participants over 40 years of age (Such testing would involve near maximal or maximal exertion on the part of the participant)?	<b>NO</b>
8	Will the study require the co-operation of a 'gatekeeper' for initial access to the groups or individuals to be recruited (e.g., students at school, members of a sport team)?	<b>YES</b>

9	Will it be necessary for participants to take part in the study without their knowledge and consent at the time (e.g., covert observation)?	<b>NO</b>
10	Will the study involve asking sensitive questions (e.g., about drug use)?	<b>NO</b>
11	Will the study involve any invasive procedures (other than venous or capillary blood samples), exposure to radiation or either electrical or magnetic stimulation?	<b>NO</b>
12	Is physical pain or more than mild physical discomfort likely to result from the study?	<b>NO</b>
13	Could the study induce psychological stress beyond those voluntarily encountered in the participant's normal life?	<b>NO</b>
14	Will the study involve prolonged or repetitive testing (beyond normal test-retest)?	<b>NO</b>
15	Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants?	<b>NO</b>
16	Does the environment in which the study takes place expose the investigator to potential risk or harm?	<b>NO</b>
17	Will there be any substances (other than water) be administered during the study?	<b>NO</b>
18	Do you have concerns over the mobility or learning abilities of your participants?	<b>NO</b>
19	Are you storing any biological samples covered by the Human Tissue Act ?	<b>NO</b>
20	Have you read the University's Standard Operating Protocols/Guidelines relating to the Human Tissue Act?	<b>NA</b>
21	Have you received HTA training?	<b>NA</b>
	<b>If you have answered 'YES' to Question 19 and 'NO' to either Questions 20 or 21, please complete the following online training link: <a href="http://www.rsclearn.mrc.ac.uk">http://www.rsclearn.mrc.ac.uk</a>. When completed, please send your completed form to the Faculty HTA advisor.</b>	
22	Does the study involve participants who are particularly vulnerable or unable to give informed consent (e.g., Children under 18 years of age). <b>ONLY IF YOU HAVE SELECTED 'YES' TO THIS QUESTION</b> , complete the following four supplementary questions.	<b>NO</b>
i	Will the data be directly supervised by an appropriately qualified individual (e.g., class teacher or coach)? If 'YES', provide the person's details as follows: <b>Name: Phone No:</b> <b>Email address:</b>	<b>NA</b>

ii	Will the study only use previously validated and published methods / tools (e.g., validated questionnaires, observations, interview guides, skills tests etc.)?	NA
iii	Have you completed an enhanced CRB check?	NA
iv	Will the study only require activities that would be considered part of the participant's normal educational or sporting experience (e.g., a PE lesson or coaching session)?	NA

**If you have answered 'YES' to any of the questions numbered 6-18 or question 22 and 'NO' to any of the supplementary items to question 22 (i-iv), explain how you intend to reduce any potential risks or harm to those involved in the study (maximum of 200 words).**

Question 8 - The collection of data within the context will be approved beforehand by the Committee at the selected club. The gatekeeper has the official role of the club's Secretary and will provide a letter consenting to the project with the club's official letterhead. The gatekeeper is Sheila Rollinson and her main point of contact is [sheilarollinson@dclfc.co.uk](mailto:sheilarollinson@dclfc.co.uk)

**Providing sufficient detail at this stage could permit approval under the Exercise and Sport Science Ethics Committee's expedited procedures. However, the committee retains the right to refer the application to the full Exercise and Sports Science (ESS) ethics committee. In such cases, investigators should be aware that this could delay consideration of the application. Information regarding meeting dates for the ESS ethics committee can be obtained from Mrs Stephanie Holland ([s.a.holland@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:s.a.holland@mmu.ac.uk)).**

**Ethics Stage 1 application form. Use this form for all Stage 1 reviews  
from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2013 onwards.**

### **8.3 Appendix 3: ESS Information Sheet for Participants**

Appendix 3 is the Information Sheet for Participants (ISP) that the coaches and players read prior to consenting to participate in the research project.



**MANCHESTER METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY**

**MMU Cheshire**

**Department of Exercise and Sport Science**

**Information Sheet for Participants (ISP)**

**Title of Study:**

A narrative biographical exploration of the coach-athlete relationship in women's elite football

**Ethics Committee Reference Number:**

**Participant Information Sheet**

### **1) This is an invitation to take part in a piece of research.**

I would like to offer you a chance to take part in a research study that I am conducting. I understand that before you agree you need to know about the project and what is required of you. The following document will hopefully explain everything you need to know. However, if you have any questions then please do not hesitate to ask. The project will focus on the coach/athlete relationship within a team of elite female footballers. The intention is to understand the interactions and meanings the coach and athletes hold towards the interactions and how these interactions may have an impact on their relationships.

### **2) What is the purpose of the research?**

The main purpose of this research project is to obtain a Master's Degree. The information gathered will help to further understand the relationship between the coaches and their athletes. The project will focus on a women's elite football team who play at an elite standard in England.

### **3) Why is the study being performed?**

The aim of this project is to explore the relationship between coaches and athletes within a women's elite football team. The findings of this research will help to identify the importance of the *interactions* between coaches and athletes and the *meaning* that coaches and athletes attached to these *interactions*. Additional research in this area is important to develop our understanding of the complexities of the coach-athlete relationship.

### **4) Why am I being asked to take part?**

You are being asked to participate in this study as you are currently working as a member of staff (e.g., Head Coach/Assistant Coach, manager) within the club under investigation, or you currently play for the respective team.

### **5) Do I have to take part?**

I am offering you the opportunity to take part in the research project. However, it is your choice whether you participate or not. All areas of the research will be explained and all the information you should need will be given. You can, at any time during the process, ask as many questions as necessary. Also, you can begin as a participant in the project but if you decide it is not for you or you cannot partake anymore then you can withdraw. I do not need to receive a specific reason.

If you do decide to take part, you will be asked to sign an informed consent form stating that you agree and you will be given a copy together with this information sheet to keep.

#### **6) What will happen to me if I agree to take part?**

Your participation in this study will involve the Principal Investigator (Hannah Ward) observing and recording field notes for a research diary during your training sessions and matches. Data collection for this study will be conducted during the 2014-15 football season and will not require any additional commitment beyond the observations of your day-to-day role as a coach or player. Additionally, interviews will be conducted to explore your thoughts, feelings and perceptions of the coach/athlete relationship. The main requirements from you are (i) to agree to be observed at training sessions and (ii) to participate in three/four thirty minute interviews of a semi-structured nature prior to or post a training session or match of your choosing during the months of March, April and May. They will be tape-recorded in order for the researcher to transcribe the interview afterwards to assist memory recall. All of the information collected and the individual's identities will be confidential. Also, to help the project it would be highly beneficial for you as a coach or player, to be present for at least half of the training sessions and matches throughout the competitive season.

#### **7) Are there any disadvantages or risks in taking part?**

There are no anticipated risks or disadvantages to the participants through their involvement in this study. All data will remain confidential, with the additional use of pseudonyms to protect the privacy of all the participants and key stakeholders. The Principal Investigator (Hannah Ward) will ensure that the data collected is only from the sporting environment. Therefore, any potential risks to the participants through participation in the project will be minimised.

#### **8) What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

There is no promise that the study will be able to benefit you individually. However, the information gathered is intended to deepen the understanding surrounding the coach and athlete relationship in sport, and for this particular project, women in elite football.

**9) Who are the members of the research team?**

Hannah Ward will undertake the role of Principal Investigator in the present study, and will work under the supervision of Dr. Ryan Groom (Director of Studies), Dr. Bill Taylor and Mr Andy Coyles (Co-supervisors).

Miss Hannah Ward

[11055177@stu.mmu.ac.uk](mailto:11055177@stu.mmu.ac.uk)

**10) Who is funding the research?**

The project is self-funded by the Principal Investigator.

**11) Who will have access to the data?**

All the data from the research diary and interviews will be collected and recorded confidentially with the use of passwords and codes to protect the security of the data. All data will be retained for no more than two years following the publication of the findings of this work. The findings will be submitted to an academic journal for peer review however, individual participants will not be identifiable through the information presented. All participants will receive a copy of the final work on request, and the researcher will be happy to explain any aspect that you do not understand or would like to know more information.

**12) Who do I contact if I feel my rights have been violated?**

If you are unhappy with any area of the research project you can contact the Principal Investigator (Hannah Ward). However, if you do not wish to involve Hannah in the process you can contact the University directly:

MMU Ethics Committee  
Registrar & Clerk to the Board of Governors  
Head of Governance and Secretariat Team  
Manchester Metropolitan University  
All Saints Building, All Saints  
Manchester M15 6BH  
Tel: 0161 247 1390

I confirm that the insurance policies in place at Manchester Metropolitan University will cover claims for negligence arising from the conduct of the University's normal business, which includes research carried out by staff and by undergraduate and postgraduate students as part of their course. This does not extend to clinical negligence.



**13) Finally, thank you for your time and participation!**

ESS Ethics Stage 1 ISP form. Use this ISP form for all Stage 1 applications  
from September 2013 onwards.



## 8.4 Appendix 4: ESS Informed Consent for Involvement in Interviews Form

Appendix 4 is the template of the Informed Consent for Involvement in Interviews that the participants completed and signed prior to the interviews being conducted.

 Manchester Metropolitan University — Cheshire —	<b>Department of Exercise and Sport Science</b>  <b>Informed Consent for Involvement in Interviews</b>	 Manchester Metropolitan University — Cheshire —
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**(Both the investigator and participant should retain a copy of this form)**

Name of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Supervisor/Principal Investigator: Miss Hannah Ward

Project Title: A narrative biographical exploration of the coach athlete relationship in women's elite football

Ethics Committee Approval Number: 11.12.14(i)

**Participant Statement**

I have read the participant information sheet for this study and understand what is involved in taking part. Any questions I have about the study, or my participation in it, have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I do not have to take part and that I may decide to withdraw from the study at any point without giving a reason. Any concerns I have raised regarding this study have been answered and I understand that any further concerns that arise during the time of the study will be addressed by the investigator. I therefore agree to participate in the study.

I agree to allow the interview to be recorded. YES ☐ NO ☐

I agree to allow direct quotations to be used. YES ☐ NO ☐

I wish my identity to remain anonymous. YES ☐ NO ☐

Signed (Participant)	<input type="text"/>	Date	<input type="text"/>
Signed (Investigator)	<input type="text"/>	Date	<input type="text"/>

**Parental or guardian consent for research involving children.**

I confirm that the details of this study have been fully explained and described in writing to (insert name) and have been understood by him/her and I therefore consent to his/her participation in this study.

Signed: <input type="text"/>	Date: <input type="text"/>
------------------------------	----------------------------

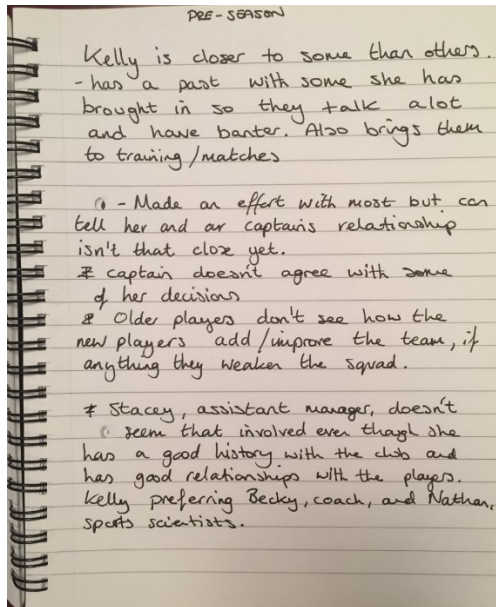
Please provide a contact number in case we need to get in touch with you.

Telephone:

This version of the form should be used from  
September 2013 onwards.

## 8.5 Appendix 5: Ethnographic Field Note Examples

Appendix 5 is extracts from the observational diaries that were kept throughout the season. Here are seven examples of the information and data that were collected.



### COMPETITIVE SEASON

Everyone upbeat after the first win, can see from behaviours, twitter, facebook and text messages.

#### RULES

- Don't train at least once a week then don't start
- No redbull in the changing room
- Laura made vice - captain
- People weren't happy with the rules but everyone knows where they stand now.
- 2 players mainly not happy about the
  - red bull because they have it daily.
- A lot of injuries at the moment, the no training rule is being tested but Kelly is sticking to it.

Team seems very mixed about their feelings towards Kelly:

- Some know her previously and seem quite close compared to others.
- - Some like her as a person but not sure about her coaching/managering ability.
- Some aren't quite sure about her.
- A handful of players don't express their feelings or opinion much.
- People expressing that they are noticing she communicates and seems closer to other players more than others. Questioning if she likes them more and if they should read into it. Will it impact team selection?

Captain - manager relationship is not good.

- Can feel tension between them, not a lot of communication but when there is they don't see eye to eye.

- Both want the best for the club but not agreeing on what is best. (ie team selection and personnel).

- Few disappointing results in a row now, can hear players aren't happy and as motivated as pre-season and the start of the season.

- Players saying training isn't great and very repetitive. Not working on areas that need improving and it's becoming frustrating.
  - Becky's sessions are better than Kelly's.

- Kelly only focusing on the positives and not addressing the areas of improvements after the games in a debrief and before training starts. Half of players becoming increasingly frustrated.

TUESDAY 11<sup>th</sup> Feb 2015

Asked to arrive at training early, everyone speculating what it could be. The Chief Executive discussed the situation the club is in and that he has hired John as

- the new manager.

Met John on the training pitch, introduced himself properly as some have seen him before from two one off training sessions.

He asked us everyone's names, what went wrong and what we would like to see happen.

- High intensity session - players commenting on the improvement of training already.

Pulling people aside for conversations and asked everyone to text:

- 1) Their full name
- 2) Best position
- 3) Favorite position
- 4) 3 things you believe the team needs.

John slowly trying to implement his playing philosophy:

Attacking third	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Unlimited touches</li><li>- Limited passes</li></ul>	# first 10 mins of each half the ball gets played long. "10 game" and then play football.
Mid third	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- 2/3 passes</li><li>- Patience</li><li>- foul zone</li></ul>	
Defending third	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- 2 touches</li></ul>	

- Not everyone is convinced and players struggling to adapt, even in training.

- John trying to be motivational with it along side his coaches.

- He believes it is the best way for us to play.

John starting to write a lot of messages onto the whatsapp group and getting everyone involved with more conversations and banter.

Can feel more respect towards him than Kelly. His behavior and how he conducts himself. Players training and trying harder than before.

Looks to be having more face to face conversations with players however, not with everyone. Can tell Anna and as captain don't agree at all with what he wants and John and Anna's conversations are either banter or disagreements (in the nicest way with no shaming).

Odd conversations still happening about people not liking the way he wants us to play. Some players not really saying much, just turning up, playing and then leaving.

## 8.6 Appendix 6: Interview Guide for Coaches

Appendix 6 is the Coach Interview Guideline that was used for Kelly's interviews. Below is a small sample of the questions that include pre-season and Kelly's first three matches.

### Coaches Interview Guideline

**Name:**\_\_\_\_\_.

**Age:**\_\_\_\_\_.

**Role at the club:**\_\_\_\_\_.

**Duration at the club:**\_\_\_\_\_.

#### Start of Season:

- What were your aims for the season?
- How were these agreed (players, club/officials)?
- What were you trying to achieve?
- How did you feel at the start of the year about the season ahead?
- How did you build a relationship with the players?
- Were you excited about working with any players in particular?

#### Start of the Year: Pre-Season and Training

##### *Perceptions of commitment*

- How committed did you feel towards the club?
- How committed did you feel towards the athletes?

- How committed did you feel the athletes were towards you?
- How committed did you feel the athletes were towards training and matches?
- How committed did you feel the athletes were towards the club?

#### *Perceptions of motivation*

- How motivated were you towards the club?
- How motivated did you feel towards the athletes?
- How motivated did you feel the athletes were towards you?
- How motivated did you feel the athletes were towards training and matches?
- How motivated did you feel the athletes were towards the club?
- Can you think of any specific examples that highlight the positive motivation of the athletes?
- Can you think of any specific examples that highlight the negative motivation of the athletes?

#### *Perceptions of behaviour*

- How would you describe the behaviours of the athletes towards you?
- How would you describe your behaviours towards the athletes?
- How would you describe the behaviours of the athletes around the club?
- How would you describe the behaviours of the athletes in training and matches?
- Can you think of any specific examples that highlight the positive behaviours of the athletes?
- Can you think of any specific examples that highlight the negative behaviours of the athletes?

### *Perceptions of closeness*

#### Personal (like and trust)

- Did you get along with your players?
- Did you feel your players liked you?
- Did you trust your players?
- Did you feel your players trusted you?

#### Generic (Belief, respect and intimacy)

- Did you know your players?
- Did you feel your players respected you?
- Did you believe in your players?
- Did you feel your players believed in you?
- How close did you feel towards your players?
- How close did you feel your players were towards you?

### *Perceptions of lack of closeness*

#### Unattached (Isolation)

- Did you ever feel alone or unsupported by your players?
- Do you think the players ever felt alone or unsupported by you or the other players? (e.g. injured players too)

#### Distress (Anger and frustration)

- Were there any times when you were angry with your players?
- Did any of your players show anger towards you?
- Were there any times when you felt frustrated by your players?



- Did any of your players show frustration towards you?

### *Perceptions of co-orientation*

#### Shared knowledge (Self-disclosure, information exchange)

- How did you interact and talk with your players? (e.g. face-to-face, text messages, emails, phone calls, etc.)
- Was open communication important to you with your players?
- Do you feel you communicated enough with your players at training and on match days?
- Did you feel your players felt they were able to talk to you about personal information if it impacted on their attendance or performance?
- Did you ever talk about yourself with your players? (e.g. family/occupation/hobbies)

#### Shared understanding (Acceptance and influence)

- How accepted did you feel by your players?
- Did you think your players felt accepted by you?
- Did you feel your players accepted your coaching style?
- Did you think your players accepted your aims on match days?
- Were there any times that you felt you influenced your players in a positive way?
- Were there any times that you felt you influenced your players in a negative way?
- Did the players influence you in a positive way?
- Did the players influence you in a negative way?

### *Perceptions of lack of co-orientation*

#### Disconnection (Disagreements and inadequacy signs)

- Were there any occasions you and your players had disagreements at training and on match days?
- (If yes) How did these disagreements impact on your relationship?
- Were there any occasions that you felt your actions did not mutually benefit you and the players?
- Were there any occasions that you felt the player's actions did not mutually benefit the both of you?
- Were there any occasions that you felt you needed help from your players?
- Were there any occasions that you felt you did not receive the help from your players that you believed you needed?

Contention (Unequal needs and imbalanced influence)

- Do you believe both the players and your needs were met during the season?
- Were there any occasions when the needs were unequal between you and your players?
- Were there times that the relationship was unbalanced?
- Did you ever feel the relationship with your players was one-sided or you were not getting anything from the relationship?
- Do you believe there were times when the players felt they were not getting anything from the relationship?

### *Perceptions of complementarity*

Reciprocal behaviour (Roles and tasks)

- How much did you understand your role towards the club?
- How much did you understand your role towards the players?
- How much did the players understand your role towards the club?
- How much did the players understand your role towards them?

- Did the players know the tasks set out at training sessions and on match days?

Helping transactions (Instructional support and emotional support)

- Did you feel emotionally supported by your players?
- How did you feel supported?
- Did you feel you offered emotional support to your players?
- How did you support your players?
- Do you think your players felt they showed emotional support towards you?
- Do you think your players felt emotionally supported by you?
- Did you feel your players followed your instructions at training and on match days?

*Perceptions of non-complementarity behaviours*

Opposed behaviours (Incompatibility and power struggles)

- Did you feel you had a good working relationship with your players?
- Were there times when the relationship was not working or you felt unsuited to your players?
- Did you ever feel unsuited to the club?
- Did you have any power struggles with your players?
- Did the incident(s) make you feel differently towards your players?
- Do you feel the players felt a different way about you following the incident(s)?

Ineffectual support (Lack of support)

- Did you ever feel a lack of support from your players at training and on match days?
- Do you think your players ever felt as though you did not support them enough?

## **Competitive Season**

### First three games:

North Side FC (LG-away) W: 3-6

AFC Ladies (CP-home) W: 1-0

Feds WFC (LG-home) W: 5-3

- What can you remember about the games?
- How committed did you feel towards the club on match days and at training?
- How committed did you feel towards the athletes?
- How committed did you feel the athletes were towards you?
- How committed did you feel the athletes were towards the club?

### *Perceptions of closeness*

- Did you get along with your players?
- Did you feel your players liked you?
- Did you trust your players?
- Did you feel your players trusted you?
- Did you respect your players?
- Did you feel your players respected you?
- Did you believe in your players?
- Did you feel your players believed in you?
- How close did you feel towards your players?
- How close did you feel your players were towards you?

### *Perceptions of lack of closeness*

- Did you feel alone or unsupported by your players?

- Do you think the players ever felt alone or unsupported by you or the other players?
- Did you feel angry with your players?
- Did any of your players show anger towards you?
- Did you feel frustrated by your players?
- Did any of your players show frustration towards you?

*Perceptions of co-orientation*

- How did you interact and talk with your players? (e.g. on match days, training sessions and in between)
- Was open communication important to you with your players?
- Do you feel you communicated enough with your players?
- Did you feel your players felt they were able to talk to you prior to the match?
- Did you feel your players felt they were able to talk to you about the match afterwards?
- Did you think your players accepted your aims on match days?
- Were there any times that you felt you influenced your players in a positive way prior/during/post the match?
- Were there any times that you felt you influenced your players in a negative way prior/during/post the match?
- Did the players influence you in a positive way prior/during/post the match?
- Did the players influence you in a negative way prior/during/post the match?

*Perceptions of lack of co-orientation*

- Did you feel your actions did not mutually benefit you and the players?
- Did you feel the player's actions did not mutually benefit the both of you?
- Did you feel you needed help from your players?
- Did you feel you did not receive the help from your players that you believed you needed?
- Do you believe both the players and your needs were met?

- Were there any occasions when the needs were unequal between you and your players?
- Were there times that the relationship was unbalanced?
- Did you feel the relationship with your players was one-sided?
- Do you believe there were times when you or the players felt you were not getting anything from the relationship?
- Were there any occasions you and your players had disagreements at training or on match days?
- (If yes) How did these disagreements impact on your relationship?

*Perceptions of complementarity*

- How much did you understand your role towards the club on match days?
- How much did you understand your role towards the players on match days?
- How much do you think the players understood your role towards them on match days?
- Did the players know the tasks set out on match days?
- Did you feel emotionally supported by your players on match days?
- Did you feel you offered emotional support to your players on match days?
- Do you think your players felt they showed emotional support towards you on match days?
- Do you think your players felt emotionally supported by you on match days?
- Did you feel your players followed your instructions on match days?

*Perceptions of non-complementarity behaviours*

- Was the relationship working?
- Did you feel you and your players were unsuited?
- Did you have any power struggles with your players on match days?
- Did the incident(s) make you feel differently towards your players?
- Do you feel the players felt a different way about you following the incident(s)?
- Did you ever feel a lack of support from your players on match days?

- Do you think your players ever felt as though you did not support them enough on match days?

## 8.7 Appendix 7: Interview Guide for Players

Appendix 7 is the Player Interview Guideline that was used for all of the player participants. Below is a small sample of the questions that include pre-season and Kelly's first three matches.

### Player Interview Guideline

Name:\_\_\_\_\_.

Age:\_\_\_\_\_.

Duration of playing:\_\_\_\_\_.

Any other role at the club (e.g. captain, socially):\_\_\_\_\_.

Duration at the club:\_\_\_\_\_.

### Player

#### Start of Season (with Kelly):

- Did you know the aims for the season?
- How were these agreed (coach, club/officials)?
- What were you trying to achieve?
- How did you feel at the start of the year about the season ahead?
- How did you build a relationship with the coach?
- Were you excited about working with the new coach?

#### Start of the Year: Pre-Season and Training



### *Perceptions of commitment*

- How committed did you feel towards the club?
- How committed did you feel towards the coach?
- How committed did you feel the coach was towards you?
- How committed did you feel the coach was towards training and matches?
- How committed did you feel the coach was towards the club?

### *Perceptions of motivation*

- How motivated were you towards the club?
- How motivated did you feel towards the coach?
- How motivated did you feel the coach was towards you?
- How motivated did you feel the coach was towards training and matches?
- How motivated did you feel the coach was towards the club?
- Can you think of any specific examples that highlight the positive motivation of the coach?
- Can you think of any specific examples that highlight the negative motivation of the coach?

### *Perceptions of behaviour*

- How would you describe the behaviours of the coach towards you?
- How would you describe your behaviours towards the coach?
- How would you describe the behaviours of the coach around the club?
- How would you describe the behaviours of the coach in training and matches?

- Can you think of any specific examples that highlight the positive behaviours of the coach?
- Can you think of any specific examples that highlight the negative behaviours of the coach?

### *Perceptions of closeness*

#### Personal (Like and trust)

- Did you get along with your coach?
- Did you feel your coach liked you?
- Did you trust your coach?
- Did you feel your coach trusted you?

#### Generic (Belief, respect and intimacy)

- Did you know your coach?
- Did you feel your coach respected you?
- Did you believe in your coach?
- Did you feel your coach believed in you?
- How close did you feel towards your coach?

### *Perceptions of lack of closeness*

#### Unattached (Isolation)

- Did you ever feel alone or segregated by your coach?
- Do you think the coach ever felt alone or segregated by you or the other players?

#### Distress (Anger and frustration)

- Were there any times when you were angry with your coach?

- Did your coach show anger towards you?
- Were there any times when you felt frustrated by your coach?
- Did your coach show frustration towards you?

### *Perceptions of co-orientation*

#### Shared knowledge (Self-disclosure, information exchange)

- How did you interact and talk with your coach? (e.g. face-to-face, text messages, emails, phone calls etc.)
- Was open communication important to you with your coach?
- Do you feel you communicated enough with your coach at training and on match days?
- Did you feel as though you were able to talk about personal information if it impacted on your attendance or performance?
- Did you ever talk about yourself with your coach? (e.g. family/occupation/hobbies)

#### Shared understanding (Acceptance and influence)

- How accepted did you feel by your coach?
- Did you think your coach felt accepted by you?
- Did you accept the coach's coaching style?
- Did you accept your coach's aims on match days?
- Were there any times that you felt you influenced your coach in a positive way?
- Were there any times that you felt you influenced your coach in a negative way?
- Did the coach influence you in a positive way?
- Did the coach influence you in a negative way?

### *Perceptions of lack of co-orientation*

#### Disconnection (Disagreements and inadequacy signs)

- Were there any occasions you and your coach had disagreements at training or on match days?
- (If yes) How did these disagreements impact on your relationship?
- Were there any occasions that you felt your actions did not mutually benefit you and the coach?
- Were there any occasions that you felt the coach's actions did not mutually benefit the both of you?
- Were there any occasions that you felt you needed help from your coach?
- Were there any occasions that you felt you did not receive the help from your coach that you believed you needed?

#### Contention (Unequal needs and imbalanced influence)

- Do you believe both the coach and your needs were met during the season?
- Were there any occasions when the needs were unequal between you and your coach?
- Were there times that the relationship was unbalanced?
- Did you ever feel the relationship with your coach was one-sided or you were not getting anything from the relationship?
- Do you believe there were times when the coach felt they were not getting anything from the relationship?

#### *Perceptions of complementarity*

##### Reciprocal behaviour (Roles and tasks)

- How much did you understand your role towards the club?
- How much did you understand your role towards the coach?
- How much did the coach understand your role towards the club?

- How much did the coach understand your role towards them?
- Did you know the tasks set out at training sessions and on match days?

#### Helping transactions (Instructional support and emotional support)

- Did you feel emotionally supported by your coach?
- How did you feel supported?
- Did you feel you offered emotional support to your coach?
- How did you support your coach?
- Do you think your coach felt they showed emotional support towards you?
- Do you think your coach felt emotionally supported by you?
- Did you follow the instructions at training and on match days?

#### *Perceptions of non-complementarity behaviours*

##### Opposed behaviours (Incompatibility and power struggles)

- Did you feel you had a good working relationship with your coach?
- Were there times when the relationship was not working or you felt unsuited to your coach?
- Did you ever feel unsuited to the club?
- Did you have any power struggles with your coach?
- Did the incident(s) make you feel differently towards your coach?
- Do you feel the coach felt a different way about you following the incident(s)?

##### Ineffectual support (Lack of support)

- Did you ever feel a lack of support from your coach at training and on match days?
- Do you think your coach ever felt as though you did not support them enough?

## **Competitive Season**

### **Kelly's first three games:**

North Side FC (LG-away) W: 3-6

AFC Ladies (CP-home) W: 1-0

Feds WFC (LG-home) W: 5-3

- What can you remember about the games?
- How committed did you feel towards the club on match days and at training?
- How committed did you feel towards the coach?
- How committed did you feel the coach was towards you?
- How committed did you feel the coach was towards the club?

### *Perceptions of closeness*

- Did you get along with your coach?
- Did you feel your coach liked you?
- Did you trust your coach?
- Did you feel your coach trusted you?
- Did you respect your coach?
- Did you feel your coach respected you?
- Did you believe in your coach?
- Did you feel your coach believed in you?
- How close did you feel towards your coach?

### *Perceptions of lack of closeness*

- Did you feel alone or unsupported by your coach?
- Do you think the coach ever felt alone or unsupported by you or the other players?

- Did you feel angry with your coach?
- Did your coach show anger towards you?
- Did you feel frustrated by your coach?
- Did your coach show frustration towards you?

*Perceptions of co-orientation*

- How did you interact and talk with your coach? (e.g. on match days, training sessions and in between)
- Was open communication important to you with your coach?
- Would you have liked to communicate with your coach more?
- Did you feel you were able to talk to your coach prior to the match?
- Did you feel you could talk to your coach after the match?
- Did you accept your coach's aims?
- Were there times that you felt influenced by your coach in a positive way prior/during/post the match?
- Did the coach influence you in a positive way prior/during/post the match?
- Did the coach influence you in a negative way prior/during/post the match?

*Perceptions of lack of co-orientation*

- Did you feel your actions did not mutually benefit you and the coach?
- Did you feel the coach's actions did not mutually benefit the both of you?
- Did you feel you needed help from your coach?
- Did you feel you did not receive the help from your coach that you believed you needed?
- Do you believe both the coach and your needs were met?
- Were there any occasions when the needs were unequal between you and your coach?
- Were there times that the relationship was unbalanced?
- Did you feel the relationship with your coach was one sided?

- Do you believe there were times when you or the coach felt you were not getting anything from the relationship?
- Were there any occasions you and your coach had disagreements at training or on match days?
- (If yes) How did these disagreements impact on your relationship?

*Perceptions of complementarity*

- How much did you understand your role towards the club on match days?
- How much did you understand your role towards the coach on match days?
- How much do you think the coach understood your role towards them on match days?
- Did you know the tasks set out on match days?
- Did you feel emotionally supported by your coach on match days?
- Did you feel you offered emotional support to your coach on match days?
- Do you think your coach felt they showed emotional support towards you on match days?
- Do you think your coach felt emotionally supported by you on match days?
- Did you follow the coach's instructions on match days?

*Perceptions of non-complementarity behaviours*

- Was the relationship working?
- Did you feel you and your coach were unsuited?
- Did you have any power struggles with your coach on match days?
- Did the incident(s) make you feel differently towards your coach?
- Do you feel the coach felt a different way about you following the incident(s)?



## 8.8 Appendix 8: Key Data Analysis Themes

Appendix 8 is the eleven key themes and document that acted as guidance during the data analysis of the transcribed interviews and observational diaries.

### 1) Kelly's Positive Start

No.	Description of theme
1	Team aims for the season and how they were agreed
2	Building a relationship
3	Commitment in pre-season and the start of the season towards each other, the club, training and matches
4	Motivation in pre-season towards each other, the club, training and matches
5	Behaviours in pre-season and the start of the season towards each other, the club, training and matches
6	Closeness in pre-season and the start of the season towards each other, the club, training and matches
7	Trust in pre-season and the start of the season towards each other, the club, training and matches
8	Respect in pre-season and the start of the season towards each other, the club, training and matches

<b>9</b>	Belief in pre-season and the start of the season towards each other, the club, training and matches
<b>10</b>	Communication and interaction in pre-season and the start of the season towards each other, the club, training and matches
<b>11</b>	Incompatibility, disagreements and power struggles in pre-season and the start of the season towards each other, the club, training and matches

## 2) Kelly's Poor Results

<b>N.O</b>	<b>Description of theme</b>
<b>12</b>	Building a relationship
<b>13</b>	Commitment towards each other, the club, training and matches
<b>14</b>	Motivation towards each other, the club, training and matches
<b>15</b>	Behaviours towards each other, the club, training and matches
<b>16</b>	Closeness towards each other, the club, training and matches
<b>17</b>	Trust towards each other, the club, training and matches
<b>18</b>	Respect towards each other, the club, training and matches
<b>19</b>	Belief towards each other, the club, training and matches
<b>20</b>	Communication and interaction towards each other, the club, training and matches

<b>21</b>	Incompatibility, disagreements and power struggles towards each other, the club, training and matches
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### 3) Kelly is Sacked

<b>N.O</b>	<b>Description of theme</b>
<b>22</b>	Building a relationship
<b>23</b>	Commitment towards each other, the club, training and matches
<b>24</b>	Motivation towards each other, the club, training and matches
<b>25</b>	Behaviours towards each other, the club, training and matches
<b>26</b>	Closeness towards each other, the club, training and matches
<b>27</b>	Trust towards each other, the club, training and matches
<b>28</b>	Respect towards each other, the club, training and matches
<b>29</b>	Belief towards each other, the club, training and matches
<b>30</b>	Communication and interaction towards each other, the club, training and matches
<b>31</b>	Incompatibility, disagreements and power struggles towards each other, the club, training and matches

### 4) New Management – John’s First Three Matches

<b>N.O</b>	<b>Description of theme</b>
<b>32</b>	Team aims for the season and how they were agreed
<b>33</b>	Building a relationship
<b>34</b>	Commitment towards each other, the club, training and matches
<b>35</b>	Behaviours towards each other, the club, training and matches
<b>36</b>	Closeness towards each other, the club, training and matches
<b>37</b>	Trust towards each other, the club, training and matches
<b>38</b>	Respect towards each other, the club, training and matches
<b>39</b>	Belief towards each other, the club, training and matches
<b>40</b>	Communication and interaction towards each other, the club, training and matches
<b>41</b>	Incompatibility, disagreements and power struggles towards each other, the club, training and matches

#### **5) John's Mixture of Results**

<b>N.O</b>	<b>Description of theme</b>
<b>42</b>	Building a relationship

<b>43</b>	Commitment towards each other, the club, training and matches
<b>44</b>	Behaviours towards each other, the club, training and matches
<b>45</b>	Closeness towards each other, the club, training and matches
<b>46</b>	Trust towards each other, the club, training and matches
<b>47</b>	Respect towards each other, the club, training and matches
<b>48</b>	Belief towards each other, the club, training and matches
<b>49</b>	Communication and interaction towards each other, the club, training and matches
<b>50</b>	Incompatibility, disagreements and power struggles towards each other, the club, training and matches

#### **6) John's Last Four Games**

<b>N.O</b>	<b>Description of theme</b>
<b>51</b>	Building a relationship
<b>52</b>	Commitment towards each other, the club, training and matches
<b>53</b>	Behaviours towards each other, the club, training and matches
<b>54</b>	Closeness towards each other, the club, training and matches
<b>55</b>	Trust towards each other, the club, training and matches

<b>56</b>	Respect towards each other, the club, training and matches
<b>57</b>	Belief towards each other, the club, training and matches
<b>58</b>	Communication and interaction towards each other, the club, training and matches
<b>59</b>	Incompatibility, disagreements and power struggles towards each other, the club, training and matches