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Exploring the Daily Hassles of Neophyte Cycling Coaches

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Abstract

Sport coaching is increasingly acknowledged as a stressful activity, especially for those coaching in community contexts. This highlights the significant need to identify the diverse sources of key stressors. The aim of this research was to explore the recurrent stressors experienced by novice coaches to better inform their coping strategies and reduce the drop-out rate caused by stress. The novelty of this research lies in its longitudinal exploration of the daily hassles experienced by community sport coaches within their coaching role. Ontologically and epistemologically positioned within the interpretivist paradigm, we interviewed eight recently qualified cycling coaches over an 18-month period. Reflective thematic analysis developed three themes highlighting sources of stress over time: at the start of their participation, coaches discussed the hassles of *accessing facilities* and *struggling to fit in*; towards the end of their participation, coaches discussed *feeling isolated*. Results from this study can better inform the education and support delivered by national governing bodies of sport across the community and club landscape and increase sport psychology practitioners' awareness of the daily hassles experienced by coaches.

Keywords: coach, coaching, novice, qualitative, sport, stressors

49 **Exploring the Daily Hassles of Neophyte Cycling Coaches**

50 Forty decades of stress research highlights the substantial, damaging impact of stress on
51 mental health (e.g., psychological distress, depression, psychiatric disorders) and physical health
52 behaviours (e.g., substance abuse, alcohol dependence, smoking, and excessive eating) (see
53 Thoits, 2010; Umberson et al., 2008). Within the context of sport, coaching is increasingly
54 acknowledged as a stressful occupation (Carson et al., 2019; Frey, 2007; Kelley et al., 1999;
55 Levey et al., 2009). Literature examining coach stress has typically focused on elite settings (see
56 Didymus, 2017; Fletcher & Scott, 2010; Ntwanano et al., 2017) with a range of stressors
57 identified, including organisational stressors; scrutiny from parents, public, and the media; the
58 demands and expectations of the coach role; athletes' performance; athlete injury, coachability,
59 professionalism, attitude, and commitment (Norris et al., 2017). There is a significant positive
60 relationship between the frequency of organisational stressors and burnout, surface acting (i.e.,
61 emotional displays that do not reflect an individual's true feelings), and subjective performance
62 (Arnold & Fletcher, 2021). To this end, it is likely that psychological stress may contribute to the
63 drop-out of around 200,000 coaches in the United Kingdom (U.K.) — around 20% of the
64 workforce — each year (North, 2009; O'Connor & Bennie, 2006).

65 To maintain positive mental health, coaches may promote and protect positive
66 functioning by balancing different demands, learning and reflecting, and developing those who
67 they coach (Pankow et al., 2022). Yet there is insufficient evidence to inform the provision of
68 mental health support for coaches (Sherwin, 2017). Moreover, sport coaching is a context-
69 specific process that occurs in both (pressured) high-performance and (less intense) participation
70 domains (Collins et al., 2022; Côté & Gilbert, 2009). In the U.K., the expansive (community
71 based) coach role within the participation domain, might include collaborating with others (i.e.,

72 organisations and professionals); focusing on non-sport outcomes (i.e., social and health
73 inequalities); and delivering government policy (i.e., physical and mental wellbeing; individual,
74 economic, and social development) (Ives et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2021). Historically, stress has
75 been emphasised as a contextualised and transactional process, which implies not all events are
76 equally stressful for all individuals under all circumstances (Wright et al., 2020). Consequently,
77 coaches face a range of stressors depending on their role, experience, and setting (i.e., coaches
78 will experience different stressors if novice or expert, working in community or performance
79 domains).

80 Crucially, stressor-related research has focused on the *type* (e.g., competitive,
81 organisational, and personal; Rhind et al., 2013), rather than *dimensions* of stressors (Arnold &
82 Fletcher, 2021). One dimension is frequency, relating to how often the stressor is experienced
83 (Arnold et al., 2019; Arnold et al., 2013; Larner et al., 2016; Simms et al., 2020). This is
84 important given its relation to performers' health, well-being, and performance (Arnold et al.,
85 2019), and should be considered alongside intensity and duration (Arnold & Fletcher, 2021). The
86 intensity of a stressor highlights the impact on the individual in terms of how much adjustment is
87 needed to process it (Vagg & Spielberger, 1999). Duration relates to how long the stressor lasts
88 and is best considered on a continuum, leaving ambiguity of where short-term stress ends and
89 longer lasting stress starts (Smyth et al., 2013). Focusing on dimensions of stress identifies the
90 small, mundane stressors experienced throughout the lifespan (Fletcher et al., 2006; Lazarus &
91 Folkman, 1984; Wright et al., 2020). These unpleasant, but transient stressors, caused by the
92 friction of daily life, have been coined daily hassles (Lazarus & DeLongis, 1983; Wright et al.,
93 2020). Experienced frequently and for long time periods, hassles are not demanding in isolation
94 (Chamberlain & Zika, 1990; Kanner et al., 1981; Wright et al., 2020) but can adversely impact

95 an individual's health and well-being (see Kohn, 1996; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; McLean &
96 Link, 1994; Wheaton, 1994). As such, the negative effects of hassles can far exceed those of
97 major life events (Landreville & Vézina, 1992; Weinberger et al., 1987). This highlights the need
98 for longitudinal studies examining experiences of stress.

99 Daily stress literature list numerous examples from a broad host of domains, such as
100 weather, traffic, work demands, arguments, meeting a deadline, sleep disturbances, and financial
101 concerns (Wright et al., 2020). Within a sport context, athlete hassles with a shorter duration
102 might include receiving a bad call or making a game error (Anshel & Anderson, 2002; Anshel &
103 Delaney, 2001; Anshel et al., 2000). Hassles with a longer duration might include retaining roster
104 spots, managing one's lifestyle and media demands (Schinke et al., 2012), extended injury
105 rehabilitation, and homesickness for immigrated athletes (Tenenbaum et al., 2003). Arguably,
106 these examples are low in intensity and manageable in isolation, but regular, recurrent, and
107 stressful when combined and experienced over time. Consequently, hassles change over time as
108 they may be appraised as salient and harmful to well-being, health, and psychopathology (i.e.,
109 underlying psychobiological dysfunction) more widely (Arnold & Fletcher, 2021; Chamberlain
110 & Zika, 1990; Lazarus, 1984; Wright et al., 2020). This highlights the need for longitudinal
111 studies examining experiences of daily hassles.

112 There is a lack of research specifically examining the daily hassles of sport coaching, or
113 how stressors change over time. Better understanding the stressors of coaching at the grassroots
114 or community level is crucial as it is these coaches who are most likely to experience mental
115 illness (e.g., depression and anxiety) and are typically unaware of strategies or policies regarding
116 available mental health support (Smith et al., 2020). Of the thirty-eight studies included in Norris
117 et al.'s (2017) review, only three explicitly sampled coaches in a community context, with only

118 one (see Stebbings et al., 2015) employing a longitudinal design. The novelty of this study is its
119 longitudinal focus on the daily hassles (stressors experienced frequently, but not intense in
120 isolation) of neophyte community sport coaches. The aim was to better understand coaches'
121 experiences of everyday psychological stress (hassles), to increase the evidence-base that
122 informs the provision of mental health support for coaches. This work extends previous
123 qualitative research on community sport coaching (e.g., Cronin et al., 2018; Gale et al., 2023;
124 Ives et al., 2021; Roberts et al., 2019) and advances sport coaching research, more broadly, by
125 researching the under-explored, every day contexts of coaches (see Allen & Shaw, 2009, 2013;
126 Stodter & Cushion, 2014, 2017). Findings will also better inform the support delivered by sport
127 psychology practitioners and the coach education and development opportunities delivered by
128 national governing bodies (NGBs) of sport.

129 **Method**

130 **Study Design**

131 This research explored individual's experiences of daily hassles in their coaching role
132 over an 18-month period. This captured participants' experiences of daily hassles over a whole
133 season within cycling. Ontologically, this work took a constructivist approach and was
134 epistemologically positioned within the interpretivist paradigm. This respected the multiple
135 realities of participants, rather than an absolute truth (Alvesson & Sckoldberg, 2009; Coe, 2012;
136 Markula & Silk, 2011). The first and third authors had continued interactions with the NGB and
137 the sport context providing insight into the cycling landscape and a depth of knowledge on the
138 theories, concepts, and literature surrounding stress in sport (Levitt et al., 2017).

139 **Participants**

140 Following institutional ethical approval, eight cycling coaches (2 female and 6 male)
141 aged 32-73 years old ($M=49$; $SD=14.94$) were recruited to voluntarily participate. The NGB
142 acted as a gatekeeper to participants. To ensure participants were independently leading the
143 planning and delivery of coaching activities, purposive sampling focused on those who had
144 recently completed a NGB Level 2 qualification. Participants gave signed consent and verbal
145 assent to participate. To protect participant confidentiality, all names used are pseudonyms. All
146 participants aligned with the same NGB within the U.K. The NGB is in the top half of Olympic
147 funded sports in the U.K. Operating nationally, with responsibility for governing and developing
148 the sport from grassroots participation to the international stage, the organisation is supported by
149 12,500 volunteers at a regional level.

150 **Data Collection**

151 Interviews are a widely used qualitative data collection method in sport and exercise
152 science, creating conversations where participants can interact, reflect, and reconstruct their
153 experiences, reaching shared meanings and understanding, offering insights into complex,
154 specific life events (Roberts, 2020; Sparkes & Smith, 2016). Positioned within the interpretivist
155 paradigm, interviews were socially constructed, where the first author and participants played
156 equal roles in creating the narrative (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2011; Smith,
157 2009; Smith & Deemer, 2000). This dialogue progressed towards making sense of and
158 determining meaning of specific experiences in relation to daily hassles, reflecting a narrative
159 truth, rather than objective truth in some pristine form (Roberts, 2020; Sparkes & Smith, 2016).
160 This created multiple layers of truths, uncovering each person's character, values, and
161 idiosyncrasies across various situations.

162 At the start of their participation, coaches were recently qualified. Semi-structured
163 interviews ($N=23$ interviews), ranging from 30.72 minutes to 101.62 minutes in length
164 ($M=59.34$; $SD=17.70$), were conducted using an interview guide developed in line with Castillo-
165 Montoya's (2016) four phase process (i.e., aligning interview questions with research questions;
166 constructing an inquiry-based conversation; receiving feedback on interview protocols; and
167 piloting the interview protocol). The guide served as prompts, more than questions, allowing
168 discussions to follow the flow of conversation and emerging issues (Jimenez & Orozco, 2021;
169 Purdy, 2014; Thelwell et al., 2008). Coaches were interviewed regularly (frequency ranged from
170 5 to 10; $M=6.12$; see Table 1) during the 18-month period to understand their occupational
171 practice and everyday action over time (Townsend & Cushion, 2021). This enabled the
172 identification of temporal changes across lives and exploration of responses to change
173 (Hermanowicz, 2013). Over time, the first author became more familiar with participants, and as
174 rapport strengthened, interviews became more spontaneous and conversational in nature. This
175 flexibility in questioning was key, demonstrating the rules of everyday conversation, enhancing
176 the quality of the interview data as coaches' experiences became more divergent (Aldiabat &
177 LeNavenec, 2018; Riessman, 2008; Turner, 2010). Consequently, unstructured interviews ($N=26$
178 interviews), ranging from 13.42 to 89.85 minutes in length ($M=54.77$; $SD=21.25$),
179 complemented semi-structured interviews.

180 All interviews ($N=49$) were audio recorded (totaling 46 hours) to capture the topic and
181 dynamics of the conversation. Audio files provided an opportunity to reflect, review, and recall
182 the interview dialogue and make sense of the participants' wider stress experiences (Kvale &
183 Brinkmann, 2009). All audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, producing 410,223 words

184 across 2,739 pages of single-spaced text. This created denaturalised, polished, and selective
185 transcripts that prioritised verbal speech (Oliver et al., 2005; Riessman, 2008).

186 **Data Analysis**

187 Thematic analysis was employed to conceptualise patterns of shared meaning across the
188 data set in relation to the central meaning that themes captured (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The
189 analysis was inductive, 'grounded in' the data, 'inescapably informed' by the paradigmatic,
190 epistemological, and ontological assumptions of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 331). To
191 enable conceptual coherence, a reflexive thematic analysis was used to complement the
192 constructionist positioning of the research (Braun & Clarke, 2013, 2019). This utilised the
193 subjective skills of the researcher as an analytic resource (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

194 In line with a reflexive thematic analysis approach, there was no development or
195 application of a codebook (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Instead, semantic coding, interpretative and
196 conceptual across the analysis, provided a descriptive analysis as communicated by participants
197 (Byrne, 2022; Trainor & Bundon, 2021). Meaning resided at the intersection of the data and the
198 first author's contextual, theoretically embedded, interpretative practices – meaning knowledge
199 was constructed, rather than discovered (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Codes formed the basis of
200 repeated patterns across the data set that could be grouped in a meaningful way. Codes were
201 combined, refined, separated, or discarded, paying attention to contradictions, tensions, and
202 inconsistencies with meaning within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Different iterations of
203 code clusters were tracked on an Excel spreadsheet (Byrne, 2022; Trainor & Bundon, 2021).
204 Tentative themes were then developed for each cluster, creating a 'thematic map', where the
205 relationship among codes was actively constructed, examined, and informed by the narrative of
206 each theme (Braun et al., 2016; Byrne, 2022). This provided insight to the significance of

207 individual themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Each theme was considered in relation to the research
208 question, producing a coherent and internally consistent account that fitted into the broader
209 overall story (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Theme titles were further refined during the write up of the
210 study's findings.

211 There was potential for constantly new understanding and insights within the data (Braun
212 & Clarke, 2021; Low, 2019; Mason, 2010). Coding quality came from the depth of engagement
213 – dwelling with the data (Ho et al., 2017) – and the situated, reflexive interpretation process. The
214 reader is asked to judge if they share our understanding of what constitutes codes and themes,
215 outlined above, considering the study's paradigmatic, ontological, and epistemological
216 assumptions about meaningful knowledge and knowledge production (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

217 **Methodological Integrity**

218 The interpretive qualitative methods reported in this study are packed with several layers
219 of truth, offering a representation of reality by revealing an interconnected, multi-dimensional
220 narrative experienced by the individuals in question (Salla, 1993). Positioned within a
221 constructionist epistemology, this research focused on understanding individual's experiences of
222 stress, through transactional critical incidents (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Here, social reality
223 was a product of how participants, both individually and collectively, made sense of daily hassles
224 in their social world (Markula & Silk, 2011; Smith, 1989). Member checking was avoided
225 because its ontological assumption clashed with the ontological relativism of the study
226 (Motulsky, 2021). To increase integrity, participants' points were clarified during interviews.
227 Inter-rater reliability was also avoided because of power differentials between the research team
228 (Smith & McGannon, 2018).

229 This study recruited a small sample. Yet justifying rigour through sample size conflicts
230 with the organic version of thematic analysis used (Braun et al., 2016; Dworkin, 2012). Instead,
231 we achieve higher information power through a narrow study aim and specific sample criteria
232 (i.e., neophyte coaches with knowledge and experience of daily hassles; Aldiabat & LeNavenec,
233 2018). Quality interview data was achieved through a focus on rich (layered, intricate, and
234 detailed) and thick (quantity) data (Aldiabat & LeNavenec, 2018; Burmeister & Aitken, 2012;
235 Dibley, 2011). In addition, the numerous quotations shared in the results demonstrate the width
236 and credibility of this work (Burke, 2016). We feel this work offers a substantive contribution to
237 understanding social life, and we have strived to be transparent in our work, including a vivid
238 description of the analysis strategy used (Aldiabat & LeNavenec, 2018; Burke, 2016). The
239 research team aligned to the same research paradigm, acting as critical friends to the first author
240 to best support the application of methods, structuring the data collection and analysis process,
241 providing researcher reflexivity and exploration of different socio-psychological contexts (Levitt
242 et al., 2017).

243 **Results**

244 The present study explored the daily hassles of sport coaching. Three themes were
245 developed from the analysis: *accessing facilities*, *struggling to fit in*, and *left in the cold*.
246 Although interviews were conducted throughout coaches' participation, findings are presented
247 under two headings: 'Entering the coaching role', capturing hassles at the start of coaches'
248 participation, and the themes *accessing facilities*, and *struggling to fit in*; and 'established in the
249 coaching role', capturing hassles towards the end of coaches' participation, and the theme *left in*
250 *the cold*. This reflects the change in hassles over time. These are presented in Table 2 and
251 discussed below. Although this might appear simplistic, developed themes provide overarching

252 patterns across the data in relation to coaching, more than the complexity of participants' lives
253 during their participation.

254 **Entering the Coaching Role**

255 As participants entered their coaching role, the daily hassles they experienced related to
256 the new world they had entered. In this section, we discuss the themes of accessing facilities and
257 struggling to fit in.

258 *Accessing Facilities*

259 Accessing facilities included the hassles of needing further training beyond their initial
260 NGB qualification, the financial barrier of accessing venues, and the seasonal challenge of
261 coaching. Some coaches needed to undertake further training to access facilities, specifically
262 those wanting to coach in discipline-specific spaces. For example, Joe “levelled-up” his
263 qualification to access the trails in his mountain bike club and Adam completed additional
264 training to deliver the “in-house” rider programme at the velodrome. Hiring facilities also
265 brought a financial barrier. James wanted to take riders to his local velodrome — to offer riders
266 variety, and use his Track-specific qualification — but the cost made it prohibitive:

267 It was in excess of £900 for two hours. We've only got 10 kids, so I can't go to each kid
268 and ask for £90... then you've got to [travel], too – that's a two hour drive, or an hour
269 and forty on the train, if you can get your bike on the train, which is a definite no-go in
270 rush hour [...] If I lived [closer], I'd be there all day, every day. It means using the
271 velodrome is a no-no, so I'll be taking [the riders somewhere local], because that's
272 relatively cheap and I'll only have to charge each one £5 or £10 and I'll cover the
273 shortfall [...] they have bikes we can hire, too. Only downside is that they want their own
274 coaches there, but that's an insurance thing. (*James*)

275 Coaches also experienced hassles associated with the terrain of their physical coaching
276 environment. Joe struggled to access the park where he delivered sessions during the autumn and
277 winter months because it often closed due to flooding from the rain. Peter and Chris's club did
278 not have their own facility, so they used local primary schools. This tied in with the club's focus
279 of growing their junior membership, but the lack of artificial lighting restricted their coaching to
280 summer school-term times.

281 *Struggling to fit in*

282 On entering their coaching role, coaches discussed how they struggled to fit in with their
283 peers. Hassles included clubs being set in their ways, poor communication, a variation in
284 coaching, and misaligned goals. This was made worse by their strong connection with the NGB
285 — they were motivated, and proud, to have gained the social status of “Coach”. The NGB
286 qualifications endorsed their knowledge, with coaches discussing the comfort they felt knowing
287 they coached “the [NGB] way” (James). Moreover, identifying their development needs as they
288 engaged with riders, coaches became motivated to progress through the NGB's education
289 pathway, strengthening and shaping their relationship with the NGB. However, this strong
290 alignment with the NGB, and doing things the NGB way, caused challenges when coaches tried
291 to embed themselves into established clubs. Even though they had completed their training to
292 qualify as coaches in these settings, establishing themselves as a qualified coach – and an equal –
293 was challenging. There was a difference between the coaching they had been expected to deliver
294 through their formal education and the coaching they witnessed at their facilities. This hassle was
295 low in intensity, but a regular feature of sessions:

296 I started to watch the coaches a little bit more to see what they were doing and some of
297 them haven't got a clue. I emailed [the tutor] and said, “What you've told me to do on

298 the course, I'm going to be crossing wires here and ruffling some feathers". He emailed
299 back saying, "What do you mean?", and I said, "They've got no idea of the concept of a
300 warm up, it's just full on, straight away"... they came out of the session, and they were
301 done in, they were just flat out, but they only did 30 laps. (*Adam*)

302 These clubs were "set in their ways" (Louise) and participants' ideas could come across
303 as too different and too big of a change. Coaches discussed disagreeing with some of the
304 techniques their peers coached but did not feel they "cared enough" to be corrected (Louise).
305 Some felt their clubs were under-resourced, leaving coaches with perceived responsibility to stay
306 involved with the club. The challenge was having peers "happy and on-board" with new ideas,
307 "without rocking the boat too much" (Louise):

308 I turned up at those Tuesday evening development centres and thought, 'Crikey, this is a
309 whole other level compared to Saturday mornings, which now feels like some sort of
310 OAP pedestrian activity' [...] The kids in the club are never going to win races with our
311 current approach to training, that's a fact, and then they're going to leave. (*Louise*)

312 Another aspect of coaches' struggles to fit in was session planning. Sharing the planning
313 responsibility was intended to reduce stress, splitting the workload. However, coaches felt the
314 more experienced, and sometimes senior, coaches they worked with were unreliable, haphazard,
315 unpredictable, and inconsistent with planning activities. When they did provide a session plan, it
316 "was on the back of a cigarette packet or something" (Joe), which created differences in the
317 standards, and perceived quality, of coaching sessions. This struggle to "get eyes on session
318 plans" and "chasing" (Louise) those who they coached with, left coaches feeling unprepared for
319 sessions and questioning their abilities:

320 You have to be adaptable to the needs of the person in front of you, but this very laid-
321 back approach, where we don't plan what we're doing, or who we're coaching, or where
322 we're taking them until we get there is frustrating... I'm not at a stage where I have the
323 knowledge to comfortably just go, "Yes, let's do sprinting and this is exactly the thing we
324 need to do" [...] One day I turned up and it turned out [the head coach] had told the kids
325 that he was doing a Mountain bike session, so all the kids were getting these old shitty
326 mountain bikes and cyclo-cross bikes from the container [...] I had my road bike, but I
327 have a mountain bike that I could have brought if he had told me [...] If you're not going
328 to communicate to me that I need to bring a different bike, how do you expect me to
329 continue to turn up to this? [...] Just the way the club is run, and the most basic thing of
330 him deciding what a coaching session is going to look like without even letting me know.
331 How am I meant to contribute to that, or plan for the coaching session? (*Louise*)

332 A lack of information before sessions also hindered coaches' ability to plan:
333 I've asked for their names beforehand, and I've kind of stalked them a little on Facebook,
334 and one or two of them I've added, and said, "Just so I can give you the best day for you,
335 on Sunday, can you let me know what you're hoping to work on and what kind of trails
336 you can ride?" [...] I might get three out of five of them reply, so that'll be our plan [...] I
337 just take a page, write down what I did in the last one and just jot down what I'm going to
338 work on. Then come Sunday morning, [one] will turn up and she's never done it before,
339 or she's really skilled and she'll totally throw whatever sort of plan I have. (*Beth*)

340 This difficulty to embed themselves in clubs meant coaches were left managing fragile
341 relationships with their peers. Moreover, however, they were unable to prepare for sessions. This
342 left them feeling that riders, especially those with more advanced technical skills, tested their

343 abilities and knowledge as coaches. This knocked participants' confidence, leaving them
344 questioning their legitimacy as coaches.

345 **Established in the Coaching Role**

346 As participants became established in their coaching role, nearing the end of their
347 participation in this study, the daily hassles they experienced related to being jaded and isolated.
348 In this section, we discuss the themes of being left in the cold.

349 *Left in the Cold*

350 When coaches first entered the coaching role, they felt a strong association with the
351 NGB; their new qualification endorsed their knowledge, and they liked coaching the NGB way.
352 Yet a year into their participation, when established in their role, this had changed, and coaches
353 felt disconnected from the NGB. At this point, coaches discussed how this impacted their long-
354 term relationship with the NGB. Coaches came to view the NGB as a certificate provider who
355 simply supplied them with the resources, knowledge, and certificate that enabled them to coach.
356 As such, coaches described a transactional relationship with the NGB:

357 [The NGB] run a course that gives you a certificate that says, 'You can do this', and
358 that's it, really. [...] You get the materials you need. So, they set you up to be a coach,
359 and I think that's how I see it. But the fact that they don't have any post-course checks,
360 to me, means that they have no involvement anymore. (*Peter*)

361 To address this disconnect, coaches wanted a NGB 'kit' – a wearable uniform – to
362 endorse and communicate their knowledge and status to those who they coached. Without it, as
363 coaches distanced themselves from the NGB, they identified more strongly as club coaches.
364 They also disconnected from the NGB's focus on elite cycling and winning Olympic medals,
365 which was removed from their community coaching environment:

366 [The NGB's] adverts, the quotes and what appears to be the ethos, is towards the racing
367 end of things. That's fine. I have no problem with that because every racer has got to start
368 somewhere. They've got to start with a love of cycling and get on with it. So, if I can do
369 that with the children that I have in my groups, then I'm more than happy [...] [The NGB]
370 needs people like us. (*Peter*)

371 When entering their coaching role, coaches were keen to coach "the [NGB] way". Yet
372 when established in their role, coaches discussed how this negatively impacted their practice.
373 This left them unable to deliver the coaching required by riders and "offering advice" to stay
374 within their insurance remit (Louise). For some, progressing through the coach education
375 pathway remedied this hassle by changing their coaching remit. Yet those who could not, or
376 lacked the interest to, progress through the pathway, were left with this hassle. This contrasts
377 against participants' motivations to progress through the NGB's qualifications upon entering
378 their coaching role, where the focus was to strengthen their relationship with the NGB. This links
379 to the hassle of completing further training, identified previously. Remember, upon entering the
380 coach role, Adam needed to attend additional training to be able to coach at his chosen facility. A
381 year into coaching, Adam was still travelling a "50-mile round trip", numerous times, voluntarily
382 observing and delivering sessions, completing this training, and still not coaching independently:

383 The Velodrome might as well teach me the [rider programme] that I'm learning now,
384 without me paying [to complete the NGB coaching award] [...] I'm never going to work
385 on a [NGB] race, and that's the only thing you need a [NGB] qualification for, so you
386 might as well be taught by the Track and pay the Track and then you've done what they
387 want straight away, and it would be a lot less process [...] I haven't got one of those

388 [National] jobs I want... I can't understand why you would have to do a [National]
389 qualification when you're actually going to do something else for someone else (*Adam*)
390 Findings show that, over time, coaches became clearer on their own goals, motivations,
391 and focus, evaluating their place in the club structure(s) they were embedding themselves.
392 Consequently, the hassle of 'fitting in' persisted through coaches' participation in this study. On
393 entering their role, coaches discussed struggling to offer ideas, and this was still the case a year
394 into their coaching. In addition, over time, clubs who supported new coaches came to be
395 interpreted as overpowering and stunting development. Initially, this extra support helped
396 balance coaching alongside other life commitments (e.g., work and parenting). Yet coaches
397 shared how this became a hassle, where coaching became "quite circular", "tightly defined", and
398 a "narrow window" of "very niched" skills" (Oliver). The club had a "tried and tested method"
399 (Oliver), but this negatively impacted participants' coaching and development. This reflected the
400 micro-level misalignment between the goals, focus, and motivations of the coach and their club.
401 For example, some felt a different discipline focus, or race rather than a "bums on saddles" focus
402 (Joe), or a focus on commuting, encouraging riders to be lifelong cyclists:

403 We had the parents [at one school] fill out questionnaires [...] and one thing that they said
404 they wanted [the sessions] to give their children was confidence when it came to riding
405 on the road. I knew coaching alone wouldn't do that, really. We needed to get them on
406 the road to get confidence on the road and gain road awareness. [...] So that we're
407 coaching skills, then they could be of some use. [...]. It fulfils their parents' wishes, as
408 much as anything else, and it throws the obligation back to them, because they need to
409 come with them. I've had probably 4-5 parents come out with their children, which is
410 really quite exciting. (*Peter*)

411 To navigate this hassle, coaches discussed how exploring new opportunities facilitated
412 feelings of empowerment and added “extra validation” (Oliver) to their coaching. Coaches
413 discussed being “between a rock and hard place” (Louise), not wanting to “undermine” the
414 coaches’ efforts but wanting to create a “more fruitful learning experience” for riders. There
415 were “too many things that [she] didn’t agree with [...] to improve” the club, and she did not feel
416 she had the “power” or “time” to address these issues and so she removed herself from the club
417 (Louise). When established in their role, the challenge of integrating into their clubs’ practices
418 and routines left coaches transitioning from their clubs and operating independently, “in a silo”
419 (James). Moving away from their clubs offered some sense of freedom and eased the hassles of
420 becoming embedded in the club, longer term. Yet, over time, the repeated stress of feeling
421 unsupported meant coaches felt alone and isolated. One example of where coaches struggled was
422 in the extra resource needed to affiliate breakaway groups to the NGB – for example, welfare
423 and safeguarding officers – hindering the development of formalising clubs, further removing
424 them from the NGB activity associated with affiliated clubs.

425 In navigating one hassle, however, coaches found themselves experiencing another. For
426 example, Joe felt some of the trails were not always specific to the coaching points being
427 covered and still struggled to access the coaching site in winter months (reflecting the hassle of
428 accessing facilities discussed previously). A lack of artificial lighting in the physical coaching
429 environment restricted some participants’ coaching to weekends and summer months. This
430 means that these participants’ hassles changed throughout the year, as coaching became seasonal.
431 Whereas a lack of confidence left participants questioning their legitimacy upon entering their
432 coaching role, when established in their role, this hassle changed (i.e., a lack of consistency in
433 coaching) but still left participants questioning their legitimacy. To address this, Joe moved his

434 sessions to a school's all-weather courts, which were accessible all year. But changing his
435 coaching location changed his session focus, removing the mountain-bike specific nature of
436 sessions, and becoming more generic, or multi-discipline sessions. Infrequent engagement with
437 riders, which over time, increased the isolated feeling coaches discussed. The frequency of this
438 hassle increased when coaches consistently coached different riders, with a lack of continuity
439 hindering familiarity with riders, and, consequently, rapport:

440 I got nominated for [a national award of] talent development coach of the year by [the
441 NGB], which is all very exciting. But I feel a bit of a fraud because I don't individually
442 look after any riders. I couldn't really say, 'I coach this kid all the time and they have
443 progressed to this.' I'm always assisting the staff so I didn't get shortlisted, but I kind of
444 can understand why [...] I really undersold myself, but I guess I played it out in my
445 head, and the idea of getting nominated and winning it, and then someone saying, 'You
446 don't even coach that often?' I'd go, 'Yes, I know. I shouldn't be here' That's the thing I
447 hate about stepping away from [the club] ... I kind of feel like I don't have a legitimate
448 basis for my coaching because I'm always just helping. (*Louise*)

449 In summary, we see how when established in the coach role, participants discussed some
450 hassles had stayed constant (e.g., the challenge the fitting into the club, undertaking further
451 training), some had changed (e.g., coaches still questioned their legitimacy, but at this point it
452 was because of inconsistent coaching activity, not a lack of confidence because of being new to
453 the role), and some hassles were new (e.g., feeling disconnected to the NGB) with some being
454 the result of navigating existing hassles (e.g., transitioning away from their clubs, and changing
455 venues). An apparent dichotomy emerges: too much support left participants feeling that their
456 development was hindered; too little support, they felt isolated and alone. Both were perceived

457 stressful. When participants felt that the club's procedural rituals and culture were fixed and
458 static, they felt their ideas were negatively received, or ignored. They felt unable to contribute to
459 sessions and to the club more generally. Transitioning away from the club navigated the hassle,
460 but ultimately caused another: being left in the cold.

461 **Discussion**

462 This study explored the daily hassles experienced by neophyte sport coaches over an 18-
463 month period. Focused on the frequency and intensity of stressors (i.e., how demanding they
464 are), rather than the type of stressors experienced in coaching, the conceptual significance of this
465 work is its contribution to existing research by demonstrating the evolution of hassles over time.
466 Analysis generated three themes highlighting that on entering their coaching role, coaches
467 experienced the hassles of *accessing facilities* and *struggling to fit in*; and towards the end of
468 their participation, they experienced being *left in the cold*. To this end, findings focus on the
469 causes of stress more than its consequences or outcomes, increasing the evidence-base that
470 informs the provision of coaches' mental health support to facilitate environments that support
471 and retain coaches.

472 Some hassles are inevitable, but others can be managed, and perhaps minimised. We see
473 how coaches naturally engaged in task-centered coping (i.e., addressing the problem, rather than
474 emotional reactions; a primary prevention strategy) in attempts to reduce their perceptions of
475 hassles. For example, when becoming embedded in their club, they started with small tasks,
476 moving from the peripheries towards full participation within their socio-cultural practice (Lave
477 & Wenger, 2001). Yet, building on Capel et al.'s (2011) findings, this lack of accountability and
478 control over sessions was a hassle as coaches struggled to implement their ideas. Over time, the
479 misalignment between coaches' goals and those of the club increased coaches' struggle to fit in

480 with existing practices and routines. The reality shock of the coaching they witnessed, the
481 national and local standards, and the economic constraints of the clubs and facilities within
482 which coaches operated all risked coaches isolating themselves from their peers. This could
483 negatively impacted coaches' attitudes, behaviours, and, possibly, psychological health (see
484 Hellgren et al., 1999; Norris et al., 2017). Tackling the problem head-on, coaches' coping
485 strategies saw them transition away from their clubs. But this left them feeling isolated,
486 questioning their legitimacy as coaches.

487 Findings highlight how coaches in a community context can experience isolation as well
488 as the upper echelons (Potts et al., 2021). This emphasises the value of social support (e.g.,
489 mentoring systems, see Norris et al., 2020) to facilitate relationships and communication to
490 mitigate these stressors (Sias, 2009). This lack of support extended to participants wanting to feel
491 valued by their NGB, something that worsened over time. Care is an essential, yet undervalued
492 aspect of pedagogical relationships and a key aspect of supporting coach mental health (Cronin
493 & Armour, 2017; Cronin & Lowes, 2019; Grey-Thompson, 2017; Ives et al., 2019; Noddings,
494 1984; Smith et al., 2016). Noddings encourages dialogue to build trust, empathy, and
495 understanding. Modern sport has been subjected to a diverse range of social and political
496 influences, necessitating policies and practices concerning child welfare neglecting a focus on
497 coach welfare (Cronin & Lowes, 2019). Current findings raise the awareness of needing a
498 continued relationship between NGBs and their coaching workforce to better support community
499 coaches' mental well-being through a caring relationship.

500 Focused on the causes, rather than the consequences, of stress, current findings
501 theoretically contribute to primary stress management strategies (see Arnold & Fletcher, 2021;
502 Fletcher et al., 2006). Practically, NGB coach education could achieve this in two ways. Firstly,

503 introductory education should support coaches in identifying how their values and beliefs
504 influence their coaching. Coaches who are more aware of their own coaching values and
505 motivations could, where possible, align themselves with clubs who have similar values and
506 focus. This would limit coaches operating in clubs with conflicting values and focus. This would
507 not provide a shortcut for coaches' transition from the peripheries to full participation, but it
508 could make 'fitting in' less of a struggle. Secondly, NGBs should deliver education that raise
509 coaches' awareness of how daily hassles impact their psychological wellbeing, rather than
510 focusing solely on the stressors experienced by their athletes. The current study highlights the
511 more subtle forms of stress – the hassles that might be accepted norms within coaching
512 environments – aside from the stressors associated with major events.

513 In addition, findings begin to equip practitioners with information to move beyond
514 informal advice on handling general coaching demands and issues affecting coaching ability.
515 Findings highlight to sport psychology practitioners and coach developers the reality of the
516 coaches' stressors within this domain. Coaches should be supported in identifying the hassles,
517 and possible combinations of hassles, within their coaching environment. Sport psychology
518 practitioners and coach developers can work with coaches to identify which hassles are
519 changeable, which are not, and which are affecting their job performance or well-being the most.
520 From here, sport psychologists could build coaches' resilience to help them manage and mitigate
521 the negative impacts of hassles. This would move beyond the primary stress interventions
522 coaches naturally undertook in this study (i.e., dealing with the cause of the stress), towards
523 secondary and tertiary preventions (i.e., helping individuals recognise and manage their reactions
524 to stress). As such, sport psychologists should switch their intervention from a focus on the

525 environment to the individual, employing, for example, cognitive restructuring (see Didymus &
526 Fletcher, 2017) or mindfulness practice (see Kaiseler et al., 2017).

527 A strength of this work is its exploration of daily hassles of sport coaches, longitudinally,
528 rather than cross-sectionally. The ontological and epistemological positioning of this work means
529 findings are the result of subjective, multiple realities and do not represent an absolute truth. As
530 such, findings are contextualised to the sport of cycling and caution is required in translating
531 these findings across other sports and NGBs (Levitt et al., 2017; Smith, 2017). Therefore, the
532 implications discussed are not intended to suggest a developmental framework for the planning
533 and delivery of psychological support for coaches. Importantly, although the multiple quotes
534 presented offer deep insight into these participants' experiences, the sample size means it is
535 feasible that there are more identifiable hassles. Future studies may consider: 1) expanding the
536 number of participants, 2) exploring the often-neglected aspect of how neophyte coaches recover
537 from hassles, 3) using daily dairies, rather than interviews, to capture participants' experiences of
538 daily hassles, 4) exploring the subjective and objective assessment of the relationship between
539 stressors and symptoms, assessing coaches' cognitive appraisals of hassles to better understand
540 whether environmental changes or stress-management techniques are more effective, 5)
541 evaluating the effectiveness of interventions developed to support coaches' experiences of daily
542 hassles, and 6) developing measures to comprehensively, reliably, and vividly assess hassles.

543 In conclusion, the novelty and conceptual significance of this work rests in its
544 longitudinal exploration of daily hassles, rather than the type of stressors, experienced in
545 community coaching. Findings contribute to existing research by demonstrating the evolution of
546 hassles over time: on entering their coaching role, coaches experienced the hassles of *accessing*
547 *facilities* and *struggling to fit in*; and towards the end of their participation, they experienced

548 being *left in the cold*. These conceptual issues have significance for stakeholders across the
549 community sport landscape (e.g., NGBs, coach developers, coaches, and sport psychology
550 practitioners). A better understanding of the daily hassles experienced by community coaches
551 highlights the need to focus on effective, evidence-based stress management programmes that
552 inform the provision of mental health support for all coaches, rather than focusing on elite
553 coaches or athletes. Facilitating environments that promote psychological wellbeing and safety to
554 better support the management of the environmental demands that neophyte coaches experience
555 will retain more coaches within the coaching workforce.
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855

856 **Table 1**

857 *Details of Participant Interviews*

Participant	Interview Length (in minutes)										M Interview Length (in minutes) per participant	SD Interview Length (in minutes) per participant
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
Louise	67.65	87.37	101.62	54.10	69.38	78.72	96.21	41.18	58.60	64.30	71.91	19.09
Adam	74.48	64.02	33.80	48.15	54.35	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	54.96	15.47
Oliver	52.62	46.17	43.75	59.17	62.35	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	52.81	8.03
James	30.72	68.58	65.23	23.78	68.83	34.02	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	48.53	21.13
Joe	64.10	54.85	58.45	36.88	76.12	34.82	46.87	N/A	N/A	N/A	53.16	14.82
Peter	52.05	79.77	87.50	89.85	76.50	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	77.13	15.05
Chris	54.97	39.93	51.90	40.00	59.10	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	49.18	8.79
Beth	45.02	42.23	57.42	18.07	13.42	64.65	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	40.14	20.63
M	55.20	60.37	62.46	46.25	60.01	53.05	71.54	41.18	58.60	64.30		
Interview Length (in minutes) at each time point												
SD	13.76	17.59	22.34	22.55	20.38	22.27	34.89	N/A	N/A	N/A		
Interview Length (in minutes) at each time point												

858

859 **Table 2**860 *Developed Themes from Reflexive Thematic Analysis*

Timeline	Theme	Subtheme(s)
Entering the coaching role	Accessing facilities	Need for further training Financial barrier Seasonal challenges of coaching
	Struggling to fit in	Club set in their ways Poor communication Variation in coaching quality Misaligned goals
Established in coaching role	Feeling isolated	Disconnected from NGB Operating in a silo Questioned legitimacy as coach

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