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Sports coaching histories and biographies: a raison D'être

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary research into sports coaching practice and coach behaviour stimulates discussion about the fundamental precepts of effective coaching, although these debates invariably lack references to historical patterns of coaching practice or consideration of the cultural environments within which coaching has evolved. The last decade has seen a significant increase in studies outlining the biographies and working lives of nineteenth and twentieth-century coaches and these have highlighted the ongoing importance of tacit craft knowledge, community, experience, and intuition, to coaching effectiveness. This introduction to a special issue of *Sports Coaching Review* exploring some coaching histories argues that researchers should reflect on how these histories illustrate key elements of what coaches value and how they operate. Taken collectively, these biographies illuminate how sports coaching practice has been traditionally transmitted and sustained in different sports and cultural environments and they provide an essential backdrop to discussions about the nature of modern-day coaching.

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> Training is useful, but there is no substitute for experience.
>
> (Rosa Klebb, *From Russia with Love*, Bond Movie, 1963)

Contemporary research projects investigating sports coaching practice and coach behaviour invariably generate debates about the way coaches operate and how to educate them effectively. Unsurprisingly, given the limited historiography available, these discussions generally take place in a historical vacuum with little reference to long-established patterns of coaching practice or consideration of the cultural environments within which coaching has previously evolved. This is disappointing, but it is also understandable given the lack of interest shown in coaching history by sports historians over the years, although the last decade has seen

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a significant increase in studies deconstructing the biographies and working practices of nineteenth and twentieth-century coaches (Carter, 2011; Day, 2012; Day & Carpenter, 2016), including efforts to compare French and British coaching traditions (Day & Loudcher, 2017; Loudcher & Day, 2017) and to explore European coaching cultures (Day, 2021). While little of this material has been incorporated into other coaching research projects to date, these explorations of the lives of generations of expert coaches have highlighted the ongoing importance of tacit craft knowledge, community, experience, and intuition, to their coaching effectiveness and this has implications for contemporary coach educators and coaching practitioners. In an age of certification and the prioritisation of explicit knowledge, much of it scientific in nature, it pays to step back occasionally and reflect on what coaching really involves and what history might contribute to that understanding. To be able to do that successfully, coaching history researchers need to expose more thoroughly the life courses and social networks established by previous generations of coaches and, in this special issue, contributors from around Europe continue to fill some of the gaps in our knowledge. Taken collectively, these biographies illuminate how the precepts of sports coaching have been traditionally transmitted and sustained in different sports and cultural environments and they provide an essential backdrop to discussions about the nature of modern-day coaching.

Coaching histories

It would be wrong to assume that the paucity of existing research into coaching history implies that sports coaching is a modern phenomenon. In fact, its roots can be traced back to the gymnastes of Ancient Greece and the doctores of Ancient Rome with subsequent practitioners consistently drawing from, and elaborating on, their practices and knowledge. From at least the twelfth century, elite social groups across Europe engaged in competitive activities, preparation for which required specialist training from professionals, in the form of experts such as fencing, riding, and dancing professors, falconers, wrestling trainers, real tennis-masters (maître-paumier), horse vaulting-masters, and masters-of-arms. Their accumulated knowledge, combined with increased entrepreneurial opportunities and regulation, provided a platform for further developments in coaching and training. In the eighteenth-century Britain, the gambling culture that funded professional livelihoods was particularly evident in rowing, pedestrianism, and boxing, and by the 1820s, competitors usually prepared for around 2 months under the direction of a professional trainer who assessed the athlete, planned training, and then monitored physical and psychological improvements (Walker, 1837, pp. 283–284). As in all eras, "intelligent and firm" coaches did not work without some constraints

on their behaviour, and they were required to follow the rules laid down by their employers who would monitor them closely. The coach had to lead by example and report progress truthfully to his man's backers (Dowling, 1841, pp. 91–92) and his expertise was publicly acknowledged. Egan (1823) described Robert Barclay, whose training regime was developed from his experiences with his own coach Jacky Smith, as an intuitive trainer whose detailed planning and scientific approach in researching and experimenting with training factors would have brought credit to "any anatomist" (9–22, 103–105).

As was the case with Barclay, coaches were normally retired performers who used the knowledge and practical skills developed during their competitive lifetime to formulate their own methods of training and competition preparation. In the process of training others, individuals expanded their coaching toolbox, a collection of coaching techniques and sport-specific practices related to skill development and physical preparation. In contrast to "professional knowledge", this craft knowledge was "knowing in action"; a feel for coaching developed with, and from, experience. Skilled coaches also experimented in applying emerging knowledge, particularly in periods of the rapid commodification of sport when the incentive to innovate was a strong motivator for those who relied financially on their coaching ability. These coaching practices mirrored the structures typical of skilled crafts where the master–apprentice relationship involved the transmission of tacit knowledge through the apprentice "stealing with the eyes" by continually observing the master at work (Gamble, 2001, pp. 190–196). It has been argued that this inhibited innovation because an apprentice was taught only to copy, but coaching craftsmen, who adopted multiple roles as trainers, technicians, psychologists, managers, publicity agents, and entrepreneurs, were always stimulated to experiment by external forces such as competition, commercialisation, and other coaches.

Craft knowledge was embedded within informal communities of practice, "stables" of athletes and coaches engaging in a process of collective learning (Wenger, 1998). Bourdieu's concept of habitus (Bourdieu, 1990) helps clarify how learning occurs at an embodied and unnoticed level through daily engagement with others within social and cultural contexts, and Sage (1989) employed the term "organizational socialization" to refer to the process whereby individuals usually enter coaching provided with comprehensive "maps of meaning" from their athletic experiences. Coaching communities regenerated as new members recruited from family, athletes, and both experienced and novice coaches, gradually moved closer to the coaching practitioners who served as exemplars of expert practice. Financial incentives prevent those who have competitive knowledge from sharing it with outsiders and these key individuals were always cautious about sharing their knowledge outside of their community with many of them trying to

hide what they knew, a practice that contemporary authors refer to as "regimes of appropriation" (Duguid, 2005; Teece, 1986). Although these coaching communities were often criticised for perpetuating fads and secret training methods, craft knowledge was never static and progressive coaches in all periods have exemplified the notion of the "Bricoleur" in constantly trialling emerging information, intuitively accepting, or rejecting, appropriate material, and developing a "feel" for coaching founded on their tacit knowledge.

Throughout history, these leading coaches have regarded themselves as practical individuals whose experiential knowledge gave them the ability to effectively control all aspects of their work (Nelson, 1924, pp. 25–26). While several nineteenth- and twentieth-century instructional manuals discussed the explicit knowledge required by a coach, such as training methods, psychology, ergogenic aids, and diet, there were rarely any attempts to address the more implicit aspects of coaching because it was assumed that such knowledge could only be achieved practically through experience, observation, and trial and error. Andrews (1903, Preface, x) was clear about this in saying at the start of his text, I am not, and do not pose as, an educated man and the information that follows is the result of practical experience only. If I run counter to theories put forwards by more learned people my excuse is that I judge from results I have seen and tested without having gone deeply into the why and the wherefore. While this lack of theoretical underpinning has been interpreted erroneously as evidence that these men were uneducated, it merely represents the ongoing tension that exists between empirical scientific knowledge and tacit craft knowledge that can be observed in many social practices. Tacit knowledge is a form of "know how" or a "knack" of doing something (Polanyi, 1998) and successful coaches have often argued that they possessed an innate ability to improve athletes. Mussabini (1913) thought the "discerning eye of the trainer" could assess the effectiveness of training, while Dyson (1950) believed his "coaching eye" made him an accomplished coach. These individuals, who invariably appear to do the right thing at the right time, have normally been highly intuitive and capable of generating innovations in ideas, concepts, and methods in the absence of a conscious reasoning process (Martin, 1953).

The coaching environment changed in Britain after a late nineteenth-century educated middle class, which outwardly rejected coaching and serious training, created several national governing bodies for their sports. They attacked working-class coaches for their lack of theoretical underpinning and their antipathy was reflected in the regulatory mechanisms they employed to marginalise professional coaches. Even though their exclusion was never absolute, the important point for many British amateurs was the type of man the professional coach was, and the nature of the relationship established between athlete and trainer. Professionals needed to recognise

their place within the greater scheme of amateur-controlled sport and so long as coaches adopted their allotted role as servants then suitable men might prove to be acceptable. Just as some workingmen could be considered worthy and respectable, so some professional coaches could conform to amateur ideals by becoming icons of hard work and prudence (Light, 2005, pp. 71–73). The British team to the 1912 Stockholm Olympics was accompanied by 11 acceptable professionals, including Walter Brickett, attending his second Games as the swimming trainer (Day, 2010). Stockholm athletics trainers Alec Nelson and Bill Thomas both went on to have long careers at Cambridge and Oxford, respectively, but they were always reliant on patronage and subject to the ongoing master–servant relationship that was imposed on their paid coaches by university athletes.

Men like Brickett, Nelson, and Thomas experienced a different relationship with their athletes than did their counterparts in America, where the importance of American football, baseball, and then basketball, at both professional and intercollegiate levels, created an environment in which the professional coach was highly valued. In a society which rejected class theories based on heredity, amateur principles were modified and the word "professional" was applied to those who were not only paid for coaching but also did it well, so the amateur-professional distinction became as much a question of proficiency as about money. The American approach to sport resulted in a highly systematic coach-centred model, emphasising excellence and winning, and coaches adopted industrialised approaches to team organisation (Westby & Sack, 1976), at the core of which was the subsuming of individuality on behalf of the team. There was an emphasis on obedience to authority both on and off the field and principles of scientific management were used to teach strategies and train athletes. This was a coaching model that contrasted sharply with the laissez faire approach adopted by British amateurs, but it was also the model that was favoured by several European nations who approached American coaches to lead their national programmes. In a clear demonstration of how the cultural environment influences the way coaches are perceived, American professional coaches became powerful and highly visible cultural figures at home and abroad while their counterparts in Britain remained subservient figures working in an environment, and in a manner, dictated to them by their social superiors.

Recognising the opportunities afforded to them by the expansion of college and athletic club coaching positions several British professionals emigrated to North America during the late nineteenth century to take advantage of the more positive coaching environment, while others moved to Europe and South America. These coaches were not simply the carriers of an official corpus of knowledge, but they acted as innovators, modifying and refashioning skills, tactical ideas, and technical knowledge to suit the needs of local athletes. Men like trainer James Robinson and

swimming coach George Kistler made a significant impact on American college sports and, as a result, their biographies have proved relatively easy to compile, particularly from the college records and local newspapers reports that consistently valorised them. For those British professionals who stayed at home, their marginalisation by amateur governing bodies, who wrote them out of the records of their sport, makes the task much more difficult, not least because these working-class men and women lacked a public profile and access to resources. Little trace remains of most of these British professional coaches, just as documentary records of tradesmen and artisans are sparse compared with the biographic records left by the elite, and they have been consistently hidden from view, even within the historiography of sport. It is a problem that extends to coaches' life courses across Europe and this special issue builds on the broader European coaching cultural perspectives discussed in Day (2021) to present individual biographies from Spain, Ireland, Sweden, Germany, and France, as well as some of those coaches who migrated from Britain to America.

Writing biographies

While social history focusses on large-scale social strata or classes, students of the history of everyday life concentrate on ordinary people such as coaches, who are regarded as important historical actors in their own right, to offer insights into the rich complexities of social relations. Individuals are not merely the passive victims of historical processes but active agents who participate in shaping their world (Thompson, 1963) and merely by existing, each person contributes, however minutely, to the shaping of society and to the course of its history. Individual life-stories can be seen as reflections of social structures and it is by exploring the lives of individuals that scholars can illuminate what Wright Mills (1970, p. 12) called the "historical push and shove" of society so, in order to understand the impact that coaches have made, and still make, within any sporting or social context, researchers need to explore these men and women in detail. This micro-historical approach does not exclude drawing conclusions about generic populations such as sports coaches because collating several individual stories has the potential to uncover patterns characteristic of a particular coaching context. The point of analysing their stories is not to concentrate on uniqueness, since it is unlikely that any single story will be entirely typical, nor atypical, but to gain a deeper understanding of structures and patterns through their analysis (Joachim, 2011, pp. 688–692). Cunningham (2001, p. 436) argues that even a small selection of biographies can be used to understand individuals on a collective scale and stories of people's experiences located and understood in the context of their time and place can be used to create larger stories about patterns of change and

persistence over time, stories that are critical to our understanding of social production and reproduction (Struna, 2000, p. 187).

Biographical studies of historical coaching practitioners situated within their cultural context provide important pointers for contemporary coaching practice through developing an understanding of what attributes and strategies have traditionally been important when engaging in elite coaching. Gilbert and Jackson (2004) cited the example of John Wooden, who embarked on a course of intensive self-study at the end of each season, directed by his analysis of his coaching strengths and weaknesses, and they concluded that great coaches are active learners who engage in constant reflection. Jones, Armour, and Potrac (2003) used a biographical case study to demonstrate how one contemporary coach was influenced by his own experience as a player, and Lemyre, Trudel, and Durand-Bush (2007, p. 194) suggested that asking coaches to tell their stories in this way can expose the sociocultural context and the expectations and norms of the wider coaching community. Jarvis (2007), who regarded learning as a lifelong activity, having the potential to occur within every social situation, used the term "biography" to capture the concept of who coaches are at a specific moment in time, based on their accumulation of experiences, knowledge, and skills. A decade later, Watts and Cushion (2017) observed how the biographies of experienced coaches shaped their identities, learning, and practice, and they concluded that coaching journeys have implications for future coaching practice, coach learning and coach education, an approach to research that would be familiar to any historian. The historical study of coaching figures, whether in the form of oral histories, which are invaluable in identifying the constraints and drivers influencing the working lives of coaches of a recent vintage, or biography based on archival research, which can reveal the working lives and cultural environment of their predecessors, contributes significantly to articulating an appreciation of what "coaching" involves, both at a personal and structural level. A deeper understanding of these and similar historical discourses can only help inform scholars in their debates about the nature and direction of coaching practice and education.

Biographies of coaches and trainers are constructed from a broad spectrum of sources that combine to uncover their origins and economic class, marital status, social networks and daily practice. Important secondary sources, which help provide context, include historiography, the term most often applied to the collections of previously published work about, and around, a particular topic. Key primary sources include organisational archives and minutes, pictures and photographs, trade directories, census material, contemporary maps, diaries, films, autobiographies and biographies, local and family histories, and private family papers. Newspaper and periodical archives are essential sources and the way in which this information has been recorded and reported can also say a lot about the wider

aspects and traditions within any historical period. The digital age has made accessing newspaper archives much easier and has also encouraged more historians to incorporate other online material such as census returns and genealogical resources, into academic research, the use of which has proved critical to the construction of biographical dossiers by supplying, and verifying, personal information about coaches, as well as tracking them over time. Other influential primary sources include the instructional and biographical texts written by prominent athletes, coaches, and administrators because they reflect the attitudes of the period they were written in and they reveal much about the coaching and training practices of the time.

Ian Stone's recent exposition of the life of athletics coach Alec Nelson (Stone, 2023) provides an excellent exemplar of the kind of in-depth work that can be done. Stone draws on an extensive range of sources, including those generated by his personal family connection to Nelson, to produce a blow-by-blow account of the career trajectory of one of Britain's most prominent coaches before the Second World War. In many ways, of course, Nelson was unique in that he found himself in a privileged position at Cambridge University where he was directly connected to many of the aristocratic and upper-class amateurs who were organising and managing British sport in this period. His amiable personality and a willingness to play the role of servant made him acceptable to the amateurs he worked with, and they responded by accepting his training advice and by providing him with the kind of support that someone of their class would give to any valued retainer. His uniqueness does not detract at all from the value of this biography as an addition to the historiography of coaching since it provides a point of comparison for other coaching lives of the period.

There are some caveats, of course, concerning the use of biographies as a research source. Firstly, the writing of coaching lives is not an uncomplicated endeavour and it needs to be recognised that biographies have often been treated with suspicion. As early as Channing (1836) (44) was arguing that no "department of literature is so false as biography", while Bourdieu (1998) pointed out that the uncomplicated, one-dimensional life story could not exist and that lived lives were chaos. Some of these concerns relate to the relationship between author and subject. Coaching historians appreciate that they make epistemological choices that influence how they choose to gain knowledge about the past and historiographical issues such as the nature, validity, reliability, and interpretation of evidence, together with a writer's ideological commitment, all play a part in the way biographies are produced. It is a misconception to think that "the facts" in themselves will yield "truth". Historians of modern times have "mountains of facts" at their disposal making it comparatively easy to select some facts, while ignoring other equally relevant materials, in order to produce a one-sided history (Lipoński, 2012, p. 169). The result is that some biographies turn

into hagiographies, with negative commentary and evidence being excluded from the published version, while others represent a form of character assassination with the author only concentrating on the negative side of the subject.

The final version of any biography, and the stance that it takes in evaluating the individual being studied, inevitably reflects the writer's own biography. It is difficult for historians to re-create past events without viewing them through their own personal frame of reference, and no historian starts with a clean slate, since, whatever the topic of study, meanings have already been attached to it (Kalela, 2012, p. 12). All historians live and work in their own present and that present will be evident in what gets written, leading historians to "play creative roles in the production and presentation of history" (Booth, 2005, p. 211). As Carr (1990, pp. 24–25) pointed out, historians always have their own "bees buzzing" in their head when they write and he advised readers that, "When you read a work of history, always listen out for the buzzing. If you can detect none, either you are tone deaf or your historian is a dull dog". It is appropriate, therefore, to see history as more about interpretations and the construction of meanings rather than recreating the past as it actually was. These differences have led to the development of a more pragmatic attitude to writing history which recognises that imagination and inventiveness are integral to creating a historical narrative and accepts that historical discourses are essentially subjective because even researchers able to access unlimited sources would still have to interpret their collection of facts. The ideal result for any biographical work, therefore, is to create a "narrative truth" (Carroll, 2001) within which historical facts are marshalled to construct an accurate representation of a life course while recognising that it remains a story open to interpretation (Marwick, 2001).

> Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, transmitted from the past. (McLellan, 1977, p. 300)

Another criticism aimed at the use of biographies to tell a broader narrative relates to the need for any biography to always be situated in its cultural context in order to be able to fully understand what that biography says about coaching as a social activity. Social, political, and cultural influences play a critical role in determining coaching practice in all contexts and environments so it is important that coaching biographies are read and analysed in the context of societal culture and power relations, not least because "cultural pressures shape the leeway coaches are given" (Ronglan, 2019, p. 23). Different cultures are characterised by different coaching traditions created from a complex interaction between power dynamics, gender, political imperatives, and transnational influences. If coaching

historians subscribe to Said's view that the "history of all cultures is the history of cultural borrowings" (Said, 1993, p. 217) they need to account for the international sources of knowledge in their biographies and to consider the "complex interplay between national, social and cultural boundaries" (Hanquinet, Savage, Duru, & Hanquinet, 2019, pp. 90, 95). Coaching heritages do not emerge from a single, unitary pattern of development, because they are culturally specific and constantly in flux, so when processes of acquisition and transmission occur many variants are created (Phillips, 2001, p. 4). Sports provide a vehicle for the expression and construction of national cultures and every country and sport has a specific culture that dictates the way elite sport coaches operate, coaching cultures that cannot be changed or adapted immediately because they have been ingrained over a long period (Elliott, 2012; Sotiriadou, Gowthorp, & De Bosscher, 2014). As a result, there are innumerable "histories" related to coaching even though, to date, these "histories" have been almost exclusively male orientated. There have been recent efforts to redress this issue, with chapters devoted to female coaching experiences in Norway and Britain in Day (2021), contributions in this special issue on women coaches in Britain, Germany, and Sweden, and a collection of papers on the history of women coaches in a special issue of *Sport in History* that will be published in 2024, but the "herstory" of coaching remains to be fully uncovered.

Exemplar biographies

Women coaches are the primary focus of two papers in this special issue. Conor Heffernan explores the life courses and experiences of two women who supervised female fitness classes in the first half of the nineteenth century. After P.H. Clias arrived in England in 1821, he established a private gymnastics school and began training individuals with the aim of establishing his fitness programme nationally. One of his pupils, Marian Mason, went on to run fitness classes, write a book on physical culture, and teach the Clias system to other women. Ten years later Monsieur and Madame Beaujeu established a training college in Dublin, Ireland, where Madame Beaujeu taught classes to women and contributed to a fitness book for women. She subsequently travelled to the United States where she continued to teach. Through the lives of these women Conor tracks the emergence of female fitness coaches in the first half of the nineteenth century and their pathways into the profession, as well as exploring the training systems these women promoted. In a field dominated by men, the emergence of female instructors was rare but, as the paper makes clear, it was possible, and the paper uses these biographies to throw new light on the history of women's coaching. Some of the key conclusions that Conor draws are that, while women may have been dependent on men for their

introduction into the field, and the communities of practice that surrounded them were dominated by male experts, some women were able to break away from patriarchal constraints and generate their own careers over which they exerted a considerable degree of control. Conor also draws attention to the way that the sharing of information in a transnational context was significant in that it led to a gradual homogenisation of training systems across Europe.

Jörg Krieger, Caroline Meier and Astrid Becker-Larsen analyse the roles, responsibilities, struggles, constraints, and freedoms of coaches within the German Democratic Republic's (GDR) hierarchical, performance-focused sport system through the biography of Jutta Müller, demonstrating how she negotiated the political power games within the GDR's sport system and used them to her advantage. Her proficiency as a former athlete paired with her commitment, ambition, and her relentless striving for excellence laid the basis for her career as an elite coach within an authoritarian sports system. Müller's subsequent representation as the "ice mother" was important to the state both at home and abroad, since she embodied, and thereby propagated, many values and virtues that the socialist state identified with, such as unconditional commitment to a higher (state set) goal, discipline and ambition, and ignoring the social background of her athletes. In addition, Müller's motherly reputation combined with her "production" of emphatically feminine and graceful athletes made herself and her athletes less susceptible to international scepticism about substance abuse as opposed to the women's swim team. In this sense she was a valuable asset for the state. Her close and trusting relationship with the athletes also gave her the opportunity to leverage power, reducing the athletes' autonomy and making them dependent on her. Müller was conscious of her symbolic power, and she nourished it, and navigated it carefully and cleverly throughout her career. She had to be cold-hearted, she had to be performance-driven, she had to be extraordinary in her approach. If she was not, she risked being dropped. Yet another important aspect and message for the domestic as well as international society was her being a successful *woman* and *mother* in sport enabling the state to uphold the ideal of the widely proclaimed gender equality in the GDR. The authors conclude that the GDR profited from Müller just as much as she profited from the state.

Robert Svensson Primus and Daniel Svensson tackle historical gender experiences by comparing the coaching approaches of Sven-Göran Eriksson and Pia Sundhage and their coaching of elite soccer in Sweden. Both coaches argued that they had become increasingly pragmatic and flexible during their coaching careers, allowing for more individual freedom rather than relying on a dogmatic system, and the authors conclude that Eriksson and Sundhage managed equally well the balance between tradition and innovation by drawing on the officially sanctioned Swedish coach education system

and their own experiences from coaching in different cultural contexts over many years. Sundhage actually relied more on her personal experiences, which the authors argue could be explained by her status as a player, something which Eriksson could not rely on. Her leadership style has been the result of a long and continuous learning process, where personal experiences and relations to players and other coaches have been integral. For both coaches, drawing on their increasing experience and status as coaches had given them security and allowed for tactical flexibility and innovation as well as allowing them to amend their coaching philosophy as new technological, scientific, and economic developments opened up new opportunities. International influences were important to both coaches. Having coached in several different countries Eriksson came to realise that the coaching approach taken depended on the culture of the country one was working in while experiences of differences between national football cultures were important for Sundhage as she developed her tactical understanding of the game.

Three papers in this special issue focus on the biographies of French coaches, although the term "coach" was not widely adopted into the French sporting lexicon until the latter stages of the twentieth century (Loudcher & Day, 2017, p. 12). Serge Vaucelle analyses the coaching life of Joseph Maigrot (1900–1983) who had a lasting impact on the development of athletics in France, not least through creating and managing a team of track and field coaches at the National Sport Institute in Paris from the 1940s to the 1960s. For Serge, Maigrot was responsible for the development of eclectic training methods, tinged with realism, pragmatism, humanism and empiricism, and he remained a devotee of "playing it by ear". The tracks where he worked were off-limits to theoreticians and scientists, those he associated with the "intellectualisation of athletic knowledge", Maigrot's admired the training methods adopted by the American athletes and he wrote approvingly of their "work load" and their manner of training "in the presence of a great number of 'coaches' whose role in this set-up, to my eye, appears to be to act more as observers than as technical advisors". He saw this as a confirmation of his view that "athletic training is essentially a question of psychology and pedagogy; the scientific dimension of it is relatively simple". In 1976, he delivered an acerbic broadside against "sports teachers who have become sages", coaches wrapped up in the latest scientific discoveries. "No, science is not the best guide to athletics. All athletes must be capable of experimenting and reacting". Maigrot was one of the driving forces behind the emergence of the "sporting academy" system, a model subsequently adopted by all major sports at the national level, a sports policy that had a profound impact on France's sporting landscape. One of its effects was to entrench an "old school" management model and the

legacy left by Maigrot, the archetypal coach of his era, a coach "in the French style", thus had a lasting and potentially stunting impact on the parochial world of French athletics.

Laurent Grün outlines the coaching biography of George Boulogne who, despite not having been a professional footballer, was National Technical Director from 1956 to 1982, a position that enabled him to promote a doctrine for French football, based on defensive conceptions and copied from various successful national teams. He built a community of French coaches and even though French football showed little improvement under his direction, his methods and doctrine influenced several generations of French coaches. This doctrine reflected Boulogne's empirical way of thinking and, despite attracting media criticism at the end of the 1970s, he never changed his position and he continued to emphasise defensive foundations, improvements in physical capacity, and early training. Boulogne did not hesitate to borrow from other nations such as Italy and West Germany and, as was the case in other countries such as Spain, he preferred to focus on the physical dimension of the game and its intensity, while emphasising moral values such as work and determination, qualities that were emphasised during the annual national training courses for the coaching diploma. As a result, few French coaches introduced any significant innovations and their recourse to empiricism remained limited to the models that had been provided for them on certification courses. Laurent concludes that during Boulogne's era, French elite trainers saw themselves primarily as "practical men" who learned by sharing with their peers and kept on relying heavily on experience.

Jean-François Loudcher and Yannick Hernandez place their biography of Jean Bretonnel, a prominent French boxing coach/manager active from 1925 to 1989, within the broader cultural context. To better understand his personality, as well as the system which he put in place, they consider how his forceful character, knowledge of the boxing world and situational intelligence were deployed within a closed "cultural form". Bretonnel was an autodidact who, on different occasions, assumed the role of boxing coach, physical education teacher, masseur, soigneur, manager, organiser and secretary. He succeeded in shaping a new profession and, above all, in getting French boxing recognised by the Americans who at that time controlled the professional sport globally. He also benefited from a favourable socio-historical context during France's post-war reconstruction, when boxing matches were among the country's most popular sporting spectacles. He stayed one step ahead of his professional rivals, but by the 1980s his star was waning and he finally retired in 1989. With respect to his "system", his expertise as a manager, was closely bound up with his approach to the exercise of power, based upon a closed, formal network which had no interest in innovation, a system that proved to be incompatible with the

transformations which would soon reshape the sport. Jean-Francois and Yannick conclude that studying Bretonnel's career within its cultural context provides an opportunity to better understand the deterministic potential of culture, as well as the professional and private motives that might lead an individual to develop a particular relationship with the cultural context. For these authors, this approach raises the possibility of combining a comprehensive analysis with a better understanding of the knowledge developed and the forms of power deployed within the structure of specific coaching and sporting networks.

In their paper on Spanish athletics coaches Carlos García-Martí and Juan Antonio Simón demonstrate how combining coaching biographies can illuminate wider coaching trends in a specific sport and in a particular cultural context. Athletics in Spain was a very minority practice until the 1950s, when athletics underwent a progressive development and institutionalisation that included the appearance, for the first time, of the role of the coach. Through the biographical study of five coaches, this paper illuminates how the figure of the coach was developed, arising initially from within existing athletic clubs, and then later through the profession of physical education teacher. The coaches considered by Carlos and Juan, shared the same historical space, temporally and spatially, but they implemented different strategies, even though they had similar access to overseas visits, competitions, and literature. In this respect their biographies help the reader to understand that coaching practices and approaches differ from one individual to other depending on their different starting points, their social capital, and their agency. Having been an elite athlete or not, their educational level, geographical location, and access to power centres shaped their professional trajectories and this background, together with the availability of professional opportunities created specific approaches to coaching practices. Those that had been successful athletes seem to have favoured a more subjective, experience-based approach while those without a recognised athletic career acted more rationally with respect to science and certification, although these distinctions were not clear cut. There was a gradient of different individual synthesis – full of tensions and contradictions – of both the modern, rationalised approach to coaching and the idea that coaching was also a craft that depended both on their intuition and their ability to forge strong relationships with their athletes. Carlos and Juan also comment on how the wider cultural context, not least the arrival of democracy, facilitated the opportunities and development of these coaches.

In the final contribution to this special issue Dave Day uses a collection of coaching biographies to illustrate how coaching knowledge transcends national boundaries through the vehicle of the individual coach. While

indigenous coaching cultures are founded and sustained according to national traditions, coaching preferences cross national boundaries to influence cultural developments in other nations. This phenomenon occurs through neighbourhood diffusion, the adoption of practices in adjacent countries, and hierarchical diffusion, whereby emerging nations adopt structural features of advanced nation's sports programmes and recruit coaching experts from those countries. Dave addresses a phase of coach migration from Britain that occurred during the late Victorian period and presents biographies of some British coaches who made an impact in America. Their collective biography illustrates some common features of these men's lives and the effect that they had on their host nation's coaching culture, contributing in the process to an understanding of the ways in which national coaching cultures have evolved and the relationship between the exchange of sports coaches and the transfer of knowledge and experience. While an individual life course cannot on its own definitively highlight wider social trends, this collection of short biographies illustrates nicely the social and economic origins of those British coaches who chose to travel abroad. As skilled working-class men with an aptitude for training and coaching their opportunities were inevitably limited by a sporting culture in which they were treated as servants rather than experts in their craft. In leaving Britain for America during the long-Victorian period they were exchanging an environment in which their expertise and experience was being increasingly marginalised for one in which their skills were highly valued and the length and depth of their involvement with the American system suggests that it was also economically worthwhile. In the process, the presence of these migrant coaches stimulated the creation of a culturally specific coaching heritage, one that significantly altered the balance of power in international sport. The value accorded to the professional coach and a focus on victory rather than participation became defining characteristics of American sports at all levels and as the modern Olympics became dominated by Americans, Elite athletes increasingly regarded the United States as "the exemplar of modernity, technology, and progress".

Reflections

The individual lives of coaches over the last 200 years have been dictated by the social, political, and economic conditions of the era, and the culture, in which they operated, but the history of coaching suggests that each generation has fundamentally operated in ways that would be familiar to their predecessors, who had developed strategies of effective training long before the widespread incorporation of sports scientists into coaching teams. In 1873, the *British Medical Journal* (589) observed that,

> The absence of any scientific work on exercise and training for the guidance of athletes is to us no matter of surprise. Experience has built up a system of training which, although in some respects … open to improvement by the application of scientific knowledge, is on the whole probably much more correct than would be the programme recommended by the whole body of our savants in the Council.

Almost a century later, when Bob Janousek, the first foreign coach of a British Olympic sport, was appointed as British national rowing coach, he observed that traditional British professional coaches were not "that hot on theory and sciences and all that stuff but they've got something … they have a feel … coaching is a mixture of art and science" (Dodd, 2012, p. 23). Four years later, however, Bloomfield (1973, p. 206) was arguing that, although an "apprentice-type education" had worked well in the past, a more formal education of coaches was required because international-level coaching was "no longer a matter of techniques which are passed down from the coach to the player, who in turn becomes a coach". This argument has attracted some more recent support with Cushion, Armour, and Jones (2003, p. 225) suggesting that, although experience plays a central role in impacting upon coaches' practice, the preparation of the practitioner cannot be left to experience alone. Evans and Richard (2007, p. 1) take it as a given that contemporary coaches can no longer rely solely on "learning the trade" through experience. Others have criticised experience or "craft knowledge" on the grounds that it leads to the development of "tacit" knowledge that often "operates at a non-conscious level as instinct or intuition and is based upon 'weak' problem solving methods such as trial and error" (Abraham, Collins, & Martindale, 2006, p. 551).

Nevertheless, a substantial volume of contemporary research into coach learning lends weight to the centrality of experience, reflection, and informal self-directed learning to coaching lives (Cushion, Armour, & Jones, 2003; Gilbert & Trudel, 2001; Gould, Gianinni, Krane, & Hodge, 1990; Nelson & Christopher, 2006, p. 174; Salmela, 1995). In their extensive review of the literature for Sports Coach UK, Cushion et al. (2010: ii, iii, vi) noted that informal learning through coaching experience and engaging with other coaches remained the dominant mode of learning. Coaches continue to prioritise experience over explicit knowledge, and communities over certification (Vallée & Bloom, 2005, p. 185). Jones, Armour, and Potrac (2004) considered that practical experiences were more important than coach certification programmes in developing a coach while Nash and Sproule (2012) demonstrated the limited impact of coach education and qualifications on actual coaching practice. Successful coaches continue to rely on an inquiring mind, intuition, tacit knowledge, and experience and reflection, rather than on sport science or coach certification (Stodter & Cushion, 2014). When soccer players graduate into coaching roles, their own methods remain heavily influenced by their playing experiences,

irrespective of their levels of formal qualification (Potrac, Jones, & Cushion, 2007) while better qualified, in terms of certification, elite swimming coaches do not necessarily produce the best swimmers (Stewart & Hopkins, 2000, pp. 880–881). Coaching practitioners have been found to possess a largely implicit form of knowledge which shares similar characteristics with craft knowledge (Jones, Armour, & Potrac, 2003, pp. 220–224) and contemporary coaches consistently identify other coaches as their most important resource in terms of developing the skill of coaching, with trial and error or experimentation, and their own past experiences, as other key reference points (Irwin, Hanton, & Kerwin, 2004, pp. 430–432, 439). Winchester, Culver, and Camiré (2013, p. 415) suggested that knowledge, skills, attitudes, and insights are developed from a coach's daily experiences, in sport, work and at home, and through their exposure to the coaching environment. One study of Olympic coaches found that they attributed their success to learning from other coaches/mentors and their past experiences as an athlete, which not only added to their credibility with the athletes but also meant that they had a familiarity with, and understanding of, a sport's culture (Currie & Oates-Wilding, 2012).

This continuing reliance on experience should come as no real surprise. Any coaching situation is fluid and ever evolving, which forces coaches to think creatively in order to establish some degree of control over their shifting environments, and they use their previous experiences to adapt their coaching strategies. In this scenario, coaching involves a "continuing reconstruction of experience", the rethinking and re-examining of concepts and experiences in order to deal with the demands of the present (Vazir, 2006, pp. 445–446), and the coach is an active participant in their own learning, operating in a cyclical, transactional manner with their environments (Burden, 2000, p. 467). Throughout the history of coaching, this reliance on experience, combined with intuition, has provided a body of craft knowledge, a "feel" for coaching founded on tacit knowledge, which has resulted in training innovations, and the creation of new ideas, concepts and methods (Berman, Down, & Hill, 2002).

Finally, in reflecting on what the future holds for coaching history it needs to be recognised that there is no single way of conducting historical enquiry and the kind of research a coaching historian undertakes is the result of personal choice (Kalela, 2012, p. 39). Booth (2005, p. 210) criticised sports historians in general for a failure to engage more extensively with theory and it is true that few coaching historians adopt a specific theoretical position in their work, although every coaching historian implicitly employs theoretical concepts, such as modernisation, hegemony, feminism, globalisation, and discourse, to help them frame questions and analyse their findings. However, in contrast to the devotees of some theorists in some other research fields, they appreciate that no

theory is immutable and that, while they might be prepared to use a theory, they should always be prepared to adapt it. If the facts do not fit the theory then the historian should check the facts again and, if still convinced they are correct, then the theory should be modified. Until substantiated by evidence, theories are just competing hypotheses. They might aid understanding but they do not explain a situation completely and empirical support is a necessary concomitant for accepting any hypothesis (Day & Vamplew, 2015).

While utilising several different theoretical concepts in different ways, coaching historians have invariably adopted an empiricist approach, interrogating surviving sources of the past and piecing them together systematically to form a supposedly definitive explanation of coaching, although this methodology has been challenged by those who point out that sources such as archives have an inbuilt bias (Booth, 2006; Johnes, 2007). The result has been a more pragmatic attitude to writing history which recognises that imagination and inventiveness are integral to creating an historical narrative (Elton, 2002) and accepts that historical discourses are essentially subjective because even researchers able to access unlimited sources would still have to interpret their collection of facts. As a result, any historical perspective is a contested terrain with a plurality of meanings and coaching historians offer only one interpretation of the past (Day & Vamplew, 2015).

One way in which coaching history may usefully evolve is to change the format, what Munslow calls "modes of expression", in which coaching history can be presented. The mode of expression selected by the historian reflects their epistemological, methodological and professional orientation towards how they think they can best know the truthful meaning of the past (Munslow, 2007, pp. 64–5). This could be spoken, or written, a fixed or moving image, or a gesture, a myth, a legend, a fable, a tale, a novella, a history, an epic, a mime, a film, a comic, a postcard, a performance, a street theatre, a conversation or a painting. Irrespective of how it is presented though, coaching history is likely to remain wedded to its identity as an empirically based, interpretive social science and practitioners will continue to utilise evidence, no matter its origin, in such a way as to create "cumulative plausibility" so that readers are increasingly convinced by the argument (Holt, 1992, p. 21). Given this dependence on evidence, it is critical that coaching historians continuously interrogate their sources to assess their authenticity and validity in order to be able to defend any privileging of material. With respect to the production of biographies, although the final narratives may lack evidence in parts, this does not invalidate the research as, according to Bale (2004, p. 26), these narratives do not need to be "'stuffed with truth' since extreme detail does not necessarily reveal 'the essence of the real man'". As Carlos and Juan note in the conclusion to their paper, historical coaching biographies, detailed or not, help illuminate the ever-present entanglement

between social context and personal agency that cannot be wholly dealt with by certification alone. Coaching is a social object made of struggles and tensions that will always be interpreted individually by the actors involved, each of whom will leave his or her handprint on the history of coaching.

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