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Title: "An analysis of the preferred coaching characteristics of players and coaches at a professional soccer club."

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Alan Lynn is an elite swimming coach and academic-practitioner. He is a former Technical Director of Scottish Swimming and now UG Course Director in Sport Studies at Strathclyde University in Glasgow. He has written two highly successful books on swimming and a third is in production. His ongoing doctoral project is investigating the development of elite sports coaches in the UK.

Brown Ferguson is a full-time professional football (soccer) player and winner of the distinguished prize for best UG dissertation at Strathclyde University in 2006. He is currently a Masters student supervised by Alan Lynn.

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Little attempt has been made by research to utilise qualitative measures of investigation to detail the perceptions of elite coaching qualities and characteristics. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to use a qualitative method of investigation to identify 'coaching characteristics' that players and coaches believe the 'ideal coach' should adopt.

By expanding on the work of Clarke (2005) this study used Kelly's (1955) Personal Construct Psychology approach as well as a 'laddering' technique of interview to investigate a sample of 4 players and 2 coaches from a full time professional soccer club in the Scottish Football League. The subjects had all worked with 8 common coaches (elements) during their careers and were asked to complete a rep grid using the 8 elements as well as their 'ideal coach'. A triadic method of elicitation was used which forced the respondent to identify amongst three random elements a coaching characteristic that two elements had which the other hadn't. This process was conducted 10 times and produced ten different constructs with which the elements were rated on a scale of 1-5. These constructs were then analysed using Shaw's (1990) software package Repgrid 2. The main components derived from this package were then collated and two of the subjects were interviewed using a technique known as laddering (Hinckle, 1965). The 'laddering' approach of interview aimed to elicit deeper and richer information about the key components identified in the analysis.

The main findings from this study suggest that a key coaching characteristic is the development of strong relationships between coaches and players based on mutual respect and trust and also that the soccer players in the sample preferred coaches who have take a more 'hands on' approach.

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The major implication of this project for soccer coach education in Scotland can be summarized as:

- A more holistic approach to the education and development of soccer coaches. The traditional technical and tactical focus of training and certification courses was not reported as being a significant factor by either the players or coaches, i.e. the 'what' of coaching. Rather the 'how' of coaching was emphasized as a preferred coaching characteristic, with developing the humanistic skills of coaching seen as more desirable in certification courses.

References

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