



**Development of Ice Hockey Strength and Conditioning Coaching  
during the first season in the field.**

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## Abstract

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This diary based thesis attempts to present the author's first season as a strength and conditioning coach in the sport of ice hockey. It aims to highlight professional development of a strength and conditioning coach with relatively low levels of experience in strength and conditioning coaching, particularly within the sport of ice hockey. The season presented in the thesis takes place after the compulsory internship year required to complete the degree program at Haaga-Helia. During the internship many areas of the coaching process were heavily influenced by the senior coaching staff in the organization; this resulted in majority of coaching decisions, long and short term planning elements were taken care of by others and not the author. This was done as a way to educate the author without giving too much responsibility and to avoid costly mistakes. The observations featured in this thesis therefore, should be viewed as the author's first season working professionally as a strength and conditioning coach. The author was responsible for the strength and conditioning programming for under 16 SM and under 15 AAA teams in the junior Tappara organization.

The main responsibilities for the season were running the gym based strength and conditioning practice sessions, short term planning and to enhance the long term annual planning to fit the strength and conditioning training. Within that is the responsibility to educate the players on how to correctly perform exercises, monitor their strength levels and encourage them to become better athletes.

The thesis follows 12 weeks of the season with 3-4 diary entries per week (depending on the weekly schedule). The daily reports are set up to follow working tasks and objectives for each day and will be analysed in a weekly reflection.

The desired outcome is a clear development of professional practice and coaching effectiveness, supported by the theoretical framework. The author does not expect to become a perfect strength and conditioning coach by the end of the thesis but hopes to see noticeable growth in the areas identified through analysis of current coaching competency.

The project is a diary of the author's actions, reflections and development as a coach for Tappara RY Under 16 SM and Under 15 AAA teams. The author tries to remain honest and present a realistic picture of the process throughout the season. This means there may be inconsistencies in the actions and thoughts of the author. These should be considered as a reflection of the dynamic nature of coaching, especially junior athletes, and of the process of self development.

**Keywords**

**Coach development, Strength and Conditioning, Ice Hockey, Athlete Centred Coaching**

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## 1 Introduction

I am relatively new to the field of Strength and Conditioning Coaching, moreover I am new and inexperienced in coaching within the sport of Ice Hockey. I have worked as a personal trainer for a number of years and have coached Rugby Union but have only in recent years taken steps to becoming a strength and conditioning coach.

Living in Finland with a desire to pursue a career as a professional strength coach, and to work within team sports meant naturally I have gravitated towards Ice Hockey. I am familiar with the sport from a fan's perspective, however the professional insight is an area of newly charted territory in terms of understanding the specific qualities required, the culture of the sport in Finland and generally what the common practices are. I have gained some experience and professional insight of the sport throughout my studies including my internship with Tappara U18SM. The season was unavoidably yet understandably cut short due to the COVID 19 pandemic and I was not afforded a lot of responsibility due to the nature of the role and the agreed upon learning outcomes of the internship. None the less, the exposure to top level junior ice hockey provided me with a great starting point for my career. I have now been presented with an opportunity to act as the Strength and Conditioning Coach for Tappara Under 16 SM and Under 15 AAA teams respectively. This new role will allow me to have greater responsibility and opportunities to influence the seasonal process and moreover, the opportunity to learn and grow as a coach. With that in mind, I am considering this to be my first season in a strength and conditioning coaching role. By monitoring and reviewing my progress throughout the thesis, I hope to find confidence in my abilities and identifying what areas I need to improve. I hope to find a different and better perspective on the realities of coaching as well as find and define daily practices to help me become more consistent and diligent. I do not expect to become an elite level coach by the end of this season, but I do expect to have improved and to have taken steps to be the kind of coach I aspire to be.

Tampere Tappara is one of two main hockey organisations in the city of Tampere and it's men's team is considered to be one of the most successful teams in Finnish ice hockey. Tappara juniors work closely with the men's team and cover all age grade hockey from under 7 years old to under 18 years old. The club has junior teams all over the city and the surrounding areas with the championship and first division teams situated more centrally. There is of course a higher management structure including head of coaching and general manager. The management system ensures the organisation can run a professional outfit with strong infrastructure for supporting coaches, athletes and parents of the athletes. This also gives great scope for improving the quality of coaching; experience for the athletes; and most importantly improving the development of young athletes.

The coaching roster for both teams is made up of head coach, two assistant coaches, a goalie coach and myself as the strength and conditioning coach. There is also a head of strength and conditioning coaching who over sees all the strength and conditioning coaches from under 11 until under 18.

In addition to my position on the coaching roster, I am part of a team of four strength and conditioning coaches. This team is overseen by the head of strength and conditioning. This provides myself and the other coaches a point of contact and to create consistency in terms of long term development of athletes and coaching practices.

According to the club's values and philosophy, the over all objective for the strength and conditioning team are:

1. To create a clear pathway for the strength and conditioning training
2. To create a culture for strength and conditioning
3. To grow people in to athletes and ice hockey players
4. Promote player long term health
5. Build the base characteristics of the players to a sufficiently hard level
6. Create healthy, skilled, strong, fast and durable athletes — Tappara Ice hockey players.

As a part of the strength and conditioning team I have a responsibility to deliver these principles as best as possible. In addition my main duties are based around planning and implementing the strength and conditioning program within a motivational environment and educating players on principles of strength and conditioning training. We are fortunate to have a large private gym for the junior teams which affords a lot of opportunities for creativity within gym based practices. The lay out of the facility is specifically designed to allow teams to train effectively all year covering multiple areas of physical development.

The thesis will follow my progress during a 12 week window with the observation period starting on 30.11.2021 and ending on 18.02.2022.

In essence, this thesis is process oriented. That is to say, its purpose is to allow me to focus on the actions and decisions daily and weekly, to be able to make conscious considerations based off of a theoretical frame work and to reflect on each weeks progress with the intention of being accountable and aware of the positives and what improvements are necessary to make.

As the purpose of this thesis is to develop the skills of a professional coach, it is necessary to base my actions and decisions on current peer reviewed literature. This gives the thesis a credible basis on which to develop an effective frame work.

The following texts make up the core theoretical sources used throughout the process.

*Dorgo S, PhD, 2009. Unfolding the practical knowledge of an expert Strength and Conditioning Coach. International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching, 4, 1. PP. 17- 30.*

*Gilbert W PhD, 2017 Coaching better every season – A Year Round System for Athlete Development and Program Success. HUMAN KINETICS. Champaign, Illinois.*

*Gilbert W PhD, Baldis M PhD CSCS. 2014 Becoming an effective strength and conditioning coach. Strength and Conditioning Journal 36, 1. PP. 28-34.*

*Haff G, PhD, CSCS,\*D FNCSA Triplett N, PhD, CSCS,\*D FNCSA 2016. Essentials of Strength Training and Conditioning Fourth Edition. NSCA. HUMAN KINETICS. Champaign, Illinois.*

*Till K, PhD, Muir B, PhD, Abraham A, PhD, Piggot D, PhD, Tee J, PhD. 2019. A Frame Work for Decision Making within Strength and Conditioning. Strength and Conditioning Journal 41, 1. PP. 14-26.*

When observing and interviewing an elite level professional strength and conditioning coach and their peers, Dorgo (2009) identified and categorized the required knowledge and skills of an elite level strength and conditioning coach in two individual knowledge clusters. The first being foundational practical knowledge which includes, amongst others, knowledge of strength and conditioning, athletes, and facilities. In essence this knowledge cluster forms the foundation on which applied practical coaching knowledge is built. It contains less practical hands on coaching skills but creates a platform to build applied practical knowledge. The second knowledge cluster contains the so called “hands on” element of coaching. That is to say, the knowledge and skills a coach needs to execute an effective practice session. The applied practical knowledge cluster identify the key skills required for my role and for effective practical strength and conditioning coaching. The four main categories of applied practical knowledge are *Plan Modification, Supervision, Coaching pedagogical strategies* and *Professional Development*.

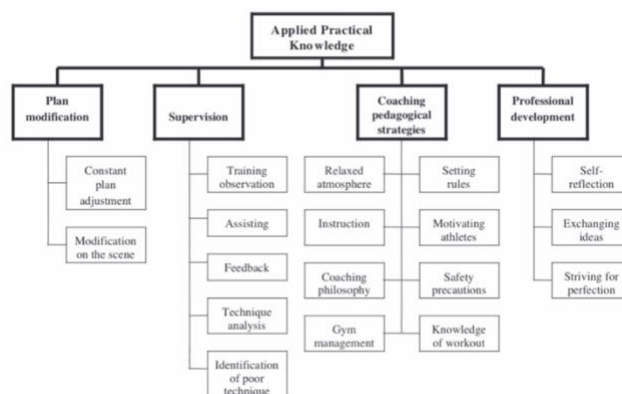


Figure 1. Depicts the applied practical knowledge, the four main domains and their respective subdivisions. *Applied Practical Knowledge Cluster (Dorgo. 2009).*

### Key professional components.

#### Strength and conditioning

The discipline of developing general and sports specific physical qualities in order to prepare athletes to meet the physical demands of the sport in question. Strength and Conditioning is used to improve an athlete's ability to perform in their task as well as reduce chances of injury

#### Coaching effectiveness

The consistent application of integrated professional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal knowledge to improve athletes' competence, confidence, connection, and character in specific coaching contexts. (Côté, Gilbert 2009)

#### Athlete centred coaching

Placing athlete development at the core of the coaching philosophy. Many coaches agree athlete centred coaching revolves around the coach-athlete relationship as a partnership. (Gilbert. 2017)

#### Periodisation

The planning of sequenced and structured training interventions in order to manage adaptive response to training and accumulated fatigue. (Haff, Triplett. 2016)

#### Unilateral movement

A movement utilising one side of the body only. E.g single leg squat

#### Bilateral

A movement utilising both sides of the body. E.g barbell back squat.

### Macrocycle

A subdivision of the annual periodisation plan typically lasting several months up to a year  
(Haff, Triplett. 2016)

### Mesocycle

A subdivision of the annual periodisation plan typically lasting two to six weeks  
(Haff, Triplett. 2016)

### Microcycle

A subdivision of the annual periodisation plan typically lasting one day. These are further broken down in to individual training sessions.

(Haff, Triplett. 2016)



## 2 Framework

### 2.1 Theoretical Model

*Figure 2* depicts the *Cognitive Practical Coaching Guide*. A model created by the author in line with the theoretical framework to depict each area of daily, weekly and monthly working tasks throughout a given season. It is essentially a step by step map to be used throughout the season, providing a clear pathway and structure to each day.

The three main domains, Planning, Delivering and Reflecting (P-D-R) (Till, Muir, Abraham, Tee, 2019.) focus on the deliberate process of coaching in a practical setting. Session planning, delivering practices and personal self reflection.

Each domain contains sub sections related to the applied practical knowledge cluster depicted in *Figure 1*. These domains lay out the progressions for a typical day coaching and are significant to one another, for example planning for the practice, delivering the practice and reflecting on planning and delivering. The individual sub sections may not always be applicable daily but are used weekly or monthly, for example short term and long term reflections.

Within the centre of the model is the constant process of growing Coach-Athlete relationships. In line with the thoughts of many coaches shared by Gilbert (2017, 76) investing time in creating and developing relationships with athletes should form a cornerstone of coaching practice. This domain is central as it is required (to various degrees) during each working task.

Each domain is contained within the over all coaching purpose which is to guide athletes in to reaching their potential. This stands as a reminder that each decision made and each action taken should be motivated by the over all coaching purposes. Every decision and action is effected by and effects the over all purpose of guiding athletes to reach their potential.

The Cognitive Practical Coaching Guide will be present throughout the observation period and will form the structure for each days working tasks. Each day will feature reflections based on the use of the Cognitive Practical Coaching Guide and how I used it in practice. The Reflecting task however for the most part will be absent, simply because this thesis in of its self, is the reflection. I therefore feel it unnecessary to specifically discuss the reflections within the practice and discipline of reflecting.

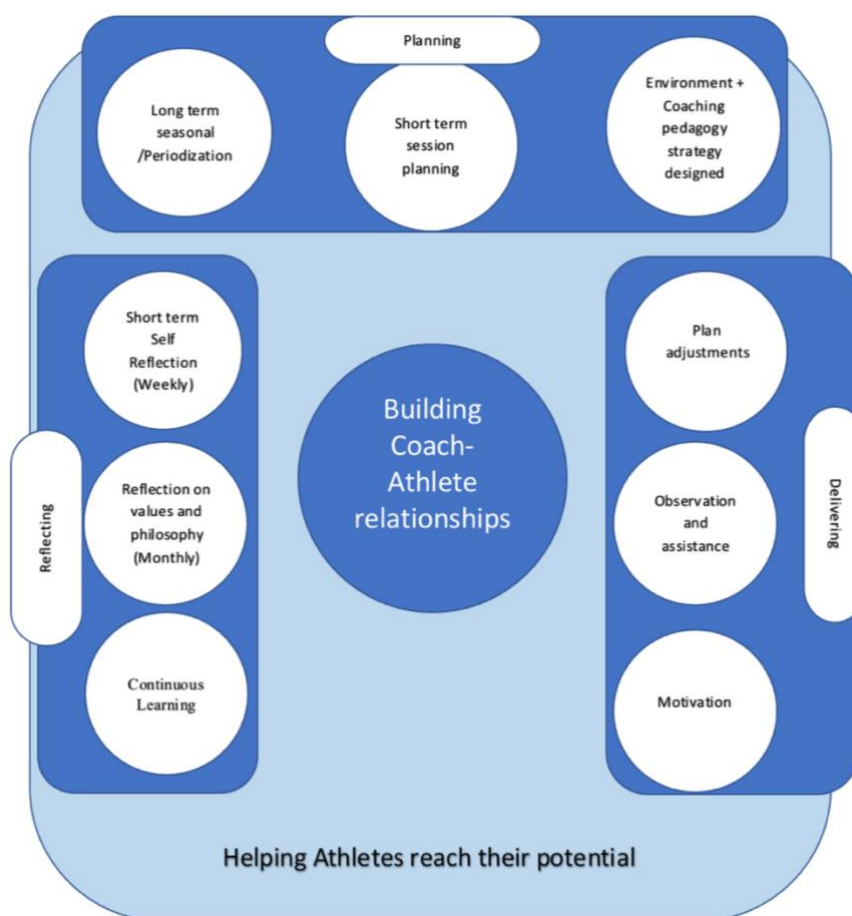


Figure 2. Cognitive Practical Coaching Guide.

## 2.2. Analysis of Current Work

### *Long term seasonal/Periodization planning*

This task requires information from the head coaching teams (team head coach and head of strength and conditioning coaching). This information includes the focus for each mesocycle, how many training sessions during one mesocycle, how many games and on which weeks the team will taper off or de load. I am then able to apply the information to the strength and conditioning Periodisation plan.

This task requires decision making skills, based on an understanding of how to develop the specific qualities and how to progress and regress the loading.

### *Short term session planning*

For this working task, I refer to the annual plan; for information on the specific loading for the session; and the practice times, to ensure the practice is time effective.

I try to map out a basic plan for the individual session, then adjust in the hours close to the session. There may be relevant information given to me in the hours leading up to a practice session that effects the plan.

This task requires critical thinking and decision making based on information and constraints leading up to the practice. For example, the team may have had a strenuous game the previous evening, or a schedule change which requires an adjustment to the planning.

#### *Environment + coaching pedagogical strategy design*

This task requires an understanding of my own values and philosophy and an established set of standards, rules and constraints for the athletes and coaches involved in the practice.

It also requires knowledge of different pedagogical styles, and an understanding of how to implement psychological theories, for example the self determination theory.

I aim to create a fun and relatively relaxed environment with as much autonomy as is possible.

An example of this is choosing to use games during the warm up in which I give basic instructions and allow the team to create the game (selecting their own teams and rules). I like to use music as a motivational tool and I give the players freedom over what they listen to. In addition to the autonomy, I am aiming to include a sense of responsibility and ownership. The easiest way I have found at this point is setting standards for packing the gym up after practice.

#### *Plan Adjustment*

This task requires decision making based on information from players and other coaches. I also need to be able to quickly draw from my knowledge of alternative exercises for injured players.

Usually alterations to the over all session plan happen due to changes in ice time or if the players arrive later.

Other modifications may come from players current abilities, or if they have an injury preventing them from following what is written. Majority of these plan adjustments are for injured players, I often do not know prior to the training if there are any new injuries that have occurred during the days between the strength and conditioning sessions. This means more often than not the plan adjustments are made during the session and are done along with the input from the players.

#### *Observation and assistance*

This task makes up the majority of the hands on coaching when delivering a practice session. It requires a solid and consistent understanding of correct exercise form and purpose for the selection. Without that knowledge it becomes difficult to assist the players and correct issues. Within this I have realised, I need a good understanding of

biomechanics for each movement to be able to identify why the movement may not be correctly executed.

During this task, I speak with the players a lot and try to get feed back from them regarding the movements so I can assist them in a more individual manner.

#### *Motivation*

Currently during this task I focus on giving praise to athletes when appropriate regarding their individual abilities. I also connect the exercises with a hockey specific task to give more of an extrinsic motivational value.

#### *Short term reflection*

This task requires self evaluation skills and self awareness. I aim to reflect on how each working day and week has gone, what was positive and what can be improved.

#### *Reflection on values and philosophy*

This task also calls for evaluation skills and self awareness. This self reflection is more long term and focuses on my personal values and coaching philosophy. This should be connected to the weekly reflections to see if I have acted according to my values and my philosophy.

#### *Continuous learning*

The purpose of self reflection tasks is for constant improvement in my professional life. Therefore this task requires me to identify areas in which I am insufficient and put time in to researching these areas to improve.

#### *Building coach athlete relationships*

This is a core concept to coaching: the more a coach knows and trusts the players, the better the coaching experience. This is true for the athlete also.

This task requires good communication skills with athletes.

As discussed by Gilbert (2017, 78) It can be as simple as having a conversation with them about something outside of the session and sharing of ideas and thoughts.

### 2.3 Self Evaluation of Tasks

I will self assess my abilities to carry out each element of the framework. I will do so using the following criteria.

- 1 A beginning-stage actor: completing a work task still requires collegiate or written instructions; independent and flexible completion of tasks is lacking
- 2 A skillful performer: you have a thorough understanding of the work tasks and you perform systematically at the level required by the tasks
- 3 An experienced specialist: you are capable of developing the procedures required by the tasks and instructing others to perform in the tasks



*Figure 3. Spider graph depicting results of self assessment compared to the skills of an elite coach.*

*Long term seasonal/Periodization planning*

Score: 2

I feel reasonably confident in this area and delivering a product based on the information given by the head coach. I feel I am competent in creating an effective plan based on my current knowledge as well as using evidence based resources to guide me in this task. I am able to format and consolidate the information provided into a more concise plan, E.G a periodised annual plan containing macro, meso and micro cycles, as well as loading schemes. I am aware of limits to my knowledge in this area and am unable to develop the task further than simply reformatting and making decisions specific to strength and conditioning

*Short term session planning*

Score: 2

Similar to long term planning, I feel confident in completing this task to the required level. I understand what is required and am able to work unassisted to create and adjust the short term plan.

I do feel able to implement some degree of development to this task based on the current practice within the teams I am coaching, yet there remains inconsistencies in my process.

*Environment + coaching pedagogical strategy design*

Score: 1

This is the area of the planning process I pay the least amount of attention to currently. Although I am interacting with elements of environmental design and coaching styles, I feel there is room for improvement in terms of consciously planning and designing the environment and selection of coaching style.

*Plan Adjustment*

Score: 2

I am comfortable in adjusting the plan quickly, during practice sessions and am able to justify my reasoning to other coaches and players. I am able to create session additional plans for injured players with relative ease.

I feel I should be able to offer more to injured players and try to incorporate rehabilitation exercises in to the alternatives as a posed to avoiding the injured area.

*Observation and assistance*

Score: 2

I am able to observe the practice and assist when I see errors. I feel confident in being able to modify exercises should an athlete need to.

I feel there are inconsistencies in this area and feel I need a clear blue print for exercise technique to be able to be consistent with what I am looking for from the athletes. With in that I need a better understanding of movement mechanics to be able to progress this task.

#### *Motivation*

Score: 1

I am limited with my knowledge and ideas of purposefully creating a sense of motivation. I am able to give motivation as part of my feedback and am able to discuss the benefits of exercises in connection to their playing. However, I am unable to develop an over all motivational climate in the practices.

#### *Short term reflection*

Score: 2

I have a good ability to think objectively about my performance each week and each session. I feel I am able to be self critical as well as identifying areas I excelled. However I do not have a structure for short term self reflection and often I do not sit down and dedicate time specifically for self reflection, usually I simply reflect on the practice in my head when I am traveling home.

#### *Reflection on values and philosophy*

Score: 2

Although I feel well equipped to undertake this task, I am vastly inconsistent with it. When I do go through the process of reflection on my values and philosophy, I find it beneficial, however I seldom schedule sessions.

#### *Continuous learning*

Score: 2

I feel confident in my ability to find resources to learn from, often I will research an area I a specifically need for a practice session and try to implement it.

Currently I do not arrange time in my week or season to specifically develop my knowledge, to read or talk with others who can share ideas with me and teach me.

#### *Building coach athlete relationships*

Score: 1

Although to a degree this occurs naturally when coaching, and I have a fairly good relationship with some players, I do not feel I am particularly confident in actively building relationships with individual athletes. Majority of my interactions with them are based on the present task and specific to the session.

Based on what I have identified in the self evaluation of tasks section, the main areas requiring development are as follows:

Environment + coaching pedagogical strategy design.

Motivation

Building coach athlete relationships

## **2.4 Interest Groups at Work**

The hierarchy of the Tappara Juniors is made up of an Executive Manager – Kari Aaltonen, Player Coordinator – Kimmo Vähä-Ruohola as well as individual head of coaching for different age groups. For under 15 and 16 the head of coaching is Niklas Sirén who is also Strength and Conditioning coordinator.

As previously mentioned the strength and conditioning department consists of the Strength and Conditioning coordinator, also acting as under 18s strength and conditioning coach, a strength and conditioning coach for under 15 and 16 (myself), under 13 and 14, under 12 and 11 respectively. These coaches are responsible for the top teams of the individual age groups

With regards to the staffing structures on the individual teams, they are composed of a head of coaching, head coach, two assistant coaches, a goalie coach and strength coach. The teams also have equipment managers and team managers.

## **2.5 Interactions Skills at Work**

Majority of my professional communication is done with the head coach for each team. This is usually about scheduling, planning and any case by case issues that may arise. There are occasions where I will speak with the head of coaching but for the most part, the head coaches pass on the relevant information for the teams respectively. The team's head coaches and head of coaching will meet for planning sessions and will filter the relevant information back to me. This is effective as there is a lot of information about the on ice practices that, at this point, is irrelevant to my work.

Within sessions, if I have any assistant coaches in the gym, I will communicate the training objectives with them and talk about key points for specific movements.

Over all I find the communication within the club to be fairly open and easy, meetings and discussions are often had by having casual encounters with each other rather than specifically scheduling time to sit and talk. I feel each member of the coaching and management staff are approachable and happy to assist and help other coaches and management personnel, there is a high level of motivation to grow the club and create as good and as professional an environment as possible. This is reflected in the way the staff interact with each other. There is a sense of pushing for better and better yet an understanding and a respect for individuals and the differences in philosophy and methodology.



### 3 DIARY ENTRIES

#### Week 1

**Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> November 2021**

Objectives for the day

Building coach athlete relationships by being more actively engaged with the players.

I felt I engaged well with the under 16s players today. I was asking them more questions than I usually do regarding their training and their season so far. I tried to actively listen to their answers and asked follow up questions. I discussed with one player how he must be feeling about returning to playing after missing a month or two through injury and we talked about my own struggle with injuries throughout my sporting career.

I occasionally asked about things not related to hockey. An example of this was a player wearing a hat from an English football team: I asked him why he supported them and who his favourite player was. This led to a discussion about his interest in football and how he enjoys playing during the summer months when there is no ice hockey.

I talked to a few players about my ideas of the weights room being an extension of the ice. The desired outcome for me is more about seeing them perform well during games, being more robust and stronger than their opponents when it counts.

In addition to this, I shared a few funny stories about previous gyms I have worked in and talked a little about my studies.

As I already have the periodisation for this cycle complete, I only needed to plan the individual sessions for both groups. For the under 16 group there is an additional step as each player has a log book for tracking individual progress. Under 15s typically follow a similar program, some exercises are modified to work for the different levels of abilities between the two groups. Both groups have just started a maximum strength cycle (4weeks) which involves general unilateral movements and sports specific bi lateral movements.

As the under 16s group have an intense period at the moment with three games per week for the following two weeks, the session design needed to match and complement the current over all loading. Under 15s can handle a little more workload in the gym.

I planned to create a fairly relaxed environment for the under 16s today as it was the first gym training after a long week of games and practices, as well as being the start of another long week.

I wanted to create an environment where they were willing to work, but left the gym feeling re energised and excited for the week ahead. I did this by allowing the players to play

their own games during the rest times. After the warm up I discussed how the focus of the lifts was not to push beyond the limits but to work to what we needed for the games. I believe for this session I was effective in creating the right environment and got the balance of focused work and enjoyment correct.

I had not specifically planned the environment for the under 15s, however I allowed them to pick their own music for the practice to create a positive and fun environment and increase the feeling of autonomy.

The group was large which meant I needed to be firm with them and set boundaries. I gave them a challenge of taking 10 minutes for each exercise to try and divert their focus back on to the training.

In both sessions I used a count down timer for the full session duration to add a time constraint and to allow the players to easily see how long they had left.

For the under 16 group I focused on coaching the squat as this is an area I have targeted to develop. I was conscious of maintaining good dialogue with players, asking questions and giving positive and motivating feedback to the players as well as assisting and adjusting.

I didn't need to make adjustments to the plan as I had a good idea of how they players would feeling based on conversations with the head coach. There were no new injured players that needed additional assistance.

With regards to the under 15s team, the large group made it difficult to focus assisting and observation as I was having to deal with enforcing the boundaries and ensuring players were focused on the training. It was difficult to undertake the specific job tasks for session delivery.

### **Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2021**

Objectives for the day

Complete the working tasks with intent and in a time effective manner

I wanted to give my attention to the daily working tasks to ensure I did not go in to the session without a plan and was able to deliver a strong coaching session. I feel I achieved this objective, especially during short term planning. I was conscious about the current situation and physical demands of the previous week and this current weeks schedule for the players.

When planning the environment for the practice, i was conscious and objective about selecting a method best suited for the practice.

The planning was relatively easy and took little time. The gym session was low load and lasted 45 minutes including warm up. I planned a 20 minute core and fundamental movement conditioning practice.

I selected a coach-led practice to keep within the time frame. Within this I planned to keep the team in a large group. My aim was to have their focus on the exercises for the full 20 minutes before leaving for the ice.

I had to be flexible with the plan as a few players were late, in addition the other coaches had a few announcements regarding the ice practice. It did not alter my environment design and the coach-led approach, I simply had to give more attention to the time and priorities certain movements.

The players responded well to the coach-led approach and understood why we were having a light practice. I reinforced the purpose of the session design with the verbal explanation of “keeping the engine warm, but not using too much fuel”.

I think the players are accustomed to having more coach-led practices, however, throughout the season my goal is to create a more autonomy supported environment.

#### Week 1 reflection

The week was short and did not follow the usual schedule, meaning it was a little harder to implement the theoretical frame work. Although in fact, it was potentially a positive as it gave me an opportunity to sample the daily and weekly cycle of tasks.

In addition, the process of constant daily reflection throughout this first week, has resulted in me being more conscious of each step of the weekly process. It has helped me to being organising my days systematically, allowing me to give more attention to the right areas at the right times.

I feel my skills in developing coach-athlete relationships took a step in a positive direction. Although I did not have a lot of coaching hours this week, the frame work and daily objectives helped me to think consciously about the way I interact with players.

I had to clearly divide my time and set times for achieving each step of the framework. This has meant talking with my family about how my job as a coach requires “office time” when I am at home during the day and set boundaries surrounding my time planning and my free time. Prior to this period of observation, my planning time has been fairly short and often done on the scene. Therefore having the framework in place along side the daily reflections, has been an adjustment to my weekly process.

I encountered a few small problems during the week, mostly the group size of the under 15aaa team, but also the lateness of the U16SM team during Thursday’s practice. With regards to u15aaa I am still adjusting to having such a large group of players and discovering how to deliver an effective practice. I found the methods of adding in time constraints helped to keep the attention of the players, however I know many of the players were unable to complete every set. I would still consider it to be effective during the practice and it resolved the issue of gaining focus and reducing the amount of players getting distracted during the longer rest periods. The lateness of the U16SM team was not a major concern, especially as I had designed a coach centred practice, I simply had

to be more focused on the time and make adjustments accordingly. Had it been a more athlete centred practice, it would have potentially been a bit more difficult.

### Planning

#### Long term planning

As has been discussed I did not need to complete this step during the week as it has previously been completed.

#### Short term planning

The main focus of this area according to the presented framework is to create an effective session plan using critical thinking and decision making skills based on the annual plan and other information such as session length and over all loading (weekly and monthly). As I was aware of the current high levels of loading for the under 16SM team during this week and coming few weeks, I believe I made the correct decision to create a lighter training plan for both days.

I am still learning and observing the physical literacy of the players in both groups which effects my decision making in terms of exercise selection and specific loading for each exercise. I have been instructed by department heads, U15AAA will follow the same annual plan as U16SM. However, there is a wider variety in ability between players in this group and often the session lengths and loading is not equal.

#### Environment and coaching pedagogical design.

According to the supported literature and the theoretical frame work, my coaching philosophy should be reflected in the design. Although I do feel during this week I have included elements of my coaching philosophy within the design, I do feel I need a much clearer understanding of what my philosophy is and how to implement it. I felt I was able to begin bringing an athlete centred environment to the conditioning training by asking the captain to take control over part of the warm up.

#### Adjustments on the scene

As this task requires information on changes to plans and players readiness, I feel during this week I made good choices when reacting to lateness, this was the only adjustments I had to make.

#### Observation and assistance.

I have not been so conscious of this previously. During this week, I felt I handle things fairly well giving instructions only when needed and asking for feedback from players. The difficulty comes with trying to observe the entire group and give my attention to players that need it most.

## Motivation

I need to do further research in to implementation of the self determination theory during this process. I am familiar with the concepts but I feel this needs to be added to the pedagogical design.

## **Week 2**

### **Monday 6<sup>th</sup> of December**

#### Objectives for the day

Pay closer attention to environment and pedagogical strategy.

I found specifically planning the environment and the session separately from the strength and conditioning program was a good step forward in terms of being consciously aware of the environment i am able to create. The act of specifically mapping out the environment for the practice allowed me to focus meaningfully on my own actions and thoughts throughout the practice. It also helped me to establish more consistent constraints and affordances in the session, I found it gave me a clear and consistent picture, even though I didn't necessarily change many of the elements from my usual practice, specifically planning it made it more clear and concrete. I will add this step in to my planning phase from now on, I think it will help me to develop the skill of controlling and building the exact environment I want to create.

Today's session was simple as it was a unilateral full body maximum strength session so I have focused on traditional barbell exercises. The practice is more generalised in terms of movements selected but they are exercises I am familiar with and form the foundation for many sports specific movements we will use throughout the season.

Unfortunately due to other scheduling issues, the gym based practice was canceled. I did not get the opportunity to deliver the planning. However, I feel the process of planning in a more detailed way would have helped me to deliver a quality coaching session.

## Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> December

Objectives for the day

Deliver a quality coaching session based on the detailed environment design.

I was extremely conscious of being true to my plan and observing how the players reacted. I decided to use time constraints for the lifting program to try and give the players a sense of pressure to get through the session. I found it helped create more focus, a few players said they felt the pressure of the clock and it encouraged them to pick up the pace. Although not every player achieved every set, majority of them completed the plan with more concentration and higher effort level than they normally would. I noticed peer coaching going on and had more players ask me to help them, or asking me questions on the plan. I am unsure if this is down to a heightened level of focus due to the constraints, or if the level of trust has grown. In addition, although the time constraints are effective, ultimately i want it to serve as a tool to teach players to be more accountable for their efforts, I do not want to keep it as a constant throughout the season, but a tool to used when I feel they need it.

I opted for a different style of warm up for todays practice for under 15AAA. I have noticed potential problems arising when using games. The strength practice design was simple to do as it is similar to the previous strength sessions during the current cycle.

The designing of the environment took a considerable amount of time as I wanted to give my full attention to it.

For this practice I began with a coach-led warm up, which is different to how I usually start. For the main lifting program I opted for a combination of a coach and athlete lead style. The use of time as a constraint was a way of encourage an increase in effort level and focus without direct verbal feedback from me. The team had a constant visual reminder which I simply needed to support.

I did not need to adjust the plan much although I had to give one alternative exercise to an athlete with a minor knee injury.

I found myself focusing less on the players and more on the setting and the time constraints I had added. On reflection this is probably quite a normal reaction as it added a new element for me to control, I am sure with time I will be able to manage this better. In the plan I had aimed to motivate the players by praising effort and highlighting why a movement is important to hockey. I did not keep up with this as much as I had planned. I gave praise for good efforts but I did not connect the movements to the game very much. I think this was for two reasons. Firstly as I mentioned previously the change to my approach caused an internal distraction, secondly when I remembered I'd didn't feel it was necessary information for the player I was engaging with at the time.

## Week 2 Reflections

This week has again been short due to changes in schedule and illness on my part. It is unfortunate I was only able to coach once this week, none the less I believe my skills in planning have improved.

Using the practice plan from Haaga-Helia I was able to think more clearly about my style of coaching and what kind of atmosphere I wanted to create.

I noticed the new focus on environment changed my observations during the practice, I am not sure if it was positive or negative, however it created challenges and offered alternative perspectives on how I have been coaching. I believe that paying closer attention to the environment, through design and through observations during the practice, was a definite step towards developing the skill of creating a strong working environment for the future. I believe the more practice I get, the more I will be able to balance the environment and coaching style selection with the specific strength and conditioning coaching.

The main challenge from this week was intrinsic, my focus was divided between observation and assistance with the players and the upkeep of the environment. I struggled with the balance between the two and noticed I was more concerned with the environment design. I was often asking myself if I was being true to the plan, when I should have been acting to assist the players in their training.

I had to stop and refer back to the framework during the session, this helped me to remember to concentrate on the key elements of delivery, "plan adjustments" "observation and assistance" and "motivation".

As I mentioned during the reflection from Tuesday, I overlooked the motivation aspect of delivery, in essence this was not acting true to the environmental and coaching style design. However, on further reflection, although I didn't use verbal motivation often enough, I do think the use of time constraints increased the motivation over all as it raised the challenge level.

When creating an effective environment, a key concept used by leading industry coaches is to set rules and boundaries to encourage the athletes to behave in certain ways. The use of these rules and boundaries is used to create the atmosphere. An example of this is a coach having a casual and relaxed demeanor may create a more relaxed atmosphere, or a coach being demanding and strict, may create a sense of urgency and high pressure. They are also used to set a level of motivation and work effort. The most common example of this is the concept of a leaderboard. (Dorgo, 2009).

During this week, I opted to use time as a constraint within the environment to create a sense of pressure and enhance the motivation to perform. I did not want to divert from

having a relaxed demeanor and was hoping to give the players a chance to discover the restraints without having to put the pressure on through my behavior.

As I have mentioned during the reflections, I do not wish to keep the time constraints a constant throughout the season, I hope to use it as a pedagogical device. My hopes are that given time and repetition with this particular constraint, the athletes will have learnt to be conscious of working effectively and being accountable for their actions during the training sessions. The over all objective is to create an autonomous environment, or perhaps more importantly, to educate athletes to take ownership of their actions when working in an autonomy supportive environment.

### **Week 3**

#### **Monday 13<sup>th</sup> December**

Objectives for the day

Become more comfortable interacting with players on a social level to help develop relationships.

Due to the structure of today's practice I did not manage to speak individually to many players. I did however manage to speak to one player a lot about himself, specifically about taste in music, I also shared my own tastes. Although I did not manage to speak to as many players as I aimed to, I was able to joke around with a few of the players and build more friendly and open lines of communication that way.

Before the practice I design open ended questions to help with my process of getting to know the team.

"You are coaching people first and sports second" – (Gilbert 2017. 78). This quote was a motivation for designing the questions as the relationship between Coach and athlete must go beyond the session topic for it to be meaningful and impactful.

When designing the questions, I considered what an open ended question is. According to an online article an open ended question leaves room for the recipients to give an explanatory answer. Questions including words like how, why, who, what. As opposed to a question that results in a yes or no answer. (Questionpro.2021)

I came up with the following:

How was your day at school?

How long have you played ice hockey?

What is your favourite sports film?

What kind of music do you like to listen to before a game?



This current cycle leading in to Christmas is a three week active rest cycle. An active rest cycle would typically occur during the second transition phase (post season) (Haff, Triplett. 2016). However due to the structure of our season and considering the high over all loading from the last two to three weeks, an active rest cycle fits in to our annual plan mid way through the season.

An active rest period should consist of no formal or structured training and should be made up of low intensity recreational games (Haff, Triplett 2016). Although according to the literature, formally structured training should be limited, I want to take the opportunity to develop fundamental movement skills.

Today's session is relatively unstructured and will consist of recreational games environment design.

I used the Haaga Helia Topical lesson planning template to frame the planning and have chosen to be very athlete centred. The players will have the freedom to design majority of the session through selecting their own games.

The players arrived late to the gym which gave us only an hour to practice. I stuck true to the plan but needed to amend it to match the time frame however I tried to limit the structure as much as possible and allow the game to feel more recreational and casual.

## **Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> December**

Objectives for the day

Become more comfortable interacting with players on a social level to help develop relationships.

I spoke to a number of players about their day in school, had a discussion about the differences between the age groups with two goalies from the u15AAA group who have joined the u16SM team. The open questions were useful, however a reluctance from the players to speak English at length combined with the natural withdrawn nature of Finnish people makes it difficult to get a lot of information from them. None the less, I found them to be useful starting points for conversation.

After a discussion with the head coach at last night's practice session, we discussed incorporating mobility in to the practice for today. I have created a plan based around fundamental movement patterns and mobility exercises. I have focused on the squat, lunge, bending and rotational movement patterns.

I planned a coach lead session as it contains a lot of mobility and movement unfamiliar to the players. Felt it important to deliver a more coach lead practice to support the learning of new movement drills and mobility exercises.

The under 16SM session was good, the rest of the coaching team also helped and translated my instructions in Finnish which got the players more comfortable. Many of the players found the movements challenging although they looked simple. We ended with a game of basketball as they had asked. I was true to the planning and felt the session was effective and achieved the objectives set.

The under 15AAA practice was quite different as the numbers were low. I took the opportunity to involve myself with some games with them. I changed the plan and decided to play fairly low intensity ball games. As they were only 11 players I joined one team and focused on just enjoying myself with them and getting to know them.

### **Thursday 16 December**

Objectives for the day

Become more comfortable interacting with players on a social level to help develop relationships.

I felt comfortable talking to players and being more social and casual with them. Joining in with the under 16 dodgeball game today helped me to interact more with the players on a level I do not usually do. I felt there is a bit more trust and feelings of safety developing from the players perspective. "An important part of the development of coach athlete relationships is allowing your self to be vulnerable with players" (Gilbert 2017. 78). I interpret that to mean, it's important to show the human side of yourself and not just the professional side. It means sharing things and "letting your guard down". I believe taking part in the game with the players today and on Tuesday was an opportunity for the players to see this from me.

For the under 15 group I ran the same practice as Tuesday as there were players attending who were absent on Tuesday.

I had to observe and correct many of the players during the dynamic stretching portion. I tried to give as simple feed back as possible and used visual examples to communicate. I waited to see if they understood or if they needed further help before moving on to the next player.

### **Week 3 Reflection**

As this week was focused on recovery both mentally and physically, it means the practice sessions were relatively easy on my part also. The players intrinsic motivation was high which lead to high levels of engagement from them. I did not face many challenges at all this week.

I felt my skills of connection with the players developed this week and are heading in the direction I am hoping for. I was less closed off with players than usual and more natural

when engaging with them. Previous attempts at getting to know the players has felt forced and calculated. I am hoping to develop the skills to be able to communicate comfortably with the athletes from the first meeting and begin to learn about them early on. Although I do not have those skills yet, I have definitely moved closer to that goal.

With regards to creating a better gym environment, this week I felt my planning was not complete until I had also planned how I would run the practice. I know I still have room for improvement with this, I need to consciously take my values and philosophy in to consideration. I also want to add a unique culture and behaviour to the gym so I can increase motivation over all and show players the value of strength and conditioning within their careers. Similar to having the ability to communicate well from the first meeting, this is an area I am moving towards but have not achieved that yet. None the less, becoming more aware of how I can control these areas has been a big step forward in my approach to coaching.

In previous weeks I have taken the environmental coaching and pedagogical strategy design as a separate working task, however according to the theoretical frame work, it is part of the planning phase and not it's own entity. I chose to temporarily focus on this as an individual element as I wanted to give more time and attention specifically to the task. This week I tried to consolidate my working tasks more to make sure I was sticking to the frame work in a more concise way. I have added the Environment and coaching pedagogy strategy design back in to the planning phase of my working day. I hope to now be able to take it further and strengthen the connection between each planning element (long term, short term and environmental and pedagogical planning).

During the week I referenced Gilbert (2017. 78) "Never forget you are coaching people first and the sport second". I felt it was an important concept to focus on when considering the process of growing athlete relationships. I opted to create open questions that did not necessarily link to sports and the particular season, instead I aimed to find out more about athletes as people, as young men and women. To develop this inline with the supporting literature, I will create a file to note down things that are meaningful to them (Gilbert 2017. 78). The idea behind this is to concretely gather information on players what will help to develop the relationships with the individuals. I can for example draw on this information later when talking with them.

## **Week 4**

### **Monday 20<sup>th</sup> December**

Objectives for the day

I will continue with focusing on developing my communication skills with the athletes.

I spoke with a lot of players today and asked a lot of open questions. I had a discussion with a group of players regarding the different level between playing in under 16 and under 18. I shared some personal experiences from my own sporting career. I also set aside time after the practice to note down the names of each player in the team and began writing some basic likes and dislikes for the individual players. I hope to gather more information for this as the season goes on.

As we are still in a recovery cycle and have a short (30 minutes) practice after the on ice practice, I designed a relaxed and casual environment with a session and focus on mobility and recovery. This follows from a discussion with the head coach regarding areas of mobility. We decided to focus on ankles, hips and thoracic spine.

The players were late getting to the gym which gave us only 15 minutes to work. I had to adjust the practice and focused only on the ankle mobility.

The players found it very easy but it gave me a good opportunity to see how good their ankle mobility actually is. I did not need to assist many players as the exercises were extremely easy.

I tried to keep the engagement and motivation as high as I could despite the lack of challenge by explaining to players the purpose and importance of ankle mobility. It seemed to help and most of the players understood the purpose of the exercises.

### **Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> December**

Objectives for the day

Have fun with the players

Today was the last session before Christmas so I planned a fun session with the under 16s team. Unfortunately I was unable to achieve this objective as the plan changed at short notice resulting in a completely different looking practice.

The planning for the under 16 group was straight forward as I listed a selection of games for them to play. The games selected were easily modified to fit the intensity required.

There had been a last minute decision made to test the players this evening. All coaches were involved, and did not need much re organisation to execute the tests. I felt it was a

good test for my flexibility as a coach as it meant I had to react to a totally new session at the last minute.

I ran the single leg squat testing along side the head coach and another coach. We clearly stated the criteria for the tests and showed the players how it worked. My role was counting the repetitions and timing. I gave other players the responsibility of timing so I could concentrate on watching each repetition carefully. Due to it being a test, the only assistance I could give was giving prompts about range of motion.

I tried to motivate the players encouraging them to give their best effort and explained testing was more for the coaching staff to see if the programming is effective and to see their current level.

Today's under 15s practice was before an on ice skating test, therefore I have focused on preparing the players for the tests. Each drill was selected to help them prepare physically for the tests.

I designed a coach-led environment to ensure the players underwent a quality warm up before the tests. Unfortunately the testing means I am unable to fully complete my daily objectives with this group but I tried to maintain a level of enjoyment as best as possible. The practice time for U15AAA had changed and began half an hour earlier creating a delay because of cross over between the U16SM and U15AAA teams. This was not much of an issue, but resulted in starting a few minutes late. I decided to continue the plan until the time was up, even if it meant missing a drill or two at the end.

I made adjustments to the running mechanics section of the plan as I wanted to prioritise number of repetitions and sets completed over teaching the drills and correcting movements.

Most of the observation and assistance happened during the mobilisation at the beginning. I had to adjust a few players techniques during this section. I gave some feedback to individuals during the sprint mechanics element, but as I was conscious of the time, and conscious of keeping to the objective of preparing the players for the skating tests, I gave general over all feedback and reiterated my key points.

The players generally seemed in good spirits and fairly motivated. Many of them were asking me questions about the practice, I didn't feel I needed to give much motivation.

#### Week 4 Reflections

This week was incredibly short leading up to Christmas, I did however feel I improved in terms of my planning and in my confidence within coach athlete relationship development. As the sessions have looked a bit different this week in terms of mobility practices and testing, it has given me the opportunity to engage more with the players and to give more of myself during our interactions. I found that asking players to help with the timing during the one leg squat tests, gave me an opportunity to show trust for players. I had handed them my phone as I was using it to time the squat, this I was hoping, showed I was willing

to trust them to be honest and respectful with my personal belongings. I also noticed they enjoyed the responsibility of timing. It was after all, their responsibility to start and stop the test.

Although I am still building the player database, this week I found it helped me to engage more with certain players as I could draw from previous conversations.

I felt challenged from different directions during the week. Mondays mobility session required more attention on my part. Although I felt the ankle mobility was an important consideration, I should have listened to the players better and re structured the session. We had limited time, I possibly should have created a coach-led practice and made sure they performed a full body mobility practice. I had made the decision in a rush and had convinced myself this was the best course of action, where as in reality, the practice was less than optimal.

To have corrected this, I should have asked myself what the purpose and objective was for the practice. I feel this would have given me more clarity and given me a better perspective. It was not a completely wasted session however, I want to include the ankle mobility more often and was able to introduce the exercises to players.

Tuesday evenings change of plan challenged me as I was not prepared for such a last minute change, I overcame it by breaking down what was needed for each test, for example, I created a document for each player to write their results down. This gave me a clear idea of how to act as soon as I got to the gym. I felt happy that I was able to think objectively within a short time frame and felt I was ready for the testing as soon as the players entered the gym. Although many of the steps I took were not necessary in the end, I am happy to have been able to think on my feet and organise myself enough to be prepared.

I have recently been reading an autobiographical book unrelated to coaching or sports, the book is not a part of the supporting literature or the theoretical frame work. However, themes in the book have stood out to me as useful, and I have taken the message on throughout the week. The author discusses how, throughout their career and life, she has developed a curiosity about others, and have developed many ways in which to build relationships just through being curious and asking questions. (Margolyes 2021)

It reinforces my belief that our relationships with other people are controllable. That is to say, if we are to develop relationships, it is up to us as individuals to interact, ask questions, be engaging with the person and show care and interest. In relation to building coach and athlete relationships it is not enough to let the relationship develop over time naturally, we need to be actively feeding it the right things for it to grow. This has been a driving force for my motivation in engaging more with players and I have noticed a difference. These concepts are not new to coaching, many coaches consider the forming and developing of coach and athlete relationships to be the most important aspect of their

job (Gilbert 2017). On a personal level this is the first time I have felt the need to implement relationship building strategies.

When comparing the ideas in both texts, although unrelated in many ways, it is hard to dismiss the notion that building relationships is a skill which requires practice and sometimes strategy to develop.

## **Week 5**

### **Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> December**

Objectives for the day

Ask at least three players questions from the open questions I created and make a note of their answers in the database for relationship development.

I found it easier to approach and connect with players today, mostly I asked questions about their Christmas holiday which created a natural conversation starter. I took the daily objective further and discussed things about their individual development. For example one player is recovering from an ankle injury, we discussed his progress and talked about how he feels about returning to full mobility.

There was a change to the annual plan and we will now begin a short muscle endurance cycle. I have been given very precise instructions following a meeting with the head of strength and conditioning which gave me a clear understanding of what to prepare for. Both teams will follow the same program however there will be a slight difference in the exercise selection for under 15s AAA.

I did not have time for the specific environment planning for today's practice due to non work commitments.

At the start of the practice, the previous team's gym training over ran which interfered with under 16s training. I had to wait for them to leave before starting. I didn't want to waste the players time by waiting for the other group to finish so I improvised an endurance based circuit and returned to the original planning thereafter.

I didn't need to assist many players today in the under 16s team, through observations and discussions with the players it became clear they were comfortable enough with the movements. I gave small amounts of corrective feedback to some of the younger players and assisted them when needed. Over all the team moved well and seemed comfortable and confident in what I was asking of them.

During the under 15s session I needed to give a lot more assistance as there is such a difference in the ability of some players. There were also a few new players today who needed additional attention.

The motivation in both teams was fairly high, players seemed happy to be getting back to hard training after an easy few weeks. I didn't feel I needed to give a lot of motivation, aside from explaining the purpose of the training and discussing the session objectives. I gave some individual motivation to players and individually praised players for displaying high levels of effort during the practice

### **Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> December**

Objectives for the day

Ask at least three players questions from the open questions I created and make a note of their answers in the database for relationship development.

Continuing to build on from yesterday's objectives I asked more players the open questions and made attempts to make more connections with them. I find the questions to be useful because I instantly have a way to communicate and start a conversation with a player. Due to the age difference and language barriers it can be challenging for me to know how to start a conversation, the questions create openings for discussions.

I have followed a similar structure from yesterday as the sessions are the same length of time. I have added more core strengthening exercises for under 16 SM to supplement what was missed yesterday due to the timing issues.

I did not need to make any adjustments to the main plan for U16SM. The players had their on ice practice before the gym which meant I didn't have as much time pressure as usual. I gave alternative plans to two players, one had been with the U18SM team yesterday and was feeling tired and sore. I talked him through the plan and we discussed options to alter it to fit his fatigue levels. The other player has a broken wrist so I had to create a completely different session for him.

U15AAA I removed the metabolic conditioning component as they were due to have an intense on ice practice.

As I had introduced a new exercise today, majority of my assistance was based around that. The players were very familiar with the rest of the exercises and did not need much assistance. I had to ensure work was being done a few times, asked players for feedback but mostly I was able to be fairly "hands off" and give more autonomy.

In terms of observation and assistance I helped players with their bench press. I have not prescribed bench press very much and when observing I noticed a lot of inconsistencies. I gave more consistent instructions on set up and execution.

The motivation currently is fairly high with the under 16s team, I do not need to find ways to motivate them very much. My positive feedback is always on praising effort over results. I am trying to attach sports specific meanings to each exercise to increase the intrinsic motivation of the athlete. At this point that seems to be enough. The over all team



environment has created high motivation. The team are winning games and playing well together on the ice, naturally this increases the players feelings of competency and connectivity.

I also focused my efforts on the bench press during the under 15s practice and I found that giving players my attention through very specific feedback and by assisting them, they became motivated and engaged with the lift. I have never given my attention to one exercise only, but found it was an effective way of encouraging players to do more and showing players my purpose as a coach is to improve their athletic ability.

#### Week 5 Reflection

This was the first week returning to full practice intensity as well as after the short Christmas break, my focus on developing the skills to connect with players and build relationships has developed slightly, made easier by the use of open question designs. I am feeling more comfortable in building relationships with athletes and other coaches but still know I am a long way off where I want to be.

None the less I feel positive about these improvements and am noticing my confidence as a coach growing. The use of the database I created has helped me a lot in this, it is not that I have difficulties in remaining what we have talked about, but the act of writing it down helps me to connect the dots so to speak. When I see that player in the future I do not have to think much about how I can connect to them. An example, one of the players is a golfer during the summer. We have discussed it a few times and I have made notes on his favourite professional players and the best course to play in Finland. When I have the opportunity to speak to him casually I can ask him about golf and show I remember our previous talks. This shows I have payed attention to him and shown a legitimate interest in him as an individual and not just as an athlete I happen to be coaching.

The changes to the practice times interfered with my planning in a way I was not expecting. I found the limits to the time I had to plan each day were an obstacle and something I could have controlled in a better way. For both days I was unable to complete the environment and pedagogical planning. I could have made more time before practice or found time after practice to plan for the next day. Although this didn't effect my practices too much with U16SM as the team has become accustomed to the environment I try to create. As it is late in the season, the players already have a good idea of what to expect, they are able to set up the environment effectively themselves. None the less, if I wish to improve on my ability to build an effective team environment, I must find the time to plan and interact with the ideas and philosophies I have.

I noticed the lack of planning with the under 15AAA group. The entire squad is split in to two separate teams. However, the last two days has seen the entire squad training in one group which meant I needed to be more organised with a clear vision for the sessions. I would not describe the practices as disastrous. However there were a number of details

over looked by myself which resulted in a less effective practice session, not every player managed to finish their training in time. The biggest issue was the rest times for certain exercises. The players often group in 3s and use only one piece of equipment, this ends up extending the rest period between sets which not only effects the training method but the session timing. For the following weeks I will plan to avoid this as best as I can by making the groups smaller on certain exercises, setting up more areas for the slower exercises and encouraging players to find a free space to do their next set when their rest time is up. I feel I have learnt from these challenges and look forward to seeing if my adjustments can make a difference in the future. What is important to recognise is the cause of the issues. The players are not at fault, especially during this stage of their athletic and social/emotional development. It is my responsibility to teach them how to be effective in the gym. It is wrong for me to put blame on the players without looking at what steps I can take to improve the situation.

## **Week 6**

### **Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> Jan**

Objectives for the day

Plan in a time effective manner

As I struggled with planning last week I needed to give more attention to this area and hopefully find a solution to times where I am not able to balance work and home life effectively. Today I managed to create both the short term session plan and the environment and pedagogical plan by setting myself a time specifically to complete this task.

There is a game for under 16 SM tomorrow meaning today was based on speed and plyometrics. I did not include any barbell lifts as I wanted the session to be quick and straightforward after the ice. I wanted the players to be able to perform quality repetitions with sports specific movements in preparation for the game, the focus of the plan is not necessarily develop physical qualities but to ensure the players are explosive and feeling competent in their physical abilities.

I tried to make the plan easy to understand and execute as I wanted the over all environment to be fast paced with good focus and intention.

I did not need to adjust the plan for this session. I did however need to consider the injured players of which there were four. I could have handled this better and will have to consider how I manage this in the future. I felt the injured players had a poor session as a result of my lack of preparation for them.

I designed a session in which I controlled the first half and allowed the players to run the second half which meant my role changed as the session progressed. During both sections I tried to watch as many players as possible and gave feedback when it was necessary, this became easier during the second portion as I was free to interact with the players more. The drills were simple to understand and most players were able to perform each movement without needing much assistance.

I had to encourage the players returning from the under 18 SM team to pick up their efforts during the player-led portion of the practice. They were clearly a bit disconnected from the team and practice. Majority of the team were energised and excited to train in preparation for their first game after the holidays.

### **Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> January**

Objectives for the day

Plan in a time effective manner

I was fortunate in the sense that today's session was similar to a session from previous weeks so I only needed to make a few adjustments. Mostly the technicalities were identical. The environment plan took the longest as I was aiming for more a detailed to see if this makes a difference to my coaching during the session. I again set aside time to focus only on the planning and clearly communicated to my family that I needed to have the time to plan.

One of the core points in the plan was making sure I gave clear instructions in regards to the rest times and to educate the players on why they are important to follow strictly. This was the issue last week and I felt it important to make it a focal point for the environment and pedagogical side of the practice. In addition to educating the players I planned to set up more spaces for each exercise to speed things up.

We started late which meant I had to pay closer attention to the timing but it did not affect the overall practice plan.

I recognised my skills in observation and assistance improving today. During the stretching I felt comfortable and alert and was able to effectively communicate with players. During the main portion of the session I again focused on the bench press and carried over what I had shown the players last week. I was able to watch multiple sets at the same time and give feedback individually.

The players were engaged in my instructions and understood my reasoning. Each player completed the training session in good time with little need for encouragement from me. Regarding the players I assisted during bench press, I could see many of them feeling good about having pushed themselves further than they thought possible. My aim with

some of the players was to challenge them so they could understand what it felt like to lift weights appropriate to the objectives of the training and give confidence in doing so.

### **Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> Jan**

Objectives for the day

Plan in a time effective manner

I manage to get majority of the planning done in the evening yesterday as I did not have time in the morning. We had an early practice time this morning so I focused my efforts on planning during the evening.

I planned two endurance based circuits with the combination of body weight strength movements with aerobic endurance. The objective of the practice was endurance and strength endurance training. I aimed to combine both in these metabolic conditioning circuits. I have chosen lower repetitions and body weight movements, this is to ensure the players are able to work continuously for 12 minutes.

I planned to have a coach-led practice today with constant movement and action from the players. I want to ensure the players have minimum rest for the hour, each element is based on endurance in different forms. To be able to achieve this, the practice must be coach-led. I will control the rest times between the circuits and keep them between 3-5 minutes only.

I made no plan adjustments for the majority of the team, however I changed a few exercises for players with injuries. Over all the session ran according to the plan. Most of the session my concentration was on observing the levels of fatigue. I was regularly asking how difficult the exercises were as well as watching how the players performed throughout the session. I was aiming to see when the ability to perform the movements started to decline. I gave prompts related to the standards of movement I wanted to see, for example bringing the knee to the floor during walking lunges, or chest to the ground on the press ups.

As the session was an early morning practice and before the ice, the players were not fully engaged at the beginning of the session, I tried to use music to lift the mood and energy.

A few of the leadership players in the group seemed a little behind in terms of motivation. I had to give them encouragement and spoke with them about how they are leading the team and setting examples.

## Friday 7<sup>th</sup> Jan

Objectives for the day

Plan in a time effective manner.

This objective could have been changed as I managed to plan the session a lot faster than I had anticipated. Although it was quick, the focus planning from the last few weeks has helped me significantly. Being able to identify that I do not need to create a brand new plan for every session and having an understanding that a degree of reparation is necessary for effective training outcomes has freed up a lot of time.

Today plan was similar to Monday's practice and consisted of plyometrics with long rest times. I have opted for a player-led practice as we have recently had a series of coach-led practices. I also want the players to start working as a unit ahead of the weekend.

I modified the practice for the injured players and gave a completely different practice plan to another player who will likely not continue the rest of the season. As these players are not involved in games this week, I gave them more of my attention to allow the playing team to work with the team captain.

On observation I noticed most players were correctly performing the movements and I only had to make simple remarks and follow ups to one or two players.

Motivation was high today because of the weekends games and the autonomy supported environment. All players finished the program perfectly to time and tidied the gym up after themselves. As the session went on I gave players full access to the music. Many players put on their pre game play lists which created a sense of excitement within the group.

### Week 6 Reflection

As I had mentioned during the week, I noticed my skills in observation and assistance improved. This is possibly to do with the focus I've put on developing athlete relationships. I felt my confidence improved in terms of get involved with the players more directly. It was a highlight for me seeing players make progress in their confidence and understanding of what they are able to do in the gym. When I started with both of these teams during the summer, many players were reluctant to push themselves. I would see players lifting the same weights for every training system selected. I recognised this was due to a lack of understanding of their own abilities as well as fundamental principles of resistance training. Of course it is my job to teach them these things, this week has been a breakthrough for me in this area. Because I have been able to get more involved with the players and assist them more during a practice sessions.

Focusing on the session planning all week was also beneficial. I noticed a difference, especially with U15 AAA. It helped me to organise and deal with the issue with time management as well as creating a clear picture of what we can and cannot do during a

session. I still found it challenging to manage my time with the large planning requirements. I recognise this as something that I will grow accustomed to over time and figure out more effective methods.

I felt it important this week to clarify my approach to the issue of time management with the under 15 AAA team. When asking if they had completed the training plan, I made it clear I was taking ownership of it. I explained that these adjustments are also things in my control and are areas I need to put my thought in to when planning. I discussed that as a coach it is part of my job to make sure we can use the time well. The team may not have been able to finish the sessions previously due to my actions not theirs. We talked about how it is a two way situation. I need to consider how my plan effects their training and their ability to move with the freedoms I've given them, and in return they need to acting responsibly within the perimeters I set out. I can not be critical of the players and their actions without being critical of my own.

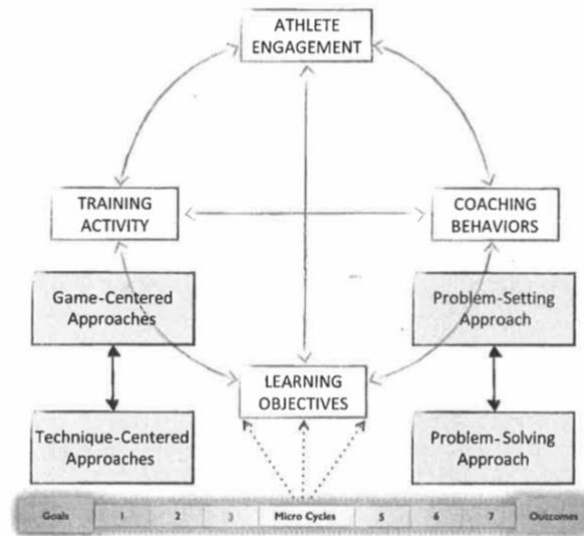
By speaking to them rationally about the realities of the situation, i hoped to have shown them respect as apposed to scorning them and pinning the blame on them completely.

I felt positive and confident in my coaching after most of the practices and have found the frame work of daily working tasks is becoming habitual. I am feeling that the supportive framework is also allowing me to be more creative and relaxed. A highlight for myself this week was designing individual sessions for injured players prior to them entering the gym. Previously I have been unprepared for injured players and have tried to assist them during the practice on things they are unable to do. For example I would instruct them to start with the exercises they know they can do, then I will make amendments to their training. This week I have noticed I am more aware of the injured players and their limitations and felt I had the mind space to individually plan for them. It's possibly down to having build better relationships with players. From talking with them I knew the extent of their injuries and what steps they are taking to return to play.

I hope to develop this in to my daily and weekly working tasks. Perhaps simply by communicating better with the other coaches about injuries.

I noticed the these players responded well to my assistance. As a strength and conditioning coach this is something I feel I can offer that other coaches can not. It is part of my responsibility to ensure the injured players do not regress to much. From next week I will begin taking more time to prepare for injuries.

I observed the athletes motivations and behaviours during certain sessions this week. Particularly the sessions involving me heavily being involved in assisting the bench press.



*Figure 4 The Coaching Practice planning and Reflective Framework (Till, Muir, Abraham, Tee, 2019.)*

I noticed the players' enthusiasm and drive to lift more weights grew due to my helping them. It is important for me to remember, athlete engagement is on a continuum with many facets, one of which being the coaches behaviours within the context of the learning environment and session objectives.

The above frame work is a tool to enhance the planning process for effective coaching. What I found relevant in this, is how the four main elements are essentially split in to objectives (Learning Objectives) and specific context of the practice (training activity) but more importantly are the two behavioural elements, coaches behaviour and athlete engagement. I did not specifically plan by behaviours during the observation and assistance task, however, it is likely that the way I conducted myself was appropriate for the setting, and resulted in high levels of athlete engagement. It is worth considering how my actions and behaviours can be thought out and planned to meet the learning or training outcomes.

## **Week 7**

### **Monday 10<sup>th</sup> Jan**

Objectives for the day

Focus on my interactions with players. Ask questions about the weekends games.

I definitely feel achieved my goal for the day. I focused a lot on having meaningful interactions with individual players as well as the team as collective. I thought more about how I address them at the beginning and end of the practice. From an individual perspective I spoke with several players about their weekend games and about their first day back in school after the holidays.

I have tried to create a low load practice as the team has two games over the weekend. I gave myself the flexibility in the plan to adjust depending on the physical state of the players. In addition i don't see any value in writing out exactly which movements I want to run during this kind of practice. I would rather think on my feet and be present with the players compared to following a list and not allowing much room for change. This freedom should allow me to taylor the practice based on what I observe and what feedback I get from the players.

The idea was to create a fully coach-led practice with mobility elements combined aerobic endurance as the players were required to constantly move through various dynamic stretches. I needed to be in control of what the movements were based on how much time we had, and more importantly how well the players moved.

Despite the plan and the desired outcome of the session, I made major plan adjustments due to the players having a challenging weekend from a social and emotional perspective. The session was comprised of three games of dodge ball combined with a 5-10 minutes core conditioning circuit. I encouraged players who were "out" during the dodgeball game to stay active, I gave some options for mobility but wanted to keep the focus on enjoyment and team cohesion.

My motivation for the change was from observations and communication with the players and coaches as they entered the gym. There was clear disappointment from losing on Sunday which broke a winning streak. Many players also reported to be feeling sore and fatigued from the long weekend. I took the opportunity in my position within the team to bring some enjoyment and raise their energy and morale a bit. It seemed hugely successful and the players left the gym in a much better mood than when they arrived. This change of plan gave me a lot more opportunities to speak with players and to show that I am listening to them.

I saw this entire practice as a motivational exercise. Looking at the bigger picture I hope to have delivered a "pick me up" for the team and influenced the feeling during the ice practice.

## **Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> Jan**

Objectives for the day

Be present and interested in the individual players to develop coach athlete relationships.  
Use the open questions and the database to help with interacting more meaningfully.

I found myself achieving today's objective without thinking about it: I was talking to a lot of the players about school, practice and their own progress. I spoke with one player especially and told him how happy I am to see his improvements and pointed out how his efforts have started to pay off. Thought out the exercises I was giving support naturally



and noticing how the players respond to it. Even though they do not show it in very obvious ways I could see their feelings of competency growing.

I have decided to go with the middle ground in terms of autonomy supportive environment design. Giving a lot of instructions during the warm up and guidance throughout the dynamic stretching element, then affording a lot of autonomy throughout the lifting portion.

I made minor plan adjustments for U16SM as we were late starting. I removed a few movements to shorten the session length and could have shortened it more.

I also made major plan adjustments for the U15AAA group and focused more on unilateral movement patterns with lower weight. I opted for this as the session was much shorter than I thought, I simplified the session so the players would be able to execute the training easily and quickly by them selves.

I focused on the back squat with the under 16s as it is an area we have focused on a lot this year. I was happy to see some players have made vast improvements in their technique and gained a lot of confidence. Most of my feedback was on depth of the squat. We have been using a box as a guide for the depth, however today I wanted to see how they would manage without. I was expecting to need to give this feedback and most of the players improved once I had spoken to them.

As I had simplified the under 15s session to increase the flow of the practice, I wanted to be more hands off. I was pleasantly surprised to see they were confident in running their own dynamic stretching.

During the main body of the session I focused on the side lunge movement as it was the least familiar exercise. It is simple enough to perform and I saw good improvements in their movement patterns. I was happy to also see some of the players explaining what I had shown them to others in the group.

The motivation for the under 16s group was fairly low because the practice plan didn't meet their expectations. We are in a lower intensity week and it seemed many of the players were expecting a light and easy session. I tried to change the mood by explaining the reason for it, today was to be the highest intensity session as tomorrow is a rest day and the rest of the week is relatively light. This seemed to help a small bit but I was unable to motivate them to their usual level, it was a challenge for me as usually this team are very self driven. I did managed to influence a few players on an individual level by giving them positive feedback and expressing my delight in seeing their improvement.

In contrast the under 15s motivation was high and the players were eager to train. I didn't feel the need to try and raise their motivation and concentration much at all. I praised them for giving a great effort in running their own stretching and said I would let them do it more often.

### Week 7 Reflection

This week I noticed my interpersonal skills improving. I was able to talk with players about long term progress and give feedback based on that. Although I am still getting to know the players, I feel I took a step towards more effective communication, especially with regards to addressing individual progress.

I mentioned in the week about the players' expectations of the session not being met. I should have taken the time to explain the weekly structure to them so they understood my decisions. This was an opportunity to educate players on physical preparation. This was the biggest challenge I faced this week, the players complained a lot about the heavy practice, as I mentioned I spoke to players individually and even asked them what the issue is. I tried to bring some clarity to them. However, had I been more clear at the beginning of the week, I could have altered their perceptions and given them a better clue as to what was coming up in the week.

In *Coaching Better Every Season*, Gilbert (2017, 36) presents seven common components of an athlete centred coaching philosophy. The components come from some of the top high school football coaches.

- 1 Create a positive and fun sport environment
- 2 Every player is valued, regardless of skill level or role in the team
- 3 Rules are few, but expectations are clear and demanding
- 4 Open, honest and clear communication is essential
- 5 Care about the players and work to understand each of them
- 6 Develop players self esteem and love of the game
- 7 Self discipline and responsibility are essential for success

In this instance I was drawn to number four: Open, honest and clear communication is essential. I was not clear with my communication with the players, they have a right to know what is coming up and I have a duty to be open and transparent with it. I believe during this week my failure to be open to and communicate the structure of the week, resulted in the negativity within the group. Another coach spoke to me and mentioned the players had complained about the session, we discussed the planning and my decision making. He understood but it highlighted to me that I should have presented the players with more information on how the recovery cycle would be structured from a strength and conditioning perspective.

The development of Coach and athlete relationships is a central focus when considering the literature and the theoretical frame work presented earlier. The knowledge cluster depicted in fig3 in particular highlights the elements of knowing the athletes.

I am still at the stage of getting to know the athletes and feel I should be further along.

Although it is a long process, limits in my knowledge and skill level in this domain have resulted in a slower process. I do feel I am developing these skills (As mentioned previously), however mastery of this skills is far from my grasp.

I should use the basic information about the players and add to it, to help me to understand them and to help me follow up with the relationship development.

In terms of planning I feel like trying to plan everything on each day is not effective for me. Although I have the annual plan, it is not time effective for me to plan the individual sessions on the day. I understand now why there is necessity for last minute adjustments on the scene. I have been trying to plan for each day individually to give flexibility for daily changes to schedules etc. Next week I will try to plan for the entire week and adjust during the practice if needed. I have fallen in to this habit also because in a previous seasons, the information has been given to me per day, which in turn means I must plan each session each day. During this season it has become clear it is a hindrance to work this way and I must alter it.

## **Week 8**

### **Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> Jan**

Objectives for the day

Plan the weeks sessions

I managed to plan for the entire week. Although I had to sacrifice the environment and pedagogical design aspect I feel it will be a pay off in the future as I can now put more time in to the other planning elements. I want to see the difference this will make over all and see if it works better for me to plan larger chunks in one go as apposed to planning day by day. I have also updated the annual plan, we will have a strength cycle followed by maximum velocity cycle. However as we are in the middle of the season each cycle will include both strength and speed/power training.

The adjustments made in todays session were for an injured player, he has an knee injury so we tried to avoid jumping and landing. I did not want to remove him from the main program so made small changed but kept within the objectives of the session.

The main observations were for the knees to feet jump exercises. It was completely new for the players and many struggled to execute it initially. I gave simple feedback and instructions and saw progress in the exercise. The other movements the players were familiar with and did not need a lot of assistance for. I gave them the freedom to work through the exercises they knew and gave my attention and energy to the knees to feet movement.

Although I did not plan the environment beforehand. I tried to motivate the players through the environment. I wrote a note on the board saying "Be Explosive, Be Aggressive". My aim was to set a tone for the team and have it act as a constant point of reflection throughout. The motivation seemed a little flat at first as we only had 10 players in attendance. I recognised the low numbers change the environment a little. I tried to match their more relaxed energy, the players were happy to work and to listen to my instructions but seemed to prefer to have a more casual environment. I felt it appropriate to adjust and go with the atmosphere they had created this instance. There was a good level of concentration and little procrastination.

### **Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> Jan**

Objectives for the day

Complete the preparation for the session efficiently

I did not have a great deal of time due to other coaching commitments so focused on the preparation for today with what spare time I had. I managed to prepare the session enough to execute it with a clear idea of how I wanted it to look in terms of coaching style. I have attached a time frame to the session and will run it mostly as an autonomy supported session. To execute the plan for today I will ensure the gym is set up and ready for the players to begin as soon as they arrive. My aim is to set a one hour time limit on the session and give them the instructions that they are to complete the session in this time.

During the practice I added two additional core strengthening movements as one or two players were unable to perform certain movements. Aside from that the plan was not changed.

I had to be very observant and help a lot of players as we were training at the top end of their abilities. Although I picked exercises we have been using all season, I wanted to encourage the players to lift a lot more than they are used to lifting.

As the practice started I lifted my energy and made it clear we are going to be performing heavy lifts today so they need to help and encourage each other. This seemed to work in setting a tone for the session. The players were extremely motivated to lift more weight. I wanted to raise their confidence with their strength levels so made sure to show how happy I was to see their numbers increasing. One player in particular asked if I would help him to try for a second personal best. Needless to say the motivation to lift heavier grew as the session progressed. I was hoping to see an increase in extrinsic motivation as players would see their team mates increasing the loading. I noticed particularly when the smaller players were attempting to squat with more weight than some of the bigger

athletes. It seemed not only boosted the confidence in those individuals performing the squats, but also the motivation of the bigger to do better.

### **Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> Jan**

Objectives for the day

Complete the rest of the planning for the current mesocycle

I wanted to take advantage of a day with no practice scheduled to get a large portion of planning done. I noticed how much easier the week has been due to the change in planning strategy. I feel this is a better method for my individual needs. As a result of today's planning session I have completed the next mesocycle. This means I have all the practice plans for the next few weeks.

### **Week 8 Reflection**

The week was short for me as I had to commit my time to other coaching duties. However, I felt I improved on my ability to effect the athletes during the observation and assistance task. Continuing on from last week's reflection, I found myself considering how I should act during coaching session and how it plays a part in the environment and therefore, the session outcome. It was a particular highlight for me during the Wednesday night session. I observed the players confidence grow as I was able to set the right environment to encourage them to lift beyond their comfort zones. Many of those players have never been challenged that way before and was a further breakthrough for myself and the players. Many of the players have had a tendency to lift the same weights regardless of the training goal. For example, if the plan states they must lift at 90% of their 1 repetition maximum (1RM), or if it states they must lift at 50% of their 1RM, majority of players will lift the same amount. Over the past few weeks, I have not been encouraging them to lift beyond their capabilities, but to encourage them to lift at their current abilities. I will now be able to build upon this for the rest of the season. I can continue the conversation with the players regarding correct loading in the sessions.

I feel the adjustment to the process of planning has been a useful step forward. Although I sacrificed other areas of planning (environmental and pedagogical) in order to get ahead with long and short term session planning, I strongly believe this will have a positive impact in the long term and make my daily tasks more time effective.

The week was short and relatively straight forward. Fortunately I did not run in to many challenges and thought the week was a positive one. I felt good about having recognised and adapted to the players own needs in terms of the environment of the practice, I feel my actions in this instance are aligned with the athlete centred coaching philosophy laid out in Coaching Better Every Season as previously mentioned.

- 1 Create a positive and fun sport environment
  - 2 Every player is valued, regardless of skill level or role in the team
  - 3 Rules are few, but expectations are clear and demanding
  - 4 Open, honest and clear communication is essential
  - 5 Care about the players and work to understand each of them
  - 6 Develop players self esteem and love of the game
  - 7 Self discipline and responsibility are essential for success.
- (Gilbert 2017. 36)

Although not exclusively spoken about, I feel that my willingness to alter my vision for the environment is in keeping with these 7 principles. I believe I displayed an understanding for what the players were expecting as a collective, and recognised signs of self discipline and responsibility. Although it is perhaps my own interpretation, throughout my experience and having had discussions on athlete centred coaching with tutors and leading Finnish Ice hockey coaches, it's clear to me that athlete centred coaching is a two way conversation of sorts. That is to say, my role is to listen and respond to players expectations and demands, just as much as they need to listen and respond to the expectations and demands I set out. In responding to their behaviours and the environment created autonomously, I feel I acted within the parameters of an athlete centred coaching philosophy.

## **WEEK 9**

### **Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> Jan**

Objectives for the day

Concentrate on the environment and pedagogical design as it was neglected last week.

Having all the specific session plans has helped me to give more time to creating the environmental plan. I feel I am still missing detail within these plans, however I have tried to be more conscious of my own remarks and philosophy within it. I hope to develop in this area and to grow my skills within environment and pedagogical strategy selection.

During the practice session for U16SM I had to make small adjustments to the plan. A few players had picked up new injuries I was unaware of but otherwise was faced with no compelling reason to alter the plan.

The U15AAA practice session was shorter than I initially planned for so I adjusted the session to fit the schedule. We did two compound movements for strength (back squat

and pull ups) then two core exercises with a shorter rest time. Core strength is an area this group need to develop so I took the opportunity to work on more core strengthening.

I assisted many under 16s players in the bench press today. Many of the players were not able to keep optimal mechanics throughout the heavier sets: it gave an opportunity to adjust their technique and give tips on creating and maintaining tension throughout the lift. It also provided a solid platform for me to build on individual relationships as well as attempt to increase the feeling of competency for some of the players

I gave a lot of focus to spotting the back squat during the under 15s session and encouraged the players to work in a group of three, one person lifting and two people spotting. I have been trying to teach them this for a while, today a player had to drop the bar off his back because he started to lose balance. This gave an opportunity to point out why we need to consider safety and spot our team mates.

Before the under 16s practice started I spoke to the group about being ready to train and owning it. I pointed out the areas with most autonomy afforded to them, for example monitoring their own rest times. We talked about how these areas come with their own responsibilities as well as being freeing. I also gave a time constraint as a motivation to focus on what they were doing. It worked as all players completed the exercises with the prescribed weight within the 40 minutes.

Despite the shorter time and low numbers, the energy was good in the under 15s group, they were excited to train and were supporting each other throughout the session. I didn't need to give much motivation to them. I also set a time limit for the group and most players finished exactly on time or with a few minutes to spare.

### **Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> Jan**

Objectives for the day

Create a good environment plan for today's U16SM practice

I created a plan with a bit more details than usual in terms of my actions and how I will use resources in the gym to enhance the environment I want to create. I specifically plan to use music as usual but intentionally giving players freedom to pick the music. Of course this comes with a sense of responsibility, I will make it clear that if the music becomes a distract then they will not be permitted to choose.

I made a lot of adjustments for U15 as we were given a lot more time for the session than initially planned for. I extended it by adding more core exercises.

For U16 I also had to make major changes to the plan as they were very late finishing in a player meeting. We had 45 minutes for the entire practice. I gave a tight 10 minutes for

warm up and reduced the session to the three strength exercises. This impacted the environment design a lot, I had to create a sense of urgency by bringing the attention to how little time we had and how we needed work to get the session done as possible. As under 15s had more time than initially planned, I was able to actively interact with the players a lot more, giving feedback when applicable on many of the exercises and having more freedom to see and help more players. Most of the feedback I gave was for small adjustment on body angle during the core exercises. For the under 16s I needed to spend most of the session assisting a u15 player who had joined us for the session. I coached him mostly one on one with the exercises to make sure he was comfortable in what was going on. I noticed he was training on his own as apposed to in small groups and seemed to be a bit intimidated by the other players. I wanted to ensure he felt safe and competent in what we were doing as well as being able to train well in the short amount of time. In terms of session motivation, U15 were highly motivated and engaged. I did not need to add much motivation, players were asking if they could increase the difficulty on some movements and asking for observations and assistance. The limit of time seemed to help motivate the U16 players. The players understood and bought in to the reduced session time so were motivated to get through it. The plan was similar to previous weeks which increased the feeling of competency.

#### Week 9 Reflection

A large portion of the focus this week was on the pedagogical and environment design elements. I had made some improvements in this area, most likely as a result of the efforts put in to the other areas of planning.

It gave me the time and space to focus on setting up the environment without it feeling like an after thought. I noticed how it helped me to clarify my intentions and desired outcomes for the practice. For example, I could concentrate on planning what message I wanted to send out to the players, the message of taking ownership and responsibility for their actions. leaving the gym as a better athlete. It has not been something I have done so consciously but now I feel more like my coaching philosophy and purpose is showing in the practice plan.

I found it was not always possible to execute that plan. This is to be expected however, and as has been discussed in the theoretical frame work, and important step in the process of delivering a practice is adjusting to allow the theoretical elements to the practical elements. The paper work does not always marry up to the dynamic nature of reality. The improvements to the planning process, and the act of sitting and consciously giving attention to how I want the practice to look gave me a more clear set of guide lines to adhere to when making adjustments. As I had to do a fair amount of adjustments on the scene, the additional details in planning helped me to keep in contact with my initial intentions regardless of the changes I needed to make. In a sense it set up a stronger



foundation for the session, which in turn gave me the ability to adjust the plan with a stable and clear basis.

If I consider my actions this week with the steps of the Cognitive Coaching Guide it may seem as though I did not follow it directly. As I have arranged the short term planning to be a weekly or monthly task, it has given me the freedom to consider the other planning elements with further detail, as well as being more time effective. On reflection the adjustments have allowed me to connect more with the main over all principle of the model, "Helping Athletes reach their potential". Although each portion effects this as it is the basis of theoretical model. I have been able to see how I can connect this within my planning and implementation in a more concrete way.

## **Week 10**

### **Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> Feb**

Objectives for the day

Ease myself back to working after illness

As I have been unwell this week, I felt it important to give myself time to reconnect with the individual steps of the frame work without taking on too many other specific objectives as I am still noticing my ability to concentrate has not fully returned. The session planning has been complete leaving only the environment and pedagogy planning left. I will aim to run the same practice for both teams but with slightly different coaching styles. Having a little more of a coach-led practice for under 15s but a little more freedom for under 16s I made some adjustments during the warm up as the players wanted to select their own games. The rest of the session did not change.

Following the warm up for under 15s the players broke up in to two groups. One group running the sprints and the other doing the plyometrics. This made observation quite difficult during the sprints as I could not focus on individuals. I gave my focus to the box jump and gave the key point of limiting ground contact time as much as possible. During this task I remembered to be engaged and energetic with the players. I tried to teach them some fundamentals of plyometrics at the same time, hoping to give them a better understanding of why this exercise was selected.

I tried to let the under 16s players practice freely as I had planned, I stepped in only when I needed to. I gave a few pointers for the plyometric exercises but over all, the players were very familiar with the movements so only small adjustments were necessary.

As the session was so short I made a point of being extra energetic and trying to build upon the energy in the gym. I gave comments about training with a purpose and being aggressive during the sprints and the jumps. They understood and it picked up their

efforts a lot. As players in both groups asked to select their own games during warm up, I attempted to use it to motivate the players for the rest of the session. I spoke about giving them autonomy to play their own games, as long as they were prepared to focus during the rest of the session. This helped with majority of the players, as I kept the dialogue going throughout the session. With players who are less focused I tried to communicate with them in different ways, for example a selection of players from the leadership group in the team were not concentrating, I spoke to them about leading by example and how their behaviours effect the rest of the team.

### **Friday 4<sup>th</sup> Feb**

Objectives for the day

Create a quality session plan with key points for each movement

I used The Essentials of Strength Training and Conditioning to create more detailed key points for the lifting. I wanted to be able to be consistent with the language I am using and be more consistent with key points for each player

I focused my attention during the practice on the back squat and reflected constantly to the key points, even though the weight was very light and easy for the players, it gave a good opportunity to work on the mechanics. I found the more detailed planning enhanced the key points as I had much better understanding in my head when assisting players. Interestingly I found a few athletes needed different instructions to the key points for various reasons. It highlighted the need for individual and less structured feedback. The challenge level of practice was low so I had to focus the motivation on explaining why it was easy and ensuring the players understood the reasoning. At the start I could see some players were not engaged when they saw it was very easy. Quickly they all understood and concentrated on moving as best they could.

Week 10 Reflection

My ability to plan effectively was developed again throughout the week. I had opted to create more consistent key points for the technical movements. I have found myself being inconsistent with the use of key points and decided to try and include them in more detail in to the plans. I found it was useful, although I was not coaching with the session plan open in front of me, I was able to check it on occasions to remind myself of what I had prepared. In a practical sense it was a useful resource and allowed me to be consistent with every athlete. Having more consistent and direct key points made it easier for the players to understand and to remember which in turn reflects on the effectiveness of the practice plan. In addition to this, they key points gave me a reference and a base to work

from when assisting and observing the exercises. It made the task more systematic and allowed me to see more clearly what was going well or what was not working. As discussed, during Friday's session I tried to communicate with the players why the session intensity was low. I had previously failed to meet the players expectations regarding the objectives of recovery sessions so I saw this as an opportunity to act differently. I to give a clear message about the low level of challenge for that particular day and more importantly gave a reason why. This was not a challenging situation but I saw it as an opportunity to challenge myself and be more conscious of the message I was giving out.

I relayed heavily on Essentials of Strength Training and Conditioning during the planning phase. I wanted to ensure I was coaching certain movements correctly using evidence based resources. Although my technical understanding was fairly consistent with the literature, I found it useful to follow the steps in the book and connect what was written, with what I have previously learnt. At this point, many of the players are still learning how to train with a barbell, I feel it is important to reflect on guidelines and texts by such organisations as the National Strength and Conditioning Association.

Using the literature, it allowed me to plan with concise clear steps for each movements. Steps that I perhaps would over look when coaching older athletes.

For future seasons and other coaching positions i take, it is worth considering setting times in the annual plan to correctly teach the technical skills of key compound movements. By this I mean, running a clinic based only on the development of correct technical execution. I feel by doing this, I would be able to draw from it during the season and give the players a more thorough understanding of the movements.

## **Week 11**

### **Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> Feb**

Objectives for the day

Complete planning each short term session for the next macrocycle

Having taken the time once again to focus on planning, I have completed each up and coming session for the next four weeks. This has been based off the information from the senior strength and conditioning staff and head coach. I have found planning in advance and then adjusting accordingly when I receive information closer to the practice has made a big difference in terms of time effectiveness. It gives me time to focus on other elements of planning such as the environment and pedagogical selection and preparation for injured players.

With regards to environmental and pedagogical strategy for today's practice, I have planned a heavily autonomous session. I wrote each element of the practice on the board and explained to the players it is their responsibility to carry out the practice themselves. I have decided to try this as the team is quite used to having a lot of autonomy in many areas and want to give an opportunity to learn how to experience a practice with less coaching dictation. Many of the older age groups in the organisation expect the players to complete session on their own without a coach in the gym and I hope to give them a taste of this. The programming for today was simple and familiar to all, which presented a good opportunity to increase the level of autonomy.

I did not make any adjustments to today's practice plan. We had low player numbers, all of which were healthy and with good energy, they understood the environment I had tried to create and seemed to buy in to it after a bit of a bumpy start, this was down to the players expectations. I gave simple feedback when I saw it was necessary but tried to keep my distance. Majority of the players were able to perform each exercise without any issues. I felt the change to the pedagogical design had an effect on the overall motivation of the players. I noticed in giving the players the freedom, they understood that it was their responsibility to get through the training. I have a feeling the small group size impacted this and it would be less successful with a larger group.

### **Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> Feb**

Objectives for the day

Create a clear and detailed environment and pedagogical design

As all the long term and short term planning is up to date, I wanted to focus on creating a good environment and pedagogical plan. I tried to give myself prompts and included a strong emphasis on ownership for the session. I planned key words and questions to help me influence the players mindset. I also tried to keep the key points short and easy to remember. These key points are based on the training objective more, for example I have planned key phrases such as "break the box" and "skate hard". I want to make sure the players can clearly understand I am asking them to be explosive and move as fast as they possibly can.

During the session I did not need to make any adjustments to the main plan, the selected exercises were easy to prepare for, and each player was able to perform them. One adjustment was made by the players however. During the dynamic stretching portion, the captain asked if he could lead the team.

The three exercises selected were simple and extremely familiar to the players. I did not need to give much instructions. I simply encourage and reiterated the key points from the

plan. On a few occasions the players were not executing the movements with enough velocity, the key points came in to play with these players.

The over all motivation was fairly high. Players were ready to go and seemed excited about coming in to the gym. It is possible that the shorter training week has played a part in this but none the less it resulted in a good practice. I spoke about owning the practice and gave an example of how I would interpret the phrase "own it!" I asked the players what the Finnish phrase would be and got them to think about how their actions connect to the phrase. I am not sure if it was as effective as I hoped right away but I want to build on it.

#### Week 11 Reflection

This week I feel I took further steps to creating a better environment for the practice sessions. Although the daily objectives have been split between creating a good environment and pedagogical plan and completing long and short term planning, the over all development focus has been on the session environment and pedagogical planning. I am more aware of the opportunities afforded to me as well as understanding that my role as their coach is not just to teach them technical proficiency, but also to teach them ownership and work ethic. I have become conscious of what other qualities they could end the season with. When considering what they are learning, I must consider the bigger and more transferable skills. I feel this week I began adding more of these components to the pedagogical design, for example asking the players to think about how their own actions in the practice will effect the outcomes.

I spoke to one player in particular on Thursday if he has finished the session. They were unable to complete it and was the only person to have not finished the training. I had observed their behaviour and we spoke a few times about putting efforts and focus in the right direction. We discussed after the practice why they were unable to complete the training, and if their actions throughout the practice were a factor. The player agreed, they did not conduct themselves in the best possible way and agreed to be more conscious of their actions and the outcomes. This was particularly important for me as it meant I was staying true to the kind of environment I tried to create. This also enabled me to stay true to an athlete centred approach. My objective was not to punish the player or make them feel negatively about the situation, more it was to instil ownership and highlight the results of their own actions.

**Week 12****Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> Feb**

Objectives for the day

Organise my self to be up to date with the schedule after missing last week from sickness

As last week saw some changes to the planning, it was necessary to alter the long term and short term planning for the week. I prioritised this as I need to ensure I have planned effectively for the weekends games. I have adjusted the planning so the end of the week focuses on the game preparation and the session today is recovery based.

I was able to rearrange the pre existing programs to match up with the long term planning which helped to lighten the work and maintain some consistency within the plan.

As todays practice was focused on recovering, I wanted the session to centre heavily on enjoyment and team building. I did not create a plan using the Haaga Helia template as I opted for a heavily athlete centred approach. I simply wrote on the board:

10 minutes dynamic mobilisation

Games of own design

I did not need to adjust the plan at all as it is completely athlete centred. It is up to them what the practice looks like. This included the dynamic mobilisation however I needed to give assistance during this portion as the captain and leadership group were not present. I still wanted the team to follow their own dynamic stretching and I tried to give them the freedom to practice what they have learnt. They managed well but towards the end of the 10 minutes it was clear I needed to assist them.

For the games I did not have any input aside from what the team asked of me, for example, starting a game of dodgeball or even joining one team to even up the numbers. The team naturally were motivated for the practice today as the focus was on their enjoyment and their own autonomy to create the session. I was happy to see other members of the team taking leadership responsibility despite the lack of designated leadership players.

## Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> Feb

Objectives for the day

Connect with the players and be an energised and present coach

I have noticed my focus on being a personable and engaged coach has slipped in recent weeks. During today's practice I tried to enjoy myself with the players, as I had given them considerable freedom during the practice, I actively tried to participate in elements of their ball game and looked for opportunities to connect with the quieter players on a different level.

I opted for a fairly different format for the practice, on arriving at the gym I learnt that many players were missing so decided to create a relaxed and open training environment. The players had the freedom to leave the gym as soon as they finished the training. I didn't give any time pressure, I simply gave them the message of being honest and holding themselves accountable for completing the training. Ultimately there was a finishing time to the practice but I felt it important to take the pressure off and treat the players as adults. In a larger group it's likely this would not be a good approach, however with the small number of players it was much easier to communicate this with them and allow them more freedom. I have noticed when the numbers are low in training, the team takes on a different persona, I felt it important to adjust and complement the more focused environment.

As we are in a recovery week I altered the plan to be focused completely around core strength. I purposefully planned a shorter practice to make sure even the slower and less focused players would finish on time, as well as highlighting how quickly the more engaged and focused players completed the practice session

I focused my observations and assistance on the "stir the pot" exercise as this is one we have not closely looked at. I reiterated the main points of keeping the trunk and hips balanced and stable by focusing on the tension in their core muscles and glutes.

The session motivation was fairly high due to the level of freedom afforded to the players. They seemed to quickly pick up on what the open ended environment was offering them and the level of trust I had given. Every player finished earlier than the allotted time. I was happy to see the players did not leave once they had finished and opted to use the time to play some games of their own design.

## Week 12 Reflection

I feel I improved on my ability to create an athlete centred environment through out this week. Granted the recovery cycle has allowed me to go in to the gym with less structured plans, the opportunity to deliver coaching sessions whereby the players are given responsibility for majority of the decision making has helped me understand ways in which

it can be done. It has clarified to me that it requires a lot of work to develop trust, confidence and understanding to achieve a fully autonomy supported environment. I would not be able to run this kind of practice session without having laid the foundation for it first. At the beginning of the season, the team would not have been ready for this level of autonomy, even during a recovery session but currently, large portions of the practice sessions are completed without the need of a coach.

As is discussed in *Coaching Better Every Season* (Gilbert 2017. 34), this is a process and at the centre is the connection with players. The foundation layer of Coach John Woodens famous pyramid of teaching success in sport is based completely on forming a deep connection with the players. Without this connection the process of affording more autonomy and freedom is not possible.

Although I don't think my relationship with the players is quite as well developed as it should perhaps be, throughout the season the development of understanding how both parties (myself and the team) act and what the expectations are, we have grown to the point where a more relaxed environment can thrive.

For up and coming seasons I should become more conscious of the process of teaching and learning how to interact with a more autonomy supported environment instead of expecting the players to understand right away.



## 4 Discussion

### 4.1 Secondary Self Evaluation of Tasks

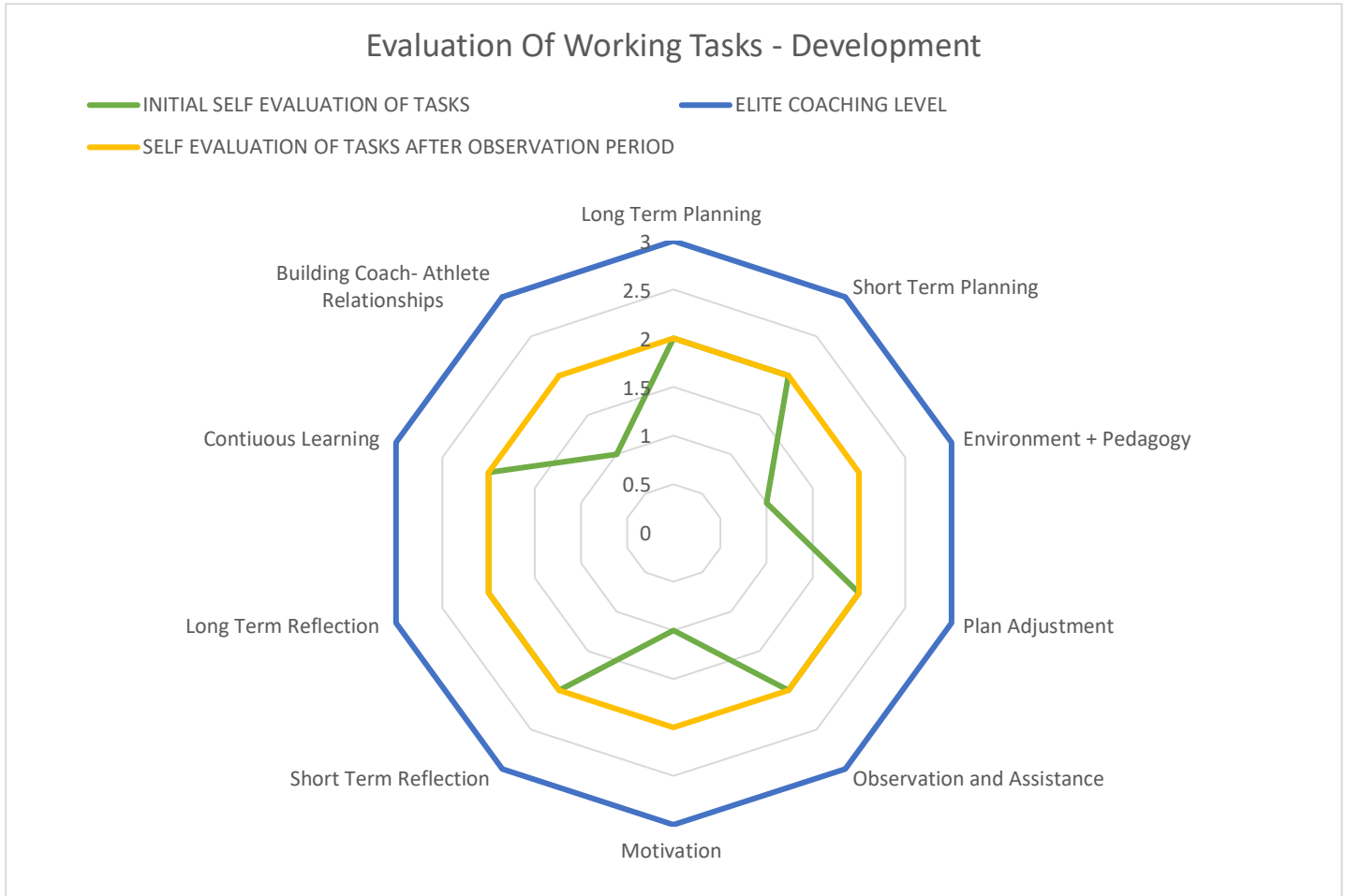


Figure 5 Self Evaluation of working tasks depicting progress made after period of observation.

#### Long term seasonal/Periodization planning

Score: 2

I still feel confident in this area and am able to deliver a product based on the information given to me. I understand the depths of long term planning and the multifaceted dimensions I have yet to fully understand. Throughout this process, I did not need to carry out much long term planning in terms of designing the annual plan, my long term planning tasks were more organisational. For example I received information and formatted it for my own understanding and referencing. I do not feel I necessarily improved much in this area other than efficiency in creating and maintaining the necessary documentation.

*Short term session planning.*

Score: 2

I feel I have become more efficient in this stage yet I am unsure if I can say that I have progressed to becoming an experienced specialist. I do feel I added value to the task and was able to develop as the season progressed, however I know I still have to consider more options in this stage.

*Environment + coaching pedagogical strategy design.*

Score: 2

In comparison to the initial assessment this is an area I have improved on. I am now aware of the importance of giving my attention to this task and have seen the benefits of doing so in a practical setting. I am more conscious of what coaching style and what environment is appropriate for a given practice session. There are still many inconsistencies in this task and I need to prepare a more stable philosophy to ensure I am more consistent, even when it is necessary to change the coaching style having a more solid philosophy to back up this task will create a much clearer picture.

*Plan Adjustment*

Score: 2

I still feel I am confident in plan adjustments and have taken steps forward in terms of understanding the level of fatigue from the players, how to ask the players and look for signs that they may need an easier or harder practice. I am more equipped to aid injured players but still tend to avoid the injured areas, mostly this is because players often have external physiotherapy and I do not feel it is ethical to give out information regarding the specific injury. Although I feel I made improvements in this area, I still do not feel I fit in to category 3. A further understanding of monitoring of players recovery is required, as well as a better grasp of calculating long term loading.

*Observation and assistance*

Score: 2

I remain confident in my ability to complete this task to a good level and have improved my approach systematically. I am more conscious of my feedback and questioning with players. Throughout the process I have gotten better at giving key points in an understandable fashion. I have noticed that a majority of the time I am able to correct a player's technique, but still fall short when the reason for the incorrect technique is due to an imbalance, be it mobility or neuromuscular. To achieve a higher level for this task I need to develop an ability to identify imbalances and prescribe individual corrective exercises.

*Motivation*

Score: 2

I feel I have taken steps to better understanding motivation in athletes. I have improved in my abilities to motivate players on an individual level through reward and through giving ownership. I have learn that much of the motivational climate comes from the practice environment and from engaging with an athlete centred coaching philosophy and less to do with being vocal with praise. I know there is still a lot of work to do in this area but I feel now I have a better understanding of how to systematically approach creating some form of motivation within the session. It is now an area I am able to give attention to during planning and am able to act on what I have planned when delivering a session. It may not always be successful and I still have a lot to learn.

*Building coach athlete relationships*

Score: 2

I am now able to apply a strategy to help me in this task and find it easier to make connections with individual players. I can be proactive in developing and maintaining relationships and have developed ideas on how to maintain and build upon the process of growing coach athlete relationship.

I understand I am still missing skills within this task and have to be more formulaic with the approach, I hope this task can become almost second nature with continued practice.

**4.2 Reflections on development**

I have identified several new methods for my coaching development during this process. The most valuable being the systematic approach to building coach athlete relationships. The understanding that close relationships with the players will not necessarily form over time but require strategic methods and constant work. Using the open questions to not just get the players to talk more with me but to find out a little more about them which in turn lays foundations for the building of closeness and trust. Creating a database on the interests of each individual player and updating it regularly has allowed me to build on the open questions. This method gives me more structure to how I build the athlete relationships and provides me with valuable information to assist with making meaningful connections with players.

In addition the creation and use of the cognitive practical coaching guide has given me structure for my everyday working tasks as well as giving clarity and direction throughout the season. I felt that even on a bad day, as long as I completed or interacted with each element of the framework, I would be able to have a productive and positive days work. It helps to guide me through coaching sessions. Previously I have not been too clear on

how to run a gym based practice with a team, the session delivery tasks gave me a good sense of direction and I could apply my own personality to the task and parameters set. I will definitely continue following the framework in future coaching roles and as my skill levels progress further, I aim to be able to develop it and shape it to include more of my personal philosophy. I will consider creating a similar model to include seasonal periodisation. I hope to be able to identify the main tasks for certain points of the season, an example of this could be during the pre season phase. The main task for the coach athlete relationships domain would be learning the players' names and get to know them initially. As the season progresses, perhaps the tasks focus more on developing a deeper connection with the players. Throughout the process I had already considered this from an environment perspective and touched upon it a little. Perhaps a systematic development of teaching how to manage autonomy, for example pre season training having less autonomy and more coach centred practices and slowly allowing players to learn and find their way by giving more affordances as the season progresses. In that respect, the task within the frame work may differ or have more specific objectives at different points of the season.

Over all the process of maintaining a diary has given me a chance to be more conscious of my coaching decisions and has made sure I hold myself accountable for what actions and steps I take. It has allowed me to connect with my current abilities and given me the chance to develop self awareness in areas I would otherwise overlook. I will likely continue to use the diary format as a way of completing the reflection elements of the framework. I believe that meaningful development can not happen without the process of constant self evaluation and accountability and reflection on daily actions.

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