

**EXAMINING TENNIS COACHES' CONSTRUCTIONS OF THEIR ROLE IN A  
PERFORMANCE SETTING:**

**What is it Like to Coach an Elite Junior Tennis Player?**

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**Declaration**

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

## Abstract

Despite a growing body of research into sports coaching there remains little understanding of what it is like to coach elite junior tennis players. The purpose of this PhD was to examine the lived coaching experience of independent tennis coaches and describe what it is like to be a coach of an elite junior tennis player. Using autoethnography to explore the first authors' experiences of coaching elite juniors, and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) of 8 novice participants (1 – 4 years-experience) and 8 experienced participants (over 10 years-experience) this PhD sought to provide a comprehensive description of how tennis coaches described their experiences of tennis coaching. In total there were eight constructs identified in this PhD and they were; (a) connection, (b) competence, (c) competition, (d) conflict, (d) comprehension, (e) confidence, (f) code, and (g) coping. The eight constructs were classified under three types of coaching construct; *contextual constructs* (connection, conflict, & competition), *efficacy constructs* (competence, & confidence), and *outcome constructs* (comprehension, code, & coping). Acceptance of the challenges in coaching was a factor in experienced coaches describing different constructs compared to novice coaches. The findings of this research contribute to an evolving, problematic epistemology of sports coaching and highlight shortcomings in the capacity of tennis coach education to prepare novice coaches for their initiation into coaching. The findings present governing bodies opportunities to inform coach education literature and help tennis coaches to sustain themselves in an emotionally challenging role.

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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

Academic literature suggests that “sport mirrors society” (Cassidy et al., 2016, p. 37). The social values of modern society inform the behaviours of people within the sporting sub-cultures that they interact. Hardman (2008) argued that sports coaching is a “culturally based social endeavour” (p. 67). There is no separate reality for sports coaches to operate outside of the cultural boundaries that are dictated by wider society.

Recently there has been an increase in the number of interpretative research methodologies into sports coaching (Lundkvist et al., 2012; Cronin & Armour, 2015; Burgess et al., 2016; Cronin & Armour, 2017; Stanson & Chambers, 2019). Sports coaching academics have become dissatisfied with rationalistic and unproblematic representations of sports coaching. A mismatch between coach education literature and the practical realities of coaching encouraged academics to seek representational reflections of practice. Numerous academics have researched the experiences of sports coaches and their research produced various descriptions of coaching; for example, swamp like (Schon, 1987); complex and filled with contradictory values (Saury & Durand, 1995); intellectual rather than practical (Cassidy et al., 2016); uncontrollable and incomprehensible (Jones, 2005); dynamic and social (Cushion, Armour, & Jones, 2006); foggy and messy (Cushion, 2007); political (Potrac et al., 2012); emotionally challenging (Purdy et al., 2013), and stressful (Thelwell et al., 2018).

Currently, the data available to tennis coach educators and tennis coaches about what it is like to be a tennis coach are limited. Football and rugby are primary coaching contexts that give insights into the experiences of sports coaches (Lundkvist, Gustafsson, Hjälm, & Hassmén, 2012; Tawse, Bloom, Sabiston, & Reid 2012; Stanson & Chambers, 2019).

Researching the experiences of tennis coaches in the elite junior coaching context would add

to our understanding of coaching and illustrating the experiences of practitioners can help cultivate a realistic understanding of the social conditions experienced by tennis coaches. Furthermore, capturing the experiences of tennis coaches would allow for comparisons with the experiences of coaches from other sporting contexts.

Coaching is a complex, dynamic, and social activity where a coach attempts to meet the needs of their athlete (Saury & Durand, 1995; Cushion et al., 2006; Jowett & Cockerill, 2002). People have some understanding of what coaching entails (Borrie, 1996), but despite general understanding of coaching, academic literature has been unable to provide coaches with certainty to guide their actions (Armour, 2013). There are subtle differences between the experiences and stories told by coaches because their profession varies “by sport, level, and context”, making it difficult to prescribe a uniform approach to practitioners (Gilbert & Trudel, 2005, p. 32).

Some academics argue that coaching is a step by step, linear process, that coaches go through sequentially to help an athlete learn and improve their skill (Borrie & Knowles, 2003). Academics have proposed coaching models to help the development of athletes physically, psychologically, and technically (Potrac et al., 2000; Jones, 2000). Prescriptive, linear models are appealing to coaches because they simplify the process and make it easier to quantify the outcomes of coaching actions. Simplification of the coaching process into individual sessions that follow sequentially promotes a definition of coaches as subject specialists and method appliers (Squires, 1999).

Recent developments in coaching research suggest that there are inadequacies in our understanding (Cassidy, Jones, & Potrac, 2016). It has been suggested that models do not serve coaching well, due to oversimplification that downplays the complexity inherent within the process (Cushion, 2007). Academics are increasingly moving away from trying to

uncover models of best practice that can be prescribed across sporting contexts.

Interpretative research approaches into coaching, that assume social reality is shaped by human experience, are increasingly being used to uncover realistic descriptions of coaching. Academics argue that a one size fits all approach does not exist and research must gather data that gives insight into the gritty realities experienced by coaches (Cassidy, Jones, & Potrac, 2016).

Academics have become dissatisfied with oversimplified presentations of coaching and recognise that coaching is a social activity. Coaching takes place within a social and cultural setting. Coaches' interaction with players, parents, governing bodies, colleagues, and peers are subject to the constraints and opportunities of human interaction (Jones, Armour & Potrac, 2002). The stakeholders within each coaching context have their own roles to play in coaches' working environments and have the potential to affect their attitudes and behaviours. Examples of how coaches may be affected by other stakeholders include; feeling pressure to gain positive results for players, prioritising winning to justify money earned, seeking affirmation of governing bodies through positive player results, seeking a positive reputation as a coach amongst colleagues, peers creating problems with self-worth / self-identity, and becoming overly competitive with other coaches to earn a living (Cassidy et al., 2016).

Sports coaching does not exist within a cultural vacuum and is affected by the societal and sporting structures within which it operates (Cross & Lyle, 1999). Each coaching context has its own governing body, competition structure, and coaching structure. An avenue for future research is to investigate the subtle differences that each coaching context brings to the coaches' reality. Academics increasingly recommend research that seeks to contribute to an evolving problematic epistemology of sports coaching; one that seeks to extend beyond continuing rationalistic and heroic accounts of practice (Potrac et al., 2012).

The experiences of tennis coaches are yet to be fully explored in coaching literature and this limits our understanding of the challenges in elite junior tennis coaching. There are currently no interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) studies, carried out by researcher-practitioners, into the experiences of tennis coaches working with elite junior tennis players. Tennis specific research in the UK has targeted certain areas of coaching, such as; skill acquisition (Reid & Giblin, 2015), talent development (e.g. Wolfenden & Holt, 2006), and parental involvement (Knight & Harwood, 2013). Tennis specific research has enriched the literature used to educate aspiring new coaches and further develop the knowledge base of existing coaches. However, there remain gaps in our understanding of what it is like to be a tennis coach in the elite junior coaching context.

Research into tennis coaches' experiences can help to cultivate a realistic understanding of the social conditions experienced by tennis coaches of elite junior tennis players. The findings of interpretative phenomenological analyses into tennis coaches' experiences can be used to (a) prepare novice tennis coaches for their careers by informing them about the emotionally challenging nature of coaching, (b) stimulate professional self-reflection amongst existing tennis coaches to help current coaches evaluate their own working practices and consider the positives and negatives of such coaching practices, (c) encourage governing bodies to evaluate current coach education directives and cater for the support needs of tennis coaches having understood the emotional challenges tennis coaches face in their working lives, and (d) stimulate further research into the experiences of other tennis coaches leading to new insights, modified teaching practices, and improved coaching delivery for junior tennis players.

The purpose of this PhD was to examine the lived coaching experience of independent tennis coaches and describe what it is like to be a coach of an elite junior tennis player. This overarching aim will be achieved by working to the following objectives:

Phase 1: An autoethnographic study on three critical coaching incidents in my experience of coaching an elite junior tennis player.

Phase 2: An IPA of the coaching experiences of eight independent novice tennis coaches working with elite junior tennis players.

Phase 3: An IPA of the coaching experiences of eight independent experienced tennis coaches working with elite junior tennis players.

Phase 4: A longitudinal IPA of the coaching experiences of two novice and two experienced tennis coaches working with elite junior tennis players.

The next chapter is a review of literature related to this research. The literature review will show the challenging nature of coaching, the theoretical boundaries for this research, and highlight the gap in our understanding of what it is like to be a tennis coach of an elite junior tennis player.

## Chapter Two

### Literature Review

The literature review will highlight work associated with my research. I will review literature specific to the coaching process, the lived experience of sports coaches, and research in tennis coaching. Before I discuss literature associated with my research, I will discuss the challenges of reviewing research into sports coaching due to the complex and multi-faceted nature of the topic.

Research has enriched coaching by generating context specific literature and injecting new ideas into practice. However, increased knowledge and contradictory views make coaching difficult to define (Lyle, 1999; Stober & Grant, 2006; Cushion, 2007; Cushion, 2018). Terms such as; coaching, coaching process, coaching expertise, coaching experience, coaching effectiveness, performance coaching, and talent development are used interchangeably in coaching settings and the boundaries of such terms are not firmly set. Therefore, it is not always clear where one area of coaching stops, and another begins. For this literature review the term *coaching* will refer to a dynamic, social, and complex process where the coach seeks to meet the needs of their athlete (Jowett & Cockerill, 2002; Potrac et al., 2012).

Although this chapter does not present a systematic review, I have included some detail about how I found the literature to help show the breadth of work reviewed. To find literature, I searched academic databases. The databases that I searched included; Google Scholar, OpenAthens, Humankinetics, PsychNET, Sage Journals, and Taylor & Francis Online. Papers in the literature review primarily included descriptive research to show the characteristics of sports coaching and the experiences of sports coaches. I began searching for literature with general search terms in Google Scholar such as “coaching”, “coaching

experience”, “coaching process”, and “coaching expertise”. Once I became familiar with the theoretical boundaries of coaching, I focussed on “coaching experience”. I began to search for interpretative phenomenological analyses, and autoethnographies to understand the experiences of sports coaches. Searching through tennis specific research highlighted a gap in knowledge relating to what it is like to be a tennis coach of elite junior tennis players. I have presented the literature to illustrate what is known about the challenging reality of being a coach and highlight a gap in our understanding. I will highlight a gap in our understanding of tennis coaching through four stages.

First, I will show the challenging nature of the coaching process. Coaching research covers many different areas and the first stage of my literature review was to look specifically at (a) the coaching process, (b) coaching expertise, (c) coach-athlete relationships, and (d) parental involvement. I used terms associated with coaching that already exist to separate the literature areas. I start my literature review with a broad overview of the coaching process and finish with two important participants in a tennis coach’s role – the player and their parents. My literature review gives a framework to understand coaching in an individual sport such as tennis.

Second, I will review autoethnographies and interpretative phenomenological analyses into sports coaching. Such studies give an understanding of what is known about the lived experiences of sports coaches in different sporting contexts. The literature will show the emotional challenges that coaches face.

Third, I will discuss existing research into tennis coaching. This literature will show knowledge relating to skill acquisition in tennis, the social context of tennis coaching, and the importance of parental involvement in elite junior tennis. Furthermore, examining tennis

coaching literature will highlight a limited understanding of the lived experience of UK tennis coaches working with elite junior tennis players.

Finally, having discussed literature relevant to sports coaching and shown a shortage of knowledge relevant to tennis coaches lived experience, I will conclude my literature review by showing how this research can add to knowledge. Examining the lived coaching experience of independent tennis coaches and describing what it is like to be a coach of an elite junior tennis player will give context specific data that highlight emotional challenges in tennis coaching.

### **Understanding coaching**

Cushion (2007) believed that literature about coaching over-simplified the process. Simplifying coaching into individual episodes of coach-athlete interaction that result in desired athlete outcomes has helped develop the theoretical understanding of coaching. However, Cushion believed literature downplayed the complexity of the process because it presented coaching as isolated episodes seen as "individual areas for treatment" (Cross & Ellice, 1997, p. 19). Cushion, Jones, and Armour (2006) said there are too many blank spaces in coaching literature and the dynamic, social, interpersonal, and situational nature of the coaching process needs more attention.

### **The coaching process.**

Many people have "an understanding of the term coaching and the kind of activities that coaching entails" (Borrie, 1996, p. 243). Researchers have reinforced the general understanding of coaching as a process through which athlete's develop technically, tactically, and physically (Vella, Oades, & Crowe, 2013). Despite a general understanding of what coaching entails, over 30 years of sports coaching research continues to show "swamp like" complexity in the coaching process (Schon, 1987). According to Schon (1987),

coaching is not an absolute process but is like *shifting sands*, shaped by complimentary and conflicting elements (Rossi & Cassidy, 1999). There is no *best model* of coaching that can inform practice across sporting contexts (Cross, 1995b). Recently, Cassidy, Jones, and Potrac (2016) went as far to say that as “any serious researcher or practitioner knows, the search for the best coaching recipe is a fool’s errand. Such a one size fits all approach does not exist” (p. 14).

Understanding talent development as a chronological and linear process influences our view of the coaching process (Bloom, 1985; Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Romer, 1993; Stambulova, 2000; Cote, 1999). Linear approaches in talent development contribute to understanding coaching as a step by step process that coaches go through to help an athlete learn and improve their skill (Borrie & Knowles, 2003). Linear approaches define coaching as a series of coaching sessions that follow a logical and linear sequence resulting in desired athlete outcomes. Recently however, researchers recognise the inherent human and social interactions in coaches’ activities and consider the holistic nature of the coaching process (Cassidy, Jones, & Potrac, 2016; Arnold, Edwards, & Rees, 2018; Baker, Wattie, & Schorer, 2019; Roberts et al., 2019).

Coaching “lacks the comforting (albeit illusory) certainty of a single discipline boundary” (Armour, 2013, p. 14). In other words, being an effective coach relies on more than practical ability to execute a tennis stroke. The ability to execute a tennis shot expertly does not mean the coach will possess the necessary interpersonal skills, communication skills, intuitions, feelings, previous experiences, underlying assumptions, well-tuned sensitivities, embodied understandings, subtle cue recognitions and idiosyncratic decision making skills; all of which are unmistakable signs of coaching (Cushion, 2007; Roberts et al., 2019).

Literature suggests that current levels of understanding may be inadequate to conceptualise the reality of coaching practice (Cushion, 2007; Baker, Wattie, & Schorer, 2019; Roberts et al., 2019). The over-simplification of coaching models reflects inadequacies in our understanding of practice. Simplified conceptual models of coaching make it easier to quantify outcomes for practitioners and governing bodies. Searching for the elusive causal relationship between effective coaching and positive athlete outcomes is the driving force behind a search for simplified models (Cushion, Armour, & Jones 2006, Cushion, 2007; Roberts et al., 2019).

Research into sports coaching historically focussed on developing theories, methods, and models of best practice for the development of young athletes psychologically, physically, and technically (Potrac, et al., 2000; Jones, 2000). For example, sporting governing bodies continue to recommend variations of Istvan Balyi's Long Term Athlete Development Programme (LTAD) as a guide for developing young sporting talent (Cassidy et al., 2016). Sports governing bodies are under pressure to generate a product (Cassidy et al., 2016). The products sporting governing bodies expect to produce are successful athletes and coaching programmes that are the envy of other countries. Sporting achievement give countries opportunities to show their cultural supremacy over others (Cassidy et al., 2016). A combination of training ethos, scientific understanding of biological maturation, and linear developmental transitions infuse many sporting organisation's recommendations for coaching practice. Some coaching bodies recommend linear coaching models that must be adhered to for young athletes to be nationally and internationally competitive. Day (2011) described this as "global law", when coaching models become over prescribed when they have previously been successful.

Literature describes coaching as "structured improvisation" (Bordieu, 1977; Cushion, 2001). Recognising an organic attitude towards coaching suggests that modelling the

coaching process does practitioners a disservice (Cushion 2007). Models often leave coaching practitioners with idealistic, disconnected formulae from coach education modules and “models dressed in theoretical tinsel gain a concreteness once framed” (Cushion, 2007, p. 398). Enthusiasm throughout coaching to find a definitive right or wrong way to coach contributes to misapplication and over prescription of coaching models.

More recently, researchers recognise that coaching takes place within a social and cultural setting and literature increasingly reports the dynamic and social nature of practice (Arnold, Edwards, & Rees, 2018). The coaches' interactions with players, parents, governing bodies, managers, colleagues, and peers are subject to the constraints and opportunities of human interaction. Sports coaching does not exist within a cultural vacuum and is affected by societal and sporting structures it works in (Cross & Lyle, 1999; Cushion, 2018; Sandaros, & Chambers, 2019).

The complex and interdependent nature of human interactions occurring within cultural and social boundaries mean coaches are far more than subject specialists and method appliers (Squires, 1999). Cultural and social influences on coaches mean the search for a one-size-fits-all approach to coaching remain problematic (Jones, Armour, & Potrac, 2002; Baker et al., 2019). Coaching is a social activity that requires a “myriad of connections between subject and method, but just as importantly, to and between other persons in life. Inevitably these connections are fraught with the unique tension characteristics of human interaction” (Jones, Armour, & Potrac, 2002, p. 35). Human interactions make coaching a complicated process that requires idiosyncratic approaches and places a substantial cognitive load on the coach (Roberts et al., 2019; Thelwell et al., 2008; Thelwell et al., 2017).

Having begun to highlight the complexity that human interaction, culture, and society bring to coaching, sports coaching literature also highlighted the role that context can play in

understanding coaching. Researchers found the context that coaching occurs within can influence the role practitioners will fulfil (Cushion, Armour, & Jones, 2006). Each coaching context has its own unique subjectivities and peculiarities depending on whether it is a performance or a participation context (Cote et al., 2007). There are four categories of coaching context according to Cote et al., (2007). The four contexts are; (a) participation coaches for children, (b) participation coaches for adults, (c) performance coaches for young adolescents, and (d) performance coaches for older adolescents and adults. Researchers argue that the contextual peculiarities of each coaching context are worthy of their own individual attention (Cushion, Armour, & Jones, 2006; Cassidy et al., 2016; Cushion 2018; Roberts et al., 2019; Baker, 2019).

More researchers are producing literature that embraces Schon's stance, that coaching is swamp like, complicated, and messy (Schon, 1987, Cushion, 2007). Researchers should "wade in and through the swamp" (Cushion, Armour, & Jones, 2006, p. 96) to better illustrate the parameters and nature of coaching. Furthermore, there is a move towards "interpretative research approaches that capture the essence in situ, to broaden our understanding of coaching" (Cushion, Armour, & Jones, 2006, p. 96).

For coach education programmes to improve, researchers must consider the contextual factors that influence the lives of the coach and athlete, and the relationships that exist between them (Thelwell et al, 2017). During the last decade, coaching research has gained momentum in "grappling with fundamental questions about coaching practice and being immersed in that practice" (Cushion, 2007, p. 399). A paradigm shift in coaching research has moved away from ignoring taken for granted practices and producing "systematic distortions of knowledge and understanding" of coaching (Cushion 2007, p. 399). Research moved to seek realistic depictions of coaching that extend beyond rationalistic and heroic accounts of practice (Potrac et al., 2012).

Coaching practitioners want a more sophisticated understanding of coaching. Future studies should aim to describe the complex, “continuous and interdependent” nature of coaching rather than “reducing the coaching process to generic rules” (Cushion, 2007, p. 399). It would help coach education to understand how coaches are constantly renegotiating coaching in the face of new and organic challenges when they are in the practical coaching context (Thelwell et al., 2018; Roberts et al., 2019; Baker, 2019).

This section reviewed knowledge of the coaching process and discussed the complexity of the coaching process. Having discussed the complexity, this section also illustrated the need for greater focus on the contextual peculiarities of coaching and studies that shed light on the effects that coaching can have on coaches' lives. This literature review will now discuss coaching expertise. Coaching expertise is relevant because it helps to show how coaches evaluate their self-efficacy and reflects the skills, knowledge, and competencies they bring to the context.

### **Coaching expertise.**

Literature defines coaching expertise differently across studies (Roberts et al., 2018). For example, when reviewing the *International Journal of Sports Science and Coaching*, Cote and Gilbert (2009) found five articles that referred to expertise differently: successful, experienced, elite, expert, and great. The concept of expertise in coaching remains an ambiguous concept because of the integrative and interdependent relationship with effectiveness (Cote & Gilbert, 2009; Kearney et al., 2018). Some researchers argue that “coaching is only effective when the coach is considered an expert in their field” (Monahan, 2018, p. 183). Conversely, expertise is generally judged by effective performance (Cassidy, Jones, & Potrac, 2016; Monahan, 2018; Kearney et al., 2018; Roberts et al., 2019).

The interplay between expertise and effectiveness presents emotional challenges for coaches. Coaches' feelings of expertise fluctuate in the face of positive/negative results and positive/negative public judgements (Cassidy et al., 2016). Coaches' professional understanding is fragile and connected to their understanding of expertise (Kelchtermans, 2009). Coaches regularly ask themselves questions such as; what must I do to be a proper coach? What must I do to have the justified feeling that I am doing well? Am I fulfilling my coaching duties (Kelchtermans, 2009a, 2009b)? Being successful is sometimes considered the gold standard of expertise in coaching. Success implies positive results. Therefore, is a coach experiencing poor results with players not an expert? Being classed as an experienced coach is sometimes considered the gold standard of expertise in coaching. However, how much experience is acceptable to be an expert? Is a successful coach with only three years-experience not an expert?

A lack of clarity about expertise, can lead coaches to question their expert status when faced with poor player results and negative feedback from others within their sport (e.g. governing body, parents, and other coaches). Literature has tried to move our understanding of expertise forward by uncovering the specific knowledge that expert coaches have (Gullich, 2014).

Academics have tried to frame expertise in sport coaching within a framework that includes coaches' knowledge, athlete outcomes, and the context that coaches work in. Literature suggests that coaching can be viewed from an information-processing stance and expert coaches must have an ability to apply knowledge effectively and recognise patterns, with different individuals, in different contexts, and produce positive athlete outcomes (Abraham & Collins, 1998; Cushion, Armour, & Jones, 2003; Abraham et al., 2006; Nash & Collins, 2006; Lyle, 2002; Kearney et al., 2018; Sherwood, Smith, & Masters, 2019).

Cote and Gilbert (2009) proposed an integrated definition of expertise in coaching that included to three factors. Firstly, expertise refers to specific knowledge within a coaching context. Secondly, effective coaches “apply and align their coaching expertise to particular athletes and situations to maximise athlete learning outcomes” (p. 316). Thirdly, a coach who is effective “over an extended period of time” is an expert coach (p. 316).

Research has continued to produce concise conceptual descriptions of knowledge areas, and concepts that reflect the coaching process through the eyes of expert coaches. However, research in parallel environments (e.g., teaching) suggest that such concepts are “experientially much too tidy” (Abraham et al., 2006, p. 551) and fail to capture the specialist knowledge and decision-making skills that expert coaches possess (Cassidy & Tinning, 2004). Sports coaches rely on organic application of knowledge and concepts to coaching problems, further illustrating the decision-making aspect of coaching. Researchers acknowledge that more research will help us understand coach related variables in gaining expert knowledge and how they apply their knowledge to coaching situations (Roberts et al., 2019).

The development of coaches from novice to expert has attracted attention in the literature but it still needs studying in more detail (Nash & Sproule, 2011). There are no guarantees that novice coaches will develop into experts because coaching knowledge does not develop in a linear fashion (Trudel & Gilbert, 2006; Ollis & Sproule, 2007; Nash & Sproule, 2009). In a paper assessing the development of coaching knowledge Cote (2006) concluded that expertise occurs when a coach reaches a threshold of coaching experiences. Formal and informal coach education additives that contribute to the activation of that threshold (Cote, 2006)

Research by Nash and Sproule (2011) and Vergreer and Lyle (2009) found that the number of years of coaching experience was fundamental to the development of expertise in coaching. Both papers agreed that coaches showed “expert-related increases in cognitive processing complexity” with years of coaching experience (p. 431). Therefore, expert coaches process more complex information when assessing possible solutions to coaching problems. Their research also highlighted a lack of the expert-novice paradigm in coaching research and argued this was worthy of more attention to understand how coaches develop cognitively over years of practical coaching.

Coaching would benefit from more research studying coach development (Nash & Sproule, 2011; Vergreer & Lyle 2009). For example, Nash and Sproule (2011) discovered that novice coaches were less able to question their approach to coaching than expert coaches when faced with poor results. More expert – novice studies would help to show what skills and competencies coaches gain at different stages of their career and help understand how expert coaches cope when coaching behaviours are ineffective.

This section has reviewed literature related to coaching expertise and has discussed the difficulty of finding a singular definition of expertise. The ambiguity surrounding defining expertise can create problems for coaches with self-evaluations and feelings of expertise. Increased research that uses the novice-expert paradigm will improve the understanding of coaching expertise. This literature review will now discuss an integral part of a coaches' reality – the coach-athlete relationship.

### **The coach-athlete relationship.**

The interactions between coach and athlete play a critical role in the delivery of coaching (Lyle, 1999). The coach-athlete relationship is the “process through which athletes needs are expressed and fulfilled” (Jowett & Cockerill, 2002, p. 16). Effective coaching

relies on the relationship between the coach and athlete, and the coach-athlete relationship influences the experiences of coaches (Jowett, 2017). Coaches' and athletes spend considerable time together at the elite junior level due to the training requirements to reach elite level. Practice time, session planning, competitions and the associated travel, tactical planning, match debriefs, and sometimes even social events are some of the occasions that require coaches and athletes to be in each-others' company. Each elite junior athlete that a coach works with, accounts for a considerable proportion of the coaches' working week. Furthermore, coaching relationships can last for several years resulting in the coach and the athlete playing considerable roles in each-other's lives (Delrue et al., 2017; Jowett, 2017).

Early research into coaches and their athletes focussed on behavioural aspects of coaching. Behavioural coaching research gave practitioners models of leadership behaviour in sport and models for coach-player relationships (Chelladurai, 1993; Chelladurai & Reimer, 1998; Smoll & Smith, 1989). Behavioural coaching models provided guidelines for how coaches should coach (Jowett & Cockerill, 2002). During the last 20 years there has been an increase in research examining coaching from a relationship perspective. Coach-athlete relationship research considers coaches and athlete's behaviours alongside their emotions and cognitions. For example, how does coaching stress affect the coach-athlete relationship (Thelwell et al., 2017)? How do fluctuations in coach behaviour affect athlete behaviour (Delrue et al., 2017)? Who has the power in coach-athlete relationships (Jowett, 2017)?

Literature shows that coaches spend much of their time on technical and administrative elements of coaching (Mcready, 1984; Reid et al., 2006; Lorimer & Jowett; 2009; Reid & Giblin, 2015; Jowett, 2017). Technical aspects of coaching are well defined, easy for coaches to control within a coaching session, and athletes view coaches positively when they perceive them to show expert technical knowledge (Boardley, Kavussanu, & Ring, 2008).

Athletes' perceptions of coaches are an important part in effective coach-athlete relationships (Jowett & Ntoumanis 2004; Boardley, Kavusannu, & Ring, 2008; Olympiou, Jowett, & Duda, 2008; Lorimer & Jowett, 2009; Alvarez et al., 2012; Rhind & Jowett, 2012; Jowett, 2017; Delrue et al., 2017; Moen et al., 2019). Coaching relationships are effective when coaches and athletes feel "comfortable and confident" with each other (Jowett & Cockerill, 2002, p. 16) and the quality of coach-athlete relationships can be described through Jowett and Shanmugam (2016) four C's;

- Closeness reflects interpersonal feelings of coaches and athletes that largely encapsulate an affective bond through their mutual respect, trust, appreciation, and liking for one another.
- Commitment reflects interpersonal thoughts of coaches and athletes of maintaining a close (as opposed to distant, detached, unfriendly) relationship over time despite ups and downs.
- Complementarity reflects coaches and athletes' interpersonal behaviours of leadership (reciprocal complementarity) and co-operation (corresponding complementarity).
- Co-orientation reflects coaches and athletes' level of interdependence in terms of similarity and understanding.

Lyle (1999) believed that coaches who neglect the influential nature of the coach-athlete relationship do not develop athletes to their full potential. Research has targeted athlete and coach perceptions to give insights into intangible aspects of coaching. Empathetic accuracy is a prominent area of research in coaching. Empathetic accuracy is the moment to moment understanding of an individual's attitudes, feelings, and motivations (Lorimer & Jowett, 2009). Coaches and athletes who understand perceptions of each other will increase satisfaction in the coaching relationship (Moen et al., 2019).

Literature recommends coaches should spend more time trying to develop coaching relationships and interacting beyond the technical instructions dictated by sport. Creating a positive and constructive interpersonal environment between coach and athlete should be a shared focus of coaching relationships (Boardley, Kavussanu, & Ring 2008). Boardley, Kavussanu, and Ring (2008) suggest that “coaches should be made aware that their influence on athletes may be exerted through athlete’s perceptions of their (coach) effectiveness” (p. 284). This requires coaches to be aware of how athletes experience the coach and their coaching, rather than simply focussing on delivering a prescriptive, linear sequence of individual coaching sessions. The power of athlete perceptions on coaches should feature in coaches’ thinking to maximise their coaching (Lorimer & Jowett, 2009; Jowett, 2017; Jowett, et al., 2017). Coaches who rely too much on technical aspects of coaching may detract from other important areas of coaching such as communication, intuitions, feelings, previous experiences, underlying assumptions, well-tuned sensitivities, embodied understandings, and subtle cue recognitions (Cushion, 2007).

A further consideration for coaching and the relationship perspective is the nature of coaching relationships. Some coaches describe the coach-athlete relationships as “a family relation” and others have described it as “a teacher-pupil relation” (Jowett & Carpenter, 2015, p. 18). However, the “majority of athletes have described it as a friendship relation” (Jowett & Carpenter, 2015, p. 18). Different perceptions of the nature of the coaching relationship can affect expectations of coaches and athletes. Family relations and friendship relations are governed by relationship rules, but each relationship is a different relational context (Jowett & Carpenter, 2015). For example, friendship relationships distribute power symmetrically; but family relationships distribute power hierarchically (Jowett & Carpenter, 2015). It is important for coaches to understand athlete perceptions of coaching relationships because this can impact on athlete expectations for the relationship.

Jowett and Carpenter (2015) suggested relationship rules are “behaviours that people think or believe should or should not be performed” in the relationship (p. 2). Relationship rules have two key dimensions; (a) interpersonal related rules refer to the conduct of a relationship (e.g., respect and trust one another); and (b) task related rules refer to the conduct of business (e.g., work well together and achieve goals).

Jowett and Carpenter (2015) found difficulties for coaches and athletes in relationships. For example, athletes who described coaching relationships like friendships also expected their coach to “maintain authority, power, leadership, and control” (p. 13). Contradictions between how athletes described coaching relationships (i.e. a friendship) and the expected authoritative behaviours they wanted from their coach (i.e. and teacher or parent) were a source of interpersonal conflict. Therefore, coaches have a difficult task to position their coaching for the needs of their athlete when behaviours and expectations are not well matched. Overall, relationship rules “provide the boundary conditions within which the athletes and coaches are safe, secure and happy” (Jowett & Carpenter, 2015, p. 21). Research into how coaches manage relationship boundaries with rules and what happens when those rules are broken will give insight into the experience of being a coach.

This section reviewed literature relating to the coach-athlete relationship. The coach-athlete relationship is fundamental to effective coaching. However, due to the subtleties and nuances of managing individual relationships with athletes, the coach-athlete relationship provides complex issues associated with coaching elite juniors. Having discussed the recent move towards sports coaching research from a relationship perspective, this section also highlighted the importance of athlete perceptions on the coaching process. Athletes' perceptions of coaches have the potential to change behaviours and affect satisfaction within coach-athlete relationships. Finally, the literature showed that different perspectives on the nature of the coach-athlete relationship (family relation or friendship relation) can affect

expectations that athletes have for the relationship. Relationship rules supply boundaries for coaches and athletes to feel safe, secure, and happy. This literature review will now discuss coach-parent interactions.

### **Parental involvement.**

Parents are critical components in allowing children and young adolescents to excel in sport due to the necessary travel commitments (tournaments and training), financial commitments (coaching, travel, tournaments, equipment, nutrition, etc.), and time/energy commitments (emotional support, sacrifices to their own social lives) (Bloom, 1985; Brustad, 1993; Hellstedt, 1987; Cote, 1999; Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005; Knight & Holt, 2014; Knight, Berrow, & Harwood, 2017; Weltevreden, van Hooft, & van Vianen, 2018; Harwood et al., 2019).

The focus of this PhD was to examine the lived coaching experience of independent tennis coaches and describe what it was like to be a coach of an elite junior tennis player. Crucially, tennis coaching occurs on a one-to-one basis and junior players play ten to twenty hours per week. Elite junior tennis player can practice for 20 hours per week, which requires commitment from; (a) the coach, who allocates the required time to each player they teach and facilitate the required practice time for their players, (b) the player, who dedicate themselves to their chosen sport, often making sacrifices to other areas of their lives to fit in the necessary training away from other commitments, and (c) the parents, who sacrifice significant time, money, and energy for their child's chosen sport.

Parents play a critical role in the reality of being a tennis coach of elite junior tennis players because without parents, the children would not be able to attend practice (Lauer et al., 2006; Knight & Holt, 2014). The influence of the family in the development of talent in sport is well researched and family support is fundamental to talent development in young

people (Bloom 1985; Cote, 1999). Coaches and parents interact at training, at tournaments, at planning meetings, and over the phone to report on competition performance.

Understanding the role and influence that parents play on athletic development is crucial to understanding the reality of being a tennis coach of elite junior athletes (Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005; Knight & Holt, 2014; Gould et al., 2016; Harwood et al., 2019).

Research has highlighted several areas where parents are influential in developing their child's sporting prowess. Firstly, parental involvement helps to promote the child's best interests. Parents that manage to adequately balance their involvement (i.e. not overly involved or not under involved), promote their children's best interests by providing them with the opportunity to practice the necessary hours that may be required to achieve elite level (Hellstedt; 1987; Cote, 1999; Knight, Berrow, & Harwood, 2017; Weltevreden, van Hooft, & van Vianen, 2018).

Parents are not merely a taxi service, ferrying their children to practice or competition, and who sit disinterested whilst their child participates. Parental support during sport participation is positively associated with children's enjoyment and enthusiasm of their sport (Knight, Berrow, & Harwood, 2017; Weltevreden, van Hooft, & van Vianen, 2018).

Children who receive encouragement from their parents have a higher perceived sense of physical competence, and self-confidence (Power & Woolger, 1994; Brustad, 1993). Studies have also shown that parents, rather than travelling to training and competition under duress, are happy and willing to attend tournaments and will gladly watch their children practice, taking pride in their child's sporting ability (Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whelan, 1993; Monsaas, 1985; Sloan, 1985; Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005; Lauer et al., 2006; Gould et al., 2016).

In addition to providing their children with the opportunities to practice, through time (not to mention money) dedicated to their child's sport, parental support can also act as an emotional buffer for children (Umarova, 2015; Burgess, Knight, & Mellallieu, 2016). Parental support helps to alleviate performance stress that children may experience when competing at elite levels. Children are not non-thinking pawns, who blindly attend sporting events oblivious to the work that coaches and parents have put into their development. Children are often aware of the performance context they are in and feel pressure to perform. They want to do themselves justice and impress their coaches, parents, and peers. Van Yepren (1995) reported that parents played an important role in shielding athletes from performance stresses.

Research into parental expectations has also provided data that help to explain some of challenges coaches may face when working with junior athletes in elite contexts. The role of the family in all children's lives is important in transmitting values, attitudes, and beliefs and this can have ramifications for attitudes towards achievement, hard work, success, and persistence (Howe, 1990; Csikszentmihalyi, et al., 1993). Eccles and Harold (1991) proposed that parental expectations influence children's decisions to engage in activities, the intensity with which they work, and the child's actual performance level. There have been several studies that demonstrate positive relationships between parental expectations and children's success, and enjoyment of sport (McElroy & Kirkendall, 1980; Scanlan & Laithwaite, 1985). Unfortunately, there are also stories that grab the headlines, often referring to parental expectations becoming a source of pressure. The resulting stress that excessively high expectations can cause may interfere with children's participation and performance in sport (Brustad, 1988; Scanlan, Stein, & Ravizza, 1991; Weiss, Weise, & Klint, 1989; Lauer et al., 2006; Gould et al., 2016). Coaches that are in strong coach-athlete relationships experience

stress when their player is stressed resulting from over-parental involvement (Lauer et al., 2006; Knight & Harwood, 2013; Knight, Berrow, & Harwood, 2017).

Factors outside of the coaches' control that hinder player development are coaching stressors (Kelly et al., 2018; Thelwell et al., 2010; Thelwell et al., 2017). For example, the financial demands that sport participation can place on parents sometimes increase the demands that parents may place on coaches. Positive tournament results offer reassurance to parents that investment in their child's sport is giving return on investment and evidence of effective coaching. Therefore, how coaches and parents evaluate the coaches' professional performance can be a source of stress for coaches (Thelwell et al., 2008; Kelchtermans, 2009; Thelwell et al., 2017)

Parents of young athletes are "significant persons and role models" in athletes sporting lives (Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005, p. 270). Early research into the role of the family in talent development of athletes has highlighted the influence that parents can have on athletes (Cote, 1999). Three major components contribute to parent's effect on the coach-athlete relationship; (a) opportunity, (b) information, and (c) support (Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005; Knight, Berrow, & Harwood, 2017; Harwood et al., 2019). Parents provide opportunities for their children to participate in sport and they contributed to the quality of the coach-athlete relationship through their attitudes and behaviours towards the coach (Lauer et al., 2006; Gould et al., 2016). For example, a child may hear parents talking negatively about the coach and this might reduce their trust and perception of efficacy with the coach.

Research continues to conclude parents play an important role in the development of children who specialise in sports (Knight, Berrow, & Harwood, 2017; Weltevreden et al., 2018; Harwood et al., 2019). Furthermore, coach and parent behaviours affect athlete

outcomes (Keegan et al., 2010). Frequent contact between coaches and parents mean parental interactions are an important part of the coaches' reality.

Coach-parent interactions are frequent in elite junior sports and some argue the athletic triangle (coach, player, parent) is a natural element of the social system in youth sports (Smoll, Cumming, & Smith 2011). Coaches and parents must communicate effectively to “increase harmony and minimise hassle” in athlete triangles (p. 13) Coach-parent interactions should promote the quality of athletes' sport experiences and there are several key areas for coaches to be aware of, namely; (a) coaches and parents play important roles in determining the outcomes of participation in youth sports; (b) coaches should serve as valuable information resources for parents and should answer parents' questions as best as possible; (c) effective communication is a two-way street. Coaches require both speaking and listening skills to help achieve positive coach-parent relationships; (d) holding a pre-season coach-parent meeting is the key to avoiding unpleasant experiences. However, contact should also remain constant throughout the season; (e) the objective of a coach-parent meeting is to gain parents cooperation and support (Jowett & Timson-Katichs, 2005, Lauer et al., 2006; Smoll, Cumming, & Smith 2011; Knight, Berrow, & Harwood, 2017; Weltevreden et al., 2018; Harwood et al., 2019).

There is a wide range of literature relating to parental involvement in junior sport (Knight, Berrow, & Harwood, 2017; Weltevreden et al., 2018; Harwood et al., 2019). Contextual peculiarities across different sports, levels, and contexts mean continued research is necessary to fully grasp the nuances of each sporting context. Researching the experiences of tennis coaches can add to the understanding of how parental involvement can affect tennis coaches' realities (Weltevreden, 2018).

This section has reviewed literature relating to parental involvement. Parental involvement is crucial to elite junior sport and parents play a major part in the reality of being an elite junior coach. Having discussed the role that the family can play in talent development of children who specialise in sports, it also highlights the significant role that the parents play in providing opportunity, information and support for their children in sport. Parents have a significant influence on the quality of coach-athlete relationships and coaches should consider the influence of parents on their coaching more and more. This literature review will now review studies into sports coaches' experiences that have contributed to knowledge of what it's like to be a coach.

### **Research into Coaches' Experiences**

Methodologies such as autoethnography and IPA give powerful and evocative accounts of coaching practice within specific contexts. Sports coaching researchers have become "dissatisfied with dominant research designs, statistics, and limited ways of thinking" (Geraity, 2014 p. 205). Coaching scholars believe research has too often reduced complex human behaviour to a few measurable variables (Cushion 2007) and argued for methodologies that give improved access to values and ethics, daily interactions, and emotions that are taboo or out of the scope of social science research (Geraity, 2014).

Earlier sections of this literature review showed coaching as a complicated process (Saury & Durand, 1995). Sports coaching scholars use autoethnographies to challenge disembodied ways of knowing coaching and see the "actual coaching world" more clearly (Sparkes & Smith, 2014, p. 160). Research conducted by researcher-practitioners gives access to insightful, personalised data that describe coaches' experiences. Autoethnographies support literature that suggest coaching is stressful and emotionally challenging (Kelly et al., 2018; Thelwell, 2008; Purdy et al., 2013; Thelwell et al., 2017).

Autoethnographies communicate how the idea of coaching as a performance shows itself in coaches' daily interactions and illuminate "unexamined issues in the muddy depths of coaching" (Jones, 2006, p. 1017). For example, managing the impressions of athletes dominates coaches' thoughts and this is emotionally challenging for them. Fear of negative athlete judgements is a source of anxiety for coaches (Jones, 2006).

Literature continually describes coaching as a performance (Thelwell, 2008; Adams, 2019). Coaches use different strategies in their performances to achieve athlete outcomes, further their own career, or manage their mental state. Coaches may use; *humour* to include or motivate athletes (Adams, 2019); *care* to mentor athletes (Jones, 2009); *aggression* and *bullying* to exert power over athletes (Conn, 2017; Edwards, 2018; Malyon, 2018; Wilson, 2018); *Empathy* to gain athletes trust (Jones, 2011); *ruthlessness* to further their own standing with other coaches (Potrac et al., 2012); *avoidance* to remove stressors (Thelwell, 2010); and *working harder* to communicate discipline to athletes and parents (Lundkvist et al., 2012).

"To coach is to risk exposure to a hyper-expectant listening audience that is not there in everyday life" (Jones, 2006, p. 1018). Coaches are concerned by gaining the respect of athletes and fear athlete's negative perceptions of their coaching (Kelchtermans, 2009; Jowett, 2017). Jones (2006) highlighted fear, vulnerability, and paranoia in coaching and reinforced work that highlighted the powerful effect athlete perception can have on coaches' feelings of efficacy (Lorimer & Jowett, 2009; Jowett, 2017; Jowett, et al., 2017). Fear of negative judgements made by athletes affect coaches' self-identity, self-confidence, self-worth, and self-esteem, and coach educators should not dismiss the possibility that current coaches may struggle with fear of losing the respect of athletes (Cassidy et al., 2016).

Autoethnographies discuss fear and uncertainty in coaching, which are connected to; maintaining power in relationships (Purdy, Potrac, & Jones, 2008; Potrac et al., 2012; Cooper

et al., 2017; Adams, 2019), competition and conflict between coaches (Potrac et al., 2012; Peel et al., 2013; Knijnika, Spaaij, & Jeanes, 2019).

Fear of being less successful than other coaches is associated with competition between coaches. Periods of poor results are a strong influence on their experience of coaching. Coaching has the “unfortunate characteristic that coaches normally encounter one another with natural suspicion” (Potrac et al., 2012, p. 87) meaning coaching is sometimes comprised of selfish motivations. Coaches protect their individual standing at the expense of “building social relationships that were durable and trustworthy” with other coaches and athletes (p. 89).

To illustrate attitudes of coaches within performance coaching contexts, Potrac et al. (2012) used a hunter metaphor (Bauman, 2007, 2012). *Hunter* coaches “competed with and hunted against other hunter coaches” for reputational gain. The principal concern for coaches becomes “one of not losing out” (p. 87) and furthering one’s own standing in coaching. Often “survival was the ultimate proof of fitness” for coaches (p. 89).

Competition and feeling vulnerable to other coaches poaching players may resonate with existing tennis coaches. A large proportion of tennis coaches are self-employed. There may be common experiences relating to competition and vulnerability for tennis coaches. Understanding how tennis coaches describe their environments can give insight into competitive attitudes amongst self-employed coaches and highlight how they cope with self-employment.

Autoethnographies have described fear and vulnerability in coaching which link to gaining respect of athletes and competition between coaches. Fear and vulnerability are major causes of stress on human beings (Bauman, 2007) and research continues to examine

the effects of stress on sport coaches (Thelwell, 2008, Thelwell, Weston & Greenlees, 2010; Thelwell, et al., 2018).

As well as autoethnographies, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) methodologies have added to the understanding of coaches' realities. The idiographic influence of IPA enables researchers to delve deeper into coaching phenomena. For example, researchers using IPA have examined coaching burnout.

Coach burnout has received attention in literature and there are several issues associated with coach burnout, such as; such as; lack of perceived autonomy and control (Vealey et al., 1992), leadership style (Dale and Weinberg 1989), perceived success (Thelwell et al., 2010; Vealey et al., 1992), media coverage (Kelley et al., 1999), entrapment in the coaching job (Raedeke et al., 2000), role ambiguity, indistinct role descriptions, role conflicts (Capel et al. 1987; Thelwall et al., 2008; Thelwell et al., 2010).

Lundkvist, Gustafsson, Hjälml, and Hassmén (2012) conducted an interpretative phenomenological analysis of elite football coaches in Sweden to find causes of stress and burnout amongst coaches. Lundkvist et al., (2012) concluded that there were two primary factors in coaches burning out. Firstly, if coaches had problems handling the performance coaching culture then they would be more predisposed to burnout. Performance coaching culture can prove stressful for coaches due to the emphasis on winning. Coaches can interpret this as stressful because poor performance can lead to poor results. Poor results can lead to "prolonged uncertainty and insecurity about whether or not the coach will keep their job on losing streaks" (p. 415). Issues such as financial uncertainty and job insecurity have shown strong associations with extended levels of psychological stress and burnout (Dekker & Schaufeli 1995). Such issues are often a reality for coaches working in an elite sporting context (Thelwell et al., 2017).

Secondly, work-overload and balancing this with family life can cause coaches long term stress, leading to coach burnout (Lundkvist et al., 2012; Thelwell et al., 2008). Lundkvist (2012) found that coaches carry out lots of extra work at home (e.g. session planning, tactical planning, video analysis, phone calls with parents or athletes). Extra work that is performed away from the court can reduce relaxation time for coaches and reduce time spent with loved ones, causing relationship stress. Lundkvist et al., (2012) also found that coaches can suffer from “divided labour” (p. 416). Divided labour occurs when coaches work multiple jobs to earn a satisfactory living. Coaches with divided work have different employers and this can create long working days and role conflict between employers. Work overload and limited recovery time caused by divided labour had strong links with exhaustion (Lundkvist et al., 2012). Stress and exhaustion are associated with the coaching role and sustained periods of stress and exhaustion can lead to coaches leaving the profession (Lundkvist et al., 2012).

IPA methodologies continue to show revealing experiences of pressure, anxiety, and damage to self-esteem amongst coaches (Dixon & Turner, 2018). Emotional challenges associated with elite sport are associated with coach burnout and coaches leaving the profession. Coach retention is a serious challenge for many governing bodies with athletes competing at elite level (Dixon & Turner, 2018; Hassmen et al., 2019) and there is evidence that coaches would benefit from psychological support in their role (Sandardos & Chambers, 2017; Kelly et al., 2018).

Cronin and Armour (2017) used IPA to investigate elite youth coaches and found three important elements of being a youth performance coach. The three elements of youth performance coaching were; (a) care, (b) commitment to educate athletes authentically for corporeal challenges to come, and (c) working with others to achieve a specialised corporeal excellence.

Cronin and Armour (2017) supported studies that showed caring was fundamental to the coaches' role (Jones, 2009; Tawse et al., 2012). However, coaches' commitment to educating others' showed that coaches' lifeworld extended far beyond the field of play and into their private lives. Performance coaches perform extra coaching tasks in social settings or in private, for example, when in cafes (reviewing training diaries, or meeting parents or other coaches) or at home (session planning) (Cronin & Armour, 2017). An extract from Cronin and Armour (2017) showed how the unsociable hours in coaching can affect their private lives:

I married a woman who hated sport and I'm the complete opposite. Basketball is in my heart. I'd never leave basketball. She didn't want to share me with basketball. We went our separate ways because I was involved with the national team at the time and it was a constant battle, every day. She couldn't, and she didn't understand our culture. She didn't understand our way of life. She had never been exposed to it (p. 928).

Examining the experiences of sport coaches has shown the realities of being a coach. For example, care, being a role model, working with others, taking work home with you, educating others, balancing work-life, and managing mental health are issues that affect many coaches. These issues affect many other working professionals. It is important for sport governing bodies to understand that sport coaches are not immune to the pressures that other professionals experience (e.g., in business, politics, and health care). All professionals experience pressure from work. There is an underlying assumption from those outside coaching that sport coaches are less susceptible to issues such as stress or burnout. Many people perceive sport coaches work in an area of interest, passion, or even a hobby and it can be difficult for those outside of coaching or those new to coaching to appreciate the associated stresses of performance coaching. Autoethnographies and IPA's have highlighted

the emotional challenging and stressful part of coaching (Jones, 2009; Potrac et al., 2012; Tawse et al., 2012; Lundkvist et al., 2012; Dixon & Turner, 2018; Hassmen et al., 2019).

This section has reviewed autoethnographies and IPA studies into the experiences of performance sports coaches and shows that coaches face emotional challenges in their roles. Literature shows that coaching is emotionally challenging and stressful. Stress can lead to coach burn out or transitioning out of coaching. Autoethnography and IPA have added to coaching literature and highlighted governing bodies should consider coach retention more in their coaching directives. This literature review will now discuss research specific to tennis coaching.

### **Research into Tennis Coaching**

I will review three areas of literature in tennis coaching that have influences on the reality of tennis coaches. Firstly, tennis is a technical sport, and it is sometimes difficult for coaches to describe complex information to youngsters. Secondly, literature shows that socio-economic factors give tennis unique characteristics compared to other sporting contexts. Finally, research into tennis coaching shows parents are influential in developing the talent of young tennis players. Specifically, I will discuss 3 areas of research in tennis coaching that give insights tennis coaches' realities, namely (a) coaching methods in tennis (b) socio-economic influences in tennis, and (c) parental involvement in tennis.

#### **Coaching methods in tennis.**

Research in tennis coaching shows that tennis coaches often use prescriptive coaching methods (Reid et al., 2006; Reid & Giblin, 2015; Oppici et al., 2017; Vernon, Farrow, & Reid, 2018; Krause et al., 2019). Prescriptive coaching methods assume that coaches "have all encompassing knowledge, much of which should be passed on to the player" (p. 3).

Prescriptive coaching is characterised by “superfluous extrinsic feedback and demonstration” (Reid et al., 2006, p. 3).

Despite Reid et al., (2006) concluding tennis coaching needed a change in thinking over 15 years ago, literature continues to recommend a shift to player centred methods. Player centred methods involve varied and random practice sessions, are inclusive of athlete input, and generate intrinsic feedback within tennis players (Krause et al., 2019). However, research illustrates that tennis coaches direct their players to specific cues and reference points, which does not always allow players to take ownership of skills (Vernon, Farrow, & Reid, 2018). Players in receipt of prescriptive coaching act out the coaches' instruction and there is little athlete feedback. Some researchers argue prescriptive coaching sessions are not representative of the characteristics of match-play (Reid & Giblin, 2015; Krause et al., 2019). Discrepancies between practice sessions and tournaments can leave players ill-prepared for the rigours of competition and results can suffer (Krause et al., 2019).

Prescriptive coaching methods are relevant to daily interactions of tennis coaches because prescriptive coaching assumes all-encompassing knowledge on behalf of the coach (Reid et al., 2006; Reid & Giblin, 2015). Self-evaluations of expertise and self-efficacy is emotionally challenging for coaches, especially during periods of poor player results (Kelchtermans, 2009). Coaches put themselves under pressure to have the answers during coaching sessions because they fear negative athlete judgements of their efficacy and technical expertise (Jones, 2006; Cassidy et al., 2016). Tennis coaching is reliant on prescriptive methods sometimes to the detriment of coach-athlete relationship (Lyle, 1999).

Tennis coaches cannot ignore the technical requirements of their sport. Therefore, tennis coaches must grasp complicated, bio-mechanical, and technical information, disentangle the information, and communicate it in simple terms to their players. However,

practitioners should not always view tennis coaching as a transfer of information process (Reid & Giblin, 2015). Coaches use higher order thinking skills to turn complicated technical data into simple movements and this shows that coaching is “intellectual work as opposed to technical work” (Cassidy et al., 2016, p. 8). Tennis coaches must understand how to teach technical skills to players of different ages, physical abilities, intellectual abilities, and personalities. This can place a high cognitive load on tennis coaches (Purdy et al., 2013).

Researchers recommend tennis coaches adapt to individual coaching situations and strike a balance between prescriptive approaches or player centred approaches (Reid & Giblin, 2015; Cassidy et al., 2016; Vernon, Farrow, & Reid, 2018; Krause et al., 2019). Both approaches are useful for coaches and their relevance to tennis coaching highlights the need for coaches to use emotional intelligence and adapt to the needs of each player that they are on court with (Thelwell et al., 2008).

### **Socio-economic influences in tennis.**

Tennis has unique socio-economic influences which affect the relationships tennis coaches face in their role (Gruneau, 1999; De Bosscher, 2004; Smoll, Cumming, & Smith, 2011; Knight & Holt, 2014; Dunn et al., 2016).

Elite junior tennis coaching is “a multifaceted social setting involving complex relationships between players, parents, and coaches” (Wolfenden & Holt, 2005, p. 122). The “specific nature of the social context in which talent development in tennis occurs” contributes to the reality of tennis coaches (p. 122). For example, tennis players commit to tennis earlier than in other sports, sacrificing participation in other recreational sports to train for tennis (Wolfenden & Holt, 2005; Knight & Holt, 2014). Early specialisation in tennis means coaches, players, and parents interact with each other intensely for many years, and

this can increase pressure on coach-athlete and coach-parent relationships (Wolfenden & Holt, 2005).

Early specialisation in elite junior tennis has also been associated with parents that become overly involved. However, “one athlete’s optimal push is another athlete’s controlling parental behaviour” (Lauer et al., 2010, p. 493). Early specialisation can cause issues in coach-parent relationships because the coaches’ role is to encourage focus and commitment to tennis (Knight & Holt, 2014; Dunn et al., 2016). Commitment to tennis at elite junior level requires sacrifice from parents to allow their child to train. When children commit to tennis, players, and their mothers “sacrifice their social life”, and family time becomes “constrained due to the talented child’s involvement in tennis” (Wolfenden & Holt, 2005, p. 122). Such issues can place a strain on families due to feeling tied into their child’s tennis (Kirk et al., 1997; Monsaas, 1985; Smoll, & Cumming, 2006).

Tennis is a middle to upper-class sport and parent’s financial support is a vital part of tennis participation in the elite context (Gruneau, 1999; De Bosscher & Heyndels, 2004; Dunn et al., 2016). Costs to the parents to fund their child’s tennis are “estimated at approximately, £1000 per month” (Wolfenden & Holt, 2005, p. 124). Governing bodies cannot dismiss the financial burden on parents as a cause of tension within tennis coaching relationships (Dunn et al., 2016).

A useful addition to tennis coach education would be data that shows how elite junior tennis coaches feel about the environment they are situated in. Tennis coaches are important stakeholders in this social context, and it would be useful to understand what it is like for them to try to be effective in a sport reliant on high financial investment from parents (Dunn et al., 2016), and has conflict between parents and coaches (Wolfenden & Holt, 2005; Smoll, Cumming, & Smith, 2011).

**Parental involvement in tennis.**

Parental involvement in youth sport has received much attention but generalisations across all of youth sport fail to fully grasp the contextual peculiarities across different sports and levels (Smoll, Cumming, & Smith, 2011). Governing bodies in tennis, however, have been proactive in researching this area (Gould et al., 2006; Knight & Harwood, 2009; Knight & Holt 2013).

Literature shows parents can help coaches to successfully develop junior tennis players, but managing parents expectations is challenging (Gould et al., 2006; Knight & Harwood, 2009; Lauer et al., 2010; Knight & Holt, 2013; Gould et al., 2016; Knight, Berrow, & Harwood, 2017; Harwood et al., 2019).

Gould et al., (2006) said that “parents play two important roles in their child’s sport involvement as both; providers of tennis experiences and interpreters of tennis experiences” (p. 632). Parents influence coach-athlete relationships when they show positive attitudes towards coaches and their child is receptive to parent’s positive perception of the coach (Gould et al., 2016; Weltevreden et al., 2018).

Conversely, literature shows that parental involvement can cause issues for tennis coaches. On the one hand parental involvement is of great importance and essential for enhancing talent development; but on the other hand, an issue of growing concern because they are deemed to interfere by coaches (Gould et al., 2006; Lauer et al., 2010; Gould et al., 2016)

Parents sometimes unknowingly interfere with their child’s development (Knight & Harwood, 2009; Knight & Holt 2013; Knight, Berrow, & Harwood, 2017). Parents exert unintentional pressure on junior tennis players, and they need education about how to help their child in elite junior tennis (Gould et al., 2006). Knight and Harwood (2009) said “when

children excel in sport, it was often directly attributed to their parents, and this leads to excessive pushing from parents”, resulting in pressure on the child (p. 561). Coaches working in a performance context recognise “just as parent’s reputations can be built on their child’s athletic success, so can the reputation of the coach” (p. 561). Coaches’ work is open to public evaluation and issues that limit athlete development cause coaches stress (Thelwell et al., 2008; Thelwell et al., 2010).

Unintentional pressure can also occur through the “importance parents place on rankings, and the status of having an elite tennis player” (Lauer et al., 2010, p. 494). The level of investment for parents “sucks them further into the world of tennis, and parents can feel hermeneutically sealed in the tennis world” (p. 494). When this occurs, decisions about the child’s development are based on what is best for their tennis rather pursuing other interests.

Knowledge of unintentional pressure can help coaches understand parental behaviours that affect player development in tennis. Understanding the reasons for unintentional pressure on the child can help coaches be more patient and understanding of parental involvement, and this will help children’s experience in elite junior tennis through positive coach-parent relationships and a healthy emotional climate to learn tennis in.

Academics recommend better education for tennis parents (Kight & Holt, 2013; Harwood et al., 2019). Parents have difficulties striking a balance with being under involved, optimally involved, and over involved. Effective coach-parent relationships include conversations that educate coach and parent about the pressure a player may be under. Ineffective coach-parent relationships leave parents unclear about their child’s development because of poor communication and this can cause parents to become more involved (Knight & Holt, 2013). For example, poor coach-parent relationships can result in coaches avoiding

difficult conversations with parents (Thelwell et al., 2010) and parents feeling disconnected from their child's progress. Poor coach-parent relationships affect job motivation (Kelchtermans, 2009). Tension between coach and parent cause coaches' anxiety with their role and have a negative impact on their desire to remain as a coach.

Knight and Holt (2013) stated parents require time to find their optimal levels of involvement. For example, in tennis, the better player will not always win, and this is not an easy concept to grasp. Lost tennis matches can cause parents to push too hard for positive results. Coach-parent communication helps parents achieve an appropriate level of involvement (Gould et al., 2016; Weltevreden et al., 2018).

Parental involvement is a coaching stressor for tennis coaches (Knight and Harwood, 2009). Parental involvement creates stress for coaches because parents can make "excessive demands on coaches' time" (p. 560). Parents and coaches do not clearly understand each other's roles, and this can leave parents unsure of the demands they can place on the coach. Communication and patience are necessary to develop coach-parent relationships that are effective and mutually appreciated (Knight & Holt, 2013; Gould et al., 2016; Weltevreden et al., 2018; Harwood et al., 2019).

The financial demands that tennis places on parents can increase the demands that parents place on coaches (Gruneau, 1999; Knight & Harwood 2013). Positive tournament results reassure parents that their investment in tennis is giving return on investment and evidence of effective coaching. Furthermore, the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) system emphasises winning to gain ratings wins and ranking points. Parents who are investing heavily in tennis coaching for their child can unintentionally put pressure on coaches and players to achieve results because of the financial obligations they face. Factors outside the

coaches' control that can hinder player development are coaching stressors (Knight & Harwood, 2013).

Parental involvement in tennis helps coaches to develop successful junior tennis players. Parents help coaches by providing the children with access to training, financial investment for coaching, travel to competition, emotional support during difficult periods, and supporting the coaches message (Gould et al., 2016; Knight, Berrow, & Harwood, 2017; Harwood et al., 2019). However, understanding and accepting aspects of parental involvement is challenging for coaches in their daily interactions (Knight & Harwood, 2009; Knight & Holt 2013; Knight, Berrow, & Harwood, 2017). The effects of parental involvement on coaches' daily interactions require further examination (Harwood et al., 2019).

This section discussed literature in tennis coaching that affect the daily interactions of tennis coaches. The literature shows that (a) tennis coaches often use prescriptive teaching methods, (b) tennis has unique socio-economic influences that affect the relationships tennis coaches face in their role, and (c) parents help coaches to successfully develop junior tennis players but managing parents' expectations is challenging. Overall, research into tennis coaching gives an understanding of the environment of tennis coaching. To date, research into tennis coaching has failed to give adequate attention to the experiences of tennis coaches' day to day interactions. Future research can give more insight into what it is like for tennis coaches to work in an emotionally challenging environment.

### **Critique of UK Tennis Coach Education**

The UK is one of 34 European nations with their own coach education system (Crespo, & Van De Braam, 2012). Tennis coaches in the UK receive education and continuous professional development (CPD) from the LTA (NGB) rather than the

International Tennis Federation (ITF, world governing body). The LTA coach education system has the highest award from the ITF, receiving “gold level recognition” (lta.org.uk).

UK tennis coaches receive qualification on a scale starting at level 1 (coaching assistant) to level 5 (master club / performance coach). As coaches progress through their qualifications, they receive more specialised education and training depending on their chosen career path. Tennis coaches choose to focus on either (a) development coaching (level 5 master club coach), which enables them to be head coach at clubs or centres and specialise with early stage players, improvers, senior club players, and manage the entire club programmes and structure, or (b) performance coaching (level 5 master performance coach), which enables them to specialise with elite juniors between 11 and 18, and manage entire elite performance programmes.

LTA tennis coach qualifications include education and training in areas such as technique and biomechanics, nutrition, physical conditioning, tactics, psychology, talent identification, teaching methods, and business management (lta.org.uk). LTA coach education provides comprehensive training for new coaches and equips practitioners with excellent knowledge in the four performance factors (technical, tactical, physical, and mental).

Despite a robust education system for tennis coaches, there is currently a lack of ongoing support for active coaches. The CPD modules on offer for tennis coaches to maintain their coaching licences continue to focus on updating knowledge on the four performance factors – technique, tactics, physical, and mental skills. Furthermore, the training for mental skills in tennis is focussed on the needs of athletes. Tennis coaches do not currently receive help or training in the mental skills required to sustain their own performance as tennis professionals themselves.

The literature review has shown that coaching is emotionally challenging and little work has been done to understand what it is like for tennis coaches. A useful avenue for UK tennis coach education is to improve the continuous support for active tennis coaches. Improved recognition of the challenges that tennis coaches face and improved support for active tennis coaches would help practitioners to maintain effective performance in an emotionally challenging role. Improved support for tennis coaches will benefit junior tennis players by keeping the best tennis coaches in the profession and maintaining the highest standards of on court delivery.

### **Confidence in the Literature**

I stated previously in this chapter that the research on coaching has primarily been descriptive. Descriptive research cannot claim causality through its findings, but it does show the characteristics of coaching as a phenomenon. Much of the research has also been qualitative which is helpful for understanding subjective accounts of how people with experience of coaching have experienced the phenomenon.

Descriptive qualitative research does not conclude with absolute or objective statements. Sports coaching, however, is a human endeavour and perceptions of human behaviour are not absolute or objective. The literature I reviewed described specific instances about coaching culture as experienced by coaches. Maintaining a broad view of the descriptive research available in sports coaching enabled me to infer cultural consistencies throughout coaching. The inferred cultural consistencies showed that coaching is described as; intellectual rather than practical (Cassidy et al., 2016); uncontrollable and incomprehensible (Jones, 2005); dynamic and social (Cushion, Armour, & Jones, 2006); foggy and messy (Cushion, 2007); political (Potrac et al., 2012); emotionally challenging (Purdy et al., 2013); Stressful (Thelwell et al., 2017).

I have tried to capture the subjective reality of coaching by reviewing studies that used autoethnography, phenomenology, and IPA. These methodologies access data that is difficult to get from experimental and hypothesis-driven methodologies. The literature reviewed in this chapter and the data in chapters four, five, six, and seven are not law-like statements of how all coaches experience coaching. This chapter and the remaining results chapters reflect how selected coaches have experienced coaching. Continued descriptive and qualitative research can continue to add to coaching knowledge by increasing the pool of coaching knowledge that others may draw “shared world meaning” from (Williams, 2000, p. 220).

### **Conclusion and Research Gap**

This literature review has been an analysis of sport coaching literature and identified the boundaries of this PhD. The purpose of this PhD is to examine the lived coaching experience of independent tennis coaches and describe what it is like to be a coach of an elite junior tennis player.

I conducted the literature review in four parts. First, the term coaching was contextualised with reference to the following theoretical boundaries; (a) the coaching process, (b) coaching expertise, (c) coach-athlete relationships, and (d) parent involvement. Reviewing this literature highlighted the complex and messy nature of sport coaching and showed the multifaceted nature of influences on coaching practice. Sports coach researchers have asserted that each sport coaching context will have its own peculiarities.

Second, I reviewed qualitative studies into sport coaching and gave specific attention to autoethnographies into sport coaching and IPA studies of sport coaches' experiences. Coaching research uses autoethnography and IPA to obtain rich information to further the

understanding what it is to be a sports coach. This literature highlighted the reality of sport coaching and the emotional challenges coaches' face.

Third, I reviewed literature specific to tennis coaching. This highlighted (a) tennis coaches often use prescriptive teaching methods, (b) tennis has unique socio-economic influences that affect the relationships tennis coaches face in their role and (c) parents help coaches to successfully develop junior tennis players but managing parents' expectations is challenging. Overall, research into tennis coaching gives an understanding of the environment of tennis coaching. Future research can give insights into what it is like for tennis coaches to work in stressful and emotionally challenging environments.

Finally, this review suggests that existing research has failed to give adequate attention to the experience of tennis coaches in the elite junior coaching context. Little is known of how tennis coaches experience their coaching world in the face of challenges in the coaching process. Failure to understand the experiences of existing tennis coaches of elite junior tennis players reduces tennis coach education's capacity to prepare aspiring coaches for challenges in the elite junior tennis context. This PhD will examine the lived coaching experience of independent tennis coaches and describe what it is like to be a coach of an elite junior tennis player. The results of this PhD can inform tennis coach education regarding what it is like to be a tennis coach of an elite junior tennis player. The data can prepare aspiring tennis coaches for emotional challenges in their elite junior coaching careers.

### **Research Question**

The purpose of this PhD is to examine the lived coaching experience of independent tennis coaches and describe what it is like to be a coach of an elite junior tennis player. I will achieve the overarching aim by working to the following objectives:

Phase 1: An autoethnographic study on three critical coaching incidents in my experience of coaching an elite junior tennis player.

Phase 2: An IPA of the coaching experiences of eight independent novice tennis coaches working with elite junior tennis players.

Phase 3: An IPA of the coaching experiences of eight independent experienced tennis coaches working with elite junior tennis players.

Phase 4: A longitudinal IPA of the coaching experiences of two novice and two experienced tennis coaches working with elite junior tennis players.

The next chapter will describe my methodology. I will introduce autoethnography and interpretative phenomenological analysis because they helped me capture the experiences of tennis coaches working with elite junior tennis players. I will also describe other considerations, such as; origins of the research, participant selection, data collection, data analysis, and research credibility.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Methodology**

This chapter describes the research process undertaken to capture tennis coaches' experiences of coaching elite junior tennis players. The chapter will describe the considerations regarding issues such as; my personal interest in the research, research paradigm, the rationale for autoethnography and IPA as research methods, data collection, data analysis, and ensuring research quality.

#### **My personal interest in the research**

I have included a section on my personal interest in the research so readers can understand parts of my background that may have influenced my subjective analysis of the data. My interest in tennis began from the age of three. My whole family have played tennis to some extent, culminating with me taking it to heart the most. From the moment I had my first lesson at the age of four, there have been very few weeks since, that I have not stepped on a tennis court in a playing or coaching capacity. Many of my earliest memories as a child are of being on a tennis court. I met my wife through tennis, my best man through tennis, earned a living through tennis, and now I am furthering my education through tennis and this PhD. During this time, as a former elite junior tennis player and an NCAA Division 1 player, I have experienced tennis coaching both; as a recipient of coaching for over 15 years, and now as a tennis coach working with elite junior tennis players for 14 years.

When I stopped playing competitively aged twenty-three, I did not want to be a coach. During my junior tennis playing days I did not enjoy my experiences with performance coaches. My own belief was that selection for national training camps meant a few days of being told I wasn't good enough, or I wasn't fit enough, or I wasn't dedicated enough. I often thought "if I'm so bad, then why are you picking me for this training?" Furthermore, I

questioned whether performance coaches simply liked being critical of players. As a child I was extremely shy, and I now reflect that I was simply more sensitive to criticism than other players and I took it too personally. I had insecurities and self-doubts that I wasn't cut out for performance sport. However, I still question why no performance coach seemed to recognise my shyness or if they did recognise it, why they did not consider that their approach wasn't always appropriate for me?

I believe that my experiences of elite junior tennis were influenced by my shy personality and my dislike for what I considered to be overly negative feedback that I received. As I moved up the age groups, I kept my shy personality and I maintained my dislike for what I saw in performance tennis coaches. I saw no warmth to players, I saw criticism, I saw emphasis on results, and I saw culturally powerful cliques of coaches, players, and their parents looking to gain something from their associations with each other. I could not understand why coaches behaved this way towards children.

I began coaching with a perception that performance coaches were failed tennis players with a chip on their shoulder because they did not make it as professionals. I was convinced that coaching provided them with the opportunity to tell everyone how good they used to be as players. When I began coaching aged 25, I was determined to be a different coach. Different to what I had experienced. I wanted to take a stance and show that performance coaching could be performed in a positive environment, and with empathy towards the children you coached.

Once I began working with elite junior tennis players, mainly in the under 14 age group, I immediately felt pressure. I believed that I needed to prove to myself that it was possible to coach the way I wanted to coach in the performance environment. I also believed I had to prove to other coaches that my self-proclaimed, different approach belonged in

performance tennis coaching. I was anxious to prove my worth and it became clear that the only way I could prove this was by ensuring the players I coached were winning tournaments. The more involved in coaching I became the more difficult I found it to maintain the coaching front I wanted to convey. I increasingly felt my coaching front slipping. I was nervous when players were competing, and I felt like a failure when kids I coached lost. My coaching focus became entirely about myself and my insecurity. I paid less attention to the effect my coaching was having on players emotionally.

As the pressure I put on myself increased I felt unable to be the coach I wanted to be. I was unable to relax on court, and I felt my behaviours were similar with what I saw and experienced from coaches when I was a junior. I stopped enjoying coaching and I started to take my insecurities out on the players I coached by overly highlighting where they were going wrong. I had stopped being positive with the players I taught. Tennis coaching became stressful for me and I did not like the type of coach I had become. My dissatisfaction led me to question whether I should remain as a coach and I experienced mental struggles with job motivation, self-worth, and self-confidence. I began to doubt myself and questioned if my shy personality was causing me issues with performance sport.

Reading around the current literature, I became increasingly aware of problematic descriptions of sports coaching (e.g. messy, ambiguous, political, emotionally challenging, and stressful). Unable to find detailed accounts from other tennis coaches about their experiences, I became increasingly motivated to investigate tennis coaches' experiences further. This is how the research question for my PhD came to fruition. I would like this research to help future tennis coaches by preparing them for what lies ahead if they decide to coach elite junior tennis players.

The first study of this PhD illustrates and confirms some of the emotions I have felt personally and how they resulted in some of my coaching behaviours becoming less than ideal. The emotions I have experienced through my coaching journey so far have been a mix of pride enjoyment, enthusiasm, satisfaction, fun, self-confidence; anxiety, self-loathing, fear, vulnerability, inadequacy, and helplessness. I became interested in investigating what tennis coaching was like for other tennis coaches to help shed further light on my own experiences.

I have previously been judgemental of performance tennis coaches, but my own experiences as a coach have highlighted that coaching elite junior tennis players is an emotionally challenging role. The emotional challenges may have a profound effect on coaches and alter their coaching behaviours. For example, it is quite possible that there are tennis players that I have coached who believe I am an overly negative, overly critical tennis coach.

My experiences of coaching have influenced how I understood the coaches that have taken part in my research. For example, my abiding memory of performance coaches when I was a player was that they were aloof, and they believed themselves to be above communicating with parents and players. They did not appear willing to make time for parents and players away from training sessions. My experiences in coaching gave me an insight into how my previous coaches may have felt and I have felt more compassion towards the coaches I interviewed than I expected. When coaches have described dislike of parent interactions, I sometimes interpreted this as insecurity. Insecurity resonated with my experiences in coaching because I did not always feel in control of player development and I felt less control over tournament results. Parental interaction during difficult coaching periods with players were challenging as I did not always feel confident in what to say to parents wanting to know why their son or daughter had performed badly. I recognised

avoidance strategies in my own behaviours that mirrored some of the descriptions given by the participants in this research.

I have personal experience of how coaching pressures can change coaching behaviours, and I wanted to understand what it was like for other tennis coaches in the elite junior coaching environment. Therefore, the purpose of this PhD became an examination of the lived coaching experience of independent UK tennis coaches and to describe what it is like to be a coach of an elite junior tennis player.

### **Research Design**

I chose qualitative research as the best form of social enquiry to answer the research questions of this PhD. Qualitative research focuses on the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences and the world in which they live (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Advocates of qualitative research celebrate its ability to uncover the taken for granted meanings that inform the actions of individuals within their world. Uncovering such meaning is achieved by engaging with the phenomenon to discover significant viewpoints and actions of people who experience the phenomenon (Charmaz, 2004).

#### **Interpretivist paradigm.**

The theoretical approach influencing the methodology for this PhD was interpretivism. Interpretivism assumes “the social world is complex, and that people define their own meanings with respect to social, political and cultural influences” (Potrac, Jones, & Nelson, 2014, p. 32). “Understanding the experiences of people and groups” and describing what it is like for them to be in their worlds, “lies at the heart of interpretative enquiry” (Potrac, Jones, & Nelson, 2014, p. 32). The axiological values throughout this research were to explore individual sense making of independent tennis coaches working with elite junior tennis players. Using a phenomenological perspective, the aim was to understand what it was

like for tennis coaches in their world and “interpret the means by which they made sense of their world” (Sparkes & Smith, 2014, p. 40).

My rhetorical standpoint was driven by my experiences as a tennis coach and a mismatch between tennis coach education and my own coaching practice. Tennis coaching courses portrayed an unproblematic representation of tennis coaching. However, my own experiences contradicted the simplistic examples given in coaching courses. I often felt insecure, anxious, vulnerable, helpless, and confused by coaching. Such feelings left me questioning “am I the only one feeling like this?” After reading more around the subject of coaching I became increasingly aware of literature that described coaching as ambiguous, messy, emotionally challenging, and political. These terms had more resonance with my own experiences of tennis coaching, and I focussed on the experiences of other tennis coaches’ and what tennis coaching was like for them.

Interpretivist approaches contrast positivist approaches used in natural science. Positivist approaches are primarily concerned with generating “nomothetic or law like accounts of action that can be used to make future predictions” (Potrac, Jones, & Nelson, 2014, p. 32). Interpretivism focusses on understanding how individuals make sense of their experiences and actions within it (Potrac, Jones, & Nelson, 2014). The interpretivist approach for this PhD adopted; a relativist ontology (i.e. that there is no reality independent of perception); a subjectivist epistemology (i.e. that knowledge is subjective and socially constructed); and an idiographic methodology (i.e. that focussed on individual cases).

The purpose of this PhD was not to provide a universal law of how all tennis coaches experience tennis coaching. Interpretivist researchers subscribe to the view that the social world is constructed within individuals’ subjectivities, interests, emotions, and values

(Sparkes, 1992; Keltchermans, 2009). I acknowledge that the findings of this PhD reflect my subjective analysis of the data.

Due to the idiographic nature of interpretative research, many consider that generalisations cannot be made from research that is interpretivist (Potrac, Jones, & Nelson, 2014). Williams (2000) counter argued by saying that if one takes a broad understanding of generalisation as a “general notion obtained by inference from specific cases” (p. 212); interpretivism could be considered as containing many generalisations. The point of such research is to “infer from specific instances, something about a culture” (Potrac, Jones, & Nelson, 2014, p. 33). Berger (1963) referred to commenting on culture through specific instances as seeing the general in the particular. Interpretivists believe that within the social world there are “cultural consistencies” that make it possible to make moderate generalisations based on idiographic research. Such moderate generalisations about the social world are “shared world meaning” (Williams, 2000, p. 220). Therefore, writers and readers have some responsibility with respect to transferability or generalizability because they can choose parts of data analysis that resonate with their own lives

### **Qualitative methods.**

Underneath the umbrella term of qualitative research lies many different methodological approaches, that have their own distinct languages and traditions (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Different qualitative approaches include; autoethnography, ethnography, phenomenology, discourse analysis, narrative analysis, grounded theory, and ideological research (Sparkes & Smith, 2014; Nelson, Groom, & Potrac, 2014). This PhD utilised autoethnography (of my own coaching experiences) and an interpretative approach to phenomenology, known as interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). I used IPA to examine the lived coaching experiences of independent UK tennis coaches working with elite

junior tennis players. The following section provides justification for the use of autoethnography and IPA for this PhD.

### **Autoethnography.**

For those new to the concept (including myself), autoethnography is an unusual word that does not conjure up an easily recognised meaning. When broken down into its three parts, autoethnography is easier to understand. 'Auto' refers to the self or author. 'Ethno' refers to culture and human interaction. 'Graphy' is the process of conducting research (Ellis, 2004). I used autoethnography in study 1 to examine my personal struggles with coaching. Through autoethnography I hoped to study tennis coaching culture and my place within it, highlighting the moral struggles I encountered that may have shared world meaning with other coaches working with elite junior tennis players.

Autoethnography was developed as a qualitative methodology and is specifically related to writing personal stories (Sparkes, 2000, 2002; Goodall, 2008). Autoethnography is sometimes referred to as a narrative of the self (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Ellis and Bochner (2000) said that autoethnography displays multiple layers of consciousness. The autoethnographer gazes back and forth "first through an ethnographic wide angled lens, focusing outward on social interactions and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations" (p. 739). When done correctly, highly personalised stories in autoethnography relate the person with the culture. Autoethnography demonstrates commitment to analysis through theoretical analysis of the stories told, connecting with the social world through theoretical insights.

Autoethnography is a relatively new approach in sports coaching research and it is not without its critics. The most frequent critique of autoethnography is that it is self-indulgent,

because autoethnography is primarily about the single author. Furthermore, some social scientists argue that research must be social and analytical, therefore they don't believe autoethnography can fulfil the criteria of being social if it is merely about one author (Geraity, 2014).

In response to criticisms of self-indulgence, autoethnographers demonstrate courage (Goodall, 2008) in their writing through use of "vulnerable writing" (Geraity 2014, p. 212). Autoethnography is not motivated by author's wishing to present idealised versions of themselves, but to access data that is difficult to gather from interviews. Vulnerable writing taps into the author's existential crises and highlights personal insecurities, fears, and perceived weaknesses rather than deflecting from them. Autoethnographers overcome personal insecurities, stigma, and fears of being labelled abnormal to communicate their stories, warts, and all. Vulnerable writing can make autoethnography a powerful method for communicating the reality of people's experiences, rather than diluted, toned down, or even sugar-coated versions of their reality.

Criticisms of autoethnography not being social are rebuked on the basis that "individuals and society are mutually created" (Geraity, 2014, p. 208). Autoethnographies are not simply about the author but are also concerned with an experience (e.g. illness, relationship breakdown, working relationships) in connection with others and culture. "Autoethnographies go beyond the self and connect with issues such as identity (Geraity, 2014, p. 208). The stories within my autoethnography focus on my struggles as a coach. To guard against my stories being considered *not social* I carried out critical peer review throughout the process. I maintained strong relationships with individuals mentioned in my stories and their feedback was sought regarding interpretations. The stories in study 1 were co-constructed with Sarah and her parents.

To ensure study 1 remained analytical, I followed each story with analytic reflexivity and theoretical analysis. I used my own experiences as a coach as a “means to a theoretical end” and gave theoretical insight into my experiences of coaching (Geraity, 2014, p. 206).

### **Why is autoethnography useful?**

A strength of autoethnography is its ability to access information not easily acquired from interview respondents. Sports coaching researchers have become “dissatisfied with dominant research designs, statistics, and limited ways of thinking” (Geraity, 2014, p. 205). Many coaching scholars feel that research has tried to reduce complex human behaviour to a few measurable variables. Scholars argue for methodologies that give improved access to values and ethics, daily interactions, and emotions that are taboo or out of the scope of social science research (Geraity, 2014). Through autoethnography I was able to communicate some of the doubts and insecurities that I experienced in the elite junior coaching context. Discussing insecurities may not be easy for participants in this research due to their high-level qualifications and feeling unsure about talking to a researcher-practitioner regarding professional struggles.

Atkinson (2012) said that much can be learned from autoethnography about the social processes, experiences, and realities of sports coaches. He argued that by “opening up their personal they are also able to help readers better connect with academic arguments, theories and ideas” (Sparkes & Smith, 2014, p. 161). The autoethnographer plays a dual role in research, both as member of the social world under study and as a researcher of the same world. Coaches' and athletes' stories, as members of a group within a social context can provide powerful, rich evocative accounts of their lived experience in sporting contexts (Allen-Collinson, 2012).

Coaching scholars are increasingly opting to use autoethnography to communicate some of the complex experiences and interactions they have endured over years of coaching (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). These scholars have extensive knowledge of coaching literature and are well versed in the methodologies used to research coaching. The increased use of autoethnography highlights the value that story telling has when trying to tell their coaching stories accurately and realistically (Geraity, 2014).

My stories in study 1 showed how the performance narrative influenced my own coaching behaviours towards Sarah (the player I was coaching). My insecurity as a novice coach, working with an elite junior was a major influence on my negative coaching behaviours towards Sarah. The performance narrative is a story of single-minded dedication to sport performance (Douglas & Carless, 2014). Within the plot of the performance narrative, winning, results, and achievements are pre-eminent and link closely to the storyteller's mental well-being, identity, and self-worth. My stories show my perception of poor player behaviour having a negative impact on my mental well-being as a coach. Professional insecurity led to negative coaching behaviours towards Sarah, and the breakdown of the coaching relationship. Autoethnographies from tennis coaches can help other coaches contextualise mental struggles they may experience as tennis coaches. My autoethnography helped in contextualising my own experiences and highlighting any biases I had when starting the research phase of my PhD.

### **Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).**

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a qualitative research method that is committed to “examining how people make sense of their life experiences” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 1). For example, I used IPA in studies two, three, and four to

examine tennis coaches' understanding of their coaching world gained through direct, first-hand involvement and everyday experiences of coaching elite junior tennis players.

In IPA studies, research participants are encouraged to describe their lived experiences within a context (e.g. coaching) and the researcher is “interested in the everyday flow of lived experience taking on particular significance” to the participant (Smith, et al., 2009, p. 1). IPA extends beyond simple description and “makes sense of the individuals lived experience by developing an interpretative analysis of the description in relation to social, cultural, and theoretical contexts” (Callary, Rathwell, & Young, 2015, p. 63). Therefore, the analyst offers an interpretative account “of what it means for the participant to have such concerns about their particular context” (Larkin, et al., 2008, p. 13). For example, study 2 highlighted that novice coaches focussed on achieving positive results for their players. Descriptions of poor player results were often associated with negative or defensive responses relating to themselves and they questioned “is it my fault?” I interpreted player results as inextricably linked to coaches' feelings of *competence* (p. 130).

There are three principles that inform IPA. Firstly, IPA is *phenomenological*. Phenomenology is the philosophical approach to the study of experience. Of interest to phenomenologists is “what the experience of being human is like” (Smith et al, 2009, p. 32). In everyday life, people are busy with their daily activities and routines in the world. Often our daily activities are taken for granted and little or no thought is given to the experience itself. Phenomenology asks that we disengage from our “natural attitudes” (Husserl, 1927) that direct our focus elsewhere and we begin to actively attend to (or reflect) on the experiences themselves. When we do this, we adopt a phenomenological attitude. Husserl (1927) defines the phenomenological attitude as a self-meditative process whereby the philosopher puts aside the natural, taken-for-granted everyday world and any interpretations to let the phenomenon show itself in its essence. This self-meditative process is known as

phenomenological reduction. For example, during studies two, three, and four there were many examples of coaches speaking positively and negatively about parental involvement. A phenomenological attitude guided me away from positive and negative interpretations about parental involvement and highlighted that parental involvement was an essence of coaching elite junior tennis players.

Secondly, IPA is *hermeneutic*. Hermeneutics is the theory of interpretation. The origins of hermeneutics stem from “attempts to provide surer foundations to the interpretation of biblical texts” (Smith et al, 2009, p. 21). Hermeneutics has increasingly developed into a philosophical approach to the “interpretation of a wider range of texts such as historical documents and literary works” (p. 21). Within the context of IPA research, hermeneutics is concerned with textual meaning, “as in the techniques used in speaking and writing that divulge the intentions and context of the speaker or writer (Callary, et al., 2015, p. 64). For example, study 4 showed that novice coaches had yet to accept elements of their coaching role. One coach asked the question “why do parents get so much of a voice in tennis” (p. 183), this was interpreted as his lacking in acceptance of parental involvement in elite junior tennis.

Finally, IPA is *idiographic*. “Idiography is concerned with the particular” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 29). Much of the research within psychology is nomothetic and it is concerned with making claims at the group or population level. IPA is committed to the study of specific experiences rather than general ones and aims to supply a depth of analysis that other methods may not offer. Furthermore, a detailed examination of the participants’ experiences is an effective way to “give voice” to the participants experiences and concerns (Sparkes & Smith, 2014, p. 126). Due to IPA focussing on the particular, it uses smaller sample sizes and carefully selected samples. IPA is committed to understanding how “particular experiential phenomena have been understood from the perspective of particular people, in a particular

context” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 32). My sample for this research was sixteen tennis coaches throughout studies two, three, and four. My data analysis section (see p. 70) describes the steps used to ensure I carried out intensive qualitative analysis on each interview transcript.

### **Why is IPA useful?**

The use of “IPA in sport psychology and coaching is on the rise” (Callary, et al., 2015, p. 65). A primary reason for the increasing use of IPA is that it produces rich participant descriptions and offers a “subjective, meaning-centred approach”, allowing the researcher to remain true to original meanings of the participants descriptions (Sparkes & Smith, 2014, p. 127).

Callary, Rathwell, and Young (2015) performed an IPA study and used their paper to describe the IPA process and evaluate its usefulness as a potential methodology in sports coaching research. Their study focussed on masters’ athletes in swimming and they included 10 athletes in their research. They concluded that the idiographic nature of IPA helped them become *experience close* with their participants (Smith, 2011). Smith (2011) said that experiences “cannot be plucked straightforwardly from the heads of participants” because the meaning behind participant descriptions may not be immediately obvious (p. 10). There must be detailed analysis of each case to fully appreciate participant experiences. Callary, Rathwell, and Young (2015) described IPA as a rigorous process that produces a plethora of rich data for researchers to get *experience close* with their participants.

IPA is an intensive, demanding, and detailed methodology. Callary et al., (2015) added that the process was challenging and “sometimes laborious” due to the “time and energy spent on the process” (p. 73). Despite the time and energy demands IPA places on the research, Callary et al., (2015) recommended the use of IPA as a method for future sports research.

## **Overview of Thesis**

There are four separate studies in this PhD. The first study (Chapter 4) is an autoethnography telling a story relating to three connected, critical coaching experiences in my tennis coaching life. I decided that this was a useful way to open the results section of my PhD. Starting the four studies with an autoethnography helped with the bracketing process (phenomenological reduction, see p. 62) for studies 2, 3, and 4. The process of self-analysis and vulnerable writing involved in autoethnography helped to highlight some of my own biases before the subsequent research studies (studies 2, 3, & 4).

Chapter 4 will include a detailed methodology for the procedures carried out when performing my autoethnography. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 will include the results of three IPA studies examining the experiences of independent UK tennis coaches working with elite junior tennis players. The rest of this chapter will discuss the procedures undertaken for the interpretative phenomenological analysis carried out in studies 2, 3, and 4.

## **Procedure**

The IPA studies that contributed to this PhD involved interviewing sixteen tennis coaches to acquire data for analysis. The following sections provide detail about the selection of participants, interview procedures, data analysis, and research credibility.

### **Participant selection.**

Once full ethical approval was granted by LJMU Ethics Committee I began contacting tennis coaches with experience of working in elite junior tennis. I selected tennis coaches who would be able to help answer my research question. Tennis coaches were “selected purposively, because they can offer insight into particular experiences and phenomenon” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 48).

Tennis coaches with experience of coaching elite junior tennis players were accessed via referral from various gatekeepers (p. 48). I have been a tennis coach for 15 years and I was able to speak with many contacts within coaching and gain access to a pool of potential research participants. I acquired contact details through gatekeepers, or the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) website. LTA coach contact details are available in the public domain via [www.LTA.org.uk](http://www.LTA.org.uk). I sent emails asking if coaches would be interested in taking part in the studies.

Coaches were sent emails which included: a participant information sheet, the research question, an explanation of my background, rationale for the research, and a request for a 45 – 60 minute interview about their coaching experiences with elite junior tennis players (Appendix C). Coaches responded via email and I included those who agreed to participate in the research on a research participant list. The research participant list was for my use only and included the participant's name, email address, where they coached, and their coaching qualifications.

Further email communication with the participants confirmed a date, a time, and a place of convenience for the participant to conduct a 45 – 60 minute interview. Interview date, time, and venue were recorded on the research participant list. Participants were given the option to conduct interviews at their own tennis centres to minimise demands on their time. I travelled to the participant's place of work and carried out interviews in the tennis centre cafe. Each participant involved in the research was assured about confidentiality and informed of their right to withdraw from the research at any point. I told participants that interviews would be audio recorded and they signed consent forms (Appendix E, F, & G)

### **Participant inclusion criteria.**

I selected coaches purposively. To obtain rich data regarding tennis coaches' experiences of coaching elite junior tennis players, the following inclusion criteria informed participant selection; (a) tennis coaches held level 4 or level 5 LTA coaching qualifications (b) tennis coaches were currently working with elite junior tennis players (c) tennis coaches participating in study 2 and 4 were defined as *novice* because they had between 1 and 4 years coaching experience with elite juniors (Flett et al., 2012) (d) tennis coaches participating in study 3 and 4 were defined as *experienced* because they had over 10 years coaching experience with elite juniors (Nash & Sproule, 2011).

The definition of "elite junior tennis player" used two further criteria that influenced the inclusion of tennis coaches; (c) "junior elite" was defined as junior tennis players competing at Grade 2 (National tournament level) and upwards (Rees et al, 2016). Participant coaches worked with players competing at national level (grade 2) Tennis Europe Level (U14) and International Tennis Federation (ITF) Level (U18), (d) "junior tennis players" were considered as tennis players between the ages of 11 and 18. This age bracket correlated with LTA yellow ball, junior competition age restrictions.

#### **Participant exclusion criteria.**

I did not consider all qualified tennis coaches as potential research participants for this PhD. Exclusion criteria for this research were as follows; (a) tennis coaches that did not hold level 4 or level 5 tennis coach qualifications; (b) tennis coaches that did not or have not worked with elite junior tennis players

#### **Interviews and interview guide.**

The interviews in this PhD were semi-structured and the interviews lasted between 1.5 and 3.5 hours. I believe that the interviews lasted longer than anticipated because the coaches were keen to discuss their experiences and they enjoyed discussing coaching issues.

Understanding what it was like for participant tennis coaches to coach elite junior tennis players required interview schedules that provided a “loose agenda” for interviews with participant coaches regarding their experiences with elite junior tennis players (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 58). I wanted interviews to flow naturally and not come across artificial. To help achieve a natural flow to interviews I carried out preparatory reading for the interview process and spent time familiarising myself with each coach’s performance programme. The primary focus of my interviews was the participant as “the experiential expert on the topic at hand” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 58). I wanted to get as “experience close” with the participants as possible (Smith, 2011, p. 10) and to fully understand what it was like for each participant to coach elite junior tennis players.

Before interviews began, I created a list of questions I believed would help to examine tennis coaches’ experiences of coaching elite junior tennis players. Questions were developed in four ways: (a) questions were generated from my own experiences with elite junior tennis players (for example, I had previous experience of parental involvement and decided to include the following question “do parents buy into your coaching ideas?”), (b) I generated questions through discussions with tennis coaches who weren’t part of the research (for example, a coaching colleague of mine suggested asking “do you enjoy LTA national coaches watching your lessons?”), (c) questions were generated by speaking to researchers from other disciplines (for example, a friend working in market research suggested asking “what are the three biggest issues you face as a tennis coach?”), and (d) questions were generated by reading around the academic literature associated with coaching (for example, coach-athlete relationship literature informed my questions relating to coaches’ flexibility of approach towards each player they worked with). I then conducted three pilot interviews to test my interview questions specifically to gauge the flow of responses. Questions were tested on three tennis coaches who were not selected for interview within this PhD. After the

pilot interviews and a period of reflection, the interview questions and interview question order were adjusted to facilitate better flow.

Interviews opened with a show of appreciation of the participants' time and a brief reminder of the purpose of the interview. The opening question in interviews related to why the participant coach chose tennis coaching as a career. Interviews began in this way to make the participant feel comfortable and to give them an opportunity to speak about themselves (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). After initial discussions and general chat about tennis coaching, I invited participants to discuss more specific coaching experiences relevant to their work with elite junior tennis players.

The interview guide included specific questions with related "prompts and probes" to stimulate the conversation further (appendix B, C, & D); (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 60). The order of questions was not fixed. The aim of each interview was to allow the participant as much time and "leeway to lead the interview to the thing itself" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 58). The *thing itself* being the coaches' own experiences of coaching elite junior tennis players.

To conclude each interview, I asked participants the same closing question, "what is the role of a tennis coach in an elite junior tennis players life?" I included this question because pilot testing showed it was useful to encourage participants to discuss their role and experiences in more detail. After answering the final question, I thanked coaches for their time and reminded them that they could withdraw from the research at any time. Participants were informed they would receive the typed transcription of their interview to assure them that names and venues were removed, and to invite further reflection.

Interviews carried out during the longitudinal study (study 4) used different questions than those in study 2 and 3. Specific information about the construction of questions for study 4 is included in chapter seven

### **Data preparation.**

I transcribed each interview verbatim. The transcription process was one of the most time intensive parts of this PhD. Interviews lasted between 1.5 and 3.5 hours. Transcriptions took between 7 and 20 hours to complete. My experience of transcription during this PhD supports the assertions of Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) who said that the transcription process takes “around seven hours for every hour of recorded sound” (p. 54).

The transcriptions were an exact record of “all the words spoken by everybody present at the interview” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 74). Transcribed textual words were spelt conventionally as recommended by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009). Non-verbal utterances (e.g. laughter and hesitations) were included in transcriptions. I printed transcriptions onto a paper document with large margins allowing for notes during data analysis.

Audio files and related transcription documents were saved in password protected files on my lap-top. Only I had access to this data. Word files were sent to coaches to check their interview transcripts and provide opportunities for further reflection.

### **Data analysis.**

IPA “does not prescribe a single method for analysing data” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 79). Some researchers have argued that IPAs' focus on the participant's experiences requires a flexible approach to analytic development (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005). However, successful IPA studies require a set of common processes and common principles to carry out data analysis. The interview transcripts in this PhD were analysed

following Smith, Flowers, and Larkin's (2009) six recommended steps for Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis:

(a) Reading and re-reading – I read the first interview transcript repeatedly over 3 days. Re-reading was useful to become familiar with the data and allowed for analysis of the interview structure. Issues that I found with the flow of the interviews were noted and extra prompts and probes were added for following interviews.

(b) Initial noting – I printed off interview transcripts for the reading and rereading. I made notes at the side of the transcript and highlighted interesting dialogue. Descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual comments were added to the transcripts. This process provided much of the analysis of similarities and contradictions in what participants were saying during interviews. For example, in study 4 *acceptance* was identified in experienced coaches' responses. Comments that referred to "getting used to it" and "developing a thicker skin" were highlighted and reanalysed to identify experienced coaches' *acceptance* of coaching issues. Conversely, novice coaches described less tolerant attitudes of coaching issues which showed a lack of *acceptance* (e.g. Josh, study 4: "I feel like saying who the hell do you think you are to these parents").

(c) Developing emergent themes – Having identified interesting extracts, emergent themes were beginning to develop. Continued reading of coaching literature helped inform the development of emergent themes. *Connection* was a superordinate theme and coaches described their relationships with athletes. While I was developing *connection* as a superordinate theme, Jowett and Shanmugam (2016) four C's model helped to inform my understanding of *connection*.

(d) Searching for connections across emergent themes – I typed a list of emergent themes and I spent time reading and rereading the themes. Themes were grouped under superordinate

theme titles that encapsulated subordinate themes. As mentioned above, *connection* was a superordinate theme. *Connection* included the relationships that coaches described with other social agents in tennis. *Connection* was made up of three subordinate themes. These were; *connection* with players; parents; and coaches.

(e) Moving to the next case – The next transcript was treated as a new case and steps (a) to (d) were repeated.

(f) Searching for patterns across cases – Higher order themes from each case were compared with each other. Comparisons of interview transcripts enabled the analysis of idiosyncrasies within case themes, and cases that shared higher order themes.

During the research process, I followed the process outlined above. However, I adopted a flexible approach to the process. There were several occasions when I revisited the first step (a) reading and re-reading and followed the process again. Going backwards and forwards through the analytical steps helped ensure that my chosen superordinate themes were fully encompassing of the descriptions given by coaches. For example, *competition* (study 3, p. 144) was originally labelled as *culture*. On reflection, I considered *culture* to be too broad and didn't fully reflect the coaches' descriptions. Reanalysis of the data meant I changed *culture* to *competition* because this reflected the coaches' descriptions of *competition* between coaches more accurately.

### **Maintaining a phenomenological attitude.**

IPA is not without its critics. Giorgi (2011) wrote a 23-page paper explaining why he believed Jonathan Smith's (2009) IPA was neither (a) a scientific process, nor (b) phenomenological. Giorgi's criticisms of IPA were:

(a) Giorgi said that "IPA's hesitation to proclaim fixed methods makes the possibility of replication of IPA studies impossible and thus makes the fulfilment of an important scientific

criterion impossible" (p. 95). Giorgi's key point was that he would not know how to replicate an IPA study, which is considered a key criterion for scientific study.

(b) Giorgi also argued that IPA did not adhere to fundamental values of philosophical phenomenology. Giorgi claimed that IPA had little to do with philosophical phenomenology because there was confusion over the term *bracketing*. According to Giorgi, Smith's IPA uses two different meanings for bracketing and does not clearly state which meaning of bracketing is used. Giorgi said that Smith (2009) only once refers to bracketing of the natural attitude, for example, past knowledge (specifically theoretical or scientific understandings) and ontological assumptions (including that of the thing "really" existing) need to be suspended. Suspending of our natural attitude is what Giorgi refers to as "phenomenological reduction" (p. 198) and is fundamental to any claim of phenomenological status. Giorgi said that Smith's IPA then referred to bracketing by a different meaning (e.g. eidetic and transcendental reduction). Eidetic and transcendental reduction involves bracketing ideas that emerge from the analysis of transcripts. This form of bracketing is used to avoid prejudicing current analyses in terms used understand earlier analyses or data. Giorgi argued that failure to clarify his meaning of *bracketing* and failure to mention phenomenological reduction meant Smith's (2009) IPA could not be considered scientific.

The work of Jonathan Smith (2009, 2011) has heavily influenced the work in this PhD. I consider it necessary to confront the issues Giorgi raised with IPA and show how I tried to address those concerns. This section will show how I addressed Giorgi's concerns with IPA.

Firstly, to address Giorgi's concern that IPA was not scientific because it does not prescribe a definitive procedure. The data analysis section above (see p. 70) shows the step by step process I followed to analyse all transcripts in the three IPA studies of my PhD. I

carried out my data analysis process diligently at every stage, for each study that was conducted. Despite having a process that I followed, I believe there are merits to qualitative research that allows researchers flexibility with their methods. Qualitative research is a dynamic process rather than a static product (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). "It is not possible to predict every possible encounter" in the research field (p. 237) and no researcher can resolve all research dilemmas. I took steps to ensure research credibility (see below, p. 73) and IPA allowed me the flexibility to adapt to issues that arose.

Secondly, to address Giorgi's concerns that IPA was not phenomenological, I took steps to ensure I respected phenomenology throughout this research. Giorgi raised concerns that IPA used two different meanings for bracketing and did not mention the phenomenological psychological reduction which he states, "is critical for phenomenological psychology" (Giorgi, 2011, p. 198). To address the dual meaning of 'bracketing' I refer to my autoethnography (study 1). The self-reflection and vulnerable writing involved in my autoethnography helped to highlight my biases and preferences brought about through my previous coaching experiences. My awareness of personal biases allowed for the bracketing of my "natural attitude" and phenomenological reduction (p. 198).

Bracketing throughout the analysis of data was also necessary so not to "prejudice a current interview transcript in terms used to comprehend earlier interview transcripts" for example, eidetic and transcendental reduction (Giorgi, 2011, p. 199). I made every attempt to maintain a phenomenological attitude during data analysis and viewed each new interview transcript as a blank canvas.

The work of Finlay (2008) informed my phenomenological attitude. To maintain a phenomenological attitude I adhered to the following principles; (a) I was genuinely curious about each participant (b) I didn't assume commonality (c) I was open to being surprised (d) I

stayed engaged with empathy and compassionate interest (e) I was focussed on accessing the participants' experience rather than engaging in it (f) I engaged in reflection after each interview.

Giorgi and Giorgi (2003) stated that phenomenological research “captures the phenomenon as closely as possible” and captures “the way the phenomenon is experienced within context” (p. 27). By implementing the actions mentioned above, I believe this research has captured the phenomenon of coaching elite junior tennis players as closely as possible.

### **Research Credibility**

This PhD is my first experience of conducting an IPA study. An objective of the studies within this PhD was to provide plausible and persuasive evidence relating to the experiences of tennis coaches working with elite junior tennis players. To illustrate what it is like for such coaches, the IPA studies in this PhD adhered to the work of Jonathan Smith (2009). When concluding a paper evaluating the contribution of IPA analysis, Jonathan Smith provided seven criteria that he believed would help researchers produce “high-quality” IPA papers with “rigour and interpretative flair” (p. 23). The criteria influencing the IPA studies in this PhD were as follows:

(a) The studies will have a clear focus – The focus of this study was to examine the lived coaching experience of independent UK tennis coaches and describe what it is like to be a coach of an elite junior tennis player. My study supervisor and critical friends helped me to narrow the focus of my PhD. Conversations with critical friends forced me to improve my ability to communicate the rationale for my PhD and in doing so, helped me to strengthen my argument for studying tennis coaches' experiences and refine my method for investigating the

topic. I recorded my thoughts after conversations with critical friends in a reflective journal and revisited the journal at the end of the day to inform my understanding of the research.

(b) The studies will have strong data – I followed steps to ensure I maintained a phenomenological attitude (see p. 72). I spent time after each interview assessing how the interview went and recording my thoughts in my reflective journal. For example, there were two occasions during study 2 that I had follow up conversations with coaches over the phone to ask follow-up questions. I conducted follow up interviews when I reflected on conversations, and I believed I had failed to satisfactorily investigate some of descriptions in initial interviews. I kept my reflective journal throughout the entire research and analysis process. I kept the journal with me continuously and noted down thoughts and reflections that arose during the day. I made notes about theoretical areas to read into, reflections on the participants and their stories.

(c) The studies should be rigorous – I included interview extracts that illustrated convergence and divergence across the samples. Extracts from three participants were used to show each theme following principle three of Jonathan Smith's 'what makes a good IPA paper'. To ensure the research process was rigorous I adhered to the process in my *data analysis* section (see p. 70) and in my *maintaining a phenomenological attitude* section (see p. 72). Once I completed writing a first draft and study 2 and 3, I emailed participants with the results and my interpretations. I undertook the member reflection process with the participants so that the data were credible, and the results made sense to them (Cresswell & Miller, 2000).

(d) Sufficient space should be given to the elaboration of each theme – Study 4 illustrated novice coaches struggling to accept the amount of parental involvement in coaching. I included multiple extracts to show that each interview over the two-years included descriptions of parental involvement and their struggles with accepting parental involvement.

Multiples extracts from transcribed interviews across 2-years showed consistent descriptions of parental involvement but there was no change in attitude over two-years.

(e) The analysis should be interpretative not just descriptive – Personal interpretations have been included under each subordinate theme demonstrating the double hermeneutic. The double hermeneutic is my attempt to make sense of the participant, who is making sense of what is happening to them (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012). For example, study 2 identified *competition* as a coaching construct for novice coaches. I interpreted that novice coaches weren't comfortable being competitive and I highlighted that they used combative language when they described interactions with other. For example, part of my analysis included the following interpretation: "Comments such as *fighting*, and *battling* provided evidence that coaches were compelled to behave in combative ways towards other coaches". (see chapter 5, p. 131)

(f) The analysis should be pointing to both convergence and divergence – I included extracts that illustrated similarities across the participants' experiences. I also included extracts that illustrated differences across participant experiences, showing the uniqueness of participants' experience. For example, study 4 illustrated that novice and experienced coaches described *connection*, *conflict*, and *competition*. There was also strong evidence in study 4 that novice and experienced coaches described the constructs differently because novice coaches were less *accepting* of their experiences.

(g) The paper needs to be carefully written – Wider reading continued to inform the understanding of what good IPA writing looks like. The IPA papers identified as 'good' by Jonathan Smith (2011) will provide the focal point of continued reading. The writing process was informed by English teachers, university lecturers from other academic fields, and the

project supervisor. All written documents were read by an outside source with expertise in writing to achieve the best possible presentation.

### **Methodology Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the origins of my PhD. Having considered the range of qualitative research methods available, this chapter has shown why autoethnography and IPA were chosen as appropriate methods to understand the experiences of tennis coaches. This chapter has also described the data collection and data analysis procedures that were undertaken to complete this PhD and provided considerations to combat some of the criticisms of IPA as a research method. Finally, this chapter provided a list of steps taken that ensured the work within this PhD was of good quality and credible. The next chapter will be study 1, my autoethnography of coaching an elite junior tennis player.

## Chapter Four

### Study One

This study is an autoethnography of three connected, critical coaching experiences in my tennis coaching life. I chose autoethnography to open the results section of my PhD because the process of self-analysis and vulnerable writing helped me to understand my experiences in greater depth. Furthermore, my autoethnography helped to highlight some of my biases before interviewing participants in studies 2, 3, and 4.

Academics use autoethnography to explore various issues that coaches face, and their stories are improving our understanding of what it is like to be a coach in various sporting contexts (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Observation is a primary source of knowledge for coaches (Cushion, Armour, & Jones, 2003). However, some researchers argue that coach education does not use the wealth of experience that coaches have to help the education of novice coaches (Cushion, Armour, & Jones, 2003). Autoethnographers are leading research away from abstract theorising about coaching, and towards more “thickly described, evocative accounts of coaching” practice and culture (Geraity, 2014, p. 206). Autoethnography is an effective way for existing coaches to communicate their experiences and inform practice.

Researchers describe autoethnography as a *narrative of the self* (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Through narrative “we define who we are, who we were and where we may be in the future” (Crossley, 2000, p. 67). Furthermore, narrative theory states that through “creating personal stories people can make sense of their lives, communicate previous experiences to others and create new possibilities for life through extending and developing their identities” (Douglas & Carless, 2014, p. 214). My autoethnography relates personal stories to the tennis coaching culture that I work in.

Autoethnography can inform tennis coach education literature through a vivid insight into emotional challenges that tennis coaches may face. First-person accounts from tennis coaches working with elite junior tennis players can illustrate the realities of what it is like to be a coach in the elite junior context. Descriptions from coaches about the emotional challenges associated with sustaining themselves professionally and supporting coach-athlete relationships within elite junior tennis can provide data for training of new coaches.

The purpose of study 1 was to provide a first-person account of my coaching relationship with an elite junior tennis player and illustrate how the performance narrative influenced my coaching behaviours. The performance narrative is a story of single-minded dedication to sport performance to the exclusion of other areas of life and self (Douglas & Carless, 2014). Within the plot of the performance narrative, winning, results, and achievements are pre-eminent and link closely to the storyteller's mental well-being, identity, and self-worth. The storyline of the performance narrative is consistent with sport is life and life is sport (Dacyshyn, 1999), and the performance narrative permeates much of elite sport participation. In elite junior tennis, athletic achievement is the primary focus of the coach and their athlete. My experience of junior elite tennis culture as a player, and then as a coach influenced my beliefs and behaviours. I wanted to prove my worth as a tennis coach, and I became fixated on winning as a measure of my effectiveness as a coach.

My stories will illustrate emotional challenges that I experienced whilst coaching Sarah (her name is changed to protect her identity). I illustrate the emotional challenges I experienced with the following three stories and associated reflections; (a) learning my new coaching narrative, (b) understanding my new coaching narrative, and (c) accepting my new coaching narrative.

The stories in my autoethnography illustrate the performance narrative ceasing to fit my experience of coaching. I focussed on tournament results for Sarah because I believed winning was the only way to show that I was an effective coach in the elite coaching environment. My primary source of self-worth was working with players who won. During a difficult period of results, I struggled to find alternative ways to assess my coaching effectiveness (Kelchtermans, 2009). I had no alternative *narrative* to define my coaching role and I experienced “narrative wreckage” (Frank, 1995). Narrative wreckage occurs when a person’s experiences no longer fit the contours of available or dominant narrative types. Without an appropriate narrative for my coaching role, I experienced emotional struggles with my professional self-understanding (Kelchtermans, 2009). Emotional struggles with coaching influenced my behaviours towards Sarah and this led to the coaching relationship ending (Douglas & Carless, 2008).

The purpose of study 1 was to provide a first-person account of my coaching relationship with an elite junior tennis player (Sarah). Analysis of my story will achieve the following; (a) understanding of my experiences in greater depth (b) highlight my own biases before starting studies 2, 3, and 4 (c) invite the reader to apply the ideas to their own experiences from the natural and in-depth depictions of my coaching stories (Smith 2018). My autoethnography is the starting point for an examination of the experiences of tennis coaches of elite junior tennis players and a comprehensive description of what tennis coaching is like. Sharing the emotional challenges that I experienced with Sarah can help other tennis coaches by showing the potential anxieties coaches may face. There are potential *shared world meanings* from my experiences to reassure new or existing coaches about their own coaching experiences (Williams, 2000).

## **Method**

## Research Design

The autoethnography is about my personal thoughts and experiences of coaching an elite junior tennis player, during an eleven-year period. I present highly personalised stories as three separate diary entries, illustrating an important series of events during the coaching relationship with Sarah.

The interpretivist paradigm informed the decision to include autoethnography in my PhD. The social world is complex, and “people define their own meanings with respect to social, political and cultural influences” (Potrac, Jones, & Nelson, 2014, p. 32). I used a conceptual framework for my autoethnography that was based on the work of Chang (2008) and this study included the following assumptions:

- a) Culture is a group orientated concept by which the self is always connected with others. Autoethnography can help researchers make comments on culture through analysis of specific instances (Berger, 1963). Throughout the writing of this study, I would often ask myself “am I the only one to feel like this about coaching?” Interpretivists believe that within the social world there are cultural consistencies that make it possible to make moderate generalisations based on idiographic research (e.g. autoethnography).
- b) Reading and re-reading autoethnographies provides a window through which the self and others can be explained and understood. I used autoethnography to understand my professional development in greater detail. The analysis of personal experience and vulnerable writing involved in this process gave me access to information that may not have been easily accessible when interviewing other tennis coaches. I hope that documenting my emotional challenges with tennis coaching will provide new knowledge of tennis coaching, which educates, and reassures new or existing coaches who face emotional challenges.

c) Telling one's story does not automatically result in the cultural understanding of self and others. Cultural understanding only grows through in-depth cultural analysis and interpretation. My stories show emotional struggles affecting my coaching behaviour. I hope that my stories add to the understanding of broader coaching issues such as, coaching stress and the effect on coach-athlete relationships (Thelwell et al., 2017)

The stories in my autoethnography communicate three critical experiences in my coaching relationship with one elite junior tennis player. The stories illustrate the performance narrative ceasing to fit my coaching role and show how I developed a new coaching narrative in the face of my coaching experiences.

### **Participants**

I received full ethical approval from the LJMU ethics committee for this study. Autoethnography is not simply a story owned by the author, it carries several ethical concerns about the consent, confidentiality, and anonymity of others present within the story as either active participants or background associates (Tolich, 2010). Tolich (2010) proposed some autoethnographical guidelines, such as recognising voluntary participation, practicing process consent (e.g. continued consensual process that involves the researcher and other participants staying engaged in mutual decision making and ensures the participants are kept informed), and being aware of internal confidentiality (e.g. ensuring participants are unable to identify each other within the data presentation). I addressed these ethical dilemmas by (a) gaining consent from those involved prior to and during the writing process, (b) respecting the potential for harm to others through my story and minimising this through careful consideration of chosen content, (c) ensuring the discretion of information between the researcher, outside others, and those involved in the story, and (d) using pseudonyms to keep anonymity.

The three episodes within this study are my personal experiences and thoughts whilst coaching Sarah. Having played tennis as a junior at the elite level and returning from America with no desire to become a coach, my introduction to coaching was as a hitting partner to elite juniors. As time progressed and I realised I enjoyed coaching, I gained qualifications, which enabled me to teach tennis as a profession. I was experienced in my own tennis journey and had a strong playing standard. However, my playing experiences were a strong influence on my early coaching behaviours. I used experiences as a player and the experiences I had of other coaches who instructed me at county, regional, and national level to inform my coaching role. Though qualified as a coach, and confident in my knowledge, I had yet to discover the implications of coaching and more specifically the nuances of coaching elite juniors. I describe the coaching relationship within this study via three self-narratives. They describe the eventual breakdown of the coaching relationship due to my coaching behaviours. Sarah and I re-established the coaching relationship several months after the breakdown, and the relationship is still ongoing. I have coached Sarah from the age of 8 to present day. Sarah is now 21 years old, playing on a full tennis scholarship in America – NCAA division 1.

### **Procedure**

I began the study by producing a detailed timeline of my tennis experiences from the age of 16 through to present day (Appendix H). The timeline began at 16 because this was when I started working towards coach assistant qualifications and gained my first experiences of coaching. I included experiences and reflections as a player on the timeline. My playing experiences were recorded because they influenced my perception of the coaching role (i.e. through interactions with other players, coaches who instructed me as a player, listening to parents speaking about coaches, seeing other coaches at tournaments, and my thoughts on eventually wanting to become a coach after playing).

I listed important experiences in chronological order, beginning with the first lesson I ever delivered through to my most recent lesson 15 years later. Important experiences included on-court player interactions, tournament visits, player and parent interactions off court, coaching courses, other coaching interactions, and private reflections away from the court (e.g. driving home after sessions and watching other coaches' sessions).

After constructing the timeline, I searched for the most important events in my coaching life, noting feelings and emotions attached to the event. I reduced my important events to 6 critical coaching experiences I considered most important in my coaching career. A second period of reflection followed, firstly "looking through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focussing outward on social and cultural aspects" of my experience (Sparkes, & Smith, 2014, p. 159); then looking inward to expose the vulnerable self that reflects on and is affected by the cultural surroundings within which it operates.

My study supervisor acted as a critical friend (Carless and Sparkes, 2008) to challenge the choice of critical experiences and provide a listening ear. This allowed me to discuss the impact of critical experiences on me and my coaching. Further conversations helped me to reduce the six critical experiences to three, connected self-narratives. The theme that held the stories together was the performance narrative and how it affected my coaching beliefs and behaviours. My three narrative episodes have strong links to the performance narrative causing emotional challenges.

### **Data Analysis**

I analysed the stories in my autoethnography to search for insight into social and cultural aspects of tennis coaching (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Analytic autoethnography uses the self as a means to a theoretical end. Authors communicate their experience through stories and include straightforward interpretation of their stories. The interplay between the

story and interpretation leads to theoretical insight (Anderson, 2006). Study 1 tells a story about my emotional challenges when coaching an elite junior tennis player. After a period of immersion into the data, it became clear that the scaffold and structure holding the stories together was the performance narrative and how I lived that through my coaching identity. Each narrative describes events occurring on or off court and includes thoughts, and emotions influencing my behaviour. I follow the narratives with reflexivity and give insight into subjective experiences. Throughout the analytic reflexivity I was committed to theoretical analysis to ensure that my personal experiences linked to broader coaching issues and coaching culture (e.g. coach-athlete relationships, performance narrative, professional self-understanding).

### **Research Credibility**

Autoethnography allowed me to include information that would not have been easily accessible when researching other coaches. The interpretivist approach guiding my PhD included a relativist ontology (i.e. that there is no reality independent of perception) and a subjectivist epistemology (i.e. that that knowledge is subjective and socially constructed). In acknowledgement of the interpretivist paradigm, I was aware that there are no universal judgement criteria to assess a piece of work. The criteria used to judge a piece of research can sometimes change depending on context and the purpose that the reader is trying to achieve (Sparkes, & Smith, 2014). An important characteristic of research at one time and in one place, may take on diminished importance at another time and place. I did not assume, however, that anything goes when assessing a piece of qualitative research and I have taken steps to consider how readers might judge my work and make this an appealing study to the reader (Sparkes & Smith, 2009).

I wrote my autoethnography with consideration to Richardson's (2000) 5 criteria to help researchers produce a credible autoethnography and I took the following considerations; Does the work make a substantive contribution and is the work insightful to our existing ways of knowing tennis coaching? Does the work have aesthetic merit and is the work evocative to the reader? Is the work reflexive and does it demonstrate an understanding of my place in the research? Will the work have an impact on the reader and resonate with the reader's experience and encourage reflection? Is the work a fair expression of the reality of tennis coaching?

I upheld Richardson's (2000) 5 criteria through several methods. My literature review highlighted that there was a gap in our understanding of what it is like to be a tennis coach of an elite junior tennis player. Critical friends read drafts of my stories throughout the writing process to ensure my stories were evocative. Reflexive writing follows each story and I discuss my interpretations of each story with the reader. I consulted Sarah's parents throughout the writing process to ensure my stories were an accurate reflection of the events that occurred.

### **Representations**

A criticism of autoethnography is that it can be self-indulgent, and egocentric. Commitment to vulnerable writing was my attempt to overcome the criticisms of autoethnography, and to give insight into my own personal insecurities as a tennis coach of an elite junior tennis player. Sparkes and Smith (2014) state that to "write individual experience is simultaneously to write social experience because culture circulates through us all" (p. 160). Autoethnography, is therefore always "connected to a world beyond the self" (p. 160).

Conversations with my project supervisor helped the writing process and we discussed how my story might be told if it was a movie. Comparisons with movies and TV shows were a useful mechanism to develop the story I wanted to tell. Many popular stories have “three-part structures containing a set-up, conflict, and a resolution” (Gearity, 2014, p. 214). The three stories within my autoethnography followed a three-part structure and tell the story of my coaching relationship with Sarah.

I had access to two university lecturers, unrelated to sport psychology, who read my stories and gave feedback about clarity, coherency between the stories, theoretical analysis, and impact. I continued reading autoethnographies throughout the writing process and the work of Douglas and Carless (2008, 2009, 2012) informed my understanding of narratives present in coaching (e.g. performance narratives, relationship narratives, dialogical narratives). The performance narrative had a strong resonance with the data in my stories because I associated performance coaching with the story of single-minded dedication to sport performance to the exclusion of other areas of life and self (Douglas & Carless, 2009).

## **Results**

I present the results in this study as real diary extracts from a personal coaching journal to reflect the day's events and how I, as the coach, tried to make sense of my experiences. The stories occurred during an ongoing coaching relationship and are connected by the performance narrative influencing my coaching behaviours.

### **Story 1. February 2010 – Learning my new coaching narrative**

*To be quite honest I'm struggling on court right now. Results haven't been great and the changes I've made to Sarah's game seem to be giving her more problems than improvements and I'm doubting whether the changes are the right ones now. She just can't execute the more aggressive game that I am asking for. Is it me or is it her? I can't help but*

worry about what her parents think about my coaching? The improvements seem to be harder to come by and the early success we had together seem a distant memory. Her dad wants a catch up and I'm dreading it, it's got to be one of those awkward conversations. He's gonna get rid of me. We've always had a great relationship, but the serious stuff has always been done face to face. It feels like I'm gonna be walking into a mafia hit.

I went to their house while Sarah was at school and mum was at work. The fact no one else was around made it even more scary. This obviously isn't gonna be good, he's gonna tear a strip off me for all the poor results. We chatted over coffee and politely danced around Sarah and her tennis, he's a good guy and we get on well, so I assume he clearly feels awkward firing me. After the first coffee, he tops me up and sits back down and there is an awkward silence. Here comes the bullet.

He tells me they are up against it financially and he is thinking of downsizing their house to help pay for the tennis. My brain was going into overdrive, thinking what was coming next. Surely, he's gonna tell me now that they want a better, more experienced coach so they aren't wasting their money on my coaching that doesn't work. The words never came. He was always brutally honest with me - which I preferred as I always knew where I stood with them all. But at that moment I was not sure if he was looking for reassurance that I was the right man for the job or if he wanted me to tell him to stop her tennis. I'm just a tennis coach, am I meant to know how to respond in this situation?

I offered to step aside as coach. I didn't really want to as I loved coaching Sarah, but I had to say something to fill the silence. I couldn't just sit there open mouthed looking stupid. I honestly didn't feel good enough at my job to provide any reassurance their money was in safe hands with me. Maybe they should play it safe and go to an academy with coaches with track records of success.

*He refused my offer. He told me that he really appreciated the work I was doing and my work with her had a positive effect on her way beyond the tennis court. He wanted me as coach no matter what. I couldn't help thinking, "Appreciate the work I'm doing? She's been losing!"*

### **Reflections on Story 1.**

Professional self-understanding forms part of an individual's *personal interpretative framework* (Kelchtermans 2009a, 2009b). Kelchtermans (2009) says there are a set of cognitions individuals use to make sense of their social environment and their actions within it. A factor that contributed to the narrative I expected my coaching role to be defined by was *task-perception* (Kelchtermans, 2009a, 2009b). *Task-perception* is characterised by what an individual believes to be good practice in their role and what the individual expects to be responsible for.

I began story one by revealing my on-court struggles were related to a poor run of tournaments with Sarah. My *task-perception* of the coaching role with Sarah was that I was responsible for helping her win in tennis. Performance related concerns infused my coaching beliefs. I strongly believed that to be a good player you had to win, and to be a good coach you had to coach players that won. This narrative was the primary influence on my early coaching perspective.

During the early stages of my coaching career I lacked "narrative alignment" (McLeod, 1997). I believed the only way for people to perceive me as an effective coach was through the positive results of the players I worked with. I became preoccupied with tournament results and my focus was too much on my own performance as a coach, rather than the relationship I created with players. I assumed that positive results would automatically result in a positive coaching relationship. Conversely, I believed poor results

would make players and parents view my coaching negatively and consider me as an ineffective coach. I was struggling to accept that Sarah's parents appreciated my coaching. Tournament results were not what I wanted and no matter how positive Sarah's parents were about my coaching, I did not believe my coaching could be perceived as successful. Narrative alignment requires a balance between one's experience, the story one tells, and the narrative types available within one's culture. Smith and Sparkes (2005a) suggested individuals need access to alternative narrative types to guide their personal stories and achieve narrative alignment. I was unaware of the emotional effect poor narrative alignment would have on me, but I was recognising I was anxious about coaching at the junior elite level.

Early in my coaching relationship with Sarah, she had success at some big tournaments. On one hand this gave me confidence that my coaching was effective because Sarah winning big tournaments provided me with evidence that I had done a good job. On the other hand, early success with Sarah became a benchmark for success that I had to keep achieving as a coach to prove my worth. Jowett (2003) said "it is natural to try to outperform success and that causes anxiety in itself" (p. 453). My emotional struggles on court were due to a drop in Sarah's results. I viewed results as the only source of evidence that my coaching was effective. Because of my reliance on results for self-confidence, I believed that I was beginning to fail as a coach. Just like I felt I had failed as a player.

My interactions with Sarah's parents were also affected by my *task perception*. I was aware of the important role parents play in developing children's talent (Cote 1999). Sarah's parents fit the description of parents as followers and supporters of their children and I was aware of their sacrifices to personal and family life to give Sarah optimal training opportunities (Cote, 1999). Being aware of their support for Sarah and the sacrifices I knew

they were making added to the sense of pressure I put on myself to chase tournament wins with Sarah.

Discussing private financial matters with Sarah's dad influenced how important I thought tennis was to Sarah and her parents. Knowing the financial strain that tennis was going to place on Sarah's family created an increased sense of importance to gain visible success. Interdependence theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) states that people will not stay in relationships unless the rewards exceed the costs. I felt increasingly tied into the performance narrative and I felt responsible for delivering the rewards that were associated with the costs of Sarah's tennis participation. The only reward that I saw of any value was winning.

Harwood and Knight (2009a, 2009b) found financial commitments to be one of the major parental stressors in British tennis. As Sarah's Dad was trying to reassure me that he and his wife were happy with me as Sarah's coach I was thinking of my *future perspective* and how I saw my role with Sarah going forward (Kelchtermans 2009a, 2009b). I believed I would have to match their financial commitment with my emotional and physical commitment to coaching Sarah.

Players, coaches, and parents have different expectations for each other within the coach-athlete relationship (Jowett & Carpenter, 2015). Each party has different criteria by which they will judge each other's role (Jowett & Cockerill, 2002). Despite Sarah's Dad's assertion that he was happy with my coaching because "I had a positive effect on her way beyond the tennis court", I could not comprehend that Sarah's dad was happy with my coaching. I was unable to accept he was using a relational narrative to understand my role with Sarah. The relationship was more important than achievement in terms of wins or trophies and sport performance was a by-product of a positive relationship. Sarah's dad

prioritised the connection between my-self and Sarah and I knew no other narrative apart from the performance narrative, where I imagined being judged solely on results in competition. We were experiencing troubles on court (with aggressive play) and in tournaments (with results). I could not adapt my narrative to the coaching role I was fulfilling, and I remained preoccupied with results.

### **Story 2. February 2012 – Understanding my new coaching narrative**

*It was the usual Tuesday. I picked Sarah up from school and brought her to the centre. I had a lesson beforehand with a kid – not particularly great – but I put my all into it to make it fun. I can see Sarah sat down, chatting away without a care in the world. “Where is the warm-up please? You’re on in 20 mins and you’re not looking too ready”. My attention is now not on my current lesson, I’m consumed with frustration because of the lack of discipline. 10 minutes to go, still no movement... “Come off it Sarah, show me something!” Lesson over and I chat to the parent of the child I have just coached. I gave the usual debrief but I was still distracted by the frustration with Sarah. What am I going to say to her? I have a responsibility to make sure she doesn’t skive while she is out of school. I can’t be responsible for her missing school and her not even putting the effort in as a tennis player. What will her parents think of this, am I just a soft touch? Is this just a jolly? You’re being paid to coach this kid Cal. You can’t let this slide, do something about it.*

*Sarah walked onto court, oblivious to my mood. I imagined all her rivals and what I thought their warm-ups would look like in the same situation. Early to practice, energetic, dynamic, organised, disciplined... Perfect. I described the scene to Sarah, over exaggerating what I imagined the perfect warm-up to be and then compared it to what I had just witnessed from her. She clearly felt that these days out of school were no more than an opportunity to skive and revel in her own self-importance. Coming out of school just to sit and chat to*

*whoever! Disgrace. All this effort I've gone to, to get you here for your tennis and that's what you do. Fucking hell! You're gonna know in this moment exactly how fed up I am with that lack of warm-up!*

*I finished my rant and left the court for Sarah to come off court on her own. I hadn't seen her speechless for 5 years. Her eyes were red, and she made no eye contact. As I left the court the anger drained from my body, leaving only shame. Ashamed of myself for reacting in that way. Who was that speaking? Am I really that person? I sat slumped in the clubroom; deflated, conflicted, disappointed, and reflected on the performance I just put on. I went over all the negative stereotypes of performance coaches I had created over the years when I played. I ticked every box.*

### **Reflections on Story 2.**

According to Kelchtermans (2009a, 2009b) the personal *interpretative framework* influences a person's actions and interactions within their social environment. My actions and interactions with Sarah and her parents were interacting with personal issues such as; self-image, self-esteem, job-motivation, task-perception, and future-perspectives. My struggles with narrative alignment in the previous story caused issues with *task-perception* and *future perspectives*. I was struggling with how I understood what I was responsible for (Sarah winning) and how I saw my role with Sarah going forwards (matching Sarah's parent's financial commitment with my emotional and physical commitment). I was becoming increasingly anxious about my coaching and I did not feel able to deliver results as consistently as I wanted.

Story 2 described my narrative wreckage (Frank, 1995). My experiences with Sarah and her parents no longer fit the performance narrative, and my sense of self was threatened, causing narrative wreckage. The performance narrative that infused my coaching beliefs did

not provide a workable template for my coaching life (McLeod, 1997). I felt that I had lost control of the coaching relationship and I was insecure about the perceptions of Sarah's parents.

Potrac and Jones (2009) illustrated that power in the coach-athlete relationship was an issue for coaches. My observations of Sarah chatting in the clubroom while she should have been warming up made me feel like I had lost some control over the coaching relationship. We had many discussions about the importance of warming up and the need to maximise on-court time by being ready to start on time. Sarah's lack of warm up made me question who was in control of the relationship. My understanding was if the coach says warm-up then that's what should happen. Sarah felt differently, and I believed this was a sign of my lack of authority

My previous discussions with Sarah's dad about finances (story 1) increased the importance I attached to positive tournament results and their impact on my coaching relationship with Sarah. Having seen Sarah's lack of discipline towards her tennis, I believed it was necessary to show that I was in control of Sarah's development. My interpretation was that Sarah was coming out of school to skive and this was fuelling anxiety that my authority had reduced. I believed my coaching message had diluted and Sarah saw me as a soft touch. I was fearful of how this was perceived by Sarah's parents, who were paying for me to coach Sarah while she was out of school. My actions towards Sarah in this story stemmed from a need to perform as I imagined a performance coach should perform.

My performance was to compensate for the lack of effort I thought Sarah was showing. I was feeling insecure and ineffective because I was not able to get Sarah to conform to my performance narrative. Her lack of discipline was a sign that Sarah was not conforming to my performance narrative and matching my commitment to her and her

parents. The only thing I felt able to control was that of my own performance and can be interpreted through Goffman's (1955) notion of face work. Goffman (1955) believed people construct and project a certain image of themselves to leave a desired impression in the eyes of others. By displaying a dominant personality and a dominant coaching style I felt I was communicating to Sarah my authority and the commitment I was showing to her tennis journey.

After my altercation with Sarah, I described leaving the court feeling "ashamed, deflated, conflicted, and disappointed" in myself. I believe this reflected narrative wreckage and I questioned the way I had behaved. My questions related to *self-image* and my *self-confidence* as a coach (Kelchtermans 2009a, 2009b). I was pre-occupied with judgements that I imagined about me as a tennis coach. I believed that Sarah and her parents would view me as a dysfluent coach because of poor results, player indiscipline, and now loss of control and negative coaching behaviours. I had behaved like the coach I swore I would never become. As I reflected on my performance while I was sat in the clubroom, I felt inadequate as a tennis coach and my *self-esteem* and *self-confidence* had reached a new low.

Jowett and Cockrell (2002) described negative coaching behaviours as "arrogant, ignorant and ultimately betray the trust that is implicit within the coach-athlete relationship" (p. 17). I knew the damage I had done to the coaching relationship with Sarah. The negative feelings I experienced as I came off court, were the realisation of the damage I had done to Sarah and her tennis. Jowett and Cockrell (2002) state that when negative coaching behaviours occur "the athlete's performance and general well-being are negatively affected" (p. 17).

My emotional struggles with narrative alignment were a constant source of anxiety and pressure (Thelwell et al., 2010). I was aware of the financial pressure this journey was

putting on Sarah and her parents and I felt responsible for delivering results to justify their sacrifice. My personal coaching beliefs were beginning to change, and I understood that focussing on results was counter-productive to effective coaching. However, I felt anxious that I had to make this journey worthwhile for Sarah and her parents. I still believed that I had to achieve positive results with Sarah, and I believe this contributed to my inability to replace the performance narrative with a more suitable narrative for my coaching role. Any behaviour that I thought was going to cause an obstacle to obtaining results (e.g., Sarah not warming up or showing dedication to the cause), caused narrative tension.

I believe my behaviour toward Sarah was the culmination of months of worry about poor results and constant narrative tension between my coaching role and the performance narrative that I was trying to maintain. Poor narrative alignment resulting from a lack of alternative narratives resulted in emotional challenges that proved too much for me to manage. Emotional challenges resulted in narrative wreckage and the breakdown of the coaching relationship with Sarah (Frank, 1995).

### **Story 3. August 2012 – Accepting my new narrative**

*The fallout from that last session has been quite something. I lost the trust and respect of her parents and Sarah is currently working with another coach. It feels awkward being on court next to her when I'm no longer her coach. Every time I see her it's a reminder of what an idiot I was in that moment and how self-absorbed I had become. Who were my actions really helping? I'm embarrassed.*

*I still see Sarah, but she clearly feels awkward as we just politely wave nowadays. To be honest I'm surprised she can stand the sight of me after all these months and especially after our last session. I saw her today and she was off to a competition. In between my own sessions I felt the need to clear the air with her before she left for nationals. Chats with her*

*dad resolved any tension her parents may have felt towards me, but I haven't squared it yet with my own conscience.*

*I call her over. As she walks over, I feel sick. Sick at the thought of having to apologise to a teenager for my actions as a supposed mature adult. This feels really humiliating, but I must, I was out of order. No excuses, no explanations, just swallow your pride and apologise.*

*I hold nothing back. I'm not so sure any of this is in any coaching manual, "how to apologise to your former players", but it's all I know, admit your mistakes, and treat everyone like you would want to be treated. Sarah is giving me eye contact and does not appear to be gloating – which I'd imagined before embarking on this apology. Once I got most of the painful admissions out of the way which merely alluded to my own insecurities as a coach, Sarah's facial expressions began to relax, and she looked more like the person I used to coach. The one with an air of mischief around her. "It's all fine Cal. Now can you have a word with my dad and get me back on court with you again coz he's doing my head in. He's gone into overdrive now and I can't handle it anymore. Have a word with him please".*

### **Reflections on Story 3.**

The end of my coaching relationship with Sarah triggered a period of self-reflection. Apart from the embarrassment and disappointment with my coaching behaviour, I also felt a sense of loss about not being Sarah's coach anymore. The sense of loss was confusing because the end of the coaching relationship should have reduced the pressure I felt to chase results. Why did I feel like this? Questions remained about what the relationship meant to me and what I got out of it.

The coach-athlete relationship is a situation where coaches' and athletes' emotions, thoughts, and behaviours are mutually and causally inter-connected (Jowett, & Ntoumanis,

2004). Therefore, coach-athlete relationships are bi-directional (Kelley, et al., 1983). The bi-directional nature of the relationship suggests that the athlete learns from the coach, and the coach has something to gain from the athlete (Rhind & Jowett, 2012).

As I reflected on my relationship with Sarah, I began to realise what I got from the relationship. I believe the sense of loss I was feeling was because, I was coaching Sarah, but she was coaching me. I had lost my coach. As a player, I was mentally weak. Coaches told me how talented I was as a player. However, I was not able to play my best tennis when it mattered. Sarah on the other hand was extremely mentally tough. She was a battler, a fighter, a brawler. She loved to fight in matches and was prepared to run herself into the ground to get the win. Sarah provided me with an insight into the other side of playing. The tough, gritty player that I would always lose to when I played. When I became a coach, I believed that Sarah's personality type was needed to achieve success. Coaching Sarah gave me an opportunity to work with a mentally tough player. Furthermore, I believed I could learn how to be a tougher person from watching Sarah.

Callary, Werthner, and Trudel (2012) found that coaches learned from their athletes over the course of their relationship. There are many influences on coaches and their behaviours. Coaches see and interpret new situations in relation to their formative experiences, continuously influencing their perspectives, beliefs, and behaviours (Stodter & Cushion, 2017). Jarvis (2006) believes human beings are always in the process of becoming a more experienced person because people learn from new experiences and continuously change (Jarvis 2006). I had enjoyed the experience of working with Sarah because she gave me insight into a different personality type, and I hoped to be able to learn to adapt my shy personality that I believed had held me back as a youngster.

The breakdown of my coaching relationship and associated emotional challenges forced me to reflect on my coaching beliefs. Removing the pressure of being stuck on a self-imposed competition treadmill gave me refuge from the anxieties of performance coaching. Douglas and Carless (2009) described a “place of refuge where performance values were no longer paramount” as *asylum* (p. 226). Asylum allows individuals to “re-author themselves according to alternative stories” (p. 226). Understanding that coaching was not a one-way process enabled me to consider relational narratives as part of my coaching.

Sarah’s warmth towards me after my apology highlighted that results were not the sole criteria by which Sarah judged my coaching. Results were naturally part of my coaching role but chasing results had become a preoccupation, and I lost focus on the needs of Sarah. I had lost focus on maintaining Sarah’s enjoyment of tennis, on her emotional needs as a child experiencing insecurities just as I had as a junior (and still as an adult), and on her development as a human being who simply wanted to feel cared for (Deci & Ryan, 2000). A relational narrative became apparent that could replace my performance narrative.

According to Douglas and Carless (2006), the relational narrative focuses “on care and connectedness over and above competition” (p. 24). Relational narratives show it is possible to have worth without success (Carless & Douglas, 2009). Furthermore, inherent within relational narratives is the notion of “offering the self to others’ needs” (Josselson, 1996, p. 8). I began to accept that there were different ways to assess the quality of a coaching relationship, even within the performance context. Sarah’s reaction to my apology gave me an insight into how she judged me as a coach and the relationship was more important to her more than results. The performance narrative was replaced with a relational narrative for my future coaching role.

Armour (2011) believes that coaches involved in youth sport must use sport effectively to meet the needs of athletes, “rather than simply assuming that pushing them through sports experiences will in some magical way, result in positive outcomes for all of them” (p. 20). I believe that I had been guilty of assuming performance tennis was the vehicle through which Sarah would learn valuable life lessons. I had stopped paying enough attention to the importance of the relationship in the context of Sarah growing up because I had become preoccupied with my own professional standing. Insecurities about my effectiveness resulted in my behaviours becoming overly negative due to not knowing how to overcome the difficult period of results that we were experiencing. Living the performance narrative through my coaching role had caused me stress and resulted in my coaching behaviours becoming overly negative. I believed elite performance required single-minded dedication to sport. Sarah’s lack of warm up showed my inability to get Sarah to conform to my values as a coach. Kelchtermans (2009a, 2009b) states that when a coach’s views and beliefs are challenged, they might feel they are being called into question as people. These situations can have strong emotional consequences for coaches. The relationship breakdown caused me further stress and I questioned whether I should have remained as a tennis coach.

In coaching, personal glory is secondary to the needs of the athlete and “youngsters need good role models more than they need criticism” (Wooden & Jamison, 1997, p. 5). My apology to Sarah and the following conversation highlighted that I needed to adjust my coaching narrative to help sustain myself emotionally as a coach. I could not judge my effectiveness as a coach purely based on results. There were different criteria to assess my coaching and the relationship narrative gave an alternative outlook for my coaching role.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of study 1 was to give a first-person account of my coaching relationship with an elite junior tennis player. Analysis of my story specifically aimed to achieve the following: (a) understand my experiences in greater depth, (b) highlight my own biases before starting studies 2, 3, and 4, and (c) invite the reader to apply the ideas to their own experiences from the natural and in-depth depictions of my coaching stories (Smith 2018). The findings have achieved the study aims. My autoethnography revealed how the performance narrative influenced my coaching and contributed to the eventual breakdown of a coaching relationship. Analysis of my self-narratives highlighted that I had a negative opinion of performance coaches, one that I had created from my junior playing days. Documenting my emotional struggles in coaching can stimulate debate and reflection amongst readers about other sources of anxiety for coaches.

The findings of this study contribute to our knowledge of coaching in several ways. First, this study can improve our understanding of what coaching an elite junior tennis player is like. By highlighting emotional challenges that tennis coaches may experience, this study contributes to an evolving, problematic epistemology of sports coaching that extends beyond rationalistic and heroic accounts of coaching practice (Potrac et al., 2012). Research has described coaching as an emotionally challenging and stressful endeavour (Purdy et al., 2013; Thelwell et al., 2017; Kelly et al., 2018). Research has yet to investigate the lived experiences of tennis coaches fully. This study provided specific data about emotional challenges within elite junior tennis coaching, and broadened literature relating to performance coaching culture.

Second, my story acts as an example of insecurities a young tennis coach may feel when trying to develop a socially recognised identity as an effective coach. The need for coaches to keep a positive regard for their coaching occupies young coaches' thoughts and actions daily (Kelchtermans 2009a, 2009b). People who are new to coaching have a

preconceived idea of their role (Peet et al., 2013). My story showed that I had a preconceived idea about my coaching role, and I had to ensure positive results for Sarah. I believed that positive results would prove to other tennis stakeholders that I was effective. The data in this study showed that my preoccupation with results contributed to stress in my role and the subsequent stress that I felt had an impact on my behaviour. My story contributes to emerging research that is investigating coach stress and its impact on coach-athlete relationships (Thelwell et al., 2017).

Third, analysis of my stories has highlighted the presence of the performance narrative in tennis coaching. Athletic performance is a priority in elite junior tennis and the performance narrative gave me a social script for my coaching behaviours (Douglas, 2009). My story strengthens arguments that young coaches use positive results as evidence that they are effective (Cassidy et al., 2016) and highlights that poor results can negatively affect coaches' self-esteem and create stress (Thelwell et al., 2010). This study shows how the performance narrative permeates elite junior tennis coaching, shows the effects it can have on tennis coaches, and shows how coaches can change.

My autoethnography was the starting point for an examination of the experiences of tennis coaches of elite junior tennis players and a comprehensive description of what tennis coaching is like. Sharing the emotional challenges that I experienced with Sarah can help other tennis coaches by showing the potential anxieties that coaches may face. There are potential *shared world meanings* from my experiences that may reassure new or existing coaches about their own coaching experiences (Williams, 2000).

### **Limitations**

The most frequent critique of autoethnography is that it is self-indulgent. Autoethnography is primarily about the single author and some social scientists argue that

research must be social and analytical. The aim of this study was not to present an idealised version of my coaching story. The aim was to give a realistic insight into my experiences and provide a *warts and all* depiction of what it was like for me to coach Sarah during the time described. I used “vulnerable writing” (Geraity 2014, p. 212) to communicate my fears and insecurities as a coach and I used theoretical analysis of each story to position my experience within existing coaching knowledge.

Due to autoethnography being about the self and one's position within a culture, there may be people that question the usefulness of the data included in study 1 because they believe it too personal or specific to further our wider understanding of coaching. I would argue for further autoethnographies into tennis coaching because of their ability to access data that isn't easily available through interviewing other coaches. Smith and McGannon (2018) argue that idiographic, qualitative research can make significant contributions to knowledge through generalisations that are not statistical but are naturalistic generalisations. “Naturalistic generalisations invite readers to apply ideas to their own experience, from the natural and in-depth depictions” that are related to the personal contexts of other people within the same phenomenon (Melrose, 2012, p. 1). I hope that readers of this study can find some *shared world meanings* and encourage professional self-reflection (Williams, 2000).

### **Implications and Future Research**

Future research should continue to explore the reality of elite junior tennis coaching and provide more rich data for the education of future coaches. An avenue for future research is to search for different narratives in elite junior tennis coaching. Other narratives seen in coaching include relational, personal, hero, restitution, and discovery narratives (Douglas and Carless, 2008, 2009, 2012). It would be beneficial for tennis coach education to identify different narratives in tennis coaching. Specifically, how common different

narrative types are, and what effect they have on coach-athlete relationships. Understanding the narratives that influence tennis coach behaviours will generate further insight into the reality of being a tennis coach. I hope that my story will generate self-reflections and increase the use of self-narrative analysis to understand the tennis coach within coaching culture.

The current findings also have implications for researching tennis coaching more holistically. Exploring how player, coach, and parent behaviours affect each other would provide useful insight into the dynamics of coaching interactions. For example, what effect does negative coach-parent interaction have on the player's perception of their coach? Discussions are ongoing with Sarah's father for three stories relating to his perspective on my experiences with Sarah. My interpretations of the stories in this study may differ from another persons' interpretation. I believe multi-dimensional analyses from players, coaches and parents of the same story could further our understanding of direct perspectives and meta perspectives on coaching behaviours (Jowett, 2009).

Further autoethnographies and IPA studies into tennis coaching will provide more resonating experiences that may encourage self-reflection amongst tennis coaches. Contextualising coaching experiences and providing theoretical insight may help raise self-awareness of similar struggles when coaching elite junior tennis players. Increasing self-awareness amongst tennis coaches can help in developing shared world meanings for what it is like to be a tennis coach in the elite junior context. Increased awareness of other coaches' experiences can reassure existing coaches that their struggles with coaching are not unique to them. In doing so, the current findings may help tennis coaches feel more comfortable in their coaching role and help them to keep a positive attitude towards their coaching.

The findings of this study have helped me to consider my own coaching experiences in relation to existing coaching literature. Increased understanding of my experiences has

helped my PhD in two ways. Firstly, theoretical reading to analyse my story helped me to form questions to include in interviews with coaches in studies 2, 3, and 4. I have been able to consider a broad range of theoretical topics and how best to access the participants' experiences in the following studies. For example, reading around direct and meta perspectives (Jowett, 2009) meant I asked participants in study 2 and 3 whether they were affected by the body language of watching parents. Secondly, analysis of my story has highlighted existing bias I held before starting the interview process and was a valuable process for bracketing my natural attitude (Giorgi, 2011).

### **Summary**

My story showed how the performance narrative influenced my early coaching career. My attempt to create a positive reputation as an effective coach caused issues with professional self-understanding and relationships with athletes. My story revealed I was unable to replace the performance narrative that informed my tennis coaching role, and this was influential in my preoccupation with producing positive tournament results. Interactions with Sarah and her parents contradicted the performance narrative but my rigid adherence to the performance narrative resulted in negative coaching behaviours that contributed to the breakdown of the coaching relationship. My story also shows how reflecting on my coaching helped me to change my behaviours and develop a relational narrative in the elite junior coaching context. I hope the in-depth depictions of my coaching stories in this study provide a catalyst for more autoethnographies into tennis coaching, which can lead to more realistic depictions of coaching practice.

The next chapter will continue my investigation into the social conditions that tennis coaches work in. Study 2 is an IPA into the experiences of eight novice tennis coaches of elite junior tennis players. The findings of study 2 will help to describe what coaching elite juniors is like for novice tennis coaches.

## Chapter Five

### Study Two

Chapter four illustrated the performance narrative influencing my understanding of coaching. The end of my coaching relationship with Sarah encouraged me to reflect on my attitude and behaviours towards coaching and highlighted that I needed to develop a new narrative for my role. At the beginning of my coaching career, I had a preconceived idea that coaching elite juniors was solely about helping players win. Analysis of my experiences with Sarah showed that I lost focus on the coach-athlete relationship and became too focussed on results. The next step of my PhD was to speak with other practitioners new to the elite junior tennis coaching environment and understand their experiences of practice. The purpose of this study was to examine novice tennis coaches' understanding of their world gained through direct, first-hand involvement and everyday experiences of coaching elite junior tennis players.

Peet et al., (2013) believes that novice coaches start their careers with an assumption that coaching is a transfer of knowledge process which results in positive outcomes for their athletes. There are researchers who claim there hasn't been enough consideration given to what it is like to be a coach and adequately inform new coaches of what coaching is like (Norman 2010, 2012; Potrac et al., 2014). Failure to draw on the wealth of experience that existing coaches have limits effective preparation of novice practitioners for their initiation into coaching (Cushion, Jones, & Armour, 2003).

Coach education has historically focussed heavily on aspects of practice that are "easier to quantify, measure, and mandate" (Mockler, 2011, p. 525). However, researchers increasingly acknowledge that coaching relies on interpersonal relationships and academics have sought a change in research approach (Potrac, 2014). Increasingly, the social conditions

and “the dynamic, social, interpersonal, and situational nature of coaching” are receiving more attention in literature (Cushion et al., 2006, p. 96).

According to Kelchtermans' (2009a, 2009b) there is a *personal interpretative framework* that individuals use to make sense of a social environment (e.g. work-place, practice setting, tournament setting) and the actions within it. The personal interpretative framework is a set of cognitions that guide an individual's actions and interactions with people or events and influence their professional self-understanding (Kelchtermans, 2009a, 2009b). There are five components to professional self-understanding; self-image, self-esteem, job motivation, task perception, and future perspective. Novice coaches who start coaching with preconceived cognitions about their coaching environment and the people they meet can experience difficulties with professional self-understanding (Peel et al., 2013). Novice coaches are uncertain of their role due to a mismatch in what they expect coaching to be like, and the reality of what coaching is like. *Actual* coaching interactions may contradict *expected* interactions and result in novice coaches *living in contradiction* (Peel et al., 2013). Continued periods of uncertainty about coaching experiences create personal conflicts for novice coaches (Peel et al., 2013). Professional self-understanding and self-evaluations of effectiveness are affected as novice coaches discover the realities of coaching.

Several studies have alluded to the notion that coaches put themselves under considerable pressure to gain positive feedback from relevant others within their sport, such as parents, athletes, governing bodies, and other coaches (Jones et al., 2005; Potrac et al., 2002; Potrac, 2014). Tennis coaches are typically self-employed which makes it important to create a good reputation to earn a living (Cassidy et al., 2016, p. 79). Failure to create a positive reputation amongst significant others can cause coaches to feel “threatened, vulnerable and uncertain” of their competence (Cassidy et al., 2016, p. 79). Research into what it is like for novice tennis coaches to coach elite junior tennis players will capture data

to reflect novice coaches' experiences. Furthermore, these data can prepare future coaches for their coaching roles.

Research has made progress in understanding the complexity of coaching (Cushion, 2006, 2007). However, the messy, uncertain, and emotionally challenging experiences of coaching still leave novice coaches feeling unsure about their role. It would be beneficial for tennis coach education to understand the experiences of novice tennis coaches of elite junior tennis players to improve the holistic training of new practitioners. Capturing how novice tennis coaches make sense of their environment will give data to enable better informed decision-making for future coaches.

The purpose of this study was to examine novice tennis coaches' understanding of their world gained through direct, first-hand involvement and everyday experiences of coaching elite junior tennis players. Insights of novice tennis coaches will give context specific data about what it is like for novice coaches working with elite junior tennis players. The data from this study can educate future coaches wanting to work with elite junior tennis players.

## **Method**

### **Research design, procedure for maintaining a phenomenological attitude, data analysis, and credibility**

The procedures used for research design, procedure for maintaining a phenomenological attitude, data analysis, and credibility were detailed on pages 70 – 86 in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

### **Participants**

I received full ethical approval from the LJMU ethics committee for this study. There were 8 novice tennis coaches interviewed during this study and included of 7 males and 1 female. Participants were aged between 23 and 36 years and worked in the following areas; Scotland (1), Northern England (3), Midlands (1), Southern England (2), and Wales (1). Novice coaches had 1 – 4 years coaching experience with elite juniors (Flett et al., 2012). Participants were currently working with elite junior tennis players and held level 4 or 5 coaching qualifications. I selected participants purposively (see methodology, p. 63). Junior tennis players were aged between 11 – 18 years old, corresponding with the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) yellow ball competition system. I defined junior elite as competing at National level competition (Grade 2) and above (Rees et al., 2016). The contact details of participants were available in the public domain and found on the LTA website ([www.lta.org.uk](http://www.lta.org.uk)). All tennis coaches were registered with the LTA and currently active. Tennis coaches were self-employed, and I contacted them directly.

### **Interviews and Interview Guide**

I conducted interviews one-to-one with participants, and they were semi-structured. During interviews participants described their coaching experiences with players, parents, and other coaches. The first question I asked was about why they chose to become a tennis coach. The conversation moved to specific players they worked with, and issues that arose in practice or competition. I invited participants to reflect on how their coaching experiences compared with what they expected coaching to involve. Interviews lasted between one and three hours, and were audio recorded prior to word for word transcription. I emailed coaches a copy of their interview transcripts so they could check names and venues were removed and provide opportunities for further reflection. A copy of the interview structure is shown in appendix B.

## Results

The results show novice coaches describing *contextual coaching constructs* which summarise the environment that elite junior tennis coaching takes place in. Specifically, the results show novice coaches describing (a) interpersonal relationships with various stakeholders (players, parents, and other coaches), (b) player results affect how novice coaches view their effectiveness, (c) coaching was associated with inner and interpersonal conflicts, and (d) elite junior coaching takes place in a competitive environment. Overall, the results show novice coaches describing the context their coaching takes place in and they struggled to cope with the reality of coaching.

*Contextual coaching constructs* are categorised into four superordinate themes. The themes are: connection, competence, conflict, and competition. Each superordinate theme has multiple Subordinate themes, which are summarised in table 1 at the back of this chapter (p. 142).

### **Superordinate theme 1: Connection with stakeholders**

Connection was a theme where novice coaches described relationships they experienced in coaching. Novice coaches described relationships with players, parents, and other coaches. Connection shows the stakeholders whom novice coaches believed were foremost in their day-to-day activities, how novice coaches felt about stakeholders, and how they managed relationships. I divided connection into 3 subordinate themes including; players, parents, and other coaches.

#### **Connection with elite junior players.**

Connection with elite junior players shows how novice coaches described players and the effect this had on the tone of their relationships with players. Novice coaches often discussed tennis players as a collective, rather than speaking specifically about individuals.

Participants described their perceptions of elite junior tennis players and this informed their task perception (Keltchermans, 2009). The interplay between perception of players and task perception informed how novice coaches tried to manage relationships with players.

Novice coaches described positive and negative traits associated with player attitudes and behaviour. For example, Josh described his experience of elite juniors: "High performance players are really driven and all they want is to get better".

Generalising about player attitudes informed Josh's task perception and what he thought was necessary to create a positive relationship with players. Josh understood his role as ensuring players improved, and if players got better, Josh thought he was fulfilling his role. However, when novice coaches described negative player attitudes, they generally expressed frustration with a lack of improvement in the player. Jimmy described players as lacking in work ethic:

They (players) think they are so much better than they actually are. It's not their fault, I guess. It's not because they are bad kids, but once they step on the court, they think they are better than they are, and that tennis owes them something. They think that they should be at all the better tournaments and be playing all over the world, but no-one has that right. You've got to earn that privilege.

Jimmy's response implied he thought players had a sense of entitlement to playing international competition. Jimmy believed player improvement was associated with playing at Tennis Europe or International Tennis Federation (ITF) events. Players not competing at Tennis Europe or ITF were perceived to have poor attitudes, further highlighting the interplay between coaches' perception of players and their task perception. Coaches who perceived players as lacking the correct work ethic were likely to describe intolerant attitudes to player

behaviour and they adopt a disciplinarian approach. Thomas said: "Our kids have it too easy compared to the Eastern European kids. You've got to get the discipline across to them".

Descriptions of negative player attitudes were generally associated with poor results. Winning and losing matches was influential in novice coaches' opinion of players. For example, Peter described a player he worked with after losing first round in ITF competition:

It's just rich kids playing tennis. I've never seen so many kids that don't even carry their own racket bag. I had this one lad, came back having lost first round in some ITF that mum and dad had paid for him to go to, and the parents walk in with their (players) bags. I told him "why can't you carry your own bag?" and that's just some average tennis player.

Novice coaches throughout this study generally described examples of players losing matches followed by descriptions of negative player traits. Negative opinions of player behaviour showed novice coaches were intolerant or impatient to losing. Jimmy described his experiences of coaching girls:

Kids are grumpy on court. Especially girls. When they come off having lost it's always really, negative and they are like, I was rubbish. It's your job to make them snap out of it. Abroad, the players just seem more prepared to listen and are desperate to improve. Here it's so negative. I'm rubbish (player). So, then the coach gets worried about themselves coz results haven't gone their way. Then it all just gets messy and everyone is unhappy.

Losing tennis matches is an inevitable part of any level of tennis participation, not just the elite level. Results carried a lot of importance for the participants and they associated player attitudes with their reactions to losses. Results infused participants responses and the

negative tone to descriptions of players continued to suggest coaches were intolerant of poor results. Thomas stated:

If you look at a Russian girl, or a Latvian girl, or a Serbian girl, they aren't in floods of tears because they lost a match. Whereas when our girls lose one match, they are in floods of tears. They all just seem a bit weak.

Adopting an attitude of winning is good and losing is bad infused many of the coaches' responses. Participants were perhaps describing their preconceived ideas of what they expected their role to be (i.e., responsible for their players winning matches). Winning matches stopped their players from becoming negative and winning allowed novice coaches to feel like they were effective. Feeling responsible for their players winning was fundamental to the novice coaches' understanding of their role. Being able to help their players win matches was a source of motivation for participants. Amy described how results linked to her understanding of effectiveness:

All players love winning, of course they do and if that's what motivates them then fine. It's not the be all and end all for me, but it is great when they win as it shows me, I'm doing something right at least.

Results were a primary focus for novice coaches, and they described players who struggled with results negatively. Viewing players as focussed on winning rather than technical development, personal development, tactical development gave participants a tangible measure of effective coaching. Furthermore, novice coaches' opinions of player attitudes influenced the tone of the relationship between the coach and their player. Novice coaches described players as having poor attitudes when they experienced poor results, and this generally produced intolerant attitudes towards players and descriptions of disciplinarian approaches to their coaching.

**Connection with parents.**

Connection with parents shows novice coaches' attitudes towards the parents of players they taught, and illustrates issues with coach-parent relationships. Participants described negative attitudes towards parents, and this showed a dislike of parent interactions. Furthermore, novice coaches' dislike of parent interaction created an apprehensive attitude amongst novice coaches. Josh described his approach to parent interactions through his career so far:

I've always seen parents as like the enemy. Literally the enemy. I'm trying not to, but I have actively gone out of my way to avoid them and not speak to them. I've always had this sense they were working against me. I've no idea where that came from, probably just listening to other coaches.

Viewing parents as *literally the enemy* suggested a them and us attitude. Fearing parent interactions made Josh resistant to working with parents. Participants described difficulties in accepting that parents wanted to give feedback and Jimmy described his discomfort:

You've got to know who the stress parents are. They might say I want my kid to do this tournament and the coach just goes ok coz if they (coach) go against the parent then they are in all sorts of shit.

It was not clear whether *stress parents* were described as such because they were stressing themselves due to wanting their children to succeed; or whether they were classed as *stress parents* because they placed stress on the coach. Nevertheless, labelling parents as *stress parents* showed a discomfort with parent interactions. Participants were uncomfortable with parent interactions and this could be attributed to their age or limited experience of dealing with such interactions. Josh said "I think I've got a lot to learn about talking to

parents. I feel like they don't listen, so I feel like, why bother?" Novice coaches recognised that parents would remain heavily involved in their coaching and there was room to improve at parent communication.

Jimmy continued to describe that unnecessary stress was not positive for his players; "Usually the stress parent puts stress on the kid and that affects how they play".

Acknowledging the detrimental effect that stress can have on a player's performance added to the negativity with which Jimmy viewed parents. Coaches agreed that parents who put pressure on their children impeded their ability to be effective with players. This seemed related to the intolerant attitudes towards parents.

Participants described suspicious attitudes towards parents and their behaviours. Participants were concerned by the conversations that parents had with other parents at training or competition. Elite juniors of similar ages attend the same tournaments throughout the year. Player relationships and inter-parent relationships become more close-knit due to seeing the same people at tournaments. Regular inter-parent contact caused concern for novice coaches. Amy discussed her view on parents interacting with each other:

You know there is a massive culture of gossip with all these parents. They have so much downtime, sitting watching their kids at tournaments... They will all be sitting there hatching their plans and ideas.

A natural consequence of seeing the same parents at tournaments is parent-networks. Often, parents will discuss training, coaching, competition, and many other non-tennis related issues with familiar parents at competition. Novice coaches were suspicious about the nature of parent's conversations with other parents. The suspicious attitude described by novice coaches' produced feelings of uncertainty and insecurity about what was being discussed, and

whether it would affect coaching relationships with players. Josh described similar suspicions:

You just never know what they (parents) are thinking when results don't go your way. One minute you think you're doing a good job. The next minute they've (parents) found a better coach and they bin you off. All coz they (parent) chatted to someone (another parent) at the last tournament and they reckon they've found this amazing coach. It's mad.

There was general agreement amongst the novice coaches that they were uncertain of parent's intentions and this made them less likely to interact with parents. It is possible that communicating less with parents increased the level of suspicion coaches had towards parents, due to minimal coach-parent contact. Amy described a recent strategy she used to avoid parent interaction: "I could see 3 parents when I'd finished the session. It was a long day and I couldn't be bothered with the hassle, so I pretended to be on my phone till they left". Negative perceptions of parents were influential in how novice coaches behaved around parents.

When participants described positive attitudes towards parents there was a one-sided tone to how they described the relationship. Thomas described his relationship with parents of a player he coached:

Their parents are great. They listen to everything I say. You should have the parents' support obviously, but they have to do it under my way of saying things should be done... At the end of the day we (coaches) know what needs doing. They're (parents) paying us for our expertise, so they should leave us to it.

Thomas recognised that he required parental support to be an effective coach. However, there was little recognition that parents had useful input. Novice coaches

consistently described suspicious and untrusting attitudes towards parents, and this influenced the nature of their relationships with parents. Novice coaches either avoided interactions with parents or tried to keep parent feedback out of the coach-parent relationship.

### **Connection with other coaches.**

Connection with other coaches shows how novice coaches perceive other coaches in elite junior coaching and these perceptions informed their behaviour towards other coaches. Participants described being competitive with each other and this seemed to be associated with mistrust of other coaches. The elite junior coaching environment was challenging to novice coaches and they described a culture where one's individual standing was important. Cultural capital was a strong influence on the observations of novice coaches. Amy described other coaches as keen to impress tennis stakeholders: "I think you get a lot of young men who maybe feel that it is important for them to prove themselves and show everyone what they know".

There was general agreement amongst the participants that other coaches were keen to impress each other. Amy described coaching performances to show expertise. Conversely, desire to show one's effectiveness to others created a fear of failure amongst novice coaches. Jimmy did not want to approach other coaches for advice because he was fearful of how it made him look:

I'd love to say right let's go down the road to this place and get some help from that coach. But then the coach thinks, well what if he does a good job? How does that make me look? He had the answer and I didn't. He's gonna want my player then.

Viewing other coaches as competition reduced the participants' willingness to interact with each other because they were untrusting of them and feared losing players to them.

Josh, however, described coaches that he worked at his tennis centre with, in a positive way and he was happy to interact with them:

We are actually all good friends, a close-knit team. I think that filters out into the centre and into the kids. There is a togetherness and a gratitude to what we are trying to do.

However, Josh thought that coaches from other tennis centres weren't prepared to work together: "I think our culture is unique though. From what I have heard in other centres you have got 9 or 10 coaches fighting over business... kudos and centres are don't work together". Fear of the unknown influenced participants responses, and they described negative opinions of other coaches. Reputational gain and financial gain were contributing factors in coaches viewing each other as competition and not willing to work together. Participants generally described suspicious attitudes towards coaches from other tennis centres and this influenced untrusting attitudes of other coaches.

Rivalry between coaches was a theme participants continued to describe throughout this study and Thomas summed up his attitude to other coaches: "No matter what you are doing, you are competing against other coaches with the players you teach".

Novice coaches agreed that it was important to compare favourably with other coaches. Participants regularly described other coaches as competition and this seemed to reduce participants' willingness to work with other coaches, seek help from other coaches, or share problem solving information. Other coaches were generally viewed with suspicion, because they had the potential to effect novice coaches' income (through taking paid hours from them) and threaten their self-esteem (through fear of comparing unfavourably on knowledge).

### **Superordinate Theme 2: Competence**

Competence was a theme where novice coaches described their effectiveness. Having identified their primary stakeholders (players, parents, and other coaches), participants described issues which helped them feel effective as coaches. I divided competence into 3 subordinate themes including; players are social capital, my reputation matters, and task perception

### **Players are social capital.**

Players are social capital shows novice coaches describing that the achievements of their players were a source feeling effective for them. There was general agreement that being associated with players of elite level reflected positively on the coach. Ben described that other coaches were keen to receive recognition for working with elite players:

You know there's the whole, oh I coached him when you know you've heard it all before. You didn't really coach him did you. He was like 7 and it was on a squad and now he's world ranked, all of a sudden you coached him. I hate all that. Who have you really coached? Not just some kid that you were on court with once.

Participants agreed that there was a positive correlation between coaches feeling of self-efficacy and receiving recognition for working with elite juniors. Being associated with well-known players or having a substantial number of national players was important to novice coaches. Peter described how losing a player of elite level had a negative effect on coaches' sense of competence: "The biggest thing in the coaching world is ego. Everyone has a massive ego. If a player moves to someone else (another coach), it's like the end of the world and the coach is really insulted".

Players change coaches regularly in elite junior tennis. Change of coaches may occur due to many circumstances; moving-house, financial constraints, schooling preferences, etc.

Peter described coaches were offended or perhaps hurt when players changed coaches. Josh gave further insight into the effect losing players had on coaches: "It's not nice when you lose a player to another coach. You do kind of feel like the other coach is better than you".

Participants were aware of where players trained and when players had changed coach. This might be because coaches fear how it looks in the wider tennis community. Losing players could mean a loss of credibility for less assured coaches at the start of their careers and they are concerned with the perception of tennis stakeholders. Ben described coaches wanting to work with as many national players as possible, which seemed to reflect that players were good for coaches' social standing:

There is such a strange culture of one-up-man-ship in this country between parents and between coaches. Everyone is trying to get more players to their centre, irrespective of what's right for the kid. Parents just want their kids playing with better kid's, so they move for no other reason than that. Coaches just want to say they have 6, 7, 8, national level kids. It just isn't healthy for the kids.

Coaches prioritise being viewed as good coaches by others (Cassidy et al., 2016) so it was understandable that there was emphasis on where and whom players trained with.

Working with elite junior tennis players provided participants a sense of competence because it reflected positively on coaches in the coaching community. Amy described that being effective with a player had resulted in interest from parents about coaching: "I had a dad come to me the other day basically saying, the work I did with xxx, he wanted me to replicate with his daughter. That is a nice tick in the box for me". Amy showed that her players were a source of positive reinforcement for her coaching and she received requests for business on the back of her players' performance, further highlighting that players were social capital. Novice coaches were sensitive to how their coaching was perceived by tennis stakeholders.

Being associated with players of elite level was positively associated with participants' sense of competence.

**My reputation matters.**

My reputation matters showed novice coaches discussing the importance of managing the opinions and beliefs of tennis stakeholders (players, parents, and other coaches). A positive reputation gave participants a sense of belonging to the coaching community and novice coaches believed results helped create a positive reputation. Josh described how he believed his positive reputation had earned him a sense of belonging:

As sad as it sounds, the results of my players and my track record so far have given me that kind of reputation. Which then kind of allows me to not care about those things (results)... If that makes sense. You know I can hold my head up and shake the hand of the LTA guys and talk to them on trips.

Josh described results and reputation being closely linked. Having a positive reputation was important to the participants. Participants' reputations served to protect self-confidence and a source of self-esteem. Novice coaches who thought tennis stakeholders had positive opinions about their coaching were comforted by their perceived positive reputation.

Coaching ability or results were not the only source of positive reputation for novice coaches. Amy believed that her playing ability contributed to her having a good reputation as a coach and this was helpful during conversations with parents:

I feel I have a lot to fall back on with parents. You know because they know where I have played and where I have been and what I have experienced personally. You know there is a respect there already. So, I feel that gives me strength in those situations to argue my corner when needed.

Amy described her reputation as being attributable to her high-level playing background. Reputation as a player served to boost participants' self-confidence. Although considered unrelated to coaches' ability to coach effectively, participants consistently described playing ability informing their perception of other coaches'. Peter described how he viewed other coaches:

If someone says to me that they are a tennis coach, I always think well how good were they as a player? Can they play? Coz if they can't you assume; they won't be a good coach. You shouldn't do that, jump to that conclusion, but you do. Straight away.

Participants often referred to playing ability when describing other coaches. It appeared common for novice coaches from elite junior or elite playing backgrounds to use playing ability as a reflection of coaching ability. Former playing coaches, with less experience seemed to have limited criteria by which to judge other coaches and reverted to judging them on playing ability. Perhaps the elite junior context heightened the sense of needing to set a good example through expert shot production rather than expert teaching or communication. Playing ability was positively associated with how participant perceived their reputation amongst tennis stakeholders. Perceptions of a positive reputation amongst other coaches, and parents made novice coaches feel more competent.

Participants who had not played at elite junior level held different opinions about coaches who came from elite playing backgrounds. Thomas had not previously played at junior elite level and described a negative opinion of some coaches:

I honestly don't like a lot of coaches. There are a lot of them that just do it for the money. It's an easy way for them to make money coz people look at how they play, and they get lessons. The coaches that have been good players can be a bit full of themselves.

Going from a former elite junior playing background into a coaching career was common amongst the participant coaches. Thomas described an unfavourable opinion of coaches that had formerly played at elite level because he believed they placed too much importance on their playing ability. Former playing coaches and non-playing coaches perceived each other differently and this affected the reputation they attached to other coaches. Having a positive reputation made novice coaches feel secure in coaching. However, coaches who attached a negative reputation to other coaches (through low perception of playing ability) were unlikely to work amicably with coaches who had not played at a high level. Playing ability appeared to be a way for some coaches to market themselves as elite coaches and this didn't appear to help inter-coach relationships due to a perception of over reliance on playing ability.

### **Task-perception.**

Task-perception shows how novice coaches describe their coaching role and what they believe they are responsible for. There was inconsistency amongst participants' responses when they discussed what coaching involved. Conversations often began with an ideological definition of good coaching, for example, Ben described his role: "I think if you're able to adapt to different situations and personalities then you're well on your way to be a good coach".

Participants generally agreed that the ability to adapt was an important part of their role because coaching involved developing relationships with many different personality types. Novice coaches acknowledged that to be effective they needed to work differently with each player they coached. However, conversations with novice coaches consistently moved away from behavioural aspects of coaching. The ability to adapt became less

prominent in interviews and results dominated participant descriptions of coaching. Ben began to describe the expected output of his role:

But I think in any career you want to be noticed. You want to improve and get to the next stages. I would say I've kind of got embroiled in that culture of producing kids and winning to make a name for myself. I don't deny that.

Ben described producing kids and winning as the key to furthering his career as a coach. Use of words such as *produce* and *make* suggested that Ben's task-perception was coaching is a practical role rather than an intellectual role. The fruits of his labour seemingly only became apparent when he had produced or made something tangible. Ben described that coaching could only be perceived as successful when he had produced results rather than adapting to different personalities, as he described earlier. Results continuously provided the justification that coaching was effective. A similar pattern emerged across responses and Josh began by describing his task-perception as defined by developing long-term relationships:

I feel like I've established good relationships coz I don't feel the need to take on any new players. My current players are pretty settled with me, so they must be happy. I quite like the fact that I'm busy with a few, good players. No one new.

Establishing good relationships highlighted a relational nature to Josh's coaching and he had adapted his coaching to maintain good relationships with more than one player. Josh described relationship duration as a sign of good coaching. Earlier work by Jowett (2007) found that players, parents, and coaches often perceive coaching relationships differently and want different things from a relationship. Later in the conversation, Josh alluded to results reinforcing that he was doing a good job, and implied a different task-perception:

I mean I like hearing that my kids have done well. In my head I can hear myself saying that I am not interested in results, but it is still nice to hear that they have won. It's really, nice coz it reinforces what you think you are doing well.

Josh understood his task-perception as having to produce results for players and it was results that provided the reinforcement that he was doing a good job for his players. There was evidence here of Josh experiencing narrative tension as he seemed to be trying to balance a need for results with the need to develop relationships. Josh valued the relationships that he had created with his players, but he did not feel that long-term relationships alone were enough to perceive himself and being effective.

Task-perception showed the interplay between the ideology of coaching (adapting and creating positive relationships) and the reality of coaches wanting to be successful (winning). Novice coaches generally agreed, that the coaching role relied on creating positive relationships, but in the end, results were the defining characteristic of positive relationships.

### **Superordinate Theme 3: Conflict**

Conflict was a theme where novice coaches described a mismatch between ideological perceptions of coaching and the practical realities of coaching, which caused problems with job motivation. Conflict also includes novice coaches' descriptions of difficulties managing relationships with players, and parents. I divided conflict into 2 subordinate themes including inner-conflict, and interpersonal conflict.

#### **Inner-conflict.**

Inner-conflict shows novice coaches describing struggles with their task perception (see superordinate theme 2). Novice coaches struggled when they did not coach elite juniors. The participants described coaching elite junior players as being less profitable than coaching social players. Social players view tennis primarily as a social activity and focus on the

health and social benefits of tennis participation. Social players play relatively few hours per week compared to elite players and are at an earlier developmental stage of their tennis. Players at the elite level practice many hours per week and coaches are unable to charge more profitable hourly rates because players train between 10 and 20 hours per week. The volume of hours elite juniors train makes it unsustainable for parents to endure the cost of their child's tennis participation if lessons were charged at full cost. Coaches must balance reduced coaching rates with elite juniors by supplementing their income with coaching social players at a higher price. Conflict between what the coach wanted to be doing (coaching elite juniors) and what they were doing (coaching social players) resulted in novice coaches questioning their role and whether they wanted to continue coaching. Jimmy described his frustrations with not coaching elite juniors:

It's more like a social club or a babysitting service. Other coaches I speak to say that they have gone through those hours, you just have to put up with it. I don't think you should have to put up with it. Why should you have to coach the crap kids that don't want to play tennis? I have got to the stage now where it's kind of like do I just bag it (quit)?

There was agreement amongst coaches that not being able to coach players of the desired standard was a source of frustration because it contradicted their professional self-understanding of being a coach of elite juniors. Participants' frustrations led to them questioning whether they wanted to carry on coaching. Peter described similar frustrations to Jimmy: "a lot of my hours at the moment I would rather not do. I would rather not coach the snotty kids (development players) who are really rude". The dual coaching role provided inner-conflict for Jimmy and he described negative attitudes towards the social playing children that were on his sessions. Novice coaches were regularly frustrated by working with social players because of their desire to work with elite juniors. Participants described

idealised versions of what their coaching role should include and when there was a mismatch with what they expected and what they experienced; coaches felt demotivated. Peter continued to describe the effect that his frustrations had on him:

Do I just stick with it (coaching) and come home moaning every night? Or do I leave (coaching), go into another job and then think bloody-hell I should have stayed coaching. I just don't know, it's an odd one.

Peter perceived himself as a performance coach and believed he should be coaching elite juniors more frequently. Being on court and delivering lessons (with development players) was insufficient to maintain his motivation to coach.

Participants generally agreed that there were financial sacrifices made by coaches to work with elite juniors. Participants described rewards they received from coaching other than financial rewards that sustained their motivation to coach. Thomas described altruistic rewards from coaching that justified lower earnings: "I really like it when you have made this little kid become a person. It makes me feel really, really, good. That feeling outweighs the money you get. That's not much anyway ha". Developing children mentally and emotionally and seeing them grow into more mature young adults provided satisfactory reward for some of the coaches. However, it was not clear from Thomas whether seeking altruistic rewards from coaching were the intended reason for going into coaching or whether it became a justification for doing the job, as he discovered elite junior coaching was less profitable than coaching development players.

The evidence suggested that coaches started their careers aware of a financial dilemma with elite junior coaching, but as the reality of their role became more apparent to them, they began to question whether they could sustain their performance coaching role. Peter was starting to learn more about his coaching reality and the financial implications: "I

always said it was not about the money, but at the end of the day it is". There was an awkwardness when participants discussed coaches being involved in coaching for the money. Perhaps novice coaches were uncomfortable earning money from relationships with people that placed trust in them.

There were congruous descriptions from participants illustrating discomfort with discussing development coaching and financial reward. Participants were frustrated with spending most of their week working and earning in the development context and it continued to have a demotivating effect for participants. Ben had similar reservations to Jimmy and Peter regarding his future perspective in tennis coaching: "I would rather not have the money. Recently I have been saying that I just don't want to coach... I don't think I can coach anymore...". The idea of people making money from elite junior sport, simply to pay their bills is widely accepted (Smoll, Cumming, & Smith, 2011), but participants experienced inner-conflict with motivation to remain as a coach when they worked outside their preferred elite coaching context.

### **Interpersonal conflict.**

Interpersonal conflict shows novice coaches' describing conflicts between themselves, players, and their parents. Superordinate theme 1 (connection) showed that novice coaches identified players and their parents as important stakeholders, but they held negative opinions about them. Interpersonal conflict shows that managing coaching relationships was not always a smooth process.

Participants described examples of players coming to practice without the necessary motivation to work hard. Work ethic was a source of interpersonal conflict between coaches and players. When describing a bad lesson with a player, Josh said:

It was a bad day, so I had to come down on him. Let him know he was not performing. I felt you know what, is this my fault? Is it something I have done wrong here? I can confidently say that it was not, because I was on top form. Their mum could see that I was trying to gee him up and that's really, important, to be involved with the parents. She (the mum) was completely on my side, so we just stopped. He was not happy with me.

There was general agreement amongst the novice coaches that player work ethic and motivation was a source of conflict between coach and player. Peter described his experience of low player work ethic: "I hate it when the kid turns up and can't be arsed. I just say (to the player) don't waste my time". As Peter continued, he described how he was concerned about the parent's perception of the session: "I won't carry on with the session if it's like that. The parents are watching, thinking that's crap". Peter imagined negative judgements from the parents, and this informed his behaviour towards his player. Superordinate theme 1 showed that novice coaches attached negative traits to players and their parents, and this negativity contributed to interpersonal conflict.

Amy described how fear of parent's attitudes influenced coaches on court delivery, and this led to conflict:

I think there are a lot of lessons delivered for good parent PR just to keep them (parents) on side and not necessarily what needs to be done. You know I've seen kids run into the ground just so the parents think the kid is working hard. But then the parents complain you're working the kid too hard. Yeah, I see lots of that. Coaches can be scared of parents.

Participants were concerned with player work ethic and the way it reflected on their coaching. Efforts to overcome poor work-ethic were a source of conflict with parents. Ben described issues that he had experienced with a parent:

So, we would have arguments. He (parent) was under the impression that he was a tennis coach, but he was not. He would do things that he thought were right and I thought they weren't. I didn't let it affect me on court and I just did the same things I wanted to do because I feel like I am right... It broke down eventually.

Interpersonal conflict shows how novice coaches' negative perceptions of players and parents (superordinate theme 1: connection) impacted on interpersonal relationships.

Suspicious and untrusting attitudes towards parents caused issues for novice coaches when managing coach-parent relationships because they were not confident about parent interactions. Thomas described a recent conflict: "I didn't speak to her parents for a few weeks and it got really awkward. I was always rushing back on court for next session then I got home too late to ring". Novice coaches who don't feel confident to speak to parents during difficult periods can avoid difficult conversations. Thomas was learning that avoidance was not the best solution: "on reflection I could have found the time, it was just easy to put it off. Her dad had a proper go at me when he saw me at xxx (a competition)".

Participants were quick to imagine negative feedback from parents and this made novice coaches defensive and sometimes insecure. Inability to effectively manage coach-parent relationships was a source of interpersonal conflict for novice coaches.

#### **Superordinate Theme 4: Competition**

Competition was a theme where novice coaches described the coaching environment. Novice coaches found the coaching environment challenging and they described issues that

made coaching competitive and created pressure to achieve things quickly. I divided competition into 2 subordinate themes including self-employment and instant results.

### **Self-employment.**

Self-employment shows that novice coaches were sensitive to issues of self-employment. Self-employment afforded coaches the freedom to work with whomever they wanted and the potential to pick the times they worked. However, it created difficulties for their coaching roles and how they interacted with other coaches. Amy described self-employed status effecting how coaches behaved:

A lot of coaches are self-employed, if they were employed then maybe they'd be on the same page more. It's full of ego's, one-up-man-ship because they are self-employed. I think in other countries people are employed but here it is all self-employed. That's how ego and things get out of control because you are worried about yourself.

Competitiveness between coaches was a consistent theme. Self-employment appeared to drive much of this competitiveness. Competition between coaches was acknowledged not to be in the best interests of the players, as indicated by Ben: "I think they (coaches) feel that instead of having the kids interests at heart, the whole thing can become a competition (between coaches). Everyone is fighting for business".

One could assume that being self-employed requires individuals to view others as competition. Participants were struggling to find ways of coping with the nature of self-employment and balancing this with creating an amiable coaching community. Peter described his struggles with self-employment in tennis coaching: "How can you go into successful business and everybody is self-employed? It's a battle".

Self-employment appeared to encourage a competitive mentality towards other coaches. Comments such as *fighting*, and *battling* provided evidence that coaches were compelled to behave in combative ways towards other coaches. Communication amongst coaches, information sharing, and problem solving was reduced because of competition due to self-employment. Feeling unable to talk to other coaches influenced novice coaches' experience of coaching. Ben said "coaching is quite lonely. There aren't many people you can properly talk to". Self-employment influenced novice coaches' attitudes towards other coaches and informed their perception of the culture coaches worked in.

### **Instant results.**

Instant results show that novice coaches felt pressure to gain positive results quickly in elite junior tennis coaching. Participants agreed that tennis stakeholders (players, parents, and other coaches) wanted results quickly. Pressure to deliver results quickly was described by Amy: "I think there is a real pressure to deliver results and there is such an instant gratification culture. Everyone expects great things after a few lessons or a few squads". Superordinate theme 2 (competence) showed that novice coaches wanted to create a good reputation and results were fundamental to this. Participants were aware that players and parents had expectations of coaches. Josh said:

I think it's a shame when a coach is doing a really good job with a player, but you have this gallery of parents watching (squads) and chatting. Then one of the rival kids (from another tennis centre) is doing slightly better in tournaments so suddenly, they (parents) decide enough is enough and that's it for you (coach). They're off to another better programme somewhere else".

Throughout this study, tournament results continued to be closely associated with proof of effective coaching and Josh implied that better results elsewhere meant parents were

likely to remove their children from one coach and replace them with the coach of another more successful player. Referring to parents collectively as *gallery of parents* suggested Josh perceived all parents the same. Participants generally agreed that the quality of each coach-parent relationship was tightly bound by the success of the player they coach.

Participants agreed that parents were influential in the instant results culture. Novice coaches associate results with justification of their coaching methods. However, participants thought parents who used results to judge whether their time, effort, and money was well-spent, were adding to the instant results culture. Thomas described pressure that he felt when trying to explain the up and down tennis journey to parents:

It's really hard for coaches to transition with players. How do you tell a parent that their kid who is top at green and when they move up to yellow ball they are nowhere? From great success to no success. Parents just aren't prepared for that. I think it's such a problem that you are saying to these parents that their wonderful, all singing, all dancing green player is now at the bottom of the pile again. They need to feel constantly motivated and engaged all the time. When they get demotivated you feel it as a coach.

Thomas perceived parental attitudes as extreme ends of a spectrum, but many parents may view ups and downs of elite junior sport in a more considered way. Participants described parent's perspectives as extremes, either very positive or very negative. Josh said "when a player wins the parents are really happy. When a player loses my coaching is rubbish". Participants continuously described parents as difficult to satisfy or wanting instant results and this created uncertainty for novice coaches to be able to sustain positive results and keep parents happy.

## Discussion

This study was an examination of the lived experience of eight novice tennis coaches working with elite junior tennis players. The aim of the study was to capture the reality of what it is like to be a coach of an elite junior tennis player by understanding the participants' world gained through direct, first-hand involvement and everyday experiences of coaching. A review of coaching literature (chapter 3) highlighted a lack of research investigating the experiences of tennis coaches. I constructed the study aim to help fill a gap in our understanding of the experiences of novice tennis coaches working with elite juniors. The results of this study provide a four-construct framework to understand the elite junior coaching environment through the eyes of novice tennis coaches. *Contextual coaching constructs* included four superordinate themes and these themes were: connection, competence, conflict, and competition. Overall, the four superordinate themes show novice coaches describing the environment elite junior tennis coaching takes place in.

The data in this study has added to our understanding of coaching in several ways. Firstly, this study was the first IPA of the experiences of novice coaches working with elite junior tennis players. The results show novice coaches describing *contextual coaching constructs*. *Contextual coaching constructs* describe the environment that elite junior tennis coaching takes place in, and they include (a) connection, (b) competence, (c) conflict, and (d) competition.

Secondly, the evidence in this study supports an existing understanding that novice coaches start coaching with a preconceived idea of what they expected coaching to be, for example, elite coaches are experts who coach elite players, their expertise deserves respect, effective coaching is defined by winning, and coaching is a linear process (Peel et al, 2013). As novice coaches gained practical coaching experience, they learned that coaching was not as they initially imagined, and the participants' actual coaching activities contradicted with their perception of desired coaching activities. The participants were insecure about their

coaching experiences and described a demotivating effect when they were unable to work with elite junior tennis players full time. Participants described working with social players as frustrating and demotivating. Differences between expected coaching experiences (coaching elite juniors) and actual coaching experiences (coaching social playing juniors) caused novice coaches inner-conflicts with professional self-understanding and had a negative effect on their motivation to remain as tennis coaches for long-term careers (Kelchtermans 2009a, 2009b).

Thirdly, this study suggested that novice coaches were uncomfortable with parental interactions. Participants described impatient and intolerant attitudes towards parental involvement in elite tennis. The data from this study supports earlier work by Knight and Harwood (2009) and the participants described stressful experiences with parents in coaching. Furthermore, this study adds to Knight and Harwoods work (2009) by providing evidence of suspicious and untrusting attitudes towards parents, which increased novice coaches' unwillingness to accept parental involvement in coaching. Avoidance strategies and blaming strategies were described by the participants when discussing parents, which indicated discomfort with parental interactions. There was general agreement throughout this study that novice coaches found parental interactions to be a coaching stressor. The avoidance strategies described in this study support previous work into coaching related stressors (Thelwell at al., 2010).

Fourthly, this study highlighted self-employment as a significant factor in participants opinions of other tennis coaches and was associated with untrusting attitudes of other coaches. Participants described negative attitudes towards other coaches, and this was generally associated with issues related to self-employment. Novice coaches feared being viewed less knowledgeable than other coaches because it could directly affect the participants income and leave them feeling insecure and vulnerable about their coaching reputation

amongst tennis stakeholders (Cassidy et al., 2016). The data supports earlier work into stress associated with self-employment. Previous work found that stress factors associated with self-employment mostly affected men (Parslow et al., 2004) and the desire to earn satisfactory self-employed income encouraged self-employed workers to sacrifice leisure and family time, which increased stress, increased fatigue, and affected working relationships (Nadal & Lapiedra, 2010)

Finally, this study showed similarities with study 1 and the data suggested that the performance narrative was present in the attitudes of novice coaches. Novice coaches used tournament results as reassurance that their coaching was effective, and this created pressure to continue to obtain positive tournament results. The evidence across studies 1 and 2 shows that novice coaches desire to prove themselves effective, create a positive reputation, and satisfy players parents heightened to importance they placed on results. Continued pressure to chase positive tournament results could have consequences, such as stress, for novice coaches during periods of poor tournament results (Thelwell et al., 2010).

The findings of this study have illustrated the experiences of novice tennis coaches working with elite junior tennis players and they described *contextual coaching constructs*. Novice coaches focussed on the environment of elite junior tennis coaching and they were surprised by what coaching in the elite junior context involved. Novice coaches throughout this research described anxieties regarding coaching. Their anxieties were associated; with differences between what they expected coaching to be like and their actual coaching experiences; parental interactions; the self-employed nature of their coaching role; and pressure to obtain positive tournament results to increase feelings of competence and reputational gain. The anxieties that novice coaches experienced had a negative effect on their motivation to coach. The participants in this study had between 1 and 4 years coaching experience and were still learning about the elite junior coaching context. The data shows

similarities with the work of Bleach (2019), who described people learning new skills as “fragile learners” who are close to giving up at any point (p. 86). Understanding the reality of novice tennis coaches adds to an evolving problematic epistemology of sports coaching (Potrac et al., 2012) and paves the way for this PhD to continue its investigation into tennis coaches' experiences. The next study will examine the experiences of experienced tennis coaches of elite junior tennis players.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

The data from this study relates to coaches with between 1 and 4 years coaching experience working with elite juniors. The limited experience of the participants brings into question the longevity and sustainability of the four constructs identified (connection, competence, conflict, and competition). It would be useful to examine whether connection, competence, conflict, and competition differ or change with time. Furthermore, it would be useful to observe how connection, competence, conflict, and competition might look for experienced coaches.

IPA as a method has limitations because it focusses on individual experience. The ability of participants to effectively communicate their experiences may have contributed to their descriptions. Meaning making takes place in the context of narratives, metaphors, and language (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). The purpose of IPA is to gain insight into experience and therefore is intertwined participant experience and the language they use. More IPA studies, from different researchers, who use a different group of participants would allow for comparison of results.

IPA relies on subjective judgement of the researcher and the researcher's ability to communicate their analyses effectively. My subjective judgement and writing ability may have influenced the findings as two analysts working with the same data may come up with

different interpretations (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). I engaged in researcher reflexivity to give insights into the interpretations I made throughout the process and encourage public scrutiny of my results.

A further challenge is to investigate whether the constructs I identified in this study are independent constructs or do they represent ends of a continuum? Selection of respondents with more coaching experience would provide useful avenues for comparison with the constructs identified in this study. Searching for commonality of experiences and idiosyncrasies amongst older coaches or coaches with more experiences would help create a holistic picture the elite junior coaching environment. Insights into the longevity of connection, competence, conflict, and competition, and new constructs that develop over time would provide useful data relating to how coaches perceive their coaching environment differently as they gain coaching experience.

### **Summary**

This study has provided an examination of what it is like to be a novice tennis coach of elite junior tennis players. Study 2 found that novice tennis coaches described what coaching was like for them through four-constructs; connection, conflict, competence, and competition. The four constructs described the context of elite junior tennis coaching and are grouped together under the classification of *contextual coaching constructs*. The data in this study supports an existing understanding that novice coaches begin coaching with a preconceived idea of what they expected coaching to be like. As novice coaches gained practical coaching experience, they learned that coaching was not like they initially imagined. The data can be used to help prepare novice tennis coaches for the emotional challenges they may experience in coaching. Novice coaches were unprepared for elements of their coaching role. Therefore, the knowledge and experiences of existing coaches should be used to

educate new coaches about situations that may arise when coaching elite juniors. The next chapter is an IPA investigation into the experiences of eight *experienced* coaches of elite junior tennis players.

Table 1.

Study 2. Superordinate Themes and Subordinate Themes included in Contextual Coaching Constructs

<b>Superordinate Themes</b>	<b>Subordinate Themes</b>
Connection	with elite junior players
	with parents
	with other coaches
Competence	Players are social capital
	My reputation matters
	Task-perception
Conflict	Inner-conflict
	Inter-personal conflict
Competition	Self-employment
	Instant gratification

## Chapter Six

### Study Three

The previous study found that connection, competence, conflict, and competition were *essences* of elite junior coaching through the eyes of eight novice coaches. A logical next step for my PhD was to speak with other practitioners who had more experience of the elite junior tennis coaching environment and understand their experiences. The purpose of this study was to examine *experienced* tennis coaches' understanding of their world gained through direct, first-hand involvement and everyday experiences of coaching elite junior tennis players.

Coaches serve an apprenticeship of observation during their coaching careers (Lortie, 1975). Prolonged periods of observation act as a primary source of learning for coaches and much of what they learn is through interaction with knowledgeable peers and “ongoing interaction in the practical coaching context” (Cushion et al., 2006, p. 217). It would be beneficial to coaching literature to understand how experienced tennis coaches describe their coaching experiences after serving apprenticeships of observation in elite junior tennis coaching.

Learning through observation of other coaches and first-hand practical experience involves practitioners restructuring their knowledge schemas after new coaching experiences occur (Gilbert & Trudel, 2005). The restructuring of coaching knowledge is rarely a case of convenient *aha moments* where coaches gain sudden insights or moments of discovery. Rather, the restructuring of coaching knowledge takes years of accumulating, revising, and reflecting on experience (Grubber, 1981). It would be useful to understand if reflection and restructuring of knowledge affect the experiences of coaches with over 10-years in the elite junior coaching context.

There are no guarantees that novice coaches will develop into expert or experienced coaches. This career uncertainty is partly because coaching knowledge does not develop in a linear fashion (Trudel & Gilbert, 2006; Ollis & Sproule, 2007; Nash & Sproule, 2009) and coaching has been shown to be an emotionally challenging profession that can cause some to leave their roles early due to stress (Lundkvist et al., 2013; Purdy, 2013; Thelwell et al., 2017). Research that highlights how experienced practitioners describe their daily activities can help younger coaches' select coping strategies from practitioners with more experience and maintain their role for long enough to gain experience and develop confidence in themselves.

Camiere, Trudel, and Forners (2014) found that practical coaching experience helped practitioners gain confidence in their coaching efficacy. The interplay between knowledge, application, and adaptation of coaching methods continues throughout coaches' careers and they keep fine tuning *what works for them* throughout their careers rather than *what is supposed to work for everyone*. The practical experiences coaches gain throughout their careers can affect how they perceive new experiences and their subsequent coaching behaviours. Coaches see and interpret new situations in relation to their formative experiences, and new experiences influence their perspectives, beliefs, and behaviours (Stodter & Cushion, 2017). Scientific evidence lacks clarity about what constitutes an expert coach or how many years of practice makes a coach experienced (Cote & Gilbert, 2009). Nash and Sproule (2011) defined an expert coach as having over ten years practical experience. Coaches who have over ten-years in the elite junior coaching context can help shed light on what it is like to work in their social conditions through interpretative analyses of how they describe their experiences.

Increased professional confidence is associated with coaches developing their philosophy to overcome issues such as the performance versus winning dilemma (Camiere,

Trudel, & Forners, 2014). Such performance-based issues have been shown to dominate the thoughts of younger coaches, as discussed in study 2 (Cassidy et al., 2016). It would be beneficial for young coaches to understand how others have learned to balance the performance versus winning dilemma, whilst sustaining their position as coaches.

Coaching research has previously been accused of failing to draw effectively on the wealth of knowledge that experienced practitioners possess and use it effectively in the preparation of new coaches for their initiation into coaching (Cushion, Jones, & Armour, 2003). Observation of other coaches remains a critical component in gaining experience, yet the “key influence of others remains largely neglected” in coach education (Stodter & Cushion, 2017, p. 334). Coaching courses, formal and informal learning opportunities, practical experiences, and access to knowledgeable peers are all additives in achieving a wealth of coaching experience. Research that captures the insights of experienced coaches’ can benefit coach education by using their insights to educate new practitioners of some of the taken for granted knowledge that experienced coaches have learned through their practical experiences. The purpose of this study was to examine *experienced* tennis coaches understanding of their world gained through direct, first-hand involvement and everyday experiences of coaching elite junior tennis players. The data from this study will make it possible to observe whether novice and experienced coaches describe coaching elite junior tennis players in similar ways.

## **Method**

**Research design, procedure for maintaining a phenomenological attitude, data analysis, and credibility**

The procedures used for research design, procedure for maintaining a phenomenological attitude, data analysis, and credibility were detailed on pages 70 – 86 in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

### **Participants**

I received full ethical approval from the LJMU ethics committee for this study. I interviewed eight, male, experienced tennis coaches during this study, they were aged between 36 and 56 years old, and they worked in the following areas; Scotland (1), Northern England (3), Midlands (1), Southern England (2), and Wales (1). Experienced coaches were defined as having over ten years coaching experience with elite juniors (Nash & Sproule, 2011). Participants were currently working with elite junior tennis players, they held level 4 or 5 coaching qualifications, and they were selected purposively (see chapter 3). Junior tennis players were aged between 11 – 18 years old, corresponding with the LTA yellow ball competition system. Junior Elite was defined as competing at National level competition (Grade 2) and above (Rees et al., 2016). The contact details of coaches were available in the public domain and found on the LTA website ([www.lta.org.uk](http://www.lta.org.uk)). All Tennis coaches were registered with the LTA and currently active. Tennis coaches were self-employed and were contacted by me directly.

### **Interviews and Interview Guide**

Interviews were semi-structured and conducted on a one-to-one basis. Discussions involved participants describing coaching experiences with players, parents, and other coaches. Opening questions focussed on why they chose to become a tennis coach. Conversations then moved to specific players they worked with, and issues that arose in practice or competition. Interviews lasted between one and three hours, and were audio recorded prior to being transcribed verbatim (word for word). I emailed coaches a copy of

their interview transcripts so they could check names and venues were removed and give opportunity for further reflection. A copy of the interview structure is shown in appendix C.

## Results

The results show experienced coaches describing coaching differently to novice coaches. The experienced coaches described *outcome coaching constructs* and were associated with gaining over 10-years practical experience and show how experienced coaches adapted to their environment. Experienced coaches described (a) a broad understanding of coaching, (b) confidence in their coaching ability, (c) their philosophical considerations, and (d) strategies to cope with the emotional challenges associated with coaching. Overall, experienced coaches were more focussed on themselves than novice coaches and had adapted their coaching to the context in which they worked.

*Outcome coaching constructs* are categorised into four superordinate themes. The four superordinate themes develop over time and show how experienced coaches understand their environment, position themselves within the environment, and how they deal with the demands of the context of elite junior tennis coaching. The themes are; comprehension, confidence, code, and coping. Each superordinate theme has multiple subordinate themes, which are summarised in table 2 at the back of this chapter (p. 174).

### **Superordinate Theme 1: Comprehension**

Comprehension was a theme where experienced coaches described a broader understanding of coaching than novice coaches in study 2. Experienced coaches described contradictions, complications, and short-term relationships. Comprehension shows experienced coaches understood that coaching was more than a transfer of information process and there were constant challenges to coaching elite juniors. I divided

comprehension into 3 subordinate themes including; coaching has contradictory values, coaching is complicated, and coaching relationships are temporary.

**Coaching has contradictory values.**

Coaching has contradictory values shows how experienced coaches described differences between the fantasy and the reality of coaching elite juniors. For example, the coaches spoken to in this study held level 5 coaching qualifications (the highest level) and had track-records working with elite junior for over 10-years. However, coaches in the elite junior context did not experience a positive correlation between higher level of qualification and payment, unlike other professions such as accountancy or medical professions. Sam described such a contradiction: "The better you make your players, the more demanding it is, and the less you get paid for".

There was general agreement amongst the experienced coaches about a contradictory relationship between perceived effectiveness (working with high-level players) and payment. Coaching elite juniors required participants to devote extra hours on and off the court to player development (e.g. session planning, match debriefs, travel to competition, warm-ups, and parental interactions). Participants described the extra hours as unpaid yet necessary for coaches to fulfil their role with players, therefore decreasing the hourly rate of pay for elite junior coaches. James described the contradictory relationship between his perceived effectiveness and payment, and also explained it was not easy for his wife to understand:

My wife doesn't really understand. She doesn't understand why I don't want to earn twice as much money (coaching development players). She's in education and earns a good living. But she doesn't get the fact that having a player represent GB is a greater reward than earning (money).

Experienced coaches understood that they had to make time and financial sacrifices to coach elite juniors. There was general agreement amongst the participants that success with their players was vindication for sacrifices they made to coach elite juniors.

Study 2 showed that novice coaches described a culture within coaching that expected instant results, and this created stress for them (p.130). Experienced coaches described further contradictions in their role because they felt responsible helping players mature as people. However, helping players mature as people was not compatible with a culture that expected improvements to happen quickly. Phil said:

It's trying to help them (players) understand that losing is not the worst thing in the world. They can learn from losses in the long run. You want the simple outcome of them becoming a better person and a better player. But getting those 2 things to happen can be challenging as they sometimes work in opposition and that hard for the kid to grasp.

Participants agreed that tennis participation helped juniors develop valuable life skills such as discipline, self-sufficiency, self-confidence, mental strength, and resilience. However, experienced coaches understood that player development and personal development did not always work together.

Experienced coaches continued to discuss their responsibility to help players mature. Participants agreed that helping players become self-sufficient and disciplined was part of their role. However, participants described that mothers and fathers of their players had contradictory expectations of coaches. Sam described an experience of contradictory parental attitudes:

You've got two parents, one is happy for you to get on with disciplining the player, and one who gets annoyed when you do and says you should back off. But when you

do back off the level falls to such a low level that it becomes pointless. There are 2 extremes. To make it worse, three days a week dad picks him up. Two days a week his mum picks him up. They are both heavily involved.

The participants agreed that there were contradictions throughout coaching.

Experienced coaches did not experience higher pay for their higher qualifications. Nor did participants experience parity between their desire to help players mature as people and players' expectations to keep winning matches, and their parent's expectations for how coaches encourage discipline in their child. Participants described the criteria used to assess their coaching was contradictory amongst players, and their parents.

### **Coaching is complicated.**

Coaching is complicated shows experienced coaches describing coaching as complicated by players attitudes to learning. James described how player attitudes made coaching more complicated than simply transfer of information:

It's a much tougher world for coaches to make a big impact quickly. When the coach first meets the player, you've got to get to know them and you've also got to discipline the player. I think if I got my coaching team together the older coaches would say the discipline is becoming more difficult on a daily basis. There aren't as many kids nowadays who will run through a brick wall to achieve something.

Novice coaches previously described that not all elite juniors came on court with a strong work ethic and this was a source of conflict for them. Experienced coaches understood that they could not to rely on players having a strong work ethic to achieve or maintain elite level. Participants in this study discussed the extra time they allocated to educating players about the desired work ethic. Sam described complications due to players not showing the correct work ethic:

Truthfully, it's a constant battle to get players to work. It's very rare it's a smooth ride. It's never smooth. Either you've got conflict with a player coz you want more from them or maybe it's conflict with their parent coz they don't like my approach. I've been through dozens of awkward situations trying to get players to work hard. But you know, that's how it is.

Participants described complications that player attitudes brought to their coaching role. There was also general agreement that the participants' efforts to improve player had the potential to cause conflict. However, experienced coaches described managing expectations as part of their role, which made coaching more complicated than just communicating technical information to players. Nathan described managing expectations and the associated complications:

You're constantly managing expectations. Constantly managing other issues that come into it, whether it be school issues, family issues, or problems away from the court. Life. Managing all that and making sure their tennis experience is fulfilling. It's tough to stay on top of.

Participants considered many different factors that could affect player performance, such as work ethic, school, social, or family issues. Experienced coaches embraced the complex and multifaceted nature of coaching and incorporated off court issues into their task perception of coaching.

### **Coaching relationships are temporary.**

Coaching relationships are temporary shows experienced coaches describing that players can change coaches regularly in the elite context. Participants described a tendency for a player or their parents to become dissatisfied with coaches and look for an alternative coach. Sam described temporary coaching relationships:

There has to be a potential end point for both parties if they want to terminate the contracts. You have to be big enough to say that the way we do things is not the only way to do it. We try our best and if you want your kid to win every match then you are probably in the wrong place.

Participants agreed that there were alternative approaches to coaching. Players might change coach in search of a different approach to technique, tactics, or leadership style from the coach. Experienced coaches recognised that awareness of alternative approaches influenced players and parents to consider alternative coaches regularly.

In addition, there was a consensus amongst the participants that their behaviour sometimes contributed to relationships ending. For example, Nathan said:

I have pushed parent's buttons too much in the past in terms of financial stuff, telling them they need more sessions or more fitness or whatever. They have actually walked away as a result. I've maybe been too brutally honest about what I think their parenting is like. My mistake and I won't make those mistakes again. Yeah, I've lost players because of that.

The self-employed nature of tennis coaching caused issues for novice coaches in study 2 (p. 129), and Nathan highlighted a difficult situation associated with self-employment. Coaches may recommend a player has extra sessions to improve, but this can cause some parents to doubt the coaches' integrity. For example, parents may perceive a coach recommending extra lessons because they want more paid hours, therefore causing relationship tension. Nathan described recommending extra practice for his players, but the financial implications to the parents caused them to question his motives and the relationships came to an end.

Participants also described relationships that ended because they were unhappy with their player's attitude. Coaches who tried to improve player attitudes through disciplining the player described relationships ending because players or their parents took exception to the coaches' actions. Chris said:

The way I see it is that I have communicated to the parent, with some video evidence that the effort level is not there. But it's never the players fault. The excuses are always there. So, I decided that he should miss his sessions until such time it improves. Anyway, we haven't seen him back, he's at xxx now (another tennis centre with new coach).

The participants regularly described occasions when they asked players to miss sessions to communicate a message that the player's effort levels were not good enough. Player or parent dissatisfaction with coaches' actions resulted in coaching relationships ending and the player moving to train with another coach.

### **Superordinate Theme 2: Confidence**

Confidence was a theme where experienced coaches described confidence in their coaching. Experienced coaches described acceptance of competition and public scrutiny, belief in their methods, and feeling less beholden to parents than novice coaches because of financial security. Confidence shows experienced coaches had accepted they were competent and were more relaxed about coaching than novice coaches who still wanted to prove they were competent. I divided comprehension into 3 subordinate themes including; acceptance of coaching issues, self-belief, and financial security.

#### **Acceptance of coaching issues.**

Acceptance of coaching issues shows experienced coaches were self-assured when they described conflict and competition between coaches. Experienced coaches were

accepting that competition between coaches existed and coaches' work was scrutinised by parents or other coaches.

The participants in this study were more accepting of competition between coaches than the novice coaches in study 2. For example, Chris said:

I would say the grass is always greener. You know there is always a centre that will come and offer your players more. It's always easy for them to go and see someone else. But you know the reality is the coach is usually doing a good job and the parents heads just get turned. Fair enough, I'll just keep doing what I do.

Experienced coaches accepted competition and described less questioning attitudes about the reasons for competition between coaches than the participants in study 2.

Accepting attitudes of experienced coaches reduced anxiety towards the competitive behaviours they described. Chris continued to say:

It's (coaching) not just about the technical aspects. You know I think a lot of the rhetoric comes back to technical issues. But it's about so much more and it's easy for other coaches to pick holes in what you do. There is always someone dying to say I can teach that shot better for example. Just communicate with the parent and be heavily committed to the whole process.

Chris accepted that it was easy for other coaches to be critical of his technical teaching, and he did not describe any negative emotions to such behaviours. Rather than defend his coaching, Chris accepted that competition amongst coaches resulted in behaviours aimed at persuading players to change coaches.

There was general agreement from the participants that coaches' work was open to public evaluation. Participants described parents making evaluations about their coaching. For example, Nathan said:

Truthfully, I don't get affected by it anymore. I'm used to it now. It's like a goldfish bowl with all the parents looking down (on the court) and talking.

Comparing notes and assessing if I'm worth bringing their kids to etc. I'm just so weatherworn now I only feel the pressure of my own expectations. Not from anyone else.

Coaches regularly conduct their sessions in front of spectators. For example, parents may stand next to or above the court watching, or coaches may be on the next court watching the session. Participants across studies one and two described public evaluations of their coaching. Imagining that judgements were negative was a consistent theme for novice coaches (study 2) and myself (study 1). Nathan described being *weatherworn*, implying a wearing effect that public scrutiny had on him. Experienced coaches had generally accepted that public scrutiny was part of coaching and this enabled them to remain focussed on performing their role instead of worrying about what parents or other coaches thought.

### **Self-Belief.**

Self-belief shows experienced coaches describing belief and conviction in their coaching methods. Experienced coaches described coaching as complicated and contradictory. However, participants described self-belief when faced with opportunities to doubt themselves (e.g. players losing matches, losing players to rival coaches, or conflict with parents). Sam said: "I think coaches just have to believe in what they do and stick to what they do".

Coaches' professional self-understanding is not static in nature (Kelchtermans, 2009a, 2009b) and their self-evaluations of effectiveness may fluctuate. Experienced coaches described player losses and conflicts in relationships, but they were less sensitive than novice coaches to such issues affecting their motivation to coach. Participants in this study

described feeling insecure early in their career and self-belief had developed over time. Phil said:

I'd say that I'm more happy coaching now. There were struggles early on but I'm more than happy with my decision now. I am totally immersed in it, I'm good at it and I enjoy it. I'm doing my best and it's all very positive. There are parts of it that are rough but what job doesn't have its issues.

Experienced coaches agreed that they had emotional struggles early in their careers just like the novice coaches in study 2. Phil described uncertainty about whether he could sustain a coaching career for the long-term because of inner-conflicts. It took Phil time to feel confident with his decision to coach. Self-belief in coaching developed gradually and seemed to be associated with increased enjoyment of the role.

Participants with more experience described greater self-belief in their coaching. Nathan described the difference between himself and younger coaches:

I've done it for so long now (coaching) – 23 years. I trust what I am doing is the best I can do. If the kid is underperforming or misbehaving, then it's him not me. Younger coaches would probably doubt themselves and think “what am I doing wrong?”

Questioning of the self can erode self-belief if it produces negative self-evaluations of efficacy, but it can also encourage coaches to search for alternative solutions to coaching issues. Participants in this study were less questioning of themselves than novice coaches (study 2) and level-headed when describing under-performing players or conflicts with parents.

### **Financial Security.**

Financial security showed experienced coaches describing money saved up being associated with increased confidence in decision making. Participants who described being financially secure were confident to suggest players missed training when they needed rest, or their behaviour felt short of the required standard. Sam said:

Would a young coach ever have the confidence to suggest that a player has a week off or you know to have an awkward conversation with a parent? Could they afford the loss of income? I think that's easier when you're older, when there is some money saved up.

There may be periods when a player needs to have a break from training and competition, but self-employed coaches may struggle to balance the need to behave ethically (e.g. recommend rest) with their self-employed status. Self-employed coaches earn less money when their players are away at competition, injured, resting, studying for exams, etc. because they earn hourly rates for sessions. Young coaches who are trying to build up financial security may experience emotional struggles when faced with training issues and their need to earn a consistent income. Nathan described that it was not easy for coaches to offer paying parents' advice they do not want to hear because there was a fear that parents could end the coaching relationship and reduce the coaches' income. Financial security gave coaches confidence to have difficult conversations with parents. Phil said:

I think when it comes to those difficult conversations (with parents), I think I've got to a point in my life where I'm a bit more mature, more self-assured, financially secure all that stuff. So, I'm not fearful of voicing my concerns to xxx (the parent).

Experienced coaches were more confident in approaching difficult situations than novice coaches, partly because they were financially secure. Feeling less beholden to each

parent of the players they taught gave the participants more confidence to coach how they wanted to.

Financial security was also associated with participants' confidence to work more intensely in the elite junior context. Performance coaching is less profitable than development coaching, because it is highly time intensive. In addition to the many hours of practice, coaches allocate time to session planning that is unpaid, and tournament visits that force coaches to cancel other paid sessions to be able to attend tournaments. Being able to allocate elite junior players the time required to improve was related to financial security. Chris described financial security enhancing the opportunity to focus purely on elite junior coaching:

I'm self-employed and for me to coach players of that level I can't have too many players because I need to give them the time and spend my days planning sessions. I can't be coaching the adult beginners for £40/hour unfortunately. It's taken me a while to get to this point, but I've got some money behind me to focus on a small number of players and give them the best I can.

Study 2 showed that novice coaches experienced inner conflicts when working in the development coaching context (p. 124). Development coaching hours, whilst more profitable, reduced novice coaches' motivation to coach, because it did not fit with their desire to only coach elite junior players. There was general agreement from experienced coaches that financial security increased their confidence to focus their efforts in the elite junior context.

### **Superordinate Theme 3: Code**

Code was a theme where experienced coaches described their philosophy on coaching. Experienced coaches described learning environment, flexibility of approach, and

mental models they used in their coaching. Code shows experienced coaches' holistic understanding of coaching and how they positioned their coaching within the context of elite junior tennis. I divided code into 2 subordinate themes including preferred learning environment for players and coaching to a mental image.

### **Preferred learning environment for players.**

Preferred learning environment shows experienced coaches describing the environment that they wanted their players to train in. The participants' preferred learning environment influenced interactions with, and expectations of players and their parents. Hard work and commitment were fundamental values that participants wished to convey with their learning environment. Sam said:

The number 1 thing we reinforce daily or even in every session is attitude and effort. Those are the 2 things that players can control and if they choose not to control those things or be poor at them then we have very little time for them.

Experienced coaches used their preferred learning environments to socialise players into patterns of disciplined behaviour and influenced their behaviour towards players. Reinforcing attitude and effort was a consistent theme amongst respondents and they agreed that they wanted a hard working environment. Players who did not conform to expectations were likely to receive less attention or discipline. Chris said:

The performance programme always needs more hours, so we will find out early on if the players have the right attitude quality. If not, they will be disciplined often, or they fall by the wayside. Then if there's no movement we will try to move them aside.

Experienced coaches communicated the environment they wanted to create as a way of avoiding future conflicts with players and parents. For example, Phil said:

Tell them what kind of coach you are and why. I'm autocratic, quite strict and I don't let anything slide. That's the way I am so I paint that picture before a ball is hit, and they know what they are dealing with. Then they can't come back at you later down the line.

Participants in this study regularly described learning environments where the coach was authoritative and not questioned. Creating a learning environment where the coach had total authority was perhaps an acknowledgement of conflict in coaching (study 2). Coaches who maintain a high locus of control could be considered as trying to minimise the potential for conflict by creating an autocratic environment and reducing the input from players or parents.

There were, however, different attitudes towards the learning environment. Some participants welcomed parental interaction and wanted a more collaborative environment for players to train in. James said:

Every kid is different, and you've got to work differently with certain kids and try different things. Everything should be based around what does the player need to do to improve and what can the parent and coach do to help? Everyone is in it together and I think that sends a message to the kid. Let them know that no-one is perfect. Let's just work together.

Nathan described a similar collaborative environment to James:

Parents have useful ideas. If a kid isn't working hard, you know, they (parents) can maybe explain why, and we can adapt accordingly. Maybe there's a reason the kid is demotivated. I spend a lot more time listening to parents nowadays. I've never not listened but I'm more aware of them now and pay a lot more attention to what they say and take their comments on and incorporate them into what I'm doing.

Variations in participants' descriptions of preferred learning environment shows that coaches have different experiences with players and their parents. Some coaches tried to create autocratic environments where player and parent input was minimal. However, there were coaches who preferred more interaction and input from players and parents, which increased the amount of interaction. Each coach created their own code and parameters for a learning environment that reflected their experiences with players and parents.

### **Coaching to a mental image.**

Coaching to a mental image shows experienced coaches describing having an image in their mind of what they wanted technique to look like, and the work ethic required for elite level. Participants used mental images to guide their on-court teaching rather than running through checklists or coaching manuals. Sam said:

One of the things you need is a clear picture in your mind of what you're trying to achieve and stick with that. Over time I have got very clear pictures of how every player, within a tolerance and the ability of the player needs to look. Have those pictures and stick to that. Don't dart around looking for solutions, stick with the picture until you get what you want.

Mental images gave coaches a tolerance level to assess the technical quality of a player's shots which influenced technical changes. Participants agreed that the mental image was their own unique picture of the expected result of their coaching. Participants suggested mental images were necessary to coach players effectively so they could give accurate benchmarks for the required standards at elite level. Chris said:

You must know the standards and what they look like. If you don't know what good looks like, then you are wasting your time as you are telling them that something is

good when it's way off the pace and that isn't fair to them. You've got to have a clear picture in your head of the level.

Knowing what the required standards looked like was not limited to the aesthetics of good technical shot production. Experienced coaches had also constructed a mental picture that informed their understanding of hard work. For example, James described an interplay between his understanding of hard work and how he used his mental image to assess a player work ethic:

That's part of good coaching, knowing the level and knowing what hard work looks like. You've got to know what it looks like. Xxx (player) for example, he works hard but he doesn't always do it in the right way, but you have to know he's working hard even if it isn't in the classical sense.

Expert coaches recognise patterns in behaviour (Nash & Collins, 2006). The participants in this study described using mental images to detect patterns of behaviour that highlighted areas for improvement in players' games or areas of strength that players possess.

### **Superordinate Theme: 4 Coping**

Coping was a theme where experienced coaches described the methods that helped them cope with stressors and sustain motivation for over 10-years. I divided coping into 3 subordinate themes including; coaching friendships, perceived control of coaching outcomes, and emotional stamina.

#### **Coaching friendships.**

Coaching friendships shows experienced coaches described positive relationships with colleagues in tennis who they could share problems with and seek advice from.

Participants shared their problems with coaches who had similar experiences. Sharing

problems with other coaches was helpful for participants when they described coaching stressors such as conflicts with parents, the strain that periods away at competition can place on family life, and specific technical issues associated with certain players. Sam described friendships that relieved stress from his role:

It's good to unload sometimes. You know you have to bite your tongue quite a lot and you end up re-assessing what you're doing. You want to crack and tell them (parent) they're talking non-sense. But you've learned that is never good. So, you need to unload with someone who gets it. Or at least listen to their stories of when it blows up just to keep you in check.

Coaches use social support as a coping strategy when stress occurs in coaching (Thelwell et al., 2010). There was general agreement amongst the participants that they needed to seek emotional support or informational support from friends within tennis.

There was agreement amongst the participants that coaching friendships helped them to cope with pressures associated with tournament visits. Coaching elite junior players required trips abroad with players, often for weeks at a time. Participants who had families acknowledged time away from home caused issues at home. Nathan said:

We chat regularly about what we are committing, what with our families, it's tough. The journey we are going to take is going to put pressure on our relationships (at home). If you're away for 2 weeks, it's pressure. It can be really tough being away from your family. For you, your wife, and your kids. It's good to chat about that with them (other coaches).

Coaching friendships were a safe place to seek advice without fear of judgement. Due to the competitive nature of coaching, it is unsurprising participants needed friends they could turn to in times of stress. Study 2 highlighted a competitive atmosphere between

coaches, therefore making it challenging to seek emotional help from a perceived rival coach coaching. Participants regularly described friendships were a source of comfort. Chris said:

I've met some great coaches over the years who I really liked and have kept in touch with even after all these years. I consider them really close friends that I can trust. They are great to sound out for advice and bounce ideas off. It's good to surround yourself with good people. People you can trust.

Chris described surrounding himself with good people and this could be interpreted as protecting himself from the impact of potential bad experiences in coaching (e.g. competition with rival coaches, conflicts, self-doubts regarding competence). Coaching friendships gave emotional reassurance about the stress competition between coaches and conflicts created.

Sam described friendships as a form of emotional protection:

There are centres that will work together and share players and share knowledge. We have a good relationship with xxx for example. I really trust their team and I've no hesitation sharing work with them. It's nice coz you know there are always clubs looking to lure your players away. So, you need relationships with people you can trust.

Coaching friendships were an important element in participants descriptions of coping with stress associated with elite junior coaching. Participants described their own micro coaching-communities that gave reassurance in the face of interpersonal conflict and protection from the competitive nature of coaching.

### **Perceived control of coaching outcomes.**

Perceived control of coaching outcomes shows experienced coaches describing causality between their actions and desired coaching outcomes. Coaching is uncontrollable and incomprehensible (Jones, 2005). Continued doubt and uncertainty are a source of stress

(Bauman, 2012) and study 2 showed that novice coaches struggled when they did not achieve desired coaching outcomes. Novice coaches described how parent behaviour could influence players' results, performance, and attitude and this reduced the control they thought they had over their coaching (p. 114). Participants in this study described coaching episodes that showed they felt in control of coaching outcomes and this was comforting for them. Nathan said:

He (player) has an x-box like many kids. You know it's linked to a level and a progress. Problem is if the game isn't going well it's easy to press quit and start the game again. I noticed this creeping into his tennis game. There was an "I can't win this mentality" and a little bit of a quit mentality. So, all I did was I increased his schedule quite subtly so that he played less on the x-box. Then he said he didn't want it anymore. Then suddenly, his mentality of digging in and trying to find a way to win ugly suddenly started to become stronger.

A cause and effect relationship between coaching actions and coaching outcome is difficult to quantify (Cassidy et al., 2016). Nathan directly associated his coaching actions with improved performance, and he described controlling his players' behaviour through adjusting his players' training programme without the player realising. Nathan's description did not mention the player's thoughts or the parent's actions, which may have been equally important in resolving the issue. Perceived control of coaching outcomes was a coping strategy for the uncontrollable nature of coaching because it removed uncertainty.

There were signs of the uncontrollable nature of coaching that Jones (2005) described. Participants who did not feel they had control over coaching outcomes found it was stressful. For example, Sam said:

I'd say when parents have had more control over the player than I do it doesn't sit comfortably. For example, xxx (parent), I just felt like an employee in his business. There were things he wanted, and I was merely there to service those needs. My opinion wasn't discounted, but it became diluted. He was exerting his influence and I was left thinking "what am I here for?"

Participants agreed that parents often had a strong influence over junior tennis players' outlook. Gould et al., (2006) described parents as "interpreters of tennis experience" (p. 632) and there was evidence that participants who felt parents had more control over tennis issues felt their influence became diluted. Participants perceived tennis as their domain, and they wanted freedom to work without interference. Simon described controlling behaviour when he thought parents hindered his coaching:

I see it so many times. Parents coming onto court while a session is going on and interfering with the player's head. For me that is a big no-no. It's invading the space of the coach. If they (parents) ask if they can come onto court, I will always say no. If anything, go and have a coffee and come back when the session is finished.

Removing a parent from the court environment may give coaches a sense of freedom to work without any external influence. Coaching is affected by external factors such as issues in the player's personal life, school issues, motivational issues, financial issues, and a myriad of interpersonal issues including parent's interpretation of coaching. Participants generally agreed that outside issues could affect their coaching but there was evidence that coaches tried to exert control over their professional environment to cope with the uncontrollable and incomprehensible nature of coaching (Jones, 2005).

### **Emotional stamina.**

Emotional stamina shows experienced coaches described coaching as emotionally challenging (Purdy et al., 2013). Participants in this study described emotional stamina which helped them build resilience and sustain motivation during sustained periods of conflict, stress, and anxiety. James said:

You put a lot in mentally as a coach. We invest in not just the hours on court but the whole process of wanting the kid to do well is quite draining (emotionally). If they (coach) get criticised they see it as hang on, "I'm doing so much here, and you are criticising me?" It's so easy to get defensive and I've had my fair share of getting defensive. I would say as time goes on, not that it doesn't still hurt, but it's easier to deal with. Maybe I don't take it as personally now? I think you become more transparent and you get tougher to it.

Conflicts occurred regularly for novice and experienced coaches. Participants in this study expected conflict and they described becoming tougher, more resilient, and tolerant of conflict. Accepting the potential for conflict and experiencing it many times helped participants to cope with conflict. Regular conflict had a hardening effect on the participants, and they developed increasing emotional stamina to sustain themselves despite emotional challenges. Nathan said:

Some parents become possessive and frantic and it can make you stressed. It doesn't really affect me anymore. I manage that better with age and you know, seen it all before. But I do see it affect the younger coaches with weekly confrontations. They haven't managed those situations well, but they just need to know that it comes with the territory. That is what is ahead of you.

Stress from parental behaviours was normal for the participants. Continued exposure to coaching stressors resulted in participants building up a tolerance to the effects that parent's behaviours can have on coaches' emotional state.

Experienced coaches agreed that getting used to conflict was part of the process of becoming an experienced coach and emotional stamina helped them endure situations that produced stress. Phil said:

Me as an old bloke now I have seen the transition from the old days when parents would blame their children if they didn't behave. Now they blame the coach instead. I've developed a thick skin to it now. I'm not proud of some of my relationships with parents, but I've just had to keep some of them at arms-length sometimes because they are never happy.

There was general agreement that a thick skin was a necessary form of coping and this implied emotional stamina as fundamental to participants sustaining themselves as coaches. Participants were accepting that they would be unable to manage stress out of their coaching roles and they developed emotional stamina to endure coaching stressors throughout their careers.

### **Discussion**

This study was an examination of the lived experience of eight experienced tennis coaches working with elite junior tennis players. The aim of the study was to assist a deeper understanding of what it was like to be a coach of an elite junior tennis player by understanding the participants world gained through direct, first-hand involvement and everyday experiences of coaching elite junior tennis players. A review of coaching literature (chapter 3) highlighted that currently there is a lack of research investigating the experiences of tennis coaches. I constructed the study aim to help fill a gap in our understanding of the

experiences of experienced tennis coaches working with elite juniors. The results of this study show experienced coaches describing *outcome coaching constructs* and they were different to those described by novice coaches in study 2. *Outcome coaching constructs* were associated with experience and show how experienced coaches have adapted to their environment. *Outcome coaching constructs* included four superordinate themes, which were comprehension, confidence, code, and coping.

The data in this study has added to our understanding of coaching in several ways. Firstly, this is the first IPA study to examine the lived experience of experienced tennis coaches working with elite junior tennis players. Experienced coaches described *outcome coaching constructs* which show how they have adapted after coaching for over 10-years. *Outcome coaching constructs* shows experienced coaches have a broad understanding of coaching (comprehension), are confident in their coaching efficacy (confidence), have developed a philosophy (code), and have developed ways of coping with stress associated with elite junior tennis coaching (coping).

Secondly, the findings of this study support previous assertions that novice and experienced coaches have different perspectives of their coaching environment (Nash & Sproule, 2011). Comparing the constructs identified in study 2 (e.g. connection, competence, conflict, & competition) with the constructs identified in this study (e.g. comprehension, confidence, code, & coping) illustrate how novice and experienced tennis coaches' perspectives differ. The findings support earlier work which found experienced coaches observe and interpret new coaching situations, and new experiences influence their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours. (Stodter & Cushion, 2017).

Thirdly, the findings of this study confirm our understanding that coaches develop confidence as they become more experienced and confidence can be associated with

developing a coaching philosophy (Camiere, Trudel, & Forners, 2014). Participants in this study described being confident about their coaching role. Confidence helped experienced coaches to consider coaching from a broad perspective and position their coaching in relation to a philosophy that was conducive to elite junior tennis.

Fourthly, novice and experienced coaches described their perceptions of self-efficacy during studies 2 and 3. It was important for both groups of coaches to feel effective in their role and the performance of their players was fundamental to feeling effective. Competence (study 2) and confidence (study 3) can be grouped together as *efficacy coaching constructs*. Novice coaches were preoccupied with proving to themselves and others that they were effective. Novice coaches' perceptions of efficacy were negatively affected when players lost, and they questioned themselves. Experienced coaches believed that they had proved to themselves and to others that they were effective with track-records of success with players. Experienced coaches' confidence remained during difficult periods of results for their players. *Efficacy coaching constructs* showed growth in coaches' feelings of efficacy after 10-years coaching.

Finally, the findings contribute to an existing understanding that coaching is emotionally challenging work irrespective of the experience coaches have (Thelwell et al., 2010; Purdy, 2013; Kelly et al., 2018). The participants in this study described stresses associated with parental behaviours, financial security, work-life balance, the contradictory nature of coaching, and regular inter and intra-personal conflicts. Experienced coaches showed signs of cognitive (comprehension) and emotional development (coping) when compared to novice coaches in study 2. The participants in this study were accepting that their coaching role would remain stressful throughout their career, and they had constructed ways of *coping* with elite junior coaching culture.

The findings of this study illustrated the experiences of experienced tennis coaches working with elite junior tennis players. Participants throughout this study described coaching as a challenging process. There was evidence in this study of connection, competence, conflict, and competition (the themes from study 2 with novice coaches) but they were not as prominent in participants' descriptions of experiences as the novice coaches in study 2. *Outcome coaching constructs* were described through comprehension, confidence, code, and coping. Furthermore, comprehension (study 2) and confidence (study 3) can be grouped together as *efficacy coaching constructs* and show growth in coaches' perceptions of effectiveness. Experienced coaches had a more holistic view of coaching than novice coaches. Rather than focussing on their dissatisfaction with coaching experiences, the participants in this study focussed on how to maintain their position as coaching for long careers. Understanding the reality of experienced tennis coaches adds to an evolving problematic epistemology of sports coaching (Potrac et al., 2012) and helps to move our understanding of coaching away from previous understandings of coaching as a simplistic, linear process (Cushion, 2007; Squires, 1999).

### **Limitations and Future Research**

IPA as a method has limitations. Firstly, IPA focusses on individual experience so it is expected that coaches in this study described different experiences to those described in study 2. Participants in this study were older, had different personal circumstances, and more coaching experience. The ability of participants to communicate their experiences, across study 2 and 3, may have contributed to differences in the experiences captured in data collection. Meaning making takes place in the context of narratives, metaphors, and language (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). The purpose of IPA is to gain insight into experience and therefore is intertwined participant experience and the language they use. More IPA studies,

from different researchers, who use a different group of participants would allow for comparison of results.

Secondly, IPA relies on subjective judgement of the researcher and the researcher's ability to communicate their analyses effectively. My subjective judgement and writing ability may have influenced the findings as two analysts working with the same data may come up with different interpretations (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). I engaged in researcher reflexivity to give insights into the interpretations I made throughout the process and encourage public scrutiny of my results (p. 183). Follow up interviews with respondents from studies 2 and 3, and examination of the original constructs (connection, competence, conflict, competition, comprehension, confidence, code, & coping). A continuation of this research would give insights into the influence my understanding of the participants had on the analysis.

A further challenge is to investigate whether the constructs I identified in this study are independent constructs or do they represent ends of a continuum? Longitudinal studies would allow for further analysis of comprehension, confidence, code, and coping. Prolonged observation and analysis of experienced coaches could give further insights into whether the four constructs found in this study change in light of new coaching experiences or are the end result of years of coaching experience.

## **Summary**

This study was an examination of what it is like to be an experienced tennis coach of elite junior tennis players. This study found that experienced tennis coaches described *outcome coaching constructs* including; comprehension, confidence, code, and coping. The data in this study confirms an existing understanding that novice and experienced coaches have different perspectives on coaching (Nash & Sproule, 2011). Coaches developed

confidence as they became more experienced and confidence could be associated with developing coaching philosophy (Camiere, Trudel, & Forners, 2014). Novice and experienced coaches both believed being effective was important, but they expressed this differently. *Efficacy coaching constructs* showed growth in coaches' feeling of efficacy. Novice coaches' sought feelings of competence (study 2), but experienced coaches described confidence (study 3). The evidence contributes to an existing understanding that coaching is emotionally challenging work irrespective of the level of experience coaches may have (Thelwell et al., 2010; Purdy, 2013; Kelly et al., 2018).

Finally, the experienced coaches in this study described coaching elite juniors differently to the novice coaches in study 2. The difference between the descriptions of novice and experienced coaches shows that insights of experienced coaches can help prepare new coaches for their future careers. The next chapter of this thesis is a longitudinal IPA that follows two novice, and two experienced coaches over two years. Study 4 will examine four coaches' experiences and observe whether there is any change to the constructs described in studies 2 and 3.

Table 2.

Study 3. Superordinate Themes and Subordinate Themes included in Outcome Coaching Constructs

<b>Superordinate Themes</b>	<b>Subordinate Themes</b>
Comprehension	Coaching has contradictory values
	Coaching is complicated
	Coaching relationships are temporary
Confidence	Acceptance of coaching issues
	Self-belief
	Financial security
Code	Preferred learning environment for Players
	Coaching to an image
Coping	Coaching friendships
	Perceived control of coaching outcomes
	Emotional stamina

## Chapter Seven

### Study Four

Through describing my own experiences of tennis coaching (chapter 4) and analysing the experiences of novice and experienced tennis coaches (chapter 5 & 6), there is evidence in this PhD which supports Olusoga et al., (2009) and Thelwell et al., (2017) who found coaching in an elite context causes stress for coaches. The findings of study 2 and 3 illustrated that both groups of coaches described their experiences differently. Novice coaches described coaching stressors through superordinate themes *competition* and *conflict*. Experienced coaches described coaching stressors through superordinate themes *comprehension* and *coping*. This final study will be a prolonged observation of two novice and two experienced coaches of elite junior tennis players and will explore change to the constructs identified in studies 2 and 3.

Coaching academics say it is imperative coaches are studied throughout their careers (Nash & Sproule, 2011). The number of years of experience a coach has continues to be recognised as fundamental to the development of expertise (Cote, 2006; Vergreer & Lyle, 2011, Stodter & Cushion, 2017), but there remains much to be learned about how practitioners' perceptions of their experiences change over time. Vergreer and Lyle (2011) said there are gaps in our understanding of how coaches experience practice due to a "dearth of expert – novice paradigm studies in coaching" (p. 447).

The expert – novice paradigm approach is where the processes and procedures employed by coaches with different levels of expertise are compared with each other. Comparisons of the experiences of expert practitioners with the experiences of novice practitioners is worthy of attention because it can help inform knowledge regarding how tennis coaches experiences' change over time. Mouchet, Morgan and Thomas (2018) said

coach education should continue to “articulate the practical experience” and “emphasise coaches’ lived-experience within the process of coach development” (p. 12).

Research that investigates the experiences of coaches over time will provide insights into cognitive, emotional, and behavioural changes that coaches may go through during years of practice. Many researchers have argued that a consistent failing of coach education is the failure to draw effectively on the wealth of knowledge that existing coaches possess and use it effectively to educate new and existing coaches (Cushion, Jones, & Armour, 2003, Nash & Sproule, 2011, Cushion, Armour, & Jones 2012, Stodter & Cushion, 2017). Understanding the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural changes that coaches may go through can help to improve the relevance of information used in tennis coach training and CPD modules. The information used to train tennis coaches can be improved by capturing data that illustrates the reality of coaching. Data regarding the lived experiences of tennis coaches will compliment current training directives and enable the LTA to (a) tailor coach education content for new coaches wishing to work in a performance context and prepare them for their initiation into coaching, and (b) reassure existing coaches about their experiences and development histories by providing accounts that show coaching to be emotionally challenging for other practitioners in the elite junior tennis context.

The preceding studies in this PhD have shown that novice tennis coaches of elite junior tennis players described their coaching experiences through four constructs; connectedness, competence, competition, and conflict. Experienced coaches who had over ten-years’ experience in the performance coaching environment described their coaching experiences through four different constructs; comprehension, confidence, code, and coping. There remain gaps in our understanding of how and why coaches’ perceptions of experiences change over time (Vergreer & Lyle, 2011; Stodter & Cushion, 2017; Mouchet, Morgan, & Thomas; 2018). The purpose of this fourth study was to interview two novice and two

experienced coaches over two-years and observe whether any changes occurred in how they described their experiences.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

I received full ethical approval from the LJMU ethics committee for this study. There were two novice tennis coaches, and two experienced tennis coaches interviewed during this final study. The aim of the study was to conduct a detailed and prolonged IPA of the participants' experiences and observe changes in how they described coaching activities. In accordance with Smith (2004 & 2011) a smaller sample size was selected for this study to allow for the inclusion of extracts from each participant. By selecting four participants, I was able to concentrate on the participants' journey over two-years and comment specifically about changes I observed in the individual. I was able to support any perceived cognitive, emotional, and behavioural changes with supporting quotes from all the participants I observed.

Four male participants were aged between 23 and 56 years old. The participants had already satisfied the inclusion criteria for study 2 and study 3. The participants worked in the following areas; Northern England (2), Southern England (2).

### **Research design, procedure for maintaining a phenomenological attitude, data analysis, and credibility**

The procedures used for research design, maintaining a phenomenological attitude, data analysis, and credibility were detailed on pages 70 – 86 in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

### **Interviews and interview guide**

Interviews were semi-structured and conducted on a one-to-one basis. I made notes from the participants' previous interview in study 2 (Josh and Thomas) or study 3 (Sam and James). My notes included major talking points from our previous interview and enabled me to begin study 4 discussing the participants' players. Participants were invited to reflect on issues they previously discussed (in study 2 or 3) and describe how they had resolved issues from the previous interview. The first interview in study 4 involved discussing recent tennis coaching experiences with players, parents, and coaches.

At the end of each interview I made notes about issues that I thought were important to the participant or that I wanted to revisit in the following interview. The second and third interviews began with a recap of the previous interview and how the participant resolved any previously discussed issues. Conversations then moved to more recent experiences.

The focus of all three interviews were specific players, tournament results, parental interaction, interactions with coaches, work-life balance, and any CPD modules that the coach had attended. I selected questions that helped me answer my research question and gave an insight into what it was like to coach elite junior tennis players. I used topics that the participants spoke about in previous interviews to inform questions and permit participants to tell their own stories in their own words (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Interviews lasted roughly 60 minutes and were audio recorded prior to being transcribed verbatim (word for word). I sent the participants a copy of their interview transcript so they could check that their names and coaching venues were removed, and they could not be identified by the details in their responses. I hoped that emailing the participants with interview transcripts also provided them with opportunities for reflection before our next interview. The interview structure is detailed in appendix D.

## **Procedure**

Coaches who participated in study 2 and study 3 were considered for study 4. During study 2 and 3, I asked if coaches would be interested in participating in a longitudinal study that required three further interviews. To achieve my sample of four participants I asked seven coaches in total to participate in study 4. Three coaches declined to participate in the longitudinal study because they did not feel able to commit to repeat interviews due to tournament travel with players. Participation was confirmed via email and I explained that three further interviews would be carried out at 8-month intervals. Participants received an explanation of study 4, reminded about confidentiality, reminded of the audio recording of interviews, signed a new participant consent form, and received a reminder of their right to withdraw from the research without the need to explain.

### **Results**

I have divided the results of this study into two sections. The first section shows novice coaches describing *comprehension* over two-years. Both novice coaches began to discuss coaching in a broader perspective over the two-years. There were four constructs described by novice coaches in study 2, namely; connection, competence, conflict, and competition (*contextual coaching constructs*). These four constructs remained present in the novice coaches' descriptions in study 4. Both novice coaches described coaching as more complicated than they had previously believed it to be (comprehension). The evidence suggested that both novice coaches were struggling to accept parental involvement, the contradictory nature of coaching, and the short-term nature of coaching relationships.

The second section shows experienced coaches' responses over the two-years. No new constructs were identified in the experienced coaches' responses. Experienced coaches described all 8 constructs identified across studies 2 and 3 (connection, competence, conflict, competition, comprehension, confidence, code, and coping). The results section shows that

experienced coaches describe the same constructs as novice coaches described in study 2. Both experienced coaches had more accepting attitudes than the novice coaches did, regarding connection, competence, conflict, and competition. Acceptance generated relaxed, level-headed, and confident responses from the experienced coaches. Each superordinate theme has multiple subordinate themes, which are summarised in table 4 at the back of this chapter (p. 206).

### **Superordinate Theme 1: Novice Coaches Describing their Wider Understanding of Coaching (Comprehension) but Struggling to Accept Coaching Issues**

Novice coaches describing comprehension but struggling to accept coaching issues was a theme where novice participants described a broader understanding of coaching than they previously described in study 2. Despite their broader understanding of coaching, novice coaches were struggling to accept issues that arose in their day-to-day activities. I divided novice coaches describing comprehension but struggling to accept coaching issues into 4 subordinate themes including; accepting the complexity of the process, struggling to accept that coaching requires parental involvement, struggling to accept coaching has contradictory values, and struggling to accept coaching relationships are temporary.

#### **Accepting the complexity of the process.**

Accepting the complexity of the process shows that both novice coaches understood that tennis coaching included many different facets which, made coaching complicated. Thomas was accepting that his role with players was extensive, and it encompassed many different elements: "There's so much involved (in coaching). All this stuff you deal with. So, you've got to learn all sorts of new things to be a coach haven't you".

Thomas was surprised by some of the interactions he described during study 2 relating to pressures he felt when coaching elite juniors (see chapter 5, p. 127). In his final interview,

Thomas began to describe some of the benefits that reflecting on his coaching experiences with me, had on his acceptance of the complexity of coaching:

There are so many elements to it (coaching). You try and juggle it all and educate yourself. Just talking to you is educating me, you know just understanding that others (coaches) feel the same and it's not this perfect world for them either. Coz you know people often look at you and then look at your player as if you've failed with them. But you know, you are just doing the best you can with the time you've got.

Recognising that other coaches had similar struggles seemed reassuring for Thomas and he was accepting that he must continue persevere with coaching actions despite time or knowledge limitations. Potential negative judgements from other coaches about Thomas' competence were not threatening to his motivation and Thomas was perhaps beginning to accept public evaluations made in tennis.

Josh was also accepting that coaching was more complicated than delivering simple instruction to players. Josh identified a cognitive element to player development that may affect his coaching effectiveness. When discussing how elite junior coaching was not primarily about getting players to perform well technically, or powerfully, or consistently, Josh said:

Yeah, a lot of it isn't technique. They (players) have got to the stage where they can all hit a good ball. It becomes far more mental. So, can your personality rub off on them and turn them into a better player. Or have they got so many bad traits from somewhere else. That is what is so hard.

Both participants described coaching as a holistic process that included physical, mental, and interpersonal factors. Josh also described a blaming strategy when he was not able to improve his players to a satisfactory level. Josh blamed players' *bad traits* as a complication, and a hindrance to his coaching. In contrast, Thomas described trying his best to overcome the

complications he faced. In both instances, Josh and Thomas were accepting that coaching was a complicated process that was not solely based on giving instructions.

**Struggling to accept that coaching requires parental involvement.**

Struggling to accept that coaching requires parental involvement shows both participants describing their discomfort with coach-parent interactions. Interactions with parents were a fundamental part of the coaching role and participants regularly discussed parents being involved in player development. The participants spoke about parental involvement in blunt terms and this showed discontent with their recent experiences with parents. For example, Josh was struggling with parental feedback after competitions and when discussing a recent conversation with the father of a player he taught, Josh said:

Maybe it's different for older coaches. Do parents feel less inclined to have a go at them (older coaches) coz they are older than the parents or coz they're a national coach and they want something from them? I feel like saying who the hell do you think you are to these parents. Honestly!

Josh perceived parental feedback as the parent questioning his authority and as Josh continued to describe his experience, there was a confrontational tone to his response. Josh continued to explain his perception of the parent's intentions:

He (parent) just wanted to dictate the session. He wanted me to do what he wanted and I kind of think "well no, I'm the coach and I will tell you what we are doing this session". I think too many coaches give in just because the parents are sat on the side and watching.

Parents watch most of their children's matches and often have valuable information regarding tactical or technical execution when in the pressure of a match. Both novice coaches described parents returning from competition with positive and negative feedback from the

weeks play. Josh was beginning to understand that parental involvement was a phenomenon in tennis coaching, but he was uncomfortable with it. Josh was increasingly questioning of parental involvement in junior tennis:

Why do parents get so much of a voice in tennis, coz in other sports they don't? Tennis is the sport that parents say I'm not happy with you (coach), or the kid says I'm not happy with you (coach) and the coach just has to take it coz he's got no-one to turn to. Parents aren't walking into the middle of a football pitch, saying excuse me, I think little Johnny should be coming off. They'd be told to get off the pitch.

The reality of competitive tennis is that it requires sacrifice from parents as well as their children. Parents transport their children to tournaments and coaches cannot attend all tournaments, partly because of their need to maintain their self-employed income with other players they coach. Therefore, parents will continue to provide tennis coaches with valuable feedback regarding matches that coaches cannot watch. Unless Josh can accept parental involvement, he may continue to experience discomfort with his elite junior coaching role and possibly transition out of coaching. Josh described concerns with his long-term perspective in coaching as illustrated by this next extract from his final interview:

I don't know how people do it (coaching) for so long. I guess they just switch off from it all or stop caring. I really can't see myself doing it (coaching) past 30-35. Might have gone mad by then! Hopefully I produce a player and go on tour with them and leave these parents and this moaning behind.

Thomas was also struggling to accept stress he associated with parental involvement. Thomas was not *coping* with his perception of negative parental attitudes towards his coaching. Thomas was struggling with his future perspective of coaching and he was preoccupied with

parents perceiving his coaching negatively. In his final interview, Thomas described that he was becoming disillusioned with coaching:

It's really tough when the kids aren't doing the drill coz, they don't like it and the parent is watching thinking this is crap. Do you make them carry on coz it will make them better at tennis? Or do you back off and just feel like a babysitter? Coz you know what they are talking about on the way home. My crap coaching, in their eyes anyway! I just don't think tennis coaches get the respect. It's not as good a job as when you first go into it, I think. That's the worrying thing. How many coaches are there like me saying the same thing? I don't like it (coaching) anymore. There must be loads (of coaches that don't like coaching).

Josh and Thomas' previous descriptions in study 2, relating to stress from parental interactions implied that stress was due to the odd problem parent. As study 4 advanced, both participants described ongoing concerns with parental involvement, and they were feeling stress from several coach-parent relationships. Josh said:

The tennis coaching world is a funny one. Everyone (parents and coaches) fucking hates each other! It must be more positive down south. At least I hope so anyway. So much aggro and people hawking (stealing) players off each other. Bitching parents, backstabbing coaches. Jesus it's hard work.

The blunt terms coach Josh used to describe what he had learned about coaching so far, implied a less than accepting attitude towards what he had observed. Josh was defining his coaching world by his interactions with parents (and coaches) and negative perceptions of parents were influential in his assessment of coaching.

Thomas was philosophical about coaching and as he discussed what he had learned throughout study 4, he began to highlight parental interactions:

I guess when I started, I was like make some really, good drills and do what you can to look good (on court). Recently I guess I learned I've been overcomplicating things and just thinking about drills, drills, drills. I think if I keep things simpler for them (players) then they have a better chance (of improving). It's not about me sounding clever. So, simplicity I'd say. Now I've just got the big challenge of dealing with the parents. The parents will always be challenging. I've got a long way to go on that one.

Interactions with parents were prominent both coaches' descriptions of recent coaching experiences. Both participants referenced parent interactions and parent responses to coaching actions when they answered questions unrelated to parents. Parent interactions were a dominant factor in how Josh and Thomas understood their coaching roles and they had yet to feel comfortable with parents. Parents drive their children to training and tournaments, and often pay coaches at the end of individual sessions, which increases coach-parent interactions. Josh and Thomas were learning that parental interactions would occur on a daily / weekly basis, but they had not accepted they were part of their role. Nor had Josh or Thomas found tolerant ways of coping with the stress they associated with parental interactions.

**Struggling to accept coaching has contradictory values.**

Struggling to accept that coaching has contradictory values shows the novice coaches were uncomfortable to ask questions of other coaches because it contradicted their perception of themselves as experts who worked in an elite context. For example, Thomas said:

I find it really hard when you're a coaching really good player, but they are struggling (with results). You know when you just can't get them to do what you're looking for. You feel like you should have the answer, and you feel under pressure coz you know you don't have it. You keep saying "more lessons" and the pressure just keeps building. You just don't feel you can admit it's not working, coz you're being paid to fix it.

Everyone says don't be scared to ask questions, but you feel like you've got to do it yourself. That's what you're paid for.

Thomas' perceived inability to fix his players' performance issues put a strain on his self-image and self-esteem. Thomas feared asking other coaches to help because he believed asking questions reduced his expertise and in his third interview he described his fear of not having the answer to coaching problems:

You feel like you almost have to pre-empt things with "now this could go wrong, or this might not work" just to take the pressure off. But who wants to hear that? You're too scared to say that kind of thing.

Not being able to guarantee success with coaching methods was a source of anxiety for novice coaches because it contradicted their expert status. Admitting that coaching methods may not always work was a source of inner-conflict.

Study 3 highlighted a contradiction between coaches' level of qualifications and their financial earning potential. Study 3 showed coaches made financial sacrifices to work in the elite junior context because elite players could not afford to play many hours at a high hourly rate. Josh was beginning to understand there may be a requirement on the coaches' behalf to make sacrifices to work with the best players. In his final interview, Josh said: "Can you say right, I'm gonna take a chance on this player coz I think they are good. But to do this yourself you're gonna have to say, I'm not going to get paid". Participants in study 2 and study 3 described elite junior coaching as being unprofitable due to the number of extra hours coaches committed, and these extra hours were usually unpaid. Josh was motivated to work with elite juniors but still had not accepted that coaches needed to make financial sacrifices to work in the elite junior context. In his final interview, Josh described the financial sacrifices coaches make:

It's impossible to justify. You can't say to your partner we can't pay the mortgage this month coz I'm giving little Johnny free lessons. She'd be like what are you doing giving free lessons. I think it's a good idea but it's not my job to do that.

The need to earn a satisfactory living contradicted Josh's perception of himself as an expert coach wanting to work with elite junior players. Tournament visits, session planning, match debriefs, and communication with the player and their parents occur in coaches' private time and was often unpaid. Novice coaches struggled to accept the discounted hourly rates, which included the extra unpaid hours. Lower hourly rates of pay contradicted the participants' perception of being an expert because they did not receive higher pay that corresponded with their qualification level or success with their players. Without a satisfactory sense of financial security or acceptance of the sacrifices required of coaches in the elite junior context, novice coaches struggled with their task perception of coaching (Kelchtermans, 2009a, 2009b).

**Struggling to accept that coaching relationships are temporary.**

Struggling to accept that coaching relationships are temporary shows both novice participants describing that elite juniors changed their coaches often, but when relationships ended the participants felt insecure or vulnerable. Josh and Thomas both described coaching relationships could terminate suddenly. In his third interview, Thomas described how a relationship with a player had ended abruptly:

As far as I was aware, they (parents) were paying me for my expertise to improve their child and I did that how I thought best. I didn't think her forehand was good. It wasn't working and it needed to change. I said that, and it ended up shit creek (the relationship ended).

The profanity in Thomas' response suggested a less than accepting attitude of the players or parent's decision to move to another coach. In his final interview, I asked Thomas

what he had learned about coaching so far and part of his response referenced players changing coaches:

I just wish that we could all (coaches) just accept that players might move on to another coach. Simply coz they get on better with someone else. Simple. But no, everyone gets so offended if a player moves to someone else. It's like it's the end of the world. I think that's massive from what I've seen.

It is understandable that coaches feel aggrieved when his player moved to a rival coach because it has the potential to affect their income and self-esteem. If another coach is viewed as more appropriate, they might question what they did wrong or what other coaches were doing more effectively.

Thomas' previous quote also alluded to players getting on better with another coach and this was perceived as a potential reason for relationships to end. In his third interview, Josh provided insight into ways that rival coaches can contribute to coaching relationships ending. Josh discussed his attempts to increase his hours on court with a player who worked with two coaches from different tennis centres:

I want to slowly work xxx (other coach) out of it. She's (player) not fully ready to get rid of him yet. She knows he's not good she just doesn't want to get rid of him. She's like, "I still think he's got some stuff technically to teach me". I'm like "are you sure coz I've not seen anything". I don't know what you see in him.

In his final interview, I asked Josh how the situation with the same player was working and he replied: "Yeah it's all good. She's doing all her stuff (tennis) here now (with Josh). She's doing so much better".

Competitive coaching behaviours that influence players' choice of coach understandably increased the chance of coaches feeling disgruntled when relationships ended.

Novice coaches struggled to accept temporary nature of coaching relationships because it affected their self-esteem. The participants questioned why other coaches were more appropriate and there was evidence of competitive behaviours that influenced players to change coach. Damage to self-esteem and mistrust of other coaches influenced the participants less than accepting attitudes to coaching relationships ending.

### **Superordinate Theme 2: Experienced Coaches Accepting Coaching Issues**

Experienced coaches accepting coaching issues was a theme where experienced participants described acceptance that coaching was challenging, and the challenges were unavoidable. Both experienced coaches accepted that the interpersonal and competitive nature of coaching would remain constant issues in their working environment. Acceptance was a fundamental element in experienced coaches' descriptions because it resulted in less questioning of the self than novice coaches. Experienced coaches were more confident and level-headed than novice coaches when describing their day-to-day coaching activities. I divided experienced coaches accepting coaching issues into 4 subordinate themes including; accepting the challenges of connection, accepting their competence, accepting conflict is part of coaching, and accepting coaching is competitive.

#### **Accepting the challenges of connection.**

Accepting the challenges of connection shows the experienced coaches embracing the interpersonal nature of coaching and accepting the turbulent nature of relationships between individuals. There was general agreement amongst participants in the preceding studies that building relationships with people was a fundamental part of coaching. Once coaching relationships had been established, experienced coaches understood and accepted that maintaining relationships would provide challenges and require considerable effort on their part. Sam said:

Sure, experience is key, but I'd encourage listening skills massively. Really listen to players. They might not want to outright say their parents are giving them a hard time or lambasting them for losing, but if you listen hard enough the clues are there. I guess experience helps you read those messages better and better as you get to know your player better. It's your job to listen and to know the player.

Connection with players was more than understanding their tennis game, their strengths, and their weaknesses. Sam described subtle cue recognitions relating to player behaviours that indicated problems with his players' mental state or issues away from the court. Accepting that his job was to listen implied Sam embraced the notion that coaching relationships are bi-directional (Rhind & Jowett, 2012). As coaches learn more and more about their players' emotions and behaviours, they can be influenced by the players' emotional states. Therefore, maintaining a positive connection with players requires emotional and cognitive empathy.

James also highlighted the importance of connection to his players. "An emotional connection with the kid is so important. You've got to find a way into their world. Whatever it might be". James understood the uniqueness of each player he coached, and he was accepting of a need to adapt. Coaches used emotional intelligence to come up with different strategies with players to maintain the relationship.

Sam described good relationships with players but there were still challenges that he had to overcome. Relationship duration is a possible indicator of successful coaching relationships (Jowett, 2009). If player, coach, and parent are happy with the relationship then they are more likely to remain committed to the relationship. Sam was proud to have long-term coaching relationships, but acknowledged they brought unique problems:

Some of the kids I coach, I'm almost a family member. I've coached them for so long and it can be difficult because of the familiarity. Sometimes they try to test you. I say would you speak to a school-teacher like that? No. I'm your teacher too. We, as coaches, are important. We can shape individual personalities. That's a big deal and I'm very aware of that.

Elite junior tennis players can be on court with their coach for over 10 hours per week and travel to competitions with their coach which increases the potential for over-familiarity. Sam understood over-familiarity created challenges for his coaching despite the relationship being positive. Maintaining boundaries and ensuring discipline was challenging, and in his final interview, Sam elaborated on why it was challenging:

It can cause problems with parents if I come down too hard on kids when they don't try hard enough. You know, I find it hard when you're the bad guy, the disciplinarian and you're the only one in the set up (player, coach, parent) being the bad guy. It's tough because if mum and dad are quite lax on discipline then it falls on me to do that. I'm happy doing it, coz that's my style but the parents don't always like it. I can understand that.

Coaches risk feeling isolated when disciplining players and their parents do not like it. Sam accepted that being disciplinarian was part of his role, but it was still uncomfortable for him. Coaches' risks upsetting players and parents at the same time because of perceived excessive disciplining. The nature of the coach-athlete triad (player, coach, parent) can leave the coach isolated when all the members of the players family perceive the coach to be overly strict. Sam was accepting that parents were sometimes uncomfortable with family outsiders disciplining a child when behaviour has slipped below expected standards. Player over-familiarity was a challenge Sam would continue to face when relationships were long-standing.

James described how he balanced players' and parents' perceptions of him while maintaining coaching relationships and he described the interrelationship between players and parent's perception of him:

The number one thing you've got to do as the coach is care about the player. If you do that then the player will always warm to you. It helps the parents warm to you too when they see that.

Both participants accepted that relationships were influential in them being effective coaches. Relationships were described as volatile, but both participants understood and accepted the challenges they encountered when maintaining relationships.

#### **Accepting their competence.**

Accepting their competence shows that both participants in this study spoke with self-assurance about their competence in coaching and they believed that their coaching had resulted in many positive player outcomes. Both participants had accepted they were capable tennis coaches and Sam described an unassuming attitude towards his competence: "I was asked to do a presentation to the LTA on why I produced good players. Well firstly, that's what I'm being asked to do".

In a later interview, I asked Sam about new approaches to teaching forehand technique and Sam described his outlook: "I hear so much talk about technical information. Yes, that is important but in actual fact technique hasn't changed that much over the years. You just know that instinctively".

When discussing technical elements of tennis coaching both participants accepted that they had the appropriate knowledge to teach. James was relaxed about his coaching role and he implied that accepting he was competent reduced his anxiety when issues arose:

There is no substitute for experience. You've been there and done it. I do look back at what I taught 10 years ago and now I just know more. I've the read books, and I've done the years. You just don't panic as time goes on.

Novice coaches in study 2 described fear, insecurity, and anxiety when they encountered player development issues that they were unable to solve. Experienced coaches had encountered player development issues many times before and they accepted players would continue to have development plateaus. Both experienced participants were level-headed when discussing player development issues. Accepting that they were competent resulted in experienced coaches feeling composed when they were in stressful coaching scenarios and modesty about their successes.

#### **Accepting conflict is part of coaching.**

Accepting that conflict is part of coaching shows experienced coaches did not feel threatened or demotivated by conflicts. Both experienced coaches described conflict in their recollections of recent coaching experiences, and they accepted that it would continue to occur. James explained that he was surprised by conflicts he experienced with parents early in his coaching career and they made him feel uncomfortable:

Once I moved into the performance world, initially I was surprised by what it entailed. You know talking finances with parents, the tough phone calls at night being told your coaching isn't good etc. Difficult conversations. It's caused many awkward moments for me over the years and I was surprised early on with what I was dealing with. Things I wasn't expecting to.

James understood that the human interactions involved in coaching would generate conflict. As James continued to discuss interpersonal conflicts with parents, he described acceptance: "There are really tough parts to the job, like getting lambasted by parents. But

what job doesn't have issues? It's a lucky person that has a job with no issues. These are my issues, it's fine". James was accepting that conflicts with parents were part of his job, but he admitted that conflict had caused him problems early in his career. Having accepted the presence of conflict in performance coaching, experienced coaches developed their emotional stamina to cope with interpersonal conflict.

Sam also described acceptance of interpersonal conflict with parents. Having accepted that conflicts would occur, Sam described empathy with players and their parents regarding pressure they feel from the elite junior tennis culture, for example:

There are always those questions. "Why is my son or daughter not being picked for this or that?" There is no outright blame but it's a leading question. You know what's coming next... "What are you going to do about it?" There is so much pressure for kids and parents to feel like they are keeping up with whoever they have set their sights on. As coach you're always gonna be up against that and they (parents) will come at you.

Both participants agreed that there was a pressure for players and parents to continuously measure improvement against the achievements of other players. Benchmarking against other players development (e.g., LTA rating and ranking, ITF ranking, Tennis Europe ranking) contributed to players and their parents worrying about falling behind others. If development targets were not achieved, experienced coaches understood they would become the focal point for parents' anxieties, and conflicts would occur. Understanding and accepting that players and parents experienced pressure to keep improving helped Sam to empathise with their challenges.

Conflict was prominent in discussions about players' attitudes. Sam previously alluded to empathy towards players and parents, however James said he sometimes deliberately created conflict to change player behaviour. James said:

I drove him (player) all the way to Glasgow, and in the match tie-break of the final he just stopped trying. I told his dad that I was going to give him the hairdryer. I'm not travelling all this way to watch him give up! I hit all the pressure points, so he knew it wasn't acceptable. I'm not sure his dad was happy but I'm not having that. You can't shy away from those things just to keep dad happy.

James used conflict to communicate to his player that his effort level was not up to the required standard for elite level. Therefore, experienced coaches used conflict to socialise players into more disciplined behaviour.

The source of conflict varied throughout the participants responses. Players and parents were primary sources of conflict. However, Study 2 and 3 found that coaches were competitive with each other. Competitive behaviours amongst coaches contributed to distrustful attitudes between coaches and this was a source of inter-coach conflict. Sam said:

I fall out with national coaches all the time. You get the feedback from camps and they are like their second serve hasn't improved, what are you doing? Well hang on, you've had my player for 20 weeks so far this year on camps and trips, I've only seen him for 5 weeks. What are you doing? I know what's gonna happen. The kid will get dropped from invitational stuff and I'm left with the fall out. Or sometimes after a long trip away the kids come back fragile because the national coach has been telling the kid something isn't good enough. So, it's always a battle with those guys. It's my head on the block not theirs.

Working with elite juniors increased the likelihood that participants' players would be selected for national training camps or national representative matches. Players selected for national representation are entrusted to LTA national coaches who want input into player development. Control over player development was a source of conflict when players worked with more than one coach. Sam accepted his players would receive coaching on international trips, but confusion over who was responsible for player development caused conflict for participants working with external coaches.

**Accepting that tennis coaching is competitive.**

Accepting that tennis coaching is competitive shows experienced coaches were relaxed about the competitive behaviours they observed between coaches. Competitive attitudes amongst coaches were described throughout studies 2 and 3. Accepting competition was part of a tennis coaches reality seemed to have a liberating effect on both participants in this study. In interview two, Sam said:

Oh yeah, it's so competitive. But what can I say? The kids are competitive, the parents are competitive, and the coaches are competitive. There are all sorts going on and competitiveness drives the behaviours of everyone for sure. That's standard (normal behaviour).

Acceptance of competition throughout coaching informed Sam's philosophy and helped him to differentiate his methods from competitor coaches. In his final interview, I asked Sam about his philosophy of coaching and he said:

You've just got to be big enough to say, "look this is how I go about it" (coaching). There are other coaches and other ways (of coaching). Not just mine. If you like my approach, come and join me on a journey. Sell the journey you believe in. You might lose player's if it's not what they want to hear or if another coach tells them what they

want to hear. But at least transparency might remove some of the bickering (between coach and parent) and in-fighting (between coaches), shall we say.

Acceptance of the competitive nature of coaching infused Sam's description of his philosophy (code). My question to Sam did not include other coaches, but his reply included two direct references of other coaches and another implied reference to them. Sam had developed his philosophy to differentiate himself from other coaches and compete for business. Accepting competition was routine throughout coaching influenced Sam's philosophy so he could sustain his coaching presence.

When further asked about the competitive nature of coaching Sam confirmed competitive behaviours between coaches. Sam said:

Bigger centres are always sniffing around your best players. The grass is always greener for parents and their kids. But are these kids better staying where they are? I think so and that would create a better culture of staying in the game longer. Instead of constantly moving from one place to another. As I say the grass is always greener. What can you do?

Sam observed coaches from High Performance Centres (HPC's) trying to tempt players to change training venues with offers of more squads (group sessions), organised trips abroad with coaches, access to more hitting partners, and access to LTA funding. Sam understood that there were benefits to players moving to larger tennis centres so they could access better resources and facilities, but he also recognised there were benefits to players receiving long-term coaching at one venue. Competition to attract players further highlights the findings of study 2 that said that players are social capital. Participants agreed that coaches were aware of reputational gain from being associated with elite junior players and this drove competitive behaviours.

In Sam's final interview, I wanted to hear more about his experience of competition in coaching. I asked if he thought coaches valued retaining positive relationships with players as much as they valued attracting new players. Sam replied:

The players that are the easiest for other centres to poach are your weaker ones. It's easy for other centres to promise them the world. You know, they're judged on how many national players they have training there. Of-course they promise the world and of course, the parents' heads will be turned when they hear all these promises. It's nice for the parents to have coaches tell them how good their kids are. Parents want their kids training at xxx or xxx (tennis centres). It's status. That's always gonna be there.

There were suggestions that parents equated their children training at certain venues with "status" which indicated there was cultural capital to be gained for parents. Lauer et al. (2006) said that parents can perceive the success of their child in tennis as a reflection of their good parenting. Both participants described a tennis hierarchy that influenced how people perceived tennis centres. For example, throughout the UK, there are regional and national performance tennis centres, and above them are High Performance Centres. Sam implied there was status associated with training at a tennis centre or with a coach. Sam accepted that coaches could persuade parents to change training venues if it showed their child was improving at tennis. Understanding and accepting the potential for coaches to influence parents' choices for their children seemed to make it easier for Sam to tolerate the competitive behaviours he observed from other coaches.

James had also accepted that coaching was competitive. When referring to the competitiveness of his tennis coaching environment James stated in his second interview: "It's tough out there. Everyone is looking to knock you and take your players". Participants across studies 2 and 3 described negative attitudes towards other coaches and James agreed. Self-

employment was consistently described as contributing to the competitiveness that was observed in study 2. In his final interview, I asked James how he coped with the competitive environment he worked in and James replied: "I believe I am a business and I've got to be seen to be doing more than the other guys. After tournaments, we're back out practicing so we're doing more than someone else is doing". Accepting the competitive nature of coaching had a motivating effect on James and he described being competitive himself. James continued to describe how he used a strong work ethic to compete: "That's what separates you from the other players and coaches. The hard work". Hard work was a tangible way for James to demonstrate his worth as a coach and a way of advertising himself as suitable to work with elite junior tennis players.

### **Discussion**

The aim of this study was to observe two novice and two experienced coaches over two-years. Adhering to my study aim allowed me to observe the constructs identified in studies 2 and 3 (see table 3 below on p. 200) and describe any changes to how they described their experiences over two years. The results of this study provide evidence that novice coaches developed comprehension over the two-years, but they struggled with issues that made coaching more challenging such as parental involvement, contradictory values, and competition between coaches. The results also show that experienced coaches described and accepted the constructs identified earlier in study 2 (with novice coaches) such as connection, competence, conflict, and competition. Finally, the results show that acceptance of coaching issues helped experienced coaches feel confident and relaxed about their experiences.

Table 3.

Summary of the eight superordinate themes identified in study 2 and study 3

<b>Superordinate Themes</b>	<b>Superordinate Theme Descriptor</b>
<b>Connection</b>	Coaches describing the types of relationships in coaching
<b>Competence</b>	Coaches describing proof of effectiveness in coaching
<b>Conflict</b>	Coaches describing difficulties managing relationships
<b>Competition</b>	Coaches describing competition between coaches
<b>Comprehension</b>	Coaches describing broad understanding of coaching
<b>Confidence</b>	Coaches describing confidence in their coaching
<b>Code</b>	Coaches describing their philosophy on coaching
<b>Coping</b>	Coaches describing ways to cope with stressors

The data in this study has added to our understanding of coaching in several ways. Firstly, this is the first longitudinal IPA study to examine the lived experience of novice and experienced tennis coaches working with elite junior tennis players. The findings of this study help to show what it is like for novice and experienced tennis coaches to work with elite junior tennis players. In addition, this study offers insights into why novice and experienced coaches have different perspectives about coaching.

Secondly, this study showed novice coaches developed *comprehension* over the two-year study. Both participants described a broader understanding of coaching than novice coaches in study 2. Novice coaches understood that coaching was more complicated than they had initially expected it to be. Although both participants were more understanding of the context in which their coaching role was performed, they struggled to accept some of the challenges they faced. Parental interactions, contradictory values, and constantly having to readjust to new coaching relationships challenged their future perspectives of coaching (Kelchtermans 2009a, 2009b). Both participants were unsure if they wanted to remain in coaching due to its emotionally challenging nature. Understanding coaching from a broader perspective over two years was daunting for both participants and highlighted that they were unprepared for the holistic nature of coaching (Cushion, Jones, & Armour, 2003).

Thirdly, this study supports previous assertions that coach education literature could use the insights of experienced coaches more effectively to prepare new practitioners for their roles with elite junior tennis players (Cushion, Jones, & Armour, 2003). Novice coaches were stressed and anxious about unexpected challenges that they encountered in their day-to-day activities. Educating new coaches about the coping mechanisms used by experienced practitioners would help to prepare them for the challenges that coaching may create by a) raising awareness that novice coaches will experience emotional challenges in their future careers b) allow novice to select coping strategies that have worked for other coaches.

Fourthly, the findings suggest that novice coaches require emotional support early in their coaching careers. Bandura said, "It is difficult to achieve much while fighting self-doubt" (1997, p. 118) and there was evidence throughout this study that both novice coaches were doubting themselves early in their careers. There were no significant descriptions of *confidence*, *code*, or *coping* from the novice participants and there may be benefits to the long-term career prospects of coaches if they received appropriate emotional support when they experienced emotional challenges.

Fifthly, the results show that experienced coaches were accepting of issues associated with connection, competence, conflict, and competition. Acceptance of coaching issues was associated with the differences observed between novice and experienced coaches throughout studies 2, 3, and 4. Accepting coaching issues was linked to level-headed descriptions of issues such as conflicts with parents, competition between coaches, relationships terminating, and sacrificing income to work in the elite junior context. There was general agreement between the experienced coaches throughout this study that conflicts, and competition were enduring features of coaching. Experienced coaches were focussed on performing their job as effectively as they could rather than questioning their experiences. Sam and James (experienced coaches) described *confidence* in their coaching, and they described less self-doubt than Josh and Thomas (novice coaches).

Sixthly, this study supports previous assertions that increased professional confidence is associated with coaches developing their philosophy (*code*) and an improved ability to overcome challenges in coaching (*coping*) (Camiere, Trudel, & Forners, 2014). Acceptance reduced experienced coaches' questioning of the challenges they faced. Articulating the practical, lived-experience of existing practitioners and emphasising the reality of coaching to new coaches can help to reduce the time taken to accept challenging elements of the coaching role (Mouchet, Morgan, & Thomas, 2018). Exposure to the lived experience of other coaches

will help trainee practitioners learn and understand the context that their role will be performed in and prepare *coping* strategies for what lies ahead of them.

Finally, this study found no change in the constructs described by the experienced coaches. Connection, competence, conflict, competition, comprehension, confidence, code, and coping remained present throughout the two years and there were no new constructs described. The constructs stayed the same, but they were sometimes expressed differently. For example, all the participants discussed parental involvement. However, novice coaches were intolerant of parental involvement, but experienced coaches were accepting of it. It is reasonable to suggest that over ten years-experience represented enough time for both experienced participants to believe they were well versed in what coaching involved. Acceptance of the challenges they faced and reduced self-doubt may have influenced the experienced coaches being less concerned with seeking change to their beliefs or behaviours. Experienced coaches were confident about coaching and were able to cope with what they had experienced, therefore accepting of their current cognitive and emotional states.

### **Limitations and future research**

A limitation of this study relates to sampling. Participants were spoken to three times, at eight-month intervals during study 4 and this may have caused issues with their recollections of experiences. I did not ask for more interviews as I did not wish to risk asking for too much of the participants' time and risk them dropping out of the research. The time between each interview may have influenced the data collection process because they had forgotten details. It would be beneficial to extend the longitudinal study, including the same four participants, and observe them over a longer time period. Insights could be gained about when novice coaches began to describe their experiences like the experienced coaches in this

research. For example, insights may be gained regarding when novice coaches began to describe *code* and *coping* in their responses.

It would also be beneficial to investigate *acceptance* in experienced coaches and whether there were any disadvantages associated with their *accepting* experiences. For example, does acceptance impact on parents' perceptions of coaches' care towards a player? Understanding of direct and meta perceptions could be improved if we understood more about the interplay between acceptance, experienced coaches becoming more relaxed, and parent's perceptions of coaches' level of care towards players.

### **Summary**

This study was an interpretative phenomenological analysis of the experiences of two novice and two experienced tennis coaches over a two-year period. This study found that the two novice coaches began to describe *comprehension* over the two years. *Comprehension* demonstrated that both novice coaches were developing their wider understanding of the coaching process. However, there were challenging elements of coaching that novice coaches struggled to accept. Lack of acceptance of parental involvement, contradictory values, and temporary relationships was associated with the novice coaches struggling with self-esteem, self-doubt, future perspectives in coaching, and task motivation (Kelchtermans 2009a, 2009b).

Conversely, this study found that the two experienced coaches described connection, competence, competition, and conflict over the two-years. Both experienced coaches described accepting attitudes towards challenges they faced in coaching. There is evidence in this study to suggest that acceptance was an influential factor in the differences observed between novice and experienced tennis coaches' descriptions of coaching. The next chapter

of this PhD will be the general discussion. Chapter eight will synthesise the findings of all four studies and provide recommendations for the future directions of tennis coach education.

Table 4.

## Study 4. Superordinate Themes and Subordinate Themes

<b>Superordinate Themes</b>	<b>Subordinate Themes</b>
Novice coaches describing comprehension but struggling to accept coaching issues.	<p>Accepting the complexity of the process.</p> <p>Struggling to accept coaching requires parental involvement.</p> <p>Struggling to accept coaching has contradictory values.</p> <p>Struggling to accept that coaching relationships are Temporary.</p>
Experienced coaches describing acceptance of coaching issues.	<p>Accepting the challenges of connection.</p> <p>Accepting their competence.</p> <p>Accepting that conflict is part of coaching.</p> <p>Accepting that coaching is competitive.</p>

## Chapter Eight

### General Discussion

#### Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this PhD was to examine the lived coaching experience of independent tennis coaches and describe what it is like to be a coach of an elite junior tennis player. The overarching purpose was achieved by working to the following objectives:

Study 1: An autoethnographic study on three critical coaching incidents in my experience of coaching an elite junior tennis player.

Study 2: An IPA of the coaching experiences of eight independent novice tennis coaches working with elite junior tennis players.

Study 3: An IPA of the coaching experiences of eight independent experienced tennis coaches working with elite junior tennis players.

Study 4: A two-year longitudinal IPA of the coaching experiences of two novice and two experienced tennis coaches working with elite junior tennis players.

I will present the findings as follows: Firstly, I will present the key findings. Secondly, I will position my key findings in relation to existing literature to help interpret my results and show how they add to current knowledge. Thirdly, I will take a reflexive approach and consider my position in the research as both the researcher (study 2, 3, & 4) and the researched (study 1). Fourthly, I will consider the implications of my key findings. Finally, I will consider limitations of my research and possible future directions for other research projects into tennis coaching.

#### Key Findings

My experiences as a tennis coach (chapter 4) showed similarities to the experiences described by the tennis coaches interviewed in studies 2, 3, and 4. The four studies have given a comprehensive analysis of how tennis coaches described their experiences of tennis coaching. The findings support an existing understanding that coaching is emotionally challenging (Purdy et al., 2013), experienced and novice coaches' have different perspectives about their coaching environments (Nash & Sproule, 2011), and that "sport mirrors society" (Cassidy et al., 2016, p. 37). There is no separate reality for sports coaches outside the boundaries that are set by society.

In total there were eight constructs found throughout this PhD. The eight constructs were: (a) connection, (b) competence, (c) competition, (d) conflict, (d) comprehension, (e) confidence, (f) code, and (g) coping.

After completing the four studies, the novice coaches described five out of eight constructs across studies 2 and 4 (connection, competence, competition, conflict, and comprehension). The experienced coaches described all eight constructs across studies 3 and 4.

Analysis of the data found that there were three coaching construct clusters that give a framework to understand how tennis coaches made sense of their environments.

Furthermore, my findings strongly suggest that *acceptance* of the challenges that coaches face helped to interpret the differences found between novice and experienced tennis coaches.

There are four key findings from this research:

- *Contextual coaching constructs* were those that appeared in discussions with novice and experienced coaches. Both groups of coaches described connection, competition, and conflict, where the coaches were describing the relationships and the environment in which their coaching occurred.

- *Efficacy coaching constructs* were tightly linked and illustrated growth in coaches' feelings of efficacy. Competence and confidence were linked by the coaches' understanding of their effectiveness. Competence encapsulated the novice coaches' desire to prove to themselves and to others within tennis that they were effective coaches. Confidence encapsulated experienced coaches' belief that they had proved to themselves and to others they were effective.
- *Outcome coaching constructs* were generally associated with gaining experience. The findings suggest that comprehension, code, and coping developed over time as coaches gained practical coaching experience. *Outcome constructs* were associated with coaches understanding of their environment, their position within it, and their ability to cope with the demands of elite junior coaching.
- The findings suggest that *acceptance* of challenges in coaching reduced self-doubt and was helpful for experienced coaches to focus on developing their coaching philosophy and strategies to maintain their coaching presence (code & coping). Experienced coaches were more accepting of challenges in coaching than novice coaches and understood that they would continue to face issues with coaching in the future (e.g. conflict with parents, and competition from coaches).

The findings illustrate how novice and experienced participants described their coaching experiences. Furthermore, *acceptance* of challenges in coaching helps to interpret the differences found between novice and experienced tennis coaches.

The next section will introduce the work of Zygmunt Bauman (2007, 2012, & 2013) which will be used to interpret my key findings and contribute to an evolving, problematic epistemology of sports coaching that extends beyond rationalistic and heroic accounts of coaching practice (Potrac et al., 2012). Using the work of Zygmunt Bauman to interpret the

findings of this research contributes to our understanding of what it is like to be a tennis coach in the elite junior coaching context.

### **Zygmunt Bauman's Liquid Modernity**

Zygmunt Bauman is a sociologist who introduced the concept of *liquid modernity* to make sense of our shared human lives. *Liquid modernity* describes what humans believe it is to be modern. A hundred years ago, for example, humans believed being modern was to chase “the final state of perfection” (Bauman, 2012, p. 8). Now, Bauman believes that to be modern means to seek “an infinity of improvement” (p. 9). There is no final state of perfection and athletes and their coaches in elite sport must continue to search for new ways to achieve marginal gains that give them an advantage over competition. *Marginal gains* is a term made famous by Sir Dave Brailsford and refers to getting 1 percent better in small areas of sport performance to achieve overall athletic improvement and gain an advantage over competitors (Clear, 2018). Bauman (2007, 2012) believes that there is a trend within contemporary society for some people to perpetually seek improvement. For the modern-day human, no final state is in sight or desired and this constant search for improvement leaves humans uncertain about their future. Uncertainty reflects the three sources of human existential fears; fearing the unknown, fearing helplessness, and fearing blows to self-esteem (Bauman, 2013).

Tennis coaching is reliant on human interaction and Bauman (2013) states “the pursuit of individual happiness in the conditions of life in common will remain a site of conflict forever. The instinctual impulses of humans are always bound to clash” (p. 98). Furthermore, Bauman believes that modern day “labour markets promote division between people, not unity and put a premium on competitive attitudes while degrading collaboration”

(2007, p. 3). The human condition dictates that people will continue to disagree and compete with each other (Bauman, 2013).

Uncertainty and change govern our social lives (Bauman, 2012). The social structures that guide individual choices, and the institutions that reinforce the repetition of routine and patterns of acceptable behaviour, no longer keep their shape for long enough to act as structures for human behaviour and interaction. Social structures and behavioural norms “decompose and melt faster than the time it takes for them to set and act as frames of reference for human actions” (Bauman, 2007, p. 1). For example, the LTA has recently employed a new performance director, Simon Timson, who changed the performance directives that guide talent development and talent identification for UK tennis in 2019. Michael Downey previously enforced his own directives between 2015 and 2018. Players, coaches, and parents must adjust to new blueprints for success that change how players are taught and selected for national representation.

The propensity for social structures to change constantly and individuals in society to continually seek improvement is *liquid modernity* (Bauman, 2012). Forms of modern life differ quite significantly across countries and cultures but what unites them all “is precisely their fragility, temporariness, vulnerability and inclination to constant change” (Bauman, 2012, p. 2). Uncertainty, doubt, and insecurity are the building blocks of human existential fears and living in a perpetual state of uncertainty makes us feel vulnerable. We look for “substitute targets on which to unload our surplus existential fears” (Bauman, 2007, p. 11). For example, coaches judge themselves by winning or losing as a sign of effectiveness despite there being many other, less well defined, indicators of effectiveness (i.e. knowledge, flexibility, communications skills, emotional intelligence, or well-tuned sensitivities).

Bauman (2012) says that people develop ways to cope with the tension and worry of modern life. Humans try to immunise themselves from fear, uncertainty, doubt, and insecurity and Bauman (2012) describes this as loss of sensitivity. Loss of sensitivity is a gradual, deliberate withdrawal of our responsiveness towards things that happen to us in our daily lives.

Sports coaching does not exist within a cultural vacuum and is affected by the societal structures within which it operates (Cross & Lyle, 1999). The data in this thesis provided evidence of uncertainty associated with coaching for novice and experienced participants. The participants spoken to during this research worked in the elite junior coaching environment, attended elite junior competitions, attended the same LTA coaching modules and were level 4 or level 5 coaches. However, there were differences in how novice and experienced coaches described their experiences.

Interpreting my PhD findings through Bauman's work reflects several things: Firstly, coaching is uncertain and filled with conflict and competition. Secondly, coaches try to overcome vulnerable self-esteem by relying on results to prove their effectiveness. Thirdly, the stress of coaching cannot be regulated out of existence and stress is constant through coaches' careers. Finally, coaches become less sensitive to stressors and develop ways to cope with challenges in elite junior coaching. The next section will explore the results through the lens of liquid modernity.

### **Research Findings Interpreted through Bauman's Liquid Modernity**

Interpreting my findings through the work of Bauman (2012) will show parallels with the *loss of sensitivity* that Bauman (2012) describes, and the *acceptance* that experienced tennis coaches described in this research. The following section will demonstrate that: (a) *contextual coaching constructs* show coaching is uncertain and filled with conflict and

competition, (b) *efficacy coaching constructs* show coaches try to overcome vulnerable self-esteem by relying on results to prove their effectiveness, (c) *Outcome coaching constructs* show the challenges of coaching cannot be regulated out of existence, and (d) *acceptance of challenges in coaching* show coaches become less sensitive to stressors and develop ways to cope with the challenges of elite junior coaching.

**Contextual coaching constructs show coaching is uncertain and filled with conflict and competition.**

Contextual coaching constructs (connection, conflict, & competition) showed that human interaction and relationships governed the working-life of tennis coaches irrespective of their experience. Bauman (2012) states that any activity dependent on human interaction (connection) will encounter problems associated with relationships (conflict & competition).

Previous studies into coaching found that coaches with less experience demonstrate more insecurities about their role than experienced coaches (Nash & Sproule, 2011). Bauman describes people who feel insecure about their position as “irritable and intolerant of anything or anyone that stands in their way” of achieving their goal (2012, p. 164). The data shows evidence of intolerant and irritable attitudes of novice coaches towards parental involvement and other coaches. Their intolerance and irritability towards others within tennis could be linked with the interpersonal conflict that they described.

Conflict dominated the experiences of novice coaches (study 2 & 4). Novice coaches appeared preoccupied with the nature of their relationships with parents and they described tension and anxiety associated with parental interactions. Tension, anxiety, and intolerance, of parental involvement caused inner and interpersonal conflicts described by novice coaches.

Experienced coaches described less conflict in study 3 and they spoke more about themselves rather than the people they came across in coaching. Experienced coaches

accepted the potential volatile nature of relationships and they had accepted that this was part of their coaching life. Both groups of coaches described conflict in their environments. Novice participants were surprised and threatened by conflict. Experienced participants were not surprised by conflict and had developed ways to cope with the tension and this made them less sensitive to conflict than the novice participants.

Competition amongst coaches was also a contextual coaching construct. Both groups of participants agreed that coaches were competitive with each other. Participants discussed self-employment and this affected how coaches viewed each other (e.g. rivals, competition, threats to income).

Bauman says that “inadequacy and inferiority are painful blows to self-esteem and personal dignity” (2013, p. 100). Novice coaches found collaborating with other coaches, from different tennis centres challenging and they were fearful of being perceived as less knowledgeable than other coaches. Experienced participants described accepting attitudes about the competitive nature of tennis coaching, and they appeared less threatened by other coaches than novice participants. Experienced participants were tolerant of competitor coaches and they were open to learning new ideas from other coaches.

**Efficacy coaching constructs show coaches trying to overcome a vulnerable self-esteem by relying on results to prove their effectiveness.**

Efficacy coaching constructs (competence & confidence) were closely linked with each other and showed growth in coaches' feelings of efficacy. Both groups of coaches feared being ineffective early in their careers. In the absence of clearly identifiable performance indicators Bauman (2007) says that we seek substitute targets that allow us to quantify what is happening and to alleviate any doubt that we feel about our perception of self. Novice and experienced coaches described player results as important.

Competence encapsulated the novice coaches' desire to prove to themselves and to others within tennis that they were effective coaches. Novice participants were sensitive to how people within tennis perceived them and they discussed player results affecting their perception of self. Player results provided novice coaches with evidence that their coaching methods were effective, therefore helping them to feel competent as tennis coaches. When discussing poor player results, novice coaches questioned themselves.

Confidence encapsulated the experienced coaches' belief that they had proved to themselves and to others that they were effective. Experienced coaches appeared less sensitive to how others perceived their coaching, than novice participants. Previous results with elite juniors gave the experienced coaches a belief that they were effective, and although they described poor player results, they were less questioning of themselves compared with novice participants.

**Outcome coaching constructs show the challenges of coaching cannot be regulated out of existence.**

Outcome coaching constructs (comprehension, code, & coping) were associated with gaining practical experience and corresponded with coaches' understanding of coaching, how they positioned themselves within their environment, and how they developed ways to cope with stressors. Both groups of coaches described coaching as emotionally challenging (comprehension) but the experienced coaches recognised that the challenges would remain constant. Experienced coaches adapted cognitively and emotionally to the elite junior context. Bauman (2013) says that human existential fears "cannot be regulated out of existence" (p. 98) and societal and individual needs are "forever mutually irreconcilable" (p. 99). Therefore, we develop ways to position ourselves within each sub-culture that we inhabit, and we develop ways to cope with the perpetual uncertainty that we experience.

Bauman states “societal and individual desires can never be catered for at the same time” (p. 98). For humans to gain what they want, “a formula of exchange acts as a product of compromise in attempt to satisfy the perpetually smouldering antagonism” that exists between humans. (2013, p. 98). Novice coaches had yet to find satisfactory ways to balance the competing demands of players (wanting to win), parents (wanting their children to develop holistically), other coaches (wanting to attract players), governing bodies (measuring success based on key performance indicators), and themselves (wanting to earn a satisfactory living).

One could consider code to represent experienced coaches' formula of exchange with people that they encounter in their working environment (Bauman, 2013). Experienced coaches developed a code to implement their coaching beliefs, in an unpredictable environment that had many competing demands. There were examples of experienced coaches taking a stance with their code and encouraging players and parents to adopt their exact philosophy. Such coaches did not describe flexible approaches and accepted that they would lose players that did not conform to their code. There were other examples of experienced coaches who were flexible with their code, and they were willing to adapt to players and their parents. In both instances, the experienced coaches were accepting that not everybody would view coaching from the same perspective and their code reflected how they positioned themselves in response to different opinions from players and parents.

Coping described strategies that experienced coaches employed when faced with stressful situations such as long periods away at tournaments. Time away from home was stressful because it put pressure on their relationships at home with partners and family. Experienced coaches had coaching friendships who they shared their struggles with, and this was a source of reassurance. Coaching friendships also acted as listening-ears to help experienced participants reflect on difficult situations with players, parents or other coaches.

Experienced coaches described emotional stamina when they discussed the “perpetually smouldering antagonism” that exists between humans (Bauman, 2013, p. 98). Experienced coaches described conflict with players, parents, other coaches with a similar frequency to the novice coaches. However, experienced coaches often finished their description of conflict by claiming they were used to it, or they developed a thick skin. Experienced coaches had accepted conflicts and become less sensitive to the conflicts that coaching elite juniors created.

**Acceptance of challenges in coaching show coaches become less sensitive to stressors and develop ways to cope with the challenges of elite junior coaching.**

Humans become less sensitive to the things that happen to them in their daily lives through a process of “adiaphorization of human behaviour” (Bauman, 2013, p. 37). When we adiaphora human behaviour, we remove human acts of behaviour from our sensitivity zone, therefore improving our ability “not to react to things that happen to us” (p. 37). Conflicts with people, competition with peers, and damage to self-esteem remain important issues in our lives but we use adiaphorization to become “indifferent” to such issues. By becoming indifferent to conflict or competition, we give “social consent to these issues which removes threat to our conscience or moral stigma” (p. 41). Therefore, we become less sensitive to certain human behaviours.

Contextual coaching constructs showed that both groups of coaches found coaching elite juniors emotionally challenging because it was reliant on human interaction and relationships (connection). Both groups of coaches described coaching as competitive and filled with conflicts. Novice coaches had not accepted the challenges associated with competition or conflict and remained sensitive to these issues. Competition and conflict caused novice coaches to question their future involvement in coaching because they were

sensitive to issues that threatened their perception of self. Arguments with parents (conflict), Losing players to other coaches (competition), and poor player results (competence) were a source of anxiety for novice coaches and they had yet to find satisfactory ways to cope with the associated stress.

Experienced coaches were less sensitive to arguments with parents, losing players to other coaches, and poor player results. Accepting that coaching elite juniors would continue to provide challenges helped experienced coaches develop belief in their methods (confidence) because they were less likely to doubt themselves compared with novice participants. Novice coaches were preoccupied with how others perceived their coaching and were focussed on trying to prove to themselves and others that they were effective (competence).

Experienced coaches who had accepted the challenges of elite junior tennis coaching anticipated they would continue to have issues and developed ways to position their coaching (code) in an environment where it was difficult to satisfy the three primary tennis stakeholders (players, parents, and other coaches). In addition, experienced coaches had developed ways to cope with the sustained emotional challenges they would face in coaching (coping)

This section has shown that contextual, efficacy, and outcome coaching constructs emerged from the descriptions of novice and experienced coaches' descriptions of working with elite junior tennis players. Interpreting the findings through the work of Bauman showed parallels with the loss of sensitivity that Bauman described and the acceptance that experienced tennis coaches described throughout this research. Furthermore, this section showed how acceptance of challenges in elite junior coaching can help to explain differences between the two groups of coaches.

**How do the Findings add to Knowledge?**

The findings of this research add to the growing body of qualitative accounts that have analysed the experiences of sports coaches. Specifically, the findings add to our knowledge of coaching in several ways.

Firstly, the findings add to coaching literature by identifying constructs that describe what it is like to be a coach of an elite junior tennis player (connection, conflict, competence, competition, comprehension, confidence, code, and coping). Describing the experiences of tennis coaches with elite junior tennis players fills the gap in our understanding of elite junior tennis coaching (see literature review p. 53). Studying elite junior tennis coaching contributes to a holistic understanding and increases the shared knowledge of the phenomenon of coaching.

Secondly, the findings support an existing understanding that experienced and novice coaches' have different perspectives regarding their coaching environments (Nash & Sproule, 2011). The use of IPA into the elite junior tennis coaching context has provided a novel account of tennis coaching and drawn attention to some of the taken for granted aspects of tennis coaching from the coaches' perspective (e.g. coping).

Thirdly, the findings contribute to an evolving, problematic epistemology of sports coaching that extends beyond rationalistic and heroic accounts of coaching practice (Potrac et al., 2012). Knowledge gained through autoethnography and IPA supported previous definitions of coaching as complex and filled with contradictory values (Saury & Durand, 1995); uncontrollable and incomprehensible (Jones, 2005); dynamic and social (Cushion, Armour, & Jones, 2006); foggy and messy (Cushion, 2007); emotionally challenging (Purdy et al., 2013); stressful (Thelwell et al., 2018). The findings give confidence in previous research that highlights the challenging nature of coaching.

Fourthly, the eight constructs identified from this PhD can stimulate future research by (a) providing avenues for comparison of coaching experiences across coaching contexts, (b) highlighting the emotional challenges on tennis coaches and consider whether they receive the appropriate support from governing bodies, (c) encourage further reflexive practices from existing coaches, and (d) questioning the effectiveness of current education directives for the preparation of novice coaches for their future careers.

Finally, the findings have shown parallels with sociological literature commenting on human society and supports previous assertions that “sport mirrors society” (Cassidy et al., 2016, p. 37). Interpreting the data through the lens of Zygmunt Bauman (2012) has shown parallels with how humans adapt their behaviours when faced with uncertainty. There were similarities between Bauman’s (2012) loss of sensitivity to uncertainty, and acceptance of the challenges in coaching described throughout this research. The findings suggest that acceptance of the challenges in coaching was an influence on the perspectives of both sets of coaches and a potential reason for novice and experienced coaches describing elite junior tennis coaching differently.

### **Reflexivity**

Reflexivity is used in qualitative research to overcome readers’ issues with subjectivity. As stated in the chapter three of this thesis (p. 60), I adopted an interpretivist approach which includes a subjectivist epistemology (i.e. that knowledge is subjective and socially constructed). I have included a section on reflexivity to enable public scrutiny of the integrity of my research (Sparkes & Smith, 2014) and offer a “methodological log of research decisions” (p. 20).

To ensure a transparent and rigorous series of studies were conducted I have reflected on how I have affected this research process. My reasons for carrying out this research were

grounded in my experiences as a former elite junior tennis player, as a recipient of coaching, and as a current tennis coach to elite junior tennis players (see methodology p. 49). My previous experiences in tennis have been useful in understanding the meaning of the participants' descriptions. My autoethnography was a helpful process to identify and understand the existing biases I held at the beginning of the research. Understanding my own biases and their influence on the research was necessary to fulfil the criteria to remain phenomenological in my attitude toward participant descriptions. For example, the original story I wanted to tell about Sarah (study 1) was about the effectiveness of my coaching because I coached Sarah from the age of 8 until her NCAA Division 1 scholarship. As I analysed my story more deeply, it became clear that the most powerful story was that my coaching behaviours were like the performance coach behaviours that I did not like when I was a junior. Having an improved knowledge of my existing perceptions of coaching was fundamental to being curious about the participants, not assuming commonality with my experience, being open to being surprised by their descriptions, staying engaged with empathy, and accessing their experiences rather than engaging in them. I was surprised that participants were so forthcoming about their emotional struggles with coaching and they seemed keen to share their anxieties about parents, and other coaches.

During this research I have learned much about the experiences of other tennis coaches by listening to how they discuss their coaching activities and interactions. Whilst conducting this research I have occupied the social positions of both tennis coach and academic researcher. I believe that my position as a tennis coach, working in the elite junior coaching context, gave me social and cultural capital with the research participants because they perceived me as having the skills and knowledge to draw on to understand their descriptions. I too was a tennis coach and would put on my tennis kit, go on the court and

enter the messy world of coaching. I was part of the practice of coaching, not an outsider looking in.

As the investigator I have shaped my research, however throughout this process I have also been shaped by the research. Having conducted my autoethnography (study 1) to investigate my own coaching journey and highlight my own biases, I have seen subsequent parallels with the participants in studies 2, 3, and 4. I shared the insecurities about what was happening to the novice coaches in study 2 and I have become more confident about my coaching competencies like the experienced coaches in study 3. Furthermore, I have realised that I have become more accepting of the criticism I face as a coach, and begun to view it less personally, as demonstrated by the experienced coaches in study 4.

Understanding in greater detail, the similarities between myself and the participants within this research has helped me to understand more about my coaching role. In practical coaching situations I have found this research both a blessing and a curse. For example, I have felt liberated on the tennis court, as I now believe that the anxieties I still feel on court are not due to a perceived lack of technical knowledge I imagine that I have. The anxieties I feel are partly due to the uncertainty I have regarding what I faced each day. The players I teach, and their parents are equally as human as I am, so the mood changes that they experience are sometimes a reflection of the day that they have had before entering the tennis setting. They are not necessarily a reflection of their frustrations with me as a coach if improvements have not been achieved.

My wider understanding of other tennis coaches' experiences impacted on this research in two ways. Firstly, my relationships with the participants (study 4) became far more open and this assisted in a mutual, warts and all tone to our discussions of coaching experiences. An example of this was in study 4, and coach A would disclose text messages

from disgruntled parents from a previous week's text conversation. The nature of our relationship had changed, from a formal interviewer/interviewee relationship, into a coaching colleague relationship with us comparing battle scars from our coaching experiences. Secondly, at a more practical level, the focus of this PhD moved away from a microscopic focus on what it was like to manage individual coach-athlete relationships. Coach-athlete relationships are inextricably linked to this research (see literature review p. 20), however as my understanding of the subject evolved, it was clear that this was too small to fully grasp the experiences that the participants were describing. As my view of coaching became more panoramic, a macro approach was needed to fully encapsulate the wealth of experiences that participants described. As I widened my view, the focus was more on the social conditions that tennis coaches work in rather than a more microscopic focus of individual coaching relationships.

### **Limitations**

The focus of this research was the experiences of tennis coaches at the elite junior level and the associated contextual peculiarities may hinder generalisability. The contextual peculiarities of the elite junior coaching context provide the first limitation of this research because the experiences of sports coaches vary by sport, level, and context (Gilbert & Trudel, 2005). It is uncertain if tennis coaches working with non-elite juniors share these experiences. The findings of this research relate specifically to coaches working in the UK, with 11 – 18-year olds, at the elite level. Coaches working with non-elite juniors may not describe conflict in the same way as the participants in this research due to their emphasis being on fun rather than performance. Different levels of conflict or an absence of conflict may influence the coping strategies that coaches of non-elite juniors describe to support their coaching careers. The rich descriptions IPA provides, however, offer the reader the

opportunity to select information that is relevant to their experiences through naturalistic generalisations (Smith & McGannon, 2018).

A second limitation of this research that also relates to generalisability is the relatively small sample size that IPA studies use. IPA was the methodological tool used to investigate the experiences of sixteen coaches throughout this research. Whilst the aim of IPA is not to make claims that are nomothetic, there are those that claim that generalisations cannot be made from research that is idiographic. However, Smith and McGannon (2018) argue that qualitative research can make significant contributions to knowledge through generalisations that are not statistical but are naturalistic generalisations. "Naturalistic generalisations invite readers to apply ideas to their own experience, from the natural and in-depth depictions" that are related to the personal contexts of other people within the same phenomenon (Melrose, 2012, p. 1).

A third limitation of this research relates to sampling for the longitudinal study (study 4). Participants engaged in interviews three times, separated by eight-month intervals during study 4 and this may have caused issues with their recollections of experiences. I did not ask for more interviews as I did not wish to risk asking for too much of the participants' time and risk them dropping out of the research. The time between each interview may have influenced the data collection process and limited the rich descriptions given by participants because they had forgotten details or had different emotional states to when the experience occurred. It would be beneficial to extend the longitudinal study, including the same four participants, and observe them over a longer time period. For example, more interviews over another 2-years could provide insight about when novice coaches began to describe code and coping in their responses.

A fourth limitation is that IPA describes themes throughout the analysis. Some researchers argue that IPA lack sufficiently strong interpretations of these themes (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). The 8 C's identified in this PhD could be used in a thematic analysis. Thematic analysis has a strong emphasis on interpretation and could be used to support or delve deeper into the interpretations made in this PhD (Sparkes & Smith, 2014)

### **Future Directions**

The findings from this thesis present opportunities for future research in relation to tennis coaching at the elite junior level. Firstly, more researcher-practitioner autoethnographies from tennis coaches within elite junior coaching would further our understanding of what it is like to be a tennis coach. Autoethnographies from different contexts and practitioners would provide more specific data and avenues for comparison of experience between coaches (e.g. development coaches, novice coaches, experienced coaches, male coaches, female coaches).

Secondly, if I was to continue this PhD for another year, I would strongly consider giving Sarah and her parents the opportunity to tell their stories about their perceptions of study 1. My relationship with Sarah and her parents remains strong. It would be beneficial to our knowledge to understand the perspective of the player and her parents on the stories I discussed in study 1. Discussions are ongoing with Sarah's father for three stories relating to his perspective on my experiences with Sarah. Player and parent interpretations of coaches' autoethnographies could improve our understanding of direct perspectives and meta perspectives on coaching behaviours (Jowett, 2009), if there were multi-dimensional analyses of the same coaching episodes from the coach, the player, and their parent(s).

Thirdly, I hope my research stimulates further research into the experiences of other tennis coaches. Increasing the phenomenological studies into tennis coaching will result in

more context specific data to be used in the training of new coaches. It has been said that the only way for research to access the reality of coaching *is by going there* (Cushion, 2003).

More research from researcher-practitioners will help lead to new, more realistic insights into tennis coaching developed from experiences by those who experience the phenomenon first-hand. Highly focussed data from different tennis coaching contexts will lead to modified teaching practices, and improved coaching delivery for junior tennis players. Small sample sizes that develop knowledge from experience can inform and enlighten existing coaches through naturalistic generalisations and vicarious learning.

Finally, a grounded theory analysis could help to test the robustness of contextual, efficacy, and outcome coaching constructs. More specific questions about the 3 groups of coaching constructs would help achieve theoretical saturation. Grounding contextual, efficacy, and outcome coaching constructs in data, rather than interpretation, would help to understand if connection, competence, conflict, competition, comprehension, confidence, code, and coping were linear constructs along a continuum or are independent constructs.

### **Implications**

Having examined tennis coaches' experiences the findings of this research can help to cultivate a realistic understanding of the social conditions experienced by tennis coaches of elite junior tennis players. This research has provided a comprehensive analysis of the experiences of tennis coaches working with elite junior tennis players. The findings of this research can be used in several ways.

#### **Prepare novice tennis coaches for their coaching careers.**

The findings of this research have illustrated the challenging nature of tennis coaching at the elite level. Novice coaches throughout this research described anxieties and doubts regarding their coaching experiences. Obtaining rich data from current tennis coaches about

their experiences can enrich coach education literature. Understanding the reality of tennis coaching will prepare new coaches for potential anxieties that they may face during their early coaching life. Coaches who are well informed regarding the complexities that lie ahead can concentrate their efforts in a focussed manner. Reducing the time taken for new coaches to accept their coaching experiences will result in more focussed attention on their players, instead of questioning their environment and their position within it.

**Stimulate professional self-reflection amongst existing tennis coaches.**

I have been surprised at the level of interest in this research from the participants. When I asked coaches to participate, I asked for forty-five minutes to one hour of their time. The interviews I conducted often lasted beyond two hours and the depth of conversation was incredibly insightful. The process of conducting this research strongly suggests there are tennis coaches feeling isolated in their working environment. The opportunity to share and discuss their coaching experiences was commented on positively by the coaches. Their enthusiasm for sharing their own struggles mirrored the cathartic feelings that I felt whilst conducting my autoethnography. For example, a coach in study 4 finished one interview by proclaiming “this felt like therapy”. Coaches can continue to benefit from understanding the shared experiences of other coaches and gain reassurance that issues they face within coaching are not just happening to them. The chance to reflect on their own experiences and the experiences of other coaches can benefit individual coaches through increased feelings of belonging to a coaching community.

**Encourage governing bodies to evaluate current coach education directives.**

It would be beneficial for the LTA to consider the emotional challenges that tennis coaches experience day-to-day. Considerable effort has been put into catering for the physical and cognitive needs of athletes. Coaches would benefit from increased focus on

their emotional needs when they are active tennis coaches. Coaching has been found to be emotionally challenging, and the data suggested that novice coaches questioned their future involvement as coaches because of the emotional challenges they experienced. Support networks would help coaches to sustain themselves mentally in the face of the emotional challenges that their working environment creates. Tennis coaches that are happy in their position are more likely to remain as coaches for the long-term. Keeping the best tennis coaches within coaching will benefit British junior tennis players by ensuring they have access to the best coaches.

### **Thesis Conclusion**

This PhD has examined the lived coaching experience of independent tennis coaches. Four individual, sequential studies have provided a comprehensive description of how tennis coaches described their experiences of tennis coaching. The findings support an existing understanding that experienced and novice coaches' have different perspectives regarding their coaching environments. In total there have been eight constructs identified throughout this PhD. The eight constructs identified were (a) connection, (b) competence, (c) competition, (d) conflict, (d) comprehension, (e) confidence, (f) code, and (g) coping. The eight constructs are classified under three types of coaching construct: *contextual coaching constructs* (connection, conflict, & competition), *efficacy coaching constructs* (competence, & confidence), and *outcome coaching constructs* (comprehension, code, & coping). Acceptance of challenges in coaching was a factor in experienced coaches describing different constructs to novice coaches. The findings of this research and the use of Zygmunt Bauman to interpret the findings are novel and contribute to an evolving, problematic epistemology of sports coaching. The findings discussed above present tennis coaches' with opportunities to make more informed coaching decisions and can help to inform LTA coach education literature.

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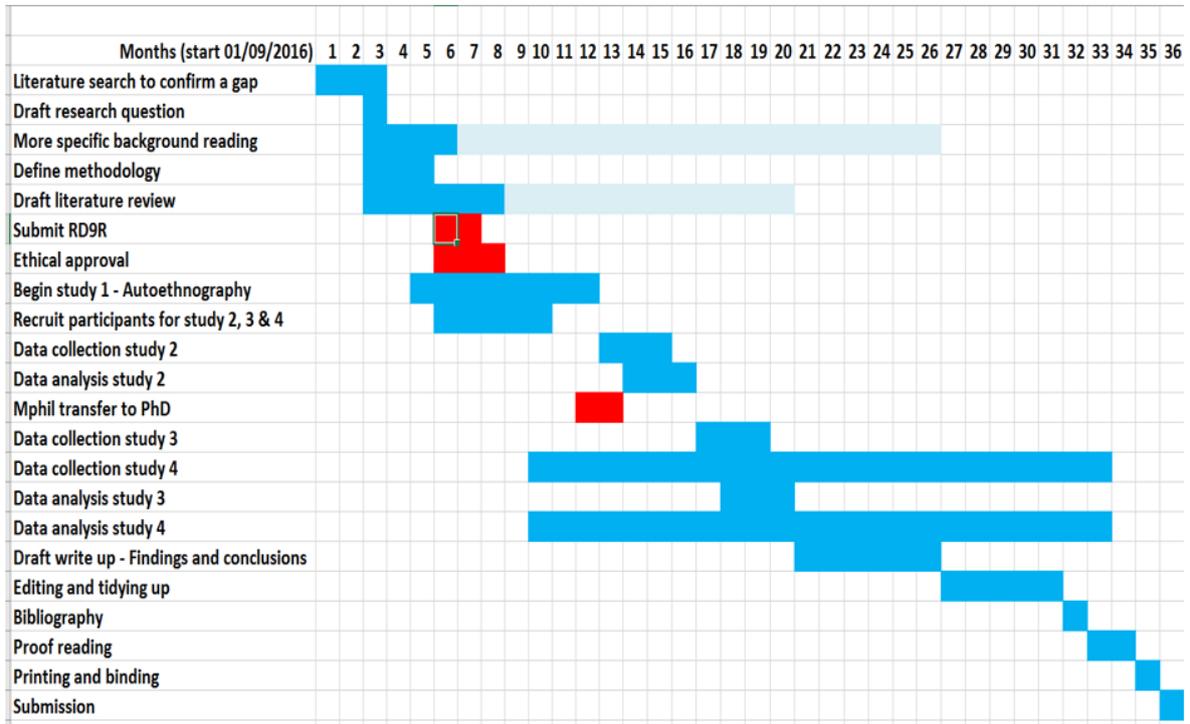
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Appendix A.

Gantt chart to show expected milestones and completion

**GANTT Chart**



## Appendix B.

## Interview schedule – Study 2

- **What made you want to become a tennis coach?**
- Prompt – What was your coach like?
- Prompt – where would you like it to lead you?
- **How would you describe the job of tennis coaching?**
- Prompt – what do you do in your job?
- Prompt – What are you responsible for?
- Probe – Can you give me an example of that responsibility?
- Probe – Was that something you expected?
- **What are the challenges you have faced so far in tennis coaching?**
- Prompt – Have you ever felt uncertain whilst on court / off court?
- Probe – Tell me more about that experience?
- Probe – How did that make you feel?
- **Do you spend time reflecting privately on lessons after you have completed them?**
- **How do you think the kids you coach would describe you?**
- Prompt – Tough, motivator, nice, strict, effective?
- Probe – Why do you think they see you like that?
- Probe – How do you feel about them thinking like that about you?
- **Where do you see yourself in 10 years?**
- Prompt – Still on court coaching? Head coach? Working for LTA? Taking a player on tour?
- **In your opinion, what is the role of a tennis coach?**
- Prompt – To improve their tennis? To educate? To inspire? To motivate

## Appendix C.

## Interview schedule – Study 3

- **What made you want to become a tennis coach?**
- Prompt – What was your coach like?
- Prompt – where would you like it to lead you?
- **How would you describe the job of tennis coaching?**
- Prompt – what do you do in your job?
- Prompt – What are you responsible for?
- Probe – Can you give me an example of that responsibility?
- Probe – Was that something you expected?
- **What are the challenges you have faced so far in tennis coaching?**
- Prompt – Have you ever felt uncertain whilst on court / off court?
- Probe – Tell me more about that experience?
- Probe – How did that make you feel?
- **Do you spend time reflecting privately on lessons after you have completed them?**
- **Has your approach to coaching changed over the years?**
- Prompt – technical, tactical approaches, interactions with parents?
- Probe – How do you feel about having to make that change?
- **Do you think coaching has changed over the years?**
- **In your opinion, what is the role of a tennis coach?**
- Prompt – To improve their tennis? To educate? To inspire? To motivate

## Appendix D.

## Interview Schedule – Study 4.

- **How have things been with player/parent over the last few months?**
- Probe – have you resolved the issue with them?
- **Have you reflected on our previous interview?**
- Prompt – Anymore thoughts on why that issue occurred?
- **How have your players been performing recently?**
- Probe – has training gone well? experienced anymore issues with?
- **Have you attended any CPD modules lately?**
- Probe – how did you interact with the coaches?
- **What are the major competitions that you are getting ready for?**
- Probe – will you be travelling with your players?
- Probe – how long are you away for?

## Appendix E.

Email sent to potential participants – STUDY 2 and 3

Dear xxxxxxxxx

My name is Callum Gowling.

I have acquired your email address from the LTA website as you are registered as an active tennis coach.

The purpose of this email is to invite you to participate in a study entitled “Examining tennis coaches’ constructions of their role in performance settings”.

My aim is to research what it is like to be a tennis coach working with elite junior tennis payers.

I would like to discuss with you, experiences that you have encountered whilst working with elite junior tennis players.

Before you decide it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it involves. Please take time to read the attached information. If there is anything that is not clearly explained or if you would like more information, please ask.

Kind Regards

Callum Gowling

## Appendix F

## Participation Information Sheet

**LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY**

**Title of Project:** Examining tennis coaches' constructions of their role in performance settings  
STUDY2

**Researcher:** Callum Gowling, David Tod

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it involves. Please take time to read the following information. Ask if there is anything that is not clearly explained or if you would like more information. Take time to decide if you would like to take part or not.

**1. What is the purpose of the study?**

Examine how independent tennis coaches describe their roles with elite junior tennis players and interpret how coaching experiences shape their coaching behaviours towards their payers.

**2. Do I have to take part?**

No. Your involvement in this study is voluntary. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet and asked to sign a consent form. You are still free to withdraw at any time throughout the study without providing a reason. A decision to withdraw will not affect your rights, any future treatment or any service you receive.

**3. Am I eligible to take part?**

Participants need to have 2 – 4 years coaching experience with elite junior tennis players.

**4. What will happen to me if I take part?**

If you decide to take part, you will be interviewed once (for about 45-60 minutes), at a time and place of your choosing. The interview may be face to face or by telephone. Your transcript and our findings will be shared with you during a follow up conversation.

**5. Are there any risks / benefits involved?**

There are no identifiable risks for taking part in the study. Potential benefits may include increased self-awareness of your professional identity and development. Increase self-awareness may stimulate new avenues of professional development.

**6. Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?**

Yes. All information or data (personal details/audio recordings etc.) collected throughout the study will remain strictly confidential between you and us (the research team). Pseudonyms will be used in transcripts and reports to help protect the identity of individuals and organisations. Data will be stored in locked systems (hard files) or in password-protected files (electronic files).

**7. Will my results from the study be used elsewhere other than for the main purpose of the study?**

Your data may be used as part of verbal conference presentations or written documentation. Any of your quotes will be de-identified prior to being placed in the public domain.

**This study has received ethical approval from LJMU's Research Ethics Committee** (*insert REC reference*)

**Contact Details of Researcher:**

Callum Gowling, email: callumgowling@btinternet.com

David Tod, email: d.a.tod@ljmu.ac.uk

**If you have any concerns regarding your involvement in this research, please discuss these with the researcher in the first instance. If you wish to make a complaint, please contact**

**researchethics@ljmu.ac.uk and your communication will be re-directed to an independent person as appropriate.**

*Please keep a copy of this participant information sheet along with a copy of the signed consent form if you decide to take part in the study.*

## Appendix G.

## Participant Consent Form

**LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY****PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

**Title of Project:** Examining tennis coaches' constructions of their role in performance settings

**Researchers:** Callum Gowling, David Tod

I confirm that I have read and understand the information provided for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily

1. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and that this will not affect my legal rights.

2. I understand that any personal information collected during the study will be anonymised and remain confidential

3. I agree to take part in the above study involving interviews

4. I understand that the interview will be audio recorded and I am happy to proceed

5. I understand that parts of our conversation may be used verbatim (direct quotations) in future publications or presentations but that such quotes will be anonymised.

Name of Participant:

Date:

Signature:

Name of Researcher:

Date:

Signature:

## Appendix H.

## Autoethnography 31 – Now

- Beth makes me enjoy being involved
- See things in her that I wish I had. We are total opposites. Imagine merging the 2!
- Mark Schmider – Dave Patterson conversation. Beth looks good technically now.
- Did I do that? Did Frank? Did I at least help?
- Why do people assume I am a good coach?
- I just keep 'playing', try to give advice when asked and keep the kids happy.
- Beth, Josh, Kim, Jordan, Peter, Tomas. These kids are great. What can I offer you lot?
- Beth's losses are really starting to hurt now! Why? She's not my child. Nottingham. Oh, poor kid. That's what used to happen to me.
- Am I turning her into me??!!!! Please don't lose that toughness Beth.
- Beth struggling with Frank. My fault? His fault? Her fault? Am I bad influence. Frank knows 100 times more than me.
- Frank backs away. Now I'm the main coach.
- Oh shit what a responsibility.
- Her dreams, her life, her childhood. Her parent's money, child and sanity.
- I can't even manage my own life – who am I for this responsibility.
- I keep getting approached and pedal the low key, I'm no coach line.
- I have a proper job – Marketing. It requires a degree thank you. justifying my very existence.
- They are only interested because Beth is so good.
- Wake up people. Beth is just talented. It's nothing to do with me.
- I notice how fickle some parents can be. How can you trust me with your child's tennis. You've never once met me, yet now you want 4 sessions a week with me based on a recommendation from a friend of a friend of a friend.
- This doesn't fit comfortably.
- Even if I was an amazing coach (which I'm not), your child may not like me. Rendering me utterly useless to you.
- Enjoyment and fear in equal measures.
- Don't fuck this up for Beth and her parents Cal. So much energy and effort from all of us.
- Should I back away? I can't offer any guarantees and I have no track record. Why trust me?
- A disaster session with Beth.
- She thinks I'm horrible. Just like every other coach.
- I'm just trying to help you improve. Please understand..... How do I get through?
- On reflection, certainly not like that Cal. Clearly!
- Who I am? I feel sick. I'm worse than any other coach. No-one ever made me cry.
- I'm weak and can't do this. I knew I wasn't the right guy to coach. Tennis should be fun for god sake. You're so insecure about your coaching the child can see that and look what's happened. You pathetic twat Cal.
- I apologise. It's all I know. But is the damage done.

- Emily breaks down.
- Nat Walls parents hate me.
- Christ am I a really bad person. Why when I try my best does everyone keep getting upset with me.
- Coaching is so hard. Spending so much time dealing with personalities. I can't just coach and hit. There is way more to this. How do I coach all these different people.
- Should it be this hard? Just coaching. If Chris Peet can do it. What the hell is wrong with me?
- Is this how Chris felt with me?
- Nope he's a twat.
- God if parents only knew how much I doubted myself on court.
- Why come to me? How can so many people be so wrong.
- They think I'm good because my shots are good. But it was Frank that gave me these shots. I'm not Frank.
- Beth's presents! Wow. The effort she goes to brings a tear to my eye every time. I've given her a hard time for so long and she still does things like that. What an amazing kid. I never did that for anyone that coached me.
- My eye. Is this a route out?
- Bow out gracefully Cal. No disgrace and you're not letting people down. You can't see. The perfect escape. Let people find a proper coach and they will flourish.
- Things are tough with Beth. Think I'm holding her back. She must have lost respect for me by now.
- Don't blame her. I was never a coach and now I can't even hit a good ball.
- Beth goes to Si Roberts. I felt it coming to be honest but it still really hurts.
- Really going to miss being on court with her and chatting with her parents. They were so understanding and put up with a lot over the years.
- Will tell the other parents that I'm leaving. Gabby, Peter, Tomas, Emily, Mark, Keyon, Ash.
- I physically can't do this anymore. It's too hard.
- Time to finally nail my colours to the mast and settle for the marketing career. I'm sure if I put my heart and soul into that I will do something to be proud of.
- Why do they all care?
- Tears? Really! Why? You're way better off with an Academy.
- I feel sad but that's just me. Normal people don't feel the same. They just get on with things.
- So many emails. They are making this tough. They are just being nice. Was I really that useful?
- Where will they go? Kev the PT says they will move on quickly. You don't mean anything to your clients. I agree. I'm no-one to these people.
- I'll leave at the end of the month.
- So many nice comments.... They don't mean it.
- Leave, follow Beth!
- Do I really want to stop?
- What if I stay and still work with Gabby, Peter, and Tomas?
- I do enjoy those sessions and I do really care about what happens to these kids.

- Get regular calls from Beth. Really glad she stayed in contact. Hope she doesn't look back at me one day like I do with other coaches. I hope I didn't ruin her childhood.
- Love hearing from Beth, she's always been special to me. Just wish I could have done a better job for her.
- Gabby, Peter and Tomas are doing well.
- They are just good players like Beth is. Nothing to do with me.
- Help Beth out with her recruitment video. Really nice to be on court with her and always happy to help this kid. I love her to bits.
- She asks for a few sessions. Of course I'll help.
- Let's get you to America.
- Time off again – eye
- Time to think / reflect
- Why all these good players? I'm not a good player anymore? So why stay?
- Beth asks me to take her to America!
- WOW! What an honour.
- Who am I to this girl after all these years??