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Citation:

Potts, A and Didymus, F and Kaiseler, M (2024) Psychological Stress and Psychological Well-being among Sports Coaches: A Close Proximity Longitudinal Daily Diary Study. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*. pp. 1-27. ISSN 1041-3200 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200.2024.2344847>

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Document Version:

Article (Published Version)

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## Psychological stress and psychological well-being among sports coaches: A close proximity longitudinal daily diary study

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To cite this article: Alexandra J. Potts, Faye F. Didymus & Mariana Kaiseler (22 Apr 2024): Psychological stress and psychological well-being among sports coaches: A close proximity longitudinal daily diary study, Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, DOI: [10.1080/10413200.2024.2344847](https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200.2024.2344847)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200.2024.2344847>



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# Psychological stress and psychological well-being among sports coaches: A close proximity longitudinal daily diary study

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## ABSTRACT

It is essential to understand sports coaches' experiences of psychological stress and psychological well-being (PWB) on a daily basis to better equip coaches to manage stress and improve well-being. Coaches make a vital contribution to sport and, given the potentially stressful nature of coaches' roles, are required to manage their own PWB and performance alongside that of the athletes with whom they work. To better understand how to support coaches, we explored coaches' experiences of stressors, primary appraisals, coping, and PWB using a close proximity longitudinal daily diary approach. Five sports coaches (one woman and four men) each completed an interval-contingent, daily diary over a 28-day period. The diary facilitated understanding of the coaches' experiences of their worlds and captured descriptions of the coaches' daily lives. Underpinned by our constructivist paradigm and following an abductive approach to data analysis, four experiences are presented (preparing for major events and championships, competition, admin and national governing body-related tasks, and work-life balance) using a trajectory approach. This method of data presentation allows understanding of each coach's journey through their experiences as they occurred over the 28-day period. The experiences are categorized into themes representing stressors, primary appraisals, coping, and PWB. Collectively, the findings highlight that coaches experienced certain stressors (e.g., athlete-related) on a regular basis, and that they appraised (e.g., as a challenge) and coped with these experiences in different ways (e.g., via information seeking). The findings also demonstrate that stress experiences influenced different elements of the coaches' PWB (e.g., relationships with others, personal growth) and that, occasionally, coaches may experience delayed or inaccessible appraisals of a stressor.

*Lay summary:* Five sports coaches' experiences of psychological stress and psychological well-being are explored using close proximity daily diaries over a 28-day period. Four experiences (preparing for major events and championships, competition, admin and national governing body-related tasks, and work-life balance) are discussed to highlight how psychological stress influences coaches' psychological well-being.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 26 July 2023  
Revised 26 March 2024  
Accepted 15 April 2024

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### IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- Coaches and practitioners should work collaboratively to raise awareness of coaches' stressors, related primary appraisals, and their coping efforts. Self-awareness raising activities could supplement coaches' ongoing reflective practices and spotlight appraising and coping as mechanisms through which well-being can be facilitated or inhibited.
- Coaches and practitioners should work collaboratively to enhance coaches' social support networks. Doing so will help coaches to benefit from the stress buffering potential of an adequate social support network.
- Sport organizations and national governing bodies must remain mindful of ongoing and frequently occurring stressors (e.g., preparing for major events and championships) and implement interventions that can reduce the impact they have on coaches' psychological well-being.

Understanding coaches' experiences of psychological stress and psychological well-being (PWB) is of paramount importance because coaches make a considerable contribution to sport (Potts et al., 2022). Whilst coaches do experience stress in a positive way, coaching has been described as an inherently stressful occupation (e.g., Didymus, 2017) and one that can have a detrimental impact on PWB (Potts et al., 2023). For example, coaches often sacrifice their personal time and work long, irregular hours with extensive travel commitments (Olusoga & Kenttä, 2017). These stressors, as well as others, contribute to a significant number of individuals ceasing engagement with coaching either by withdrawing completely or by becoming an inactive coach. Preventing drop-out and working toward creating positive and safe environments for coaches are important to facilitate the successful delivery of coaching programmes and wider positive sport experiences. Previous research has provided insight to coaches' experiences of psychological stress (see, for reviews, Norris et al., 2017, Potts et al., 2023) and PWB (e.g., Baldock et al., 2022). Thus far, however, researchers are yet to extensively explore how psychological stress impacts coaches' PWB over a period of time and in close proximity. Whilst one paper in this area does exist (Baldock et al., 2022), there is limited literature exploring coaches' appraisals and PWB, which is surprising given the importance of appraisals during psychological stress transactions (Fletcher et al., 2006), and their influence on health and performance outcomes (Blascovich, 2008).

One of the most prominent theoretical perspectives of psychological stress is transactional stress theory (TST; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), which posits that stress incorporates a transaction between an individual and his or her environment. These transactions include, amongst other related constructs, stressors, appraising, and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Coaches may experience a variety of stressors (i.e., environmental demands; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) that can be categorized as performance, organizational, or personal stressors (e.g., Baldock et al., 2021; Didymus, 2017; Olusoga et al., 2009). How coaches appraise these stressors is likely to have implications for PWB (Didymus, 2017) because appraising is an explanatory concept on which the

outcomes of stress transactions pivot (see Didymus & Fletcher, 2012). Appraising can be deliberate and conscious or automatic and subconscious (Lazarus, 1999), which means that individuals may often be unaware of their appraisals and makes appraising a difficult concept to study (Didymus, 2017; Lazarus, 1991). One aspect of appraising (see Lazarus, 1999; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), which has particular bearing on outcomes of stress transactions is primary appraising, which encapsulates the motivational relevance of the stressor and whether the stressor is pertinent to an individual's goals and or PWB (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). There are four main types of primary appraisal: benefit, challenge, harm/loss, and threat (Lazarus, 1999; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). These four appraisals have been discussed in sport psychology literature with Olympic and international level coaches (Didymus, 2017), professional (Baldock et al., 2021) and elite (Baldock et al., 2022) football coaches, and full- and part-time and voluntary coaches (Potts et al., 2022). These studies highlighted that coaches experienced the four aforementioned types of appraisals to varying degrees and, in some cases (Didymus, 2017), reported less information about their appraisals compared to that which they reported about stressors and coping.

Coping is the cognitive and/or behavioral efforts that an individual exerts to help them manage or reduce the demands of a stressor they are experiencing (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). An inability or failure to effectively cope with stress in sport can result in decreased performance (Lazarus, 2000), which can influence the physical, psychological, and behavioral responses of coaches. Skinner et al. (2003) explored the structure of coping and developed 12 families of coping, which distinguish several levels at which coping can be conceptualized. Skinner et al. (2003) hierarchical view of coping identifies a set of lower order categories (e.g., problem solving and venting) that are classified into higher order categories (e.g., information seeking and self-reliance). The findings of a recent meta-synthesis by Potts et al. (2023) highlight Skinner et al. (2003) families of coping as a helpful way to explore the ways that coaches adapt to their environment (cf. Didymus, 2017). Furthermore, the meta-synthesis identifies strategies that can be used to inform the development of stress management tactics that minimize the detrimental impacts of stress for PWB (Potts et al., 2023).

There are notable challenges relating to the definition and conceptualization of PWB (Norris et al., 2017). Indeed, well-being has been examined via and informed by different conceptual stances and definitions (Gasper, 2010) which has resulted in varied approaches to the exploration of PWB. Indeed, many researchers have focused on exploring the dimensions of PWB (e.g., hedonia, which relates to an individual's happiness, subjective well-being and positive emotions, and eudemonia, which relates to purposeful aspects of PWB such as self-acceptance, personal growth, and environmental mastery, e.g., Robertson & Cooper, 2011) rather than striving to define what PWB is (Dodge et al., 2012). Despite this, these conceptualizations and definitions share some common ground, particularly around the notion of positive functioning (Linley et al., 2006). Ryff (1995) and Ryff and Keyes (1995) worked toward a robust conceptualization of PWB and proposed a multidimensional structure that encompassed six distinct characteristics: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, relationships with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. This multidimensional theoretical model emphasizes the multifaceted nature of PWB (Ryff & Keyes, 1995) and, collectively, the

six characteristics are thought to encompass the breadth and depth of PWB (Ryff, 1995). Recent research has explored coaches' experiences of these six dimensions (e.g., Potts et al., 2022), and has begun to demonstrate an understanding of the link between primary appraisals and PWB. For example, Potts et al. (2022) highlighted how benefit appraisals had a positive impact on environmental mastery and self-acceptance, while threat appraisals had a negative impact on coaches' autonomy. Furthermore, Baldock et al. (2022) explored mental ill/well-being among elite football coaches and highlighted that mental well-being was lower at the start of the football season due to negative appraisals, responses to stressors, and ineffective coping attempts, and that stressors high in severity also lead to decreased mental well-being. These two studies highlight the conceptual links between appraising and PWB and, given that they are the only two studies in the area, suggest the need for further research that develops understanding of how best to support coaches during their efforts to manage daily stress experiences and maintain PWB.

Previous literature (Nicholls et al., 2005; Potts et al., 2023) has called for the use of longitudinal qualitative methods to explore stress transactions, facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of sports coaches' experiences, and to better understand the implications of working conditions for coaches over time (Goodger et al., 2007). Longitudinal methods allow individuals' interpretations of their world to be captured (Alaszewski, 2006), provide sensitive descriptions of individuals' daily lives (Polit & Beck, 2006), and afford insightful depth to experiences of stress. Previous research has shown value in using longitudinal methods to investigate stress among elite sports coaches using both case study (Levy et al., 2009) and multiple participant (Baldock et al., 2021, 2022) designs. While Levy et al. (2009) explored an elite coach's experiences of organizational stressors, coping, and coping effectiveness over a period of 28 days and provided a foundation for other longitudinal research in the area, the study did not examine coaches' primary appraisals or PWB.

Two studies (Baldock et al., 2021, 2022) have explored the links between coaches' appraisals and PWB but one of these (2021) did so using a cross-sectional study design and did not, therefore, fully capture the dynamic nature of appraising and the subsequent implications for PWB. In addition, Baldock et al. (2021, 2022) sampled elite, male sports coaches, many of whom were employed on a full-time basis. This is problematic given that women are underrepresented in both the coaching profession and in research (e.g., Didymus et al., 2020; Norman, 2008) and, given the need to diversify samples, understanding must be generated that resonates with both men and women coaches and with those who coach on both part- and full-time bases. With reference to study design, Baldock et al. (2022) sampled male football coaches at four time points (preseason, beginning of season, midseason, end of season) of a season, which offered limited insight to day-to-day changes in coaches' experiences and exposed the study to participants' vagaries of memory, retrospective censorship, and reframing of experiences.

The current study aims to extend previous research by offering longitudinal, close proximity insight to the influence of stress transactions on PWB among men and women coaches who were employed on either a part- or full-time basis. Insight from this study will offer a close proximity exploration of coaches' experiences, which will

help sport psychology practitioners and researchers to better understand their everyday experiences of psychological stress and PWB. Used alongside other relevant literature, the findings of the current work could inform stress management and well-being optimization interventions. The ultimate goal of such intervention work is to develop systems and cultures that are supportive of and maximize coach well-being.

## Methods and materials

### *Philosophical assumptions*

This study was informed by my (first named author) constructivist paradigm, relativist ontology, and subjectivist epistemology (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). In line with my constructivist paradigm, I understand that knowledge is constructed through social interaction between researchers and the individuals they are working with and that as constructivist researchers, we aim to seek out knowledge that is specific to a phenomenon (Sparkes & Smith, 2014), in this instance coaches' experiences. Furthermore, I understand that reality is based on an individuals' subjective experiences of the world, that these experiences are contextually bound (Smith & Heshusius, 1986), and that facts cannot be detached from values (Smith, 1983). Therefore, I acknowledge that there is no *correct* interpretation of a reality (Slevitch, 2011) and ask readers of this paper to acknowledge that the experiences presented in this paper demonstrate one possible interpretation.

### *Coaches*

Following institutional ethical approval from the first named author's institution (ref: 36409), coaches were recruited via snowball sampling (Handcock & Gile, 2011), which involved identifying coaches who met the study inclusion criteria via existing networks and then asking those individuals to identify other coaches who met the same criteria. Five sports coaches (one woman, four men) aged between 23 and 52 years ( $M_{age} = 34.6$ ,  $SD = 12.22$  years) provided informed consent and participated voluntarily in the study. This sample size is typical among studies adopting longitudinal approaches due to the intensity of data collection and analysis required for each participant (Farr & Nizza, 2019). Table 1 provides an overview of the coaches' demographic details. Pseudonyms are used throughout this manuscript to protect the coaches' identities. At the time of data collection, all of the coaches were coaching their respective sports in the United Kingdom.

**Table 1.** Coach demographics.

Coach (pseudonym)	Age (years)	Gender (M/F)	Sport	Occupational group	Coaching experience (years)	Volume of coaching (hours per week)
Alan	42	M	Track and Field Athletics	Part-time	19	14
Arthur	52	M	Race walking	Part-time	29	16
Karen	25	F	Gymnastics	Part-time	2	4
Lewis	23	M	Football	Part-time	7	6
Oscar	31	M	Field Hockey	Full-time	12	15

## **Procedure**

Following receipt of informed consent from each participant, the first named author met with each coach to explain the data collection protocol and issue each coach with a blank diary booklet. Each meeting took place in a safe and secure location where conversations could happen in confidence and afforded the coaches the opportunity to ask questions about the study or discuss their experiences (Adams & Cox, 2008). Meeting with participants prior to data collection is a procedure that has been used in previous stress research (e.g., Sitch & Day, 2015) to clearly communicate the aim of the diary. Each coach had their own start date for his or her diary entries, which was based on the time at which each coach was recruited to the study and his or her availability for the initial meeting.

The use of diaries as a method of qualitative data collection has been endorsed by researchers (e.g., Bolger et al., 2003; Milligan et al., 2005) because it allows individuals to record events and experiences regularly and as they happen. Doing so maintains close proximity to participants' experiences and attends to everyday experiences that may be overlooked when using traditional qualitative research methods (e.g., interviews) or methods that collect data at multiple timepoints with a significant period of time between each (see e.g., Baldock et al., 2022). The 28-day time frame was informed by previous work (e.g., Didymus & Fletcher, 2012, 2014; Levy et al., 2009) and was chosen because it allowed insight to be gained over a meaningful period of time (O'Connor et al., 2008). The timeframe was deemed meaningful because it represented an adequate period of time that encapsulated training, competition, and rest days, and facilitated exploration of coaches' day-to-day stress transactions in relation to their PWB (c.f., Pawsey et al., 2021).

## **Daily diary**

The diary booklet consisted of instructions, definitions of key terms (e.g., "a stressor is a positive or negative demand, event, situation, and or circumstance that you may have experienced"), diary prompts (e.g., when asking about appraisals, the two prompts were "please think about how you evaluated this stressor, which might include seeing it as a threat or a challenge to yourself and or your well-being" and "please think about whether you felt you had benefited from this stressor or perhaps experienced harm"), examples of a completed diary entry, and numbered diary entry sheets for each of the 28 days. The diary booklet was designed to enable coaches to report multiple stressors on each day if appropriate, which allowed data to be recorded in close proximity to the participants' experiences. This was deemed important to minimize vagaries of memory, retrospective censorship, and reframing.

Blank diary entry sheets were included in the diary booklet. These sheets consisted of a table with structured headings (cf. Didymus & Fletcher, 2012) that requested coaches to answer the following questions: (1) what stressors have you experienced today?; (2) can you describe each stressor?; (3) how did you evaluate this stressor?; (4) how did you cope with this stressor?; and (5) what impact do you think this stressor, primary appraisal, and coping strategy has had on your PWB? The diaries were interval-contingent and the coaches were required to complete their diaries at a regular, predetermined



time each day (Day & Thatcher, 2009). Each coach decided their own completion time in an effort to minimize disruption to the coaches' daily activities (Day & Thatcher, 2009). Coaches were given ample time after finishing their coaching activities for the day before they completed their diaries to allow time for reflection and to encourage a more accurate recall of the stressors experienced (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). Reminders in the form of a short message service were sent on a daily basis to the coaches, to prompt coaches to complete their diary at the predetermined time and to provide opportunities for the coaches to ask questions (Didymus & Fletcher, 2012, 2014). This provided sustained support to the coaches and maintained researcher visibility (Day & Thatcher, 2009), which can help to improve the quality of the data collected (Keleher & Verrinder, 2003) and can help to develop an empathetic bond between researchers and participants (Carduff et al., 2015).

### ***Pilot study***

One coach (male, part-time paid, track and field athletics) completed the diary as part of a pilot study on a daily basis for five consecutive days (cf. Didymus & Fletcher, 2012, 2014). Due to other work commitments, he was unable to commit to participating in the main phase of data collection. A pilot study is a crucial part of qualitative research design (Kim, 2010) as it helps the researcher to be better informed of and more confident in applying the proposed research design, and better prepared to face potential challenges likely to arise in the study (Chenail, 2014). By using a pilot study, the aim was to ensure that the diary contained appropriate prompts and examples relating to the aims of the study that would guide the coaches through their diary completion. This also allowed the first named author to gain feedback from the coach regarding the design, structure, and clarity of the diary booklet. Following completion, the pilot study coach reported back on the ease of completing the diary booklet. He provided insight to the usefulness of the definitions provided at the start of the booklet and how useful the examples were in allowing the coach to understand what was required from each question. He also said that the design allowed him the freedom to report on multiple stressor experiences from the same day. Thus, the diary booklet was deemed acceptable, and no changes were made in preparation for the main phase of data collection.

### ***Data analysis***

A total of 131 out of a possible 140 diary entries were returned by the five coaches. The nine incomplete days were due to two coaches taking a short period of annual leave. To begin the data analyses, the diary entries were read multiple times to ensure familiarity with the data (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The entries were transcribed verbatim into Microsoft Excel® for analysis. I took an abductive approach (Dubois & Gadde, 2002) to the analyses, allowing me to flexibly use pre-identified themes that were generated using previous literature, whilst remaining sensitive to new knowledge that could be constructed (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). To expand, I used the work of Lazarus and Folkman (1984), Skinner et al. (2003), Fletcher et al. (2006), Ryff (1995), and Didymus (2017) to identify meaningful experiences that accurately and effectively represented a stressor,

primary appraisal, coping instance, or PWB dimension. These particular pieces of published literature were drawn on due to the foundational underpinning they provide to the concepts under examination.

The data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2022) guide to reflexive thematic analysis. This type of analysis is a foundational method for qualitative analysis and allowed me to ensure that the information collected from the coaches was coded and structured in line with the research aim and theoretical approaches (i.e., TST). The data were analyzed at a latent level, which allowed me to identify, analyze, and report patterns and themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The following six phases were used to analyze the data: (1) familiarization with the data by reading and transcribing the diary entries into a Microsoft<sup>®</sup> Excel<sup>®</sup> document; (2) generating initial codes relating to stressors, primary appraisals, coping, and PWB, and collating data relevant to each code; (3) organizing the codes into themes; (4) reviewing themes as a research team; (5) defining, naming, and refining the themes; and (6) producing this manuscript. Data were collected and analyzed by the first named author who is experienced in conducting qualitative research, and the second and third named authors acted as critical friends (see Smith & McGannon, 2018), contributed to analytical decisions, and made meaningful contributions to the development and refinement of this manuscript. We met regularly during this project to reflect on progress and our interpretations of the data, and to produce and edit this manuscript.

### **Data presentation**

The challenges of presenting longitudinal, qualitative data have been discussed in published literature (e.g., Nevedal et al., 2019). These challenges include, but are not limited to, effectively portraying the depth and breadth of data within the space constraints of a peer-reviewed manuscript (Audulv et al., 2022). One way in which individuals' experiences over time can be portrayed in a concise way is via a trajectory approach (Grossoehme & Lipstein, 2016). To illuminate the coaches' transactions over a period of time, trajectories (see Tables 2–6) were used to share each coaches' experiences individually. A trajectory approach facilitates understanding of longitudinal experiences to provide insight to potential changes over time for an individual or small group of individuals (Grossoehme & Lipstein, 2016). As the aim of this study was to longitudinally explore coaches' experiences, it was important to present the data in a way that emphasized each individual's trajectory (Grossoehme & Lipstein, 2016) and preserved the chronological flow of an individual's experiences.

### **Results**

Four experiences, that each encapsulated related but distinct stressors, were shared by the coaches: preparing for major events and championships, admin/NGB tasks, work-life balance, and competition. The data is presented on a coach-by-coach basis in a way that allows the trajectory of coaches' experiences and the related stressors, appraisals, coping strategies, and implications for PWB to be followed (see Tables 2–6). The stressor data were categorized into three sub-themes informed by Fletcher et al. (2006):

coach-related, athlete-related, and organizational stressors. The primary appraisal data are represented by four sub-themes: benefit, challenge, harm/loss, and threat (see Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Nine coping sub-themes were constructed using Skinner et al. (2003) classification of coping: accommodation, escape, information seeking, isolation, negotiation, opposition, problem-solving, self-reliance, and support seeking. Finally, five themes were constructed using Ryff's (1995) conceptualization of PWB: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, relationships with others, and purpose in life. Themes and sub-themes were defined in line with a recent meta-synthesis of research on psychological stress and PWB among sports coaches (Potts et al., 2023).

Quotes from the coaches' diary entries are included within the trajectories to demonstrate the progression of each experience during the 28-day period. The experiences summarized in Tables 2–6 represent themes in coaches' day-to-day lives that encapsulated related but distinct stressors. Presenting the data in this way helped to highlight that similar stressors were experienced on different days and that coaches' appraisals of and coping attempts for stressors varied over the data collection period. The trajectories also illuminate the implications of stressors, appraisals, and coping attempts for coaches' PWB. The trajectories are supported by descriptive narrative, which provides further information about each coach's diary entries. The trajectories and accompanying narrative focus on up to two pertinent experiences that each coach reported to allow us to follow the progression of the stressors within each experience and the influence on PWB, and present temporal aspects of the coaches' experiences over multiple time points. By presenting the data in this way, we offer depth of insight to coaches' most pertinent experiences rather than offering more shallow insight to the breadth of coaches' experiences. This is in line with the first author's philosophical stance and the aim of the study.

### **Alan**

Alan, a part-time paid coach in track and field athletics with 19 years of experience, reported 19 coaching days and nine non-coaching days during his 28-day data collection period. Table 2 displays Alan's trajectory, with one experience being presented: preparing for major events and championships. The stressors associated with this experience were categorized as athlete-related or organizational. With relation to primary appraisals, Alan appraised the athlete-related stressors as beneficial, challenging, a harm/loss, and threatening, and the organizational stressor as a challenge. On day 11, Alan appraised an athlete-related stressor in two different ways; beneficial as there was some goal attainment and a harm/loss because Alan felt his goals had been inhibited. There was one instance (day 14) where Alan did not report an appraisal of the athlete-related stressor and instead he reported waiting to hear from the athlete about how they were feeling, which could indicate that a delayed appraisal took place. On multiple occasions Alan used more than one coping strategy to cope with the stressors he was experiencing. For example, on day four Alan coped with the athlete-related stressor using both information seeking and support seeking, which influenced his feelings of autonomy, and on day 17 he coped with the organizational stressor using escape and self-reliance strategies, which influenced his environmental mastery. Finally, looking at

**Table 2.** Alan's trajectory pathway.

Experience	Day	Stressor	Primary appraisal	Coping	PWB
Preparing for major events and championships	1	Athlete-related "Today was stressful as I was waiting on [athlete]'s Commonwealth Youth selection call. It was something that was out of our hands now, [athlete] did everything required of him for selection, and it was now does to the selectors"	Threat "Had we done enough? What if he didn't make the team?"	Self-reliance "It was a tough one to cope with and at times I did think about calling the endurance selector because I was concerned for my athlete about the outcome of selection"	Personal growth "The athlete made the team and things calmed down"
	4	Athlete-related "Want athletes to run well especially [athlete] to run a quick [event distance]. You want the athletes to achieve their goals so you just hope you have prepared them well"	Challenge "You want the athletes to achieve their goals so you just hope you have prepared them well. It is also nice nerves too before they race as it is exciting"	Information seeking "I try to just enjoy the races and socialize/network with other coaches." Support seeking "It is also nice to catch up with the athlete's friends and families"	Autonomy "It was an unexpected late night for me having to drive back to [city]"
	7	Athlete-related "Last sessions on the track before the British Championships at the weekend. Just wanted the guys to have good sessions as it was their last one before the weekend"	Benefit "On how the session went with the athletes – it was very positive"	Problem solving "I kept focused on the session and the athletes"	Autonomy "I was more relaxed on this stressor as it was in my control"
	9	Athlete-related "I am thinking about the British Trials at the weekend. It is a big weekend for the athletes around qualifying for the worlds"	Challenge "Hoping you have done it all. We have done all we can"	Escape "Keep busy with coaching and work"	Relationships with others "This stress does take a lot out of me, plus my wife at times too"
	11	Athlete-related "British Trials heats. You just want the athletes to perform and make the finals"	Harm/loss "It was a tough day a couple [of athletes] just missed out on making the final" Benefit "I got one through with the biggest chance of going to the Worlds"	Escape "Keep busy, chatting to other people and also watching other events" Self-reliance "It is nice to have a cold beer to reflect on the day"	No reported impact on PWB

*(continued)*

**Table 2.** Continued.

Experience	Day	Stressor	Primary appraisal	Coping	PWB
	12	Athlete-related "British Trials finals day. It is all about finishing in the top two once you have the world qualifying time. It's all down to the athlete now!"	Challenge "Made sure the athlete knew what they had to do, making doubly sure they knew the plan too. Once the warm-up started, the nerves kicked in"	Escape "I kept in control by talking about other things"	No reported impact on PWB "Again, I was shattered and ready for some rest and a good night's sleep"
	14	Athlete-related "[Athlete] saw the physio today so I am hoping he can do a session today. I would like [athlete] to do a session today as this would give him a lot of confidence for the weekend but also make sure the problem is sorted"	No reported appraisal "I just played things by ear and listened to what [athlete] had to say about his own body"	Negotiation "Listened to what [athlete] had to say ... he did the session and finished it with a big smile on his face"	No reported impact on PWB
	17	Organizational "5am start to my day driving to [city] for the [competition]. A lack of sleep due to a late night and an early start. Athletes are performing at the competitions. I want the athletes to be happy and achieve their personal goals"	Challenge "I got them [athletes] here with my coaching now they need to do their bit. I will help where I can"	Escape "Loads of coffees and kept busy throughout the day" Self-reliance "Had a good chat with them [athletes] before and after their race to make sure they were happy"	Environmental mastery "It is normal daily stress this for me."

PWB, the stressors and coping strategies that Alan experienced impacted multiple aspects of his PWB and often in different ways. For example, on day seven the athlete-related stressor, benefit appraisal, and problem-solving coping strategy had a positive impact on Alan's autonomy. However, on day nine the same athlete-related stressor, challenge appraisal, and escape coping strategy had a negative impact on Alan's relationships with others, particularly the relationship between him and his wife.

**Arthur**

Arthur, a part-time paid coach with over 29 years coaching experience in track and field athletics at Olympic level, reported 21 coaching days, four non-coaching days, and three days incomplete due to annual leave. Table 3 displays Arthur's trajectory, with two experiences being presented: preparing for major events and championships and admin and National Governing Body (NGB)-related tasks. Looking first at preparing for major

**Table 3.** Arthur's trajectory pathway.

Experience	Day	Stressor	Primary appraisal	Coping	PWB
Preparing for major events and championships	1	Athlete-related "Sport science support focus on preparation for World Championships including body composition intervention and training camp preparation"	Challenge "I came away from the session feeling positive and enthused"	Information seeking "I always learning something from the sports nutritionist"	Purpose in life "The team gets a little stronger, which builds my confidence"
	9	Athlete-related "Mix of training session with some athletes preparing to compete"	Challenge "Always a challenging time of the year as I am working with each athlete's individual competition schedule"	Problem-solving "I'm on top of this. I spoke to each athlete about the coming days activity"	Environmental mastery "I have to maintain a high level of communication/ organization to ensure effective functioning of athletes and me"
	17	Athlete-related "Most of the athletes I coach competed today. Four secured qualification for the World Athletics Championships and one for the Commonwealth Games"	Benefit "This is an expression of what I work towards as a coach. It is the challenge I work for. Today was a delight as most athletes achieved their goal for the competition"	Support seeking "I share the ups and downs with the athletes. Accommodation I've learned to not let results define me, i.e., I know I'm a good coach"	Environmental mastery "I'm very happy with the outcome today and I am very proud to coach this group. Few coaches ever achieve this level of performance and I'm delivering year on year now"
Admin and NGB-related tasks	24	Athlete-related "Athletes competed in 5000 m at World Championships trials. Results include new women's UK record and two men inside the old men's record, with winner setting a world leading time for 2017!"	Benefit "Challenge executed! Key markers ahead of the World Championships in six weeks. Enjoyed the experience and the congratulations of coaching colleagues"	Support seeking "Enjoyed the experiences and the congratulations of coaching colleagues"	Environmental mastery "P-O-S-I-T-I-V-E. This has been an impressive set of results over recent weeks"
	3	Organizational "No coaching today. Two hours admin. Writing training schedules for coming week and messaging athletes to check they have entered races"	Benefit "I do enjoy this task – there is always more positive than negative"	Negotiation "I set plans/goals for the week which are part of an annual plan. I use a shared software program which athletes update online via an app or computer. I identify opportunities for athletes to train together"	Environmental mastery "Whatever day I do this, I always complete it early evening to let me switch off with family and a film/ tv." Relationships with others "Overall is has a positive impact as it reaffirms partnership with athletes"
	5	Organizational "[Name of organization]: I'm working with events in parks who today asked for	Harm/loss "Having already had the event approved and submitting	Self-reliance "I did not enjoy the conversation and worked hard to remain polite. I	Personal growth "Organizing events like this is really stressful. I need to reflect on whether

*(continued)*

**Table 3.** Continued.

Experience	Day	Stressor	Primary appraisal	Coping	PWB
		further risk assessments from contractors I have engaged with for a major event in 12 days time ... I had to contact four companies to ask them to submit documentation to the council ... the lady from the council today me this was her first time working on an event and would follow the rules to the letter"	detailed risk assessments etc. I was disappointed to be asked for repeat information and was embarrassed to ask for it at this late stage"	want to repeat this event in the future and I support the need for a risk assessment etc." Opposition "I felt angry and powerless in the face of an additional layer of bureaucracy"	to do this again when I do it alongside other work"
	5	Organizational "[Organization]: funders of the event are not responding to emails and calls. The NGB needs to support paperwork to the [names organization] to ensure this event counts as a qualifying performance for the World Championships"	Threat "This is a potential threat to my integrity if the event does not secure the correct status – athletes from several countries are competing, hoping to qualify for the World Championships"	Self-reliance "I'm asking if I should have gone about this process differently and whether to do it again in the future?"	No reported impact on PWB "I'm worried about the lack of contact and will pursue tomorrow"
	8	Organizational "Asked to produce a plan of work for 12 months in 48 hours' time. Following a [organization] review, [organization] has reorganized and I have a new role"	Threat "This type of request/ demand is typical or the way I am asked to work. I am managed, not led, by a group of people who have too much to do ... it frustrates me that I am better than my employees"	Negotiation "My work schedule and planned activities did not give time to drop everything to complete this task [compromise]" Support seeking "I have an overview of my calendar for the coming 12 months and when I meet my line manager on Sunday, I will brief him on this"	No reported impact on PWB "I did not let this have an impact on my well-being. I will do this work and do it well – ready to review in July"

events and championships, all of the stressors associated with this experience were categorized as athlete-related stressors. Arthur appraised these athlete-related stressors as beneficial (days 17 and 24) or as a challenge (days one and nine) and he used coping strategies relating to accommodation (day 17), information seeking (day one), and support seeking (day 17). With reference to PWB, the athlete-related stressors and coping strategies used had a positive impact on Arthur's environmental mastery (day nine) and purpose in life (day one), and Arthur felt this had a positive impact on his environmental mastery as he is achieving a level over and above other coaches on an annual basis (day 17). Stressors relating to admin and NGB-related tasks were

categorized as organizational stressors and were appraised by Arthur in three different ways: beneficial (day three), a harm/loss (day five), and threatening (day five). The beneficial appraisal was coped with via negotiation coping and this transaction had a positive impact on Arthur's environmental mastery and relationships with others. For the harm/loss and threat appraisals, Arthur used self-reliance coping strategies such as reflecting about future planning. These stress transactions had a negative impact on Arthur's personal growth. Arthur used multiple coping strategies to help cope with the organizational stressors he was experiencing, which included information seeking, negotiation, opposition, self-reliance, and support seeking. For example, on day five, Arthur used opposition and self-reliance and, on day eight, he used negotiation and support seeking.

### **Karen**

Karen, a part-time paid coach in youth gymnastics reported eight coaching days and 20 non-coaching days. Table 4 displays Karen's trajectory, with one experience being presented: work-life balance. The stressors associated with this experience were categorized as organizational and coach-related stressors. Karen appraised the organizational stressor experienced on day one as both a threat and challenge as the stressor had the

**Table 4.** Karen's trajectory pathway.

Experience	Day	Stressor	Primary appraisal	Coping	PWB
Work-life balance	1	Organizational "Emailed from the head coach regarding shift cover in the new year. Head coach has asked if I am able to cover an extra two hour shift on Fridays from the New Year"	Threat "I saw this stressor as a slight inconvenience as I struggle with time management currently and this would add to the workload"  Challenge "However, I also see it as an opportunity to improve my financial conditions"	Negotiation "I agreed to take on the extra shifts on the agreement that once the other coach was able to cover the shift I would be able to stand down"	No reported impact on PWB "Overall, would not impact my current well-being as it would be a concern in the New Year and not immediately"
	25	Coach-related "Managing my own busy end of term schedule while trying to maintain an upbeat coaching style and attitude. At this was the last training session I had before Christmas it was important not to lose focus myself. However, after a hectic work schedule in other domains this can be challenging"	Threat "I found this difficult. I was very aware of the gymnasts' mood and motivation and trying to manage my own in a professional way was difficult"	Self-reliance "I coped. On reflection, I could have managed my lifestyle (food/resources) more efficiently. However, this is sometimes impossible while managing and maintaining multiple part time jobs"	Environmental mastery "Yes to some degree this impacted my well-being. Having multiple jobs that all have important responsibilities can have negative impacts on my own well-being"



potential to disrupt her schedule and time management (i.e., threat), however there was also some opportunity for potential gain (i.e., challenge). Karen coped with the organizational stressor by using negotiation strategies, such as agreeing on a specific time-frame for activities and stepping down afterwards. Although Karen did not report that this stress transaction had any impact on her PWB, she commented that this would be a concern for later on, indicating that the selected coping strategies were useful in alleviating distress in the short-term. Next looking at the coach-related stressor (day 25), Karen appraised the coach-related stressor as a threat as it had the potential to damage both her and her athlete’s well-being. Karen coped with the coach-related stressor by using self-reliance strategies, specifically reflecting about what could be done to better manage the stressor. This organizational stressor and the associated transaction had a negative impact on her PWB and impacted her environmental mastery. This was demonstrated by Karen’s description of how having multiple jobs and important responsibilities can have a negative impact on her PWB.

**Lewis**

Lewis, a part-time paid youth football coach, reported 11 coaching days and 17 non-coaching days. Table 5 displays Lewis’ trajectory, with one experience being presented: admin and NGB-related tasks. The stressors associated with this experience were categorized as organizational and examples include administrative tasks and responding to messages from

**Table 5.** Lewis’ trajectory pathway.

Experience	Day	Stressor	Primary appraisal	Coping	PWB
Admin and NGB-related tasks	1	Organizational "Parents not replying to messages. I have to follow up with parents about their children’s availability for a fixture at the weekend"	No primary appraisal identified "I did not really see this as any of the appraisals as this happens so regularly"	Accommodation "Sent texts to the parents to get their children’s availability and remove uncertainty"	No reported impact on PWB "No impact on my PWB. This happens on a regular basis and if it was to affect my well-being I would be constantly changing my mood"
	7	Organizational "Non-coaching day but still had admin stressors. Sorting things out for next season. I had a meeting with the club secretary to help plan for next season but I want to get prepared for next season"	Threat "Threat mostly as I have worked hard to set these teams up and I want them to keep going"	Information seeking "Meeting with club secretary and further planning"	No reported impact on PWB "No, not yet but if it gets closer to the time and it’s not sorted out it will start to"
	23	Organizational "There are a number of administration duties that I have to complete. Sorting out teams and kit for next year, as well as a number of presentation day things to sort out"	Threat "Threat to try and fit it all in"	Problem solving "I gave myself specific times to complete these duties"	No reported impact on PWB "No"

parents. With relation to primary appraisals, Lewis did not report an appraisal of the stressor initially on day one, stating it was a regular occurrence in his coaching role, but later, on days seven and 23, Lewis appraised the stressors as a threat because he perceived a threat to his goals or himself. Lewis coped using accommodation, information seeking, and problem solving to cope with the organizational stressors. Lewis did not report that the admin and NGB-related tasks, and the associated appraisals or coping strategies had an impact on his PWB. Lewis did, however, identify that this stressor experience happens on a regular basis, suggesting that he regularly appraises and copes with this stressor.

### Oscar

Oscar, a full-time paid coach in field hockey with 12 years of experience at university and regional level, reported 16 coaching days, six non-coaching days, and six incomplete days due to annual leave. Table 6 displays Oscar's trajectory, with one experience

**Table 6.** Oscar's trajectory pathway.

Experience	Day	Stressor	Primary appraisal	Coping	PWB
Competition	3	Athlete-related "We've just been smashed 5-0 at home vs [team]. [Team] have recruited well and are just better than us. We have to play them again next week"	No primary appraisal "I haven't evaluated it yet as I have to go home for my girlfriend's birthday"	Escape "Put it to one side – I will worry about it tomorrow"	No reported impact on PWB "I'll know more tonight whether I sleep or not!"
	6	Athlete-related "GAME DAY. 3-2 loss at home. Late entry because fixture was at 17.30. It was a game against our rivals and one we should have been good enough to win"	Threat "We played poorly and didn't want it as much as the opposition"	Escape "Night out after the game – this was pre-planned therefore had no time to think about it"	No reported impact on PWB "No"
	10	Athlete-related "Late because we had an away game vs [team] and lost 3-0"	Threat "Frustration of losing and not scoring. I was more concerned about the mind-set of the girls" Challenge "A small success in the change of tactic"	Self-reliance "Long drive home after to reflect"	No reported impact on PWB "No"
	17	Athlete-related "Ladies ones lost 3-0 vs [team] and men's ones lost 5-3 vs [team]. I also had an issue with a senior player's behavior"	No primary appraisal identified	Support seeking "Discuss with the assistant coach ASAP and arrange a meeting with the leadership committee"	No reported impact on PWB "No"
	23	Athlete-related "Late fixture in [city], lost 4-0 away. It was 3-0 at half time. Second half gave me something to think about"	Challenge "Excitement for next season. Performances are improving despite the negative results"	Accommodation "Communication with the captains"	No reported impact on PWB "No impact"

being presented: competition. The competition stressors were categorized as athlete-related. With reference to primary appraisals, Oscar appraised the stressors primarily as a threat (days six and 10) because he perceived them to be threatening to his goals. He did, however, appraise the stressor as a challenge on day 10, which related to potential gain. Oscar did not report an appraisal of these competition stressors initially and, on completion of his diary, reflected that he would evaluate the stressor later in the evening (day three). Turning to coping, Oscar employed escape strategies to cope with a 5-0 loss at home but did not identify an appraisal (day three). Escape was also used when reporting another stressor of losing a home game 3-2 and this was appraised as a harm loss (day six). On the other hand, self-reliance and reflection were used following a threat appraisal of a 3-0 loss away from home and Oscar appraised this stressor as a threat and reported being concerned with the mindset of the athletes (day 10). Oscar did not report an impact on his PWB when he experienced stressors relating to competition. When asked what the impact of the stressor was on his PWB, on four occasions Oscar replied with “no impact,” and one on occasion he wrote “I’ll know more tonight whether I sleep or not!”

## Discussion

The aim of this study was to address gaps in extant literature by exploring the impact of stress transactions on PWB among sports coaches using a close proximity longitudinal approach. Using a daily diary method over 28 days, we captured sports coaches’ experiences and present an original insight to coaches’ daily transactions with their environment and the influence of these transactions on coaches’ PWB. This study also allowed us to identify changes over time in the stress transactions that each coach experienced and makes a significant contribution to knowledge by understanding how appraisals and coping strategies fluctuated over short periods of time and influenced PWB dimension perceptions among sports coaches. This exploration of interconnected concepts was an important aim of the study because it is only through developing an understanding of the implications psychological stress has on PWB that we can continue to develop knowledge on ways to optimize coaches’ experiences. Doing so will help to inform evidence-based applied stress management interventions (Potts et al., 2023) which can, for example, mitigate the likelihood of experiencing burnout and subsequently coaches’ intentions to remain in their current jobs (Kilo & Hassmén, 2016).

The coaches reported a variety of stressors associated with athletes, other coaches, and the organization within which they operate. While previous literature has tended to report on individual occurrences of stressors from the coaches’ memorable past (e.g., Didymus, 2017; Olusoga et al., 2009; Potts et al., 2019), the novel close proximity methods that we used in this study allowed us to study stress transactions over a period of time. For example, whilst multiple coaches in Olusoga et al. (2009) interview study recalled preparing for major events on five separate occasions, this study extends and adds depth to existing findings by highlighting that this stressor was experienced over a period of time by coaches, often on days close in proximity (e.g., Alan reported this stressor across 12 out of 28 days, with six of these stressor experiences occurring over a 10-day period). These findings are noteworthy because it is only through better

understanding of how stress transactions manifest and influence PWB over a period of time that researchers can work with practitioners and coaches to provide evidence-based recommendations and work to better support coaches.

Administration duties were frequently reported as a stressor over multiple days (e.g., Lewis reported this stressor on four days and Arthur reported it on five days), which is similar to previous research by Levy et al. (2009) where administration duties were reported on 13 separate occasions by the coach who completed their diary-based case study. The current study extends the findings of Levy et al. (2009) by demonstrating the impact of administration duties on multiple coaches' PWB. For example, Arthur reported that administration duties had a positive impact on his sense of environmental mastery and relationships with others, but a negative impact on his personal growth. This insight, coupled with the findings from Levy et al. (2009), suggest that administration duties are a prominent stressor among sports coaches and that NGBs and sport organizations should be mindful of this stressor when assessing, planning, and monitoring coach workload. Coaches could benefit from exploring opportunities to refine their time management and prioritization skills, and work with NGBs and sport organizations to set realistic workloads and deadlines. Sport organizations themselves have a responsibility to ensure that policies are in place to effectively manage coaches' workloads and support continued professional development as far as is practical within the profession.

Despite numerous suggestions relating to the importance of longitudinal work on coaches' experiences of stress and PWB (e.g., Baldock et al., 2022; Norris et al., 2017; Potts et al., 2023), this study is the first of its kind to provide a close proximity longitudinal and qualitative exploration of stressors, primary appraisals, coping, and PWB among men and women coaches who were employed on either a part- or full-time basis. Work of this nature is particularly noteworthy when considering the pivotal role that primary appraisals play in stress transactions (Didymus & Fletcher, 2012) and the influence of appraisals and coping on an individual's PWB (Folkman et al., 1986). It was evident that coaches appraised the same stressor in different ways on different occasions and that positive (i.e., benefit or challenge) and negative (i.e., harm/loss or threat) appraisals may be experienced in response to similar situations and leads to drawing on different coping strategies. For example, preparing for major events and championships, which was frequently appraised as a benefit (e.g., by Arthur), had an impact on multiple aspects of PWB. This stressor and the associated primary appraisal had a positive impact on Arthur's perception of environmental mastery and purpose in life, and had both a positive and negative impact on his relationships with others. This finding highlights the complexity of the stress-PWB interplay and spotlights the idea that the same stressor can have varied implications for PWB.

Our findings relating to appraising echo previous literature (e.g., Webster et al., 2011), which has suggested that appraising a stressor in just one way is overly simplistic and may not reflect the dynamic nature of stress, particularly when considering that different appraisals may be related with environmental or situational properties rather than the stressor itself. For example, Arthur appraised the organizational stressor of completing admin and NGB tasks as a threat on days five and eight and as a harm/loss on day five. While not explored in this study directly, perceived control over a stressor has been shown to influence stress appraisals and subsequent coping preferences

(Kaiseler et al., 2012) and could offer explanatory insight to the stress-PWB interplay. Collectively, these findings suggest the potential added value of exploring perceptions of control when understanding stress, coping, and PWB among sports coaches. This is important if research is to inform the development of coach education materials to include information on stressors, appraisals, and coping, leading to improved PWB. For example, this could involve upskilling coaches to raise awareness of and optimize their appraisals and coping efforts. While our findings have developed understanding of the impact of stressors, appraisals, and coping on PWB among a diverse sample of coaches, further qualitative and longitudinal research is required to better understand the dynamic nature of stress transactions among coaches.

Contrary to previous literature, challenging conditions can adversely affect employees' PWB (e.g., Semmer et al., 2005) and such conditions can often be harmful for an individual (Webster et al., 2011) rather than provide an opportunity for potential growth. This was supported by our results as Alan, for example, appraised the stressor he experienced on day 12 as a challenge, yet explained how he was "shattered" from the experience. Lazarus (1999) posited that threat states are associated with an individual being concerned about his or her future losses. This notion has been supported by wider psychology literature with adults, which has highlighted an association between threat appraisals, in particular, and diminished PWB (Schmid & Muldoon, 2015). This is particularly important given that diminished PWB and health prevents individuals from performing at their optimum (González-Morales & Neves, 2015). Collectively, these findings on appraisals re-emphasize the need to monitor coaches' primary appraisals and their transactions with the environment in which they operate to help promote more healthy working conditions.

One interesting and novel finding that we reported relating to primary appraisals was that coaches sometimes delayed their appraisal of a stressor (e.g., Alan delayed his appraisal of the athlete-related stressor on day 14 until he heard from his athlete). Whilst previous literature has indicated that athletes may delay their appraisal and coping strategy deployment (Nicholls et al., 2009), this novel finding of a delayed appraisal without exploring coping strategy deployment has not yet been reported among coaches. Nevertheless, caution should be drawn in interpreting the results as these may be due to limitations in the research methods used as there was no scope to follow-up with coaches. Furthermore, while theory suggests that coping is only initiated if an appraisal of the stressor has taken place because the appraisal acts as the mediator between stressors and coping and subsequently influences the coping strategies that an individual uses (Lazarus, 1993), the findings in this study suggested that on certain occasions, coaches did not report an appraisal of a stressor yet still described a coping strategy. Several potential explanations may explain this outcome. For example, it may be that the appraisal took place, but that appraisal was subconscious and, therefore, not accessible during the recall of experiences. Moving forward, it may be important for researchers to further explore the complexities of appraising using complimentary methods (e.g., semi-structured interviews following diary entries) which would allow a better understanding of appraisals, acknowledging the aforementioned challenges of gaining a more in-depth understanding of when appraising is initiated and why appraisals may be delayed, if coaches are aware of their appraisals, and how appraising informs the initiation of coping strategies.

Turning to coping, a wide variety of coping strategies were employed to cope with athlete-related stressors. This may be due to the prominence of athlete-related stressors that were experienced by coaches on a more regular basis than coach-related and organizational stressors, which therefore resulted in the coaches drawing on more and different strategies (e.g., negotiation, opposition, self-reliance). In particular, coaches drew on support seeking strategies to cope with the organizational stressor admin and NGB-related tasks they experienced. A systematic review by Norris et al. (2017) highlighted the need to continue to explore support seeking strategies to cope with stressors among coaches due to the buffering effect social support can have on the negative outcomes of stress (Cohen & Wills, 1985). In line with previous calls from research (e.g., Norris et al., 2020), our findings make a useful contribution to practice by suggesting that practitioners should work with coaches to understand and enhance their social support networks (e.g., understanding perceived and received types of support from friends and family or assistant coaches; see Norris et al., 2024) and maximize opportunities for reaching out to effective support networks who are able to buffer stress and provide the specific support matching the coaches' needs to ensure optimum functioning.

In addition to appraisals influencing PWB, previous research has highlighted that coping can also impact PWB (see, for review, Potts et al., 2023). To expand, certain families of coping, such as negotiation, information seeking, and problem solving can give rise to positive impacts on PWB (Almassy et al., 2014) and minimize the potentially harmful effects of stressors. For example, on day seven Alan reported coping with the athlete-related stressor preparing for major events and championships by problem solving which had a positive impact on his autonomy as he felt he was in control of the stressor and, as such, felt more relaxed. On the other hand, families of coping such as escape and avoidance strategies may contribute to lower PWB (Glidden et al., 2006). For example, on day three Oscar used escape strategies to cope with the athlete-related stressor competition. While there was no reported impact on PWB directly, Oscar implied that he would "know more tonight whether I sleep or not," implying that there may be an underlying response to this stressor and the associated coping strategy which may be detrimental to Oscar's health. Therefore, it is important to consider how coping strategies can impact PWB and inform coaches of helpful strategies to enhance PWB and work to develop these strategies (e.g., through coach education programmes) and unhelpful strategies which could have a detrimental impact on PWB.

Karen was the only coach who shared her experiences of work-life balance, of which the associated stressors were categorized as coach-related. To cope with these coach-related stressors, Karen used self-reliance methods (e.g., reflection) echoing findings in previous literature (e.g., Didymus, 2017; Frey, 2007). The benefits of reflection have been shown to have a positive impact on an individual's growth and development (Traver et al., 2014), which are key elements of PWB (Ryff, 1995). It would be useful for researchers to better understand how the reflective process can be beneficial for stress and PWB. Furthermore, in broadening an understanding of reflection on stress and PWB, this could help coaches develop and refine their reflective techniques (e.g., by incorporating a written or audio recorded diary), which are important in encouraging coaches to develop hardy dispositions and help them better thrive in demanding situations (Cropley et al., 2020). In addition, Karen was the only coach who shared her experiences of work-life

balance as a stressor due to the different roles she fulfilled. Thus, it is important that researchers continue to explore the experiences of coaches of different genders to create a more representative overview of the experiences of the coaching workforce.

### ***Implications for practice***

The findings of this study advance knowledge of coaches' experiences of psychological stress and PWB using close proximity longitudinal methods and presents several implications for the applied field. Coaches and practitioners should work collaboratively to raise awareness of coaches' stressors, related primary appraisals, and their coping efforts. Self-awareness raising activities could supplement coaches' ongoing reflective practices and spotlight appraising and coping as mechanisms through which PWB can be facilitated or inhibited. While previous research in the sport psychology field has identified that coaches experience stressors such as preparing for major events (e.g., Olusoga et al., 2009), this study is the first to provide insight into how these stressors are experienced by coaches and how they manifest over time often on days close in proximity. Practical insights such as these are important for sport psychology practitioners and consultants who support coaches with assessing, planning, and monitoring coach workload and to ensure coaches are equipped with appropriate and effective coping strategies to deal with such stressors over a longer period of time. Furthermore, sport organizations and national governing bodies must remain mindful of such ongoing and frequently occurring stressors and design and implement interventions that can reduce the impact these stressors have on coaches' PWB.

Coach education programs should attend to the findings on appraisals and coping and how these two facets of psychological stress can influence PWB. From an appraisal perspective, practitioners should work with coaches to ensure they are aware of and monitor their primary appraisals and transactions with the environment in which they operate to help promote more healthy working conditions. From a coping perspective, previous research (e.g., Norris et al., 2020) has called for social support networks among coaches to be enhanced to buffer stress and provide the specific support matching the coaches' needs to ensure optimum functioning. Indeed, our findings make a useful contribution to practice by suggesting that practitioners should work with coaches to understand and enhance their social support networks (e.g., understanding perceived and received types of support from friends and family or assistant coaches; Norris et al., 2024) and maximize opportunities for reaching out to effective support networks. Furthermore, coach education programs should focus on educating coaches of more helpful coping strategies which can enhance PWB and work with coaches to develop these strategies. This will also help raise awareness of unhelpful coping strategies that may be harmful to PWB.

### ***Strengths and limitations***

One strength of the work was that, through using a close proximity, longitudinal interval-contingent daily diary approach, the coaches' experiences were captured as they were occurring, which reduced the risk and potential implications of retrospective recall and forgetfulness (Day & Thatcher, 2009; Nicholls et al., 2005). Furthermore, the daily

diary method allowed us to explore the coaches' individual experiences (Tennen et al., 2000) and has helped to develop understanding of the coaches' experiences of psychological stress and PWB and the subsequent impact of psychological stress on PWB. By presenting each coaches' experiences as trajectories, readers are able to identify changes over the period of data collection (Grossoehme & Lipstein, 2016). This was important given that researchers have called for longitudinal research on stress in sport to inform the development of coach education and support. Despite such calls (e.g., Norris et al., 2017; Potts et al., 2023), this study is the first to provide longitudinal insight to psychological stress and PWB among sports coaches using close proximity research methods. The study includes both men and women sports coaches and the findings support the notion that different genders have different needs in relation to their stress experiences. Therefore, future research should consider the experiences of coaches of different genders and diverse cultural background to create a more representative understanding of the coaching workforce needs and design tailored solutions to support.

Turning next to methodological limitations of this study, the use of an interval-contingent daily diary protocol relies on individuals completing their diary entries at the same time each day and with sufficient detail (Day & Thatcher, 2009). It was important that each coach completed his or her diary entries at the same time each day to ensure consistency and to minimize the effects of daily fluctuations in hormones (cf. Szczepanski et al., 1997) and the influence of sunlight and the circadian rhythm (cf. Farhud & Aryan, 2018) on the findings. Some coaches provided a wealth of information about the stressors they were experiencing, whereas other coaches offered little elaboration. Although regular contact was maintained with each coach during the diary period, variations in the depth of the data retrieved highlight a methodological limitation of diary research. This method limits researchers' control over the data that is collected and the success of the method is often dependent on the motivation of participants (Välimäki et al., 2007). Furthermore, whilst definitions of and prompts for each aspect of the diary were offered to participants, coaches often reported less information about their appraisals than they did about stressors and coping efforts. This implies that coaches may have been unsure or unaware of their appraisals of stressors. It may also have been the case that coaches were not aware of any impact of stress for their PWB or that such impact was not recognized until after the diary entry was recorded. To address these limitations in future studies, complementary methods (i.e., semi-structured interviews) used in combination with diary methods may be useful to develop follow up on reported experiences to provide greater depth and clarity of the coaches' experiences (Way, 2011).

## Conclusion

This study has advanced understanding of coaches' experiences of psychological stress and PWB. By adopting longitudinal and close proximity methods, original and real-time insights that develop understanding and help to capture coaches' daily transactions with stress and PWB has been developed. The findings highlight that coaches experience similar stressors on a regular basis and they appraise and cope with these experiences in different ways. Furthermore, these stress experiences and transactions can impact different aspects of the coaches' PWB, which is something that needs to be



explored and understood to ensure coaches' PWB is not negatively impacted by their experiences of stress while engaging in their role as a coach. It seems that it is often the coaches' primary appraisal and coping strategies of a stressor that determines the impact of the stress transaction on the coaches' PWB. Based on these findings, future research is warranted to further understand coaches' stress appraisals, perceptions of control, and coping effectiveness on PWB. The focus should continue to be on the stressors influencing the appraisal process and coping preferences, as well as coping effectiveness, and the impact on PWB. Complimentary methods such as momentary data capture (e.g., via daily audio recorded diaries) coupled with retrospective recall (e.g., semi-structured interviews) are required if we are to fully understand these links.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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## Data availability statement

De-identified data that support the findings of this study are available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to their sensitive nature (i.e., a risk to compromise the privacy of research participants).

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