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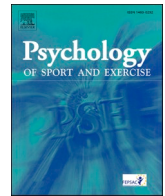
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Giving voice to high-performance sports coaches to spotlight their perceptions of psychological well-being[☆]

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ABSTRACT

High-performance sports coaches work in achievement-oriented environments that have the potential to enhance or undermine psychological well-being (PWB). Despite context-specific understanding of PWB being important, we know little about what PWB means to high-performance coaches and have minimal understanding of how to help coaches and governing bodies to nourish and protect PWB. Underpinned by our constructivist paradigm and our relativist and subjectivist onto-epistemological stance, we worked with eight high-performance sports coaches to: 1) qualitatively explore what PWB means to high-performance coaches to generate new understanding of the fundamentally important elements of their PWB and 2) build a clearer picture of factors that facilitate and or inhibit coaches' PWB. Using reflexive thematic analysis, we constructed six themes from data collected via semi-structured interviews: 1) from balance to self-awareness: PWB means something different to everyone; 2) curiosity fuels development of self and others, which builds PWB; 3) enjoyment of coaching and escapism from it sustain PWB; 4) being surrounded by good people and seeing them achieve are routes to happiness; 5) coaching can feel like being "stuck in the trenches" whilst waiting to be found out as a fraud; and 6) boundary management is a form of self-preservation that protects PWB. These findings give voice to high-performance sports coaches' understanding of PWB, help to develop an evidence base from which individualized interventions can be developed, and promote the need for systemic changes in sport that will help coaches to live well and be well.

Perhaps the essence of living a good life (Bishop, 2015) is to live life well and, perhaps, to live well is to *be* well. Psychological well-being (PWB) has at its core some of the fundamental ingredients of living and being well. Defining PWB is, however, a difficult task partly because of its entwinement with other concepts (e.g., quality of life, health). Despite the definitional impasse, there is consensus that PWB is a complex, multi-dimensional construct (e.g., Lomas & VanderWeele, 2022) that is essential for human functioning (e.g., Didymus et al., 2018) and is important for health, productivity, and performance (e.g., Wright & Cropanzano, 2000). To facilitate our theoretically sensitive and informed study of PWB among sports coaches, we align to the view that PWB may have two main elements: hedonia and eudaimonia. The hedonic element is thought to encompass happiness, subjective well-being, and affect (i.e., *being* well; Kahneman et al., 1999), whilst eudaimonia relates to personal growth, environmental mastery, autonomy, self-acceptance, positive relationships, and purpose in life (i.e., *living*

well; Ryff, 2018). Without these components, an individual's PWB is likely to be compromised and psychological health, performance, and the opportunity to live and be well are at risk.

The achievement-oriented culture of sport means that high-performance coaches often experience intense pressure to perform. Coaches working at all levels of sport may experience ineffective coping (e.g., Baldock et al., 2022) and burnout (see, for a review, Olusoga et al., 2019), each of which has implications for PWB (e.g., reduced happiness and sense of personal growth, increased negative affect). However, head coaches have been highlighted as a population who experience more stressors relating to their coaching role than part-time coaches (Didymus et al., 2021) and researchers have advocated for further work that explores the unique context of high-performance coaching to better understand PWB (e.g., Baldock et al., 2022). Whilst stressors, ineffective coping, and burnout, for example, can be fostered by high-performance sport and can undermine PWB, sport can also be fertile ground for

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opportunities that nurture PWB. Indeed, elements of the coach-athlete relationship, including relationship quality (Davis et al., 2023), can positively influence coaches' PWB. Involvement in high-performance sport seems, therefore, to be a double-edged sword that could diminish or enhance coaches' PWB. Further exploration is needed to understand how working in high-performance sport influences coaches' abilities to live and be well.

There is increasing evidence pointing to the context-specific nature of eudaimonia (Lomas & VanderWeele, 2023), which highlights a need to study PWB in specific contexts. Indeed, researchers (e.g., Lundkvist, 2011) have advocated for contextually sensitive explorations of PWB, which have rarely been the focus of academic endeavor with sports coaches. Instead, researchers using qualitative methods have often applied theoretical and empirical understanding from other domains and have assumed that these understandings of PWB hold true for coaches (e.g., Baldock et al., 2022). One exception is the work of Higham et al. (2024) who used interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to explore how professional football coaches make sense of their well-being. This study focused solely on men coaches in the context of football. Another exception is Simova et al. (2024) who developed a mid-range grounded theory of well-being with high-performance coaches, which focused on dynamic negotiation and harmony between personal and culturally imposed values and identity to depict coaches' "integrated well-being" (p. 222). These IPA and theory development studies offer useful starting points for the study of PWB in the context of sport, but further work is needed to sensitively portray individuals' experiences and to organically study what PWB means to both men and women coaches. This will help to better understand high-performance sport coaches' context-specific experiences and address shortcomings in existing understanding of PWB.

Researchers who have used qualitative methods to understand coaches' experiences of hedonia and eudaimonia (see, for reviews, Didymus et al., 2018; Norris et al., 2017; Potts et al., 2023) have begun to explore some of the factors that influence coaches' PWB. For example, self-determination to coach has been shown to foster higher PWB, lower perceptions of stress, and lower levels of burnout (McLean & Mallett, 2012). In research using interviews and close proximity qualitative methods, both appraisals and coping have been shown to be influential for coaches' PWB. For example, benefit appraisals may encourage environmental mastery and self-acceptance (Potts et al., 2022) and problem solving as a form of coping seems to positively impact coaches' perceptions of autonomy (Potts et al., 2024). This research has offered useful insight to how PWB may be associated with other important concepts (e.g., burnout, appraisals, coping) but there remains a significant gap in understanding about what PWB means to coaches. This is problematic because conceptualizations of PWB are still evolving and the hedonia and eudaimonia dichotomy may offer an overly simplistic view of a phenomenon that can be experienced distinctly differently by individuals in various contexts.

Extant qualitative evidence has contributed important understanding but, considering the achievement-oriented culture of high-performance sport that may enhance and or undermine PWB, it is imperative that we learn more about what PWB means to coaches. Indeed, PWB has been recognized as a priority for sport psychology researchers (e.g., Norris et al., 2017) and greater attention needs to be paid to the academically underserved population of sports coaches (Leprince et al., 2024). Qualitative research that aims to spotlight sports coaches' understanding of PWB will help to build an evidence base on which future research can be developed. In addition, generating understanding of PWB in this unique population will lay the foundations for the development and testing of interventions that foster coaches' opportunities to live and be well. Qualitative methods are particularly well suited for foundational research in this space where the aim is to generate new, in-depth understanding of PWB. Thus, the aims of this study were: 1) to qualitatively explore what PWB means to high-performance sports coaches to generate new understanding of the

fundamentally important elements of their PWB and 2) to build a clearer picture of factors that facilitate and or inhibit coaches' PWB. By addressing these aims, we give voice to high-performance sports coaches to foreground their perceptions of PWB and make a meaningful contribution to knowledge.

1. Methodology and methods

1.1. Philosophical and methodological approach

Methodological coherence, or ontological and epistemological alignment, is a signal of rigor in qualitative research (Smith & McGannon, 2018). This work is informed by our constructivist paradigm and our relativist and subjectivist onto-epistemological stance. We seek theory-informed knowledge that is specific to our phenomenon of interest (Sparkes & Smith, 2014) and is influenced by our values and experiences. In this study, we explored coaches' subjective, socially constructed understandings of PWB as shaped by their individual experiences (Fossey et al., 2002). We explicated coaches' conceptualizations of PWB to understand what was meaningful to them within the specific context of high-performance coaching (cf. Coyle et al., 2017). To maintain open and thoughtful minds throughout this research, we each kept a reflexive journal using a Microsoft Word® document that was stored in a password protected Microsoft OneDrive® folder. The aims of this activity were to expose implicit biases in our approach to knowledge development (Finlay & Gough, 2003), to remain aware of our internal responses during the research (Etherington, 2004), and to acknowledge subjectivities when capturing our developing understanding of the findings (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). At key points during this project (e.g., when analyzing the data), we wrote in our reflexive journals about the complex interplay of our constructivist foundations, our explorations of PWB, and the theories that informed our thinking.

There is debate in the literature about the immutability of PWB. For example, some researchers (e.g., Davern et al., 2007; Lucas & Diener, 2008) view subjective well-being, which can be seen as a distinct dimension of PWB, as a trait-like construct that remains relatively stable across time and situations. Recent research in sport that explored PWB alongside other similar concepts (e.g., social well-being), has also demonstrated that well-being among coaches remained stable over a six-month period (Ackeret et al., 2024). Nonetheless, other researchers have argued that personal growth, environmental mastery, and autonomy, for example, may be more dynamic and likely to fluctuate over time. This deadlock makes it possible to justify both cross-sectional and longitudinal methods for the study of PWB, but it can be argued that cross-sectional methods are useful when the aim is to develop foundational understanding. To address our aim of foregrounding coaches' voices to explore, in depth, their perceptions of PWB, semi-structured interviews were our cross-sectional method of choice. This method allowed coaches to discuss areas of perceived importance (Sparkes & Smith, 2014) whilst facilitating exploration of experiences that were relevant to our research aims. The chosen method complemented our constructivist position by allowing us and each coach to engage in flexible and collaborative co-construction of knowledge (Roulston, 2010).

1.2. Arthur, Claire, Jack, Jenny, Niamh, Paul, Ryan, and Sasha (Pseudonyms)

Following institutional ethics approval, we used a combination of purposive and snowball sampling (Patton, 2015) to recruit sports coaches who were working in high-performance contexts. We defined high-performance coaches as individuals who support athletes or teams who are either officially Olympic or world championship qualified or who play in elite professional leagues in culturally significant sports (Grey et al., 2020). The aim here was to recruit coaches who were important for athletic performance in high-standard competitions

(Mallett et al., 2013) and who required expert management, leadership, direction, ability, and knowledge to fulfill their coaching role (Grey et al., 2020). Eight coaches (see Table 1) aged between 30 and 61 years ($M_{age} = 41.75$, $SD = 11.97$ years) provided informed consent and voluntarily participated in the study. In line with pioneers of thematic analysis (e.g., Braun & Clarke, 2016) and other researchers who have discussed sample size in qualitative research (e.g., Malterud et al., 2015), our sample size was not fixed a-priori. Instead, we were guided by information power (Malterud et al., 2015) to recruit a sample of coaches that was big enough to develop patterns across the data and address the research aims without being too big that we were at risk of failing to do justice to the complexity and nuance of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2016). At the time of the interviews, seven coaches were coaching their respective sports in the United Kingdom and one coach, Sasha, was coaching in the United States of America. Although not purposefully sampled in this way, each coach identified as white British.

1.3. Procedure

Our initial email contact with coaches included a comprehensive overview of the study, information about what coaches would be required to do if they chose to participate, and details of the voluntary nature of participation. We also advised coaches that they could withdraw from the study at any point without providing a reason for doing so. Once a coach had provided written informed consent, they were invited to an interview that took place at a time that was mutually convenient. We conducted the interviews either face-to-face ($n=4$) or via Microsoft Teams® ($n=4$) when geographical distance prevented in person discussions. The interviews lasted between 54 and 97 minutes ($M_{duration}=01:14:10$, $SD=00:14:26$) and we recorded them using either a digital voice recorder or the record function in Microsoft Teams®. Recordings that were facilitated by Microsoft Teams® were stored securely as audio only files and the autogenerated audio-visual recordings were permanently deleted to protect participants' identities.

1.4. Interview guide

The interview guide was informed by our pre-existing knowledge and understanding of various conceptualizations of PWB. We have been researching well-being and related concepts for >25 years collectively and, during this time, have developed deep theoretical and practical understanding of PWB. The first named author is an accredited sport and exercise scientist (Chartered Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences accreditation for research and psychology support) and has worked in an applied capacity with athletes and coaches at all levels of competition. When developing the interview guide, we ensured that the questions themselves were atheoretical and as free from our existing knowledge and experience as possible so that coaches could share their idiosyncratic, organic perceptions of PWB. This allowed us to inductively explore coaches' understanding of PWB before iteratively and

reflexively exploring these understandings in light of theory during our analysis. We designed a five section semi-structured guide using open-ended questions to steer conversations (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). The first section contained ice breaker questions to build rapport (e.g., "tell me about you and your role as a coach") and the second section focused on exploring coaches' understanding of PWB (e.g., "what does PWB mean to you personally?"). In the third section of the interviews, we explored coaches' experiences of PWB (e.g., "what contributes positively or negatively to your PWB?") to facilitate depth of insight about their understanding of our phenomenon of interest. Section four provided an opportunity to pause, reflect, and garner further insight (e.g., "is there anything else you'd like to tell me?") and section five focused on coaches' reflections on the interview and the study format (e.g., "how do you think the interview went?").

1.5. Reflexive thematic analysis

We chose reflexive thematic analysis (RTA; Braun & Clarke, 2019) as our analytical approach. This form of thematic analysis aligns with our constructivist position because it allowed us to focus on explaining and understanding the coaches' individualized meanings of PWB whilst also exploring the data set as a whole to understand patterns of shared meaning. We (i.e., both named authors) were each involved with every phase of data analysis, which we executed in both independent and collaborative ways. Following verbatim transcription of the interview audio files, we began an independent process of familiarization with the transcripts. This first involved us reading and re-reading the transcripts, which was particularly important because we conducted the interviews ourselves but outsourced transcription to an external agency. Once we were confident that we were familiar with the transcripts, we began coding (e.g., Braun & Clarke, 2019), first independently and then during lengthy working meetings where we each used printed copies of the transcripts to begin noting our early impressions. This was the first systematic phase of our analysis that involved us each searching for semantic codes that captured surface level meanings (e.g., "being happy in the moment and content with my current position"), developing latent codes that encompassed underlying or implicit meanings in the data (e.g., "autonomy to make decisions"), creating codes that had both semantic and latent elements (e.g., "complementary roles help to facilitate learning by osmosis and development"), and ensuring that codes could be interpreted clearly when read independently from the data. Whilst our analysis was largely inductive, we recognize that our knowledge of and expertise relating to PWB meant that our analysis was not conducted in a "theoretical vacuum" (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 331). In line with our constructivist position, our pre-existing theoretical knowledge and practical experience helped us to interpret the data, to create codes that encapsulated latent meaning, and to engage with theoretically sensitive RTA. Coding was iterative and flexible: we developed, changed, and refined codes throughout the analysis by regularly sweeping back through the data.

Once we were comfortable that our codes fully captured the data, we began to generate initial sub-themes and themes (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This involved us promoting complex and multidimensional codes to initial themes by starring them on the transcripts and clustering similar codes together. At this point of the analysis, we focused on identifying patterns of shared meaning among the codes (Braun & Clarke, 2019) and continued to iteratively refine, cluster, and promote codes. Once we had generated, named, and defined the initial sub-themes and themes, we created a Microsoft Excel® spreadsheet to record and further refine our list of codes, sub-themes, and themes and to reflect on their relevance to our research aim. In addition to mapping the themes electronically, we wrote each initial theme on a sticky note that we could manually move, review, and discuss as our analysis evolved when drafting and re-drafting this manuscript. During our reviews of the developing findings, we discussed the central organizing concept that united the codes within each theme to explore the

Table 1
Coaches' demographic information.

Coach (pseudonym)	Age (years)	Gender	Sport	Coaching experience (years)
Arthur	57	Man	Track and field athletics	34
Claire	61	Woman	Track and field athletics	20
Jack	44	Man	Track and field athletics	28
Jenny	44	Woman	Hockey	9
Niamh	34	Woman	Triathlon	11
Paul	30	Man	Crickets	13
Ryan	31	Man	Triathlon	8
Sasha	33	Woman	Football (soccer)	10

relevancy of each code to its theme. For example, the central organizing concept for one of our themes was “positive and negative ramifications of relationships” so we assessed the relevancy of codes within this theme according to how clearly they focused on the impact of relationships for coaches’ PWB. We also considered the quality of our themes, each theme’s boundaries, and whether the themes represented the coded extracts of data and the dataset as a whole. With reference to theme quality, we paid close attention to relevant parts of [Braun and Clarke’s \(2021\)](#) evaluation tool for the assessment of research quality in studies using thematic analysis. In particular, we ensured that our themes captured something meaningful, were relevant to the central ideas of the manuscript, and represented patterns of shared meaning that were underpinned by a core concept. During theme development, we considered each coach’s perceptions of PWB equally, rather than focusing on prevalent ideas or meanings that resonated with many coaches. Throughout the RTA, we highlighted key pieces of text that evocatively represented some part of the coaches’ insights or represented a poignant message from a coach that may resonate with others. This helped us to decide which quotes to feature in this manuscript.

1.6. Research quality

Based on our belief that criteria for assessing the quality of qualitative research are both time- and place-contingent (see [Sparkes & Smith, 2014](#)), we encourage readers to judge the quality of this research using the following criteria: (1) credibility, (2) resonance, (3) rich rigor, and (4) significant contribution. We achieve credibility by presenting thick descriptions of the coaches’ experiences that allow readers to come to their own conclusions ([Smith, 2017](#)) and by offering our interpretations of the coaches’ subjective experiences via accompanying narrative ([Sparkes & Smith, 2014](#)). The presentation of verbatim quotes allowed us to achieve resonance by presenting the findings using the coaches’ spoken words. The work we present here was rigorous in its design and execution, which we achieved via reflexivity and by working with and as critical friends to challenge our interpretations of the data and to receive constructive feedback ([Smith & McGannon, 2018](#)). We also enhanced rigor during our analysis by using [Braun and Clarke’s \(2021\)](#) evaluation tool for the assessment of research quality in studies using thematic analysis. We aimed to make a significant contribution by extending context-specific knowledge of PWB, working toward the improvement of PWB support for coaches, and empowering coaches by giving them space to share their understandings of PWB. Our reflexive stance meant that we continually reviewed the quality of this research and paid attention to how our knowledge and experience may have influenced our analysis, theme development, and presentation of the coaches’ spoken words. For example, we used our reflexive diaries to check and challenge how our pre-existing theoretical knowledge influenced our analysis. We also helped each other during lengthy discussions to notice blind spots in our analysis; to maintain open minds when trying to understand meanings within the data; and to explore the coherence of our epistemology, methodology, and methods (e.g., [Carter & Little, 2007](#)).

2. Interpretation and discussion

The knowledge that we constructed from interviews with coaches relates to six themes that each represent a pattern of shared meaning underpinned by a core concept: 1) from balance to self-awareness: PWB means something different to everyone; 2) curiosity fuels development of self and others, which builds PWB; 3) enjoyment of coaching and escapism from it sustain PWB; 4) being surrounded by good people and seeing them achieve are routes to happiness; 5) coaching can feel like being “stuck in the trenches” whilst waiting to be found out as a fraud; and 6) boundary management is a form of self-preservation that protects PWB. The findings are presented as verbatim quotes and as narrative to show our interpretations of the data. The breadth and depth of the findings mean that we needed to be selective about which of the

coaches’ quotes to include in the manuscript. We aligned our decisions here with our research quality criteria, specifically attending to resonance and credibility, which we achieved by choosing quotes that demonstrate thick description.

2.1. From balance to self-awareness: PWB means something different to everyone

This theme represents coaches’ perceptions of the essence of PWB and was built on the core concept that PWB meant something different to each coach who was involved in this study. The theme begins to address our primary aim, which was to qualitatively explore what PWB means to high-performance sports coaches to generate new understanding of the fundamentally important elements of their PWB. Psychologists and philosophers have worked for many decades towards robust definitions of PWB, yet our findings accentuate the complex and multifaceted nature of this phenomenon. For example, Paul explained his perception of the essence of PWB as being in a state of balance or equilibrium and experiencing steadiness of his emotions: “I guess it’s [PWB] about being in a state of equilibrium, being at peace with myself, with life, not being too elated or too unhappy, just being at a really steady state.” Similarly, Jenny described PWB as “...a sort of inner calm, an inner peace with yourself, that would be well-being, yes...there is this overarching sense of inner peace, inner calm that you can get to.” This sense of balance and equilibrium reported by some coaches is similar to [Dodge et al.’s \(2012\)](#) idea that well-being, albeit broader than PWB, is “the balance point between an individual’s resource pool and the challenges faced” (p. 230).

Other coaches, however, discussed feeling valued as central to their understanding of PWB. For example, Sasha said:

I’m incredibly happy [and well] now because the club has invested in me big time. I feel valued and that is huge for me...They took care of me contract wise, they took care of me pay wise. They value my opinion and involve us in everything, which involves more work but I’m happy to run through a brick wall for anybody if I’m valued.

Some coaches highlighted that self-awareness, understanding their own weaknesses, and being accepting of flaws, which are similar ideas to self-acceptance that features in [Ryff’s \(2018\)](#) conceptualization of eudaimonia, were fundamental to their perceptions of PWB. Jenny, for example, reflected on her developing self-awareness and explained how this fed into her understanding of PWB:

I thought I was in a good place but what I realize now is I perhaps wasn’t...I’m at the start of this journey and I’ve got lots more exploring to do. There are a lot of behaviors that I was doing that I thought were okay but actually they’re not. And so, if you can identify those and work out where they stem from and then perhaps try not to resort to those behaviors, you then have a better sense of well-being.

Whilst some coaches mentioned happiness as part of their understanding of PWB, this idea did not feature prominently in our discussions with coaches. This is surprising given that happiness has been one of the central organizing concepts on which knowledge has developed since the genesis of research on well-being (e.g., [Wilson, 1967](#)). Indeed, some researchers refer to happiness as the “holy grail” ([Frederick & Lazzara, 2020](#), p. 164) for understanding PWB. Whilst we recognize that shared conceptual understanding is beneficial to move understanding forward with cohesion and clarity, our findings advocate for researchers to first consider individuals’ understanding of PWB, rather than approaching research in this space with fixed a-priori ideas of how PWB should be conceptualized. This presents a real challenge for sport psychology researchers and calls for methodological innovation and revolutionary thought. Innovation that makes use of multiple methods (e.g., audio diaries coupled with semi-structured interviews) could shed further light on coaches’ understandings of PWB. Revolutionary thought may involve

researchers shifting away from the idea that a universally acceptable definition of PWB is needed and toward shared understanding that PWB may be too complex, multi-faceted, and context-specific to reach a single agreement on how it should be conceptualized.

2.2. Curiosity fuels development of self and others, which builds PWB

This theme reflects the core concept that many of the coaches were naturally curious, and that this curiosity fueled professional and personal development of self and others, which helped to build a sense of PWB. Arthur, for example, reflected on the importance of his own development for building a sense of mastery and enabling PWB:

I had a couple of days last week in [city] on a study tour with other people working on the performance pathway with [governing body]. So, a group of peer coaches and other people. We had a couple of days looking at other world class environments...that was rewarding, looking at another world class organization and how they do things. I realized that there's more of it [coaching] that I've mastered than not, if you like. The day that you win the Olympics and break the world record, it's like, well, you've done everything then. So then, that's it, job done...we got [number] place at the Games, so we've come very close to that. But, in general, there's always something to work towards.

Claire shared similar sentiments about her own development when asked about what nourished her PWB:

One of the things we were asked to do was produce an individual development plan, so I put my business head on and said "I'm going to produce a five-year plan"...I want to move into helping coaches and coaching coaches. Especially the younger ones and bringing more girls through if possible. I'll do everything I can to get better, to grow if that's the latest word, develop. You're never going to know everything are you, nobody ever is so, yes, I will do anything I can...I want to progress as much as I can.

In another example of this shared pattern of meaning relating to development of self and others, Niamh spoke about the challenge of working beyond her comfort zone and the opportunities for development that this afforded:

You don't want to be bored with your work because it's well within your capabilities or comfort, I think it's good to have things that make you think and stimulate you...I want to be successful; I want to do well at what I do, I want to make sure I'm delivering a service to the athletes that is the best service that I possibly can. At the end of the day, we're a world class program, so you're expected to deliver a world class service...For somebody like me who has always had goals my whole life, you know, performance goals, and someone that obviously enjoys seeing development and progression and success and obviously a part of psychological well-being is your psychological happiness or health...It's the new challenge and new chapter of my life and, yes, there's a lot of areas for development and improvement and I just see that as a positive thing really...you just learn don't you, learn what you enjoy, what you don't enjoy, what brings you happiness or doesn't and what works for you. So, yes, at the minute I guess I'm probably a bit like a rabbit in the headlights and it's great because everything is a new experience for me and I'm learning and developing all the time.

Paul discussed the value of learning as a driving factor for his PWB. Specifically, he told us about the importance of learning for his sense of accomplishment and competence, for feeling valued, and for his own and others' development:

I'm part of a coach education network, so over COVID when we were all in lockdown, I was put in touch with someone who was the [nation]'s head coach of cricket. He has set up this coach education

network that's online for cricket and there was a 12-week block where you'd go online, you'd meet up every week, you'd do some assignments, and you'd get a qualification at the end of it. I finished [the qualification] so I got this elite membership. I'm now in this WhatsApp group with literally the best cricket coaches in the world. Once a month they bring in an external speaker, he or she presents on a topic, so that's a really valuable way for me to engage with other coaches and take some learnings. A big one for me is to feel like I'm improving [as a coach] and then also having a really effective manager who makes me feel valued. I enjoy working with people and helping them become as good as they can be, that's kind of what drives [my PWB] at the minute.

For Jack, watching other people grow and develop made him happy: "...watching people grow and develop and improve themselves within an area that they enjoy gives me happiness...in terms of self-actualizing, I do get a sense of purpose from watching people grow and develop." These sentiments and shared meaning relating to self and other development were central to coaches' understanding of the factors that facilitate their PWB. Opportunities for professional development have been shown in quantitative research to predict coaches' need satisfaction, positive affect, and subjective vitality (Stebbing et al., 2012), which are encapsulated within many conceptualizations of PWB. Our findings add depth and richness to existing understanding in this space and extend other research (Pankow et al., 2022), which has demonstrated that coaches who are high in positive mental health (PMH) are more likely to act in ways that foster the growth and development of others (e.g., student-athletes). Every coach in the current study discussed a focus on others' development, which suggests that keenness to do so may not be limited to those who have higher PMH.

2.3. Enjoyment of coaching and escapism from it sustain PWB

This theme represents a pattern of shared meaning underpinned by the core concept of PWB sustenance via enjoyment and escapism. It was clear from the coaches who we worked with that enjoyment of coaching helped to sustain their PWB:

I get pleasure out of the Monday morning conversation that I have with the guys here. As strange as that might be to some people, this is what I absolutely love...I absolutely love my job. I coach a session, and I absolutely love it. I lead a meeting, and I love it. I get to spend an hour on my own writing a program and I absolutely love it...Like when I was taking a bike session yesterday and truly being in the moment of taking that bike session. And knowing that the session is going well, and knowing that people are happy, and you're doing it and you're achieving everything that you want to achieve out of it. For me, it's as much joy as that person standing on a podium, and the feeling is the same. And in ways, the feeling is longer lasting. It genuinely is about the day-to-day processes of it that, for me, I get real joy out of (Ryan).

Similarly, Jenny spoke about her enjoyment of both the coaching role and the various environments that she worked in:

All the environments that I'm in at the minute I really enjoy...the only environments I wasn't really enjoying was my primary schools and I've stopped doing those for the last few months and I've not wanted to go back to them. A couple of schools have asked me to go back and I've said I'm not going back yet...I'm not in a rush to go back. I've got to a point in my coaching where I really want to be working with talented athletes in the pathway who are invested and want to be there so I'm just going to focus on the environments that I'm going to enjoy and enjoy the players that I work with.

This core concept of enjoyment echoes ideas presented in organizational psychology where researchers have shown that the work enjoyment variable of pleasure predicts well-being and job satisfaction

(Frederick & Lazzara, 2020). Researchers have also explained work enjoyment as a form of intrinsic motivation, which is rooted in finding work itself pleasurable or interesting (e.g., Laurence et al., 2020) and can promote career longevity. The coaches who we worked with each portrayed passion for their coaching work, which they described as integral to maintaining PWB. Whilst coaches' harmonious work passion has been shown in other research to have positive relationships with various measures of *subjective* well-being (i.e., happiness, life satisfaction), obsessive work passion may have a negative relationship with subjective happiness (Yukhymenko-Lescroart & Sharma, 2023), which is central to hedonic conceptualizations of PWB (Kahneman et al., 1999). Taken together, our findings and those of other research highlight that different types of passion may have unique implications for coaches' PWB.

As well as enjoying coaching, coaches spoke about escapism from it as important for sustaining their PWB. Coaches discussed spending time with family, taking holidays, and participating in different sports to that which they coached as useful forms of escapism. For example, Jack portrayed the importance of spending time with family for his PWB:

Time with my family is a key pillar; it is one of the pillars that makes me happy. I've got a 21-year-old, a 17-year-old, and a four-year-old...when they're happy and okay, I feel happy and okay. My wife's also a key part of that.

In another example of escapism, Arthur reported that taking holidays and protecting that time by not working whilst away was important for sustaining his PWB: "Making time to go on holiday and things. When you work in [sport], it never stops...there's all these distractions. You have to make that time and say 'I'm not here. I'm on holiday.'" For Ryan, playing cricket helped to sustain his PWB by shifting his focus away from triathlon:

I try to play cricket in the summer, just as something different. When I did my first coaching job, I really felt like I needed it then, because was it was the thing that really got me out of my own head...I think I've probably learnt to cope a bit better, and I've learnt to manage better, be that other coping strategies or just generally managing [work] better. But doing something different with people that literally don't care about triathlon at all is really beneficial. So much so, they don't really understand what it's about, and so it's kind of pointless even talking about it, because they don't get it. And that's great!

Spending time with family and taking holidays, for example, afford opportunities for rest and recovery and have antidotal potential for high-performance coaches who work in achievement-orientated cultures, often work unsocial hours (e.g., Didymus, 2017), and may spend extended periods of time away from members of their support networks when travelling for training camps or competitions. According to Eccles et al. (2023), coaches' rest involves both sleep and resting whilst awake (i.e., wakeful resting), which are important for coping, recovery, and well-being. We highlight in the current study that participating in different sports is helpful for coaches' PWB, which supports Eccles et al.'s (2023) suggestion that wakeful resting involves engaging with life outside of coaching. Taking part in sport, for example, may also offer opportunities for psychological detachment (i.e., switching off from work-related demands after work), which is inherent to the stressor-detachment model of psychological recovery from work (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015). This model emphasizes that work-induced strain is reduced during recovery experiences, including those that foster psychological detachment. It may be that spending time with family after work, as described by Jack, offers similar opportunities for psychological detachment that promote rest and recovery and, in turn, sustain PWB.

2.4. Being surrounded by good people and seeing them achieve are routes to happiness

This theme is built on the core concept of relationships. Researchers who have explored the eudaimonic element of PWB (e.g., Ryff, 2018), have highlighted positive relationships as a core element of eudaimonia that is necessary for living life well. Researchers in sport have also highlighted that coach-athlete (Davis et al., 2023) and personal relationships (Higham et al., 2023) are important for coaches' PWB. Coaches in the current study spoke extensively about relationships with both athletes and coaches and offered new understanding of the implications of contributing to others' achievements for their own PWB. For example, Ryan stated simply that "relationships are the number one route to happiness." Later in his interview, he expanded on this idea and spoke about the relationships he has with others, which nourish his PWB:

Having relationships with the people I have here that I can talk performance is great. I think we're in a place now where there's a coaching staff team that are really bought into the direction that we're going at the moment. And I'm not naïve enough to think that everyone will be, because that's never the case, but I think we have a really exciting group of staff within this environment that are about high-performance sport and are developing and I believe we're on the same page. And I genuinely like to be around them and genuinely like to spend time with.

Paul also reflected on his relationships with others and explored how his core purpose as a coach, which involves making a difference to athletes and helping them to achieve their goals, contributed to his sense of fulfillment:

Developing great relationships with the players...Ultimately my role as a coach is to make a difference to people's lives, hopefully positively, whether that's through technical enhancement, giving them a different perspective on life, or whether it's through performance enhancement. I want to try and help people achieve more than I can, so I pass on the learnings that I've had and try and help them be as good as they can be. I just like seeing people get better, that's just what I like. I like seeing a starting point, I like seeing improvement, I like seeing people enjoy getting better...Coaching is about dealing with people and if I can make a difference positively in someone's life, whether that's on the field or off it, then that's really what would make me feel fulfilled...Knowing that I've made a difference just to one person, that's really cool.

Similarly, Niamh talked about her relationships with other coaches and her contributions to athletes' achievements, which were important for fostering her well-being:

On the whole I think we [coach and head coaches] have a really good relationship, I think we work really well together, we complement each other pretty well. I think we're all quite good at taking constructive feedback or having open discussions about what we're each doing and our thoughts and opinions. So, as a group, I think we work really well together. We're contributing to other people's dreams...You can see you're also developing them as people, not just as athletes...I feel like I've been doing a good job, so that gives me a sense of psychological well-being.

Claire shared similar meanings about supporting athletes to achieve their goals and the implications this has for her own goals as a coach:

Seeing people achieve is always good, that's always a big one...I'm not there for the gold medals, I'm not there for the PBs, I'm never going to get a gold medal or a PB, but I do like seeing other people get them. I don't know, it makes them happy I suppose, it's what they want to do, it's why they're there, their end goal is to achieve. And I suppose...My end goal is to help them achieve their end goal.

In addition to being seemingly important for PWB, many researchers argue that all people have a basic need to connect with others via positive relationships. In a landmark article, Baumeister and Leary (1995) suggested the need to belong as a powerful, universal, and influential human drive: “human beings have a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and impactful interpersonal relationships” (p. 497). Whilst many coaches in the current study spoke about the constructive aspects of relationships that build PWB and fulfil a fundamental social need, some coaches described negative implications of toxic relationships, working in isolation, and a lack of collaboration with other coaches. For example, Jenny shared insight to toxic relationships with athletes and highlighted the negative implications of this for her PWB:

In the end there was four or five girls, one in particular, who were just really, really toxic and it turned out that she was just absolutely horrendous to me in her behaviors, in her respect, the feedback she gave me...It ended up with her sending me this email after she'd refused to join a half time team talk, which was just like an essay of an email, just pure negative feedback about me as a coach and as a person. It absolutely destroyed me.

Paul shared his experiences of loneliness and isolation and reflected on the importance of having a strong network of support staff to maintain a positive outlook:

Head coaching is a really lonely job, that's my learning from doing it. As I said, I've been very lucky that I've had some very good support staff; we are a team and we are there for each other. I know that ultimately when we win you get loads of messages and when you lose you don't get any messages and people criticize and that's part of the job. But it can be really challenging if you don't have good people around you to help keep a perspective on the world.

This pattern of shared meaning relating to the positive and negative aspects of relationships manifested as a lack of collaboration for Claire. She spoke at length about this when exploring the factors that inhibit her PWB:

Coaches are horribly suspicious people and very, very competitive so there is all this sort of, 'you're watching what I'm doing, why are you doing that?' We tended to coach in siloes and it was very suspicious, and we all looked sideways and over our shoulders and kept things to ourselves. We didn't share, we didn't collaborate...communication is terrible [and] that's the sort of thing that upsets me, that's where my well-being falls down because it affects me to the point where I spend too much time thinking about it. And because I spend too much time thinking about it, I don't concentrate on other things that I should concentrate on...It niggles in my mind, it's like an itch you can't scratch. We got this national development program, and it abolished all that [suspicion and siloed working]. It was great because it made everybody get together every two months...It meant that we all started speaking to each other, we all started exchanging information and knowledge and tips and having a drink in the bar in the evening. That was when it was more productive, I think, listening to other people and collaborating and it was really, really good. And then the budget ran out and [NGB] had to scale back what they were doing so they got rid of a load of [NGB] staff, they got rid of a load of the home country staff as well. So, [country] lost the people who – some through natural wastage and some through redundancy – who they'd got administering this program and it just died. And so, we've now gone back to looking over our shoulders and looking sideways and not collaborating with each other and what have you. It's a shame.

This loneliness of command and siloed working described by Paul and Claire echoes findings from clinical (e.g., Henrich & Gullone, 2006) and corporate (e.g., Zumaeta, 2019) contexts where loneliness among the general population and C-suite executives is described as a situation of significant concern and as a professional hazard. Despite considerable

literature on leadership in various contexts, there remains limited attention to how leaders experience their roles (Zumaeta, 2019), particularly in the context of coaching where there is a notable dearth of attention to the socioemotional costs of being in high-performance and or head coaching positions. Loneliness is defined as dissatisfaction that stems from a mismatch between the quality and quantity of relationships a person desires and has (Perlman & Peplau, 1981). Theorists have developed various approaches to understand loneliness, including the social needs approach (e.g., Sullivan, 1953), the cognitive discrepancy approach (e.g., Peplau & Perlman, 1982), and the interactionist approach (e.g., Weiss, 1982). Each of these approaches takes a different stance on the origin and maintenance of loneliness that is worthy of further attention during future research with high-performance coaches.

2.5. Coaching can feel like being “stuck in the trenches” whilst waiting to be found out as a fraud

This theme represents a pattern of shared meaning built on the core concept of intense and varied schedules that are entwined with, and perhaps contribute to, a sense of imposter syndrome. Some coaches explained that feelings of imposter syndrome crept in whilst being immersed in continual coaching cycles that eroded their PWB. Most coaches attributed the impact of their schedules on their PWB to working unsocial hours for long periods of time, which echoes research describing unrelenting training and competition schedules as a stressor for coaches (e.g., Didymus et al., 2021). The current research extends this understanding by exploring the influence of such schedules for coaches' PWB. Sasha spoke about being unprepared for high-performance coaching and finding it difficult to see the bigger picture when engrossed with a busy coaching schedule:

When you're in it, you're just so focused on...Winning is such a relief and there's no enjoyment – I shouldn't say there's no enjoyment, you've got to enjoy the small things, but I had no perspective whatsoever. We went on a six-game unbeaten streak and I had no idea [we were on that streak], because when you're stuck in the trenches you just can't zoom out. On reflection, I just had no idea what it was like to sit in that seat. And I put a lot of pressure on myself, let alone anyone else, when there didn't need to be. But again, when you're thrust into the spotlight, it's tough, because you're plastered everywhere, and you didn't ask for it.

Similarly, Jenny used the idiom of being on a hamster wheel to describe her coaching schedule. She explained that she was unsure how to change this sense of entrapment until a significant life event encouraged her to focus on creating longer periods of inner peace and calm:

So, it feels at times like you're on a bit of a hamster wheel, a bit of a treadmill where you're constantly just managing time. It can get a bit hectic and a bit out of control and, to be honest, it did get like that but big things have happened since then where I'm trying to reassess stuff. [My PWB] fluctuates but I suppose there is this overarching sense of inner peace, inner calm that you can get to. This is something that I'm working on myself at the minute in terms of my own personal journey that I've been going on for the last couple of years where I've really been trying to explore what it means to feel that peace and calm for longer periods of time rather than feeling quite stressed and on the hamster wheel and not really knowing how not to feel like that.

Arthur spoke about his busy and intense championship schedule, which he likened to being on a treadmill that does not stop:

The Olympics got postponed, so that bumped the World Championships into this year, which also has Commonwealth Games and European Championships, which are huge things in their own right. So, there's this eight-week block of crazy, back-to-back

championships. When you work in athletics, endurance never stops. There's the track and field season, but then you have road races and cross-country. Then it gets into the indoor track and field season, which is all the sprints and then everything else comes back. The endurance treadmill is fast and it just doesn't seem to stop.

In addition to intense and varied coaching and competition schedules, imposter syndrome eroded coaches' PWB and was discussed by many of those who we worked with. During an intense period of training and competition, Claire shared her thoughts about waiting to be found out as a fraud and a sense of insecurity that stemmed from not feeling embedded in her coaching environments:

I do struggle with imposter syndrome...there are some occasions when I'm waiting to be found out as a fraud. I'm waiting for someone to catch me out...I go into this out of body experience where I'm up here watching me do it to make sure that I'm doing it in a way that's not going to be...not criticized, criticized is the wrong word, found out as a fraud, you know, someone's going to say she's not what she thinks she is, she's not all she's cracked up to be...I've never really felt embedded in anything, I've always felt a little bit, not on the edge, but not fully immersed. Almost like I could be hoofed out.

Niamh also spoke about imposter syndrome as corrosive for her PWB, particularly when starting a new coaching role and feeling a need to prove her ability as a coach:

I feel like I have to prove to everybody that I'm capable of [coaching] ...It's a bit of pressure there. I think when you're new to anything you feel nervous about doing it so a bit of an imposter syndrome, I guess. While I'm bringing a different type of experience, sometimes I feel like a bit of imposter syndrome and don't feel 100 percent confident.

Imposter syndrome has been characterized in occupational psychology literature as feeling fraudulent in the workplace (Clance & Imes, 1978) and has been linked with an array of negative outcomes, including anxiety, depression, and burnout (e.g., Haar & de Jong, 2024). The links between anxiety and PWB, for example, may explain why the coaches in the current study perceived feelings of being an imposter as an inhibitor of their PWB. Imposter syndrome was discussed at length by Claire and Niamh which, unfortunately, is common among high achieving women (Clance & Imes, 1978). While not yet explicitly explored among coaches, research in the hospitality and tourism sector suggests that imposter syndrome is influenced by a complex interplay of individual and systemic factors (Forson et al., 2024) and, if not managed or reduced, could lead to individuals avoiding taking on new challenges or sharing ideas. Taken together, our findings and those from other contexts suggest that imposter syndrome may be a noteworthy avenue for future research with high-performance coaches, particularly women coaches, if the aim is to retain coaches within the profession and work towards a more balanced and representative coaching workforce (Didymus et al., 2021).

2.6. Boundary management is a form of self-preservation that protects PWB

This theme represents a pattern of shared meaning that is underpinned by the core concept of self-preservation. Coaches discussed boundary management as important for such self-preservation and the protection of their PWB. Jack, for example, spoke about needing to turn down opportunities when the timing of them was not conducive for his PWB:

I got asked to attend [championships] last summer, and again, it just wasn't right. It came out of left field, got two weeks' notice, and I already had plans in place. We were due to move house, so I'd got lots of things in line. And that's stressful enough anyway. But this would be just one more stressor that I'm thinking, it's a wonderful opportunity, a load of free kit, but it would have been too hard, and it

would have been 10 days away from home and my family. I've developed almost a protection mechanism for myself. So, I've become quite good – certainly within athletics – at saying no...I took a full year away from coaching when [my son] came. I also took six months off any coach development work because I wanted to spend time with my son and enjoy that first period of time.

Sasha shared similar sentiments about boundary setting, whereby she set an unhelpful precedent for being contactable by athletes and coaches at all hours of the day:

I learned boundaries this year for the first time, in the second half of the season. I think once you set norms with people, like if you respond to messages at 23:00 or 05:00 hours, you set the norm that that's okay. And I think I did that. I made that mistake in the second half of the season, and then I was being called at 06:00 hours, 23:00 hours, and at the finish, I was like, "I'm not answering." But I'd already set the precedent that I would answer. So, I learnt very quickly that it wasn't sustainable to do that. I kind of pulled back a little bit as well in terms of, with all the stuff that was coming out about [sport league]. I kind of distanced myself a little bit because you just want to protect yourself.

Whilst limited research has explored the protective functions of boundary setting for coaches' PWB, researchers have highlighted the implications of boundary management for coaches' mental health, coaching effectiveness, and relationships in both sport and life (Davis et al., 2024). Boundary theory, which details how people manage work and non-work roles (e.g., Edwards & Rothbard, 2000), and the notion of job crafting (see Rumbold et al., 2023) offer useful explanatory potential here. With reference to boundary theory, maintenance of work-home and work-work borders is important for many reasons, not least for achieving balance in life and for minimizing role conflict that can be experienced by high-performance coaches who often work unsocial hours. Job crafting, on the other hand, describes a process by which individuals have the autonomy to proactively develop or adjust the boundaries of their role(s) to fine-tune their own job characteristics (e.g., Grant et al., 2010). This type of boundary management can lead to greater task identity, task significance, and autonomy, each of which can impact job performance (e.g., Grant et al., 2010), which is highly germane in the context of high-performance sports coaching. Boundary theory and wider empirical research help to explain why coaches in the present study reported that boundary management acted as a form of self-preservation that they valued as protective for their PWB.

2.7. Applied implications and recommendations for future research

By giving voice to high-performance coaches and sharing the meaning that they attribute to PWB, we hope that the findings will be useful to coaches themselves, practitioners, and governing bodies. Coaches in this study discussed being surrounded by good people (e.g., other coaches, coach mentors, athletes) as a factor that protected their well-being and other literature (Cho & Lee, 2022) has highlighted direct relationships between lack of support and both turnover intentions and well-being. Thus, coaches may benefit from systems (e.g., mentoring) and interventions (e.g., coach learning networks) that build coach-to-coach and coach-to-organization support to protect their PWB and longevity in the profession. Coaches highlighted that boundary setting was a noteworthy protective factor for their PWB and, thus, we recommend that organizations develop policies and practices that enable coaches' boundary work. Such boundary work could include a focus on constructing, dismantling, and maintaining work-home or work-work borders to promote coaches' awareness of their boundaries and nurture PWB. Given that imposter syndrome was described as corrosive for PWB, particularly among women coaches, work is needed to address individual and systemic factors (Forson et al., 2024) that contribute to feelings of fraudulence in the workplace. Such work could

include the promotion of workplace cultures that foster diversity and inclusivity and create more role models for high-performance women coaches. This will require systemic change within sport organizations. Person-centered interventions could include communication skills training, mentoring, and awareness raising that build confidence and self-esteem, develop a sense of belonging in the workplace, and support coaches' PWB and career advancement.

Given the infantile state of literature that seeks to understand PWB among coaches, it is perhaps surprising that the effectiveness and efficacy of some interventions have already been tested. Interventions in this space have included brief online rational-emotive-behavioral-therapy (REBT; Bailey & Turner, 2023), mindfulness-based work (e.g., Lebeau et al., 2024), and guided learning of self-regulatory competencies (SRCs; McNeill et al., 2020). The mindfulness and SRC interventions were effective for reducing symptoms of burnout and bringing about perceived improvements in coaches' well-being, whilst the REBT intervention enhanced well-being as measured by better scores on the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (Tennant et al., 2007) for some but not all coaches. In light of these insights and our findings, researchers would do well to further explore the efficacy and effectiveness of interventions that aim to enhance coaches' PWB. Such work could use single-case research designs to demonstrate intervention efficaciousness at an individual level and to allow intervention effects that could be masked by group designs to be detected. Our choice of methods (i.e., semi-structured interviews) was based on evidence highlighting PWB and other related concepts (e.g., PMH, subjective well-being) as trait-like phenomena that may be relatively stable across time and situations (Ackeret et al., 2024; Davern et al., 2007; Lucas & Diener, 2008). However, some of the coaches who we spoke to perceived PWB to be a fluid and dynamic phenomenon. Researchers could, therefore, consider longitudinal study designs to build on the work of Higham et al. (2023) and close-proximity methods (see Potts et al., 2024) to explore PWB among coaches in future work.

2.8. Strengths and limitations

We maintained reflexivity throughout this research, which helped us to identify and remain mindful of strengths and limitations of the work. One strength lies in the balance of men and women coaches who voluntarily engaged with this study. Research within the context of high-performance sport has typically focused on the experiences of men coaches, meaning that women are too often underrepresented (e.g., Didymus et al., 2021). This study brings women coaches into focus, which is important to generate understanding that resonates with both women and men. Further, the coaches in this study represented a variety of individual and team sports, which aids the transferability (Smith, 2017) of our findings. One limitation, however, relates to the timing of the interviews in relation to the stage of the season that each coach was in. Researchers who have used longitudinal methods have shown that some coaches report lower mental well-being at the beginning of a sport season (Baldock et al., 2022) whilst others may experience increased stress and insufficient recovery during their competition period. We did not capture information about the stage of the season that each coach was in at the time of data collection, but our cross-sectional design means that we portray in this manuscript a snapshot of coaches' experiences at one point in time.

3. Conclusion

We explored what PWB means to high-performance sports coaches who often carry the hopes of a nation and their organization when working with athletes who are competing at the highest levels in sport. This study foregrounds coaches' perceptions of PWB, advances understanding of PWB in the context of high-performance sport, helps to develop an evidence base on which individualized interventions can be developed, and promotes the need for systemic changes in sport that will

help coaches to live well and be well. To close, we advance four take home messages. First, the complex and multifaceted nature of PWB presents a notable challenge for researchers. Our findings advocate for liberation of universally acceptable conceptualization of PWB and promote understanding of individuals' idiosyncratic perceptions. Second, coaches would do well to explore, perhaps during reflective practice, the activities that nourish and protect their PWB to first raise awareness and then instigate change where needed. Our third take home message relates to coaches' enjoyment of their roles and the environments they work within. This enjoyment has the potential to encourage coaches to overwork and, thus, they need to be supported to take time away from coaching to rest, recover, and psychologically detach from work. Finally, systems and interventions that build coach-to-coach and coach-to-organization support are needed to minimize imposter syndrome, particularly among women coaches, protect coaches' PWB, and promote longevity in the profession.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Faye F. Didymus: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Supervision, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Alexandra J. Potts:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare the following financial interests/personal relationships which may be considered as potential competing interests: Faye F. Didymus reports financial support was provided by Association for Applied Sport Psychology. If there are other authors, they declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

The authors do not have permission to share data.

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