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Stressors, Appraisals, and Coping in Olympic and International Level Sport Coaches

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To facilitate optimal performance, coaches require refined skills for coping with the stressful events that they and their athletes encounter. However, little is known about how coaches cope with stressors and sustain their involvement in sport. Therefore, using the cognitive-motivational-relational theory of stress and emotions (Lazarus, 1999), this study aimed to provide an in depth exploration of the stress and coping experiences of elite level coaches who are based in the U.K. Specifically, this study explored the stressors encountered, the situational properties of these stressors, the transactional alternatives experienced, the coping strategies used, and coaches' short-term perceived coping effectiveness of the strategies employed. Fifteen high level coaches were interviewed using a semi-structured approach. To establish a clear skill level for the participants, an elite level coach was defined as an individual currently coaching at international or Olympic level who had been coaching at this level for a minimum of five years. All of the interviews were conducted face-to-face and lasted between 35 and 95 minutes ($M_{\text{length}} = 57.47$, $SD = 15.81$). A variety of stressors (e.g., effective communication, media coverage) were reported by the coaches that were underpinned by seven situational properties. Coaches experienced challenge, benefit, threat, and harm appraisals and primarily coped using strategies that aimed to solve stressors (e.g., effective planning) or manage coach and athlete emotions (e.g., positive encouragement). Coaches suggested that the majority of their coping strategies were moderately effective in terms of managing the negative outcomes of stress. Interestingly, each of the fifteen coaches reported that their primary concern during stressful experiences was to minimise the impact of these experiences on athletes. The findings suggest that practitioners should work

alongside coaches to consider the complex and idiographic nature of stress experiences from both coach and athlete perspectives.