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8 May 2020

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# Getting it right for everyone: Sport coaching and the adult participation domain

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## ABSTRACT

Sport provision is best understood as a series of distinctive domains, with characteristic purposes, motivations, practices and demands on coaches' expertise. This paper identifies the characteristics of the instructor-led adult participation coaching domain, which is the least well researched and developed, and identifies the implications for coach education and workforce management. The propositions are illustrated by conversations with Coaching Development Managers from eight sports in the UK that have a significant adult participation profile. The paper confirms the variety of domain populations, from casual recreation to coach-dependent adult competition, including 'Masters'-designated participation, but outside the mainstream of performance sport. It highlights two principal coaching practices: market-led sport instructors, delivering episodic, largely technique-based 'lessons' to participants, and (club) coaches of adult competition sport. However, much of the characteristic adult participation is casual recreation and coach-independent. The paper argues that a fuller understanding of this domain is important for ensuring that coaches' expertise and practice are matched to participant needs.

**Key words:** sport coaching; workforce management; adult participation; coaching domains

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## INTRODUCTION

Academic writing on sport coaching has witnessed a gradual incorporation of the concept of coaching domains into the literature (19, 25, 34). The discourse of sport coaching policy has embraced the most obvious distinction, that is, between participation and performance coaching (16, 20), and there has been some debate over time as to the most appropriate categorisation of these domains (23, 38). One of the catalysts for this paper was a series of workshops in which the

need to be more specific about performance-improvement roles in sport was debated. The focus of attention was a potential distinction between the roles of sport coach and sport instructor, and a consequent focus on a sector of the adult participation population, in which it was perceived that the ‘instructor’ designation was a more apt descriptor of coaching practice. There was also an acknowledgement of a niche literature on ‘Masters’ sport, the implications from which have not been incorporated into mainstream coaching literature (4, 13). This clarification of occupational context and deployment is an important aspect of workforce management and deployment within the coaching ‘system’. Complementary processes of resource allocation, recruitment, career mobility and the provision of coach education and development are dependent on conceptual clarity, policy direction and an awareness of demands on expertise, in what is an underdeveloped sector of workforce management policy in sport (10).

The adult participation coaching domain occupies a ‘territory’, or conceptual space, that is currently ill-defined either in sport participation models or in coaching provision models. However, the acknowledgement of domains in the field of coaching science is important for a number of reasons. One of the most significant ramifications of domain differences is the impact on coach education, both in underlying assumptions about content and expertise, and in the structure of coach education systems. In addition, the commonplace failure of sport coaching researchers to contextualise their sample coaches’ practice and research findings can be assuaged to some extent by a greater attention to domain distinctions. Much of the academic writing in this field has embraced the significance of complexity, particularity and context (18, 33), but rarely translated this into the implications for interpreting practice and managing provision. It might be argued that the conflation of coaching roles and a failure to differentiate between ‘coached populations’ is a manifestation of the academic field’s predilection to use sport coaching, perhaps lazily, as a ubiquitous and all-embracing ‘family term’ that, in practice, connotes a range of distinctive roles (25).

Despite the gradual emergence of domain specificity in the literature, there remains a need to ‘populate’ our expectations about particular domain practice. This scoping exercise is intended to delineate the boundaries of a particular segment of the adult participation coaching domain, and, in doing so, to provide ‘markers’ for the structure and content of the coach education appropriate to the roles within this domain. The concomitant identification of domain behaviours provides a marker for characteristic practice and subsequent development strategies. The ideas in the paper have been informed by responses from coach development managers in eight sports in the UK, in which there is an evident adult participation element and the acknowledgement of an ‘instructor’ role is clearly part of the normal discourse within the sport.

## COACHING DOMAINS

Coaching domains are discrete communities of coaching practice with distinctive participant populations, competition formats, levels of technical expertise, performance standards, and social arrangements. This set of characteristic contexts and leadership practices creates a segmentation within sport practice with recognisable occupational and social spaces, which, in turn, require complementary education and deployment of coaching practitioners who are ‘fit for purpose’. The language of domains is evident in the literature (6, 8, 12, 16, 21, 31, 32), with a number of more in-depth treatments (20, 25, 38).

A coaching domain has been defined as a “distinctive sporting milieu in which the environmental demands lead to a more or less coherent community of coaching practice, with its attendant demands on the coach’s expertise and practice” (25, p. 71). The corollary of this is that a segmentation of the coaching workforce is created which, in turn, necessitates a managed approach to the supply and demand of coaches both in specific sports and in sport more generally (26).

Lyle and Cushion (25) provide the most detailed account of coaching domains (Table 1). They point out that the particular combinations of role within a sport, participant aspirations and commitment, and the organisation and delivery dimensions produce a very distinctive pattern of ‘coaching’ activity that demands a corresponding specificity of expertise. The requirements of the domain are reflected in a characteristic configuration of planning practice, competition preparation, resource management, strategic development, performance analysis, interpersonal skills, sport specific knowledge, and delivery skills, which, in turn, create a frame of reference through which coaches interpret, give meaning to, and direct their coaching practice.

**Table 1.** Evaluation criteria for coaching domains

| Coaching domain criteria   | Characteristics and implications for practice   |
|----------------------------|---|
| Intensity of participation | The extent of the participant’s engagement in training and competition will impact on the coach’s role.                         |
| Intensity of preparation   | Distinctive preparation for specific competitions and/or non-specific play or practice will be evident in planning strategies.  |
| Complexity of preparation  | Performance athletes are likely to attempt to enhance all performance-related variables; others may focus on skill development. |

|                                   |   |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Participant motives               | A coaching environment created by an immediacy of engagement and satisfaction will differ from that of a competition success based programme.   |
| Recruitment                       | Performance athletes tend to be the product of 'development systems' and attendant rewards; participation athletes may be driven more by personal drive to participate or other social motives. |
| Interpersonal climate             | The intensity and shared commitment between coach and athlete is likely to engender a different climate of interpersonal relationships than in a more transitory programme.                     |
| Competition emphasis              | Measures of effectiveness, levels of accountability and the specificity of practice will differ with more or less institutionalised modes of competition.                                       |
| Value systems                     | A broad consensus on values and 'athlete centredness' in coaching may be tested by the rewards evident in performance sport.  |
| Community of practice             | More intermittent, localised or short-term engagement may not produce the opportunity for networking or shared practice that is evident in organisation-dependent coaching.                     |
| Deployment and career development | The reward environment and career trajectories generated within the domain will impact on deployment and professional development.  |

[Summarised and adapted from Lyle & Cushion, 2017, p. 75]

It would be helpful to situate the instructor-led adult participation domain in apposition to other coaching domains. Domain categories have been configured to generate a manageable number of domains that permit discrimination without becoming unhelpfully fragmented. Categorisation of these sporting milieux is fundamental to understanding the implications of distinctive roles and practices to education and policy (12, 16). There may be some entirely justified comment that the identification of a small number of distinctive domains is rather generalised and the search for commonality masks the wide variety of practices likely to be found within these categories. Nevertheless, the domain categories are of particular use to policy makers in the determination of priorities and formulation of desirable provision, and to managers responsible for coaching workforce development.

The defining characteristic of an appropriate sub-division of sport domains should be that they are differentiated by a common factor. A simple example will illustrate this. Table 2 demonstrates how potential typologies can be determined by different criteria.

**Table 2:** Possible classification systems

| Criterion            | Domains     |              |                    |                      |            |
|----------------------|-------------|--------------|--------------------|----------------------|------------|
| <b>Performance:</b>  | Initiation  | Beginner     | Development        | Performance          | Expert     |
| <b>Organisation:</b> | Youth sport | School sport | Club sport         | Representative sport |            |
| <b>Motive:</b>       | Beginner    | Recreation   | Talent development | Performance          | Excellence |
| <b>Composite:</b>    | School      | Recreation   | Performance        | Professional         | Elite      |

Thus, the simple (and relatively common) categorisation into children, participation, performance, and elite domains is differentiated, respectively, by age, motivation, aspiration/intention, and performance standard. Nevertheless, there is no imperative that models of workforce development or coach education categorisations need be conceptually sound. A pragmatic (best coverage) approach may be appropriate. Indeed, it can be argued, for example, that there is already a policy-based *de facto* segmentation in sport. The ‘long-term athlete development model’ (37), which has been a requirement in National Sports Organisation planning (29), divides the participants’ development into a series of stages that are distinctive in their demands on appropriate preparation and competition, and consequent coaching expertise and practice.

When describing attempts to categorise domains, it may be thought to be self-evident that models or typologies of domain structures should not be inferred to be entirely discrete, linear or category exclusive. As with any multi-criteria determination, the boundaries of provision categories and their associated behaviours and practices will overlap, and there may also be sport-specific, contextual or cultural differences. Collins et al. (7) address this by identifying a continuum based on participant motives. Their emphasis on ‘participation for personal well-being’ is particularly useful in the context of this paper’s focus on the participation domain. An example of the challenges posed by a confusion of criteria is that of Masters sport (5). This is a provision sector determined by age (normally over 35 years of age) in which participants prepare for competition, but exhibit varying levels of standards of performance, commitment or ‘seriousness’. The acknowledged heterogeneity (5) of motives and practice may reflect existing typologies of coaching engagement, rather than constitute, other than by age, a discrete domain.

There have been a number of attempts to identify and categorise coaching domains (24) and a recent policy document (20) provides a useful overview. Lyle (22) identifies three overarching domains – participation coaching, development coaching, and performance coaching. Within each of these, it is argued, there will be characteristic coaching practices that best evolve

from the institutional context, the coaches' role, the participants' aspirations and development stages, and the nature of characteristic competition structures and significance. Trudel and Gilbert (38) decide upon a simple typology: recreational sport, developmental sport, and elite sport.

Such domain typologies have been incorporated into participation models (3). Two influential models are the Participant Development Model (32) and Côté's Development Framework (9). The former distinguishes usefully between participation and performance engagement, with some emphasis on the early stages of learning, and the possibility of movement between populations. The latter identifies sampling, specialising and investment phases, but also distinguishes between children, adolescents, and adults.

A recent publication emanating from a pan-European aim to harmonise and facilitate the education, mobility and employability of sport coaches (20), identifies six coaching domains: the participation domain is divided into three further segments – children, adolescents and adults; the performance domain is also divided into three segments – emerging athletes, performance athletes and high-performance athletes. Although frameworks such as these, and, indeed, any similar typologies, provide a useful tool for policy analysis, they do have a number of limitations. The 'neatness' of models and the implied values therein (9) may underplay the meritocratic/selective/sifting nature of the athlete journey in sport. The desire to make models all-encompassing means that they need to be made age- and sport-specific for application and implementation. Despite the place of motive or satisfaction as a distinguishing characteristic, experience tells us that the management of provision by sporting bodies is often based on the relative standard of competition in which athletes/performers are engaged.

Table 3 is an attempt to provide an overview and reconciliation of the domains proposed by the authors and sporting bodies identified above. In the context of this paper, our interest is in a particular segment of the adult participation domain in relation to the other domains. As the subsequent discussion will demonstrate, however, the scope of the adult participation coaching role may be more nuanced than it would first appear; not all of this particular form of participant involvement in sport will be coach-dependent, and there will be a variety of 'leadership' roles.



Table 3: Reconciliation of coaching domains and coaching roles

| Côté (1)   | Sports Coach UK<br>Participant Development Model (2)             |  | Sports Coach UK Terminology (3) |   | European Sport Coaching<br>Framework (4) |
|--|--|--|---------------------------------|---|--|
|  | Active Start Phase 0-6 years                                     |  |                                 |   |  |
| Sampling Years 6-12<br>Children                      | Fundamentals Phase 5/6-8/9 years<br>Beginner/Child               |  | Children's Coach                | Children's Coach                            | Coaching Children                        |
|  | Learning to Play and Practice Phase 8-12 years<br>Beginner/Child |  |                                 |   |  |
|  |  | Talent Development Early 8+<br>Child Performer       | Talent Development<br>Coach     | Performance Development<br>Coach            | Coaching Emerging Athletes               |
| Specialising Years<br>13-15<br>Young adolescents     |  | Talent Development<br>Late 12/13+<br>Child Performer |                                 |   |  |
| Recreational Years 13+<br>Adults/adolescents         | Developing Participation<br>12+<br>Young person Participant      |  | Participation Coach             | Participant Coach<br><i>Community Coach</i> | Coaching Adolescents<br>(Participation)  |
| Investment Years<br>16+ - Late<br>adolescents/adults |  | Developing Performance<br>Young Person Performer     | Performance Coach               | Performance Development<br>Coach            | Coaching Emerging Athletes               |
|  |  | Sustaining Performance<br>Adult Performer            | Performance Coach               | Performance Coach<br><i>Community Coach</i> | Coaching Performance<br>Athletes         |
| Recreational Years 16+<br>Adults/adolescents         | Sustaining Participation 18+<br>Adult Participant                |  | Participation Coach             | Participant Coach<br><i>Community Coach</i> | Coaching Adults<br>(Participation)       |
| Investment Years<br>16+ - Late<br>adolescents/adults |  | Elite Performance<br>Young person/ Adult Performer   | High Performance<br>Coach       | Elite Performance Coach                     | Coaching High-Performance<br>Athletes    |
|  | Learning/Relearning<br>Adult Participant                         |  | Participation Coach             |   |  |

Notes:

1. A review of the evidence to sustain the Development of Sports Participation model can be found in Côté, J., & Vierimaa, M. (2014). The Development Model of Sports Participation: 15 years after its first conceptualisation. *Science and Sports*, 29(Supplement), S63-S69.
2. This information was derived from a presentation by G. Ross from Sports Coach UK on the 'Participant Development Model – Core Purpose, Philosophy and Values', 22<sup>nd</sup> Sept 2008.
3. This terminology was presented by Sports Coach UK at the 3<sup>rd</sup> UK Coaching Summit, Twickenham, London, 2008.
4. Derived from Lara-Bercial, S., North, J., Hamäläinen, K., Olmanns, K., Minkhorst, J., & Petrovic, L. (2017). *European Sport Coaching Framework*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

## THE ADULT PARTICIPATION COACHING DOMAIN

In this section, we establish some domain boundaries and characteristics before moving on to highlight a particular segment of the adult participation domain in which the prevalent coaching profile may more accurately be described as coach-independent but potentially subject to intervention by 'instructors'. However, before moving on, we might note that the very term 'participation' itself is not unproblematic. Its basic meaning of 'to take part' is presumably intended, in relevant typologies, to imply 'for its own sake', but this does little to portray the range of potential activities. Table 3 went some way to 'defining by difference', in the sense that it differentiated this domain from others by age, motive and engagement in a level of competition. However, it is necessary to consider more closely the combination of range of activities and coaching practices that might be characteristic of the domain. The scope of the domain will range from the purely recreational (in the sense of being unstructured, rather than determined by motive), in which such casual participation is rarely coach-dependent, through the varying 'instructor' modes, in which the coach's contribution is generally short-term and technical, to relatively committed participation within competition structures, but outside the 'fast track' of high performance sport.

We also have to recognise that definitions and boundaries, given that they have implications for public investment, are subject to political interpretation. In the UK, the

Government has broadened significantly its understanding of non-high-performance sport, participation and coaching (11). In recent policy documentation, sport is always conflated with physical activity, and the range of sport ‘helper’ roles has no boundaries. This is in response to disappointing statistics on participation rates, health and obesity, and inclusion. While, at one time, the broad sector of ‘non-organised-competition-based participation’ was largely recreational, the sport and physical activity sector has now, in policy terms, become impossible to delimit. Not surprisingly, those regulatory bodies responsible for enacting Government policy in this sector (and in receipt of Government funding) have had no option but to reflect these policy imperatives. Sport England’s (36) strategy, *Coaching in an Active Nation*, demonstrates this broad, inclusive agenda. There is an increased emphasis on volunteers and ‘easier to gain’ qualifications. The UK Coaching strategy document (39), on its opening page, singles out ‘teachers, mums, and kids’ as having a coaching role. Indeed, it goes on to say, “We don’t mind whether you call yourself a coach, activator, facilitator, instructor, leader, teacher, or trainer” (no page numbers). This perhaps illustrates a pragmatic approach to policy implementation, rather than providing any helpful guidance.

The adult participation coaching domain, at least in policy terms, has been made less exclusive and any clarity of understanding about the role of the coach has been deliberately obfuscated. However, academic writing may also contribute to an absence of role clarity. The paper began by acknowledging that there were sports in which there was an ‘instructor’ role. This role may be differentiated from a coaching role, particularly in individual sports (e.g., skiing, tennis, martial arts, swimming), and some qualifications in this distinctive provision may be regulated by agencies other than National Sports Organisations. The use of the term ‘instructor’ and research into characteristic practice, is common in the coaching science field and the distinctions may not always be made clear (see examples: 14, 28, 35).

An interpretation of ‘participation orientated’ to imply ‘without involvement in any formally organised competitive activities’ is too restrictive. Although this does capture casual and purposeful recreation, it omits participation in regular competition that may be undertaken with a recreational or well-being motive, whether at young adult, adult or Masters stages. Côté (9) notes that his adult participation category requires some elaboration. He identifies sports instructors, who focus on the development of sport-specific skills, and adult recreational sport in which the participants very often do not have a coach. ‘High play and low practice’ contrasts with the greater emphasis on preparation and practice in the performance domain. North (32), whose data suggest that adult participants are five and a half times less likely to be coached than adult performers, confirms the frequency of ‘coach-independent’ activity. Allen, Bell, Lynn, Taylor & Lavalley (2), researching in a context that was coach-dependent and involved regular competition, identified the following features of adult participation: a balance between enjoyment and commitment, lack of

time for development, social context considered important, a wide range of abilities, shared decision making, and an emphasis on the coach's interpersonal skills.

## **METHODS**

In order to illustrate the characteristics of the adult participation coaching domain, informal semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals designated as Coach Development Managers in eight sports in the UK (badminton, canoeing, golf, ice skating, judo, skiing, swimming, and triathlon). These sports were purposively selected as representative of sports with an evident adult recreational element. This means of gathering insights into the domain was chosen in the light of evident sport-specificity and the interviewees' varying roles. The interviews were conducted by the author, face-to-face, recorded and lasted on average from 60 to 90 minutes. The interviews could best be described as exploratory conversations; the intention was to produce a narrative that could be interpreted thematically, and would inform an understanding of the participation domain.

The goal of the conversations was to produce an aggregated insight into the adult participation coaching domain across sports. Therefore, a loose semi-structured framework was employed, with topics derived from the domain-defining elements identified earlier in the paper used to guide the conversations. The discussion topics centered on: an understanding of the distinctive domains in the sport, the scale and characteristics of the participation domain in the sport, typical coaching/instructing environments, the employment and deployment of coaches, common terminology, and issues relating to coach education. The managers' narratives were analysed thematically and synthesised under the following headings: terminology, coach characteristics, participant characteristics, delivery conditions, and sport-specific issues (see Table 4 for a summary).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The objective of the study was to scope the adult participation coaching domain and to demonstrate its distinctiveness, with attendant implications for workforce management and coaching education. Clarification of domain characteristics would also contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of coaching domains more generally. The value in the study lies in the informed insights of the Coach Development Managers. Overall, the insights confirm that the adult participation coaching domain is a recognisable and acknowledged sector in the sports surveyed. Furthermore, they demonstrate that coaching practice in this domain has a distinctive character; more particularly, that it sustains a level of commercial activity not evident in other domains.

Table 4: Key insights

| Theme                              | Sport 1   | Sport 2  | Sport 3   | Sport 4   | Sport 5   | Sport 6  | Sport 7   | Sport 8  |
|------------------------------------|---|--|---|---|---|--|---|--|
| <b>Terminology</b>                 | Instructor is an acknowledged role, but often 'badged' as coach.  | Coach is the acknowledged terminology.   | Coach is the acknowledged terminology.  | Coach is the normal terminology, although there is an 'instructor' award.                         | Distinguishes between coaches, teachers and instructors.  | Instructor is normal usage outwith competition preparation.  | Coach is the normal terminology.  | Instructor is common terminology   |
| <b>Coach characteristics</b>       | Practitioners work within clubs and commercial centres.   | High number of freelance commercial coaches. Most advertising emphasises the coach's experience in the sport.  | Personal proficiency is evaluated on yearly registration. Provision in 'centres', with freelance coaches.               | There is demanding personal proficiency with accompanies coaching awards.                         | Many coaches of 'learn to' programmes are young people  | There are career opportunities for professional instructors. Personal proficiency is demanding.  | Many club-based volunteer coaches but some commercial activity.                                     | Self-employed coaches; personal proficiency essential.   |
| <b>Participant characteristics</b> | For adult amateur players, casual play and local competition is the norm. A smaller number take 'lessons'.  | The sport acknowledges adult participants who are not coach-dependent but take part in local competitions. Providing 'training prescriptions' is common. | Much participation is recreational. All 'classes' are coach-dependent and focused on proficiency in test standards.     | Adults belong to clubs or join Local Authority classes. A 'participation' motive is acknowledged. | Clear distinction between competition and recreational activity. Recreation is not coach-dependent.         | Very high proportion of recreational participants, with very few coach-dependant. An individual sport catering for many levels of ability. | For adults, casual play is widespread, as is club recreational activity.                            | High proportion of recreational participants in adventure sport who are not coach-dependent.               |
| <b>Delivery conditions</b>         | Most often club based but almost always on a commercial basis.  | Coaches work across ages/stages to generate income.  | All coaching is 'fee' based.  | Club based, but a significant number of freelance coaches who hire facilities for classes         | Club and Local Authority based. Commercial operators hire facilities.                                       | Commercial enterprise with 'lessons' a norm.   | Many clubs operate from shared facilities.  | Many instructors operate from fee-based activity centres.  |
| <b>Sport-specific issues</b>       | The emphasis is on development of individual technique.   | Many participants are 'self-coached'.  | There is a clear distinction between competition and the skills-based proficiency system.                               | There is a grading system for all levels of participant.  | Competition is coach-dependent, with age-banding throughout   | There are some tensions between the commercial instructor sector and Governing Bodies.   | Some playing competence for coaches required.   | Proficiency awards are the basis of non-competition participation  |
|                                    | This is an individual sport with a very high proportion of participants who play in local competitions but who do not access 'instruction' or coaching. | Mostly adult participants; there is a strong club structure with volunteer coaches, largely for young people.  | Outwith recreation, 'learn to' classes are mostly for children. Coach status is based on the standard of the performer. | The sport is largely populated by young people. Almost all participation is 'organised'.          | Largely populated by younger people. There are many volunteer coaches in clubs but a strong private sector. | A high-profile Olympic sport but with a large majority of recreational participants. Beginners usually access 'lessons'.                   | Significant degree of competition in the sport but recreational activity is rarely coach-dependent. | The sport does not like the term 'instructor' but acknowledges that 'short burst' involvement is the norm. |

It is clear that the adult participation sector, perhaps dependent on sport specificity, comprises a significant range of sport-related activity. In addition to recreational participation, understood to be less formally organised and related to lifestyle satisfaction, there is a form of competition-based engagement that is characterised by less-intensive or minimal training/preparation - more play than practice. The former is largely coach-independent, and the latter may be more coach-dependent, but this likely to be a function of club membership or self-directed participation. The competition in this domain, for adults, is best conceptualised as being outside what the Governing Body of the sport would recognise as a performance-development pathway or a high-status level of competition. These participants may be more or less 'serious' about competition and improvement; those who perceive the need for, or satisfaction to be derived from, improved performance are the participants most likely to access 'instruction'.

The term 'instruction' permeates the domain, although it is by no means universal; it seems likely that this is a function of historical usage rather than reflective of any role analysis. Nevertheless, the 'instruction' aspect of coaching intervention was prevalent. Most evident was the short-term skills/technique improvement episode (or series of episodes) based on a commercial transaction. Clearly, this is more evident in non-team sports, exemplified by adventure sports or

individual performance sports. It was in these instruction-responsive sports that any cursory examination of the Internet reveals advertising for coaching/instruction services. The corollary of this is that there are employment opportunities in this sector of adult participation. (This has some parallels with the provision of short-term sports teaching delivery in young children's sport, in what might be considered the pre-performance/participation stage.)

In concert, the interviewees described a complex picture in which the variety in forms of participation attracted a range of coaching practices. The competition-based participation in some sports involved less practice than would be characteristic of performance sport. Indeed, the relative balance of 'play to practice' is a defining feature. The coaching in this context may be described as less-directive and reflective of an episodic, less-intensive intervention. There is less long-term planning and less attempted control over the full range of performance elements than in performance sport. The coach may be viewed more as an organiser than working to specific performance goals. Participants in these contexts were more likely to be sports club members and to be coached by volunteer coaches or those receiving some payment from their clubs. On the other hand, recreational participants or those in individual sports who compete but are largely self-directed are more likely to avail themselves of 'improvement lessons'. This can best be described as a fee-based short-term intervention focusing on skills-technique improvement – the term 'lesson' is often used. The scale of this in some sports, e.g. golf, skiing, with a large adult recreational base is sufficiently extensive to identify paid instruction as a significant (albeit not universal) feature of the domain. Coaches or instructors in this context often have limited prior knowledge of the participants and rarely carry their support into competition or recreational activity. It is not surprising, therefore, that interviewees identified speedy analysis and a capacity to deal with a range of abilities as an important element of (instructor) expertise. Although the language would not be used in this way, a 'fault finding and correction approach' was common.

There are a number of concomitant issues about coaches' expertise and qualifications in the instructor-access domain. In 'instructor' awards, personal proficiency in sport-specific skills is crucial. This is a clear barrier to higher levels of certification and employment. Interviewees described qualification structures that required demonstrable sport-specific proficiency, most often evident in the form of a grading system. This was most evident in adventure and martial arts sports in which the safety factor was complemented by the advantages of possessing demonstration skills beyond those of participants. Another issue is that, in this domain, particularly the commercial sector, coach/instructor qualifications were valued as marketing tools.

Interviewees identified a number of characteristics of those coaches who were acknowledged to have high status in this domain. The Coach Development Managers focused on competences that were central to expert pedagogy: 'could make an impact on performance', had a technical capacity to intervene successfully in challenging conditions, was able to work from evidence-based practice (speedy analysis of performance), and had a repertoire of interventions



appropriate to a range of participant needs. These characteristics tended to reinforce the basic teaching competences of analysis, activity, feedback, individualisation and so on, and the episodic pedagogy of the instructor mode. Where specific certification was available (e.g. golf, skiing), instructors would seek to obtain awards in order to increase their market value. However, it was very interesting that, where interviewees gave examples of well-known ‘coach instructors’, their renown was achieved by having worked with ‘high performance’ athletes – also a marketing device.

## CONCLUSIONS

As with all sporting provision, the adult participation coaching domain will be subject to the vagaries of individual circumstances and contexts. Nevertheless, there are a number of distinguishing features, including a balance (and sometimes combination) of commercial instructor-led provision (17) and recreational, often non-coach-dependent, activity. The former involves working across ages/stages/levels of ability, with largely intermittent, short-term intervention. The latter often involves a form of performance sport in which play, despite being given organisation and direction by a coach, is more important than practice, although some health-related activities may be quite intensively pursued. Participation drivers may vary but generally involve satisfaction derived from the participation itself rather than extrinsic recognition; participation may become a lifestyle choice. There is a distinction between team and individual sports. The ‘individual’ sports are more likely to have a full range of adult recreation and casual participation and irregular competition participation. The team sports are more likely to exhibit ‘organised’ participation, even where the standard of participation is relatively low. Team sport individuals are much less likely to access ‘instruction’ on an ‘episodic’ or sessional basis, but participation is generally coach-dependent. Some further research is required into such coaching practice in which performance improvement is likely to be replaced by the maintenance of physical and technical capacities, and a supportive and collaborative environment. Where adult team sports are clearly, not ‘performance orientated’, there is unlikely to be an expectation of advanced certification for coaches.

We might, therefore, adopt the following range of adult participation-orientated contexts:

- Participation that is essentially recreative but has a purposeful improvement intention and may be instructor-facilitated.
- Organised participation in sport that varies in standard of performance but has limited preparation and, although it may involve leadership and some coaching, would not normally be populated by coaches with higher levels of qualification.
- Participation in competition sport (often characterised as club sport) that mirrors high-performance sport but has less intensity of preparation and a generally lower standard of performance.

- Committed individual sport that is not normally coach-dependent but within which participants may have recourse to ‘upskilling’ or ‘reinforcing’ episodes from instructors. Much of this latter provision may be incorporated within commercial practice.
- Casual adult recreation that is not coach-dependent.

The range of participant motives and practices is added to and is well illustrated in Masters Sport. This is a discrete sector of adult participation determined by age categories, but ranging from more-recreational forms of competition to national and world championship competition, which displays relatively intensive preparation (5). The important feature of this sector is that it is based on participation in competition structures, although the participants have a full range of motives for participating. The literature on Masters Sport tends to focus on swimming, and in seeking for sector-specific coaching behaviours is characterised by comparisons to ‘youth sport’ (27). There seems little doubt that adult participants prefer sound adult learning practices, particularly a collaborative, inclusive approach. However, it is less clear that these characteristics of coaches’ practice differ markedly from, for example, 18-30-year old participants in performance sport. Nevertheless, the literature is valuable for highlighting the need for context-specific research.

There is a conceptual ‘space’ in adult sport participation that is matched by a distinctive provision by individuals and organisations. The nature of this (individual) sport-related activity is that it can take place with minimum organisation and cooperation by others (excepting facility and services provision). The participation tends to have no specific developmental goals other than the immediate satisfaction of the activity itself; this sense of satisfaction may be found in more challenging environments, in being recognised to have reached a level of technical competence, or in the striving to win that is fundamental to some sport competition (1). There is also a social dimension to sports participation that cannot be overlooked. For many adult participants, the social aspect of engaging in sport-related activity will be the principal motive. For others, there may be a health and well-being motive for their sport activity (40). There was also an acknowledgement from a number of representatives of the National Sporting Organisations who were interviewed that the further development of this strand of their sports was desirable. This, of course, merely reinforces the value of identifying the domain characteristics and the coaching workforce required to deliver it appropriately and effectively.

## **APPLICATIONS IN SPORT**

There are a number of implications for coach education and employment/deployment. Those who operate in the commercial sector will, to some extent, be self-selecting as they need to have (at least in many of the individual sports) a high level of personal proficiency. This is required for the pedagogical purposes of feeding, rallying, sparring, demonstrating and having the sport-specific technical insight to analyse, evaluate, feedback and devise appropriate intervention strategies (in addition to providing a safe environment). The distinguishing feature in this domain is that instructors/coaches are generally required to operate across a wide range of client abilities

in order to maximise income. Since much of the instruction with participants takes place with limited, in any, prior knowledge of their abilities, practitioners are required to operate from observable behaviour – thus reinforcing the emphasis on technique/skills (in the context of either [more] effective technique or [increased] competence in challenging environments) (30). Adults, sensitive to sound andragogical practice, are also likely to be able to make judgements about whether or not (satisfying) progress in performance is taking place, and instructors will, therefore, be at pains to make this evident.

For coaches operating in the adult participation domain who have a more stable relationship with a team or individual, but within the ‘high play, low practice’ principle, there are also a number of potential implications. Coaches are less likely to be responsible for intensive, detailed training programmes (particularly in team sports) than for organisational responsibilities and competition management. For all coaching practitioners in this domain the social element of participation is an important factor. In the commercial sector, this manifests itself in the importance of communication and establishing supporting, non-threatening learning environments. For adult recreationalists, the social element of participation is a significant feature of their motivation to maintain involvement. Coaches in this domain will, therefore, have some responsibility for ensuring that an over-emphasis on competition, a less-satisfying level of participation, and financial and other demands do not detract from the personal satisfaction and social benefits of a rewarding level of commitment to the sport. There are also others for whom more intermittent, casual and non-coach-dependent participation is the norm, and this seems likely to be sustained by a social dimension.

The incorporation of activity that facilitates the distinguishing features of the domain is the responsibility of providers of recreational opportunities and appropriate forms of competition, club management, and provision of leadership qualifications by National Sporting Organisations. Planned workforce management, in terms of recruitment and award structures, is also the responsibility of these agencies, although the sector is also serviced by members’ bodies and market-led providers of instructor and teacher awards. To some extent, the domain may be self-regulating, although there is a responsibility on Governing Bodies to ensure that appropriate qualifications are available, and to regulate, where possible, participation by appropriately qualified personnel. Adults’ expressions of satisfaction will create a market-led approach, whether that is commercial or participant-based acceptance of leadership. Adult ‘learn to’ programmes should be differentiated from children’s programmes, and overall management by sport authorities is likely to be concerned with sustaining and maintaining participation through the life cycle. In this context, understanding domain-specific environments and the provision of appropriate coaching/leadership support will be important.

The paper has reinforced the value of identifying domain-specific participation in sport, and further illustrated the characteristics of the coaching environment in an adult participation



domain that is acknowledged to be under-researched (15). We began by highlighting the potential for instructor-coach distinctions, but, despite the widespread use of the instructor/lesson terminology, the names are less important than an appreciation of the processes involved. There is some recognition in the literature of career progression and mobility in coaching (19) but little of this involves recruitment to the adult participation sector and subsequent career development. The characteristics of coaches in this domain, the influence of the market, the appropriateness of qualifications and an acknowledgement of appropriate expertise require further attention if this is not to continue to be the neglected sector of coaching provision.

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