Coaching ethnically diverse participants: 'Race', racism and anti-racist practice in community sport

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Abstract

The aim of this chapter is to explore the ways that issues associated with 'race', ethnicity and racism can influence community sport, particularly in relation to coaching participants from diverse ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds. It begins by considering how ideas of 'race', ethnicity and racism have shaped sporting structures and cultures, including coaching contexts. Here, the authors draw on the concepts of systemic racism and whiteness to examine the racialised power dynamics that continue to exclude minoritised coaches and participants. An overview of the policy landscape related to race equality in sport coaching is then provided - focusing specifically on British sport and English football – to highlight the organisational response to the lack of minoritised coaches in sport. The chapter then shifts to a practitioner focus, first by assessing what factors might contribute to an anti-racist perspective in a coach, and then by offering some recommendations as to what anti-racist coaching practice might look like - before, during and after a coaching session. Readers are encouraged to reflect on how this specifically anti-racist approach contrasts with existing popular coaching practices, particularly when working with ethnically diverse participants.

Introduction

In this chapter we explore some of the key considerations when coaching participants from diverse ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. In doing this we examine the influence of ideas of 'race', ethnicity and racism in a community sport coaching setting. The authors combine a critical sociological analysis of racism in sport with a first-hand coaching practitioner experience to provide a theoretically

informed and pragmatic discussion about coaching minoritised[1] participants. We argue that this dual approach is important because many commonly held ideas about 'race', ethnicity and racism – particularly in a sport setting – can lead to exclusionary coaching practices. This, and the associated racialised power dynamics that exist in sport, can make for difficult experiences in sport for minoritised participants.

We begin by introducing some of the theoretical approaches that have been used to make sense of the experiences of minoritised populations in sport settings. We focus particularly on the concepts of systemic racism and whiteness and the racialised assumptions that can underpin sporting cultures, coach education programmes, coaching practice and the coach-participant relationship. The chapter then outlines the policy landscape related to race equality in sport. We trace its emergence and development and discuss how race equality initiatives have been applied to sport coaching environments, referring to English football (soccer) as a specific example. A brief critical appraisal is then provided of the relative importance of the background and lived experience of the coach when working with minoritised participants, the so-called 'ethnic matching' of coach and participant. We then turn attention to the experiences of a current coach in England – himself from a minoritised background – and his own journey in developing what we term an anti-racist coaching practice. From this first-hand practitioner account, we identify a range of practical suggestions to be considered when coaching players from diverse ethnic backgrounds in a community sport setting. Readers are challenged to reflect on how this specifically anti-racist approach might contrast with the dominant perceptions, attitudes and approaches to coaching that they may have encountered – and their own practice if they are themselves coaches - particularly in relation to coaching ethnically diverse participants.

'Race' and racism in sport – a theoretical overview

Sport is ideologically loaded with the idea of meritocracy. The emphasis on hard work, talent and a 'never give up attitude' provides a convenient framework to help explain successes and failures – both on and off the playing field (Hylton, 2009; Kilvington, 2016; Lusted, 2018). These influential meritocratic ideas emphasise the role of the individual in shaping their sporting destiny and can reduce attention on the social structures which have the capacity to grant and deny entry to sporting opportunities. This constructs a natural order whereby individuals are seen to control their destinies and are ultimately responsible for their achievements in sport – unfettered by social barriers or influences. The meritocratic approach can also inform attitudes towards issues of 'race' and racism in sport. It is often associated with a 'colour-blind' view, whereby sport is viewed as inherently fair and accessible,

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[1] The term minoritised is used throughout this chapter to refer to a person or groups of people from 'racial', ethnic and/or religious backgrounds that are differentiated from a perceived 'white' majority. It is used in preference to other terminology, notably, 'minority', as it reflects the socially constructed process by which indicators such as skin colour have become racialised, leading to some people receiving less access to power, representation and resources than others (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

denying the existence of racialised inequalities and downplaying the significance of ideas of 'race' in shaping people's experiences (Bimper, 2015). It also serves to avoid a focus on the racialised power arrangements that can exist in sport, including in sport coaching contexts, where white people dominate and minoritised people are often under-represented and excluded, particularly in elite sport.

One way to consider the ongoing influence of ideas of 'race' in sport coaching contexts is through the concept of whiteness, which has become an increasingly prominent area of analysis in sport research. Patel (2017, p. 16) states that "whiteness refers not simply to phenotypical characteristics and origin, but rather represents complex structures of power, entitlement and status". It is argued that the racialised system that exists in sport has helped create a social positioning in which being identified as white enables social, cultural and economic privilege at the expense of minoritised 'others'. The impact of white privilege in such roles in sport is for those in power to be 'unraced', an individual, and the norm (Dyer, 1997). For Long and Hylton (2002), whiteness becomes 'normalised' as racialised privilege becomes so routine it is invisible to those who it empowers. In turn, institutions become so deeply racialised that whites do not see or acknowledge racial bias (Feagin, 2006); the preference then is to view sport through a colour-blind lens. It is through this collective thinking, which Feagin (2013) labels 'the white racial frame', that systems of oppression continue to thrive.

The dominant position of whiteness can be seen in many sports across the world. In English football, for example, spaces of governance, management and off-field roles are almost entirely populated by white people. Football has traditionally constituted an 'old-boys network' controlled and shaped by elderly white men (Back, Crabbe & Solomos, 2001; Bradbury, 2018; Lusted, 2009). Bradbury (2018, p. 12) states that "less than 1% of senior governance and operations positions at professional clubs, league associations, and national federations across Europe and at UEFA (the European governing body for football) are held by [ethnic] minority staff". Lusted (2009, p. 723) adds that in England, County Football Associations (the governance organisations for grassroots, recreational football) "fail to properly reflect their local demographics, with County FA personnel being overwhelmingly white (99.7%) and male (97%)". In 2018, of 482 senior coaches in working in English professional football, 20 were black while only two were British Asian (Kilvington, 2018). Considering sport in this more critical way can help to challenge the commonly held perceptions of meritocracy and fairness that exist in sport settings, and expose the language of equality often heard in coaching, management, participation and other settings, where positions are seen rather as "colour specific" (King, 2004a, p. 168).

Bourdieu's (1984) conceptualisation of habitus furthers our understanding of the formation, persistence and power of whiteness in sport. Bourdieu (1977, p. 72) describes the habitus as a "type of environment" comprising two functions. First, it refers to how we become ourselves and develop attitudes. Second, it relates to the ways in which we engage in social and cultural practices (like sport). As a result of this

habitus, we become unified into groups of belonging that can include some and exclude others (Bourdieu, 1984) and the habitus is generationally reproduced over time (Robbins, 2000). If we consider a habitus being shaped by certain ideas of 'race', this allows us to comprehend the enduring influence of whiteness in helping maintain white supremacy (Feagin, 2006; 2013) in settings like sport coaching. Utilising Bonilla-Silva's (2003) work on the 'white habitus', Cleland and Cashmore (2016, p. 29) state that its existence "regulates the practice and condition of whiteness with regards to taste, perception, feelings and views on matters of race and racial inequality". As a result, and in the context of sport, the white habitus encourages solidarity and connectedness amongst whites and reinforces their behaviour, practices, and performances, while simultaneously excluding minoritised groups.

Meso-level factors of sport - related to organisational structures, practices and networks - are also useful to comprehend the importance and power of whiteness (Cunningham, 2020; Feagin, 2006). It is suggested that the social and cultural practices that manifest in sports like football, such as those revolving around alcohol and public houses, have helped facilitate the formation of largely mono-ethnic (white) networks and friendships (Burdsey, 2004; King, 2004a). Such practices can exclude those without the correct 'cultural passports' (Burdsey, 2007). These informal organisational structures and procedures can enable friendships and networks of trust to develop in these spaces which can often lead to employment opportunities (King, 2004a; 2004b). As such they disadvantage minoritised personnel who are excluded from them. In professional football, Bradbury (2018, p. 15) argues that black coaches have been "frozen out" due to the "tendencies of elite level clubs to operate a series of 'racially closed' networks – rather than qualifications – based approaches to recruitment". In turn, these "mechanisms of 'white collar' recruitment gravitate against the inclusion of potential applicants drawn from minority populations who are outside of the dominant (white) social and cultural networks of which typify the football industry" (Bradbury, 2013, p. 304). 'Head-hunting', the process in which candidates are pre-selected for interview or employment in relatively opaque ways, is one example of how whiteness continues to prevail (Bradbury, 2013; 2018; Kilvington, 2018; 2020).

Ultimately, meritocracy places the blame on minoritised populations for their lack of success or opportunity and disregards the role played by structural, systemic racism in sport (St Louis, 2005). Whiteness, and the white racial frame, has naturalised systems of racialised advantage and disadvantage and downplayed the significance of ideas of race (see Bains & Patel, 1996; Burdsey, 2007; Kilvington, 2013; 2016; 2017). Utilising these conceptualisations enables us to more deeply assess how coaches may be perceived by their participants and vice versa. For example, long-standing stereotypes have helped frame whites as being in charge, the leaders, the thinkers, the tacticians (Bradbury, 2018; Hoberman, 1997; St Louis, 2004). On the flip side, minoritised athletes are physicalised as possessing superior genetic abilities including speed, power and strength (Hoberman, 1997; Van Sterkenburg & Knoppers, 2004). Although one can perceive this as a 'positive stereotype', or a backhanded compliment, it is rooted in false notions of biological difference among racial groups which frames

blackness with brawn rather than brain. The racial framing surrounding white and black athletes unequivocally attribute the qualities of hard work, intellect and determination with whites. This racial framing has been used to help explain the phenomenon of 'stacking' in sports such as cricket, football and American football (Brooks & Althouse, 2000; Kilvington, 2018; Malcolm, 1997) as well as the paucity of black managers and coaches in a variety of sports (Cashmore & Cleland, 2011). In short, assumptions about 'race', and using ideas of 'race' to inform practice - be it knowingly or unknowingly - can perpetuate structural inequalities. It is therefore imperative that sporting institutions offer solutions, including policies, to address the such issues.

The race equality policy landscape in sport and coaching

We now turn to review the emergence and development of race equality policies and initiatives in sport, focusing particularly on those related to sport coaching. It is difficult to offer a global overview given the range of approaches to race equality adopted by different national contexts. Some supra-national organisations including the United Nations and the European Union (EU) have offered sport policy guidelines in relation to social equality and helped shape national approaches, such as the EU's 1975 European Sport for All Charter (Hartmann-Tews, 2006). In the main, however, it is the specific nuances of national political contexts that have informed sport policies (Houlihan, 2009). Oliver and Lusted (2015), for example, offer a comparison between Australian and British sport approaches to handling discrimination cases, noting both similarities and differences. The limitations these types of national comparisons have been recognised, however (Dowling, Brown, Legg, & Beacom, 2018; Dowling, Brown, Legg, & Grix, 2018). In light of this, the chapter focuses on one national context – that of the United Kingdom (UK), although reference will be made particularly to the USA, for which policy in this area has had international influence.

Given the long-standing association between sport and racial politics, it is perhaps a little surprising that sport organisations have only begun to engage with race equality in the last 40 years. In the UK, for example, the first formal race equality policy to emerge in sport came in 1994 from the UK Sports Council (Carrington, Fletcher, & McDonald, 2015). In this sense, race equality is still viewed as something of a novel area of focus in sport. There are many reasons why sport might have been late to formally promoting race equality of which three have been particularly influential in the UK. First, sport has for much of its history been protected as a non-political space and seen to be sheltered from wider social issues including debates around racism (Lusted, 2012a). Second is the long-standing association between sport, meritocracy (mentioned earlier) and fairness. The need to increase opportunities in sport has thus often been questioned and even resisted by sport organisations (Long, Robinson, & Spracklen, 2005; Lusted, 2009; 2012b). Finally, key decision-making roles in sport have been the almost exclusive preserve of white people. White privilege has had the effect of marginalising the issue of race equality and downplaying the influence of racism in strategic decision making in sport.

The emerging policy landscape of race equality in British sport

We consider below three key areas in the development of UK sport policy to help illustrate the emergence of race equality considerations. As others have shown (Stylianou, Hogan, & Enright, 2019), there is no particularly neat, linear development to race equality policy development but more a complex merging of issues and organisational responses – sometimes focusing on professional sport, sometimes at the recreational level; at times there have been quite intense efforts from key organisations to drive policy implementation, at others an arguably more gestural, rhetorical approach to race equality has been taken (Swinney & Horne, 2005).

Race equality and the 'Sport for All' movement

In the UK – as with many countries – sport gradually became seen as a valid site of public – and thus state – interest, at both elite and recreational level around the middle of the 20th century. State funding of elite sport emerged as national success at international mega-events such the Olympic Games became politically salient, while at a community level it became recognised that encouraging mass participation in recreational sport and leisure activities had a number of political and social benefits (Green, 2004).

In this respect, race equality came onto the sport policy agenda almost inadvertently. For elite sport it was about talent identification – making sure athletes were able to rise to the top without any undue 'barriers' or disadvantages that might limit their progress. At a recreational level, efforts to create mass sport participation around the 1970s (Houlihan & White, 2002) connected to a wider 'sport for all' movement in European sport policy (Carrington et al., 2015; Hylton & Totten, 2013), defined as "a comprehensive sports policy which attempts to extend the beneficial effect of sport on health, social, educational and cultural development to all sections of the community" (Hartmann-Tews, 2006, p. 111). Minoritised communities in the UK became one of several key target groups from which to seek increased sport participation rates.

The emergence of a 'multiculturalist' political agenda across Europe in the 1990s furthered the attention on increasing the ethnic diversity of sport participation with the aim to improve social inclusion and cohesion (Henry, Amara, & Aquilina, 2007). Targeted interventions like single-sex, alternatively designed sessions in sports like swimming for Muslim women emerged (Alamri, 2013; Dagkas, Benn, & Jawad, 2011; Lenneis & Agergaard, 2018; Michalowski & Behrendt, 2020). At the same time, Carrington et al. (2015) note how sport became used as a form of social control over the perceived 'threat' of urban black youth. In the UK, this was evident in the Action 10 sport schemes that were funded following high-profile riots in the 1980s (Houlihan & White, 2002). Such schemes are rarely considered as race equality initiatives – they are often labelled with more broader policy objectives around social inclusion and crime prevention, targeting urban, disadvantaged areas. For example, the midnight basketball programme in the USA (Hartmann, 2016) implicitly targeted young African American males in areas of high crime, and the recent 'Premier League Kicks' campaign in England

(The Premier League, 2020) has targeted locations in areas of deprivation with large minoritised populations such as London and Manchester.

Diversifying the coaching workforce

This focus on increasing sport participation among minoritised groups was open to criticism because it did not consider non-playing roles in sport including coaching. The persistent lack of elite level coaches from minoritised backgrounds across the world gained attention particularly because as the diversity of the playing population in many elite sports increased significantly. It is a common career transition in professional sports for former players to become head coaches or managers of professional teams – and yet this pathway seems blocked to those from minoritised backgrounds.

A range of policies have emerged in elite sports over the last 20 years that have tried to increase the diversity of elite level coaches. By far the most well-known of these is the so called 'Rooney Rule' – established by Dan Rooney in 2003, the then owner of the US National Football League (NFL) team the Pittsburgh Steelers along with prominent civil rights lawyers Jonnie Cochran and Cyrus Mehri (Corapi, 2012). Prior to 2002 there had only been 8 black head coaches in NFL history which was in stark contrast to the ever-increasing numbers of black players populating NFL squads. The Rooney Rule took a 'positive action'[2] approach by requiring NFL clubs to pro-actively seek and then guarantee an interview for suitable black candidates for any future head coach vacancy.

The Rooney Rule template has recently been considered by other sport (and non-sport) organisations, most prominently in 2017 when the English Football League (EFL) – (the 3 professional leagues situated one tier below the elite English Premier League) and soon after The English Football Association (The FA - responsible for England's national football teams, and for governing the grassroots game) adopted a similar policy for future head coach/manager vacancies. In October 2020, The FA launched a Football Leadership Diversity Code which at time of writing 42 elite clubs (men's professional clubs and the top two tiers of the women's elite leagues) had committed to implementing (The Football Association, 2020a). The code includes targets of 25% of all new coaching hires (covering first team right through to youth teams) in men's professional clubs to be Black, Asian and Mixed-Heritage, with 15% for coaching hires at women's clubs.

The extent to which such policies have implemented real changes in the diversity of elite coaches remains open to question. Duru (2020) notes the reduced proportion of black head coaches in the NFL after an initial increase after the Rooney Rule was implemented. Cowell (2020) and Conricode & Bradbury (2020) offer cautionary accounts of the early impact of the EFL's adoption of these new

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[2] Positive action is a term which has different legal interpretations depending on the national context. It broadly refers to action that is designed to rectify persistent inequalities by advancing access or opportunities of under-represented groups. See Cowell (2020) for a discussion of positive action in sport in a UK legal context.

recruitment principles. It is argued that such policies do not directly challenge the authority of whiteness and systemic racism within sport organisations, which can reduce the potential for longer-term change.

Much less attention has been paid to diversifying the coaching workforce at the level of community sport. Some activities exist to increase the diversity of community coaches, particularly in the higher profile, well-funded and popular sports like English football. For example, in recent years The Football Association has set targets to increase the numbers of minoritised community football coaches taking qualifications, and developed a coach bursary programme for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME[3]) coaches to cover the costs of coaching qualifications (The Football Association, 2018).

Creating an inclusive sporting environment

An examination of the actual sporting environment – particularly in the way it is experienced by minoritised communities – is an even less developed policy agenda. This is, at least in part, because of the way that racism and the under-representation of minoritised groups has been (mis)understood and marginalised by sport organisations as we have outlined previously. It is only recently that some scrutiny has taken place on the existing structural and cultural conditions of long-standing sporting organisations and cultures themselves (Rankin-Wright, Hylton, & Norman, 2016).

This has been a long-overdue and important shift in emphasis. From a player perspective, it is well recognised that the coach plays a central role in shaping the experiences of participants and is a common factor in young people dropping out from playing sport (Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2008). A small body of research has explored the ways in which ideas of 'race' and racism have impacted upon the coach-athlete relationship. Focusing predominantly on elite sport, such studies have noted a racialised power dynamic – informed by whiteness - that can exist between white coaches and minoritised participants, often leading to unpleasant experiences for athletes (Jowett & Frost, 2007; Massao & Fasting, 2010; McDonald & Spaaij, 2020; Singer, 2005). There is less research on the coach-player relationship in recreational or youth sport. Burdsey's (2004) study of semi-professional British South Asian footballers highlights the way that some minoritised players have felt under pressure to de-emphasise their own ethnic and cultural backgrounds in order to conform to dominant expectations in sport, including those of the coach.

It is hard to find many examples of policy action to develop an anti-racist sporting environment. UK Coaching have created some resources around inclusive coaching practice (UK Coaching 2020), but none specifically focused on coaching ethnically diverse participants. Indeed, it is recognised here that the term inclusion has been historically associated with provision for disabled participants over other social groups. Returning to English football, The FA have attempted to develop awareness of equality and diversity among the coaching workforce through the use of online modules and videos contained

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[3] BAME is a commonly used term in the UK – particularly in policy - to refer to people from minoritised backgrounds.

in their coaching qualifications, alongside localised events targeting coach education such as Black History Month workshops (The Football Association, 2020b). It does seem, however, that there is a general paucity of additional guidance in sport around how to approach coaching diverse participants.

The 'ethnic matching' of coach and participant

One of the reasons behind diversifying the coaching workforce is the assumption that coaches from diverse ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds are likely to have a greater understanding, appreciation and empathy towards minoritised players. A recent survey by UK Coaching found that 36% of white coaches said they had little or no understanding of the specific needs of BAME participants, compared with 26% of coaches from BAME backgrounds (Thompson & Thompson, 2018). In the same survey, participants from BAME backgrounds consistently reported lower levels of satisfaction in their coaches - in terms of confidence and trust in their coach (80% and 86% respectively), whether they would recommend their coach to others (78% and 83% respectively) and if they had a good relationship with their coach (71% compared with 75%).

Aside from an overarching moral commitment to racial equality, there are multiple benefits in increasing the numbers of minoritised coaches, especially when community sports clubs are housed in locations with ethnically diverse areas. First, research suggests that such coaches can become role models for players, coaches, and others (Randhawa, 2011). Second, such coaches are more likely to have personal and professional contacts within minoritised communities which can destabilise 'white-to-white' networks and open up wider opportunities (Back, Crabbe & Solomos, 2001). Third, such coaches have the potential to educate other (white) coaches around the experiences of minoritised groups and help challenge racialised myths and stereotypes (Kilvington, 2016). Burdsey (2007, p. 122) also notes that minoritised figures symbolise a "friendly face" at the club which may strengthen relationships and increase confidence among minoritised participants.

However, this notion of 'ethnic matching' in community coaching can be problematised in several ways. It can have the effect of reifying racial stereotypes and racialised differences, can increase segregation of ethnic groups in community sport settings and it side-steps the potential skills deficiencies of existing white coaches. There is also the logical implication that white coaches are thus better suited to coaching white participants. In many situations, of course, a coaches' group of participants is likely to include people from several different ethnic backgrounds and it would be hard to defend a position of this type of ethnic segregation in sport. In addition, a crude ethnic 'matching' of a coach to participant/s ignores the fluidity and variety within and between minoritised communities. Taking the example of British Asian communities, a British Indian Sikh male coach may be quite removed from the specific cultural, religious and gendered experiences of a British Pakistani Muslim woman. Therefore, it is crucial that minoritised coaches are not simply positioned with 'diverse' communities under an assumption of shared experiences and cultural suitability.

What might be preferable, therefore, is to focus on ways to ensure that *all* coaches are equipped to help create an anti-racist sporting environment which allows for minoritised participants to feel safe, supported and included – regardless of the background of the coach or the diversity of the participants. An anti-racist coaching practice has the potential to disrupt racialised sport coaching environments and create more inclusive experiences for all. As we have seen, so far there have been limited attempts by sport organisations to focus on developing this type of practice among sport coaches.

Practitioner experience – What makes an anti-racist coach?

With the above overview in mind, we turn to a discussion of how coaches can help to challenge the racialised basis of sport environments and create more inclusive experiences for minoritised participants. To do this, we call upon the first-hand experience of a community coach, Asad Qureshi - one of the authors of this chapter – to outline what an anti-racist coaching practice might consist of. To begin, Asad provides a short overview of his background and motivation to coach.

I have spent over 10 years as a community coach, working with young players from diverse ethnic communities. I've held several professional roles in sport including Football Development Officer at a County FA and a coach education tutor and mentor. My own lived experience and my motivation to coach have helped shape my approach to coaching.

I identify as a British Pakistani Muslim, having parents who were born in Pakistan and moved to the UK in the 1970s. I grew up in a town in the North of England in a predominantly white, middle-class neighbourhood. I experienced quite a multicultural childhood, having mostly white friends who had quite different religious and cultural backgrounds to me. At times this contrast was difficult because my family religious practice varied quite a lot to that of my friends, particularly during festivals like Christmas or Ramadan. Sport became a big part of my childhood and it definitely helped me to fully immerse myself in my local community – both in and out of school.

It was only from aged 16 that I began to socialise with other British Asians (aside from my own family members), initially by playing for a football team made up of players from British Asian backgrounds. During several years of playing for this team, my teammates and I suffered regular, persistent racial abuse and discrimination from opposing players, coaches and fans.

My childhood experiences taught me to value and appreciate diversity and make friends with people from all different backgrounds – values which are at the centre of my approach to coaching today. Those experiences as a young football player has also driven me to want to create inclusive, safe and welcoming environments for kids to play sport and this was my main motivation to start coaching. Being a community coach, I see myself as a leader, a mentor and a role model. The purpose of my coaching is not only to develop players technically but also develop them as people – inspiring and instilling confidence in them so that they can aspire to achieve success in their lives.

Developing an anti-racist coaching practice

Over the years, Asad has picked up some tips about how to work with players from different ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds, and has begun to see how important it is to create a non-discriminatory, welcoming, safe and inclusive environment where minoritised players feel at ease. This section draws upon Asad's own reflections of working with minoritised players combined with wider anti-racist good practice to provide some recommendations for coaches to consider when working with players from diverse ethnic backgrounds. These considerations are separated into three key phases of the coaching session:

1.   Pre-session considerations

2.   During the session/match

3.   Post-session considerations

1. Pre session considerations

Publicising the anti-racist position

It is important to advertise and communicate that sessions are safe, inclusive and welcoming spaces and can be clearly recognised as adopting an anti-racist position. This anti-racist message can be reinforced in any communication – formal or informal – to help advertise and re-enforce the stance, to players, parents, other coaches and the wider community.

Creating an inclusive and supportive environment

Creating an inclusive environment does not begin when the first ball is kicked or when the warm-up starts; it starts by getting to know and understand the players beforehand. The more a coach understands their players – their backgrounds, their cultural and/or religious practices, their home, school and social environments - the less likely they are to place them in embarrassing or uncomfortable situations. This knowledge can empower the coach and make them feel more confident and less worried about inadvertently offending players or parents by what they say or do.

Be conscious of stereotyping

It can be easy to rely on stereotypes to form early opinions about players and parents – to avoid this, each player should be treated as an individual so not to assume their backgrounds and needs will be similar to others, even if they share the same religion, ethnicity or culture. A coach should reflect on the assumptions they may be making and whether they are drawn from actual observations of that player or wider social stereotypes.

Consider clothing and equipment requirements

Being sensitive to potential differences in clothing expectations and norms among participants is important; this can be managed by avoiding any particularly strict dress code or equipment requirements

– and letting participants know in advance about this. Within the Muslim faith, for instance, it can be an expectation that people should cover their knees. Allowing players to wear clothing such as tights under their shorts and not enforcing 'conventional' sport-specific attire will ensure they feel fully included. If a player follows a faith which involves wearing a head-covering then certain sessions focused on heading might not be appropriate or may need to be adjusted. This is a much more inclusive approach than, for example, a coach demanding that a player take full part in the session or sanctioning them if they cannot engage fully. In this case, an anti-racist coach would identify the 'problem' here being the design of the session/activity, not the particular clothing being worn.

Access to appropriate equipment can also be an issue. Whether it be due to economic circumstances of not knowing what the expectations are, kit such as footwear can create a barrier to participation. For example, a player may not have sports footwear they can use, which may mean they aren't suitable for all conditions or activities. Being aware of matters like this helps the coach in planning the sessions and adapting drills and exercises to take into consideration any equipment concerns.

Flexibility of session times

A coach should set realistic expectations in terms of timekeeping - it might be necessary to take a flexible approach to late comers or participants who have to leave early. Some minoritised players won't have consistent access to lifts from parents or other transport, as they come from a background where sports participation isn't the 'norm. The idea of a parent taking their child to a regular practise session and watching or waiting for them may not be something a parent recognises as an expectation. The journeys that players might be making when walking to and from sessions may also be a safeguarding concern; if a young player has to pass through an unsafe area, a coach should think how best they support them.

Encourage players' support networks

An anti-racist coach will understand the importance of a players' positive support networks and should try to encourage their development. For example, Asad once coached a Muslim player who would always prioritise the mosque over football training and games. Rather than punishing him for missing training, he praised him and would try support his mosque by offering sport coaching sessions there. The player now delivers sport at the mosque and works with young kids in the community. Parents may also want their siblings to stay together at training, despite there being an age gap. Rather than refusing this, a coach could consider adapting sessions so that both players can still take part safely.

Sporting backgrounds

A coach should aspire to understand their players' previous sporting experiences and be careful not to expect any 'sporting literacy' – i.e. being aware of the rules, norms and expectations of a sport. Players may come from a background where organised, structured sport is unfamiliar to them – they might be more used to more casual versions of sports, where different rules and etiquette are often applied. It is

good practice for coaches to communicate regularly with parents – and spend a bit more time with parents of new players - advising them around timings, locations, what the player can expect, and also what the coach expects in terms of behaviour from the players – which should include actively supporting the values of anti-racism. This can help the parent feel at ease, knowing that someone genuinely has the best interest of their child at heart.

2. During the session

Once the session is underway, there are several factors that can be considered to develop an anti-racist coaching practice.

Dealing with discrimination

When working with minoritised players, there is always a possibility that racist discrimination and abuse will take place – from players, parents, coaches and other people – even within one's own team or club. If a coach witnesses racist discrimination or abuse, or it is reported to them by someone else, it must be acted upon and handled consistently. Players will look at a coaches' reaction to discrimination and this can either give them confidence and trust in them, or have the exact opposite effect. Early on in Asad's coaching career, one of his players told him they had a racist remark directed towards them during a game. He was visibly upset and enraged. At the time, Asad told him to ignore the remark and forget it had happened (because that was Asad's own way of handling it when he was a player). Asad substituted the player to let him calm down. After the game, he realised it was the wrong thing to do. The week after, Asad apologised in front of the squad and told them he was wrong - that he would always listen to them and always support their complaints to the relevant authorities in the future. This visibly showed his commitment to anti-racism. As the coach, he set out a clear process of how reporting discrimination worked and what he would do in the future.

Language barriers and use

It is important not to assume all participants will be familiar with sport-specific 'lingo' or jargon – so coaches should try to avoid using such language, or at least check that participants know what these terms mean. If English isn't their first language, coaches can use other aids such as visual cues to help them learn and embed this into their coaching practice. An anti-racist coach will appreciate the cultural nuances of language; for example, many young Asian players refer to Asad as 'Sir' which reflects a Muslim cultural practice of respecting elders, often reinforced through mosques. Telling players to call a coach by their first name may cause discomfort, despite the best of intentions. It is important to take a flexible approach and communicate with players to establish these language norms. Making an extra effort to know how to pronounce the names of all players will help them feel welcome and valued – using names is a powerful way of building relationships with players.

Physical forms of communication

Physical contact is another important consideration for a coach. For example, the shaking of hands might be considered a cultural norm when greeting someone so a player intends to do this, but a coach doesn't reciprocate, then that may offend them. Equally, physical contact can be very unwelcome in some cultures – even a 'high five' with a player might lead to discomfort. An anti-racist coach will be open to learning about and responding to these differing expectations.

Variations in physical fitness expectations

Asad has used The FA's '4 corner model' (The Football Association, 2021) to help determine what to deliver - focusing on the Technical/Tactical; Physical, Psychological and Social aspects of a player's make-up. He is particularly interested in developing social skills and interactions - but ensures players also have the chance to develop their skills and get some exercise. In his experience, sessions should be intensive enough to ensure kids get a good workout – because it may be the only exercise they get across the week. Participants respond differently to intense physical activity though – if exertion is too high, then it is likely that some players will not return. At some times of the year, religious festivals such as Ramadan and the associated fasting can create additional physical challenges for players. Coaches should look for clues that the players are giving i.e. a player catching their breath or the play continuously breaking down are clues that players may be tired. Sessions can be adjusted accordingly to meet these varied fitness levels.

An anti-racist coach will also avoid slipping into racial stereotypes about the physical abilities and attitudes of certain groups – for example, black footballers are known to be represented in sport media as being 'lazy' or not willing to put the hard effort in (Van Sterkenberg, Peeters & Van Amsterdam, 2019) which may inform a coaches attitude and lead to discriminatory practice.

Vary participants' experiences

Coaches should try to give players lots of chances to get new experiences. Different roles, different positions, different styles of coaching, different session structures and so on will all help develop players, whilst also helping a coach learn more about their players. An anti-racist coach will be particularly ready to adapt sessions according to participants' needs at any given session. Again, it is important to be aware of racial stereotypes influencing decision making – for example a coach might play minoritised players in wide attacking positions because they are perceived to be quick and skilful, and not in central roles because they aren't considered to be smart or physical enough.

3. Post-session considerations

Once the session is completed, focus should switch back to the wider social environment of the player, trying to help them sustain a long-term engagement with sport, and ensure that they are developing as people through the experience.

Leaving the session

Players getting home from the session can be an issue to consider. For example, Asad is careful to ensure he knows the player has been picked up or they have agreed arrangements to walk home. He has had concerns in the past about some of the areas he has coached within and so it's not uncommon for him to give groups of players a lift home – provided such an arrangement has been agreed with the parents.

Feedback to parents

Some parents of minoritised players may have little experience of sport and can be wary of, and intimidated by, a sport club setting. Like some players, they may not have the 'sport literacy' to know what the norms and expectations might be. Asad has found giving feedback like the format of a school report system – one they are more likely to have previously encountered – can work well. Sending a short letter to parents once a year telling them how their child is doing – as a player and a person - is also a good idea. This helps to bring them closer to their child's participation and reinforces the benefits and positives that their sport involvement is having on them.

The legacy of participation

An anti-racist coach is likely to be as interested in the participants personal and social development as much as their athletic progress. For example, Asad gets most satisfaction from taking a group of young people who the world may not expect much from and helping them gain the tools to be successful during and after their sport participation. He takes pride in watching them perform, exceed people's expectations and grow in confidence. At the same time, other people's perceptions of minoritised young people change - hopefully leading to sport and the wider world helping to challenge some of the negative racial stereotypes that remain influential in society. His ultimate aim is to give players the confidence to go and explore the world and raise their aspirations to be whatever they want to be.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to introduce some tips to help develop what we have termed an anti-racist coaching practice among community coaches. Learning from the experience of Asad, a community youth coach in England, we have proposed a number of good practice guidelines that can help ensure coaches create an environment where minoritised participants feel safe, welcomed and included. This good practice guide has been contextualised by an overview of the key theoretical approaches to understanding the influence of ideas of 'race', whiteness and systemic racism in a sport coaching setting – aiming to offer a more critical appraisal of these issues than is commonly found, both in everyday sport cultures and in much of the wider literature on sport coaching. By reviewing the development of race equality policies in a UK context, we have outlined how the focus has shifted from increasing the diversity of participants to the coaching workforce and only more recently to a

consideration of the coaching environment. Here we argue that by adopting a specifically anti-racist approach to coaching, minoritised participants are likely to feel more included and get the most out of their coaching sessions. To return to our introduction, we challenge readers to reflect on how this specifically anti-racist approach might contrast with the dominant perceptions, attitudes and approaches to coaching that they may have encountered, particularly in relation to coaching ethnically diverse participants.

Critical questions to consider

1. How has the concept of whiteness made you reflect on sport coaching practice (including perhaps your own)?

2. Why do you think race equality policies in sport coaching aren't always seen as necessary by sport organisations, and what challenges might this present?

3. Adapting the good practice suggestions provided in the chapter, make a list of 5 top tips that you would you recommend to a coach in your particular sport and national setting? To what extent would you say our good practice guide translates to your own context?

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