# Cardiff School of Sport
## DISSERTATION ASSESSMENT PROFORMA:
### Empirical

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### Dissertation title:
How do coaches influence and improve athletes’ attentional focus through feedback and coaching behaviours?

### Supervisor:
Toby Nichols

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How do Coaches Influence and Improve Athletes’ Attentional Focus Through Feedback and Coaching Behaviours?

Dissertation submitted under the discipline of Coaching

Oliver Bishop

ST10001387
HOW DO COACHES INFLUENCE AND IMPROVE ATHLETES’ ATTENTIONAL FOCUS THROUGH FEEDBACK AND COACHING BEHAVIOURS?
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I would like to thank all the participants who took part in the study. I would also like to thank Toby Nichols, who supported the study throughout.
Abstract

The current study examined how coaches thought attention effects performance and due to this how they acted and interacted with their athletes, to try and improve attentional focus. A total of four coaches took part in the study, all coached at university first team level, in team sports. Semi structured interviews were used to examine their thoughts, interactions and behaviours. The data collected was analysed first through deductive methods, then inductive methods and finally was analysed deductively again. The results indicated that all the participants felt attention effected performance. The results discussed using specific drills and behaviours to help maintain and improve athletes’ attention. However the data collected for coaches’ interactions with athletes showed contrasting results, with further research needed.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION
1. Introduction

Abernethy (2007) suggested attention was a process that is almost part of all aspects of perception and cognition, proposing it was difficult to find any aspect of human life that was not either dependant on, or impacted by attention. Literature suggested attention was important for the enhancement of skill learning and allowed athletes to give expert performances (Rogers, Rousseau and Fisk, 1999), proposing attention had an impact on athletes’ performance.

There have been multiple definitions of attention, with many definitions having a contrasting view with others. For the purpose of this study Czajkowski’s (1996) definition was used which states, attention is the directing of awareness, intentionally or unintentionally on situations, activities, actions or objects, which controls the quality and effectiveness of perception, decision-making and performance (Gronek & Schefke, 2011). This definition suggested attention could be conscious or unconscious, which disagreed with earlier research which stated attention was only consciously controlled (James, 1890). However, the concept of attention being both conscious and unconscious was widely agreed upon more recently (Francesconi, 2001; Perkins-Ceccato, Passmore, & Lee, 2003; Francesconi, 2009; Gabbett & Masters, 2011).

Attention has been the theme for multiple studies, which have investigated how attention interacts with other factors, as well as how it can influence performance (Wulf, 2007; Bell & Hardy 2009; Marchant, Greig, & Scott, 2009; Fathi, Saemi & Zarghami 2012). The research suggested attention had an influence on performance. This idea has warranted investigation into how attention can be manipulated and improved.

Coaching was described by Cushion (2007), as a dynamic social activity with the actions and interactions of the coach used as tools to help mould their athletes’ attention. With one of the main interactions happening through feedback. Holt and Molloy (2009) said feedback was a process key in aiding learning and was important in how coaches interacted with their athletes. Feedback was used to help provide knowledge and information for athletes to change or maintain skills and behaviours (Holt & Molloy, 2009). In practice, feedback was frequently used to try and change athletes’ attentional focus, which could lead to an increase in performance. Therefore the influence of feedback on attentional focus was a topic for investigation in this study.

However little research has been done on how coaches, in practice, specifically try to promote and improve athletes’ attentional focus. This study looked to extend literature
knowledge in this area and investigated how coaches acted and interacted with their athletes, to improve their attention. The study had three aims, investigating;

1. How do coaches believe attention can influence athletes’ performance?
2. How do coaches act and behave to maintain or increase athletes’ attention?
3. How do coaches interact with athletes to maintain or increase attention?

The study would give coaches a better understanding of how attention affects athletes and the actions coaches could take to help maintain and improve it. The results have also highlighted areas in coaching that need more research, to enable a better understanding of this area.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW
2. Literature Review

Player’s attentional focus had been shown to have a direct connection with motor performance and learning (Fathi, Saemi & Zarghami, 2012). Learning has played a significant role in sport and effects how an athlete performs (Fathi, Saemi & Zarghami, 2012). It is important for coaches to understand how learning works and how to progress it (Fischman & Oxendine, 1993). Wulf (2007), Rogers, Rousseau and Fisk (1999) proposed that attention is central to enhancing learning. Through understanding how attention works the right environment and focus could be found for athletes to perform.

One intention of learning a motor skill was to try and reach an autonomous state when performing the skill (Delpech, 2012). This enabled the skill to be mostly automatic, with the majority being performed unconsciously (Salmon, 1989; Abernethy, Jackson, Masters, Maxwell & Van Der Kamp, 2007). Performing skills at an automatic level has a major advantage for sporting performance. This had been shown in models of learning (Fitts & Posner, 1967; Adams, 1971). Schmidt and Wrisberg (2008) proposed that automatic processing was faster than conscious processing and was also easier to multi task. This showed another advantage automatic movements had in sport, as reaction time to a stimulus can be extremely important and multitasking is a common occurrence in team sports.

Performing a skill unconsciously, there is less demand on informational processing (Schmidt & Wrisberg, 2004). This could be seen as beneficial, since many theories suggest there is a limited capacity to this process (filter theories, central resource theories, multi resource theory and feature integration theory). Through processing information unconsciously it means that other important information can be processed, whilst the skill is taking place. However, the exact way information is processed is not fully understood. Craik (1948), Broadbent (1958), and Welford (1967) showed that people could not multi task effectively if both tasks are controlled consciously, as they interfered with each other and reduced the effectiveness of the other. This research gave evidence for the early theories on attentional focus known as ‘filter/bottle-neck’ theories (Broadbent, 1958; Deutsch & Deutsch 1963; Treismain, 1964). However, these theories were not able to explain such things as the ‘Cocktail Party’ phenomena (Collin & Cherry 1953), which showed that whilst people had a conversation in a crowded room they could still hear their own name being mentioned by someone else, even though they were not paying attention to that conversation. Research by Master (1992), and Beilock, Carr, MacMahon, Starkes (2002) showed people could multi task, disproving the ‘filter theories’ and suggested that Craik (1948), Broadbent (1958), and Welford’s (1967) tasks were too demanding for multi-
tasking to occur. The central resource capacity theory (Kahneman, 1973) was suggested as it showed that people could effectively multi task if the attentional process was not overloaded. This led to the development of this theory into the Multi Resource Capacity theory (Wichens, 1992; Basil, 1994 suggested attention was a series of resource pools). However, there are still some issues, as the theory was not specific about the number, or types of resource pools available. Studies have also shown that neurons could interfere with other neuronal responses to unrelated stimuli (Davies, Mathews, Stammers & Westerman, 2000). Their data proved that different resource pools could interfere with each other, which goes against the multi resource theory.

The studies gave different explanations on how processing information worked, but were unanimous in suggesting there is a limited amount of information that could be processed. Other research had also shown this (Hardy, & Tattersall, 2005; Abernethy et al., 2007; Mullen, Schmidt, & Wrisberg, 2008). Enabling athletes to perform a skill automatically reduced the amount of processing needed for it (Schmidt & Wrisberg, 2004; Abernethy et al., 2007), allowing players to concentrate on other stimuli, which could improve their overall performance.

This information suggested reaching the autonomous stage of learning was beneficial to athletes. However, Abernethy et al. (2007) proposed that skills are not solely conscious or automatic but are normally a mixture of both. It is important for coaches to know what consciousness athletes use to perform a skill, so they could then focus their attention on to beneficial stimuli. The level that conscious and automatic attention plays, could be determined by the stage of learning they were in (Anson, Elliot & Davids, 2005), suggesting that skills performed in the autonomous stage, would be more automatic. Coaches needed to firstly identify the learning stage their athletes were in before working out what attentional focus should be used.

Controlling a movement automatically is one way a performer can lessen the amount of information needed to be consciously processed. Another important way is by using selective attention. Gronek and Schefke (2010) suggested that to improve attention there was a need to choose what information was most important and what information is irrelevant. Tuning out all irrelevant stimuli reduces the amount of attentional processing, therefore overload is less likely.

dimensions on two continuums: (a) internal-external, (b) narrow-broad. Coaches were then able to use those continuums to categorise what athletes were focusing on. Research has then looked at which attentional focus is more beneficial for athletes.

Knowledge of how an internal or external focus could affect performance is important. Studies have shown that experts perform better with an external focus, whilst an internal focus was considered detrimental (Beilock & Carr, 2001; Wulf and Prinz, 2001; Liao & Masters, 2002; Gray, 2004; Mullen, Hardy, & Tattersall, 2005; Jackson, Ashford & Norsworthy, 2006; Gucciardi & Dimmock, 2008; Bell & Hardy, 2009; Marchant, Greig, & Scott, 2009; Freudenheim, Wulf, Madureira, Corrêa, & Corrêa, 2010; Fathi, Saemi & Zarghami, 2012). An explanation given for this, was experts were in the autonomous stage of learning, making their skills more automatic (Bernstein, 1996; Beek, 2000). Having an internal focus made athletes more aware of their movements and could inhibit the motor system as the performer had a conscious control over a skill that was normally done automatically (Stoate, & Wulf, 2011). Masters (1992) and Beilock et al. (2002) found that high level golfers could putt better, if it was performed as a secondary task, keeping their concentration external from the putting.

When under pressure athletes who experience anxiety could change their attentional focus (Bakker, Kooijman, Kuijpers, & Oudejans, 2010). This shift of attention normally makes athletes focus internally. The self-consciousness approach (Baumeister, 1984), occurred when people were under pressure to perform well. Their attentional focus went internally, to try to control movements that were normally automatic and this lead to a process known as ‘paralysis by analysis’ during which performance would drop. The constrained action hypothesis (Wulf, Mcnevin and Shea, 2001), suggests that using external focus, movements would be controlled unconsciously/automatically, but then internal focusing interferes with the automatic control processes and reduces the performance.

Research had looked at internal, external focus by using electromyography (EMG) and showed movements relying on strength, would benefit from an external focus using less EMG and enables a high performance, (Marchant, Greig, & Scott, 2009; Correa, Freudenheim, Madureira, & Pasetto, 2010). Correa et al. (2010) explained that an internal focus slowed the speed of the stroke and co-ordination of body limbs, therefore reducing the power in the muscles. Research had also focused on sporting movements to show an external focus can aid such movements, (Fathi, Saemi & Zarghami, 2012). This showed
an external focus could increase strength as well as the performance of skills, making it beneficial in sport.

However in some circumstances an internal focus had been beneficial, for example when performers try to change their skill action. This needs to be done consciously, meaning an internal focus is needed (Bell & Hardy, 2009; Beilock et al., 2002). Another study (Stoate & Wulf, 2011) on expert swimmers, showed that their normal attention focus was best when swimming. There is however little research on this and the research design made only allowed for small differences in results.

The coaching environment is complex (Cushion, 2007), it is not something that can just be delivered, but is a dynamic social activity between the coach and athletes (Cushion, 2007), with coaches not able to control what information athletes focus on or process. Even though coaches instruct athletes to focus on a certain feature, they may choose to ignore this request or not be able to comply (Jones & Wallace, 2005). This perception of coaching agreed with the Information processing theory, that suggested for someone to listen or agree with a message, they need to be focusing on it. For coaches to provide the right message to players and ensure athletes are focusing on them, they can change their behaviours and interact with athletes. Both these strategies should help direct athletes’ attentional focus.

Coaches had to be conscious of and monitor how they behave when coaching. How they act during demonstrations, as well as drills, would have an effect on athletes’ attention. Beck, Carr and Gregory’s (2011) research had the prime goal of helping coaches regulate their behaviour, to enable athletes to achieve certain skills. Lord, Diefendorff, Schmidt and Hall’s (2010) research showed that being able to adapt and change behaviour can have beneficial effects on success. Stipulating that being able to adapt behaviour is beneficial when coaching.

Coaches must also be aware that athletes can pay attention consciously and unconsciously. Implicit learning (Reber, 1993) proposed athletes could pay attention unconsciously, it took minimal attention and athletes do learn during this, but are unaware they are doing so. This theory was supported by Pew’s (1974) work. This highlighted the need for coaches to monitor their behaviour when interacting with athletes, as athletes may process irrelevant information. For example, with a demonstration on how to catch a ball the coach may focus on the upper body movements, but the athletes may unconsciously take in information on how the coach’s lower body is positioned. So a coach must make sure all information modelled is correct even if it is not being focused on. Such
knowledge learnt from implicit learning cannot however be accessed consciously by the athlete, but Masters (1992), and Hardy, Mullen and Jones (1996) suggested implicit learnt skills are robust under stress so can influence athletes’ performances.

Athletes have a limited attentional capacity, so coaches need to be aware of this and act accordingly. This means coaches need to be conscious of how much information they give an athlete, at any one time. This can be through instruction but can also be seen in the drills athletes are given. Schmidt and Lee (2005), Lee, Chamberlin and Hodges (2001) proposed that skills should be broken down into smaller parts rather than practising the whole skill, to reduce the attentional demand of the exercise. This would be useful to do when practising a complex skill that interacts with the environment, as there are many stimuli to focus on which can lead to a decrease in performance. Cote, Baker and Abernethy (2007) also proposed that micro activities can be more beneficial than using whole practises, as the attentional demands of these micro drills are less than when practising the whole skill. Coaches need to consider if breaking a drill down, would be more beneficial for their athletes (Cote et al., 2007). By performing skills as a whole, the information could be too great, resulting in inattentional blindness. This is when athletes focus on one area/stimulus and become distracted from other areas/stimuli they needed to focus on, which explains why performance would decrease. Chabris and Simons (1999) findings supported this idea.

The way in which a coach communicates can also have an impact on the athlete. The ironic reversal theory (Wegner, 1994) suggested that coaches should not use negative statements, such as ‘don’t do this’ or ‘do not think about...’ , as this can result in the athlete doing exactly what he/she has been told not to do. Therefore coaches should make sure they give positive playing instructions, rather than the negative instructions they do not want. Douge and Hastie (1993) looked at what techniques and skills effective coaches needed. From their research it was suggested that coaches needed to give high levels of correction and instruction, provide feedback to athletes, use prompts, a questioning style and manage the training environment (Ford, Williams & Yates, 2010). Cushion and Jones’ (2001) research had the same finding, but also suggested that more questions were used with higher standard coaches.

There are many different ways coaches can change their behaviours, to directly influence their player’s attentional focus or attentional demands. By employing these approaches coaches could try to create an optimal environment for players to perform.
Effective coaching behaviours can be combined with feedback to help emphasise the learning points. However, coaches need to be aware of how the information given will influence the athlete. Holt and Molloy (2009) proposed feedback was a key process that aided learning, and should be considered as a two way process. The key aim of feedback was to enhance athletes’ knowledge of their performance (Holt & Molloy, 2009). It is important the information being given has the correct influence and impact, since coaches frequently use feedback to help athletes change behaviours or skills to reach these targets (Holt & Malloy 2009).

Feedback was shown to help athletes improve performance (Ahmadi, Hasanvand, Heirani, & Sabz, 2011), but too much feedback could have a negative impact (Ahmadi, et al., 2011). If an athlete received too much augmented feedback it will stop them from using their intrinsic feedback mechanism, which they will need to rely on during matches, when they cannot receive external feedback (Ahmadi, et al., 2011). Too much augmented feedback made athletes dependant on the coach for feedback regarding how they played (Masters, 1992; Ahmadi, et al., 2011). Receiving frequent feedback, an athlete’s limited capacity of processing can become overloaded, meaning some information will not be processed and the athlete could miss out on important information. Schmidt (1991) had shown that when feedback was given too frequently, the athlete’s performance became less stable, as they tried to correct small errors that could be a variable of the motor system. If they are constantly given information on small errors in their performance their attentional focus will become internal, which can affect the performance of automatic skills (Chattington, Marple-Horvat, Smith & Wilson 2007). Coaches therefore need to be aware of how much feedback they are giving players and need to make sure that their athletes are not dependant on them for feedback. Therefore it is important for feedback to be a two way process to involve the athletes more. Coaches must also be aware that by working to improve a skill, it can result in deterioration of athlete performance, as their attentional focus has moved from external to internal (Fathi, Saemi & Zarghami, 2012).

The frequency of feedback is important, but research has shown that the timing and scenario also is relevant to the effectiveness of feedback (Chiviacowsky & Wulf, 2005). Chiviacowsky and Wulf (2005) suggested that learners prefer feedback after good trials rather than bad ones. Suggesting that feedback after good trials maybe more advantageous. The research shows that athletes can differentiate between good and bad performances, so feedback after a poor performance could be redundant whereas after a good performance it can confirm their movement was correct. Schmidt (1991) however, proposed frequent feedback after good performances leads to maladapted short-term
corrections. This is when athletes try to correct even the smallest mistake, which can focus their attention internally potentially leading to a decrease in performance. A coach trying to correct a minor part of the skill may decide not to address this, as the consequence of attempting this can decrease the player’s performance in the short term, for only a minor improvement in the long run. This suggested that error feedback helped guide athletes to the correct movements (Schmidt, 1991). These studies contrast with each other and has given mixed messages for how coaches should deliver feedback.

From the research conducted on feedback it suggests that feedback can influence athlete’s performance. There is also a link between feedback and attentional focus. When coaches give athletes information on how to correct a skill, this can get athletes to focus internally and as discussed earlier, this can cause athletes at the later stages of learning to decrease in performance. The coaches need to decide if the benefits of the correction will be significant enough in the long run, even though in the short term the athlete’s skill may decrease. Other research from Kluger and DeNisi’s (1996) on meta-analysis has shown that coaches also need to be aware of directing the feedback towards the performer, instead of the task, as any feedback that does this can decrease performance. This is explained because it moves the athletes’ attention away from task goals and towards higher order self-goals (Beck, Carr & Gregory, 2011). Wulf and Shea (2004) concluded that from the research there is a good understanding of how feedback affects performance but future research is needed to look at how feedback affects attentional focus.
CHAPTER THREE

METHOD
3.0 Method

3.1 Participants

This study’s participants were selected using Purposive/selective sampling (Patton, 2002). The criteria used for this identified if coaches were suitable for the study and which were not. This allowed for in-depth discussions on the relevant topics (Hanton, Croply, Miles, Mellalieu & Neil, 2007). The criteria for a coach to be selected were as follows: (a) all coaches must currently be working within a team sport, and (b) coaches must be coaching at university first team level. This allowed for the players to be at a similar ability, who from an attentional perspective also had similar needs and demands (Francesconi, 2001; Gabbett & Maters, 2011). The age of the participants would also be similar, which was important, as it has been shown to effect athletes’ interpretation of feedback (Barker & Graham; 1987; Nichous, 1989; Fry & Duda, 1997). By interviewing coaches, who coached athletes with a similar age and ability, would make the data collected more valid and relevant for this related group.

A number of coaches were contacted by email and were given information on the criteria needed to participate in the study (see appendix A and B). Out of those contacted, four coaches were selected to take part in the study from a variety of different sports (rugby (n2), football and basketball). Gronek, and Schefke (2011) found that athletes playing different sports have similar attentional needs just transferred into different scenarios, so having coaches from different sports would not affect the results.

3.2 Coach Interviews

The aim of the research was to collect in depth qualitative research on coaches’ beliefs about the affect attention has on performance and how coaches act and interact with athletes, to improve their attention. The data would be collected by using semi structured interviews. This style of interview allowed the interviewer to guide the direction of the discussion but also allowed for the coaches to express their views and explain their actions in-depth (Patton, 2002). Through this style of interview participants were also able to share their feelings that were relevant to the situation (Nash & Sproule, 2011). An interview guide was designed for the study. This enabled the interviewer to ask the same major questions to all participants. But by allowing the use of probes and elaboration questions for each major question, more specific information could be collected if needed (Patton, 2002). Before finalising the questions, a pilot interview was conducted with two coaches who did not participate in the study, with the aims of (a) checking each of the
questions were clear and concise, (b) the question allowed the interviewer to get information relevant to the study, and (c) review the proposed probes and elaboration questions. Greenlees, Hutchings, Thelwell and Weston (2008) suggested reviewing the probes and elaboration questions was important, as they were used to help get more in-depth knowledge and expand participants’ answers. Also the structure of the interview was reviewed to make sure it flowed and was logically ordered. The structure allowed the participants to settle into the interview process.

3.3 Procedure

Coaches were emailed a brief summary of the intention of the study, along with the relevant requirements needed to be eligible to participate (see appendix A and B). This gave the coaches relevant information on the study and allowed them to make an informed choice on whether they would agree to participate. Four coaches responded showing an interest in participating in the study. These coaches were then sent an informed consent form for the study (see appendix C) and after signing it, became the participants.

After the participants for the study were selected, the pilot interviews commenced. Following the feedback from the pilot interview, necessary adjustments were made (see Appendix D), with three questions reworded and after a discussion over one section, two new questions were added to help collect more relevant data. The interview preparation guide (see Appendix E) outlined the content and main topics of the interview and were sent to the participants at least a week before the interview itself. Participants were instructed to think about how these topics could be seen in their coaching (Greenlees, et al., 2008), to help maximise the relevant data collected (Hanton, Cropley & Lee, 2009). Participants were also informed that their personal details would be kept confidential and procedures would be put in place to keep their identities anonymous. Participants were also reminded that they were able to drop out of the study at any point if they chose to. Before asking any question each participant was given the same basic definition of attentional focus. This made sure everyone had a similar understanding of what it was and what it could include (see appendix D). This definition aimed to help with the understanding of the subject and could potentially lead to more in-depth and relevant answers.

After this, the interviews were conducted and recorded digitally. These were conducted in an area free from distractions, in an environment comfortable for the participant (Nash & Sproule, 2011). The terms of the research and confidentiality were reiterated. The interviews were all conducted by the same researcher and lasted between 30-75 minutes.
A transcript was made for each interview conducted (see appendix F for an example). The transcripts were read and reread before relevant scenarios and points were highlighted for use in the data analysis.

### 3.4 Data analysis

The interview transcripts were analysed deductively, with the intention to discover patterns and recurring themes (Nash & Sproule, 2011). The analysis was separated into stages. Firstly the transcripts were read and reread multiple times to allow the researcher to get familiar and immersed into the data. The data was then separated into general themes that were suggested in the literature. The data was then categorised into more specific themes. This was done multiple times for each interview to justify the grouping of the data. The data was then analysed inductively to see if any theme had emerged that was not able to be categorised by previous literature. The transcripts were then analysed deductively again with the new themes, to check no information had been overlooked. After this the themes from each transcript were compared and overall themes were produced.

### 3.5 Trustworthiness

Qualitative research should be judged on its trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Due to this certain measures were taken through data collection and analysis to ensure this. The interviews were all conducted by the same researcher and used the same semi-structured interview guide. This reduced inter-interview bias (Cropley, Miles, & Peel, 2012). Through collecting large quantities of raw data to support the theme highlighted in the literature, helped improve trustworthiness. Lastly, the transcripts were sent to the participants, to confirm whether they provided a true representation of their experiences.

### 3.5 Participant considerations

Steps were taken to keep the anonymity of the participants. Only the researcher knew the identity of the participants involved. The names of the participants were never written down on any documents and were not said during the interviews. No information was used in the study that would compromise the participant’s anonymity.

Participants were reminded throughout the study that they could withdraw at any time. Participants were sent a copy of their transcript to clarify the information used, was what they had said and intended to say.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
4.0 Results and Discussion

The current study aimed to explore how coaches would act and interact with athletes to increase their attention. It sought to gain an insight into coaches’ perception of the effect feedback had on athletes’ performances, as well as how coaches behaviours and their use of feedback helped influence attention. From the interviews conducted all participants stipulated the importance of getting their athletes to perform well, proposing that their coaching was “often outcome-driven”. Discovering what these coaches aimed for, can help to explain the way in which these coaches acted and interacted with their athletes.

4.1 The relationship between attention and performance

The results suggested that athletes’ attention had an impact on performance, with the participants proposing that: “the greater the attention they have, the more likely it is that they will perform better.” This idea is in-line with recent literature, which shows there is a connection between attention and performance (Wulf, 2007; Fathi, Saemi and Zarghami, 2012). The participants inferred that one of the major factors involved in this connection was athlete’s attentional focus. They stated that attention needed to be on correct relevant stimuli for performance to succeed, thereby suggesting if players focused on irrelevant/wrong stimuli their performance would drop. One participant discussed the consequences of focusing on the wrong stimuli:

“They think about getting blocked, which nine times out of ten you change your shot to avoid a block, then you’re not going to make the shot….. Players need to understand that the best likelihood of the ball going through the basket is if you don’t recognise that someone may be blocking you, you just go through your action, you focus on what you need to focus on, whether that’s the front of the ring, the centre of the ring, the back of the ring, and you just shoot the ball”.

Studies into attentional focus have shown it has an impact on athlete performance suggesting it was important to focus on the right thing(s) at the correct time (Gronek & Schefke, 2010), with Wulf and Prinz (2001) results corresponding with this suggestion. The results and literature (Wulf & Prinz, 2001; Gronek & Schefke, 2010), agreed that attentional focus has an influence on whether players are successful performing skills. However the amount of stimuli needed for skill was not identified. Results suggested there can be multiple or single factors to be focused on. One participant discussed the attentional demands for an athlete during attack saying:
“It’s not just a case of reading the player in front of you; it’s a case of reading the entire game and being able to read all situations, reading other players and multiple defensive positions as well”.

This suggested by doing this, athletes were more likely to succeed. In contrast when looking at kicking, a participant gave the player one point to focus on, showing that scenarios can differ in demand and players need to be able to concentrate on multiple or single stimuli depending on what will influence the skill or situation. Gronek and Schefke (2010) also propose the characteristics of the sporting situation determine the focus of attention. Open skills can be influenced by others and therefore likely to have more relevant stimuli to focus on, compared to closed skills that are not influenced by as many factors (Farrow, Pyne & Gabbett, 2008). In practice, coaches need to identify what stimuli are important when performing a skill, as the results and literature suggest this will give the athletes the best chance to perform successfully.

Information collected on attentional focus suggested the participants expressed the importance that an external focus had on athletes. Proposing the right external stimuli will impact on the decisions players make and this influenced their performance. This was a recurring theme throughout the interviews. Below the examples express how external factors affect players:

“All those external factors, are how you play the game”.

“The passing of the ball would be something he would consider to be natural to him. It’s how, when and why he passes the ball, which become the key factor”.

The common trend that emerged showed external focus gave players information to make correct decisions. Games have many open skills involved in them, these open skills are influenced by several factors and require decision making skills to perform them correctly (Farrow, Pyne & Gabbett, 2008). By performing certain skills at the correct time, increases the likelihood of success.

Anson et al. (2005) and Delpech (2012) showed that skilful athletes perform some skills automatically. This is supported by Fitts and Posner’s (1967) work. Schneider & Fisk (1983) suggested automatic movements benefit performance and using an external focus
would not interfere with the automatic processes of the skill (Stoate, & Wulf, 2011). The participants all had athletes who could perform skills automatically. Shown by one participant stating:

“In my head I have those internal movements of being able to move your body, learning how to sidestep, how to move, those sorts of things I assume are generally fairly automatic by the time they get here...Most of mine would be developed on external focuses”.

Anson et al. (2005) agreed, suggesting athletes have the ability to perform automatic movements and getting them to focus on external stimuli was beneficial. The participants suggest that focusing externally is beneficial, as concentrating internally on an automatic skill will inhibit automatic processes. Masters (1992) and Beilock et al. (2002) studies found that golfers would perform automatic skills better while concentrating on a secondary task. Suggesting in practice coaches should actively get athletes to focus away from the skill to help performance of automatic movements. Another example of participants discussing automatic movement and focusing externally can be seen below:

“An outside half passing the rugby ball, the outside half doesn’t focus on his pass....
The passing of the ball would be something he would consider to be natural to him. It’s how, when and why he passes the ball, which become the key factor.”

This explains how external focus is used for automatic movements, agreeing with previous literature (Stoate & Wulf, 2011). Knowing athletes can perform automatic movements could explain why there is emphasis on getting players to focus on external stimuli to improve performance (Stoate, & Wulf, 2011). It has also been shown that an external focus can help athletes perform skills relying on strength (Correa et al., 2010). Schneider and Fisk (1983) and participants suggested it is beneficial to have athletes use automatic movements. Interestingly one coach suggested automatic movements are good, but only if the decision-making element is not taken out. If something is done but not based on what is in front of the athlete it could potentially be a bad thing, this idea was not conveyed in the literature. However this can be explained through research that suggested you need to focus on the correct stimuli to perform well (Gronek & Schefke, 2010), which also enables you to make effective decisions. In practice this means that coaches should actively get athletes to focus externally, as the stimuli from this should decide what action should be taken for every specific scenario, instead of scenarios being generalised and certain
automatic movements being performed each time. Not all participants’ approaches agreed with research (Stoate, & Wulf, 2011) and there were examples of participants consistently refocusing players’ attention internally during automatic movements. For example: “Pass delivery is going really well. Keep it going!” Or not getting athletes to focus on specific stimuli could result in athletes focusing internally, which was shown as debilitating for automatic movements (Stoate, & Wulf, 2011). However both participants portrayed knowledge on the importance of external focus for decision making, resulting in players more externally focused.

Schmidt and Wrisberg (2004) have also shown that performing skills automatically requires less attentional processing than controlled movements and suggests athletes have a greater capacity to focus on other stimuli. This is important as this process has a limited capacity (Schmidt, & Wrisberg, 2008). Results supported this idea: “Very difficult for the players to hold their attention for long periods of time,…. attention isn’t this never-ending”. Attentional processing is making sense of the stimuli around you. Stoate, and Wulf, (2011) showed focusing externally enabled players to make decisions. This was only possible because information processing allowed stimuli to be understood (Abernethny et al., 2007). Attentional processing could help correct movements and was an important skill to help improve performance (Ahmadi et al., 2011). The participants gave examples of encouraging athletes to use this process. This allowed athletes to self-correct. One participant explained: “Also with them I’d assume they’d know the skills as well, and that they should be able to self-correct”. The participants believed attention had an impact on performance, but attention needed to be on the correct stimuli for performance to be successful. Athletes who perform skills automatically or partially automatically need to focus mainly on external factors and not the skills. Lastly, the participants talked about the importance of players using informational processing, as this helps makes sense of their information and helps with decision making.

4.2 How coaches’ behaviours influence players’ attention

Game related scenarios were a common theme participants used during their sessions. They make ‘everything game-realistic’ which included examples and discussions the participants gave, which would focus their attention back to previous games or what to do in future games. Game related scenarios were used for multiple reasons. Firstly as shown, it was important for athletes to focus on the right stimuli (Gronek & Schefke, 2010). By simulating a game scenario, the training and match stimuli are representative, allowing athletes to practice focusing on the correct stimuli. This idea was important as
Abernethy, *et al.* (1998) study suggested focusing on certain stimuli over others was the most important attribute of successful performance. Rushall and Pkye (1990) showed the greatest improvement in performance was seen when all the demands of the sport were replicated. Practical implications suggested coaches should try and allow athletes to practise in game scenarios as often as possible. The participants used this idea to shape their practises, as seen below:

“Then trying to get players to think of external focuses, I’d make sure everything is a game-realistic drill with defence, so their focus is not just … it’ll be away from performing skills, but when and where to use skills and how do I read defence”.

As a by-product athletes become encouraged to focus on external factors that are beneficial to automatic movements (Stoate, & Wulf, 2011). The participants agreed it was important for athletes to focus on the right stimuli, especially as there can be many different stimuli effecting athletes’ decisions during a game. This corresponds with Abernethy *et al.* (2007) research that suggested skilled performance is dependent on effective allocations of conscious attentional resources. Abernethy *et al.* (1998) also agreed suggesting focusing on selective stimuli is important. Using game scenarios allowed athletes to practise focusing on multiple stimuli, shown in the participants’ reasoning for using game scenarios:

“Because there is more than just one thing to think of. As I said about defence, it’s not just a case of reading the player in front of you; it’s a case of reading the entire game and being able to read all situations”.

Having to focus on multiple stimuli puts pressure on the informational processing capacity (Ackerman, 1988). Therefore it would be beneficial for players to have automatic movements, as it is less reliant on using attentional resources (Beilock, Carr & Wierenga 2002; Schmidt & Wrisberg 2004), allowing attention to be on other stimuli and still not effecting players’ performance.

There are multiple stimuli in game environments, but not all will be relevant to the athletes at one time. All participants discussed athletes using selective attention. This skill enabled athletes to access the nervous system’s limited processing resources with relevant information but allows irrelevant stimuli to be blocked out (Abernethy *et al.* 2007). All participants saw this as beneficial as it allows players to focus on the right information, which they believe has a positive impact on performance, supporting the findings of
Camels, and Berthoumieux’s (2004) study. By practising game scenarios, athletes have an abundance of information presented to them and have to choose which information to process and which parts to ignore. The following example illustrates how performance suffers if irrelevant stimuli cannot be blocked:

“Players need to understand that the best likelihood of the ball going through the basket is if you don’t recognise that someone may be blocking you, you just go through your action, you focus on what you need to focus on, whether that’s the front of the ring, the centre of the ring, the back of the ring, and you just shoot the ball. If you start thinking about other things, about your shot being blocked, you’re going to change your form, you’re going to rush and that’s not what you practiced, how the ball goes in. So you’re unlikely to get the shot in.”

Selective attention also becomes useful when players are using automatic movements, as Fathi, Saemi and Zarghami’s (2012) research showed players should not focus internally. Therefore the ability to block out internal stimuli will help performance.

Using different drills and skills improved athlete’s concentration on correct stimuli and could result in a better performance. The participants suggested the need to initiate curtain behaviours to help athletes maintain their focus. This could be seen through their planning of sessions proposing that:

“If you haven’t planned your session fully and in enough detail, the ability of the players to retain attention and focus on what you, as the coach, want them to do, is very difficult”.

When planning sessions participants talked mainly about the drills they would use for their athletes. These suggestions proposed that having a structure and relevant, stimulating drills in sessions made it more conducive for athletes to concentrate. Coaching drills needed to be specific to the players and at the right level. One participant explained why planning drills at the right level was important, saying:

“So it’s a challenge to them every time and I think that stimulates their learning, stimulates their attention, because they have to concentrate. If it’s easy they become sloppy and they don’t really concentrate as hard as they should do.”
All participants suggested that challenging your athletes provides them with a stimulant, thereby making them engage more. However drills need to be set specifically for the athletes. Participants observed a noticeable difference in concentration during training when the drills become harder, and suggested the changes resulted from players needing to focus more on the skill. Beilock et al. (2002) suggested that if a task is challenging there is less capacity to focus on other tasks, implying harder tasks need to be focused on more. Training needs to have an appropriate level of challenge in it, which relates to making drills specific to the athletes (Farrow et al., 2008). The participants proposed there is an optimal level of difficulty, if the skill is too easy athletes will not concentrate, however if a drill is too hard, players lost engagement or felt they could not cope with the challenge so disengage (Farrow et al., 2008). This was shown by one participant who said: “it really becomes a struggle the opposite way and the players get frustrated, they can see that it’s not working so why are we doing this”. So knowledge of your athlete is important to predict what can or cannot be achieved. The implications of this is that coaches need to plan their sessions around athletes’ ability, allowing each drill to challenge them and this will lead to better attention from athletes. This idea relates to zone of proximal development theory (Vygotsky, 1978). When using this concept coaches may distance themselves from the athletes allowing them to use problem solving skills to work out the answer (Chak, 2001) By distancing themselves from the athlete, the coaches also allow them to process information, which was seen as beneficial (Ahmadi et al., 2011). One participant talked about this theory and how he applied it in his session to help stimulate athletes:

“You have that zone of proximity where they’re in that zone and sometimes they’re struggling to come up with the answer, or the skillset keeps breaking down, but I think they need to have that so that they continue to struggle, before they actually have the ‘light-bulb moment’ when it works; as opposed to turning up, they understand the skill, it becomes easy and so it becomes boring, doesn’t stimulate them in any way and then they leave.”

By challenging athletes, coaches help keep them stimulated and engaged throughout sessions. This is important as it will affect what they focus on which in turn relates to performance. The level of difficulty was considered one way of challenging athletes. Participants suggested through the variations of practises new challenges were created. If practises do not vary then athletes can get complacent as one participant describes:

“the first 40 minutes of our session is the same every week, so we know what’s coming, and we’re not being stimulated, which means our attention is dropping off,
we’re getting bored, we’re not performing to the highest standard and we’re getting punished for that, because we’re not at the standard we should be at.”

Keeping players engaged through challenging them, changing sessions and planning, allows the coach to make sessions specific to their athletes, and is more likely to keep them focused (Capa, Audiffren & Ragot, 2008).

The participants used many different behaviours to try and keep athletes engaged in training and to improve their attention for performance. Game scenarios were a concept used by all participants with the reasoning that it allowed athletes to practise and helped them get use to stimuli similar to a game (Rushall & Pkye, 1990). By performing in game related scenarios the players’ attention was mostly focused externally, which helped with decision making and also with automatic movements (Stoate, & Wulf, 2011). Game scenarios have multiple stimuli with some relevant and some irrelevant, so athletes were able to practise selective attention to help perform in this environment. The participants all tried to make the tasks relevant to the athletes’ abilities and showed an understanding of the importance to challenge athletes to help them focus.

The practical implications are that coaches who have athletes who can perform automatic skills should use game scenarios for training. It helps players get used to game stimuli and allows them to focus externally, helping automatic movements and decision making. Selective attention can also be practised as there are an abundance of stimuli in game situations. Game scenarios can also be challenging and different, which has been shown to keep athletes engaged.

4.3 How feedback is used and effects athletes attention

The results suggested focusing on the right stimuli can help with performance and described approaches to help maintain and direct focus. Feedback is another tool that can enhance athletes’ knowledge and performance (Schmidt & Lee, 2005) and can be used to direct attention. Each participant described using feedback to direct players’ attention to certain stimuli, for instance: “Then I’ll ask them to concentrate on what for me, similarly to you, watching the ball onto the foot or watching the ball onto the head”. This description suggested coaches used feedback to try and direct athletes’ attention, mainly related to external focus. This could be done because external focus helped athletes make decisions, it also helped athletes perform automatic movements. The above example had no supporting data proving such feedback could change player’s attention, it was only a presumption made by the participants. Research however has suggested this presumption
was correct (Beck et al., 2011). The results highlighted scenarios when feedback actually changed players’ attention, which had an impact on the performance. This is beneficial as coaches want to improve athletes’ performances. The participants used their knowledge to try and direct athletes’ attention to important stimuli:

“Go to win the header. Shout your name. Then drop off, as if you’re not going to win it, if you’re playing big guys……. Just a little bit of tactical nous, awareness as a coach, just those little tips you pick up along the way that you provide back to your players”.

This scenario shows feedback can be used to help change athletes’ attention and their performance. However if feedback can be used to direct athletes’ attention then it could focus athletes on irrelevant stimuli therefore decreasing performance (Wulf & Prinz, 2001). This idea was seen in the results with participants suggesting if feedback was directed toward the wrong stimuli or given at the wrong time, athletes’ attention could be focused on irrelevant or detrimental stimuli:

“My telling them that “This is wrong, this is wrong, this is wrong, this is why the ball isn’t going in.” isn’t necessarily going to help them. As I said, it may make them get even more frustrated, and think even more about the skill, when really, probably, they just need to relax and shoot the ball and that’s going to give them more likelihood of the ball going in.”

This showed that the participants believed feedback could be used to help change or focus athletes’ attention, which supports Beck et al. (2011) research. An example would be when coaches give athletes key points at the beginning of drills, to help athletes focus on the right stimuli (“For every drill or skill I’ll have specific key points”).

Information given through feedback is important as it helps direct the athletes’ attention but the frequency at which these messages are given are also important. With research suggesting too much can have detrimental effects (Schmidt, 1991).

Participants talked about frequency of feedback and why they used it. The main reason stated was to help emphasise/reinforce information, so athletes would keep the same attention or actions throughout. This idea is shown from an extract of one of the participants saying:
“So by giving them specific key points and then reinforcing those key points throughout they’ll start to understand “Right, this is the right way to do it and this is the wrong way to do it.”

This reasoning for using feedback could be seen in other examples but the intended outcome was the same. Some participants spoke about frequently emphasising the key points so that everybody understood their role. The idea that the frequency of feedback can help emphasise or reinforce a point is clear, but it needs to be used in relevant places. One participant explained how the frequency of feedback should increase when an athlete is learning a new skill, however when a skill is learnt the frequency should drop. This idea relates to informational processing, when an athlete has learnt a skill, they should use information to self-correct and to work out if the desired outcome occurred (Ahmadi et al., 2011). Processing athletes’ own intrinsic feedback can distinguish if a skill has been successful or not (Ahmadi et al., 2011), but novel skills require external feedback to deduce this. So feedback is used to help athletes know what to focus on and draw their attention to what goes well or poorly.

Using feedback enables athletes to gain information from their coaches and the dominant form of feedback discussed by participants is used to direct athletes’ attention. As previously shown this could have a positive or negative effect on athletes. Giving an athlete negative/improvement feedback could make them feel they have to change or improve, which is a challenge. However athletes who are challenged can have better engagement with a task. If the task is seen as too difficult attention is lost (Farrow et al., 2008). In practice coaches must be aware that giving frequent improvement feedback to athletes, they may perceive correcting all mistakes too much of a challenge and will lose attention. As one of the participants says:

“I think if you focus constantly on improvement, improvement, improvement, then that guy could have that “I’ve got a lot of improvements to make here!” and that could have a negative effect”.

These results have agreed with current research, showing feedback can refocus athletes’ attention (Beck et al., 2011). Repeating messages can help keep athletes focused but frequent negative feedback could reduce athletes’ engagement. Interestingly, participants also suggested the way feedback is given could also impact on an athlete’s attention. All participants agreed that the way feedback is given is important and will affect athletes’ engagement and motivation. The participants talk about how their behaviour will change to cater for different athletes. A basic example of this was shown in the example below:
“Some players can accept feedback through a big, huge bollocking, because they’ll respond. Others need an arm around their shoulder and a constructive, sit down … I do it quite often”.

These ideas made participants adapt their behaviours when talking to certain players, as they believe the way feedback is given had an effect on athletes’ attention. Dhurup and Surujlal’s (2012) research showed coaches need to change their behaviours to meet athletes’ preferences and this can be transferred to how they give feedback.

The affects of feedback have been discussed above, as have the positives and negatives of using it. These factors have an impact on when coaches felt feedback should or should not be used. The participants suggest “it’s that coach’s ability to decide the type and when it’s appropriate to give that feedback”. Proposing it is then up to the coach to interpret each situation to determine if feedback is needed. Participants gave many scenarios when feedback should be used. These suggestions have been broadened into different generic situations. At the start of training and at the beginning of drills participants have suggested giving information to the athletes would be seen as a positive, as it could influence players’ attention and then that attention can impact on their performance (Holt & Malloy, 2009). The participants also suggested players are more attentive if they have a structure to follow. The other time feedback was suggested as beneficial, was with learning new skills or when completing a key point successfully. Both of these ideas relate back to identifying that the outcome was positive, which helps athletes with future informational processing.

The participants gave general scenarios when they felt feedback should not be used. These were made on factors relating back to performance or how attention can affect performance. Firstly participants suggested that if a player was performing well feedback should not be given, their reason being they did not want athletes to focus on automatic movements (Stoate, & Wulf, 2011).

“If we’re doing a team run, we will set a number of plays up the field, we’ll go through the team run, if everything really works well and it all flows, and I can see the girls are happy, then I’m happy because we’re delivering what we want to deliver. There’s a sense of achievement, I do not see any reason then”.

Participants explained the roll of feedback during a game, suggesting it should only be used occasionally, as it had limited impact on players during a game. One participant suggested: “In games, I think the research out there suggests that the coach remembers about 25% of what he sees, so I would be very reticent about giving feedback”. This illustrates that his behaviours are linked to Franks and Millers (1986) research. By only
remembering 30% of what you see, could mean that feedback given may get players to focus on the wrong stimuli and this would decrease performance. As these participants feel feedback should not be given as frequently in games, they have started to try and incorporate this into their sessions through using game scenarios but by also reducing feedback given during this time: “we always finish off with a game scenario, so 8 v 8s with two goal-keepers and then we’ll let it flow”. The reason behind reducing feedback in training was due to the nature of the games they play, as one coach said you can’t stop a game, so by practising in such conditions, training becomes more game realistic.

The final suggestion for when not to use feedback was when athletes perform badly. The participant’s reasoning behind this was that athletes know when they have performed badly and by telling them this, it will not help. It could in fact hinder them, as thinking more about the skill afterwards can conflict with automatic movements (Ahmadi et al., 2011). This approach conflicts with some of the other participant’s views, suggesting feedback should not be given after a good performance (Schmidt, 1991).

Information given through feedback needs to be catered to the personality and needs of the individuals, as there are many different preferences on how to receive feedback. The feedback used can help focus athletes’ attention and therefore was important for coaches to use effectively, if not it can decrease athletes performances. The frequency of feedback can help enforce key point for athletes to focus on or learn. Research has contrasting views on whether feedback should be given after good or bad performances, seen in Ahadi et al. (2001) research. This means there cannot be practical implications for this as the results are divided. The participants suggested it was down to coaches’ experience to decide when feedback is best used, with one participant suggesting: “There is no perfect blend, I just think it’s the character of the coach understanding the characters of the players”.

This study had some limitations. It has looked at the connection between attention and performance, however there are other factors that can influence performance that have not been identified or taken into account, that can influence and impact on performance. The participants involved, all had a similar standard and age of athlete, so the implications found in this study can only be used to guide coaches with similar athletes, as the effect of using it with less abled athletes are unknown. The study had not specified gender of the participants and therefore a comparison between the results of both genders could not be made.
4.4 Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should look more at the link between feedback and athletes’ attention, with the emphasis being on when coaches should and should not give feedback. The research has had contrasting views and this can be seen with the participants interviewed as their answers were conflicting. Having a clearer understanding of this aspect would help influence coaches behaviours and give them advice on when feedback should or should not be used in practice. Other interesting information was seen through the collection of data. All participants talked about a link between pressure and athletes’ attention, suggesting that pressure can influence attentional focus (Bakker et al., 2010). All participants talked about steps in training that were taken, to try and lessen the negative effects of this. Research has been carried out on the way pressure can affect attention (Bakker et al., 2010), but further research into the strategies coaches use to lessen the effects of pressure on attention would help to improve knowledge on the subject, as well as provide practical implications for coaches.
5.0 Conclusion

The study aimed to investigate how coaches act and interact with athletes to manipulate and improve attentional focus. The perceived relationship between attention and performance, and its impact on coaches' practice was also investigated. The key finding of the study was, participants thought attention could be used to help improve athletes' performance. This was mainly achieved through athletes focusing on correct and relevant stimuli. These thoughts were in tangent with the literature (Wulf & Prinz, 2001; Gronek & Schefke, 2010) which all suggest that focusing on the right stimuli, at the correct time would aid performance. From these beliefs coaches would try and create an environment/situations where they could help maintain attention as well as manipulate athletes' focus. The participants used game scenarios and drills that challenged athletes, to help focus their attention on correct stimuli, as well as maintain it throughout the session (Beilock et al., 2002; Farrow et al., 2008). This corresponds with research which proposed skilled performance was dependent on effective allocations of conscious attentional resources, which game scenarios allowed athletes to practise. These stimuli were dominantly external which has been shown to help improve automatic movements (Stoate, & Wulf, 2011), aiding the athletes performance more. Certain skills were put in place (selective attention) to help athletes only focus on correct stimuli, as this was shown to be advantageous (Camels, & Berthoumieux, 2004).

The results of the study suggested that the interaction between coaches and athletes was important, with the majority of feedback directing athletes' attention to certain stimuli, as the processing of these stimuli was considered advantageous to performance (Abernethy et al., 2007). However, the results collected from the coaches relating to, when and where to give feedback, was contradictory, which matches the information given by the literature (Ahadi et al., 2001) and this specific area would need to be reviewed and studied in more depth to give practical implications that coaches, in the future, could employ in their sessions.
REFERENCES


APPENDICES
Dear ….

My name is Oliver Bishop, I am a third year student studying Coaching science. I am looking for Coaches working with university athletes to take part in one semi structured interview for my dissertation project.

The aim of the study is to review how coaches act and interact with athletes to maintain or improve players attentional focus.

I have attached the participant information sheet which will give you a better understanding of the project, as well as an understanding of what your role as a participant would be. If you are interested in this study and would like more information please contact me at st10001387@outlook.uwic.ac.uk

Many thanks for taking the time to read this proposal

Oliver Bishop
APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT’S INFORMATION SHEET
Research Participant Information sheet

Project title: How do coaches influence and improve athletes' attentional focus through feedback and coaching behaviours in team sports?

This information sheet provides a run through of:

- The background and aim of the research,
- My role as the researcher,
- Your role as a participant,
- Benefits of taking part,
- How data will be collected, and
- How the data/research will be used

The purpose of the information sheet is to inform participants what the study is about, displaying transparency for the research process and helping participants make an informed decision on whether to participate in the study.

Background and aims:

An athlete’s performance is crucial to their success. Research has proven that the attention skill and focus of an athlete has a large impact on their performance. I wish to study how coaches try to improve athlete’s attentional skills/focus through feedback and their coaching behaviours.

My Role as the researcher:
This study will involve me (Oliver Bishop) using a semi-structured interview with the participants. Before this a guide of the interview will be sent to each participant outlining the key areas of the interview.

Your role as the participant:
Your role is to try and answer the questions during the interview as honestly as you can, with questions relating to how you interact with participants and how your coaching behaviours affect and improve players’ attention. As participants you are not pressured to answer all the questions, if there is any reason why you don’t want to answer a question you do not have to.

Benefits of taking part:
From the information collected in this study, a better understanding of what coaches do to improve the attentional skill and focus of their athletes. This will be concentrating mainly on the feedback and coaching behaviours coaches show. From this information a comparison can be made from the attentional literature, theories to what happens in practice. The study can also give coaches guidelines on how to help improve their athletes’ attention. I am happy to share the finding of this study with any participant of the study.
How data will be collected:
As mentioned earlier this research will collect data through the use of semi structured interviews.

How the data/research will be used:

In volunteering to be a participant in this study, you are allowing me to use your responses from your interview in my research. Your data will be completely anonymous but parts maybe used to give evidence for the study.

Your rights

As a voluntary participant you have the power to enter or withdraw from the study at any point. You have full control over the information you give this research and have the final say on what anonymous information is used in the final report.

Protection to Privacy

During this study measures will be put in place to hide your identity in any transcripts, notes and the final report. No information that would allow people to know who you are will be used. Furthermore any personal information about you will remain Confidential according to the guidelines of the data protection act (1998).

Contact

If you have any further questions relating to the study, you can contact me on the details I have given below.

Oliver Bishop
50 Gordon Rd
Roath
Cardiff
CF243Al
E: St10001387@outlook.uwic.ac.uk
APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
Informed consent form

CSS reference number:

Title of project: How do coaches Influence and improve athletes’ attentional focus through feedback and coaching behaviours in team sports?

Name of researcher: Oliver Bishop

Participants need to complete this section by initialling each box, if they agree with the terms.

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet provided about this current study. I have had time to ask questions and have found the answers satisfactory. Also I have had time to consider this information.

2. I understand that participating in this study is my choice and can decide to withdraw from the study at any time and do not need a reason for doing so.

3. If I chose to withdraw from the study I understand that our relationship with Cardiff Metropolitan University and our legal rights and agreements will not change.

4. I understand any information I provide in this study maybe used in the reporting purposes but will be anonymous.

5. I agree to take part in this study on Attention

Name of participant: ________________________________

Signature of participant__________________________date _________________

Name of person taking consent_____________________date _________________

Signature of person taking consent________________________
Definition
Attention can be defined as concentrating on one or more stimuli in the environment while ignoring the others.

Section one

A1) Coaches talk about the importance of planning sessions to try to maximise learning for the athletes. What factors do you think influence your planning of sessions?

Probes:
- athletes needs effect the process
- athletes ability levels
- amount of information given.

A2) Coaches have talked about a link between player’s attention and their performance. From your experience can you explain how these two areas impact on each other?

Probes:
- Specific scenario
- Importance of focusing on the right stuff
- Briefly explain how do they know what to focus on

A3) Research has suggested there is a limited amount of information people can take in at any one time. How do you try to reduce the amount of information your players receive?

Probes:
- Discussions
- practises
- amount of feedback given.

A4) After extensive practise of a skill, some athletes maybe able to perform this skill without thinking about them. An example of this that can be seen in everyday life is walking as people don’t think about the body movements needed to do this. What information do you try and get your athletes to focus on when performing these skills?

probe
- Scenario- catching, concentrate on the ball
- Focus away from the skill its self
- Problems on keeping focus on this? (mistakes from players)
- what are the benefits of automatic skills?
A5) people can concentrate on their body movements or outside variables like a ball or opposition. Can you tell me how you get your players to focus on these things and what are the benefits of using each type?

Probes:
External- helps with automatic movements, helps with game awareness, research shows it helps performance
Internal- used for learning or modifying skill

A6. In your opinion what is the ultimate aim when trying to learn a skill and what benefits do you get from this?

Probes:
Get automatic skills
Easier to multi task
Faster reaction time
Limited amount of processing, automatic movements help reduce information.

Section two

F1) After analysing an athlete’s performance, coaches will normally give the athlete information through feedback. In your sessions when would you think it be beneficial to give a player feedback and when is it best not to?

Probes:
• Good/ bad performance
• Time spent on skill
• Ability of the athletes

F2) There are many positives from using feedback with athletes. However in your experience have there ever been any negatives from using feedback?
One weakness could be that if a coach gives feedback to frequently athletes may become dependent on the coach.

Probe:
• Frequency
• Athlete process information
• Change attentional focus
• Automatic movements
• What happens if you use negative information “don’t do this”

F4) feedback from coaches can be used to change a players actions. What information have you told your athlete for them to try and change their action?

Probe:
• Focus of attention
• Reduce players information load
• Give them information on the skill

Section three
B1) In your practices how do you use single or multiple goals to try and help athletes improve a skill.

Probes:
- In specific practice or over many
- Benefits
- How do you think this effects players attention

B2) Sticking with practices, when refining or practising a new skill coaches have suggested that you can break the skill down into smaller parts. Can you talk to me about situations you have used this and the effects it had on the athletes?

Probe:
- complex skill, new skills, skills their not good at
- amount of information presented to athlete

B3) One of the primary jobs of a coach is to improve athletes performances. Coaching is a complex skill as it has to meet the differing needs of each athlete. As a coach how have you changed your approach to meet such individual athlete needs?

Probe:
- why did you feel you needed to change,
- how did these changes help the players.
- Ability levels
- Amount of information you give athletes

B4) How and why would you try and get your athletes to use selective attention?

Probe:
When is it important and when is it not?
APPENDIX E

PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW GUIDE
Participant Interview Guide

The interview aims to understand how coaches are influenced by their athletes’ attentional focus and how coaches try to maintain or improve their athletes’ focus. The interview should take between 40-60 minutes. The interview will take place in a location agree upon by the interviewer and the participant and will be electronically recorded for analysis.

**Structure**

Before the interview starts there will be a quick recap on what your rights are as the participant and how the interview will work.

The interview is broken down into 3 main sections:

- **How coaches feel athletes attention effects their coaching**
  This will include:
  - Planning session
  - The relationship between attention and performance
  - What players should think about when doing a task

- **How do coaches talk to athletes to help influence athletes attentional focus**
  This will include:
  - Positives and negatives of feedback
  - How is feedback used to change a players actions

- **How do coaches behave and act to improve player’s attentional skills**
  This will include:
  - How do the drills you use effect attention
  - How do you change your behaviour to improve players attentional focus

At the end of the interview there will be time for the participant to give any other information that they think is relevant that has not yet been discussed.

If you have any questions about the interview you can contact me (via email) before the interview or ask me when we meet before the interview.
APPENDIX F

EXAMPLE TRANSCRIPT
Interviewer: Thank you for agreeing to take part in this interview. I’d like to start by reading you a definition of attention which will help with some of the answers to my questions. “Attention can be defined as concentrating on one or more stimuli in the environment, while ignoring the others.”

Q: Coaches talk about the importance of planning sessions to try to maximise learning for the athletes. What factors do you think influence your planning of sessions?

A: Initially it will be the level of the participants, how good they are, how much information they can take on, especially in the drills as well, so I’d have to think about what drills I’m going to give them and then how I can keep them engaged throughout. So, specifically in my coaching, I make sure I don’t give them line drills, because it ends up with the naughty kid (there’s a lad called Ralph in our group, who basically, unless he’s doing something, he will be distracting others, so for him specifically, I don’t do line drills, because as soon as he gets to the back of the queue – he’s gone!) so you need to keep everyone engaged; and I think that’s probably the same for a lot of people as well, keep them going, try not to have them waiting around too much, keep them active. That helps their attention.

Q: You have talked a bit about how players’ ability will affect your planning of sessions. Would you be able to elaborate on that a bit?

A: I’d also be thinking what I want to get across to the good players and what I want to get across to the not-so-good players, because of their development and the stage they’re at in their development. So I have players coming in from decent programmes and players who have never played in a good programme before, they might be starting anew with basketball. They might have just played local league, some might have played national league. So I have to think (1) what drills do I need to give, so that they’ll give everyone what they need. Also (2) I have to think of my coaching points and I plan my coaching points as well. Which ones will be good for the players who know quite a lot and then those that the weaker players will need as well.
Q: Some coaches talk about the possible link between players’ attention and their performance. From your experience, can you explain how these two areas impact on each other?

A: Initially I always start with the planning and I’d make sure that within my planning I have drills which allow players constantly to think, which are constantly giving them a stimulus. So I tend to avoid line drills because you’ll end up with players at the back of the line messing around, or if I did use a line drill, then I’d have it so that they’re not stopping at all, so they come straight into one line to do another action. I’d also tailor it around players as well, so if I know that particular players struggle with concentration, I may plan specifically for them, so that I can maybe give more attention to them and be aware, to keep on top of them, keep their attention.

Also I try to challenge them as well and keep it game-specific, so even if we’re doing a drill with no defence, I’ll always try to make the players think about what it would be like in a game, what would the defence be doing in a game, so they’re not just thinking about the skill, but also they’re trying to think “How would I apply it to a game scenario?”

Q: You’ve spoken a lot about how you try to use drills etc to keep players’ attention, so you obviously think attention is a big part of performance. Could you talk about the impact attention has on players and their performance during training, or during a drill?

A: It’s sort of logical – the greater the attention they have, the more likely it is that they will perform better. For example, we have at the moment in our national league team a very talented team, but the first 40 minutes of our session is the same every week, so we know what’s coming, and we’re not being stimulated, which means our attention is dropping off, we’re getting bored, we’re not performing to the highest standard and we’re getting punished for that, because we’re not at the standard we should be at. But, of course, our attention isn’t there, so they work hand in hand. The standard drops.

Q: So you’re saying that when you’re not attentive your performance drops off and you feel there is quite a strong connection with that.

Research has suggested that there is a limited amount of information that people can take in at any one time. How do you try to reduce the amount of information your players receive?

A: Initially, if I’ve got beginners or people new to the game, I’ll break the skills down and put them into their components, so for shooting I’d start with the feet, then work with
the knees and break it into its individual components. Maybe one week I’d just focus on one, I’d recognise the players getting better and being successful at it, then I’d add the next piece of the puzzle. Then I progress it through that. It’s all about breaking down, allowing them to get the hang of it and once I recognise they’ve got that part, I can move on further.

At the other end of the spectrum I’d have more advanced players, so I’d limit their knowledge, not necessarily to how to perform a skill or what they need to do skill-wise, but I would limit to game situations and game scenarios, so I wouldn’t overload them with skills and game scenarios. I’d make them understand “This is the skill. You know how to do the skill. This is where and when you use it.” That’s what I’d focus on with the better players. Also with them I’d assume they’d know the skills as well, and that they should be able to self-correct and understand what their key points are and know that if they perform the skill wrong, they should know it and I shouldn’t have to tell them about it.

Q: Research has suggested there is a limited amount of information people can take in at any one time. How do you try to reduce the amount of information your players receive? You’ve talked about the difference between beginners learning a new skill etc and how you’ve also tried to reduce it with expert players. Could you go into more depth about that please?

A: I would probably limit it to one or two key points per skill. So, for example, with shooting, I might say “Get your feet correct. Your feet need to be like this. When you’ve got that down, then we’ll move on to the next thing.”

Q: After extensive practice of a skill some athletes may be able to perform this skill without thinking about it. An example of this is in everyday life is that when somebody’s walking they don’t think about their body movements. They can just do it. What information do you try to get your players to think about when performing skills like this, which are automatic?

A: I’d probably get them to not think too much about performing the skill because they should know it, but more about when and where to use it. So reading the defence and knowing when to shoot the ball, for example, or when not to shoot the ball, as part of the skill, rather specifically the key coaching points of shooting the ball.
Q: Would you be able to give me an example of that, how you do it with a drill or anything?

A: With shooting I’d make sure that the defence is involved, for one; then try to get them to zone the defence out. So, if they’re a good shooter, they need to be able to ignore the defence and just be able to focus on – the coaching point I’d give is “Just focus on the rim. Keep your eyes on the rim and try to zone out anything else around you.”

Q: So that explains how a basketball player focus on the hoop when they’re shooting. What do you feel happens when they focus on other things?

A: Initially, if they start to focus on the defence, they might look to change their shot. They might think about getting blocked, which – 9 times out of 10 you change your shot to avoid a block, then you’re not going to make the shot. Also you might start to change or think too much about how you’re performing the skill and not relaxing, which, again, is going to inhibit your normal shot, because you’re going to ….. Hopefully in training you’d get the sort of environment where you’re relaxed and you shoot the ball as normal. If you then start to think about defence and start to tense up, that’s when you’re going to be out of what you normally practice. Again, you’re more likely then to miss a shot.

Q: People can concentrate on their body movements or external factors, like a ball or something similar. Can you tell me how you get your players to focus on this and what are the benefits of using each one?

A: Internally I’d break down skills and drills. If I wanted to break down a skill I’d give them specific coaching points for them to focus on. For example, shooting the ball again, I might get somebody to focus specifically on flicking their wrist; but I’d also break down drills so that players don’t have defence or do a 3 v 0, when teaching screening, where there’s no defence and then I can get players to focus specifically on how to perform a screen without the added factors of “Where’s the defender I have to screen, or what angle do I have to screen at to get my player open?” An example of that would be just getting them to focus on running shoulder to hip, which is how you run off a screen, and run that repetition, so that by the time they get into a game, it’s automatic, they don’t have to think about doing that. So then they can start thinking about the defence.
Q: **Just quickly, what do you think are the benefits of focusing on your body? Could you just sum up for me, internal factors?**

A: It allows you to just concentrate on one thing, or specific things I’d ask of players. That way they’re overloaded too much and they can try and get those right.

Then trying to get players to think of external focuses, I’d make sure everything is a game-realistic drill with defence, so their focus is not just … it’ll be away from performing skills, but when and where to use skills and “How do I read defence? How do I attack defence? If the defence comes at me one way, what do I do to then beat them the other?” Because the offence always has the ball, so you’re the one with the advantage, which means that whatever the defence does, you can always do something to counteract it. So I’d get that external focus to be on – if something comes at me how do I go against it and how do I beat it? Making everything game-realistic and making those coach points of “How do I beat defence?” rather than skills.

Q: **In your opinion, what is the ultimate aim when trying to learn a skill and what are the benefits you get from being at that level?**

A: The ultimate aim at the very end of it is to be able to perform it at full speed, initially, and perform it in the right situations. Working through that: first of all you want the skill to be performed correctly. Then you can start to build up the speed of it and finally look at when it’s used, but really the ultimate aim is full speed and performing it in the right places.

Q: **Talking of performing it in the right places, how would players get to this stage, of being able to know when it’s right or wrong?**

A: Playing, just playing the game, a lot of players will learn when to do the right thing and when not to do the right thing. Then, also obviously through coaching as well, with coaches making a point of “When do you do it and why do you do it?”

Q: **This section concerns your interaction with your players and the way you give them feedback. After analysing an athlete’s performance, coaches will normally give that athlete information through feedback. In your sessions, when would you think beneficial to give a player feedback and when it is best not to?**
A: It’s best to do it when someone’s continually doing something wrong. That’s when I’d normally step in and give feedback. If they know they’re doing it wrong or they’re frustrated with themselves, I generally won’t give feedback, because they’re just going to get more annoyed with themselves. Maybe when it’s a new skill as well, so, teaching new skills I may give more feedback than normal because they need constant reminders of how they should be performing it. Then once they know the skill, feedback will be given not on “How do you do the skill?” but “How do you read the game?” and progress it further like that.

Q: You spoke there about sometimes players knowing when they’ve made a mistake and they start getting frustrated. Could you elaborate on the reasons why you shouldn’t give feedback there and if you did, how it would affect them?

A: Yes, an example would be if they’re consistently missing shots, and this again goes back to thinking internally. You want them just to get confidence in shooting: some days the ball just doesn’t go in. My telling them that “This is wrong, this is wrong, this is wrong, this is why the ball isn’t going in.” isn’t necessarily going to help them. As I said, it may make them get even more frustrated, and think even more about the skill, when really, probably, they just need to relax and shoot the ball and that’s going to give them more likelihood of the ball going in than if they tense up and think about all these different things I tell them.

Q: As we said, there are many different positives from using feedback with athletes. However, in your experience, have you ever seen any negative effects from using feedback?

A: In my experience, more as a player, being in the team, it can sometimes push players over the edge. I’ve definitely experienced that, where a player has gone on the court; they’ve made one mistake and the coach has pulled them off to tell them that they made the mistake! This player had been getting this throughout the season and he just flipped and he went “Sod it! I’ve had enough.” I don’t know if he stormed out of the gym, but he definitely stormed to the end of the bench and wasn’t very receptive for the rest of the game. We might have needed him in the game, and if you’ve got him in that mind-set, he’s not going to be the best for you.
Q: Feedback from coaches can be used to change a player’s actions. What information have you given your athletes for them to try to change their actions?

A: I’d always start with the key points. For every drill or skill I’ll have specific key points that I want them to work on consistently, and as much as possible, those won’t change. So by giving them specific key points and then reinforcing those key points throughout they’ll start to understand “Right, this is the right way to do it and this is the wrong way to do it.” And if they consistently hear how to do it right or wrong, then, I hope, they’re going to start reacting to that and that’s where you get the change, particularly if they do something correctly and I praise them on that, they’ll try to get that positive reinforcement through “That’s how I do it correctly. I’ll do that again next time. Coach will see that I do that again next time.” They’ll start to get a bit more understanding of “That’s how I do it, I’m doing it right.” And feel good about themselves.

I’d also simplify or complicate things if necessary, so if a player is finding what I’m asking them to do, too difficult, then I may simplify it down to maybe taking away defence or taking away a defender or breaking down the point I want to just one specific thing they’re finding difficult, so if I have 3 key points but they were really struggling on one of them, but the other 2 were fine, I wouldn’t talk to them about the other two. I’d just get them to focus on that one key point and hopefully that would reinforce them again, to change their action and do the right thing.

Q: You gave a great point about how you limit the amount of information you give them and that enables them to focus on one specific thing. Could you give a drill that you’ve done which you’ve simplified to help the player to focus on something?

A: I may start a shooting drill with pressure, so a pressured shooting drill with some defence in. If they’re really struggling with keeping their form, with keeping the correct shooting technique under pressure, I might take that defence away, allow them to try to get their form back, try and get a rhythm, then I might actually introduce the defence again, afterwards, once they’ve got it right, to see if then they can take what they were doing right, into the defensive situation. So I may regress it, but then progress it back again once they’ve got it right. And maybe, if they’re struggling again, I may regress it again and work like that until they’re at a point where they can work with defence all the time.
Q: That’s the end of feedback. We’re now moving on to your behaviours and the practices you use to change people’s attention. In your practices how do you use single or multiple key points to try to help an athlete improve a skill?

A: I think I mentioned it previously, if I have an athlete who’s struggling I may break the skill down to one key point, or if they’re doing well with a couple of key points, I may specifically draw upon the one they’re struggling with. I may also break things down so that the player would have that key point throughout the session as well, so that they are reinforced throughout the session; even when the focus of the session is away from it I may draw upon it and try to get them reminded throughout the hour and a half session. Because you might do 15 minutes on one thing, where you want them to focus on something; but then I want them to carry that all the way through, so I may drop that key point in throughout the session as well.

With multiple points, I’d give those to my more advanced players or maybe players who have picked up all the key points I want them to. I may then start layering on more key points for those I’ve observed who are doing it correctly and don’t need to think about it, to keep them engaged as well. As we said about attention, OK, I may be giving key points to the group but one of those players, those key points may not be relevant and therefore I need to stimulate them and cater to their needs as well by giving them more key points. Also I’d have to use multiple key points in game situations; because there’s the defence and there are multiple factors in defence, I’d have to give more than just one key point for them to be able to work against the defence, so I’d have the player on the ball – “How do you read that defence?” – then I’d also have the players off the ball and how do they read their defence, which is off them, as well. So I’d have to make sure they know all the positions within a 5-man set, where they all need to be in multiple situations they may encounter in playing offence.

Q: Could you just quickly sum up what you consider to be the positive factors of using multiple goals?

A: By giving multiple goals you increase your productivity, so, although I may have certain key points, I may be able to add on more to those if players are doing it correctly. Also in multiple key points I can get players to really think about what they need to do in a game.
Q: You were talking there about using multiple key points in a game. Why do you think that’s beneficial?

A: Because there is more than just one thing to think of. As I said about defence, it’s not just a case of reading the player in front of you; it’s a case of reading the entire game and being able to read all situations, reading other players and multiple defensive positions as well.

Q: Sticking with practices, when practising skills coaches have suggested that you can break a skill down into smaller parts. Can you talk to me about situations where you’ve used this and what the effects are on the athletes? I know we’ve already given some examples with shooting, so can we use shooting again and also screening. Can you explain a bit more about how you think breaking the skill down helps the player?

A: I think I mentioned earlier that it allows them to be successful and confidence is massive, so if I give them one specific thing to focus on and they do that correctly, then I praise them for it and say “Good job!” it’s likely to reinforce positive actions. In the opposite situation, if I give them lots of things to focus on and then they weren’t able to do even one of them right and I wasn’t able then to give them any positive feedback, it’s not likely to be good for their development. Also, with beginners, you look to focus on just the one key point, because it’s easier for them to just concentrate on that. Once you’ve then got that and are able to do it every time, you can then start to build the puzzle, as such, so once they’ve got that, you can start talking more about their arm positioning and then you want to build the puzzle so that they can think about one thing at a time and then be able to piece it all together and have the complete skill. Then you go to the other end of the spectrum, which is that you always aim to teach to always make a game realistic. So an example was shooting, you want to make sure that players learn to shoot with defence rather than without it. So, thinking about the whole game and not just basic smaller parts. That’s at the other end of the spectrum.

Q: To clarify what you said there, you said it is beneficial to break the skill down into smaller parts with beginners because you feel that the person will benefit from having just one practice to focus on, one thing to concentrate on. But then, for people who can perform a skill well, you feel they should have the whole thing put together and not broken down?
A: Essentially, yes. So at the end it won’t be beneficial for someone who understands the skill, to break it down, because, going back to the shooting example, they need to think, not just about the certain aspects of being able to shoot, (1) because it’s likely to be unsuccessful, because they know how to shoot, but also (2) they need to be able to think about several things at a time. It’s a multi-dimensional sport; there’s defence, there are your own players, there’s the situation of the game, so it wouldn’t be beneficial for me to break down for a shooter how they’re performing the skill in that situation, particularly, for example, for myself I need things more about “When should I be shooting the ball and reading defences and being able to shoot with defence” rather than just certain aspects of shooting, the broken-down aspects of shooting.

Q: One of the primary jobs of a coach is to improve athletes’ performances. Coaching is a complex skill and you have to try to tailor the way you behave to meet different athletes’ needs. As a coach, how do you change your approach to meet such individuals’ needs?

A: Initially I would have to recognise what the needs of the athlete are. So the most basic aspect of that is “Are they a skilled performer, or are they not?” Then I can start to tailor my coaching points towards them, so if I have a less skilled performer, I may tailor the key points more towards a beginners’ end, but I also need to cater to the needs of the advanced players and give them coaching points which will stimulate them. Also with advanced players, I may give them more key points. Additionally, I have a thing about more psychological things as well, so confidence is a massive thing, especially with good shooters. The best shooters are those who are confident, so I may have to tailor my coaching differently between players, to enable them to stay confident. So, even if a shooter may miss a shot, or it’s a bad shot, I may still have to give them praise, keep them confident and try to link in my coaching points towards being positive. But then you may also have players who you can shout at and get lairy, but they can always hear what you’re telling them, rather than that you’re just screaming at them. One example is a coach I used to work with. He was very vocal and very loud and he liked to shout and scream. Some players would just see the shouting and screaming and switch off and be scared by it; whereas others would listen to the words he was saying and not necessarily the way he was saying them. So I think you have to tailor that towards players as well, it’s recognising which ones you can scream and shout at and that will give a positive reaction. Or which players, just taking them to the side and giving them a quick talk or a quick point in the ear is probably more beneficial to them, than screaming and shouting at them in
front of the whole group. So, yes, I recognise the needs of my players and try to work around them, rather than just what I like and how I want to coach, I recognise their individual needs and coach them as individuals.

**Q:** Finally, how and why would you try to get your athletes to use selective attention and what do you think are the benefits of this? Selective attention is when you can get someone to focus on one or more stimuli, but they can ignore others. So they might have some stimuli they can focus but others they can shut out. An example would be in cricket, if a fielder’s about to try to catch a high ball they’ll concentrate on where they are in relation to the ball. They will then concentrate on the ball, but they won’t concentrate on the crowd or the batsmen running.

**A:** Shooting is another great example for that, if you’ve caught the ball and you know you are going to shoot, you have to shut everything away then, because you’re going to have someone flying at you, so you need to make sure that the players understand that it doesn’t matter whether you get your shot blocked, which is a massive thing; people will change their form so that they don’t get their shot blocked. Players need to understand that the best likelihood of the ball going through the basket is if you don’t recognise that someone may be blocking you, you just go through your action, you focus on what you need to focus on, whether that’s the front of the ring, the centre of the ring, the back of the ring, and you just shoot the ball. If you start thinking about other things, about your shot being blocked, you’re going to change your form, you’re going to rush and that’s not what you practiced, how the ball goes in. So you’re unlikely to get the shot in.

**Q:** How do you try to make sure these players focus on those things? You said there “So that they just focus on those.” How do you make sure, in your coaching, that they try to do that?

**A:** There’s probably one thing I’d remind them of, keeping their head and their eyes still. As a coach there’s one thing you can see, a deviation in the eyes when someone will shoot. A lot of times players will shoot and then follow the ball, when it’s always coached that you look at your target and stay on your target, because whether you look at the ball, or you don’t look at the ball, the ball’s going to go where you’ve shot it. And it’s always good just to keep really focused on that one aspect. Always try ultimately to get it into a game situation, where they have to read everything in front of them, so make sure players shoot with pressure, so that they get used to that. I think one of the things I picked up
recently is that players should learn to be comfortable being uncomfortable. So, players should be comfortable shooting the ball when there’s someone right on top of them; or when there’s someone flying out on them, and they should also have the opportunity to practice and always try to practice in that situation as well, so design sessions around getting players to try to shut off the things which may be negative to them.

Q: What do you think happens when a player gets into a pressured situation, without being very familiar with the feeling of it? What do you think happens then?

A: They pretty much break down, unless they thrive in that situation and you can just chuck someone in there and they can just do it, they can deal with the situation and they can just perform those skills without having to practice the situation, but most likely if they haven’t been put in that situation and they haven’t practiced it their skills are going to start changing and they’re not going to be automatic; they’re not going to be the way you’ve worked on them. For example, passing the ball you could probably put in when you’ve got a defender right up in your face and they’ve closed down your space and you don’t have a lot of room to move, you’re not going to get a basic, easy chest pass, which is straight from me to my man. So, if players haven’t practiced in that situation you can’t expect them to be able to perform the skill and get the pass on time and on target if they haven’t practiced it like that. If they’ve just practiced running alongside a partner with no defence, they’re not going to be able to put that skill in a situation where there is defence.

Q: That’s the end of the interview. Thank you for answering all my questions.