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CARDIFF METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY
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CARDIFF SCHOOL OF SPORT

DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF SCIENCE (HONOURS)

SPORT DEVELOPMENT

2014-5

***LEFT BACK IN THE CHANGING ROOM: A STUDY
EXAMINING THE PLAYER SELECTION PROCESS IN
ASSOCIATION FOOTBALL***

(Dissertation submitted under the Coaching area)

Yzabelle Taylor

ST20019710

***LEFT BACK IN THE CHANGING ROOM: A STUDY
EXAMINING THE PLAYER SELECTION PROCESS IN
ASSOCIATION FOOTBALL***

Cardiff Metropolitan University

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Abstract.

The purpose of this study was to examine the coaches' perceptions of player selection in elite level association football. Specifically, the considerations, decision making and methods used were unearthed using qualitative data collection methods. Utilising purposive sampling techniques, semi-structured interviews were developed to collect data from three coaches. Through thematic analysis, findings suggested that, coaches who have closer relationships with their players outside of training sessions, find it harder to make decisions such as, dropping an individual from the starting eleven. Also, the only input that can solely affect a coach's decision about playing an individual is the physiotherapist. Finally, coaches alter their discourse when making player selection decisions to suit the situation. Such as, if a senior player who has a vast amount of experience is going to not be included in the starting eleven. The coach will treat these with more respect than a player who is young and inexperienced. The final section includes the future research directions such as, player perspectives of the player selection process as well as other employees of a football clubs views on the managers actions surrounding player selection.

Key Words: Player selection, Team selection, Coaches decision-making processes

CHAPTER ONE:
INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction.

Sports coaching has been described as a complex, dynamic process which is in a state of instability (e.g. Woodman, 1993; Saury and Durand 1998; Potrac et al. 2002). Despite this, traditionally, coaching was viewed as a rationalistic endeavour and portrayed as a 'knowable sequence' over which coaches were presumed to have command (Potrac, Gilbert & Denison, 2013). More recently, researchers have argued that this an unrealistic and irrational view because such environments are relatively uncontrollable, incomprehensible and often filled with contradictory views and beliefs that cause some tension (Jones & Wallace, 2006). Cushion (2007), however, believes that these values can in fact be the impetus behind the way a coach deals with the functional complexities involved in player selection, and are a major element of the interpersonal and man-management aspect of the role. Aside of these publications, there is a dearth of research examining this topic, and discussions on selection have not had a high profile with academics.

Coaches' working behaviours are often the centre of attention for sources such as the media but little is really known about the true working behaviours and practices carried out by these coaches, and the reasons for them (Potrac, Jones and Cushion, 2007). Indeed, it is not uncommon for print and social media to scrutinise a football manager who has dropped a player from the starting line-up. Potrac, Jones and Armour (2002) argue that coaches are far more than 'technicians transferring knowledge', and that in this day and age, social interactions between coach and player are inextricably linked to both the opportunities and constraints of human interaction. Fernandez-Balboa (2000) backed up this point by saying that coaching is not just about making connections between athletes and coaching methods. It involves connections between athletes and life in general. They go on to note that an appreciation of this would be valuable to any coach's repertoire.

Evidence suggests that even the most successful coaches find it difficult to cope with the relentless demands of being in the role of head coach at a competitive football club. An example of this is Pep Guardiola. In 2012 he announced that he would be leaving his role as manager at FC Barcelona despite having been very successful at the club winning three La Liga trophies, two champions' league titles, two UEFA super cups and two FIFA world club cups. When interviewed, Guardiola in 2012 stated: "I am drained and need to fill up. The demand is high and a manager must be strong, time has taken its toll and I do not

feel that I am capable of making the correct decisions for the club at this moment in time". Making correct decisions for a coach is vital as this can be the reason they are successful and not successful in the eyes of the media, supporters and the club itself.

Decision making is very broad concept, however it is one of the most frequent and significant decisions to be made by any football manager/coach is which players will be in the squad for each game, and more importantly, who will be in the starting eleven. Indeed, as Canada (2008) suggested: athlete selection is a foremost responsibility for every coach and that every coach has perceptions about how they reach their decisions. Each coach utilises a different technique when selecting the squad and starting line up; some coaches may wait until the changing room on match day to select the starting team, some may announce the eleven a few days before. Schmepp (1993) argued that to fully understand the way in which a coach works, it is necessary to explore and analyse the coach's knowledge base.

Reilly and Williams (2003) said that football is one of the fastest growing sports in the United Kingdom. With participation growing so does the competitiveness within the sport. Coaches often have a number of players to choose from, making the decision of team selection increasingly more difficult. Furthermore, in keeping with the power ridden nature of sports coaching, not all the attention within the selection process should be focused on the coaches as the players play their part too. On a game day, eleven players are selected by the coach in the starting team, all ranges of views, emotions and opinions will be flooding the changing room. The players that have not been selected will more than likely want to know why they are not playing in each game and will be feeling great disappointment (Carey, 2014). Due to this, how a coach communicates with these players is an important component of the coaching process. Naming the team is thought by some to be the easy part of a coach's job. The hard task comes after in the form of; conversations with players, media, etc. Gardner et al. (1996) however found that coaches that take part in these conversations and fully apply themselves into a leadership role, in forms of social support and feedback, tend to have more cohesive teams.

1.1 Aims and Objectives.

Given the dearth of previous research that exists, the purpose of this study was to examine coaches' decision making and their perception of how they select a team to compete in elite level Association Football. Using qualitative data collection methods,

involving semi-structured interviews, this overall aim is going to be achieved by addressing a series of interrelated objectives;

- To explore the factors a coach considers when deciding team selection and why they cogitate these.
- To compare each of the coach's methods when announcing the substitutes, and why they adopt that chosen technique method.
- To comparatively analyse each of the coaches' approaches in light of relevant theory.

**CHAPTER TWO:
REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

2.0 Introduction.

Jones, Hughes and Kingston (2008) along with other researchers have agreed that coaching is a complex and multi-faceted activity, which involves a high number of different findings over a range of different topics within the coaching process. The literature surrounding these findings has been criticised (e.g. Jones et al. 2006). Criticism of the suggested findings has been focused on the idea that coaching is not a knowable sequential course of action (Jones et al. 2008).

The idea that coaching can be delivered in an unproblematic way and accepted by the athlete is a very simple picture, and is far from what actually happens in the Sports Coaching world. Especially in football as Van Lingen (1997) explained that a coaches aims from a training session or a match will vary according to and reflecting the ages of players and level of football.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine existing literature that is relevant to this study, and highlight where this work fits in relation to the greater body of work examining sports coaching. Starting broadly, this chapter will narrow off to focus on the importance of this research. It will address general coaching research regarding the movement from a rationalistic to a complex view of coaching. To then begin narrowing down the variables involved in team selection. For example, discourse, decision making, social aspects and contextual variables will be considered. This will show exactly where the research from this paper fits. Each sub section will include a brief introduction and description followed by an explanation of the purpose of the review that follows.

2.1 Movement from rationalistic to a complex view of coaching.

This section aims to discuss and examine the existing literature that inspects coaching moving from the rationalistic to a complex view. Harrison, Preece, Blackmore, Richards and Wilkinson (1999) previously described coaching as a complicated process that requires interactions from not only the coach but also from the athlete and the environment. Existing literature also continues to agree that coaching should be an ongoing process such as Lyle (2002). However, due to this it means that no coaching framework has yet been created to be applied to all coaching situations, scenarios and at all levels (Jones *et al.*, 2002; Lyle, 2002). Greene and Grant (2003) continues to describe coaching as a collaborative, solution focused, result orientated process where the coach facilitates the enhancement of performance. As well as the learning and personal growth of an individual. Result orientation in coaching is an important aspect for coaches to be

aware of. Hall, Otazo and Hollenbeck (1999) spoke about result orientation in depth and undertake analysis of an executive coaches in sport. Hall et al. (1999) said that coaches must be aware of what is going wrong (i.e. losing) in order to make the changes to a team or individual. In an individual sport such as tennis, it is the player themselves must change a way they play in order for the individual to improve. However, in football the coach/manager is the one responsible for making the decision to make a change in tactics or substitute/ start another player. This is rarely straight forward and highlights even more that the coaching process can be seen as complex. Coaching can be a tough job, as everyone who has tried it can attest. Goals are inherently challenging, variables within the coaching process are many and dynamic, and intended outcomes can never be an inevitable conclusion (Jones and Wallace, 2005).

In an article written by Ives (2008) the theoretical and practical issues of coaching were explored. In other words the aim of the paper was to find out if the coaching process is as each as it is made out on coach education courses and if it can be fitted into any coaching models. The paper argues that goal orientated approaches to coaching generally have a different approach to coaching than personal development approaches. However, in the conclusion Ives (2008) finds that no definite answer can be made as to which approach is better and that further research needs to be undertaken in areas such as goal focused coaching.

Coaching efficacy plays a part in becoming an effective coach. Being effective can be measured through results or participant satisfaction and improvement. Coaching efficacy has been defined as “the extent to which coaches believe they have the capacity to affect the learning and performance of their athletes” (Feltz, Short and Sullivan, 2008). A coach can effect a player through a range of ways. This idea has been explored by a number of scholars. However, Mahoney, Gabriel and Perkins (1987) found that motivation amongst athletes is an interest to study. They found every athlete is motivated in different ways and it is down to the coach to know how to perform this appropriately. Duda and White (1992) completed a study surrounding goal orientation and how motivation from coaches and how highlighting the fact of wining can effect an athlete’s performance. In this case study the athletes were skiers. Duda and White’s (1992) work left room for research to be replicated amongst high level athletes in team sports.

2.2 Team/player selection

2.2.1 Discourse

By definition a substitute is something or someone that takes place of an 'other' but continues to provide the same inherent function. In sport, a substitute is a person who stands in as reserve for another competitor during a game, to replace a competitor according to the rules of the game. (Ryall, 2008). Substitutions can be made by managers for a range of different reasons: to replace an injured player, to replace a tired player, to enable a manager to apply a change of structure or tactics and finally simply, just to run down the clock at the end of a game. The FIFA rules of the game for football allow for a manager to make:

“Up to a maximum of three substitutes may be used in any match played in an official competition organised under the auspices of FIFA, the confederations or the member associations.” (Laws of the Game 2013/2014, 2013)

If a player at a club is always unused he or she may eventually start to feel more like a spectator than a player. This is because the player would have joined the football club with the aim of being actively involved in matches; if they are constantly an unused substitute then may begin to start feeling redundant and/or disaffected (Ryall, 2008). For a substitute once being told that they are on the bench from either a coach or manager, to complain would exemplify the disaffection. However, the decision for a player to be on the bench is a choice made by the coach and the substitute does not have the freedom to challenge this decision. An example of this is Lucas Podolski. Carey (2014) published a report which spoke about the player being unhappy that he was not playing Podolski was quoted as saying “I’ve had to wrap myself up warm in my winter coat with my hat and scarf on to watch the others playing” he continued to say that that he wanted to play football so what is he supposed to do? Say he is fine and just ride his contract out. Football players may find themselves in this situation throughout their career. How are they supposed to deal with it? Can a coach be an aid to a player who is in this position? Research has not yet been published to address these questions.

Within elite level football the mental toughness of both player and coach are massive factors in the coach-athlete relationship. A study undertaken by Gucciardi, Gordon, Dimmock and Mallett (2009) explores elite coach’s perceptions of how coaches can facilitate and also impede the development of mental toughness. Within the study eleven

coaches were interviewed and five key areas of developing mental toughness were found. Discourse between player and coach was one of these key areas. Gucciardi et al. (2009) continued to say that further research needs to be conducted to find the positive and negative impact coaches have when developing mental toughness through discourse and how a coach can become an expert at this area of coaching.

Coaches, like teachers, do not work in isolation; their effectiveness depends on individual and group interactions (Côté and Gilbert, 2009). This means that to be successful in coaching coaches have to regularly interact with their players, assistant coaches and a variety of other professionals. It is important for coaches to do this so that they are continuously developing their interpersonal knowledge base; so that they can communicate effectively and appropriately. However this in mind Côté and Gilbert (2009) continue to say that when a coach is communicating with their players they should not be communicating in a way that might encourage players to separate their sporting lives from “real life”. This is because coaches should use techniques that promote citizenship qualities. This paper discussed this but didn’t elaborate on how this should be done it merely just stated the facts.

Smither and London (2003) conducted a study using 400 managers from a range of sports. These managers worked with an executive coach who improved the way the managers were communicating with their athletes. Each coach in the study was found to have improved, and this led to a resultant improvement in performance from their athletes. Gonzalez (2004) also conducted a similar study to Smither and London’s (2003) but sampling only 12 participants. Gonzalez found throughout his study that for a participant to be successful in his or her sport a coach needs to; command respect, work collaboratively, act authentically and use a discursive rather than instructional approach. All of these aspects can be communicated to an athlete through various types of communication. This was not covered in great detail within either study.

A study more specific to the research looking to be covered by this study is, Cushion and Jones (2006) their study examined power, discourse and symbolic violence in professional youth soccer. Within the research coaches were found to be communicating in a controversial manner with their young players. However, Cushion and Jones found that the coaches themselves thought that their behaviours and actions were legitimate and the coaches justified their dominating discourse as being in the players best interests. The players involved in this study believed this to be the case also. They testified that they found the managers discourse motivational. The players thought they needed to show that

they were responding to what the coach was saying or this would jeopardize their place within the squad. Bourdieu (1991) is influential within Cushion and Jones's (2006) work. Bourdieu's notion of submission is reflected also in Cushion and Jones findings because, the players who succumbed to the values and followed the regime the coaches were putting in place received a more positive experience in return. This research was carried out in youth football therefore leaving opportunities to research this area within adult professional football.

Cale (2004) acknowledged the fact that a substitute is part of the squad, and that a team is the whole team, not just the starting 11. Cale (2004) continued to say that the first players whose name is on the team sheet on a match day, should be as motivated as the last substitute. Cale (2004) said that if the whole team is motivated then the team is more likely to be cohesive, i.e. stay together and work for each other. Saying all of that Cale's (2004) final point was made that the substitute does not have to be happy that he/she is not playing, they just have to appreciate the fact they are part of a team and that their input is important. A successful coach will communicate this effectively to his/her players.

2.2.2 Decision making.

Goleman (2003) found that the most effective leaders are those with a high level of emotional intelligence. A person may have all the attributes to be a good leader such as being incisive, having an analytical mind and having endless ideas. However, if they are not emotionally intelligent then they will not make a good leader. This theory can be applied to coaching. If a coach cannot make the right decisions and have the emotional intelligence to make the decisions then they will not be a good coach. A case study written by Jones, Armour and Potrac (2003) provided an in depth understanding of some of the ways an elite football coach has constructed their knowledge of coaching and how they continue to construct their knowledge. One of the main ways he talks about building his own knowledge as a coach is 'professional know how' this is the flexibility expert coaches need to have to be able to deal with problematic and unexpected tasks. He continues to speak in the case study about how a coach has to make decisions about what's working in a team. He doesn't go into much depth about this. What's working in a team could be the training sessions, the coaching staff and the decisions made by the manager. One of these decisions is team selection. This paper from Jones et al. (2003) leaves a gap in the literature to investigate team selection issues a coach may face.

Giske et al. (2013) carried out a study with the aim of investigating a soccer coaches decision making styles in relation to elite and non-elite coaching experience and level of playing history. The findings from the study were that coaches who had elite playing history tended to be more rationalistic when making decisions. This therefore suggested that there was a link between playing history and coaching ability. Giske et al. (2013) suggested further research should be undertaken into how coaches make decisions in different contexts and a clarification of strategies for facilitating decision making in coaching.

Extensive knowledge is considered a primary characteristic of those who become expert coaches (Côté and Gilbert, 2009). Santos, Jones and Mesquita (2013) conducted a study with the aim of exploring the practice of expert coaches from the perspective of orchestration. With specific aims of how a coach can manipulate contexts and relationships towards desired ends. The study interviewed five elite Portuguese coaches from a variety of sports. Santos et, al. came to the conclusion that coaches carefully and strategically consider their behaviours. Especially the behaviours they carry out that concern gaining respect. Wallace (2007) supported this point by saying coaches instigate, plan, organize, monitor and respond to evolving circumstances in order to improve a teams or individuals performance in a sport.

Lingen (1997) considered the process of substitutions within football. His work focused on youth football and mainly came to conclusion that a coach must include all players fairly, as results are less important and the football is more on the basis of taking part. However, Lingen (1997) did discuss that between the ages of 14-18 year olds that a coach should be more result orientated. Therefore, saying that the strongest team should be fielded. Lingen (1997) added that after the game the coach should always explain the reason why the player is not playing. This was not supported with any academic literature. Consequently, this left a gap within research for Lingen's theory to be further investigated and questioned within the realm of adult football as well as youth football.

2.2.3 Social aspects, contextual variables

Coaches are known to fulfil many different roles including leader, psychologist, friend, teacher, personnel manager, administrator, fundraiser and role model (Côté, 2006). Many researchers have written papers emphasizing how coaches learn and how they grasp an optimal learning environment. Streaan (1995) conducted research with youth sport coaches. He described youth sport as a "developmental intervention". He suggested that research

had already been conducted on coaching behaviours and participation motivation within youth sport. However, the dynamics of the context had been ignored. He suggests that situational factors have an effect on youth player's experiences such as roles of parents, and the cultures and rules within the participants clubs etc. These factors can effect a coach's decisions and thinking. This research was conducted in a youth environment. Therefore, this also leaves a gap within research for research to be conducted on adults, and more specifically within football.

Walsh (2004) conducted research surrounding the development and application of expertise used by elite level coaches. Walsh said that research previous to hers regarding coaching behaviours had mainly been from an athlete's perspective and from observing coaches behaviours in context. Walsh found that only coaches can provide insights into their own histories, learning, goals, beliefs, and decision making processes and only they can decode the complex interactions that they face in the dynamic context of their coaching. Following on from this finding Walsh carried out research on the following topics; effective coaching behaviours, coach training and accreditation and coaching history and influences. Walsh's research was carried out over a range of sports and with a range of coaches, this made it non-specific to one sport i.e. football.

Lyle (1994) believed that coaching was a process which involved a rational approach to the improvement of competitive performance through a planned programme of competition and preparation. Lyle believed that this happened through a direct intervention of coaching strategies and manipulation of contextual variables which effected player preparation and performance. Lyles (1994) paper contended that a systematic approach to coaching meaning that variables were controlled such as; goal setting, planning, monitoring and regulation meant that the participant's objectives were met more efficiently. The paper spoke about a coach's decision making process and how it is dependent on intuition. Lyle (1994) discussed how other papers have provided ill-founded judgement on a coach's decision making process and that each coach develops their own way of making decisions and this is grasped from knowledge-in-practice. Meaning that a coach in each environment will make different decisions based on who they are working with and where they are working, not by religiously adhering to coaching methods taught on a coach education course. There is potential to expand on this study looking at specific decisions a coach has to make as Lyle (1994) does not cover this.

CHAPTER THREE:
METHODOLOY

3.0 Introduction

The overarching aim of this study was to examine a coaches' perspective of the player selection process in elite level men's association football. In addition, the study aims to examine the range of factors that the coach must consider when making their team selection decisions. The study also examines coach's methods towards announcing the substitutes before an elite level football game. Finally, the study provides an examination of types of discourse a coach used throughout the process.

This chapter will first justify the chosen methods for this research, then provide an outline of the chosen methods used to collect and analyse the data, the choice of participants and the procedure that was carried out. Finally, issues of validity will be justified.

3.1 Rationale and Justification of Method

Scholars have argued that qualitative research involves collecting and analysing data from direct fieldwork observations, in-depth, open-ended interviews and written documents (Patton, 2005). Draper and Swift (2010) further described qualitative research as being extremely diverse offering a large variety of research techniques to collect required data. Scholars agree with Draper and Swift by saying that although the basic logic of a research method will be the same, specific techniques and approaches will vary upon the subject matter. It is important when conducting research to use the correct methods. Kumar (2011) says that research in both quantitative and qualitative forms involves controlled, valid and rigorous exploration and description of what is not known and an establishment of associations that can therefore permit an accurate prediction of outcomes under a given set of conditions. This is established from identifying limitations in knowledge previously described in Chapter 2. There can be limitations to qualitative research papers as small samples are often used and this can make it harder to generalise results to a greater audience. However, generalisation can still happen within small samples. Despite this, Jones (2004) states that qualitative methods can also provide a fullness of in-depth knowledge that quantitative data cannot offer.

There is a vast amount of research and literature examining and discussing coach and athlete relationships however, there is little discussing coaches' reasoning towards decision making. These studies such as Smither and London (2003) have been part of quantitative research and due to this did not allow for in depth and detailed examination of the true feelings from the coach. Due to this, it is necessary to perform a study using

qualitative methods to gain the best possible understanding of a coach's perspective of the selection process.

3.2 Semi-structured Interviews

Drever (2003) suggested that Semi-structured interviewing can be a very flexible technique for small scale research. However, Drever (2003) said that it is not suitable for studies that involve a large number of people, but is very helpful in small studies. Clifford, French and Valentine (2010) unpicked semi-structured interviews even more by describing them as verbal interchanges, that attempt to elicit information from another person. This occurs through the use of a pre-determined list of questions created by the researcher. Semi-structured interviews are probably one of the most commonly used qualitative methods (Kitchin and Tate, 2000). This form of qualitative research method is well suited for exploring attitudes, values, beliefs and motives of an individual therefore, meaning it is a good technique to use when talking about sensitive issues.

3.3 Participants

Sampling is a very complex issue in qualitative research as there are many variations of qualitative sampling described in the literature and much confusion and overlapping of types of sampling, particularly in the case of purposeful and theoretical sampling (Coyne, 1997). Many of the most frequent misinterpretations relate to the disparate meanings and usages of the terminology. Kumar (2011) says that the type of sampling strategy used will influence the researcher's ability to make generalisations from the samples findings. A large amount of qualitative studies use purposive sampling to gather small amounts of participants. Purposive sampling allows for the researcher to choose participants with a specific purpose in mind. (Marshall 1996).

The participants used for this study were as defined as elite this is because all three head coaches were at professional men's football clubs from the English Football League. All coaches were over the age of 18 and had a minimum of a FA Level 2 coaching license. Informed consent was obtained from the coach and the players prior to the commencement of the study.

3.4 Procedure

The head coach of an elite football academy and two elite men's' football teams were emailed with information regarding the aims and objectives of the study, and to ask for permission to be interviewed for this study. Having agreed to take part in the study, a meeting was arranged with the first coach (Coach Martin). At this meeting an overview of

the study and intentions were conducted. After this meeting it was agreed that an interview could take place at the training ground in an interview room and a specific time agreed by both coach and interviewer. Gratton and Jones (2004) argued that it is agree that it was important for a coach to feel at ease and in familiar surroundings when the interview was taking place. Once arrangements for the first interview had been finalised Coach Terry and David were then approached via telephone and times, dates and locations were arranged to conduct the recorded interviews.

In line with the study's objectives, a semi-structured interview guide was developed by the researcher. All interviews were recorded using a Dictaphone. When the interview was complete the researcher then transcribed the interview verbatim and analysed the findings. Every participant had the same key questions to answer throughout the interview, but the fact semi-structured interviews were used gave flexibility in how the questions were asked and were useful when exploring a coaches individual views towards the selection process. The interviews were loosely structured and controversial in order to maintain adaptability to the individual's experiences (Paasivaara and Lassenius, 2011).

3.5 Data Presentation and Analysis

The interview was firstly transcribed verbatim and then analysed inductively by searching for emerging patterns and themes (Gibbs, 2007; Roulston, 2010). Marshall and Rossman (1999) suggested that when conducting qualitative research both the data collection section and data analysis are brought together coherently to interpret the findings of the data. The style of data analysis used was thematic this is because it helped to reduce the amount of raw or unwanted data. Roulston (2010) describes thematic data analysis as the type of analysis that is achieved by categorising data and using 'labels' to title sections of chosen data that are similar. Therefore, within this study all transcribed interviews were read by the researcher a number of times to find key themes for this study. Once these had been found a comparison of the coach's beliefs was undertaken and results could be found.

When interviewing all forms of data gathering and analysis were done under the criteria of the aims and objectives of this study. This is because where possible researchers should remain impartial and not allow for feelings, personal history or interviewing preferences to distort the data.

3.6 Validity, Reliability and Trustworthiness

Silverman (2006) suggested that the absence of verification can lead to problems in the credibility of data found within research. Therefore, it is important that every measure is taken to ensure all data found is trustworthy. Patton (1990) says that any research needs to be credible in order to be useful. For research to gain credibility it is important that the findings are valid, reliable and accurate. Patton (1990) continued to say that a credible research requires the researcher to remain neutral throughout the whole process of the study. This means the researcher must not try and prove a particular perspective or manipulate the data to arrive at a predisposed truth.

The transcriptions of the tapes underwent a process called “member checking”, this means that a copy of the transcripts were sent to the participants. This allowed for the participants to ensure that their thoughts and opinions being used in this study were the truth. The transcriptions were checked against the audio many times to ensure that the data was reliable. Validity is described as truth: interpreted as the extent to which an account accurately represents the social phenomena to which it refers (Hammersley, 1990:57). During the interviews no leading questions were used to probe untruthful answers. This ensured that no bias influenced participant’s answers.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Flick (2007) says that the awareness of ethical issues and concerns has grown considerably in the last decades in correspondence to qualitative research. Christian (2005) supports Flick’s views and says that there are several basic principles to ethically sound research. These basic principles are:

- Informed consent; meaning that nobody should be involved in the research as a participant without knowing what the research entails and without having a chance of refusing to take part.
- Deception of participants. No false information surrounding the project may be given to the participants.
- Participant’s privacy should be upheld at all times. This includes confidentiality.
- Beneficence
- Accuracy of the data and interpretation must be the leading principle no alterations or fraud of the collection should occur

Upon gaining an understanding of Christian's (2005) basic principles to ethically sound research it was necessary to fully inform the participant of the study of what the study is going to consist of and gain fully informed consent. This study will use all participants who are over the age of 18. The interviews require informed consent as the content of the interviews explore personal feelings and thoughts of the coach being interviewed. Consent is needed as the coach may not wish to have these emotions shared with another person (See Appendix A). When making contact with the participants the researcher outlined the contents and objectives of the proposed study. At this point the participants who wished to continue and take part were given consent forms which included information surrounding issues such as participant confidentiality. Alongside, Cardiff Metropolitan University ethical considerations, participants were told that if at any point within the study they wished to withdraw they could. Finally, consent forms were signed by the participants and returned to the researcher.

CHAPTER FOUR
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Introduction.

The following chapter will present the themes developed from the interview data. Here, an attempt is also made to bring together ideas highlighted in the previous chapters then evaluate and discuss them in the context of this study. In analysing the interview transcripts, themes were developed in light of the stated aim and objectives. A discussion has been produced alongside theoretical underpinning and quotes of reference from the coaches interviewed within this study. Recommendations for a coach's future practice will then be given.

4.1 Coaching behaviours when announcing substitutes.

During this study each coach displayed different techniques when naming a starting team, four key themes were found throughout the undertaken interviews. These being decision making, influences and conflict, discourse and power. Power was discussed in keeping with Jones et al. (2002) theories.

4.1.1 Decision making toughness.

Abraham, Collins and Martindale (2006) described coaching as fundamentally a decision making process. Gilbert and Trudel (2004) found that although coaching is being increasingly recognised as a cognitive and decision making process research surrounding this issue is still limited. Meaning that all aspects of a coach's decision process has not been researched. Within this study all three coaches said that the decision process within their role at each club to be difficult. As Martin (one of the participants in this study) summarised: "Only 11 can play and there's only 16 that can be involved in the match day squad. So the challenge is picking the right team for the right reasons". The fact that the coach could only pick 11 player and had to disappoint at least five players from which the manager had felt that they had built a relationship with had a different effect on each coach. However, as Potrac et al. (2007) described a desire to win from each coach was evident. Especially from Coaches David and Terry who tended to take a very autocratic approach to decision making within their team: David "I'm the manager I make decisions" and Terry "It's my team I have autonomy, I make the decisions and I don't like them questioned."

However, throughout the interview with Martin, it could be argued that his approach to decision machining was very different. Especially on the topic of team selection: "Picking a team on a week to week basis within a first team environment is very difficult". It would seem here that he finds this part of his coaching job to be tough. Further investigation

surrounding his statement found that he likes to build up a close professional relationship with his players. This could be down to the fact that they are 18 years old. Alongside Jones (2003), coaches who have built up relationships with player find it difficult to disappoint participants. Terry recognised this by saying: “As a coach I think you have to ultimately disappoint people and leave them on the bench and you have to let them know why?”

Coach Terry had a very distinctive approach to coaching. He states his rules to players when they join his club and says what he expects and what he doesn't expect. He doesn't engage with his players outside of the football club i.e. go out for dinner with players he likes to keep it very professional. This is one reason that he didn't find disappointing players as difficult as coach Martin did. Each manager throughout the semi structured interview process found both themes of selecting a starting eleven for each game and the process of releasing players from the club the toughest decisions they had to make. However it was evident, that they knew the final decision was down to themselves and if the correct choice was not made it would be their heads on the line.

Saaty (1990) along with several other scholars have found that decision making is a natural process, and that predicting potential outcomes is imperative. This is done by breaking down the different structures of the choice a person has to make. For the purpose of this case study the factors a coach has to consider are; players technical, tactical, physiological and psychological ability. If a correct prediction is succumbed by the coach he/she will have made the correct decision for their team. However, like every person a coach cannot be expected to make a successful decision 100% of the time. Terry was aware of this and said: “On the football pitch I don't look at any of my decisions when the game is going, like making substitutes I don't look at them as making difficult decisions, they are a natural process. I'm open to know that I could be wrong.”

Upon interpretation and further discussion of that statement from Terry, it was apparent that he thinks very thoroughly before a game about who is going to be in his starting 11 and once he has made that decision, he feels comfortable presenting his choices to his team. He has options in his head that he has planned for each circumstance throughout games. This is a helpful process as when it comes to making substitutes during a game he can handle the decision making process without becoming anxious.

4.1.2 Influences and Conflict.

At each professional association football club it is more than likely that there is more than one member of staff that is influential within the first team: for example; the manager, assistant manager, physiotherapist etc. David supported this: "I've got a first team coach and an assistant manager and a goalkeeper coach, and obviously we're in regular contact."

With the more people involved in the decision making process more ideas are founded, this can be seen in both a negative and positive way. Crisfield, Cabral and Carpenter (1996) found that coaches develop their own natural style, which inherently reflects their personality, knowledge and experience. In relation to coach collaboration, Crisfield et al. (1996) found that it is vital for coaches to work together to ensure effective training and coaching programmes and ultimately contribute to the achievements of the participants goals. However, these findings were not supported by all the coaches within the study. For example Terry said: "Ultimately the decision lies with me and I will stand by my decision even if four out of five support staff think he shouldn't play".

However, all three coaches were in agreement when it came down to input from the physiotherapists. Tommy said "the one person I will listen to and he will make a decision for me is the physio". Medical information relating to an injured player is useful for coaches as they are then able to make an informed decision as to whether a player can train or play (Pike, 2001). Martin furthered this idea by linking with Potrac and Jones (2009) theories of micro politics and power ridden nature of coaching and saying:

"Sometimes you have, you'll have conversations where the physios will say "look, I don't think he is right to play" and the player will be telling you "I'm fine". And then you have to kind of work to really come to a conclusion which is best for the player and best for the team"

Kidman (2001) discussed that a coach needs to be able to create an environment focused on mutuality, this is important so that the team and the individual can grow together in the same direction, with the same views and vision of goals. The fact that all three coaches took into consideration what their medical staff had to say is proof of this, if a coach makes it clear to their medical staff the bare minimum they need from their players for them to start a game. It is then up to the medical staff to be able to provide the coach with the answers if the player can complete this standard required. If the physios believe that for a player's health and the success of the team an individual is not capable of reaching the

required levels of fitness all managers interviewed agreed that that player would not play the next games. Bringing the player in on this conversation between manager/coach and physios is a technique used by Terry and Martin, this empowers the player to help make a decision. It also, gives the player piece of mind as he feels conversations are not going on behind his back. Smoll and Smith (1989) found that no matter what coaching style is being used by a coach/manager, athletes respond better to supportive coaches as opposed to punitive coaches. This is proved by athletes with more supportive coaches show greater intrinsic motivation, and make better informed decisions. Smoll and Smith (1989) noted that this is important because coaches are more likely to get truthful responses from athletes if they seem to be more supportive. Martin supported this point by saying “I try and speak to the players one on one and try and get honest feedback. I think it’s really important to work with the entire staff and the players themselves”

The opposition is an obvious influence on team selection in all three of the manager’s perceptions. If the opposition pose a threat to an individual this may affect that individuals starting eleven position. Martin spoke about this in detail by saying:

“I think the key again is honesty. So if you talk to that player that might be one of the ways that you get them to realise and get them to learn about their psychological mind-set and the impact it has. So it might be ‘look I am going to be honest with you I don’t think you can handle the situation you’re going to be put in today. So therefore I am not going to start you I am going to take you out for these reasons etc. You’ve got two options, either, if were in this situation again you stay out the team. Or, you do some work to prove to me that you can cope with it and we can teach you how to do that’.”

Having a player in the team that may not be psychologically capable of coping in certain games can be detrimental to the whole team performance. However, Terry noticed this but took a spin on this by saying:

“I would try and flip it on its head and say ‘look lads, remember these lot knocked us off our perch and we’ve got to do the same to them. I’d probably use it as a positive... but I, then I think you’ve got to look in the players eyes and think he’s frightened of that guy I better not play him.”

Martens (1997) speaks about preparation and how playing all what ifs is important to be successful. This is important to ensure coaches are doing their jobs effectively. Planning ahead and knowing the opposition is important. There are many ways of ‘knowing the opposition’ from reflecting on previous games mentally, player analysis and even conversations with other assistant managers and coaches to gain their perspectives.

Within coaching the importance of providing athletes with feedback to correct or reinforce performance is well established (Cushion 2010; Franks 2004) From this analysis coaches can gain an understanding of the opposition's strengths and weaknesses and this can help shape a coach's team and tactics. Terry supported this point by saying:

"I think every manager would be kidding if they said they didn't have a look at their opponent's strengths and weaknesses and try and combat them... an example is... I changed my formation for 20 minutes so I told the players we are going to play this way for 20 minutes then we are going to do what comes naturally to you, yeah I think you do change your tactic. Therefore, it does change your team selection"

Reilly (2011) discussed the fact that football is a game of opinions and that coaches base their tactics and strategies on their own opinion. This is evident in Terry's approach as he has made the choice to change formation for 20 minutes because he feels that from his knowledge of the opposition his tactic will be effective.

4.1.3 Discourse.

Paltridge (2012) suggested that discourse analysis was first introduced by Harris (1952) as a way of analysing connected speech and writing. All coaches use a variety of different types of discourse when communicating with their players. Different factors can change how and why this happens for example age, experience etc. Martin notices this by saying:

"If I am dealing with an experienced pro who I am leaving out a 33 year old who has played 600 league games. I am probably going to show him a little bit more. I am probably going to have a longer more in depth discussion with him as to the reasons why and get him to understand."

Martin is then supported by Terry who says "I take into account a married man with two children has different needs/wants, expectations from his manager than a 17 year old lad who's in our academy." These two coaches have similar views that age of player's demands more respect from the manager in that an explanation is more likely to happen if the older player is not being included in a squad. However, all coaches varied when it came to how and when they speak to players about team selection. Terry said "sometimes the other team know my starting eleven before my team do... I never explain why I have put them on the bench." Upon further investigation it was apparent that Terry took that approach because he likes to be in control and not have his decisions questioned or feel as if he has to justify his decisions. This complies with Jones' (2006) theories of coaches being educators.

As previously discussed Martin had a closer relationship with his players due to this his approach to communicating with the players that he has disappointed varied a lot from Terrys and Davids. Martin said “I always, always, if I was leaving someone out or someone wasn’t on the bench. If they had played the week before or the game before and I was leaving them out then I would always give them a reason why”. The majority of players that Martin coached were under 18, due to this he felt that explanations of his actions would help with the improvement of players in his team. This again ties in with Jones (2006) theory of coaches being educators. He tells players the improvements they need to make and why. This therefore improves not just the individual but the team as a whole.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

5.0 Conclusion

This study set out to examine coaches' decision making and how they select a team to compete in elite level association football. Furthermore, the study sought to explore the factors coaches consider when selecting a team. The study also looked to compare the coach's methods when announcing substitutes and why they chose that method. These explorations and comparisons were explored through the use of interviews with three coaches within men's association football.

Upon completion of semi structured interviews with three coaches within association football, numerous themes and views were discussed. It was found that all three coaches believe that they are in control of their team and ultimately their decision is final. However, the only definite influencer into team selection that can affect a coach's final decision as to who would be in the starting eleven, is the physiotherapist or other medical professionals supporting the team. This study found that it is important for the medical staff to know what a coach expects from a 'fit to play' player. If a player does not meet the minimum physiological standards set by the coach then the player in question will not be selected in the coaches starting team. It was also established by Smoll and Smith (1989) that more supportive coaches allowed for players to make more informed decisions themselves, for example involving health related decisions. Smoll and Smith (1989) theories were supported in this study.

The next key theme that was found was that discourse after the coach has made a decision is important. A democratic style to coaching is well received from participants in this study. All coaches felt that age and experience of players altered how the players would be spoken to by the coach. In this case, the older the player the more respect they were shown. However, it was also found that younger players were also spoken to in detail as to why they were not being played, this is because the coaches felt that it would improve the player as a whole (psychologically and physiologically). More experienced players, would be granted an in depth discussion and explanation from the coach, either before the game or shortly after. In contrast, the younger players would not be told before match day as the coaches felt that it would affect the player's attitude to training. They would be told two or three days after the game to allow for emotions to settle this is one method suggested in Jones (2003).

The final theme found was that coaches that had developed a tight relationship with their players on a personal level, found it harder to disappoint players. For example, not putting

them in the starting eleven. It is suggested that coaches should keep a professional relationship with their team, as this allows for difficult decisions such as team selection to be carried out more effectively. Ultimately, not allowing emotions to blind the coach of sensible decisions for the team as a whole.

5.1 Limitations and direction for future research.

The interviews that were carried out were only carried out on three coaches. To expand on the information found from within the study, more coaches could be interviewed. A comparison of views about team selection across a range of team sports could be carried out to see if the trends do continue. The interviews only captured the views and experiences of coaches and didn't take into account what players thought. Therefore further studies which grasped the athlete's perception of team selection and compared them to the coach's perception would be of interest. Further studies would provide a more established understanding of coaching in an elite athlete and coaching environment.

Limitations to this study were that the findings from this study were based on three coaches' opinions and actions. Not every coach would agree with the findings of this paper as their perception of the team selection process may be different. Also, the coaches were only asked questions the researcher found relevant within the semi-structured interviews. Another researcher may have been able to find out more information by asking different questions to the participants in this study. The data in this study was collected in a professional environment, therefore meaning that time restrictions occurred when conducting interviews. The interviews had to be conducted at a time that suited the coaches, meaning that not all the questions could be elaborated on as much as I wished for them to be.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM



PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Study Identification Number:

Left Back in the Changing Room:

A Study examining the player selection process in association football.

Name of researcher: Yzabelle Taylor

Supervisor: Dr Kerry Harris

Participant to complete this section: Please sign each box

Name: _____ **Date of Birth:** _____

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the participant information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to study the information, ask questions and have had these answered adequately.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am able to withdraw at any time, without giving reason.
3. I understand that information from the study may be used in publication but I will always remain anonymous.
4. I agree to take part in the study.

Signature of Participant

Date

