An Examination of Athlete Lifestyle Support for Elite Youth Cricketers on a National Development Programme

By

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Abstract

There have been calls for more holistic support of athletes (Gilbourne & Richardson, 2006; Henriksen, Stambulova, & Roessler, 2010; Nesti 2006; 2010) and a growing presence of athlete lifestyle programmes (Stambulova & Ryba, 2014) within elite and youth sport settings. However, there remains a need to better understand the concerns for which elite youth athletes seek lifestyle practitioner support, and to better understand the provision of this support within applied contexts (Devaney et al. 2017). The overarching aim of this PhD project was to examine how practitioner support can meet the support needs of elite youth cricketers. This aim was driven by three research questions, (A) What is the nature of and personal meaning ascribed to elite youth cricketers lifestyle concerns; (B) What demand does the nature of concerns place on a practitioner with regard to skills, philosophy of practice and organisational integration; and (C) How does the broader socio-cultural context influence the provision of support?

The study was a uniquely applied, three-year practitioner-researcher ethnographic case study. As practitioner-researcher, I was fully embedded as an athlete lifestyle practitioner within a National Cricket talent development programme for three years. This included, but was not limited to, planning and strategic meetings, training camps, school and county visits, international and domestic tours and matches. The depth of embeddedness provided rich insight of the lives and experiences of the staff, and the players who were aged between 15 and 19. This insight was supplemented by retrospective interviews of players who had previously progressed through the programme. Underpinned by an existential theoretical approach, the project adopted a qualitative research design. Data was collected through observations, field notes, interviews (formal and informal), case notes and practitioner-researcher reflections. Data was thematically analysed (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and drawing on narrative forms of representation, facilitated the creation of 3 creative non-fiction stories of players (composite characters) journey through the programme, anchored by the critical moments (Nesti & Littlewood, 2010) in their journeys. These (evocative) stories, provide insight with a view to answering the three research questions.

The stories highlighted the individual, deeply personal and psychological nature of player concerns that ought to be viewed within the context of each individuals background, life circumstances and adolescent stage of development. The concerns were less about performance or wellbeing, and more about players as people trying to perform, suggesting

that the idea of separating performance and non-performance was a false dichotomy. The nature of support that players sought suggests that the training and personal development of practitioners should be grounded in psychology, inclusive of humanistic/person-centred and existential perspectives. The results also highlighted the importance of self-care and supervision for practitioners due to the personal cost and professional challenges associated with providing care and support. It was evident that effective player support required a high level of contextual awareness that can only be achieved through being embedded in the performance environment. However, this access was not always afforded to me as a practitioner. The reduced access to players reflected the information-dominant expectations of lifestyle support held by significant stakeholders which often under-estimated the relational elements of player support. It is argued that this poses a risk to the recruitment of practitioners and to the enabling of effective player (and staff) support. Similarly, the significant staff turnover restricted the development of positive player-coach relationships which coaches believed was necessary to enable positive player development. Finally, it was argued that dividing wellbeing and performance between support roles reflects and reinforces the false dichotomy of performance and non-performance that acts as a barrier to viewing athlete development as a genuinely holistic entity.

The findings led to a number of applied recommendations. It is argued that athlete lifestyle practitioners have a responsibility to ensure that their work is underpinned by a philosophy of practice that is grounded in psychological theory, and that this should be a driving force behind practitioner's training and on-going personal development. Practitioners are encouraged to engage in self-care and supervision due to the personal and professional challenges associated with providing care and support. It is suggested that programme managers and stakeholders attribute greater value to the relational elements of lifestyle (and other staff's) support and ensure lifestyle practitioner's full embeddedness within the performance context. Finally, it is argued as important for organisations to recognise the false dichotomy between wellbeing and performance and choose to build a support infrastructure that recognises the holistic nature of the athlete's experiences.

"With my mind in the right place, I can go out and play. But if it isn't, it can be really hard"

To the players (and staff) who shared their lives with me,
I owe this thesis to you.

Chapter One

Introduction

There is a growing awareness that sports performance, especially at the elite level, is affected by many personal, lifestyle and environmental factors (Douglas & Carless, 2005). Despite the fact that many of the issues faced by athletes relate to general difficulties within their life, as opposed to specific performance challenges (Nesti, 2006), there has been little research which is overtly aligned with support of such issues or describing what these issues are. However, it is evident that support provision within a diverse range of athlete support programmes has become increasingly holistic, and often now includes specific athlete lifestyle support programmes (Stambulova & Ryba, 2014). As a result of the growing interest in effectively identifying and developing elite talent at an early age (Martindale, Collins & Daubney, 2005), elite youth athletes are now also engaging with these diverse support structures and with the specific provision of athlete lifestyle support. Despite the increasing presence of athlete lifestyle programmes within support infrastructure, the range of concerns for which athletes engage with lifestyle support and the nature of support that is provided, remains absent from the literature. Therefore, we can conclude that there is a growing number of athlete lifestyle support programmes across a wide diversity of sports delivering support to athletes throughout the athletic career, but, that the nature of individual concerns for which athletes engage with this support, and a discussion of how this support is provided, remains absent from the literature. Further, it is reasonable to assume that the nature of concerns that elite senior professional athletes, and elite youth athletes would hold during their experiences would be vastly different and may require different forms of support.

The current research seeks to understand the concerns for which elite youth athletes on a talent development programme engage with athlete lifestyle support. Further, the research seeks to highlight the nature of support required from a lifestyle practitioner in order to provide for these concerns. Finally, it seeks to understand how the socio-cultural and contextual factors at play within a specific sport may impact both the nature of concerns experienced, and the ability of the practitioner to meet them with support. The following literature review will help build the rationale for the research. Firstly, the evolution of career transition literature, which initially led to the creation of athlete lifestyle programmes will be discussed and critiqued. Secondly, the evolution of athlete lifestyle programmes will be

discussed, from their initial establishment in response to sport psychology literature on retirement to their present delivery in elite sport alongside sport psychology support. Particular attention will be paid to lifestyle support within cricket, the context for this research. This will be followed by a discussion of the qualifications, knowledge personal qualities and skill requirements of the applied practitioners who deliver athlete lifestyle programmes. Finally, given the close alignment of athlete lifestyle support and sport psychology support, the blurred lines of role clarity between the two roles will be discussed alongside other perspectives on lifestyle-oriented support within the sport psychology literature. This chapter will then conclude with a summary of the introduction, before outlining the objectives of the current research.

Part 1: Career transition

Athlete lifestyle programmes initially emerged in response to reports of athletes struggling to cope with retirement from their sporting career (Mihavilovic, 1968; Ogilvie, 1987; Bailie & Danish, 1992; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993). Early athlete lifestyle programme, such as the Career assistance programme for athletes (CAPA) (Petitpas, Danish, McKelvain & Murphy, 1992) aimed to help alleviate athlete's anxieties regarding their future and prepare them for a smoother eventual transition out of sport. Career transition literature has since evolved to adopt a lifespan and holistic perspective (Wylleman, Alferman & Lavalee, 2004), and athlete lifestyle programmes have similarly evolved to become an increasingly established element of athlete support infrastructure throughout the career. Therefore, applied lifestyle support has remained closely aligned with career transition literature (Stambulova & Ryba, 2014). Due to this alignment, it is important to review the history and development of athlete career transition literature. This will provide the foundation for a discussion of athlete lifestyle programme development and the current landscape of athlete lifestyle support across the world, in the UK, and more specifically within cricket.

Career termination as a singular event

After observations of elite athletes struggling to come to terms with retirement, and the unsuccessful adjustment of athletes to post-athletic life, researchers began to focus on the retirement of elite athletes and athlete drop-out. For example, Mihavilovic's (1968) survey of 44 Yugoslavian retired former first team footballers revealed that for 95% of those surveyed in the study, career termination was involuntary, sudden and was perceived as being a very negative experience. Further studies articulated the experiences of retiring athletes with traumatic effects including alcohol and substance abuse, depression, eating disorders, identity confusion, decreased self-confidence and attempted suicide (Blinde & Stratta, 1992; Ogilvie & Howe, 1982, Ogilvie, 1987; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Svoboda & Vanek, 1982;). Initial transition theory in sport psychology sympathised with elements of social gerontology and thanatology. Social gerontology, the study of the ageing process, aligned retirement from the athletic career to the process of retirement from the labour force. Thanatology, the study of the dying process, aligned retirement from the athletic career to bereavement or social death (Lavallee & Wylleman, 2000). Whilst this interest was initially useful in stimulating research and awareness of the potential struggles of athletes, such models were thought to be limited in attempting to capture the retirement experiences of athletes for several reasons; firstly, due

to their non-sport specific character; and secondly due to their assumption of career termination as being an inherently negative event. Further, these approaches failed to account for the age difference between those retiring from the labour force and the average age of a retiring athlete. This age difference was of particular importance given that many retiring athletes finishing their sport careers are still relatively young and may be preparing to enter a new labour force, as opposed to exiting one where they can no longer continue their role.

Career termination as a transition process

Later research suggested that the occurrence of a traumatic experience alongside career termination was not as common as was previously suggested by Mihavilovic (1968), with 13% (Alferman 1995) and 15% (Wylleman, De Knop, Menkehorst, Theebom & Annerel 1993) reported as being sudden and involuntary. There also emerged some evidence to suggest that the end of the athletic career is not inherently a negative event and could even be experienced as "social rebirth" (Coakley 1983) rather than social death as was previously assumed. This led sport psychology researchers to consider retirement as a transition process, rather than as a singular event (McPherson 1980). Sport psychology again looked outside of the athletic domain for relevant conceptual frameworks. Frameworks such as Sussman's Analytical model (1972), and in particular, the model of human adaption to transition (Charner & Schlossberg, 1986; Schlossberg, 1981) were subsequently examined and adapted.

Schlossberg (1981, p5) suggested a definition of a transition as "an event or non-event which results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one's behaviours and relationships". The model of human adaption to transition suggests that there are three major sets of factors that influence an individual's adaption to transition, (a) the characteristics of the human experiencing the transition (e.g. psychosocial competence, gender, age, previous transition experience), (b) the perception of the particular transition (e.g. role change, affect, occurrence of stress) and (c) the characteristics of the pre and post-transition environments (e.g. the evaluation of internal support systems and institutional support). Studies using this model found that adaption to career termination were mediated by, amongst other variables, how voluntary the ultimate decision was and the level of preparation for life after sport (Alferman & Gross 1997; Webb, Nasco, Riley & Headrick, 1998). Whilst these approaches incorporated a wider range of influences, they were still found to be lacking in operational detail regarding the adjustment process (Wylleman, Alferman & Lavallee, 2004) and did not provide the flexible,

multidimensional approach that is needed to adequately study athletic retirement (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). This assertion led to more comprehensive and conceptual models of adaption to career transition. For example, Taylor & Ogilvie's (1998) domain specific model which introduced developmental factors, coping resources and possible treatment issues. Taylor & Ogilvie's (1998) model examined the entire course of the career transition process and included the following components: (a) causal factors that initiate the transition process, (b) developmental factors related to transition adaption, (c) coping resources that affect the responses to career transitions, (d) quality of adjustment to career transition and (e) treatment issues for distressful reactions to career transition. Whilst this provided more operational detail and allowed for a more individualised view of a transition process to be assumed, it remained exclusively focused on the transition out of a career in sport, paying no attention to those that occur within their career.

Transitions within the athletic career: A lifespan perspective

During the 1990's, attention began to shift towards a lifespan perspective. This shift towards a lifespan perspective paralleled a prior shift within the literature of talent development, deliberate practice and career development (Wylleman, Alferman & Lavallee, 2004). One of the first studies to adopt a lifespan perspective within talent development was carried out by Bloom (1985). This study, with 120 individuals from science, art and sport, focused on the stages of development throughout a career in sport. The stages included (1) the initiation stage, (2) the development stage and finally, (3) the mastery stage during which athletes reach their highest level of performance. Bloom's study (1985; Fig 1.1) focused on career transitions in terms of the different stages of ability level during talent development involved in the process of becoming an elite athlete.

Individual	Career Progression		
	Initiation	**Development**	**Perfection**
Player	Joyful, playful, excited, special	Hooked, Committed	Obsessed, responsible
Coach	Kind, cheerful, caring, process-centred	Strong, respecting, skilled, demanding	Successful, respected, feared, emotionally bonded
Parents	Shared excitement, supportive, sought mentors, positive	Made sacrifices, restricted activity	

Fig. 1.1. Characteristics of talented individuals (coaches and parents) at various stages of their careers (adapted from Bloom, 1985)

Similarly, Cote (1999) described patterns in the dynamics of four families of talented athletes throughout their development in sport. He identifies the "sampling years" (6-13 years of age), where the main emphasis was to experience fun, the "specialising years" (13-15) where sport specific skill development emerged and the "investment years" (15 and over) where strategic, competitive and skill development characteristics emerged as being most important. Although such models had relevance for the study of transitions in sport, it was not until Stambulova's stage model (1994, 2000) that a model navigated the career transitions facing an athlete from the beginning of specialisation through to the end of the sport career. The stage model suggested that there were 6 predictable stages that athletes transition through, including; (a) the beginning of sport specialisation, (b) the transition to intensive training in the chosen sport, (c) the transition to high-achievement sports and adult sports, (d) the transition from amateur sport to professional sport, (e) the transition from culmination to the end of the sports career, and (f) the end of the sports career. Each of the transitions is a (potential) turning point in the athlete's development and is characterised by the emergence of new contradictions and transitional problems which the athletes need to resolve, for example, higher level of physical loads and the pressure of selection or de-selection.

Holistic approach to transitions in sport

Furthering these developments, Wylleman, Lavallee and Alferman (1999) advocated a more holistic approach to the study of transitions facing athletes. It was argued that this should continue to follow the "beginning-to-end" nature of the lifespan perspective.

However, further consideration was afforded to transitions occurring outside of sport in other domains of the athlete's life. This rationale was based on findings of a strong, concurrent and reciprocal nature of transitions occurring in the athletic career and those occurring in other life domains (Petitpas, Champagne, Chartrand, Danish & Murphy, 1997; Wylleman, De Knop, Ewing & Cumming, 2000).

AGE	10	15	20	25	30	35
Athletic level	Initiation	Developmen t		Mastery		Discontinuation
Psychologic al level	Childhood	Puberty Adolescence		Young adulthood	Adulthood	
Psychosocial level	Parents Siblings Peers	Peers Coach Parents		Partner Coach Support staff Teammates Students		Family (Coach) Peers
Academic/ Vocational level	Primary education	Secondary education	(Semi-) professional athlete			Post-athletic career
			Higher education	(Semi-) professional athlete		

Fig. 1.2. A developmental model on transitions faced by athletes at athletic, psychological, psychosocial and academic/vocational level (Wyllemann & Lavallee, 2003).

In response, using data on the career development of pupil-athletes, student-athletes, professional athletes and former Olympians, Wylleman and Lavallee (2003) developed the developmental model, which included normative transitions that athletes face within athletic, individual, psychosocial and academic/vocational levels (Fig. 1.2). The athletic level includes the three developmental stages highlighted by Bloom (1985) with the addition of a discontinuation stage reflecting the transition out of high level/professional sport as something which may have a relatively long duration (Wylleman, Alferman & Lavallee, 2004). The individual level includes the developmental stages which occur at a psychological level. These are childhood, adolescence and (young) adulthood. The third level recognises the transitions that the athlete will face on a psychosocial level with relevance to their athletic involvement such as the athletic family, peer relationships, the coach-athlete relationships, marital relationships and any other interpersonal relationships significant to the athlete. The final level reflects the transitions that the athlete may face on an academic or vocational level,

which may include primary and secondary education, transfer to higher or third level education and possibly vocational training or professional occupation. Wylleman, Reints and De Knopp, (2013) added to this a financial level. This level (Fig 1.3) acknowledges the varying degrees of financial support available to athletes throughout their career, and how this interacts with transitions across the other four levels.

AGE	10	15	20	25	30	35
Athletic level	Initiation	Development	Mastery			Discontinuation
Psychological level	Childhood	Puberty Adolescence	Young adulthood		Adulthood	
Psychosocial level	Parents Siblings Peers	Peers Coach Parents	Partner Coach Support staff Teammates Students			Family (Coach) Peers
Academic/ Vocational level	Primary education	Secondary education	(Semi-) professional athlete / Higher education	(Semi-) professional athlete		Post-athletic career
Financial level	Family	Family Sport governing body	Sport governing body Government/NOC Sponsor		Family	Employer

Fig. 1.3. A holistic model on transitions faced by athletes at athletic, psychological, psychosocial and academic/vocational level and a financial level (Wylleman, Reints & De Knopp, 2013)

Turn towards context and culture

Stambulova, Alferman, Statler & Cote (2009) described how the most recent shift in career development and transition research related to understanding the contextual factors involved in career transitions. More recent studies have considered the "macro-social factors", such as the sport system and culture (p. 397). Stambulova, Alfermann, Statler and Cote (2009) advocated that culturally specific approaches should be encouraged to make career development and transition studies more socio-culturally informed. Stambulova & Ryba (2014) outlined how the first wave of such research was conducted within the positivist epistemology, using surveys and questionnaires, conceptualizing culture as an external entity

contained within national boundaries and having an effect on an athlete's cognitive, emotional and behavioural reaction to a career transition. The second wave was characterized by an attempt to permeate athlete career studies with a cultural mind set, and generally reflected the epistemological turn toward cultural psychology (Stambulova & Alfermann, 2009). Cultural psychology views culture and psychological processes as mutually constituted and stresses the importance of language, communication, relational perspectives, cultural practices and meanings, belief and values in human development, learning and behaviour. The focus of research would therefore be on understanding the constitutive dynamic between psychological processes and socio-cultural contexts. It is important to recognise that applied academic and scholarly literature, albeit not research, has long-recognised the dynamic between psychological, social and cultural processes and the importance of understanding this in delivering effective applied practice (Ravizza, 1988; Halliwell, 1990; Nesi, 2004; Fifer, Henschen, Gould & Ravizza, 2008). This lag in time appears to reflect the disparity between research and practice within the field of sport psychology that Martens (1987) previously described, and perhaps reflects a lack of credence given to real accounts from the applied world to inform research.

Stambulova & Ryba (2014) suggested the need for research to combine the perspective of whole career, whole person and whole environment, acknowledging that the first two perspective are already readily embraced (Wylleman, Reints & De Knop, 2013), but that the whole environment perspective remained relatively new. In order to achieve this turn towards culture and context, Stambulovas & Ryba (2014) made a few suggestions as to the direction of future research. Firstly, researchers, or practitioners, should be aware of cultural constitution of the project's participants and their own attitudes and behaviours in order to account for cultural and/or historical influences in athletes career development in particular contexts. Secondly, projects ought to be situated within a scientific discipline, such as sport psychology, or in the interdisciplinary space, such as an integration of psychological, sociological and managerial approaches. Thirdly, projects ought to be theoretically and methodologically positioned. Researchers should be clear about the paradigm and approaches they use and show that their project is methodologically congruent and culturally congruent. Fourth, they suggest blending theoretical and practical work together in praxis, positioning projects within applied discourse in sport psychology, in terms of what theoretical perspectives and applied strategies are used as well as how and why. Finally, they suggest

that researchers should position themselves in the project and reflect on how their backgrounds and experiences influence development of the project.

A critique of career development and transition research

Literature within the area of career development and transitions has grown considerably both in terms of the depth of research carried out, and the evolution of how researcher have come to understand the topic. This growth has provided a perspective of career development and transitions that adopts a lifespan perspective as well as a much more holistic approach to athlete careers and support. This presents supporting practitioners with a much more complete understanding of the different areas of athletes' lives and how the different areas of an athlete's life can overlap and interact at key stages during the developmental journey. For example, we can now appreciate that the transition from junior to senior sport, may co-occur with a growing need for independence in early adulthood and significant changes in the academic/vocational development.

However, the current transition literature appears to offer an overly simplistic picture of what it is like to develop as an athlete and as a human being within sport. For example, the acknowledgement of the overlap and co-occurrence of transitions such as development to mastery phases, secondary education to university or other higher education and moving into early adulthood is useful in bringing the transition's co-occurrence to an applied practitioner's awareness. However, it does little by way of informing us of the contextual and socio-cultural factors influencing an individual, whom a practitioner may work with, as well as their experience and meaning making of the transitions they encounter. Ultimately, it does not help us understand an individual athlete's lived experience at a particular moment. A lack of research allowing an athlete's voice to tell the story of moving through some of the transitions, has left the applied practitioners who draw on it with minimal guidance regarding what it is really like to be an athlete, in particular contexts, cultures and sports at different stages during their career. It has been suggested that applied practitioner accounts of working in the field better capture the complexity of athlete's experiences, but that these insights have not often led to such complexity being captured within research.

It has been acknowledged that the physical and social settings within which transitions take place can, for good or ill, exert a tremendous effect on the experience of individuals making them (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990). Whilst undoubtedly these settings will have athletic development at the core of their purpose, it seems fair to assume they will carry

their own peculiar characteristics, pre-suppositions and socio-culturally specific assumptions and norms which will impact on the individuals experience, actions and decision-making processes. Stambulova and Ryba's (2014) call for a turn towards more socio-culturally informed projects which blends practice and research appears to signal a shift, at least in intention towards addressing some of these issues. Adding further to complexity, it can be argued that the individual differences of athletes (such as age, maturity, socio-economic background among others) going through such transitions will have an interactional impact with socio-cultural, contextual and sport specific factors. Without addressing some of these more subtly nuanced elements of career development and transitions, the gap between the sport psychology research and the real world of applied work as Martens (1987) described 30 years ago will continue to exist. There has been some literature, within football, that has critiqued the transition model's application within the unique football setting. Relvas, Littlewood, Nesti, Gilbourne and Richardson (2010) argued for an extra stage of development within football, which they called the "developing mastery" stage in a critique of previous models as lacking the contextual details and specificity that they argued is critical to better understand the unique social and cultural features within a sport. They argued that players in this stage had already passed through the developing stage, yet lacked the attributes and experiences to be considered the finished article. It is argued that they therefore require continuing focused development work. This research highlights the importance of understanding athlete experiences within their specific sporting, social and cultural contexts.

The current literature has generally focused much more on retirement paying a relative lack of attention to within-career transitions. There has also been limited attention payed to non-normative transitions, and what Schlossberg (1981) referred to as non-events. Those being the unpredicted, unanticipated and involuntary moments which do not occur as part of a set plan but will undoubtedly have a major influence on the athlete's life and eventual transitions. These include but are not limited to a change of coach, a loss of coach, de-selection or a transfer to another team (Priestley, 2008). Fortunately, some work (Pummel, Harwood & Lavallee 2008; Debois, Ledon, Argiolas & Rosnet, 2012, Morris, Todd & Oliver, 2015; Morris, Todd & Oliver, 2016; Morris, Todd & Eubank, 2017) has begun to address these important omissions by considering within-career transitions, making an effort to present the athletes voice and explore the predictable and the unpredictable elements of career development. This research appears to offer a promising new line of enquiry.

Ronkainen (2014) highlighted that the current career transition scholarship to date has been mostly concerned with classifying the different forms of transitions (normative and non-normative, event and non-event), mapping their preconditions and demands as well as identifying factors that influence coping processes and outcomes (Stambulova, Alfermann, Statler & Cote, 2009). She highlighted that while Schlossbergs (1981) earlier definition of a transition heavily influenced future work, the future work did not realise the existential insight in the definition; that a transition can lead to "a change in assumptions about oneself and the world" (p.5). This conceptualises a career transition instead as a transformation of identity and life perspective. Instead, research has sought to isolate factors that affect the quality of the transition such as athletic achievement, education level, voluntariness of the transition, strength of athletic identity and coping resources (Park, Lavallee & Tod, 2013). Ronkainen (2014) suggested that whilst these studies have been useful in showing what kind of issues can be important in transitions, they fail to advance understanding of why the level of athletic achievement, for example, may influence perceived difficulty or ease of career transitions. Ronkainen (2014) suggested the need for more in depth qualitative research to gain insight into the personal and cultural frameworks of meaning that athletes draw from in making sense of their experiences and how these influence athletes' career development.

Although recognisant of the value offered by pre-existing literature on career transition, the above discussion helps highlight potentially valuable new lines of enquiry. However, it has been argued that there is a more fundamental issue that appears to have been overlooked. Nesti et al. (2012) highlighted that the term "transition" could easily be interpreted to signify something which is smooth, steady and rather easy to negotiate. They suggested that a more dramatic and useful term to use would be "critical moments", describing these as those frequently experienced moments in life when we must confront the anxiety associated with an important change in our identity. These may be professional, personal or vocational as well as being described in both positive and negative terms. In the life of an elite athlete this could include de-selection, career threatening injury, changing of schools, important conversations with a coach or even changes of peer acceptance as a result of selection or success. Pearson and Petitpas (1990) had previously alluded to the importance of moments such as these in the athletic career. Speaking from a developmental perspective, they referred to normative transitions as the usual transitions marking adolescence, early adulthood and adulthood. Pearson and Petitpas (1990) stated that "athletes often must cope with events and issues (e.g., being "cut", injury, early retirement) that either exacerbate or

add new dimensions to demands of the typical developmental process" (Remer, Tongate & Watson, 1978 in Pearson & Watson, 1990, p-7). This suggests the need for a better understanding of the individual experiences during such "critical moments" before we can begin to make sense of the journey athletes take throughout normative career development and transition processes. Critical moments were further described by Nesti et al. (2012) as ranging from something to nothing, be large or small, intended or unintended and may have a negative or positive effect on a person's sense of self (Self-awareness and self-knowledge). Moreover, Nesti et al. (2012) suggest a critical moment will involve the subjective lived experience of the individual, will invoke an emotional response and be dependent on timing (i.e., the individual's personal and contextual circumstances at the time). Such a description seems to better capture the complexity of an athlete's day to day experiences as well as placing greater emphasis on the important moments within an elite athletes' daily existence which may not otherwise have been classified as a "transition". It also appears to better capture the existential insight into Schlossberg's (1981) early definition of a transition which Ronkainen (2014) argued had been missing from career development and transition research, through the acknowledgement of the transformation of the athlete's sense of self.

In summary, the holistic lifespan perspective of current transition models has provided considerable insight into the whole career, whole person understanding of athlete career development and transitions. However, the models ought to be viewed as providing a backdrop to the highly complex, socio-culturally and contextually situated career journeys athletes experience on a day-to-day basis that is often reflected within applied account of practitioners supporting athlete's in the field, but not so much within research. Future research projects would benefit from adopting in-depth qualitative methodologies, which facilitate the blending of the theoretical and applied yet retain the ability to capture the athlete's voice. This would help to understand the day-to-day experiences and critical moments which occur, and the meaning which athletes ascribe to them in order to progress our understanding of athletes' careers, and how to plan support. It is suggested that this would allow us to understand the complex experiences which sit behind the relatively generic and predictable career journeys articulated in the holistic lifespan perspective (Wylleman, Reints & De Knop, 2013), and better guide practitioners in support of athletes at different stages of the career.

Dual career research in sport

The evolution of career development and transition research towards adopting a holistic approach and of transition models to include an academic/vocational level has led to the emergence of dual career research within sport. A dual career is defined by the European Commission (2012, p. 6) as:

"the requirement for athletes to successfully initiate, develop and finalise an elite sporting career as part of a lifelong career, in combination with the pursuit of education and/or work as well as other domains which are of importance at different stages of life, such as taking up a role in society, ensuring a satisfactory income, developing an identity and a partner relationship"

Dual career research to date has tended to focus on the challenges and rewards of balancing a career in sport with education, as opposed to other vocational pursuits not requiring an academic pathway. For example, David (2005) acknowledged the challenges facing elite university student athletes when trying to balance a dual career, outlining the time demands of balancing education alongside 20-30 hours of sport training. He suggested that this demand creates immediate implications for the lifestyle of the individual in terms of time management, required effort, and commitment to fulfil both roles.

McKenna and Dunstan-Lewis (2004) identified three main areas of concern in her action research study on the support of elite athletes in higher education. These were establishing the priorities of the student and athlete roles, managing relationships with academia and a lack of support and understanding. Their findings also suggested that elite student-athletes can be high achievers in both sport and academia. Aquilina (2013) identified how this contrasts with other studies which often illustrate that students felt the need to compromise one aspect for the benefit of the other at different stages of their studies**.** Aquilina (2013) outlined what university student athletes felt where the mutual benefits for their sport and academic activity of pursuing a dual career. These were: (1) the need to focus on more than one aspect of life relieved the intensity of pressure emanating from both sport and education helping to put things in perspective, (2) the belief that skills learned in one area were transferable and valued, (3) intellectual stimulation to accompany the physical challenges of training and performance helping to maintain interest and commitment, (4) a sense of balance in recognising that there is more to life than sport and the social comfort of mixing with peers (5) frustration with previous neglecting of education but with minimal

improvement in sport performance, (6) feeling more secure with the safety net of gaining qualifications and preparing for future life stages and hence performing better, (7) consideration of life after sport, and (8) simply performing better in sport in an academic environment which is more sport friendly. In contrast to the notion that athletes have to be relentlessly obsessed with their sport in order to succeed, Aquilina's (2013) findings suggest that athletes were able to use the 8 reasons outlined to justify their pursuing a dual career as not just compatible, but mutually complementary.

However, Ryba, Stambulova, Ronkainen and Bundgaard (2015) asserted that research has shown that the increased pressure associated with combining an academic and sporting career successfully, especially when there is a lack of support available, may lead to athlete's premature retirement from sport (Aquilina, 2013; Wyllemann & Reints, 2010). Further, Gaston-Gayle (2004) found that only academic motivation was found as a significant predictor of academic achievement for athletes. This would appear to suggest that the combination of authentic academic motivation combined with support and understanding across their sporting and academic lives to be important precursors to a successful dual career for athletes.

There has been a lot of dual career research in sport that has focused on academic study as preparation for retirement, or on university level student-athletes who are balancing an elite athletic career with study. However, many athletes are faced with the decision of whether or not to go to university during the period of adolescence, having already spent a number of years with the goal of earning a professional contract or a career in sport. The experiences of adolescent student athletes pursuing a professional career alongside the normative educational stages remain relatively under represented within the literature. Some international dual career research (Aquilina, 2013; Elbe & Beckmann, 2006; Emrich, Frohlich, Klein, Pitch, 2009; Gaston-Gayles, 2004; Jonker, Elferink-Gemser & Visscher, 2009; Wylleman, Reints & Wanter, 2007) has examined adolescents and demonstrated both the benefits and the costs of combining sport and studies. The benefits outlined included a balanced lifestyle, reduced life stress, multiple personal identities preventing a one-sided development, positive effects of athlete self-regulation, positive socialization effects, better career/retirement planning and higher employability after retirement. Potential dual career costs included student-athlete overload, increased risk of injuries, overtraining and burnout and premature dropout from sport or education. However, beyond the benefits and costs of pursuing a dual career in adolescence, we do not yet understand the nature of adolescent

athlete's experiences in navigating the challenges facing them. We also do not understand how their involvement in elite sport shapes their future dual career decisions and how specific sporting cultures influence these decisions. This appears a particularly important omission, given Nurmi's (2004) portrayal of adolescence as the most critical for the formation of identity, development of cognitive motivational strategies, and the social, learning and organisational skills that may have long-term consequences for young people's educational choices, career aspirations and sporting progress.

Further, within the UK, there has been a strong focus of research on those pursuing a career within Olympic sports as opposed to professional sports such as football, cricket or rugby. It has been noted by Aquilina's (2013) study that the athletes in her study had support, facilities and programmes at university for sporting opportunities to progress. It could be argued that the same could not be said for those athletes making decisions about whether or not to go to university having already gained, or for athletes who are still pursuing a professional contract with a club in a professional sport. In fact, for some sports which have been included in dual career studies within the UK, going to university could be seen as an important step along the pathway to an elite career. For example, Aquilina (2013) reported that up until 2012, 60% of Team GB members over the previous 20 years been a product of the higher education system. This dual career pathway may not be representative of the dual career possibilities facing athletes within UK professional sports. For example, Richardson (2003) suggested that the educational priorities of a young footballer on signing a one or two-year professional contract at the age of 16 was limited and that the "seductive nature of the football environment may dilute the desire for educational development" (p-58). However, the lack of research that has explored the lived experience of pursuing a dual-career (or not) within professional sports in the UK means that such individual's experiences remain less well understood.

It has been highlighted that Stambulova and Ryba (2014) have called for more socio-culturally and contextually situated career development and transition research. Similarly, it will be important for dual-career research to account for the drastically different student athlete journeys, socio-cultural norms and expectations associated with specific sports. From the cultural psychology perspective, individuals actively construct their life projects, but the possibilities for their career trajectories to take shape are intertwined with their situatedness in a particular socio-cultural landscape (Ryba, Stambulova, Ronkainen & Bundgaard, 2015). As such the literature to date has not allowed us to understand how athletes within

professional sport make career decisions relevant to their pursuit of further education given specific cultural norms, and club expectation which can be assumed to come with membership of such a sport.

Part 2: Career transition intervention & lifestyle programmes

Career transition interventions

Wylleman, Alferman and Lavallee (2004) outlined that with a greater awareness of career transitions in sport, the value of interventions for athletes in transition becomes more important. They highlighted that in view of the challenges athletes faced during termination of their athletic career, a number of therapeutic approaches have been described and proposed. These include cognitive restructuring, stress management and emotional expression (Gordon, 1995; Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994), the use of projective techniques (Bardaxoglou, 1997), a psychoanalytic approach (Chamalidis, 1995), and information processing approach, mentoring and an existential psychology approach (Lavallee, Nesti, Borkoles, Cockerill & Edge, 2000; Wylleman, Lavallee & Alfermann, 1999) and account making (Grove, Lavallee, Gordon & Harvey, 1998). Further, Lavallee and Anderson (2000) suggested that transition interventions should be focused on voluntariness of termination and the athlete's locus of control, the degree of identification with the athlete role, the extent of foreclosure on non-sport areas, the availability of coping resources, previous transitional experiences, continued sport related involvement, post-career planning, growing awareness of and use of transferable skills, achievement of sport related goals, access to career transition services and developing a new focus after retirement. Murphy (1995) suggested that when individual counselling is provided for athletes in transition, it ought to assist them in coping with developments in self-identity, changes in emotional and social support, enhancing coping skills and developing a sense of control.

There have been some transition specific intervention models and processes outlined in the literature. For example, the Life Development Intervention (Danish, Petitpas & Hale (1992; 1993; 1995), and Stambulova's (2010) Five Step Career Planning Strategy (see appendix for further description). These approaches have emphasised the development of goal setting skills, as well as situating the present demands on an athlete between a past from which the athlete can learn lessons, and a future towards which the athlete is motivated to progress. Alongside these proposed approaches for supporting career transitions, athlete lifestyle programmes which were closely aligned with career transition literature were established. Despite a number of early challenges, similarly aligned programmes have developed to become an established part of athlete support infrastructure. I will now turn attention to the evolution of these programmes since their origin, and their current description

within the literature. In order to aid the reader, it should be acknowledged that athlete lifestyle programmes have been referred to in the literature as Career Assistance programmes (Stambulova & Ryba, 2014), Athlete Career and Education programmes (ACE) and athlete life-skill programmes (Anderson & Morris, 2000) and sport career transition programmes and intervention (Petitpas & Champagne, 2000). However, to facilitate clarity and consistency within this research it is accepted that such descriptors refer to similarly aligned programmes with a shared grounding of an initial need to support athletes based on career transition research, whilst conceding that the finer details of programme delivery may vary. Therefore, unless specifically referring to on individual programme, all such similarly aligned programmes will be referred to as athlete lifestyle programmes throughout this research. It is worth acknowledging that much of the research available that explicitly discussed athlete lifestyle programmes is rather dated, with discussion of programmes within academic research or applied literature considerably behind the pace of development of programmes within sport national governing bodies and sporting associations.

Evolution of athlete lifestyle programmes

Priestley (2008) highlighted that with countries developing systems to identify talent early and nurture talent through local, regional and national training programmes, many elite athletes could spend anything between 10 and 25 years maintaining an intense focus on their career in sport before suddenly having it come to an end when they become no longer involved at that level (Anderson & Morris, 2000). As has been discussed, the early research reported athletes experiencing uncertainty, difficulties and maladjustment during their transition out of sport (Whethner & Orlick, 1986; Alison & Meyer, 1988; Bailie & Danish, 1992). Further, Blann & Zaichowsky (2000) reported that performance during the career could be affected by concerns about what athletes would do when they retire. Wylleman, De Knop, Menkehorst, Theeboom and Annerels (1993) highlighted how a lack of pre-retirement planning also had the greatest negative influence on how the eventual transition and post-career adaption was experienced. Therefore, the research identified the importance for athletes to plan for retirement in order to facilitate a smoother transition when the time comes, and to reduce the negative impact on performance during their career.

The findings regarding the importance of pre-retirement planning led to the development of athlete lifestyle programmes (Anderson & Morris, 2000). Anderson and Morris (2000) suggested that athlete lifestyle programmes were designed to develop social,

educational and work-related skills in elite athletes, with the justification that the early introduction of athletes to preparation for retirement could protect them from anxiety about their future whilst also preparing them for a smoother, less traumatic eventual transition out of elite sport (Anderson & Morris, 2000). It was suggested that this may include career counselling helping athletes to identify an area of interest for after the athletic career, and direct athletes to appropriate training as well as working to develop generic social and interpersonal skills which will help in an interview or in a job itself. Anderson and Morris (2000) highlighted how these early programmes also emphasized and identified the potential for athletes to transfer skills developed in sport into other areas of life. Finally, it was suggested that programmes may involve workshops on mental skills such as relaxation, positive self-talk and imagery to help cope with the demands of elite sport and offer many uses beyond.

The earliest example of an athlete lifestyle programme was the CAPA (Career Assistance Programme for Athletes) (Danish, Petitpas & Hale, 1992). This was established based on interview data with Olympic athletes from the United States. However, the CAPA programme was "surprisingly terminated" before it had time to demonstrate its value, something which Priestley (2008) recognised would mirror the early development of such programmes across the globe. Anderson & Morris (2000) interviewed Danish himself, who described how he had begun to divert a lot of his attention away from elite sport, which he heavily criticised for a reluctance to accept the need to support such a programme. He suggested nothing worthwhile was happening in the area of lifestyle programmes despite the growing evidence of its need (Bailie & Danish, 1992). Danish also outlined his belief that some coaches would need education regarding the fact that athletes are people with lives beyond their sport, arguing that "no one really cared about the athlete". Anderson and Morris (2000) secondly interviewed Petitpas, who described finding it very difficult trying to convince USA sport that lifestyle programmes were valuable and necessary. Finally, Anderson and Morris (2000) described how Blann, who had carried out research into career transitions of athletes, had experienced a system which did not recognise the basic needs of athletes as people. He argued that the limited success of lifestyle programmes in the USA had been due to a reluctance of sports to appreciate the need to assist with their delivery. Anderson & Morris (2000) concluded that at that time, such programmes had remained on the periphery of elite sports infrastructure, had been provided with limited funds and were not strongly promoted by athletes and coaches. Given such a reality, Petitpas & Champagne

(2000) suggested that programmes of this nature would have to be delivered sensitively and in less than ideal circumstances because of the unique nature of sport as well as specific needs of the athletes. They concluded this would often mean delivery being based on convenience and accessibility rather than athlete's specific needs. However, Anderson and Morris (2000) did describe the Australian ACE programme as a successful exception to this narrative at the time.

Following CAPA, further programmes were created all over the world including but not limited to the Australian Athlete Career and Education (ACE) programme, the Canadian Olympic Athlete Career Centre (COACC), the United States Olympic Education Centre (USOEC), the National Basketball league in conjunction with the National Basketball Players associations career and education programme, and the CHAMPS/Life skills programme (The National Collegiate Athletic Association). The ACE was also delivered in the UK. However, the UK would eventually develop their own programme in 2004, called the Performance Lifestyle programme delivered across Olympic sports, but also some professional sports including cricket. Henry, Amara and Aquilina (2004) were commissioned by the European Commission Sports Unit along with the Institute of Sport and Leisure Policy at Loughborough University to explore the education of young sports performers. Section 6 of the report examined the nature of vocational advice and lifestyle management support for young elite athletes. It was reported that over 70% of member states had policies or programmes in place to support athletes during their career and help them to prepare for and secure employment after their sporting career (Henry, Amara & Aquilina, 2004). For a relatively up-to-date and comprehensive list of such programmes, readers should see Stambulova and Ryba's (2014) review of career research and assistance.

Wyllemann, Alfermann and Lavallee (2004) acknowledged that athlete lifestyle programmes had been developed and were initially geared towards providing support to athletes making the transition to life after retirement. They described programmes as primarily being managed by national sports governing bodies, National Olympic Committees, specific sport federations, academic institutions and independent organisations linked to sport settings. These programmes were aimed at "developing social, educational, and work-related skills in elite athletes and generally focused on lifestyle management and the development of transferable skills that can assist individuals in making the transition from life in sport in to a post-sport career, including commitment, goal setting, time management, repeated practice and disciplined preparation" (Wyllemann, Alfermann & Lavallee, 2004, p. 13). The content

and target population of those programmes reviewed was varied. For example, Wyllemann, Alfermann and Lavallee (2004) explained that where the 'Career Transition Program' was aimed at assisting players to deal with retirement from the National Football League in the USA, the 'Study and Talent Education Program' provides information and teaches elite level student athletes the skills to optimise the combination of an academic and athletic career, as well as initiating a successful post-academic vocational career. In general, athlete lifestyle programmes were described as including; values and interest exploration, career awareness, decision making, CV preparation, interview techniques, job search strategies, career counselling and the development of generic social and interpersonal skills. According to Wylleman, Alfermann and Lavallee (2004, p. 14) athlete lifestyle programmes may cover the following topics:

1. Social aspects, including, quality of relationships (e.g. family, friends) in the context of sport and of an academic/professional occupation.

2. Aspects relevant to a balanced style of living: self-image, self-esteem, and self-identity, social roles, responsibilities, priorities, and participation in leisure activities.

3. Personal management skills, such as, education, academic skills, skills required in professional occupations, financial planning, skills transferable from the athletic career, and coping skills.

4. Vocational and professional occupation, including vocational guidance, soliciting (e.g. resume, interview, curriculum vitae), knowledge of the job market, networking, and career advice.

5. Aspects relevant to career retirement, such as, possible advantages of retirement, perceived and expected problems related to retirement, physical/physiological aspects of retirement and decreased levels of athletic activity (Wylleman et al., 1999)

Finally, they suggested that programmes need to be multidimensional and include performance enhancement, support, and counselling components (Petitpas, Brewer & Van Raalte, 1996).

Stambulova & Ryba (2014), provided a more recent review of athlete lifestyle programme (or what they referred to as career assistance programmes) through a cultural lens. The review highlighted "some of more than 60" programmes across the world (p. 7).

They learned that the programmes, even within a single country, are founded and funded by various organisation such as national governing bodies, educational institutions, local communities, high performance centres and professional sport associations. It was outlined that target groups included eligible young athletes, elite athletes, professional athletes and retiring/retired athletes. The review identified that helping athletes make their athletic career a part of and a resource for their life career and preparation for retirement permeated a majority of programmes. Major services offered by the programmes across cultures were identified as including: career planning/guidance, educational guidance, lifestyle management, life skills training, media training and retirement guidance and support. Stambulova and Ryba (2014) went on to outline how in many programmes, psychological career assistance services are combined with performance enhancement services, as well as with financial management, medical, nutritional and other expert support. Stambulova and Ryba (2014) assume that programmes were delivered by "sport psychology personnel". They stated that despite a diversity of programmes around the world, their sport psychology personnel almost everywhere adopt preventative/educational, whole career, whole person and ecological perspectives to empower athletes in their career and personal growth. However, the authors asserted that in spite of some commonalties in the content of programmes in different countries, career assistance in reality is more contextualised and culturally informed than career research because practitioners are closer than researchers to the athlete's everyday life and culture. It was suggested that practitioner's lack of cultural reflexivity could potentially hinder the applicability of career services to athletes from different cultures. Lastly, current challenges for programmes were summarised as including; financial, promotion, evaluation, accessibility and contextual sensitivity.

Despite the challenges facing such programmes, they have continued to play a role in elite and professional sport across a growing range of countries, with increasing success and acceptance when compared with the earlier struggles of the Career Assistance Programme for Athletes (Anderson & Morris, 2000). It is beyond the scope of this review to compare and contrast the current status of athlete lifestyle programme all over the world. However, in order to capture the developing trends within programmes most relevant to the current research, it is felt worthwhile to consider further the development of programmes currently operating within the UK. The Australian lifestyle programme is also worth including due to Anderson & Morris' (2000) claim that it was delivering the most comprehensive athlete lifestyle programme in the world at that time. What follows is a brief description of the

Australian ACE programmes evolution, the current landscape of UK lifestyle support before considering in depth, the history of lifestyle support provisions within England and Wales cricket. The role of sport or performance psychology programmes within respective organisations, and their relation to the organisations athlete lifestyle programme will also be acknowledged for two reasons. Firstly, there appears to be significant overlap in the two roles given the establishment of athlete lifestyle programmes in response to sport psychology literature. Further, although Stambulova and Ryba (2014) assume that lifestyle programmes are delivered by Sport Psychology personnel, this often does not appear to be the case in practice suggesting a greater divide between the two roles in practice, than is captured in the research.

The Australian (ACE) Programme

Anderson and Morris (2000) described the Australian ACE programme as the most comprehensive athlete lifestyle programme in the world at that time. Priestley (2008) described the overall aim of the programme as assisting athletes to balance the demands of their sporting careers whilst enhancing their opportunities to also develop educational and vocational skills. Strategies and support services were said to include individual athlete assessments, personal development training courses, career and education planning, online services, lifestyle management, post career transitional support and efforts to ensure programme integration. The philosophy of the programme was to create an environment where athletes were encouraged to be independent, self-reliant, and to have a capacity to meet the demands associated with elite sport. As of 2005, there were 24 career counsellors supporting over 4000 athletes across more than 50 sports (AIS, 2005). Priestley (2008, p. 482-483) described how in recent years at that time, athletes also received access to "counselling support services" and that the 'Athlete Counselling Services' leaflet (Australian Sports Commission, 2007) states that

"...It is recognised that the counselling support available through the existing resources of the ACE programme and sport psychology networks provide excellent guidance and clarification of key issues athletes may be facing. However, the spread and depth of the issues that arise at times may be beyond the professional boundaries, available resources and specialisation of these roles..."

In outlining the support available through ACE, the Australian Sports Commission also outline sport psychology support for performance related issues, which included focusing

skills, development of self-belief and confidence under pressure, pre-competition routines and post competition debrief strategies. The leaflet also outlined 'General Counselling support" via a network of specialists including trauma support, grief and loss, change management, eating disorders, relationships, depression and anxiety, addictions, adolescent issues and sexual abuse. This appears to suggest that sport psychology services would support athletes exclusively with those issues directly related to performance, with the ACE programme supporting career and educational counselling, and all other areas of the athletes lives as necessary up until those directly related to performance with a growing recognition of the breadth of issues that may arise for athletes. However, given professional boundaries and necessity for available resources, issues of a clinical concern would be referred to a network of specialists.

However, structural changes in 2015 have led to some changes to the AIS lifestyle programme. The newly named 'Personal Excellence' programme is an "initiative designed to assist athletes to make informed decisions that impact performance in sport and life" and aims to build upon the success of the ACE programme. The rationale for the programme is based on the fact that athletes are presented with a "myriad of contemporary issues such as social media, image/public profile, media, mental wellbeing, integrity, professionalism, career and education, finance, anti-doping, illicit drugs and gambling" (AIS, 2015). The personal excellence programme claims that through a multifaceted approach, "athletes will be provided guidance, resources and educational opportunities to achieve personal and professional empowerment and become professional, accountable, responsible and resilient in their approach towards sport and life". Alongside this initiative, the AIS performance psychology role is to increase "the probability for optimal performance outcomes" through the following services (AIS, 2015):

Enhance Performance

- Develop an athlete's preparedness for the podium through education and training
- Promote systematic self-regulation of constructive thinking, energy, emotion, and attention
- Create a productive team environment
- Grow leadership and communication skills

Restore Performance

- Foster recovery from injury, performance slumps, and training stress
- Cultivate psychological resilience and coping skills
- Manage interpersonal conflict

Promote Mental Health

- Screen, manage, and coordinate support
- Encourage healthy life balance
- Facilitate sport/career transitions

This shift of athlete lifestyle programme to the new Personal Excellence programme appears to suggest an increased recognition of the range of challenges and responsibilities facing modern athletes as a result of their participation in elite sport and athlete accountability for managing their lives in light of growing media scrutiny. The role of performance psychologist also appears to have grown to take on a more holistic perspective, including areas of support such as career and sport transitions and mental wellbeing. This shift of performance psychology embodying more of a holistic approach is further suggested by the AIS performance psychology research agenda currently focusing on mindfulness, mental health and resilience (AIS, 2015). There remains further counselling support for athletes, through the "Elite Athlete Brief Counselling Support (EABCS) program" for when available resources and expertise are insufficient.

Athlete lifestyle programmes in the UK

During their review, Anderson and Morris (2000) reported that a UK programme would be formally based on the Australian ACE programme. Priestley (2008) described how in 1999, the UK had adopted the ACE programme, but that it had since evolved to become the UK's own "Performance Lifestyle" (PL) programme. Despite minimal literature existing in terms of its operations, Priestley (2008, p.34-35) described how the UK Sport website (UK Sport, 2007) identified that there was 46 advisers and a national coordinator liaising with seven delivery organisations comprising of the England Institute of Sport and UK Sport, Scottish Institute of Sport, Sports Institute of Northern Ireland, Welsh Institute of Sport, Professional Rugby Players Association, Welsh Rugby Union and the England and Wales Cricket Board. At the time, the UK Sport website described the PL programme as follows:

"A Performance Lifestyle is for high achievers – those people who want to get the most out of life and produce their best in everything that they do!...It's for people who know that the many aspects of their life impact on each other and that each one needs to be carefully planned and managed if all their goals and aspirations are to be achieved...For elite athletes to maintain a performance lifestyle they have to fit many aspects into their intensive training programme...The approach is to work closely with coaches and support specialists as part of an integrated team to minimize concerns, conflicts and distractions, all of which can be detrimental to performance, and at worst, may end a career prematurely" (UK Sport, 2007).

PL was described as an individualised support service where trained advisers provide guidance on how to maximise focus while still fulfilling other important commitments such as career, family, social, financial. The main areas of support were identified as career and employment advice, education advice and a third tier of lifestyle support.

As of 2016, there still remains limited literature on the operation of UK Performance Lifestyle programmes, with the exception of websites, that can provide an up to date picture of the current landscape of support programmes in the UK. The original Performance Lifestyle programme is being delivered independently within the England Institute of Sport (EIS), the Sport Scotland Institute of Sport (SSIS), the Welsh Institute of Sport and Sports Institute of Northern Ireland (SINI). Many other sports which the performance lifestyle programme had once delivered to, such as Rugby and Cricket have developed their own unique athlete lifestyle programme. I will now discuss how each organisation outlines the goals and delivery of the Performance Lifestyle programme within their organizations.

England Institute of Sport (EIS)

According to the EIS website, (EIS, 2017), the EIS "employs over 20 professionally trained athlete Performance Lifestyle advisors. They work in partnership with over 30 sports, delivering to over 1000 athletes to ensure that they develop the skills to cope with the unique demands of being an elite performer. They also help athletes prepare for life after sport, developing links with employers to provide career development opportunities designed to fit around training and competition demands (EIS, 2017). In describing the nature of its operation, the EIS state that support ranges from 1:1 sessions to group workshops and practitioners focus on nurturing relationships based on trust and integrity, which enables

athletes to work in a safe, secure and where necessary, confidential space. The main areas of expertise within Performance Lifestyle are listed as; managing transitions, career development, planning education, personal & professional development, finance, supporting wellbeing. The website further explains the rationale for the performance lifestyle programme as the responsibility to care, develop and support athletes, given the expectations placed on them and the sacrifices and compromises they are required to make for medals and sporting success. The purpose of the programmes is outlined as ensuring that there is an appropriate balance between the pursuit of performance and the care for the person behind that performance, due to the inherently stressful nature of performance environments. Finally, preparing for the future and life after sport is said to be an important part of this.

The aim of EIS performance psychologists working alongside performance lifestyle advisors within the EIS is " predominantly to help athletes prepare psychologically for the demands of competition and training… to give them a higher probability of winning when it comes to competition" (EIS, 2017). A team of 20 Performance Psychologists aims to help "individuals and teams identify a winning mindset to develop, enhance and maintain optimal performance". The values of the EIS performance psychology team are: proactive, coach driven, immersed and performance focused. It is further suggested the aims of the performance psychology team are to ensure that:

1. Athletes receive proactive mental toughness development plans

2. The training environment is conducive to preparing athletes for performance through the implementation of pressure training, conditioning and reality testing

3. Agreed processes are adhered to at competition

4. Coaches have a full understanding of the athletes they are working with

5. Team dynamics are effective, and the principles of high performing teams are in place

6. Psychological wellness of all staff is supported

7. Bespoke solutions are provided to ongoing performance problems

8. The learning cycle is taking place at all levels of the organisation

Home Nation's Sport Institutes Programmes

The prescribed aims of Sport Wales performance lifestyle support largely replicate those of the EIS in terms of the purpose of the support role, and the nature of delivery. However, they have one practitioner operating out of a performance centre working across all sports (Sport Wales, 2017). The Sport Wales performance psychology programmes is also similarly aligned to the EIS, with a stated interest in considering the mental factors that can affect performance and aiming to help improve performance in both training and competition. Finally, they state that their sport psychologists can help with decision making, career transitions and communication. The SSIS performance lifestyle and performance psychology programmes are similarly aligned again, albeit with some differing level of detail and wording used to describe the service.

In a different approach to the three above, the SINI position performance lifestyle and sport psychology work together under one umbrella called 'The Performance Skills unit' (SINI, 2017). According to their website, performance skills combines performance lifestyle and sport psychology to offer athletes and coaches the chance to develop their capacity to cope with demanding environments and maximise performance under pressure. The proposed purpose of the performance lifestyle and performance psychology elements of this unit remain similarly aligned to the other home nation institutes. However, in a significant point of difference, as well as combining performance lifestyle and sport psychology within one unit, both of these programmes are delivered together by individual practitioners.

In summary, the performance lifestyle programme across all home nation sports institutes broadly aims to support athletes as they attempt to balance the significant demands placed on them within and outside of sport, and to support athletes in maintaining an identity beyond sport with a long-term view to their life after sport. The performance psychology programmes aims to help athletes develop the skills to perform at their best consistently in training and competition. Although both identify themselves as seeking to have a performance impact in the here and now, this seems to be a more direct agenda for the performance psychologist, and somewhat more indirect through the work with the person for the performance lifestyle programmes. In three of the 4 institutes, these two roles are delivered separately, but clearly have significant areas of overlap such as wellbeing, clinical referral responsibilities, confidentiality and the nature of work as including one-to-one, group

workshops and through other support staff. Only one of these institutes, the SINI, pull these two roles together to be delivered by one practitioner.

Other UK-based athlete lifestyle programmes

Having initially delivered the Performance Lifestyle programme in partnership with UK sport, several professional sports have gone on to develop their own athlete lifestyle programme. For example, the Professional Rugby Players Association (RPA) now provide support in the form of their Player development programme. The Welsh rugby players union deliver support in the form of their player development programme. The Professional Footballers Association (PFA) offer support within the context of education and player welfare and the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) provide a Performance lifestyle programme similarly aligned to the EIS. It is not the purpose of this review to outline the differences across all programmes in a wide diversity of sports. However, given that cricket provides the context for the current research, it is necessary to discuss the development of lifestyle programmes within this sport.

Athlete lifestyle programme within England and Wales Cricket

In 1999, the ECB signed a license agreement with UK sport and the Australian Institute of Sport to deliver the first athlete lifestyle programme in English cricket, under the "ACE programme" title (PCA, 2016). In 2001, the ECB and Professional Cricketers Association (PCA) then entered into a collaborative contract with UK sport to run the ACE programme within cricket. However, this collaboration was minimally resourced with two practitioners covering all of the professional counties and the England squads at the time. In 2003, as UK sport established its own "Performance lifestyle" (PL) programme, the ECB and PCA followed to establish the PL programme in cricket. At this point, there was one co-ordinator and 3 full time practitioners covering all of English cricket's lifestyle support needs (PCA, 2016).

In his unpublished doctoral study, Priestley (2008) described the operation of the ECB's Performance Lifestyle (PL) programme at that time as a separate support strand from sport psychology working within the multidisciplinary support team. At that time of writing, the ECB PL programme was led by a National Lead advisor who was also supporting 2 First class counties alongside the England programme. The lead advisor was supported by 4 full

time advisors, who were each supporting 3-4 counties each. There was one further part time advisor who was working with one county. The ECB had outlined the value of this programme, stating that:

"...it is crucial that an elite performer is able to manage the competing demands of life both on and off the pitch in order to perform at the highest level possible. To maintain a "performance lifestyle" cricketers have to fit many aspects of their life into and around an intensive training and competitive programme. When striving for cricket excellence it is easy to ignore some of the fundamental aspects of life that need to remain balanced in order to concentrate fully on cricket development..." (ECB PL Strategy Document, Version 18, 2005; Executive Summary; p.3).

At that time, the programme outlined three specific objectives:

1. Lifestyle Support: To ensure that players are combining the demands of cricket with all other personal aspirations and support them in becoming self-managed professionals
2. Education Guidance: To provide guidance and support for those players that are currently studying or those that wish to do so.
3. Employment & Career Advice: To enable a cricketer to explore career aspirations alongside the game.

In 2010, this provision within the ECB evolved further as the Personal Development and Welfare (PDW) programme was established as a stand-alone, cricket-specific athlete lifestyle programme. The PDW programme was developed as a joint venture between the ECB and the PCA with the aim to "Enable individuals to excel and develop sustainable performance within and outside cricket" (PCA, 2014). Practitioners aimed to support individuals within seven key areas, as opposed to the original 3. These were: 1. Elite player preparation, 2. Personal wellbeing and welfare support, 3. Self-awareness and management, 4. Interpersonal skill development, 5. Transitional support, 6. Experiential learning and 7. Dual aspiration support (ECB, 2014; PCA, 2014).
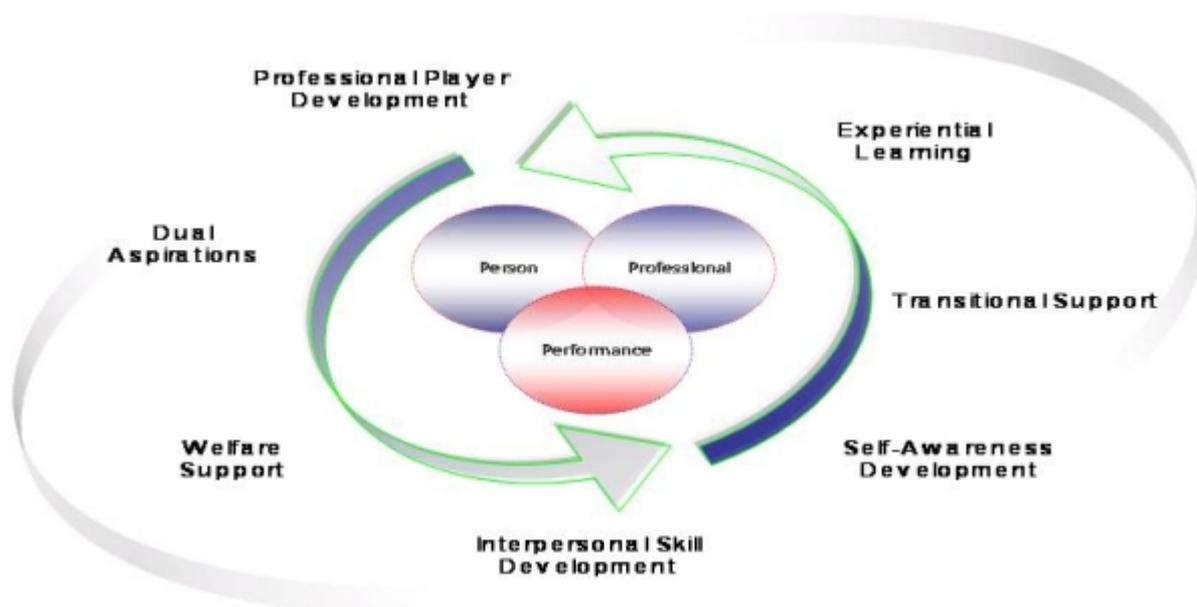
Fig.1.4. The ECB and PCA Personal Development and Welfare model of delivery across 7 areas.

At the time of writing, this landscape of player support had changed further to become the lifestyle support infrastructure that is currently in place. Although still working closely together as a joint venture, the ECB and PCA currently employ 2 separate teams of practitioners. Although similarly aligned and often working collaboratively with players, these two teams now deliver in line with two different models. As of 2017, the PCA Personal Development and Welfare programme has maintained the 7 areas of delivery described above, with the twin aims of: Improving the performance of cricketers through easing and minimising potential distractions during their playing career, and, better preparing cricketers for life after cricket. The programme is delivered through a total of 6 practitioners working under one National manager, across all of the 18 First class counties.

In 2015, the ECB's PDW programme adopted an updated model of their delivery. The ECB programme now identifies itself as providing "integrated, impartial support to players and the team environment, to develop resilience in and out of cricket". The ECB describes its programme as:

"...a nationwide, continual support system for individuals throughout the elite player pathway in English cricket. The PDW coaches work directly with players on England programmes and liaise with the PCA personal development managers who deliver to the First Class Counties, to ensure consistent support. As a team we work in the

environment to best support and challenge players to develop the resilience and personal and professional skills needed to enable them to consistently excel and perform, in and out of cricket…" (ECB, 2015)

As opposed to the previous 7 areas of delivery, the new ECB model focuses on working within the three areas of: wellbeing, lifestyle and personal development (ECB, 2015). The ECB outline the objective of their Personal Development and Welfare Programme as offering impartial player-centred support in the management of challenges and transitions within and away from the performance environment. Support, which whilst detached from performance judgment understands the specific demands of elite cricket. The aim is to generate perspective and to help players to thrive along the England Cricket Pathway. This model of delivery (Fig.1.5) is carried out by a team of three practitioners working on specific England men's and women's pathway programmes.

Fig. 1.5. ECB Personal Development and Welfare programme model of delivery

The PDW team within the ECB is placed within a multidisciplinary science and medicine team that includes performance psychologists. The ECB describe their performance psychology programme as aiming to "to work with coaches, as well as direct with players, to help optimize the mental development, mental readiness and ongoing mental performance of players in the England squads". This is done through initial diagnostic support, training for toughness coaching, mental skills strategies and work supporting team dynamics. A referral process and network for providing clinical psychology support completes support (ECB, 2017).

The Athlete Lifestyle Practitioner

Reid, Stewart and Thorne (2004) discussed how historically, athlete lifestyle support and sport psychology support provision developed out of the same concern of athlete welfare. As a result, Priestley (2008) suggested that it is not surprising that lifestyle programmes and notions of lifestyle-oriented support have remained aligned with literature and the applied work of sport psychology (Danish, Petitpas & Hale, 1992; Wylleman, Alfermann & Lavallee, 2004). However, in practice they remain separate support strands and sport psychology has evolved to develop training and professional development pathways through the BPS and BASES. There remains no clear developmental pathway for athlete lifestyle practitioners. Further, there has been a recent increase in the number of applied sport psychology practitioner and neophyte practitioner accounts discussing their experiences of, and, their approaches to supporting athletes (Nesti, 2004; Ravizza, 2002; Holt & Strean, 2001; Tod, Andersen & Marchant, 2009). However, there remains no such literature discussing the applied practice of athlete lifestyle practitioners. As a result, there is limited discussion regarding the training route, skill set or the working experiences of athlete lifestyle practitioners and limited understanding of what they actually do in carrying out their role.

However, Priestley's (2008) unpublished doctoral research carried out as a performance lifestyle practitioner in cricket, and Richardson's (2005) doctoral research investigating the similarly aligned role of Heads of Education and Welfare in football offer two examples of lifestyle-orientated support delivery within senior cricket, and youth football respectively. This can at least provide some guidance for the following discussion of the practitioners who deliver on athlete lifestyle programmes. We can also get some insight into the backgrounds and training requirements of athlete lifestyle practitioners from the stated requirement for employment from recruitment advertisements for the roles. Therefore, recruitment advertisements for the role of PDW at the PCA as well as the role of PL advisor at the ECB have helped contribute to the following discussion and can be found in the appendix.

In terms of the training background of potential athlete lifestyle practitioners, neither the EIS, nor the PCA appear to have a specific preference, suggesting that they should have a degree in a related field or discipline relevant to the personal development of high performing individuals. The ECB offered career counselling, counselling, psychology, coaching, learning and development as potential training pathways, albeit only as a desirable rather than as a

requirement. The EIS require a degree in Sports Management, Sports Science or a discipline relevant to the management and personal development of high performing individuals, as well as suggesting qualifications in coaching or mentoring as potential training pathways. It appears however, that experience within education or elite sport from an athlete or coaching perspective may help meet the need for such qualifications. Therefore, practitioners may come from a wide range of backgrounds, education and professional qualifications. However, there does appear to be an acknowledged value of those from a helping or guiding vocation, such as counselling, coaching or mentoring. Something that is clearly important however, is the individual's ability to understand the world of elite sport, the nature of life as an elite athlete and an understanding of the potential concerns which an athlete may be faced with. This may be through experience of working with coaches and athletes previously, or as the PCA stated was desirable, being an ex-athlete (preferably an ex-cricketer). Further, there is a need to understand educational systems as well as career and training pathways. More practically, applicants ought to be able to demonstrate programme and project management and analytical skills. Although there is no historical relationship with the role of heads of education and welfare and those working in traditional athlete lifestyle programmes, it can certainly be said to be similarly aligned in its focus on welfare, education and development of players away from the game. Richardson (2003) discussed how practitioners similarly established acceptance and credibility through their playing experience and knowledge of the game whilst highlighting their awareness, empathy of football culture and educational experiences as well as an undoubted affinity to the development of young people.

There seems to be a requirement for athlete lifestyle practitioners to possess certain personal qualities, such as the ability to maintain credibility, an ability to work in an integrated manner with the rest of the multi-disciplinary team as well as the requirement for high level interpersonal, facilitation, counselling and communication skills. This is similar to what some literature suggested is required of the applied sport psychologist. For example, Chandler, Eubank and Nesti (2014) discussed the importance of practitioner personal qualities related to relationship building, professionalism within the applied environment as well as recognising the caring nature of the role and the importance of the person behind the practitioner on having a professional impact. McDougall, Nesti and Richardson (2015) also discussed the challenges of delivering Sport Psychology in elite sport, highlighting the challenges to congruence, the broader role of working within the environment, being able to manage multiple relationships and the challenging influence of elite sport cultures. Despite

the absence of any discussion within the literature of such qualities being required of athlete lifestyle practitioners, it appears such factors are highly sought after by recruiting organisations, perhaps more so than any specific training or vocational background.

Priestley (2008) previously highlighted the lack of clarity regarding the qualifications and background of lifestyle practitioners, and acknowledged the similar skill sets existing between lifestyle practitioners and sport psychologists. At that time, no athlete advisor within cricket was a qualified sport psychologist, although two had an educational background in sport psychology. At the beginning of the current research, the author was the only athlete lifestyle practitioner in cricket with an educational background in sport psychology. The diversity of training backgrounds of those working as applied lifestyle practitioners does not appear to be recognised within any discussion of programmes within the literature. Indeed, the limited literature that does exist is within the field of sport psychology actually appears to assume that "sport psychology personnel" do deliver the role in applied contexts (Stambulova & Ryba, 2014, p. 8). This assumption is at odds with the reality of applied programmes in practice.

To the best of the author's knowledge, Priestley's doctoral study (2008) remains the only research to have discussed the skills, training and personal qualities underpinning effective practice, specifically as a lifestyle practitioner. He stated that the process of developing trust and the necessary working relationships would require a protracted and considerable commitment. Priestley (2008) claimed that because of these reasons, delivering effective and sustainable lifestyle-oriented support required more than recommended procedures, training or formulae. He instead suggested that there was great value in a more on-going, long-term, practitioner focused and counselling-based blueprint for future roles, training and practice. Such inferences suggested that sustainable and successful practice may be built on how practitioners philosophically approach their practice, and who they are, perhaps drawing on a model of applied sport psychology philosophy of practice (Poczwardowski, Sherman & Ravizza, 2004). He also suggested that the" "spheres of counselling and counselling psychology" (p.460) offered future practitioners and existing organisational structures a valuable and grounded framework from which to learn how they might better support the lifestyle needs of athletes. This perspective is consistent with reflections within the literature from applied sport psychology practitioners (Corlett, 1996; Ravizza, 2002; Nesti, 2004). Similar to Nesti's (2004) argument from the perspective of a sport psychology practitioner, the reason for this is because elite performance support is

about the support of the whole person and that a grounding in counselling frameworks, in particular the predominantly humanistic psychology base of counselling psychology with a focus on helping non-clinical populations to achieve their potential, in all areas of their lives. allows the practitioner to meet this need. Although subtly acknowledging the value of these domains, this appears to have remained relatively secondary in the recruitment process of athlete lifestyle practitioners, with no apparent priority to recruit someone developing as a practitioner from within such spheres.

In summary, athlete lifestyle practitioners may come from a variety of educational backgrounds, including sport related courses, such as sport management and sport science, or from backgrounds of more helping or caring professions such as counselling or psychology. In some cases, no particular educational background is demanded, but having a previous career in elite sport would be desired. There appears to be a high demand for an awareness and knowledge of elite sporting environments and an understanding of high performing athlete's lives and the challenges they may face. Finally, there appears to be a requirement for personal qualities such as communication skills, empathy and the ability to manage multiple relationships as well as the ability to establish credibility in competitive and demanding environments. Although there has been growing applied discussion within sport psychology literature regarding the skills, personal qualities and education that ought to underpin practitioners work, the same cannot be said for athlete lifestyle practitioners. However, the sparse existing research on the topic (see Priestley, 2008; Richardson, 2003) appears to agree with the arguments made by sport psychology practitioners. The lack of concrete grounding for applied lifestyle practice suggests that organisations have relied upon personal qualities and experience as opposed to training background or professional competence to achieve the levels of care, empathy and support desired. It has been suggested that there are many similarities between the skill sets and personal qualities of athlete lifestyle practitioners and sport psychologists. Indeed, academic literature appears to assume (wrongly) that practitioners working within athlete lifestyle programme have inherently come from a sport psychology background (Stabulova & Ryba, 2014). Despite this, no organisations appear to highlight this link either in practitioner recruitment or in describing their programmes. As a result, there is confusion with regard to the training pathway of an athlete lifestyle practitioner, as well as the finer details of the overlap and interface between performance lifestyle and performance psychology support. There is a lack of research outlining the philosophical underpinning upon which athlete lifestyle practitioners base their work in order

to meet the support needs of the athletes they work with. Finally, there is a lack of applied practice accounts by applied lifestyle practitioners working in the field that could provide readers with insight into the day-to-day working practices of the role.

Part 3; Lifestyle orientated support & sport psychology

This review has discussed and critiqued career transition research to date and the related growing area of research into dual careers. The review then discussed the development of athlete lifestyle programmes across the world, in the UK, and most specifically within England and Wales cricket. This was followed by a discussion of who the athlete lifestyle practitioner is, with regard to training pathways, skills and personal qualities. It is now deemed appropriate to briefly consider the relevance of career transition literature to athlete lifestyle programmes today and discuss other literature within sport psychology that is closely related to lifestyle-orientated support provision

Although transition literature has evolved in a similar nature to athlete lifestyle programme to address the whole career as opposed to exclusively retirement, its value in guiding practitioners working in such programmes today can be questioned. As has been discussed, the current transition literature offers an overly simplistic picture of what it is like to develop as an athlete and as a human being in elite sport. There is also a lack of the athlete's voice within the literature. This has contributed to a lack of understanding regarding athlete's lived experience when moving through such transitions and of the cultural and contextual factors which impact upon them. Further, the evolution of athlete lifestyle programmes to support athletes directly with regard to lifestyle factors, personal development, educational or vocational factors and with regard to wellbeing means that transitions support now represent just one aspect of the service provision. However, it is suggested that the ongoing career development and transitions encountered by an athlete may provide the backdrop to a lot of this work, with a greater need to focus on the day-to-day critical moments (Nesti & Littlewood, 2010) that shape an individual's experience, rather than the transitions themselves. This prompts the question, what specific literature can the athlete lifestyle practitioner draw on to guide their work with athletes? There is very little research which has explicitly aligned itself with athlete lifestyle support provision. However, Priestley (2008) research focused on athlete's experiences, specifically professional cricketers from the perspective of a lifestyle practitioner. Richardson (2003) also carried out action research considering the provision of the similarly aligned education and welfare support within football. Attention ought to be paid to the findings of this research.

Although Richardson's research (2003) focussed on the role of education and welfare in football, the findings did discuss how the role of supporting welfare lacked explicit

constraints and was somewhat open to interpretation by practitioners and the attitudes of specific academies. One participant in the study, an education and welfare practitioner, saw education and welfare support as an all-encompassing benefit to the boy's general wellbeing which implicitly impacted on performance. Another participant saw it as a vehicle to promote the emotional and psychological development of players. There was generally an accepted responsibility across practitioners for positively developing player self-awareness with regard to this development of the person. Priestley's (2008) doctoral research investigated the non-performance-based lifestyle-oriented experiences of professional cricketers. The findings highlighted that "at certain times, and during certain transitional phases, players lives could become crowded by an ever-increasing number of peripheral matters unrelated to their on-field performance" (p.456-457). It was recognised that some of these, such as financial, educational and career planning relate more closely to those stated as being supported by athlete lifestyle programme. However, other experiences were more "idiosyncratic, latent and elusive" (p.457). These were described as a plethora of personal and private concerns relating more to the general experiences and struggles as a person in sport. Some of these struggles related to their experience within "ever transient environments" (p.458), which were described as masculine, macho, narcissistic, unaccommodating, uncommunicative, unwelcoming, unforgiving, insensitive, pressurized, competitive and abrasive". Further it was suggested that player experiences did not occur in a vacuum or detached from the influence of the coaches they played under. Specifically, player challenges related to several general dimensions including communication, personal relationships, emotions, cognitions and their relationship to performance and support, unprofessional lifestyles, the intensity of the environment, experiences around contracts, and the implications of being a professional in the "bubble" (p,112). Also included were some of the factors associated with being a young developing cricketer, such as independence, inflated perceptions and expectations and frustrations with regard to their support network e.g. parents. Priestley's (2008) research highlighted the seemingly endless complexity and intimacy of player's experiences as well as the breadth and depth of these experiences. Importantly the findings seemed to suggest that concerns were a combination of their experiences on the field and the lives they were living off of it.

What Priestley's (2008), and Richardson's (2003) findings appear to suggest, is that the traditional notions of what athlete's lifestyle programmes support athletes with appear to be rather understated and discernible when compared with the complex real lives of elite

athletes. For example, "combining the demands of cricket with all other aspirations and support them in becoming self-managed professional" (ECB, 2007), or as most recently has been proposed, to adopt "an appropriate way of life determined by the choices and skills that underpin the attitudes, values and aspirations of a person" (ECB, 2015). As a result, we need to carry out research which can capture this complexity. Further, we need to ensure that both practitioners and the medium through which lifestyle support is offered can support issues which present with such complexity.

Blurring the line between lifestyle and performance

There is a growing body of holistic, wellbeing-focused and lifestyle-orientated research carried out by researchers within sport psychology. Douglas and Carless (2005) highlighted how there had been a growing awareness that sports performance, particularly at the elite level, is affected by many personal, lifestyle and environmental factors. There has been increasing acknowledgement within the applied sport psychology literature of the impact of such concerns for the person and that this impacts performance. Balague (1999) described how she attends to the person behind the performance when working with elite athletes. She described how she would try to find out as much as she could about the whole person even suggesting that athletes resent being treated exclusively as an athlete. In doing so, Balague (1999) endorsed the idea of utilizing detailed, long term and intimate case studies to develop the current research scope and to investigate the identity, meaning, and values of athletes. Similarly, Ravizza (2002) described how his initial attempts at supporting athletes involved teaching mental skills which he felt only ever dealt with symptoms before he shifted to relying on various, more philosophical constructs in dealing with the whole person. Nesti (2004; 2011; 2012) has written extensively on the subject, arguing that there are no such aspects of an athlete's life, in or out of sport which can be considered non-performance. Such accounts are based on years of working with over 200 premier league footballers drawing on a more philosophical approach to practice based on existential psychology. Gilbourne and Richardson (2006), reflecting on delivering psychological support in professional soccer, stated that "psychologists I work alongside rarely report the need to undertake applied work based on PST (Psychological Skills Training) interventions…In contrast their one-to-one work is often more 'lifestyle' in focus or personal in orientation" (p. 332). Indeed, the article would go on to state that the authors often reflect on the notion that applied work is a human activity and that it seems to be as much (if not more) about being spontaneous and genuine in a skilled and consistent way as it is about having a theoretical answer to a practical problem.

Gilbourne & Richardson (2006) also state that whilst they are sure applied sport psychology must take on a performance agenda, and whilst this typically equates to the delivery of psychological skills training, they believed that any successful practice was held together by the practitioner's capacity to care. However, they felt it necessary to stress that this is not simply being nice to someone, but rather is representative of a practitioner living for others through their work. This applied literature, although not strictly research, is based on extensive applied experience and provides great insight into the application of athlete support in the field. It highlights the fact that many practicing sport psychologists believe that supporting the athlete with a view to impacting performance, requires embracing the whole person and supporting them in their lives away from sport.

Although there is increasing acknowledgement of the holistic nature of athletes sporting experience, there is a significant lack of research that is explicitly aligned with athlete lifestyle programmes and their provision of athlete support. This may be a result of the lack of concrete theoretical and academic background of those operating in lifestyle supporting roles (discussed above). For example, the literature which can inform the work of lifestyle practitioner generally has generally been written from the perspective of sport psychology and is embraced as being a part of the sport psychologist's role. However, those employed to work as athlete lifestyle practitioners are not necessarily from a sport psychology (or psychology) educational or training background. This does appear to create unclear overlap between the roles, and potential confusion.

The confusion is added to by the on-going debate within the discipline of sport psychology regarding the roles and responsibilities of an applied sport psychology practitioner (e.g. Anderson, 2009; Maynard & Brady, 2010). Despite the growing support for sport psychology research and practice that focuses on the broader, more holistic experiences of elite athletes (Anderson, 2000; Andersen, Van Raalte & Brewer, 2001; Gilbourne & Richardson, 2006; Nesti, 2004;), there is still an imbalance in favour of researching, or delivering mental skills interventions and other strictly performance related agendas (Gould, Damarijan & Medbery, 1999; Thelwell & Greenless, 2001; Thelwell & Maynard, 2003; Vealey, 2007). The sport psychology literature which argues in favour of focusing on the more lifestyle orientated elements of support have tended to emerge from accounts of professional delivery by practitioners who have adopted a philosophy grounded more in existential or humanistic psychology theory (Balague, 1999; Nesti, 2005; Ravizza, 2002) or from neophyte practitioner reflections on their early experiences of working in the field (Tod

& Bond, 2010; Lindsay, Breckon, Thomas & Maynard, 2007; Balague, 2009). The neophyte practitioner accounts have reflected on the tendency for training programmes to prepare young practitioners to exclusively deliver performance enhancing mental skills interventions, to then be confronted with an array of holistic issues of a more personal nature which actually arise in applied practice. The applied accounts such as Nesti's (2005), provide an argument that is based on significant applied experience and not just research, and was grounded in psychological theory. This offers a refreshing change from the over-reliance on research that is not aligned with the experiences of those working in the field, and, applied accounts that are atheoretical, in that they are not clearly grounded in theory. Based on the applied accounts of theoretically informed practitioners, it appears that psychological theory (e.g. counselling, humanistic, existential) could have underpinned some of the broader (not just performance) support structures available to athletes. This could have helped understand the human experience of athletes as a foundation for support, rather than a divide in support roles between performance and lifestyle/wellbeing acting as the foundation for support

The role confusion, lack of theoretical engagement, and on-going debate creates something of dilemma for sport psychology as a discipline, and for lifestyle support. It would appear that some psychologists, depending on the degree to which they adopt a theoretically informed holistic philosophy of practice, would argue that the divide between performance and wellbeing (and therefore any supporting practitioner roles) is not necessary, while for others, it is a necessary divide. The applied accounts in the literature have been powerful in developing an argument for working with the whole person, in and out of sport and not just delivering mental skills education in supporting athletes. However, the research literature has yet to capture what exactly these types of factors and experiences are. However there has been some suggestions, such as anxiety, life after sport, eating behaviours (Corlett, 1996), relationship with coaches and dealing with decisions within sport (Gilbourne & Richardson, 2006), deselection, injury, changing clubs (Nesti, 2005); to form what is by no means an exhaustive list. It can be argued that these types of experiences could be described as relevant to the role of both athlete lifestyle practitioners in supporting athletes, and the role of a sport psychologist who adopts a more holistic philosophy of practice. This highlights the significance of the so-called interface between lifestyle support and performance psychology support, and further blurs the lines of clarity between the often similarly aligned support roles. However, this interface and potential role overlap has not been addressed in practice, or in the literature. In practice, the support structures appear to suggest that there is a very clear

divide between the two roles. However, in the literature, there appears to be an assumption (incorrectly) that the lifestyle support is always delivered by sport psychology personnel (Stambulova & Ryba, 2014). It is important that research looks to better understand what these "grey" areas of athlete experience are, how we can best support them and what this might mean for athlete support infrastructure.

Summary of the literature review

Within the literature review I have outlined how career development and transition research has evolved over a number of decades from considering career termination as a singular event to understanding it from a holistic lifespan perspective. Although recognising the contributions that the existing literature has made to our understanding of athlete transitions and support needs, critical reflection has highlighted the limitations of the current knowledge base and provided considerable scope for future research.

Firstly, it was argued that previous literature has focused much more on athlete's experience of retirement than on athletes experience of within-career transitions. Further, the existing within-career research has had a greater focus on more predictable normative transitions, with very limited research seeking to understand athlete's experience of non-normative transitions, or non-events. Secondly, although career transition models have grown to adopt a holistic lifespan perspective, these models remain rather predictable and too simplistic. They fail to represent the complexity involved and they do little by way of informing us of the contextual and socio-cultural factors influencing an individual, whom a practitioner may work with, as well as the individuals experience and meaning making of transitions. A lack of research allowing an athlete's voice to tell the story of moving through some of the transitions outlined in Wylleman and Lavallee's (2004) or Wyllemann, Reints and De Knopp's (2013) models, has left the literature and applied practitioners who draw on it with minimal guidance regarding what it is really like for athletes at different stages during their career. Thirdly, as well as agreeing with Stambulova and Ryba's (2014) call for more socio-culturally and contextually informed research, it is also suggested that capturing sport specific traditions, socio-cultural context and norms within research would help begin to add depth to the career transition models and offer a greater degree of guidance to practitioners. This level of contextual relevance also appears relevant to research including an element of dual-career analysis. In light of these gaps in the literature, there is a need to blend the theoretical and the applied in future research. Finally, it has been acknowledged that current career development and transition literature has focused too much on barriers to transitions, and coping processes, and has so far failed to acknowledge the existential insight in Schlossberg's (1981) initial definition of a transition. It is suggested that there is a need to for in-depth, longitudinal qualitative research which allows the athletes voice to be heard, and which can provide insight into the personal meaning which athletes attribute to their experiences during their career.

It was also suggested that at a more fundamental level, the concept of a transition appears to represent something smooth, predictable and relatively easy to negotiate with effective planning. However, this appears to be at odds with the nature of life as an elite athlete (see Priestley, 2008). It was suggested that the concept of critical moments (Nesti et al. 2012) better captures the complexity of athlete's experiences as well as placing greater emphasis on the significant moments within an athlete's daily existence which may not otherwise have been classified as a "transition" yet are highly significant in the athlete's development. It is suggested that a model of career transitions may provide an effective backdrop for the lives of elite athletes; however, it is the critical moments within this journey that will shape the athletes and their progress in their careers. As a conceptual framework, critical moments also appear to better capture the existential insight into Schlossberg's (1981) early definition of a transition which has been suggested to be absent from previous literature.

It has been acknowledged that there is very little research explicitly aligned to athlete lifestyle programmes, beyond broad descriptions of the of programme aims across the globe (Anderson & Morris, 2000; Stambulova & Ryba, 2014). Specifically, there has been a lack of insight into the nature of issues for which athletes seek support from lifestyle practitioners. There is also limited discussion of how practitioners go about providing athlete lifestyle support with regard to their position within multidisciplinary teams, skills, personal qualities and the philosophies of practice underpinning their work. Similar to the lack of sport specific contextual factors missing from athletes' experiences of transition in the literature, it is important to understand how socio-cultural factors at play within specific sports contribute to the delivery of athlete lifestyle support. This is especially important given Anderson & Morris (2000) description of the challenges facing programmes in their attempts to gain acceptance and become a central part of athlete support infrastructure.

Finally, it has been acknowledged that there are similarities between the required skill sets and the purpose of athlete lifestyle practitioners and the performance psychologists that they often work alongside. However, despite athlete lifestyle programmes emerging from within the field of sport psychology, and the recognition of the importance placed on an understanding of the interface between lifestyle support and sport psychology, these roles are delivered separately within their organisations. This fact has been placed within the context of ongoing sport psychology debate regarding the degree to which practitioners have a responsibility to support performance, and wellbeing. It is suggested that this interface is yet to be articulated, and role clarity remains blurred for practitioners of either role.

Aims of the current research

The gaps within the literature which have been described above represent opportunities to significantly contribute to the knowledge base. The current research project will attempt to seize a number of these opportunities. Firstly, the current study attempts to understand the lifestyle concerns of elite youth cricketers within a national talent development programme, which occur throughout the adolescent stage of development as the players in question attempt to navigate their way towards a professional career in cricket.

Secondly, the requirement for in-depth qualitative research which captures the lived experience and voice of athletes themselves will be met through the methodological choices taken. The current study is an ethnographic case study, conducted over a period of 3 years data collection within the participant's day to day involvement on an ECB talent development programme. The data collection methods used, including observation, informal dialogue, player case studies and formal interviewing allow for the cricketer's voices to be presented, and prioritises individual experience and meaning making, something missing from current research.

Thirdly, the current research project is an ethnography carried out as a practitioner-researcher. The practitioner-researcher will conduct the research whilst also working as a Personal Development and Welfare practitioner (PDW) for the ECB. This allows for the researcher to become an active member of the culture within which the study occurs whilst also allowing for a uniquely applied focus to permeate the research. This approach answers Stambulova and Ryba's (2014) call for more socio-culturally and contextually informed research, and their call for a blending of the theoretical and the applied.

Finally, it has been acknowledged that the only previous research explicitly aligned to athlete lifestyle support, has been Priestley (2008) unpublished doctorate research which focused on the lives of senior professional county cricketers. As a result, there is a complete absence of research explicitly aligned with athlete lifestyle support in adolescence or within a talent development programme. The current study more explicitly examines the nature of concerns for which young cricketers sought seek support within a national talent development programme, and within the context of the player-practitioner relationship. It is suggested that this positioning allows the current project to be the first to identify the issues and concerns for which athletes within a talent development programme seek support. The uniquely applied approach also represents a first attempt to situate these concerns within the context of athlete

lifestyle support delivery, with regard to the skills, philosophy of practice and personal qualities demanded of the practitioner. This is considered particularly relevant in light of the lack of this perspective within the literature, and the blurred role overlap between performance psychology and athlete lifestyle support. Finally, the current project is the first to adopt an applied perspective allowing for the delivery of lifestyle support to be situated within the broader organisation and culture of a specific sport.

In line with preceding literature review, there are a series of research questions which are aligned to this overall aim.

A. What is the nature of and personal meaning ascribed to elite youth cricketer's lifestyle concerns?

B. What demand does the nature of elite youth cricketer concerns place on the PDW practitioner with regard to skills, philosophy of practice and organisational integration?

C. How did the broader ECB socio-cultural context and environment influence the provision of support to elite youth cricketers on a national talent development programme?

Chapter 2

Methodology

A qualitative ethnographic research design was applied in order to best address the research questions. In this chapter, the theoretical framework which supports this research design is discussed. This is followed in order by a discussion of the research design, the setting and the participants, the author as practitioner-researcher, the process of gaining entry and a discussion of the data; collection, analysis and representation. The chapter will finish by addressing the ethical considerations of the research.

Theoretical framework

The current projects adopted a qualitative research design, as an ethnographic case study carried out as a practitioner-researcher within a single setting. It is therefore important to outline the philosophical and theoretical underpinning of both the research and the applied practice. I will first discuss the paradigmatic positioning of the research with regards to epistemological and ontological assumptions. I will then outline the theoretical framework of existential psychology that acted as a primary grounding for the research, and for my philosophy of practice as an applied practitioner within the project. This is important to help create clarity and congruence for the project (and the reader) with regard to the practitioner and researcher roles.

Paradigmatic position

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) stated that forms of research adopted, such as qualitative or quantitative, are based on an individual's particular ontological (i.e., what is the form and nature of reality and, therefore, what is there that can be known about it?), epistemological (i.e., What is the nature of the relationship between the knower or would-be knower and what can be known?) and methodological (i.e., How can the inquirer go about finding out whether whatever he or she believes can be known?) beliefs, which locate the individual within a research paradigm. Research paradigms represent belief systems which attach the researcher to a particular worldview which in turn shapes the strategy adopted in exploring the phenomenon under investigation. Denzin & Lincoln (1994) offered a discussion of the historical changes which have taken place regarding research paradigms and qualitative

research, referred to as "the five moments of qualitative research". These include the first moment, the traditional period, the modernist phase, blurred genres, the crisis of representation, and the fifth moment, the double crises. It is not considered necessary to describe these moments in detail (see Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). However, it is considered necessary to discuss the paradigmatic positioning of the current research in more detail in order to make my worldviews and assumptions explicit and to assist the reader in understanding the researcher's stance regarding the research (Morrow, 2005).

The current study is aiming to understand the nature of, and personal meaning of elite youth cricketer's lifestyle concerns, whilst also seeking to understand how these concerns relate to support required of lifestyle practitioners. Finally, it aims to understand how the concerns of individuals, and the support provided for them, is influenced by the broader socio-cultural factors of the ECB and cricket. Paradigmatically speaking, this does create some tensions between the concerns of individuals as they go about the meaning making and pursuing of their own careers, and the acknowledgement and assumption that individual experiences and narratives are socio-culturally situated and influenced. The tensions that do exist relate to the question of ontology. Specifically, to what degree is the concept of an identity or self, individually created, or socially created.

The current project aligns to a constructivist perspective. However, Richert (2010) differentiated between radical constructivism, social constructionism and critical constructivism. Radical constructivism takes the position that reality, if it does exist, is absolutely unknowable and the reality in which people live is created by people based upon the biological structure of the brain which consists of complex neurological networks. Social constructionism holds that reality is created between people through the use of language, and, tends to give less influence to the individual role in the creation of meaning. In other words, although people exist as biological entities, their identities are socially created; giving identity a "thin individual and thick social relational" perspective (Smith & Sparkes, 2008, p. 5). Critical constructivism similarly maintains that the reality in which people live is constructed by the efforts of people to understand and make sense out of living; "a thick individual and thin social relational" perspective (Smith & Sparkes, 2008, p. 5). The important distinction between social constructionism and critical constructivism is that the latter maintains that personal mental activity makes an important contribution to the reality that is constructed (Neimeyer & Raskin, 2000; Rosen, 1996; Sexton, 1997). In other words, both individual and social processes contribute to the construction of experience. It has been

highlighted that there has been a significant increase of research within sport and exercise psychology that has aligned itself with the social constructionist tradition (Ronkainen, 2014; Smith & Sparkes, 2008). However, the current study aligns with critical constructivism in trying to study how individuals make sense of their experiences and lifestyle challenges within a specific context and socio-cultural landscape. By maintaining that the individual makes important contributions to the meaning-making process, this perspective allows for a more traditional concept of self as located within the individual, achieving greater alignment with existential psychology.

Epistemologically, the current study adopts a transactional and subjective perspective, asserting that knowledge is always situated and partial. There is a theoretical assumption that psychological processes are enmeshed with sociocultural ontogenetic history (Bruner, 1990; Heft, 2013). There is an assumption that the investigator and the object of investigation are assumed to be interactively linked so that the data sought is created as the investigation proceeds, as opposed to previously existing and needing to be discovered. Ontologically, social constructionists assert that any notion of an external reality is fundamentally unknowable and therefore immaterial to human functioning. However, critical constructivists are grounded in ontological realism and assert that there is a reality which stands independent of our thoughts and interpretations of it (Cooper, 2003) and which does affect the individual's construction of the world they live in (Richert, 2010). However, constructivists give the notion of a pre-existing reality limited importance in psychological functioning. The pre-existing reality may limit the possibilities for what meanings can be constructed, but focus remains predominantly on the individual's mental processes and the social creation of meaning. There is an effort towards emphasizing the "personal and 'real' nature of an individual self, identity, experience and subjectivity" (Smith & Sparkes, 2008, p. 9), yet, acknowledgment that these are constructed through social interaction and that socio-cultural factors colour a person's sense of self, or identity. In other words, the influence of socio-cultural factors is readily embraced, however, there is a preference to see identities as a long-term project more situated in the person than in the social situation. Having outlined the paradigmatic positioning of the research, I will now discuss existential psychology, and how this acted as a theoretical grounding for both practice and research, helping to clarify the congruence between paradigm and theory.

An existential research framework

The theoretical approach of the research is primarily grounded in some central elements of existential theory. The foundation of this comes from existential philosophy, and the framework for the current study lies in existential psychology. Specifically, the elements of existential philosophy which are the foundation for the framework of this study are related to freedom, choice and responsibility (Cooper, 2003), being-in-the-world (Heiddegger, 1927/1967) and boundary situations (Jaspers, 1932/1970) which players were required to negotiate, and move through.

According to Cooper (2003), in attempting to put the concrete actuality of human existence back in to an understanding of human beings, existential thinkers have placed particular emphasis on the human capacity for freedom and choice. He adds that from an observer's standpoint, it may be possible to view human beings as causally determined mechanisms, but from the inside of human experiencing, choice and volition are ineradicable aspects of our being-towards-the-world. Importantly, whilst some similar perspectives on freedom such as the humanistic perspective (Rogers, 1961), equate freedom with the good life, the existential perspective acknowledges the difficulties and discomfort which freedom brings through feelings of anxiety, guilt and dread (Cooper, 2003). In other words, we are unavoidably choosing against something when we make a choice, and this brings with it the anxiety evoking possibility that we have rejected the better choice.

Human beings, faced with freedom and choice, must now encounter their *Dasein* (Being-in-the-world) and what has been described by Heiddegger (1927/1967) as being-towards-death. Being-in-the-world emphasises the inseparability of a person and their socio-historical context. According to Cooper (2003), Heiddegger:

"sought to depart from the dualistic view that human beings are first and foremost autonomous egos or minds, whose relationship with the world is primarily that of knowing and detached observing. Instead, he suggested that a proper understanding of Dasein is that of involvement in a practical context of daily living, which is shaped by and understood within cultural norms and practices".

In other words, we are born into a particular social, historic and economic context that is not of our making or choosing, and thus we cannot determine our endings, and throughout our lives are rocked by a "huge tide of accident" (Jaspers, 1932). Adding to this, in describing the context of being-towards-death, Cooper (2003) suggested that the key point is not that one day we will die, but that at some level of consciousness, we are aware of the fact that our lives are "hurtling towards that demise" (p. 12). Therefore, the freedom to

choose within the context of our social, historical and economic limitations creates great responsibility for the individual, who cannot help but be anxious in the face of possibility, and potentially experience guilt for the possibilities that we did not and may not ever actualise.

Meaning has been described as the most fundamental notion of existential thinking. (Ronkainen & Nesti, 2017). Heidegger (1962) argued that humans are fundamentally future orientated, in that our way of being is not exclusively caused by our past but directed towards goals and possibilities in the future. Within the loose group of existentialist approaches, there are different views as to whether meaning is purely created or discovered as something that is already there. However, living a life with meaning has been highlighted by existential therapists as a central focus. both in terms of discovering the meaning of our lives (Frankl, 1963) and creating meaning for ourselves with the belief that there are no given, external or ultimate meanings in our lives to be discovered (Yalom, 1980). In this sense, Cooper (2003) suggested that authenticity is not just about being true to one's existence but being true to the feelings of anxiety that arises from an acknowledgement of one's fundamental condition in the world.

The final element of existential theory which permeated the research framework, is the concept of boundary situations, and what have been referred to in sport contexts as critical moments (Nesti et al. 2012). Karl Jaspers contributed significantly to existential thinking on freedom, authenticity, transcendence and boundary situations (Ronkainen, 2014). Ronkainen (2014, p. 184) outlined that for Jaspers, the first boundary of existence is

"that we are always in "a situation": people do not exist "in general" or have all the possibilities: they are men or women, young or old, situated in a social and historical context. Yet, some situations are qualitatively different from others, more urgent, propelling a shift of awareness".

These are what were termed "boundary situations", which "yield a perspective in which we ask about the existence as a whole and conceive it as possible, or as differently possible". According to Ronkainen (2014), these are often lonely moments when everyday living loses its significance and a glimpse of a more fundamental level of being is revealed. These are moments where there are profound and personally significant changes to self (Ronkainen & Nesti, 2017), but also an opportunity for personal growth and developing a more authentic self. From an existential perspective, inauthenticity involves internalising cultural values unreflectively and pursuing actions, roles and goals of the "they" (Heidegger, 1927/1962). According to Heidegger, people flee into inauthenticity because it

allows them to escape the anxiety associated with big decisions and avoid an encounter with their fundamental condition in the world. Recognising their being-in-the-world, being therefore means "a way of being that is based on taking responsibility for one's life through awareness and conscious choice" (Algera & Lips-Wiersma (2012, p. 119), as opposed to radical individualism or doing things differently from everyone else (Roinkainen & Nesti, 2017).

Existentialist psychology draws on this foundation and embraces the uniqueness and complexity of each human life as it is lived, maintaining that human beings are more than a sum of their components (Cooper, 2003). This is different from natural scientific perspectives which have been criticised for reducing human beings to functional machines (Cooper, 2003). Existential psychology is instead, based on a human science conception of psychology focused on understanding the meaning assigned to lived experience (Giorgi, 1970). Existential psychology generally subscribes to ontological realism, an assumption that there is a reality which is independent of our perspectives on it (Cooper, 2003). Therefore, it differs from social constructionist approaches and aligns with constructivism in asserting that our knowledge is always situated and partial (Ronkainen & Nesti, 2017). However, in contrast to the concept of a fixed inner core or essence, Kierkegaard (1849/1983, p.13) articulates the existential notion of the self as "a relation that relates itself to itself", suggesting that the self does not lie in a fixed entity, but in the changing and complex relationship that human beings have with their being (Ronkainen & Nesti, 2017).

In existential psychology, the human condition has been characterised by four "givens" (Yalom, 1980, p.8): death, freedom, isolation and meaninglessness. Through acknowledging that we are on unique journey towards death, we become responsible for our lives and decisions (Cooper, 2003). This responsibility highlights the importance of making choices and taking actions which are authentic. That is, we are called to make conscious decisions knowing that we are finite beings and by choosing one option we simultaneously abandon other possibilities. Existential psychologists discuss freedom in the sense that human beings are entirely responsible for their own world, having been thrown into this life which is not of our choosing, but with the ability to take an active ownership of our futures. Freedom implies a great responsibility on the individual to make choices and take action, a responsibility which leads to normal (existential) anxiety (May, 1983). Isolation as a given refers to the fact that although we can form close relationships, each of us is always alone in their reflective consciousness. Finally, existential psychologists maintain that the search for

meaning is a fundamental motive in human life. Our being is an issue for us (Heidegger, 1962), and we are thrown into the world to look for meaning in what some existential psychologists see as an inherently meaningless world (Yalom, 1980). Finally, critical moments (Nesti & Littlewood, 2010), akin to Jasper's boundary situations, are the frequently experienced moments in our lives where we must confront the anxiety associated with an important change in our identity.

Understanding and representing the experiences of players within the current research drew on these central concepts of existential psychology. Firstly, the player's situatedness within a particular socio-cultural context across different levels (e.g. family background, cricket, the national talent programme) was assumed to play an important role in their experience. However, players were acknowledged as holding "a degree" of freedom and agency within their situation, as they negotiated their journey through the programme, and as a result had to negotiate the anxiety associated with taking responsibility for their career, or potentially the guilt of not doing so. There was a focus within the research on how players ascribed meaning to their experiences, and how they sought meaning through the decisions and actions they took. Finally, Nesti and Littlewoods (2011) description of critical moments in sport, akin to Jaspers "boundary situations", helped to focus the research on how significant events, moments, performances or decisions shaped how a player's sense of self, and how a player's journey unfolded. The concept of critical moments helped inform decisions regarding what elements of players experiences would help represent the player's journey through the programme, in that critical moments became the anchor points around which stories could be built.

The existential-humanistic philosophy of practice

As described above, human beings are faced with a fundamental situation in the world not of their choice, but are in possession of agency and are therefore, neither determined or totally constituted by their external conditions and culture (Ronkainen & Nesti, 2017). Importantly, existential views of freedom and choice argue that it is simply not possible to make a generalised statement about the kinds of choices people "should" make. Indeed, van Deurzen (2002) described the "dilemmas of existence", arguing that at all times we are pulled between the poles of various dualities, neither of which are intrinsically right. For example, at a moment in time, it may be better to conform to the demands of others, and at others it may be better to follow our own instincts. Existential psychology is founded on the grounding assumption that the fundamental aim of psychology is to understand and embrace the complexities of human life, not to fix or conquer it (van Deurzen, 2002).

Ronkainen and Nesti (2017) and Nesti (2004) described this work in sport as helping athletes to clarify what they are struggling with, identifying sources of meaning, authentic goals and values, helping athletes make conscious decisions and accepting responsibility for one's career life trajectory and relationships. The encounter, (the process of counselling) between the athlete and the existential practitioner is often considered more important than the activities that take place. According to Nesti (20004, p. 74) this demands that the practitioner "unreservedly give themselves over fully to the person with whom they are working", with the aim of helping the individual accept that they are free to choose and must accept responsibility for these choices with the goal of becoming more authentic (Ronkainen & Nesti, 2017). This involves confronting and dealing with the anxiety involved constructively (May, 1983). According to Nesti (2004), the personality of the existential practitioner is central to the success of the work carried out, meaning their skills, values and self-knowledge as opposed to specific personality traits. Similar to counselling approaches that are grounded in humanistic psychology, this requires the building and earning trusting relationships, the need for unconditional, non-judgemental, empathic, genuine and congruent support of players. However, the existential approach does differ, in that it adopts a positive view of anxiety and expects that the encounter may be uncomfortable (potentially for both the athlete and the practitioner) due to the personal demand of embracing the responsibility for one's future choices. This is usually a lengthier process, when compared with more structured processes, such as cognitive behavioural therapy (Ronkainen & Nesti, 2017). However, it has also been suggested that more brief focused work can be effective in some situations, which may often be necessary in youth sporting environments that are fast paced, with greater limitations on time.

A qualitative ethnographic research design

Having established the questions that the project will seek to answer, a qualitative research approach was adopted due to what Wolcott (2008) highlighted as two features that it can help achieve. These are, the need for rich description to communicate context, and, the goal of understanding behaviour from the participants own frame of reference. The data needed to answer the research questions is described as soft, as in, it is a "rich description of people, places and conversations, and not easily handled by statistical procedures" (Bogdan and Biklen 2007, p.2). The research questions require the ability to investigate the topic in all its complexity and contextual relevance, allowing for the focus to become increasingly clear

as the data is collected (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Qualitative research is appropriate because it enables us to "discover and highlight aspects and perspectives of reality that we cannot otherwise anticipate and thus transcends the limitations of our own perspectives" (Beeson, 1997, p. 24).

There are five key features of qualitative research incorporated into the present study. Firstly, the study is naturalistic (Patton, 2001), as in, the setting and the individuals operating within it are source of the data, whilst I the researcher assume the role of "instrument" of data collection. Secondly, the study attempts to capture descriptive data (Creswell, 2007), with data taking the form of words and observations rather than numbers for statistical analysis. Third, the study is concerned with a complex social process (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), this being a focus on players and practitioners' experiences within and out of cricket, which is inevitably impacted by various cultural, contextual and environmental factors. Fourth, the data is analysed inductively (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), using a bottom up rather than top-down approach allowing the key themes and narratives to shape the research findings, in as organic a way as is possible. Finally, the search for meaning remains the primary goal (Wolcott, 2009), with a primary concern being the accurate capturing and presentation of the perspectives of the young cricketers in the study. Importantly, qualitative research of this nature attempts to answer the research questions holistically, with respect given to socio-cultural and contextual meaning and the nuanced lives of the individuals involved.

Ethnography

Having established the research questions, and the paradigmatic positioning of the research, it was decided that an ethnographic case study approach was most appropriate. An ethnography appears best suited as it allows the research to look at the problem as a sociocultural process (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998), looking to uncover and describe the beliefs, values and attitudes that influence the behaviour of a group. A case study within a talent development environment further facilitates this as it is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single functioning unit that circumscribes the investigation (Merriam, 2009). An ethnography involves a continual endeavour to place specific encounters, events and understandings into an extensive, more meaningful context. In this regard, the current inquiry attempts to put the findings regarding player's lifestyle concerns within the context of their development, within the context of applied athlete lifestyle support, and within the context of the broader context of England and Wales cricket.

According to Peters, McAllister and Rubinstein (2001), ethnography relies heavily on participant observation and its primary strength, its holistic approach and respect for the empirical world - that is, the everyday lived experiences of people. They further outlined the potential of ethnography for offering knowledge of human life and activities in their naturally occurring settings and the commitment to understand the world and particular experiences in it from the perspective of the group being studied. In order to achieve this, there are several generic features central to ethnographic research, according to Atkinson and Hammersley (1998, p. 110). These features are:

- A strong emphasis on exploring the nature of particular social phenomenon, rather than setting out to test hypotheses about them
- A tendency to work primarily with unstructured data (i.e. that have not been coded at the point of data collection in terms of a closed set of analytic categories)
- Investigation of a small number of cases, perhaps just one, in detail
- Analysis of data that involves explicit interpretation of the meanings and functions of human actions, the product of which usually takes the form of verbal descriptions and explanations, with quantification and statistical analysis playing a subordinate role at best.

It is suggested that through embracing these features the researcher becomes the chief research instrument (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1998). Although surrounded by some controversy and being referred to as both a philosophical paradigm and a research method (Littlewood, 2005), it is important to highlight that neither are strictly true. Rather, ethnographic analysis occurs through an iterative process of participant observation alternating with attempts to make sense of what has been seen and heard. Further, the analysis is not necessarily a distinct stage of the research, instead beginning in the fieldwork phase through formulating and clarifying the research problems, and continuing through further fieldwork, descriptive note taking and report writing, even through to the publication process (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995).

The Setting

During this discussion of the setting, I will outline the structures that exist within the game of cricket in England and Wales. I will then outline the England Development

Programme (and its changing shape throughout the research) as the specific focus of this case study. Finally, I will discuss the players who were members of the programme, or past members of the programme and therefore contributed as participants during the three years of data collection.

The structure of cricket in England and Wales

The current study investigates the lifestyle-related experiences of youth cricketers who are members of the England Development Programme (EDP) a national talent development programme. The programme's name was changed to the Young Lions programme at the beginning of the third year of the project. However, for the purpose of the research, it will consistently be referred to as the EDP. Despite this being the primary setting of the research, the players play cricket and live their lives across various levels and settings within the game. Therefore, a brief overview of the game's competitive structures within England and Wales cricket is provided below, to help clarify the settings and levels across which participants may operate.

Male professional cricketers essentially compete domestically within First Class County Cricket, or the "the County Game". The county game has 18 "First Class" counties which compete in a two-division league format called the "County Championship" with 8 teams in division 1, and 10 teams in division 2. Further to this, there exists a One-day cricket competition, and a T20 competition, with all first class counties competing across all formats. There exist 6 MCC (Marleybone Cricket Club) sponsored university teams (MCCU's) which are also afforded first class status as some of their games are against the first class counties. Further to this, there exist 20 minor county teams, which are not afforded first class status. Each first class county operate a County academy which acts as the traditional developmental pathway to first class cricket. County academies are supported by the emerging player programme, which acts as a vehicle for players performing within the county, or in the surrounding minor counties to get a place on a county academy. The professional game is then underpinned by a nationwide club game, providing cricket opportunities across all ages. Therefore, age group cricket for developing players may include club teams, school teams, district teams, minor county teams, county academies, and regional teams (e.g. North of England). The players who are identified as being of the highest level at their stage of career may then also be playing International cricket on the EDP. At the beginning of the study, there were 3 male international programmes: England men, England lions, and the England

Development Programme. As a result, players who are member of the EDP may also be playing cricket at all or any of: school teams, club teams, district teams, regional teams, county academies, minor county teams, first class county second XI and/or first class county XI squads at any point throughout the year.

The England Development Programme (EDP)

The EDP at the beginning of the research was a programme for players under the age of 19 which housed two separate playing squads. One squad played as the England under-19 team, which was recognised internationally and would compete at the International Cricket Council (ICC) Under-19 world cup every two years. The second squad played as the EDP team, (formerly been known as the England Under-17 team). This second squad was mostly comprised of players under the age of 17, yet had removed the title of Under-17 to empower the programme to select players to this squad based on future potential irrespective of being under 17 or not. The goal of the EDP was to provide extra developmental opportunities to the best young players in the country to help prepare them for first class cricket, and to provide an oversupply of players to the England Performance Programme. These opportunities came in the form of training camps at the National Cricket Performance Centre (NCPC), regional training days, overseas training camps, overseas competitive tours, ICC Under-19 world cups, and home competitive series played in England and Wales. Further operational details will be described throughout the ethnographic report, including the initial insight into the beliefs and practices underpinning the programme.

The focus of the current research was exclusively on the experiences of players whilst they were members of the EDP. This could involve activities with the EDP squad and the Under-19 squad during the timeframe of the research, and, players who had previously been members of the EDP. However, due to the strongly principled, holistic approach of the EDP, players who had previously been a member of the England Under-19 side (as it was prior to the creation of the EDP) were excluded from the research as their experience was judged to be considerably different to those of players on the programme today. Whilst carrying out the research, I, as practitioner-researcher, was scheduled to deliver PDW support within the EDP squad for the entirety of their programme. I also had research access to the Under-19 side's activity and would deliver occasional support to the squad as required in collaboration with another member of the PDW team. This setup was scheduled to continue for the entirety of the 4-year project.

However, after 12 months of the project, a considerable re-structure of the international pathway led to a considerable reduction in budget available to the EDP. This resulted in the extinction of the younger squad with which I initially worked. The restructure would mean that the Under-19 side was now the only playing side of the EDP. Due to prior arrangements already made, an under 17 side would go on one further overseas tour during the projects second year but would have no further programme involvement. During the third year, the programme would look different again. This time selecting an under-19 squad that would compete at the Under-19 world cup, and an Under 17 group of 10 who were provided with national level coaching at the National Cricket Performance Centre during the winter, totalling 10 days of training camps. Finally, in 2016, at the end of the third year of the research project, a second major restructure of the international pathway was carried out. This led to a further budgetary restriction on the EDP. The programme would now include only the England under-19 side, with a squad of 16 players selected. The name of the programme was at this stage changed from the EDP, to the Young Lions programme.

At the point when this final restructure was put into place, data collection was ceased. Frustratingly, this means that data was collected throughout a period of considerable instability where the staff, and the players working on the programme could look drastically different. However, the demands placed on players remained relatively similar from year to year, as did the nature of supporting staff roles. The instability and uncertainty became a backdrop against which the research was conducted, and will, alongside many other factors, become an important part of the broader socio-cultural factors enmeshed within the context of the research. This was especially true with regard to staff experiences and the authors experience as a practitioner.

The programme was significantly different at the beginning of each of the four years of my involvement. It changed from initially being a centralised programme having central control over the players development, to one which seeks to "add value" to the county programmes. There were eight staff redundancies during this 4-year period, however for two staff, they had two each having been re-hired after the initial redundancy. The programme initially delivered 202 days of programme activity, which included home training camps at the national cricket performance centre (NCPC), regional training days, overseas training camps, overseas competitive tours, and home competitive tours. This was split across both squads with two separate staff teams. The Under-19 squad received 135 days of delivery on programme, and the EDP squad receiving 67 days of delivery on programme during the first

year. At the beginning of the final year of this project, this had been reduced to just 94 days of delivery exclusively for the Under-19 side. During this period, there was considerable change within the staff team of the under-19 side. This included: two different head coaches and two operations managers. At different stages over the course of the research, there had been the following staff delivering support to the players: one physiotherapist, three different Strength and conditioning coaches; two different PDW practitioners, two different performance psychologists, three different performance analysts – one of whom was made redundant. With regard to skill specific coaches within the programme, there was at different stages of the research: 3 different coaches responsible for spin bowling; 7 different coaches for pace bowling; six different coaches responsible for batting; three different coaches for wicket keeping and two for fielding. This meant, that during the four years I worked with the EDP, there had been 36 different members of staff fulfilling specific roles for the under-19 side at various stages of the project.

Participants

Players were selected to the programme having been identified as one of the highest potential players in the country for their respective position/skill. In the first year of the research, there were 18 members of the Under-19 squad, and 16 members of the younger EDP squad. In the second year of the research, there were 17 members of the Under-19 squad (now the only squad), this included 13 of the previous years younger EDP squad and four new members of the EDP. In the third year, there were 16 members of the Under-19 squad, which included 10 of the previous year's squad, and 6 new members of the EDP and a further group of 10 players who only experienced domestic camps. In total, this meant that over the course of the three years, there were 64 different players who took part at some stage on the EDP. Five players joined the programme at the beginning of the research project as 15-year olds. Otherwise, all players were between the ages of 16 and 18 at the point of first joining the programme. Players remained members of the EDP for between the minimum 1 year, with seven players remaining a part of a squad for the full three years of the research project. During this time, players may have been members of the EDP, but not been selected for a specific tour (although this was rare) or missed some part of the programme due to other engagements such as school. Collectively, the group of players had represented every single First Class County as a member of the programme. Of the 64 players, only 16 were not in full time education during the time they were a member of the programme. For 12 of these, they had already completed their education (A-Levels or a BTec) and had chosen not to pursue

University at that stage. For the other four, they had left school after completing their GCSE's and were only focusing on cricket. However, the majority of players were in full time education at the point of selection to the programme or had finished A-levels or a BTec during their time on the programme as the last year of eligibility for the programme overlapped with the year after finishing school or college.

Although players were the primary focus of the research, the members of support staff who worked on the programme also made a significant contribution to the data collection and the environment under study. As has already been discussed, there had been a very high level of staff turnover throughout the three years of the research, with a total of 36 staff working on the programme at some stage. The level of staff involvement ranged from a single camp or tour, to the full three years of the research. For confidentiality reasons, no further personal details will be shared with regard to either the player or the members of staff.

The Role of PDW within the EDP

The PDW role within the ECB has already been outlined in the introduction section. However, due to the practitioner-researcher role, some of the finer details of carrying out the role within the EDP can be described here. The author's practitioner role involved working exclusively on the EDP with players between the ages of 15 and 19. Delivering this role involved an initial profiling meeting at the beginning of the programme. For players who are in formal education, the PDW practitioner organised a meeting at the player's school to acknowledge the challenges faced by the players including the potential for missed school, college or University days, the need for exam facilitation on camps or tours and ensure the effective managing of workload across these different environments is a priority for all. The PDW practitioner attends all residential training camps based at the ECB's National Cricket Performance Centre, and often attends overseas tours. Attendance on tours was dependent on player and staff needs and various other staff requirement decisions made by the head of the programme.

During domestic training camps, the PDW practitioner would often deliver whole or smaller group workshops to players, or if necessary organise for a suitable external presenter to deliver a specific workshop. The content of these workshops was broad and were normally a combination of the specific group of player's needs, and the overall goals of the PDW programme. This included but was certainly not limited to themes such as coping with touring overseas, preparing for transitions within the game or cooking lessons in preparation

for moving away from home. Alternatively, they may be educational in terms of preparing for a career in professional sport, such as social media, anti-doping or anti-corruption education. Further to this, there is a priority of supporting player's individualised personal development. These broad priorities form the basis upon which practitioner delivery is often dynamically considered, prioritised, planned and then delivered.

The PDW presence on training camps and tours provided the opportunity for individual, 1:1 support which may be sought by players, proactively offered by the practitioner, recommended by a coach or discussed and agreed upon during initial meetings with players. When on an overseas tour, the overall agenda of player support mostly remains the same, but shifts subtly away from educational group workshops, towards focusing more on individuals coping with challenges, such as, balancing schoolwork and cricket, managing expectations, being away from home for a prolonged period, de-selection, injury or any other personal challenges which threaten to impact their goals for the tour.

Beyond official programme activity, players may work with the PDW practitioner for on-going areas of challenge or an identified area for development. When appropriate, this work may be in collaboration with PCA practitioners working at the player's county. Finally, the PDW practitioner plays a key role in supporting players who present with a wellbeing concern. This may be in collaboration with the ECB clinical psychology support staff and/or the performance psychologist. This work often required a formulation process in order to best understand how the programme can support the player's needs and ensure that the broader staff team could support the player to give him the best chance of continuing to develop positively. Normally a case manager would be allocated to players who do present with concerns of a wellbeing nature. The PDW is an important part of this process and could fulfil the role of case manager for players.

This portrayal of the PDW role most likely presents an unpredictable and flexible way of working. The author feels this is by and large quite representative of the role's nature within the multidisciplinary team. However, there was recognition within the PDW team, and by the author that specific player support was heavily dependent on the nature of the relationship between the PDW practitioner and the player. PDW practitioners would often reflect on the importance of developing a relationship before meaningful work can occur. This appeared to require practitioners to prioritise relationship development just as much as any specific delivery, with the assumption that through this, the appropriate delivery could be identified and delivered.

Gaining Entry

According to Krane & Baird (2005), ethnography begins with gaining entry to the setting, with the first step being to identify and contact the "gatekeeper" (p. 92). Gatekeepers are the people who control access to the other group members, group activities and sources of information (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). In the current research, the gatekeeper had already been established in the form of the PDW national lead who established the role of practitioner-researcher. As line manager, they would facilitate the introduction of the new PDW practitioner into the England Development Programme. The EDP operations manager acted as a secondary gatekeeper to the programme as someone who was more separate from the research agenda. The ethnographic methodology was negotiated between me and the gatekeepers, considering timelines for data collection, capacity to balance the practitioner role with data collection and how to negotiate the data collection involved with those members of the setting. It was decided that given the natural immersion which would occur as a practitioner, it was most ethical, and most practical to assume an overt position of participant-observer (Krane & Baird, 2005). This means that all members of the setting, players and staff, were made aware of my role as researcher alongside my role as a practitioner. They were made aware of the data collection processes and informed that their anonymity would be protected through the use of pseudonyms and/or composite characters in any resulting publication. Members of the setting were also informed that if they had any concerns regarding their experiences being used in the research, then they would not be used, and that they could speak with me at any point about this. Participants were given the option of withdrawing from the research at any point. However, there were no participants who did so.

I had no previous experience within the sport or culture of cricket either as an athlete, a spectator, a practitioner or a researcher. This meant that despite the relative ease of gaining entry, I entered the setting as an ethnographic outsider (Krane & Baird, 2005). An ethnographic outsider is a researcher not originally a member of the culture. Whilst the ethnographic outsider status typically may provide a challenge in gaining entry, the practitioner role allowed for a seamless and natural entry to the setting as well as establishment of trust and familiarisation with the participants. As a new practitioner, I was faced with the challenge of having to fit in and work within the culture I was researching yet remain aware of what this culture represented in order to conduct the research. This placed considerable importance on my commitment to maintaining a diary of personal reflections,

and consideration of the impact a researcher could have on influencing the behaviours of the group.

Krane and Baird (2005) suggested that this process of fitting in is essential to the success of the fieldwork, stating that poor rapport with the members of the setting will result in poor data as participants will remain unwilling to open their lives to the researcher. In order to establish this, it has been suggested that researchers should be sincere, communicate empathy, break through communication barriers, understand and employ the participants language, establish common ground, assist in everyday chores and remain humble (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Many of these processes are an intricate part of entering a new environment as a practitioner (see Fifer, Henschen, Gould & Ravizza, 2008) meaning that entering as practitioner and researcher was a symbiotic experience, as opposed to any sense of one role getting in the way of the other. It is suggested that fulfilling the role of practitioner gave me a sense of purpose and a committed role which encouraged the transparency and invisibility of the researcher role (Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2000). This allowed me to carry out the research through the practice without causing disruption to the usual working practices of the programme (Krane & Baird, 2005)

Practitioner-researcher ethnography of this nature has occurred previously when researchers carried out the role of care worker in Faulkner & Sparkes (1999) study on exercise therapy. Similarly, Peters *et al.* (2001a) reflected that it was to the benefit of their research as for them, simply hanging out and observing waiting rooms in a cancer clinic without a practical reason for being there would have been highly challenging and awkward for the researcher. Whilst the practitioner-researcher approach does provide ethical and functional challenges for the researcher, it is important to recognise the value to the research process of being able to enter the setting naturally and as an active participant.

The Practitioner-researcher & reflexivity

It is often the mission of ethnographic research not to interfere with the environment under study. The practitioner-researcher status of this research simply did not allow for this. Indeed, I could often be perceived as taking on the role of action-researcher, as data uncovered, and practitioner interventions became more and more interrelated over time. However, rather than problematic, this was deemed a symbiotic relationship as the insights derived from research improved player support, and the improved relationships and trust aided the continued collection of data. Yet, this dual-role increased the requirement for self-

reflexivity throughout all stages of the research. According to Day (2012), reflexivity concerns three interrelated issues. These are: 1) the researcher's underlying assumptions about knowledge production (epistemology), 2) issues of power, researcher identity and positionality, and 3) reflexive techniques to produce good quality, rigorous qualitative research. Schinke et al. (2012) further highlighted the importance of self-reflexivity when fulfilling the role of both researcher and practitioner. This process of reflexivity was engaged with in the form of a practitioner diary throughout the research and the important role of the supervisory team as "critical friends" (Smith & Sparkes, 2002) throughout data collection and analysis. This facilitated consideration of how my own background, training and philosophical positioning may have contributed and shaped the research process. At this juncture, it is also appropriate to share here the biographical information that may have impacted upon my perceptual lens when conducting the research, and, to consider the impact of the practitioner-research role on carrying out the research.

I started the research project as a 24-year old, one month shy of my 25th birthday. Coming from an Irish family with a rich interest in competitive sport I started my own sporting involvement as a Gaelic footballer. However, it was in golf that I found a greater passion as a 10-year old. Golf would remain my passion for my remaining teenage years and I harboured an ambition to turn professional. However, as I got older, my golfing development always seemed to be moving a little slower than what I felt it needed to if I was to become a professional. Alongside this (and in response to some of the associated frustrations), I developed an interest in sport psychology. At the age of 18, I accepted my golf game had not reached the level required for me to justify pursuing a professional career, and I accepted a place studying for a BSc Psychology at Queens University of Belfast. After departing for university, I began to lose my passion for golf (competitive golf at least) and lacked the motivation to continue practicing when my best levels could still not be met with the practice time that I had available. After a single year of university golf, I stopped playing competitively and I joined the university rowing club. I rowed competitively for the University for three years and found the experience of training 12 times a week, fully committed within a strong performance programme in a predominantly physical sport had proved a great antidote to the frustrations with which I had left golf at the time.

As I left University, I mostly left behind any form of full-time competitive sport. Today, I get most of my sporting joy from more physically oriented sports including running, cycling, and some recreational golf. My current sporting activity represents a shift in my

relationship with sport, which was brought about through negotiation of my own identity. Especially during my golfing years, my identity had been very much as an athlete, buying into the performance narrative (Carless and Douglas, 2009). However, I had maintained a focus on education throughout which afforded me the opportunity to go to university. It was only after my undergraduate degree, and after finishing rowing that my identity, for the first time became more shaped by my educational and vocational aspirations than by my own sporting involvement.

My personal interest in this research comes through my interest in sport, psychology and my understanding of what it might feel like for athletes striving to achieve a career in professional or elite sport. My passion for sport psychology has developed from what was initially an exclusive performance agenda, to now looking to understand how people develop as athletes, how the influence of the whole person contributes to performance and how athletes negotiate those challenges in their lives that cannot be fixed through mental skills training. This includes how people negotiate their identity in performance sport, and what role counselling support play in this process. These interests sit centrally in the PDW agenda of supporting the person behind the athlete and helping athletes to prepare for life alongside and beyond sport through education and personal development.

Given the wide variety of backgrounds from which lifestyle practitioners enter the field, it is important to state my training background and approach to supporting players. I have completed a BSc in Psychology and an MSc in Sport Psychology. As a result, I am effectively a trainee sport psychologist carrying out the role of athlete lifestyle practitioner. My philosophy of practice assumes a holistic counselling approach and is based on the existential-humanistic approach outlined within the theoretical framework section. This philosophy reflects my belief in developing a meaningful relationship with those I work with first and foremost and the value I place on rigorous personal examination and improved knowledge of self (Corlett, 1996).

Data Collection

Ethnographic enquiry

In line with ethnographic principles, observations and field notes of those within the research setting provide the backbone of this research (Ely, 1991) and the primary method of

data collection. However, in what can be considered a layered approach (Patton, 2015), other data collection methods were used as the understanding of the setting grew and observations began to unveil the issues which were most prominent, as well as what needed further clarification and investigation in order to answer the research question. These included my reflections as a practitioner, and the field/case notes taken from the discussions I had with players as a part of my practitioner role. After the initial period of 12 months of observation and maintaining field notes, I engaged in a process of stepping back and analysing the data up to that point, with a view to creating direction for the remainder of the project. It was at this stage that the final research questions were established with a clearer focus on player concerns and practitioner support alongside the broader ECB contextual and organisational influences on player concerns and support. It was also at this stage that a further data collection method was decided upon in order to supplement ethnographic observations.

It was decided that observations, field notes, case notes and practitioner reflections should continue for the remainder of the data collection period, albeit, with a clearer focus towards answering the research questions. These would be supplemented by in-depth semi-structured interviews with players who had previously been members of the EDP, but who had not been directly supported by the author as a practitioner during the project. There was one exception to this, a player who conducted a pilot interview in order to pilot the interview guide who had been supported by the author. This interview contributed data which were thought to be of value to the study and was therefore included as part of the research data. It was believed that the interview data could add depth and richness through providing a retrospective perspective on a player's journey through the EDP. It was also felt that players who had since left the EDP would have had more time to reflect upon, and perhaps offer a different insight to their experience on the programme, than the participants who were on the programme in the here and now. Further, I continued to collect autoethnographic data through the maintenance of a reflective diary. This was initially considered a means by which the influence of the practitioner-researcher role could be reflexively considered. However, this came to be seen as an important element of data collection as the practitioner experiences could contribute to the answering of research questions B and C.

Each method of data collection was selected for its ability to answer the research questions, and with epistemological and ontological positioning in mind. Although each method was particularly focused on one research question (for example practitioner reflections helping to answer research question B), it was felt that the different forms of data

provided different insights which all contributed to answering each of the research questions. In this sense, as opposed to being considered as different data for different purposes, all data collection methods can be considered as offering differing layers of data collection within the single ethnographic case study. I will now discuss each of the data collection methods in finer detail.

Observation

Observation (as has been mentioned) typically provides the backbone of ethnographic research (Ely, 1991; Taylor & Bogdan, 1988) and the same is true for this project. It has been described as taking mental pictures with a wide-angle lens (Spradley, 1980) and "becoming a human vacuum cleaner" (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p. 71). It allows the researcher to gain a broad description of the matter under investigation and the workings of a social group (Krane & Baird, 2005). In this project, observation allowed the researcher to infiltrate the world of the participants, begin to understand what the most prominent themes were in terms of their lifestyle concerns as youth international cricketers. This would then allow a narrowing of the lens to focus on these stories and how they play out in the context of athlete lifestyle support within the ECB, and more specifically, the EDP.

Hammersley & Atkinson (1995) highlighted how the stance of the researcher may range from observer to participant, or pure observation to pure participation. The researcher may also assume an overt or covert position. For example, a covert participant role would suggest that the researcher passes as a member of the social group and does not tell the participants that they are a researcher. On this continuum, I assumed the position of an overt, participant-observer through becoming a member of the research setting while conducting the observation. What is particularly unique about this position in the current study, is that despite becoming a participating member of the social group through my role as a PDW practitioner, I did not become a member of the group under investigation, the players. This creates a unique situation whereby I am observing the individual players within the setting, but also observing myself in my role and how the players relate to it through accessing my support. In this sense, the study clearly draws on elements of autoethnography, by focusing on the researcher's experience as a PDW.

This approach did not allow for what Taylor and Bogdan (1998) stated was the benefit of the participant role - that it allows the researcher to experience life as participants do. However, it is believed that the practitioner-researcher approach allowed for considerable

depth of understanding and insight. It also allowed for a uniquely applied context to the findings, illuminating the relationship between the players experience and the PDW provision of support. Peters, McAllister and Rubinstein (2001, p. 138) stated that the adoption of the practitioner-researcher, participant observer role was "successful and more internally congruent with the researcher's personality, cultural and behaviour patterns". The same was true for this project. In other words, it was much more authentic and congruent for me to position myself within the setting as a practitioner, rather than someone who appeared to simply hang around, in an environment which was otherwise so focused, purposeful and driven.

In practice, observation is described as attending to the many actions that may be occurring at one time, subtle eavesdropping and asking questions (Taylor & Bogdan, 1995). The researcher conscientiously observes social interactions and patterns, conversations, events and seemingly mundane activities inherent to the setting. Given the applied nature of this participant-observer role, this involved observing those elements of the programme that I was not inherently a part of, such as cricket training, gym sessions or eating meals together as a group. It also involved reflecting on what had just occurred during my own formal group and individual sessions, in a slightly more objective sense than may be the norm for practitioner reflection. It was important to do so in as much detail as possible, especially in the earlier stages of the research as initially it was very difficult to determine what was important data (Krane & Baird, 2005) and what was less so. Observations were made through watching players and staff go about their business, delivering formal group or individual sessions to staff and players, as well as informal conversations which occurred as a result of simply sharing the setting with participants. My approach to the more informal moments of dialogue became more focused over time as certain questions and gaps of knowledge became obvious.

In terms of procedure, notable moments were written down in a note pad in the form of keyword entries (Krane & Baird 2005). Observations and conversations were then captured fully in the form of a research log (Krane & Baird 2005) which became a more complete and precise account of the research setting. This was characterised by elaborate details originating from memories and reminders in the field notes (Schensul, Schensul & LeCompte, 1999). This was done typically at the end of each day of engagement and (normally) never more than 24 hours after the original observation (Emerson *et al.* 1995) to prevent the risk of memory fading and details being lost. This was supplemented by the

researcher's insights and interpretations of events which created a form of researcher inner dialogue and contributed to my understanding of the setting and narrowing the focus of the research lens (Krane & Baird 2005). Throughout this process, the research team acted as "critical friends" (Sparkes & Smith 2002; Wolcott, 1995) and as theoretical sounding boards, encouraging my reflection and interpretation of the themes which became central throughout the data collection period.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with a total of eight current "First Class County" professional cricketers who had previously been a member of the EDP. The goal of the interviews was to gain an in-depth understanding of how the central themes from the initial 12-month period had been experienced and reflected upon by previous members of the programme. An interview guide (See appendix) was created and was loosely shaped by the central themes. The interview guide aimed to discuss the player's initial experiences upon being selected for the programme, their story of progressing through the programme, and then finally their experience of leaving of the programme. This structure could then be informed by prompts which allowed the players to tell their story but drew upon contextual data gathered in the first 12 months. This process of semi structured interviewing as a part of an ethnographic project is consistent with guidelines provided by Krane and Baird (2005). They suggested that the interviewer will use structured questions to obtain the demographic data he or she requires and may ask the interviewee to respond to a particular statement or define a particular concept or term, following which the interviewer can ask less structured questions designed to elicit each respondent's unique perspective on the research topic. They also suggested that the questions used are open-ended, with the interview guided by the researcher's interest in a particular topic and subsequent subtopics, but that the exact wording of questions and the order in which the questions are asked is not necessarily determined ahead of the interview (Krane & Baird, 2005). This flexibility allows the interviewer to explore the perceptions of the respondent, follow up on new ideas as they are presented (Seidman, 2006), but avoid silencing the interviewees story.

The interview participants were purposefully selected (Patton, 2015). It was decided that those who had already progressed through the programme, were a better fit for sampling for a couple of reasons. Firstly, they did not have a professional relationship with the researcher, and as such there would be less bracketing (Dale, 1996) required by the researcher

in order to capture their individual experiences. It was also hoped that the player could be more honest and reflective in discussing their experiences of the programme and of PDW support having not worked with the researcher as a practitioner. There was significant value in interviewing players who had already progressed through the EDP as they had therefore been allowed time to reflect on their experiences, which it was felt would provide a different perspective to the current players.

Participant recruitment for interviews began with the sharing of the central themes from the initial 12 months of data collection with long term members of EDP staff including a physiotherapist, PDW practitioner and a Performance Psychologist who had worked on the England Development Programme since its inception, and as such had worked with all previous EDP players. They were presented with the themes, and the list of previous players. Through discussion with these staff members, a matrix was created by which past players could be categorised based upon the key themes which were remembered as being most relevant to their journey through the programme. This created a matrix of a total of 24 players, who best captured the themes regarding challenges and concerns which applied to them. These players were then ranked in order of how aligned their experiences were with the themes which were most prominent from the analysis of data after 12 months of research. The email addresses of these past players were provided by the England Development Programme administrators. Players were sent an email which outlined the purpose of the study, and what would be involved if they decided to take part, including the estimated length of the interview, the content of the interview and the anonymity involved to ensure confidentiality. In total, eight players were interviewed. All interviews took place at the player's respective First Class County Cricket grounds. The interviews lasted on average 75 minutes and 23 seconds. The shortest interview was 56 minutes and 41 seconds, and the longest interview was 1 hour, 51 minutes and 33 seconds**.**

Case study data

It has been suggested that case study data is limited in its use by its lack of generalizability. However, Stake (2000) suggested that to critique it for its lack of generalisability is to miss the point of studying the case in the first place. Indeed, Patton (2015) described thick description and case studies as the bedrock of qualitative analysis. Anderson, Miles, Mahoney and Robinson (2002) argued that case studies provide richness and depth of data and can prove particularly useful when investigating applied practice. This

is precisely the goal of using case studies in this inquiry. Although the purpose of this whole inquiry was to conduct an ethnographic case study of the England Development Programme, it is felt that maintaining case notes of individual players as data helps to serve this purpose, and follows the advice of Patton (2015), to always study the lowest level unit of analysis possible. It is important to note that within the context of an overt practitioner-researcher role, there were blurred lines definition between field notes and case notes.

The purpose of using individual player case studies in this research is to help contextualise player's lifestyle concerns within their relationship with PDW support provision. It is planned that having gained an understanding of what those experiences and challenges are, these applied practice cases will help understand how players use and relate to the PDW provision of support in navigating their way through the programme itself. The dominant source of case data was the dialogue (formal and informal) which occurred between players and me as the PDW practitioner. All data deemed relevant to each players case were logged and maintained as an individual player log. This process was similar to the maintenance of the ethnographic research log, with hand written case notes maintained during formal interactions and captured as soon as possible after informal interactions. These were then captured fully with in the player's case log, never (normally) more than 24 hours after the interactions (Emerson et al. 1995). This was carried out over the entire three year period of data collection. The other members of the research team and fellow PDW practitioners acted as critical friends throughout this process (Sparkes & Smith 2002; Wolcott, 1995), facilitating my reflection, understanding and planning of support for those players I was working with. This process of case maintenance was carried out for all players with whom I supported in my role as PDW within the EDP.

Practitioner reflective diary

The final source of data collection involved the maintenance of a practitioner reflective diary, with the goal of capturing my experiences of providing PDW support in order to meet the player's lifestyle concerns. Knowles, Gilbourne and Katz (2012) highlighted how reflective practice has been increasingly discussed in sport domains through coaching (Irwin, Hanton & Kerwin, 2004) and sport and exercise psychology where a range of theoretical and applied directions have been discussed relating to process, focus and skills associated with reflection (Anderson, Knowles & Gilbourne, 2004; Knowles, Gilbourne & Niven, 2011). Often, this reflective practice has been discussed in the literature in relation to

the benefits it can hold for the practitioner (Knowles, Gilbourne & Katz, 2012), or the benefits it may hold for athletes (Jones, Lavallee & Tod, 2011). Knowles, Gilbourne and Katz (2012) also acknowledged the emerging subset of reflective practice literature within the applied sport psychology literature relating to neophyte practitioners use of reflection to develop skills and practice based knowledge (Cropley, Miles, Hanton & Niven, 2007; Jones, Evans & Mullen, 2007; Knowles, Gilbourne, Tomlinson & Niven, 2007; Woodcock, Richards & Mugford, 2008) or to highlight their changing perspectives of applied practice experienced at this stage of the early career (Tod, Andersen & Marchant, 2008; Tod & Bond, 2010). Data collection through reflective practice, with few exceptions (Anderson, Miles, Mahoney & Robinson, 2002), has rarely been used in order to shed light on day-to-day experiences of "doing" support provision and the contextual challenges which can be present. However, Devenport and Lane (2009) have suggested that future research could utilize data from reflective diaries to identify factors associated with effective delivery. This appears to support the idea of presenting further examples of reflective diary writing in an effort to explore the experiences of practitioners. Further, the use of reflective practice through maintenance of a diary, as in this study, represents the first time reflective practice has been documented from the perspective of an applied athlete lifestyle practitioner.

The practitioner reflection data collection in this project embraced principles of autoethnography. Autoethnography is the study of one's own culture and oneself as part of that culture. Auto-ethnography is a reflexive, individualized method that extracts meaning following an immersive experience (Chang, 2008), allowing you to use your own experiences to garner insights into the larger culture or sub-culture you are a part of (Patton, 2015). Despite having gained more widespread acceptance within the qualitative research community in recent decades (Sparkes, 2004; Ellis, 2004; Stanley, 1993), auto-ethnography has been labelled as a self-indulgent and perhaps contentious method (Allen-Collinson & Hockey, 2008). However, it can be argued that the personal element of autoethnography can be used to understand the social as people do not accumulate their experiences in a social vacuum (Stanley, 1993).

Anderson (2006) suggested dividing the genre of autoethnography into evocative (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) and analytic auto-ethnography (Anderson, 2006). Analytical auto-ethnography focus on drawing theoretical explanations of broader social phenomena, whereas in evocative auto-ethnography, focus is on narrative presentations that open up conversations and evoke emotional responses. Although not completely negating the evocative benefit of

the data, the current data collection is best positioned in the analytic genre and focuses on the first author's applied experiences in an attempt to answer the research questions. In this analysis, the focus is not primarily on me as the writer, but also on those elements of my experience which illuminate wider (sub)cultural processes (Allen-Collinson & Hockey, 2007) related to delivering the athlete lifestyle practitioner roles and doing so within the broader context of the ECB and English cricket. Key specific features of this approach are the author's position as a full member in the researched group or setting, the explicit statement of such membership in any research publication and engagement in improving theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena (Anderson, 2006).

The reflective diary data was collected over a three year period carrying out the role of PDW coach working within the England Development Programme from the 1st October 2013 until 30 September 2016. Data generally included two variations of reflections. Firstly, reflections were captured in the moment often relating to applied cases or observations during applied practice, through which I could attempt to make sense of my experiences as practitioner with players and staff (Krane & Baird, 2005). It was decided that capturing these reflections should follow ethnographic guidelines of never being written up more than 24 hours after the original engagement (Krane & Baird, 2005). Secondly, reflections of a more irregular nature, which tended to capture a critical moment of learning, insight or a key moment of understanding which related to the research questions. Throughout this process, the supervisory team again acted as "critical friends" (Sparkes & Smith, 2002) and as theoretical sounding boards, encouraging my reflection and interpretation of findings throughout the data collection period.

Data Analysis & Representation

The process of transforming ethnographic data into theoretically informed interpretations in a final report has been described as one that consists of no standardised procedures or protocols (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). In fact, the manner in which the ethnographer attempts to make sense of the data has been portrayed as something that is uniquely personal (Walford, 2002). However, the process is always underpinned by the importance of getting to know the data and identifying salient aspects of group life expressed within what has been captured (Bowles, 2014). This is a process that begins as soon as the researcher enters the setting and continues throughout the rest of the investigation as a

complex mix of recorded information is steadily categorised and compressed, drafted and redrafted into a textual product (Parker, 2002). Understanding data analysis as an on-going process helps locate its contribution to decisions made in and out of the field in relation to what is relevant to the research, and to what direction the research will continue to go. This is important to recognize, as it helps understand how layers of data can be added in order to develop what has become known in the earlier stages of the research. Indeed, Rock (2007) described the process of data analysis which occurs early and in the middle of the fieldwork as being similar to constructing a jigsaw, whose final design and configuration changes with each piece found. In other words, the search for each succeeding piece is adjusted in accordance with the image of the research environment created by each preceding piece. That is not to say that there is no structure or focus to data collection and analysis. In order to guide this process from initial data collection through to the final report, there was a structured data analysis process, the focus of which was to help identify the next steps of data collection during the research and create organisation of what had become known before creating the final report.

Analysis

Throughout the research, data analysis was based on a qualitative description approach (Sandelowski, 2000). Although data coding was systematically applied, the codes were generated from the data themselves, with collection and analysis mutually shaping each other (Sandelowski, 2000). After 12 months of data collection, an initial data analysis was carried out. The purpose of an analysis of the data at this stage was to establish; what are the nature of lifestyle concerns of players in the programme, and what ought to be the focus of the research during the final two years? A thematic analysis was used in alignment with guidance provided by Braun and Clarke (2006). This involved; (1) Familiarisation through repeated reading whilst searching for meaning and patterns amongst the data, (2) Generating initial codes and organising data into meaningful groups, (3) Sorting different codes into potential themes and collating extracts from the data into themed groups, (4) Reviewing themes in line with Patton's (1990) dual criteria of internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity, (5) Defining and naming themes before (6) being prepared to use data extracts within themes to prepare the following report. This initial understanding of the players lifestyle concerns, combined with the socio-cultural, contextual and practitioner-related knowledge that had been gained during this initial phase, helped to create the direction for the rest of the research project, and as a result, decide upon what future data collection methods were required. At

this stage, there were three higher-order themes which could each provide much-warranted direction for further research. These related to the players experiences and challenges, the practitioner role and its place within the programme, and the broader environment and systemic factors that influenced both the player and the practitioner role (particularly prevalent in light of the organisational restructure that had just been carried out). It was felt that the player's experiences ought to remain the central focus of the project. However, the broader system, and practitioner themes appeared to be inseparable from the experience of the player. Therefore, the decision was taken that the players should remain the focus of the study, but that data collection should continue to capture the demands facing the lifestyle practitioner, and the influence of the socio-cultural context on the player and the practitioner. The initial data created an in-depth understanding of the nature of contextually and culturally specific lifestyle concerns for which elite youth cricketers seek support, and the personal meaning they ascribe to them. These findings provided much of the data for the first published journal article to come from the project (See Appendix).

At the end of the data collection phase, early in the fourth year of the research, analysis of all data collected was carried out. Analysis of the observational field note data, case note, and the interview data and practitioner reflection data followed a similar process to the initial analysis after 12 months. Once again, a thematic analysis was used in alignment with guidance provided by Braun and Clarke (2006) (See above). This data analysis facilitated the organisation of the findings by their contribution towards answering the three research questions. However, as has been highlighted, individual data extracts often contributed to answering two, or three questions at once given the interrelatedness of the three questions.

This process of data analysis organised the data into a meaningful format, provided direction towards answering the research questions from what was a massive and wide ranging data pool. Analysing data in this way allowed for data coming from different collection methods to run alongside each other and contribute to answering the research questions using the unique insights that each method provided. However, data collected from different methods would continue to have to be weaved together in order to be represented in the final report and answer the research questions. For example, an observation of player's lifestyle concern, could be supplemented with a practitioner reflection of trying to support this concern as a practitioner, but also within the broader context of the EDP programme and

the context of cricket. Interview data may then add another layer of insight or depth into this specific experience of a player(s).

The structured methods of data analysis were intended to help facilitate this process of adding layers to important narratives and themes rather than in itself creating the themes or structuring the report. The process of indwelling (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994) both before, during and after data collection through extensive reading, note taking and discussion with the research supervisory team helped to understand and formulate the major narratives which dominated the authors time in the setting before drawing on the data extracts to represent these in the report. This final process would ultimately continue into the writing phase up until the final report was concluded. Similar to Bowles (2014), this process in practice was messier than the description could ever depict as the author handled multiple data sets, continued to review the literature and put to pen to paper with a view to answering the research question. However, this messiness was maintained at a manageable level due to the more structured data analysis carried out, as it helped provide some order and organisation to the data before using it to answer the research questions.

Representation & criteria for judgement

It has been highlighting that ethnographic analysis and representation can be unstructured and emergent right from the first day of research through until the final report is complete. Drawing on multiple layers of data, in order to answer three interrelated research questions was a very challenging, and sometimes messy task. The challenge was to accurately convey the world under study in a way that captured this messiness and to provide insight that could answer the research questions. In order to achieve this, elements of narrative research were drawn upon. It is important to recognize, that narrative was drawn upon only in the sense of representation, not as a theoretical framework or method of analysis. Instead, a narrative form of representation was adopted to create three creative non-fiction stories of player's (composite characters) journey through the programme. The three stories follow an initial realist description of how I came to understand life on the programme, and the nature of support that I was required to deliver within the setting. Together, this forms the results of the study which are then discussed with a view to answering the research questions.

The value of using a creative non-fiction, narrative form of representation is consistent with the value that Smith and Sparkes (2009) stated that narrative research could

offer. The creative non-fiction stories allowed for the complexity and messiness of the world that was under study to be best represented. It allows for a better integration of the individual (both player and practitioner) and the social (life on the programme). Further, it is suggested that the real world of applied practice is messy and complex, and in order to truly inform applied practice, research will need to be able to embrace this. Using a narrative form of representation created the opportunity to do so. Further, the creation of composite characters allowed for deeply personal moments of individuals journeys to be presented, whilst maintaining confidentiality and anonymity for those who actually lived these moments.

Sparkes (2000) suggested that a constructive way forward in the judgement of qualitative research begins with the acknowledgement that the selection of criteria should be related to the nature of the particular piece. The judgement criteria will also be informed by the epistemological and ontological positioning of the project. In light of the theoretical positioning of this project, and the applied focus of its purpose, a recommended criterion for judgement has been established. The current research ought to be judged against the criteria of the research's coherence (Garratt & Hodkinson, 1998); authenticity (Sparkes, 2000); verisimilitude (Sparkes, 2002) and practical utility (Sayer, 1992). Given the elements of autoethnography embraced in this study, it is also suggested that plausibility is embraced as a part of the criteria for judgment (Polkinghorne, 2007). In other words, the reader ought to be convinced that the arguments and conclusions are plausible based on the evidence provided and our previous existing knowledge; that they are a truthful and highly informed representation of the experiences they look to represent; and that they can lead to a helpful way forward within practical settings. There is one final element of judgement criteria that is not often drawn upon (regrettably perhaps) - that the reader ought to get a sense of genuine and sincere care from the practitioner-researcher. This is considered important for two reasons. Firstly, given the practitioner-researcher's responsibilities within the study, and level of investment and vulnerability required from participants for the study to be successful, a genuine sense of care and support for them was necessary to help in their moments of difficulty, and it could (and will) be argued was an important ethical requirement. Secondly, it could be argued that genuine and sincere care for the participant ought to be a judgement criteria for all research, especially for research carried out in such an applied context where the findings can be clearly applied to help people in their day-to-day lives. Such criteria might seem unusual, particularly for researchers more experienced in positivist or even post-positivist research. However, for applied research with a focus and interest in participants for

who they are as people, it feels like an entirely appropriate criteria for judgement and a responsibility for me as practitioner-researcher.

Creating the Non-fictions

The three stories each tell of a player (a composite character) and his journey through the programme, from my first-person perspective of supporting them in my role as PDW practitioner. The three composite characters are made up of players that I worked with on the programme who shared similar or significantly overlapping journeys during their time on the programme, coupled with the perspectives of interviewed players who had reflected on similar experiences and journeys. An important finding at the point of the first data analysis was that there was an endless list of things that players may experience as a concern, but that there was a consistent theme of identity and the player's negotiation of their identity at an important stage of their development. This theme of identity became the thread that held the stories together, and informed the selection of individuals who could contribute to the creation of a composite character for a story. Loosely, the theme and identity that holds these three characters together are; Character 1 (George) is a player who identified heavily with his role as a student and an athlete, actively aiming to achieve at a high level across both; Character 2 (Alex) is a player who had come to identify himself solely as a cricketer, and had outright rejected education in his pursuit of a cricket career; and Character 3 (Tom) is a player whose identity seemed to be regularly in a state of flux, depending on what the environment required of him at any given time. The stories are told as a timeline of the player's journey through the programme. However, they do not necessarily include every event or period of involvement that the player engaged in. Instead, the stories are told through the critical moments (Nesti. et al. 2012) that occurred within the player's journey through the programme. Creating stories that are anchored by the critical moments within a players journey was an important element of the non-fictions, as this structure helped to align this form of representation with the existential theoretical positioning of the research and my philosophy of practice as a practitioner.

The three (composite) player's stories are told from my first-person perspective of trying to support players on their journeys through the programme. Tedlock (2000) stated that because ethnography is a process and a product, ethnographers' lives are embedded within the field experiences and that their interactions involve moral choices, their experience is

meaningful, and the outcomes are generated and informed by this meaningfulness. Representing the findings from a first person perspective helps capture the interrelatedness of the practitioner role and the environmental influence, but also tells of the player's journey through the programme just as I had come to understand them, from the perspective of the practitioner role. The first person-perspective is therefore most congruent with the practitioner-researcher role. However, Tierney (2002) highlighted that when sharing a tale of the self and the other, there is a responsibility to ensure that the self does not dominate unnecessarily which could lead to losing touch with the player-focused agenda of the research. This once again was protected against through the role of the research team as critical friends, as discussions sought to ensure that the player remained the central focus of the stories, and to check and challenge the interpretations and meaning-making of the experiences contained within the stories.

Creating the non-fictions was highly challenging, as there was a need to create work of aesthetic merit that also captures the findings within the data in such a way as to answer the research questions. Therefore, it had to be engaging and enjoyable to read due it's capacity to evoke emotion in the reader, yet also meet its analytic demand of being highly informative with regard to the three research questions. It is also important to recognise my respect for the creative writing process. I certainly did not assume that just because a creative approach was what could best meet the demands of the research, that I therefore had the right to just pick up a pen and do so with limited prior experience. There was a responsibility for me to consider what makes a piece of high-quality creative work and what do those more experienced in writing of this form draw upon. To help me with this, I had a number of inspirations. Smith, Williams and McGannon's (2015) book chapter on ethnographic creative non-fiction was helpful in considering "how might this be done?" (p-65). Specifically, the importance of the stories having a purpose for being written; the importance of showing rather than telling; the power of using dialogue; and the use of embodiment to 'show' rather than just providing description provided helpful reference points at all stages of writing and re-editing. Further, the importance of the writing, editing and re-editing cycle was highlighted by Smith, Williams and McGannon (2015). This helped me to accept that creative writing is always a work-in-progress, allowing me to patiently accept the nature of this process, and to protect me from allowing an idea of the perfect piece to get in the way of completing a good piece. As such, the cycle of writing, seeking feedback and re-editing was completed several times over for each non-fiction.

A further source of inspiration came from Cheney's (2001) book, 'Writing Creative Non-Fiction: Fiction Techniques for Crafting Great Non-Fiction". Specifically, the skill of scene setting and developing characters through showing, rather than telling, were illuminated for me through the books use of hugely diverse examples of great non-fiction and was regularly drawn upon. Van Maanen's (2011) book, "Tales of the field: On Writing Ethnography" was also very helpful. In particular the discussion of realist, impressionist and confessional tales along with more examples of great writing helped me to understand how the style of writing impacts the degree to which the author lives within the story and relates to the purpose of the story. Drawing on such material helped me to develop a much greater awareness of what writing creatively involved. This allowed me to draw on these great examples, as well as from the fiction that I have enjoyed on a personal level to learn from more experienced writers and use their expertise as a guide for how to write creatively myself

There was one further consideration taken when creating the non-fictions. During my experiences as a practitioner-researcher, I became acutely aware of how applied practice became a cycle of significant observation and gathering of information, before using this in what were at times very immersive one-to-one interactions with individuals. I also came to believe that these could be quite mundane interactions as opposed to heroic interventions. Throughout the project, I also became aware that outsiders to the project, and even other members of staff in the environment were often curious about what I talk about with players and what the conversations are like. Therefore, it felt important that how I came to understand applied practice as an interplay between sense-making within the context combined with one-to-one dialogue came through in the non-fictions. To help achieve this, the nature of dialogue was presented in an unguarded manner, often appearing as conversation transcripts with subtle moments of individual reactions & emotional responses. It is hoped that presenting the work this way can help to lift the cloak that may at times hide the reality of this type of work.

Consideration of ethics

This study was approved by the University ethics committee. The PDW national lead and the programme manager (secondary) were identified as appropriate gatekeepers, to provide consent to overt research access to the programme. This was facilitated by the researcher's entry to the setting as a new practitioner within the staff team. All members of the setting (players and staff) were provided with a verbal briefing of the practitioner-researcher's role, aims of the research, data collection procedures and were offered assurances regarding anonymity and confidentiality. Players and staff were also assured that they maintained the option to withdraw from participation at any time. However, no participants opted out of research at any point throughout the study. Written participant consent was gained for all interviews with previous EDP players. All coaches and players referenced in the study have been anonymised within the report. Player anonymity was also ensured through the use of composite characters within the results, as opposed to individual case studies which would have been more easily identified. This combined with ethical use of research data during the write up contributed to the care taken to ensure participant confidentiality.

Ethics can be a complicated subject when it comes to conducting ethnographic research, due to the unpredictable nature of the work (Goodwin, Pope, Mort, & Smith, 2003; Ferdinand, Pearson, Rowe, & Worthington, 2007). There were a number of ethical dilemmas to negotiate during the study. One concern was that despite the overt research stance, it was felt that participants came to view me more as a practitioner than a researcher as trust and rapport was developed over time. This could have resulted in participants sharing a level of information without considering its inclusion within the research. Fleming (2013) coined the ethical principle of "McFees friends" (p.39), which provided a helpful reference point for me, given the access provided by members of the setting into their lives. The principle is an uncomplicated one and works on the notion that researchers should treat their research participants in a spirit of friendship based on concern for the well-being of others. Further, I was very open with participants about my research work and members of the setting frequently saw me carrying out research work within the setting. They frequently asked me about the purpose and progress of the research I was doing with them. It is also important to acknowledge that when players disclosed concerns to me, such as feeling homesick, struggling to meet expectations or not knowing what to do after finishing secondary school, it became my responsibility to support them as a practitioner, ensuring a mutual benefit and

thereby reducing the power imbalance inherent in ethnography research settings. In general, when working within the applied setting, I felt that good ethical practice as a practitioner equated to good ethical practice as a researcher, for example, non-judgemental support and a primary focus on player welfare and confidentiality. However, it was also explained to participants that what was considered confidentiality in practice would be considered anonymity in research. Finally, all participants withheld the right to request that any data they contributed does not be included in the final report. However, a request for this to happen did not come from any member of the setting.

Chapter 3

Results

The EDP: Principles, practices, support roles and organisational change

The first half of what follows includes insight into what life for the players on the programme was like. This includes the programme principles of delivery; who were the people players engaged with in the setting; and how did the programme aim to develop players with the skills required to be first class professional cricketers and future international cricketers. This description is developed through my experiences of being introduced to the EDP, and the facets of daily life which struck me initially and which continued to be a central tenet of the programme. It also includes description of the activity's players went through, including training camps and overseas tours. After outlining the nature of the programme, I then map the journey of this programme itself, including its staff, its purpose and its principles, over the three years up until data collection ceased at the end of the third year. The need to do this came about as a result of the significant programme upheaval that occurred during the research. This upheaval had a significant impact on the programme, its staff, and as a result, the research process. This chapter acts as a backdrop against which the player's and my practitioner experiences can be understood. For this reason, it maintains a realist perspective, remaining mostly descriptive, rather than interpretive of what I saw and experienced over the three years. This realist perspective is deliberate with a view to allowing the setting to be presented, before beginning to look at the lives of the players operating within it and understand how they (and I) came to interact with it.

"Welcome to the ECB: Meet here at 7AM tomorrow"

My first week of work acting as a Personal Development and Welfare practitioner would not see me working directly one-to-one with any players. However, it provided insight into the complexity of delivering a role on a National Governing Bodies talent development. This first week highlighted the many moving parts and multiple stakeholders in player development and the value of establishing relationships with these stakeholders.

My second day on the job included a trip to a Midlands location for the national sport science and medicine conference within the sport. Those attending included practitioners

from the 18 counties and England programme including physiotherapists; strength and conditioning coaches; performance analysts; performance psychologists and PDW practitioners (both from the ECB and PCA). The purpose of the event was to reflect on the season past, share examples of great practice between counties and England as well as engage in personal development activity. Most importantly (or so I was told) it was an opportunity to socialise together, strengthening the relationships between county and England practitioners. As practitioners introduced themselves, and highlighted players from their counties that I would be working with this year, it became obvious that I was about to be thrown into a world where a very wide range of people would play their part in players journeys. My roommate for the weekend, a physiotherapist at a Division two county, provided gentle warning that the ECB and the counties did not always get on. This, he said, was because they both wanted access to the best players and they both had their own ideas about what was the best thing for the player's development. Although I tried not to become overly biased with this regard, my reflection was simply that there would clearly be two primary environments for the players to balance, one being their England programme, and the second being their county academy programme. As I tried (and sometimes failed) to remember who I would be working with over the years to come, I wondered if the players found this number of staff as overwhelming as I did on my second day on the programme.

Following the conference, I began a week long road trip around the country in order to visit the schools of players who had been selected for the programme. This process kick-started the PDW's provision of support to help players achieve in both education and cricket. All 16 players in my U17 squad were in full time education, as where 8 of the 18 members of the Under-19 squad (the lowest this number had been). The players selected for the programme would be expected to attend training camps and tours, some during school term time, and some of which were during school holidays. Understandably, this would have an impact on the amount of time players could spend at school, and how much time they would have available to study. The meetings where attended by the PDW, the player, the parents, the school's heads of year and/or personal tutors, as well as county representatives (normally the Counties Academy director, or a county coach). The PDW support would involve facilitating communication before and after camps or tours, in order establish what work needs to be completed away from school. To facilitate the work getting completed, there was a provision of 2 hours per day (up to a maximum of 10 hours per week) of supervised study

that would be built into the EDP training. This would be coordinated and supervised by me as the PDW practitioner, both on training camps and on tours.

Profiling and case conferencing

Two weeks after entering the setting, I was due to meet the players for the first time during "profiling camp". As the name suggests, the purpose of the camp was to develop a holistic profile of each player that could be used to guide the planning of their development needs for the coming winter. The premise of this camp was that the different disciplines within the staff team would spend time (as their discipline required) with each player in order to assess their strengths and weaknesses and the specific areas they most need to develop. This process would later be followed by a "case conference" meeting whereby the most relevant information would be shared within the staff team in order to build a picture of the most prominent areas of player development needs. The outcome of this meeting would then be discussed between the EDP head coach, the player himself and the most relevant county staff before all would agree on the focus for the player moving forwards.

The night before "profiling" was the first time I met the team of EDP support staff that I was to begin working with. Practitioners representing physiotherapy, performance psychology, PDW, strength and conditioning attended the meeting alongside batting, spin bowling and pace bowling coaches. The group was completed by the head of selection, the head coach and the operations manager. Further attendees were ECB leads for the science and medicine disciplines who were there to support those practitioners delivering on the programme. It was also planned for each of the player's academy directors to attend the cricket testing sessions the following day in an attempt to create (greater) alignment between the county and the EDP.

That evening, we held a meeting to discuss the two days of profiling ahead. Similar to most notable moments of experience so far, I was again struck by the number of practitioners involved. There were 14 highly skilled practitioners sitting around the table as I entered the room. During the meeting, each of them shared their plans for the weekend ahead, including; the processes they would go through, the rationale behind these and the outcome they hoped to achieve and share during the the case conference meeting. I was struck by their attention to detail, as well as their clarity regarding what they hoped to achieve and deliver. Before I was

required to share my goals for the weekend, I did my best to maintain composure within this group and wondered (again) if players also gain the same sense of wanting to impress this huge group of experienced staff.

The PDW profiling process was semi-structured and aimed to have players self-assess on areas related to the PDW role (dual aspirations, personal organisation, impression management, communication skills), as well as capture a broad picture of the players lives (family life, values, and a review of the past year etc.). As opposed to always setting specific goals, the document was aimed at agreeing any actions or support necessary following the meeting. However, I was informed that all players in education would automatically have an educational goal as one of the goals they set for the winter. When it came for me to share my sense of purpose for the weekend, I said that:

I would look to understand the players specific goals for education and what support they felt would be most helpful in this regard. I was keen to not allow myself to become identified as "just" an educational support for players, so I also stressed the importance of beginning to build a trusting relationship with players which would prove valuable to all support needs moving forward.

I was relieved to see that staff seemed to understand my relationship focused perspective and valued the approach I was taking. The holistic appreciation was reinforced as staff gathered in the hotel bar and shared stories of last year and observations of the players selected (whilst enthusiastically acting out the defining features in how they play the game). I felt a real sense that staff bought in to the idea of supporting players on and off the pitch, through the staff's in-depth knowledge of the player's home lives, their personal characteristics and their sensitivity to some of the player's previous personal challenges.

"Death Camp" and life on the EDP

Just one week after "profiling", the players' development goals were agreed. A further, three weeks later, I was due to attend my first training camp where I could begin to complete the picture of what life on the EDP was like for players. This first camp was a ten-day training camp during the October half-term break from school. The camp was (somewhat) affectionately called "death camp" by the support staff and the players who had experienced it before. It was referred to as death camp because one of the desired outcomes

of the camp was to provide players with something of a shock regarding the levels of demand expected of them now that they were on a national level programme. These levels of demand included 12-hour days, high levels of technical challenge in training (e.g. high speed bowling), high physical demands both in the gym and in the cricket sessions. There was also a significant demand with regard to the levels of behaviour and professionalism expected of players. The level of pressure and skill level which players were exposed to was acknowledged as being right on the edge, or slightly beyond players' current capabilities. I was told that developing the ability to perform under pressure had been a central tenet of the programme right from its inception three years previously. This meant putting players to test under all forms of pressure including performing when fatigued, raising standards in order to compete and scenarios where people would experience considerable psychological pressure to perform.

Over time, I would become used to the pressure training cycle that was scheduled within the programme. It followed a pattern of; developing skills without pressure, then training skills under pressure but with continued coach support, and finally, testing skills under pressure without coaching support. Pressure was created through match-like scenario, and the presence of a consequence for losing sides, or for those individuals who do not meet a required standard. As such, players were held accountable for delivering a very high level of performance during pressure training and testing scenarios with the threat of a "consequence" for those that don't meet the level of performance. Consequences for performance shortcomings often involved things like a 5-minute physical challenges. Consequences were said to be delivered in a transformational fashion, with staff equally susceptible to completing a consequence, and with the rationale of the consequence being linked to player's desired futures as potential international cricketers.

Players were also held accountable for a high level of off-field behaviour (conduct) and professionalism. This included things like sportsmanship, maintaining the spirit of the game, being on time, eating the right food, having the correct kit and keeping the training environment clean and tidy. Similar to performing under pressure, failure to maintain behavioural standards could result in a behavioural consequence, which was described as "fitting the crime". An organisational error would be punished with an organisational consequence. For example, failure to clean the environment after a training or classroom session may result in cleaning up after everybody for a day. Once again, the staff were held to account for exactly the same standards.

Being a member of the EDP meant attendance on a number of camps over the course of the winter that aimed to develop players in line with their individual goals. With the exception of the longer 10-day camp, the camps ranged from three to five days in length and were often planned during school holidays to minimise the impact on school attendance. Beyond the "performance under pressure" training cycle, players were exposed to a wide range of multi-disciplinary delivery, support and education. A day on a training camp could include a group training session, an individual-focus training session, a gym session or injury rehabilitation, a tactical discussion/education session and a performance psychology or PDW themed group workshop. Further to this, players who were in full time education would complete two hours of supervised study each day. Staff and players stayed in the same accommodation and ate the same meals together. This schedule would typically fit into a day which might last from 07:00 or 08:00, until 18:00 or 19:00. In line with good safeguarding practice, two members of the support staff were "on duty" each evening, meaning they were on-call should there be any concerns for players, and were responsible for signing players out of the residence and back in to the residence before the curfew at 10pm.

Within the pavilion that connected the two accommodation houses, staff and players would convene each evening either to chat around a table, or to play pool or table tennis. Ex-professionals on the coaching staff would share stories of their playing days (often quite recent) and would have players hanging on their every word as they tried to understand the world of professional cricket that they were giving everything to enter. Stories typically revolved around the cult figures from each county, many of whom the players had already come across when dipping their toes into first class cricket environments. The stories that were shared were just as much about the character, or "the bloke" as they were about the cricket. Being a good bloke, in cricket terms, seemed to take on everything from looking out for your teammates, working hard, providing banter, enjoying a beer with your team, maintaining the spirit of the game, among many other factors. The atmosphere highlighted how the coaches were more than happy, and even appeared to enjoy sharing their personal stories from a life within the game. Storytelling no doubt had played a role in helping them and teammates get through long stays away from home with the other "good blokes" when they were players.

As a practitioner-researcher, I spent a lot of time in that pavilion, as it was not only a hotbed of activity for entertainment during long days on camps, but it was also where you heard the most honest reflections on the camp, and on the players' own lives. With time, I

had started to realise that what players didn't tell you in a formal setting of a one-to-one meeting room, they came to tell you in the pavilion. Players would casually bring up the topic of their university applications, or the coaching qualifications they are completing. With regards to concerns of a more personal nature, such a break-up with a girlfriend, if the player didn't tell you directly, their mates within the team made a joke about it. It was in these moments that for me, the real PDW work often began as relationships were built, and an awareness of player's lives was built. As conversations were initiated, between the player and I, we would often talk it out there and then. If issues of a more private and confidential matter arose, we moved into a quiet living room for a cup of tea or booked a time over the next few days when we would make sure we had enough time to discuss any concerns in full. The players always said thank you for offering support.

Overseas tours

Each winter, the EDP schedule would retain a focus towards building for a competitive tour. Every second year, the biggest priority tour would be the ICC Under-19 World Cup. Over the course of my 4 years, there were one or more tours to Sri Lanka, Dubai, Australia, India, Bangladesh and South Africa. In my first year working on the programme, there was an U17 competitive tour, lasting 17 days. I went on this tour. For the Under 19 squad, there was an overseas batting training camp in October, a three-week competitive tour in December, and then the Under-19 world cup over a five week period during January and February. The following year, following the first organisational restructure, there was a three-week Under 19 training tour to in December, and a month-long competitive tour crossing March and April. I went on both of these tours. The following year, a world cup year, there was a three-week competitive overseas tour in December, and the World cup, again over five weeks in January and February. I did not go on either of these tours. Finally, in the fourth year, and after data collection had finished, there was a three-week overseas training tour in December, which I went on, and a five-week competitive tour in February and March, which I did not go on.

Overseas tours were described as providing a great insight into, preparation for and experience of life as an international cricketer. From a training and skill development perspective, they offered experience of playing in vastly different conditions and understanding of the skills required to succeed there. For example, learning to bat against

spin in the heat and on the spinning pitches of the sub-continent was an opportunity that could not be replicated in the UK. The tours also provided players with an opportunity to test their skills against similar aged opposition of the highest international standard. Off the field, they challenged players to develop the ability to spend significant periods of time away from their home and their family, for up to 5 weeks at a time. Players would be expected to perform under the highest pressure they had experienced, coping with the demands of fighting for selection, preparing for games, and for some dealing with injury, non-selection or de-selection. All of this could be experienced whilst removed from their usual support network at home, and thus created a microcosm of emotion. These tour experiences, the staff often stated, provided the real value of the programme.

Support for the person

Within the multidisciplinary support staff team working on the EDP, I as a PDW worked closely alongside a performance psychologist. The role of the performance psychologist was strongly aligned with the coaching staff with a predominant focus on improving performance, whilst the PDW role had a greater focus on wellbeing and a player's development as people. The ECB performance psychologists are positioned with the aim of working "with coaches, as well as direct with players, to help optimize the mental development, mental readiness and ongoing mental performance of players" (ECB, 2017). This was primarily achieved at this age group through: delivery of educational workshops in line with the ECB psychology model, supporting players and coaches to develop psychological skills within training sessions and one-to-one work with player which could be both player or psychologist-initiated.

The PDW and performance psychologist roles were delivered independently from two different support role frameworks. However, there was acknowledgement for the so called "grey area" that existed as overlap between the two roles with practitioners often moving outside of, and back inside of their structured role boundaries to support a player's need in the moment. Role boundaries were not clearly defined, but I came to understand them as: performance psychology support aims to directly influence performance, whereas the PDW work looks to directly influence personal development and welfare, with a view to influencing performance. Therefore, I had come to understand the operational details of the two roles when working together, as heavily interrelated, yet structurally independent. What

this means in practice, is that both roles had areas of support which were clearly defined and delivered as "theirs". For the performance psychologist this included supporting the delivery of "pressure" coaching within training sessions or education regarding how athletes respond to performance pressure. For the PDW, "their" areas of delivery included supporting player's educational aspirations alongside cricket, carrying out wellbeing screening processes or creating opportunities for experiential learning through the delivery of a charity project. However, beyond the more easily established role clarity, much of the work that was carried out came to be negotiated in response to the player's needs. Factors which came to influence who might deliver support lying within the "grey area" of players needs included: practitioners skill sets, practitioners' philosophies and support beliefs, which practitioner observed the need or developed the solution, the practitioner availability or time demands within the programme. The most important factor determining who would provide support was the strength of relationship between player and practitioner. Over time as the psychologist-PDW relationship grew, some of the delivery which could be located within the "grey area" was delivered by both practitioners collaboratively.

This required frequent communication and comparing of case notes, with player permission and agreed confidentiality, to try and understand the whole picture of an athlete's concerns to better inform the support. This process often led to a better understanding of who was best placed to support individual players. However, providing holistic support through this dual-role structure did also create challenges and demands for practitioners. It required a high level of communication between the two practitioners as well as a high level of understanding between practitioners as to what skills and beliefs each practitioner held. The dual-support also created some ethical issues regarding sharing confidential or sensitive information. Although players understood that the PDW and psychologist often collaborated and shared information, some players came to me looking exclusively for PDW support - as they did not want to share info with a practitioner (the performance psychologist) who worked so closely with the coaches. The ability to work freely within this dual-role delivery required trust, understanding and respect between practitioners in order to ensure there was no offence caused by any perceived "stepping on toes", or working beyond one's boundaries. As such, I came to understand a trusting relationship between the two as being the most important factor which contributed to ensuring support was truly holistic.

Mapping the EDP through 3 year: Restructures and organisational uncertainty

Within the first year, I had come to understand what has been described above as a programme which was strongly principled, heavily structured in detail and with a clear rationale lying behind why staff delivered what they delivered. Principles such as consequences for poor performance and behaviour, or, high challenge preceded by high support, and, the delivery of two hours of supervised study on every day of camp, had all come to be central and even define the programme both from the inside, and from anyone who observed from the outside. However, the programme and its principles were heavily challenged towards the end of the first year of the research after an internal restructure.

Speculation that changes lay ahead for the EDP had been circulating among the staff for several weeks during the summer after my first winter with the programme. There had been changes in senior ECB leadership which suggested that this could lead to a new philosophy that emphasised the value of further empowering the counties to develop the best young players, rather than England programmes. There were concerns for those working within the programme, as people had come to believe strongly in the programme that they worked on. There was also concern regarding whether or not EDP staff would have jobs come the following winter. There was very little public knowledge shared on the subject which led to many conversations occurring in office corridors and around the boundaries of cricket matches across the country. Amidst the uncertainty, I myself was not clear on whether or not I would continue to have a role. However, I was given some indirect reassurance that my research position at least would continue, but that my applied role may look significantly different. That July, the changes which were to be made were revealed.

Instead of two programmes for two squads, the new changes would instead mean 85 days of centralised delivery on one Under-19 programme, with no under-16 players being selected. There would be fewer domestic training camps for the EDP, however touring commitments for the new single squad would continue relatively unchanged. Four senior staff on the programme were made redundant and invited to apply for 3 roles as head of the programme, an assistant coach, and a programme manager. There was further uncertainty with the details of the schedule for the following winter remaining undecided. This was despite the fact that home competitive tours would be starting in just a matter of weeks. For support staff, the level of discontent and uncertainty was huge in response to close colleagues losing their jobs. It became obvious, that amidst such uncertainty, rumours emerge with even

the established facts becoming uncertain. There had been suggestions that the programme would still need at least three coaches plus an operations manager. There had also been rumours that a specific coach and a close colleague had been lined up for the role, and rumours that the new programmes might select anything from 15-25 players involved.

During the home tours that summer, the new roles were recruited for and some of the finer details of the restructure became public. One of the rumours had proved to be true; it was decided that there was a need for an extra coach. This meant that three out of the four staff who were made redundant were re-hired. With regard to the programme vision, the term, "add value" became synonymous with the EDP from this point on. The term was used to suggest that nothing that already gets done at the counties should be re-done at the EDP. However, there were worries amongst EDP staff that what this meant in practice was more complicated due to the diverse range of support and opportunities that players had access to across the different county academies, and the inconsistent physiotherapy, strength and conditioning, performance psychology and PDW support actually available to players within their academies when compared to what players had access to at England. Although the dust had settled in job security and staffing moving forward, the sense of frustration and loss continued meaning there was a sense of confusion and insecurity where there had previously been clarity and optimism.

As the programme moved on from the upheaval of that summer, the practices of the programme remained largely similar, as did the principles against which it was delivered to players on camps and on tours. In fact, a day on the programme looked almost exactly the same. I continued to work with the EDP, now working with the new Under 19 side, following the extinction of the second EDP squad. This meant that I continued to work with the group of players that I had in my first year as they progressed to Under-19 cricket. However, there was a significant knock-on effect of this with regard to the demand for time – practitioners continued to seek opportunities to deliver to players within the programme, despite the now limited capacity for content. For example, the PDW role was now faced with trying to deliver education and support for players within a two year time frame as opposed to the previous four years if players joined as a 15 year-old. This meant that players would mostly only join the programme for one or two years but would still have limited PDW support or education before their selection. This challenge was combined with the fact that there was less time to deliver to players given that the vast majority of the programme was made up of competitive experiences overseas. In general, the days on programme looked and felt the same, but the

sense that the programme could drive the development of the best young players over the long term was waning, and it would clearly take time to establish how the programme ought to be positioned within its new boundaries.

During the period of uncertainty, one further trend in perspective had emerged and would continue to pervade EDP delivery over the remaining years of this project. There developed a belief in keeping staff numbers to a minimum to protect against spoon feeding players with too much care, something that had developed as a criticism of National programmes within the media specifically. This argument was aligned to the idea that there was such a thing as an ideal number of staff, regardless of the player's needs or the purpose of a staff member's role. This belief manifested itself through limitations placed on the new head of the EDP with regards to how many staff could go on tour. I remained unaffected by this during the second year of the project. However, it became an issue for the PDW role during the summer of the second year. I was informed that I would only be a part of the staff team on a set 8 days of a 30 day tour. Further, if I was to attend matches beyond these days, that I ought not to wear ECB kit and would not have access to the players area. A further 6 months later, I was not travelling with the side for a December tour, or to the World cup one month later. The performance psychologist was also not selected to travel with the team for the World Cup. Through this period of restructures and change, there were now staff (myself included) who struggled to negotiate their presence on home and overseas tours as there was not enough seats on the bus". In particular, the seats of staff working in the capacity of performance psychology or PDW appeared particularly under threat as priority was given to coaching staff and areas related to physical development.

The chaos of that first summer had been replaced with relative calm, for some time at least, as we continued throughout the following winter negotiating between ourselves how best to deliver the programme given the new restraints. However, just over a year after the restructure, the senior leadership had again changed. Thus, another review into how best to use England cricket's resources was conducted. Although no immediate action was taken, this process hung over the entire third year of the project. By the time any decisions regarding a second review were taken, there had been four overseas tours, including an Under-19 World Cup, and two home tours. Throughout the third year as the review progressed, the EDP had expected to remain unchanged for two reasons: firstly, the extent of the impact of the previous review, and secondly, the quality of delivery which it was observed to continuously provide. However, one afternoon during the third summer of the research project, I received a

phone call from the head of the programme informing me that the EDP had once again bore the brunt of the budgetary restraint being placed on the International pathway, with youth player development being the ultimate cost. The programme had again lost the two assistant coaches to redundancy, those individuals second redundancy in just over two years. Two other support staff, who both delivered primarily to the EDP were also made redundant.

I too was informed I would not be working on the programme during the final year of the project, as the new structure within the ECB would only allow for two PDW members of staff within the ECB who would be working within the new structure from the following winter. However, four weeks after this, I was informed that this had been reversed and I would continue to work with the programme for the final year of the research. What followed over the next 2 months was an emotional period of adjustment for the programme, its second in only 3 years. Four staff continued to deliver to the programme (admirably) throughout a home competitive tour, whilst preparing for life after their roles in the ECB. I for a second summer in a row, was involved in only 8 days of the series, and was instructed to remain incognito during any visits to matches in order to ensure there was not a further opportunity to add fuel to the fire of claims that the ECB had too many support staff. At the end of this competitive series, what was left of the staff team within which I started the project began to renegotiate amongst ourselves how we can continue to develop the next crop of England cricketers under the new constraints. At the end of that series, data collection was ceased.

Reflections on the EDP and its changing forms

The purpose of this research project was to understand the lifestyle concerns and support provision needs of young cricketers who have been selected to the EDP, not to represent and understand the EDP itself. However, in order to present findings which are culturally and contextually informed, it is necessary for the reader to understand the context within which this research was carried out. This is deemed important to answering all of the research questions, but is especially so for research questions B and C. What has been presented above is a combination of two forms of information. Firstly, I have presented a realist, and relatively matter-of-fact description of the structures and processes which make up the delivery of the EDP. These descriptions have deliberately tried to remain non-judgmental as the purpose was not to critique how this was carried out, but to help use this as a backdrop against which player experiences, and my practitioner experiences can be viewed.

Secondly, I have shared some information which is more personal, and closely related to my experiences and interpretations of matters more directly related to me. These included my working relationship with the performance psychologist, my observations and perception of the value others afforded to the PDW role, and, my reflections on the difficult period of uncertainty which came to pervade a significant amount of my time working on the EDP.

It was important to begin the results section with this discussion of the setting for a number of reasons. Firstly, it helps understand what the experiences of those who are selected onto the EDP were and what day-to-day life on camps and tours involves. Secondly, the level of organisational change and uncertainty which pervaded my time in the programme came to represent one of the most prominent narratives over the course of the three years. For this reason, it became impossible to think of players support needs, or my capacity to support them without considering factors relating to the context. For example, my not being selected as a staff member for a tour, or not being allowed to enter the players area during home tours in order to reduce the amount of staff visible in the environment. As such, the research process became a cycle of understanding players' concerns, understanding what was required of me to provide support, and negotiating the organisational factors which influenced players' concerns, and influenced my ability to provide the support required.

The shape of this ethnographic report has been directly influenced by this reality. The complex and messy world within which the research was conducted meant it was difficult to authentically answer the research questions in isolation. Instead, the three research questions were implicated in just about every observation or conversation with data collection regarding player, practitioner and organisation becoming heavily interrelated. It was felt that using a narrative representation would allow this messiness and complexity to be captured. Therefore, what follows is the representation of three (composite) character's journeys through the programme which brings to life the nature of concerns players experienced and the meaning ascribed to them, the demands this placed on me as the lifestyle practitioner, and how meeting this demand was facilitated or not by the broader ECB socio-cultural context.

Narrative 1: George

Meeting George

"...Whizz...whizz...whizz..."

  The cycle repeats itself, as page after page emerge from the printer. I am in a mild panic that everything I need will not print before I need to get to my meeting room on the fourth floor. I am at a modest midland's hotel adjacent to one of the First Class County cricket grounds. This is the setting for my first experience of meeting the players selected for this year's Under-19 squad. I am excited, having listened to discussion about the players for the previous 3 meetings. However, I am a little daunted by the fact that I need to complete all 16 of the 30-minute meetings on this Saturday morning and afternoon with just a single break for lunch at the halfway point. I hold a cooling cup of coffee left over from breakfast and find myself stood behind the reception desk at 8.54am printing twenty copies of the profiling document that will provide the loose structure for my meetings. I had arrived late the previous evening from a visit to one of the players' school in the north of the country and went straight to a staff meeting to prepare for the weekend. This level of round the clock activity and travel all over the country had quickly become the norm in the run up to this weekend. As a result, so too had the cup of coffee. My first meeting was to be with George, who had already been on the programme for a year and was due to start in six minutes. I was desperate not to be late for fear of tainting his first impression of the PDW role and of me as someone he can rely on in the coming months. Further, the complex schedule meant that each meeting could not afford to go a single minute over, for it could put the rest of the precisely timed schedule in jeopardy. At 8.58, printing finally complete, I carry the 20 documents, a stapler, a black pen in my back pocket, and all my nervous energy to the meeting room. I reflect that I have two minutes to steady myself and get ready to make a calming and supportive first impression on George. At 8.59, after a gentle knock, the door opened:

"...Morning Darren..."

George projected and strode confidently into the room. He initiated our handshake. George was one of the younger players, but at six-foot-one, was already an impressively athletic young man, whose apparent maturity was masked by his babyish face and cheeky grin, as he sat down and assuredly asked:

" how is the new job with the under-19's going then?"

Not expecting to be the one answering the questions, I introduced myself and shared my experiences of the previous three weeks whilst George nodded patiently to show his understanding. Five minutes in, and sensing that George was already more at ease than even I was with this one-to-one setting, I began to turn the tables:

"so enough about me and my new job. Tell me about you and how you are feeling about being here".

George explained that he had just turned 17 years old, was from the south of the country and had one older brother. Both he and his brother lived with both of their parents. His dad was a doctor, and his mum, a university professor. His brother was 2 years older than him and was studying law at a highly acclaimed university. As I asked about his family life, he acknowledged that there was a high level of success within the family, both in terms of education, and sport. He reflected that he did not feel any direct pressure from family but recognised that there was a high set of standards and expectations. These high expectations, he seemed keen to reassure me, were in his best interests. According to George, this meant that unlike some players, his progress in cricket and education were treated with equal importance and that success in one could not come at the cost of the other;

"...regardless of cricket, because of my upbringing, I cannot ever see myself not going to university. It would be more a case of when and where…"

George attended an academically high achieving private school and he was currently a prefect. He suspected he would later go on to be head boy. He had been on the programme for the previous year, which had been largely successful, but this year was a step up to the Under-19 side and therefore represented a higher level of challenge. George also played tennis and rugby to a high level. However, he was now required to drop other sports in order to accept his place on the programme. In the case of rugby, this was particularly difficult as it meant dropping a sport that may also have provided a professional sporting career.

I enjoyed our conversation. So much so, that time flew and after what felt like ten minutes, it was 9.26, and 4 minutes before my second player of the day was due to arrive. The conversation had covered less than half of what the profile document was designed to capture. Nonetheless, I felt that the ease of dialogue and growing rapport we had created would provide greater value over the coming months, than ensuring we completed the document there and then would have. In the final minutes, I looked to create some sense of

pragmatism about our dialogue and reflected back to George, that I was curious to know how he felt I could support him over the coming winter:

DD: So, what do you think will challenge you the most this winter?

G: I think it is going to be really hard to manage my school work due to the two tours, that's assuming I get selected. It seems we have 18 days in Dubai before Christmas, and 32 days in Australia after Christmas. I have been given predicted grades of 3 A's at AS, and that is what I want to achieve. So, maintaining that level while missing 7 or 8 weeks of school is going to be really hard. I also think it will be hard to stay motivated to do the school work. Even though I really want to do well, having test matches overseas and regular one-day games and stuff will be distracting. The games will make it hard to really care about and focus on school work. Other than that, I also think the standard of cricket is going to be so high for me, as I have never played Under-19 cricket before…so that will take a bit of getting used to.

DD: Yeah, I agree that will be hard for you, and what can I do to help with that?

G: I think just helping me keep on track with school work and reminding me of its value from time to time, just keeping me in check will be one thing. How it worked last year was really good for me and my school. Obviously running the study sessions when we are on camps and on tour as well will be so important. Regarding cricket, I don't know, I will just have to see how it goes. I mean I think I will be ok, but I guess maybe it will get tough, we will have to wait and see.

DD: Ok I can do that. And, if you are finding it tough to make the step up in standard, I guess, you should know that you can give me a call any time, if it's just useful to get it off your chest and talk it through. What about you as a person, and how you will feel managing all of these priorities, it sounds like you will have to be very busy? Do you think you will be able to still enjoy the journey with all of that?

G: Yeah, I think so, well I will have to just get on and do it won't I? I mean, I am used to having to work hard, so I think that will be ok. But yeah, I guess checking in with me to see how I am managing would be good too?

DD: Good, and anything else that you think I could help you with?

G: Yeah, there was one more thing. I have always been a captain wherever I have played, and I guess that is something I would like to continue. That's not to say that I will necessarily

be the captain here, but it would be good to work on my leadership skills, and how I communicate to people and that kind of thing. It's something I spoke to my county captain about, and I really look up to him, so I guess just anything that can help that would be good too. But other than that, I think I will be ok.

DD: Ok, yeah that's great, let's talk about the leadership work the next time we get together, as we are just about to be out of time. So, you're aware that you will have to set some goals as part of your involvement on the programme; would you like to set any goals related to those two areas?

G: Eh, I think with the leadership thing, that's just something I would like to have working in the background. But I think it would be good to have the goal of maintaining my predicted grades for AS level and getting 3 A's. That way people will hold me to it, and that normally motivates me.

DD: OK, perfect, I will let the coach now that you want to do that. Thanks for your, time, and sorry we have had to rush the last bit. But I promise we will catch up about the leadership stuff the next time…enjoy the rest of your day.

As I stood up to shake George's hand, my 9.30 player walked in, only to apologise for interrupting. As I said goodbye to George, I ushered in Sam. As Sam got settled into his seat, I quickly scribbled some notes on his document:

"School, 3 A's goal, leadership work, managing priorities"

I placed his document to one side and got ready to start all over again with Sam. George meanwhile, walked next door to begin the rest of his day. His timetable was equally challenging to mine in the sense that he would have few breaks, and would go from meeting to meeting, each with very different objectives. This included, physical, technical and performance psychology engagements. I considered how daunting this may actually be for players, particularly those less assured than George had seemed. For us staff, we would have the time to sit and align the information gathered, but I wondered whether George would be able to do that for himself at the end of the day.

October camp: Back to cricket (and down to earth)

Two weeks after I first met George, we both attended the first training camp of the winter programme. This 9-day training camp, affectionately nicknamed "death-camp" by players and staff, was the first period of training for players following their breaks at the end of the season. I was reliably informed that it was the impact to players returning to training at such high intensity and volume over such a long period of time that gave credence to the camp's formidable nickname. The other reason was that support staff liked to use this camp as something of a culture shock for the players, to make them realise how big a step up it would be in terms of skill levels, levels of discipline and professionalism as well as the training volume to succeed at international level.

It didn't take long for players (and me) to get this message on Sunday morning, the first day of the training camp. The players completed a session batting against some very fast short ball bowling, a level beyond what most had experienced previously. Some of the more skilled batsmen adapted and handled the challenge. Most however, visibly struggled and often achieved nothing more than getting out of the way of the ball, if that. Two players had already taken a hit to the helmet, when Kieron took a ball to the shoulder and dropped to the ground screaming in pain. Kieron sat out the rest of the session to nurse his injury. However, once the initial concern had passed and staff had established there was nothing more than bruising, I sensed a satisfaction that the session had achieved its goal. Those players who had failed to score the required number of runs within the session were required to complete a physical challenge as a consequence. This was the vast majority of the squad. I was unsure whether this session did indeed achieve a necessary goal. I certainly agreed it was an eye-opening experience for players, but it felt forced in doing so, as the challenge was often beyond the level of expertise held by the players. I reflected on players sharing their concern about whether or not they were capable of stepping up to the level of the programme and couldn't help but feel this would not have helped. The purpose of the session, a realisation of what was needed, had seemed to be there already. Nonetheless, I found myself being led by the programme, as I had limited insight into cricket to dictate otherwise. Yet, I was sure the conversations I had had with players regarding their anxieties about being good enough for this environment, would certainly continue following this session. In the brief time that I observed the session, I had not seen George bat, but felt reassured I had not heard any specific stories to suggest he had struggled any more than others with the challenge.

At 7.00pm, as I walked to the lounge, where we would all eat dinner as a group, George talked with Sam a couple of steps in front of me about how hard he had found the session. He expressed his disappointment at having been in the group doing the consequence. I quickened my pace to join their conversation:

"How was your day fella's?"

"Yeah really good" George replied.

"Hard but that is what you want isn't it. Tired now though, I don't think I have ever done a 9-hour day before, never mind how little I have been doing over the last few weeks. Going to hurt in the morning"

George laughed, as he began taking the steps to the restaurant two at a time, before quickly reverting back to single steps and gesturing to the pain in his legs. The camp schedule was packed, and I did not see much more of George over the first four days due to my own work demands. But I took the fact that I hadn't heard much from him, nor the staff as a sign that things were ok. He had been very hard working in the study sessions which I supervised. I had observed him move to one side of the room on his own and seemed focused on his work, despite the high level of distraction in the room from the other boys. During my workshop on the Monday afternoon, focusing on the transitions that young players go through as they progress towards a professional career in cricket, he had also been a very vocal participant and often a much respected voice of reason amongst his peers.

On the Wednesday afternoon, I sat at my laptop and prepared the slides for my second workshop of the week, with the background noise of ball hitting bat, which regularly echoed through the building. I reflected on the challenges of facilitating a session at the end of the day; the graveyard shift as it was known. Having test ran my laptop, and the projector, I wandered down to watch some training. Arriving to the back of the nets, I made my way over to the centre of the hall and cautiously avoided the barrage of oncoming cricket balls. I began to assess the scene in front of me, which included 6 batting nets, 8 batsmen batting, two spinners bowling and four bowling machines in action. To the very side of the hall, George was deep in a conversation with Jon, the batting coach. I observed 4-5 minutes of intense dialogue, after which Jon gave George a pat on the shoulder. George turned, now walking towards the changing room. He removed his helmet and swept his sweat soaked hair to the side to reveal his eyes; all red and blood-shot. I moved in timidly, suspecting that he'd

just shed a few tears, and attempting to engage him. But his bullish body language as he walked towards the exit told me that now might not be the time. I worried whether I had made the right decision in not calling out to George, and I consoled myself that I could always speak to the coach. As I turned towards Jon, Matthew walked into the hall, fist bumping George as they passed each other and straight into the net for his own session with Jon. I took note to establish what I had missed and turned my attention to the net on the far left, only to see George reappear just 2 minutes later, arriving for his bowling session. The bowling session had been due to start 2 minutes ago and Robert, the bowling coach, semi-sarcastically reminded George of this fact. George apologised and reassured the coach that he was ready to start.

That evening, I was in the player's recreation room, hoping I might catch George to check in on him, but he had spent the evening in his room. I went to the kitchen to make a cup of tea, which I hoped would aid me in writing up the notes from some of my observations and conversations that day. Jon, the batting coach walked through the door to my right and seemed pleased to see me:

J: Ah, just the man. I was hoping to catch you before the day was done. Do you have a minute?

I gestured to ask him if wanted a cup of tea as well, and said "of course, what can I do for you?"

J: I wanted to talk to you about George. He has had a really tough session with me today.

DD: Yeah, I saw you two talking, and he seemed a bit emotional?

J: Yes, maybe you already know but he had a bit of a wobble today. I mean, it was a tough session and the level of challenge from me was high. But he really struggled with that, and that made him really frustrated. As we de-briefed, he just got a bit emotional and said he wasn't sure if he was cut out for this. I am not sure what exactly he meant by that. But, I reassured him that we all have tough sessions and that it is all part of the learning. But I just thought, he might need a chat with you. You know just to break the ice a bit, he has had a tough introduction this week and he doesn't seem to be used to this level of demand on his skills.

DD: Ok, thanks a lot, I hadn't really picked up that he was struggling. I will have some time with him in the study session during the day off tomorrow, and I will make sure I catch up with him. Thanks for the heads up.

J: No problem, he is a nice lad, and don't want him to beat himself up too much. We just want him to work and learn at this stage. Thanks for the tea.

I had appreciated Jon's seeking me out and sharing of this context. However, it also highlighted the risks involved with the "throw them in at the deep-end" approach. Perhaps, this was the plan; to knock them down and see if they can get back up.

After breakfast the next morning, I was to supervise a study session for the players before they had the rest of the day off to recover before the final four days of the camp. As the players entered the room, I asked George if we could catch up for the first 5 minutes of the study session, "just to see how his camp was going so far". He agreed and dropped his bag as I instructed the others to get started with their work. We took a seat in the next room, two of us on the one sofa, and I began:

DD: So, George, I just wanted to check in and see how you were finding the camp?

G: Yeah, it's been really good. It's been tiring, but I have enjoyed the challenge, and I think everyone has found it tough.

DD: When we caught up a few weeks ago, you mentioned how tough it might be adapting to the level of U19 cricket. I guess I wanted to see how you have coped, as it looked like you had a tough session yesterday with John.

G: Yeah, it has been tough. Much tougher than I expected, and I have struggled more than I expected.

DD: Much tougher? Ok, what have you struggled with most?

G: Well I just seem to keep getting consequences, I have had to do every performance consequence so far, and another one after I turned up late for a session. So that just makes me feel like I am obviously not doing well. Just everything really, physically I have struggled, I have struggled to complete the technical challenges, and as a result I just keep getting consequences, which then leads to more physical struggle. I am just not used to this level of judgement and demand. Also, there are a lot of lads here from up north, who know each

other, and I guess they are just a little different from me. I don't mean that in a bad way, just I don't quite feel like I fit in yet. Like I am from a really rural area down south, so I just have felt a little out of place, but that's been me rather than anything anyone has said. They seem like nice lads, I just haven't quite got the group yet.

DD: Ok, I can tell that must be tough for you. Sounds like you have been hit from all sides?

G: Yeah, a bit.

DD: Can you tell me a bit more about the social side of that first?

G: To be honest, with the social thing, I think I just need to take a bit more time to understand the different people and find my comfort level in the group. But I am not really that bothered by it. It is really the cricket stuff where the challenge has been, and then that feeds into the rest. Like if you don't do well in cricket, it is harder to settle off the field, as that is normally how I learn to settle down, by showing what I can do. But it has been tough for me to struggle that much, that hasn't happened to me before. Like, yesterday in that session with John, I was so frustrated. I got a little overwhelmed and almost cried. I don't think it helps that I have had to drop rugby to be here, and yesterday I just felt like I had made the wrong decision. I was like, "I am just not cut out to be a cricketer at this level". All the consequences just seem to keep reminding me of this.

DD: I can understand how it could feel that way. I just want to remind you that it is a development programme. The purpose of being here is to develop for the future. The consequences are just a part of that, to provide some pressure on what you do. I know it can make you feel like you get battered by them at times, but it is not a punishment, OK? You have been selected because people believe in you, and John spoke to me last night to reaffirm this point. He gets it and understands the struggle. But I get that it's tough!

G: Yeah, it's hard, but it helps to know that there is understanding from coaches. I just felt like they would have gone off me. Some of the others have been flying, and I just felt like I was being left behind.

DD: There is understanding, trust me. The challenging nature of this camp is designed to do this. All the coaches want is hard work and learning, which we both know you are capable of. As for you, don't forget, you did predict it would it would be tough, and it is. But that doesn't

mean you can't do it. Adapting to the level is what you said you would have to do, and here you are. But it takes time.

G: Yeah, thanks, that does make me feel better, to know that they understand. I do know it takes time, it is just hard in the moment when you haven't had it before. But I agree, I just have to stick with it and work hard.

DD: Agreed, and as for the social side, are you managing that ok?

G: Yeah, to be honest, it just takes time. With the pressure involved with coming here, I haven't been myself and I just lost patience a bit because of my performances, but if I can be myself and give it a bit of time, I will be fine. It's only been four days.

DD: Good, the only other thing is your schoolwork. Are you managing to get enough done with the time we have? And is there anything else I can do to help?

G: No, that's all been good, thank you. The study sessions have been useful. There is nothing else really, but thanks for checking in, it has been helpful.

DD: No worries, it's what I am here to do. Thanks for speaking to me. Anytime, here or at home that it is useful for a similar catch-up, just let me know. Also, let's make sure we make the time to catch up on how you want to develop your leadership later this week, ok?

I was struck by the complexity of George's struggle; performance, social, judgement, physical, emotional. It had felt like the camp was tough enough for him, and we had just made it much tougher, making me second-guess the value of the almost unrealistic level of challenge on day-one. I also found it difficult in supporting him in the aftermath of this. I remembered an analogy which had been shared with me during my education, that sometimes you feel like you are in a boat pulling people out of the water. In this case, I felt we had thrown George into the water, and I was trying to help him back into the boat. This made me uncomfortable having to justify the culture shock which had created his emotion.

George and I re-entered the classroom, instantly silencing the growing cacophony of noise that had been growing in a supervisor's absence. I took a seat and considered my interaction with George. I was pleased that he had been able to open up to me like he had and acknowledge his struggle. However, I also saw our interaction as a somewhat chance encounter. What if I had not seen the conversation with the coach and what if had not been in the kitchen when the coach walked in? Given that the level of challenge was so high, and that

the programme prided itself on the notion of "high challenge and high support", this support felt somewhat coincidental. I further reflected that the previous evening, George had described the day as "really good", suggesting that the challenge was what you want, maybe in an effort to save face in front of his peers. It seemed that George was very happy to talk openly about his struggles in private but was not forthcoming until I approached him. All these different pieces were required to be in place to understand what was going on, contextualise the information and have the opportunity to talk about it, even if this opportunity was a brief encounter prior to a study session. The importance of being embedded within this performance environment had just shown its importance. As had the relationships I would have with the other staff in the environment, as I simply could not hear and see everything. Finally, I also recognised that I had assumed that "no news" about George was "good news", and that socially he seemed very capable of settling into this environment straight away, which now felt naïve on my part.

"You should never judge a book by its cover" I muttered to myself as I stood up to begin my check-ins with each player, to see how their work for the camp was progressing.

There and then, I decided that these should not only be a quick how is your work going, but at the very least a semi-private check-in on all areas of your life, as I now got the feeling more would be going on than meets the eye.

Tour to Dubai

A number of weeks passed, and with the exception of a brief two day training camp, George had been at home, training with his county and attending school. I had visited some players at home during that time, but George was not one of them. However, on the 3rd December, I was stood with George in the queue of a coffee shop in London Heathrow airport. Together with the rest of the squad, we waited to board our flight to Dubai for an 18 day training camp. It is our first overseas tour together and we are both excited. George because he is about to spend 18 days doing what he loves in the Dubai sun, and I, because touring provides the greatest opportunity for me to spend much less pressured time with the players. Touring allowed for a much more informal level of conversation and therefore the chance to really get to know the players. George picked up his Christmas latte which he claimed would add "a little bit of the normal Christmas feel before three weeks in the sun". I

decided to take advantage of our moment together to ask George how he feels he is prepared to balance the tour with the two and a half weeks of missed school.

G: To be honest I haven't thought about it too much. I am confident I will be fine with the amount of study time that you will give us, and if I fall behind a little, I can catch up over the school holidays when I get back.

DD: Ok, I guess it helps that you come back to some time off from school.

G: Yeah definitely.

DD: And how have you found the balancing act between cricket and school and normal life so far?

G: Hmm, I don't know really. I mean I think I am doing fine in both, but it's tough. Like, well, I guess the programme takes you out of your day-to day life and put you into this high performing, elite environment where, you do feel all the time like you are being judged and assessed and watched, you know. But it is an environment where everything is geared around trying to improve and achieve success, so it is also a world away from your normal 17 year old like day-to-day life. I have felt a little like a different person, eh, kind of when you back, because you are like an England player, and it's a nice feeling to have, you go to school and people are like "aw yeah we have an England player at our school", or whatever... you can't help but have it affect you, the fact that you have got all these people watching and wanting you to do well. So, I guess it has taken me out of my normal pattern of life and made me have to organise myself a bit more to be able to keep up those standards in school and in cricket. I have had to be a lot more focused, like here are my school priorities, and here are my cricket priorities, and here is when I will do this, and here is when I do that. That's been the biggest thing that has challenged me, my time management and my organisation. Due to this, I now miss out on more like social time with friends. It's just you know, things that you would have just done without thinking before like going to see mates at the weekend, or like time after school or around training or whatever. That suddenly, you just don't have any time in the week anymore. But at the same time, I don't want to change it, these are just the sacrifices that I now have to make.

DD: Ok, yeah that is quite a change for you. I hope you are still enjoying it, because that sounds like a lot of work? And, I hope you feel you are getting enough support with all of that?

G: Yeah, I am. Since that first camp when we spoke, and I was finding it hard, it has got better, and I am now feeling on top of it. I actually haven't had a consequence since then believe it or not. So, I am enjoying it, and to be honest I just love that challenge. My school are being really supportive too. I think they trust me to be honest, so they more or less leave me to it. I speak to them like an adult and tell them what I need, and they let me get on with it. But I do need to be really proactive and go to them and say I need this, or I need that, and they seem to respect that and help me in return.

DD: Well that is very impressive, that you are able to do that, and that you work to manage it yourself. Just for me be cautious that you manage your own energy. You are working a lot and having to keep a lot of people happy, just make sure you ask them for help if it needed or let them know if there too much. Likewise, if it is useful to talk to me we can make sure you are managing your priorities as and when needed.

G: Yes, thanks Daz.

DD: No problem, right, your Christmas coffee will be getting cold, so you better get back to the lads. I will see you on the flight.

As George left, and I waited for my coffee, I was struck by his level of reflection on how the different parts of his life where impacting each other. A concern of mine when players joined the programme, was often that their education could suffer. George, in his attempts to achieve in both cricket and education, had spotted this threat, and made adaptions. However, some of these had meant making greater personal sacrifices, and at a great expense of energy. Supporting this shift in identity and supporting George to manage his own energy and support network around these goals felt like an important responsibility for me in the coming months.

Cricket or education?

One evening on tour, I walked onto the mezzanine, where the pool, and therefore most of the players were located. The descending sun signalled the end of another day on camp as a group of players threw a ball around in the pool. That is, despite the coaches' instructions to rest as much as possible for the rest of the day. A group of staff were to my right as I came towards the pool. I decided to leave them to what looked a conversation which was already too deep for me to enter. At the far end of the pool, George was sat with two other players,

one of the coaches and Simon, the performance analyst. Their conversation looked more informal, and more what I was looking for at this stage of the day. George nodded to welcome me into the conversation and continued making the point he was making:

G: There is so much to do, with school work, county and England camps and tours. You have to be really switched on.

One of the other players, Mo, added that he struggles to stay motivated for his school work. Mo added that one of the challenges he had was that he wants to train with the professionals during the day, rather than in the academy in the evening. But his school would not allow him to be released to do so from certain parts of the day, citing the example of another player who had been granted such release. George empathised, before sharing his thoughts on why he thinks it is important to stick with it:

G: Yeah, I get that, but to be honest, for me my education is really important. I want to do well, and I kind of enjoy having it. Like, the two main threads to my life have been school and cricket, and you know, so many times, the one is not going well, you can either be distracted by or focused on the other, and I think they have generally complemented each other fairly well. So, you know, not beating yourself about failing in results or failing on the pitch because you are always like, well, as much it feels like the end of the world, you have got something else on your plate the next day because you have got to go to school or something.

DD: Yeah, it is tough. I think the two of you also point out how individual it is in terms of what it means to you and what you want to get from it. Rather than there being one answer which can apply to all. However, I do think it is important to get you're a-levels. The one common thing you both do seem to want is to have both options available from when you are 18. Also, I think you have to realise that it doesn't have to be one or the other, there is no reason you can't do a degree during your cricket career with the flexibility available at some good universities and the timing of the county season

Robert, one of the technical coaches then interrupted:

R: Very good advice from our lifestyle advisor. Get your A-levels and then you can do what you want. And it doesn't have to be a degree, you could do a trade or get a few of you together to buy a property, live in it and sell it a few years later for a profit. I know a lot of people who did that early on in their career with great success. One thing I will say is that I

think it is important not to forget, I mean, you can't take your degrees and certificates with you when you die.

Appearing a little confused and frustrated with this comment, Simon, whom I often heard espouse the value which he gives towards players getting a good education alongside their sport, interrupted:

S: Well, to be fair, you can't take your first class cricket stats with you either.

R: Yeah, but they will be on a record, just whatever you do, you have to follow your passion, that's what I am saying.

I sensed Simon's frustration with the comment as a member of the support staff who had gone to university. The next morning, over breakfast, Simon shared his frustration with what he believed was a lack of respect and value afforded to players who do wish to pursue education:

S: "that was an interesting conversation last night, with Robert…It did annoy me a bit though, telling them to follow their passion, meaning cricket, as if you cannot be passionate about anything else. I mean I wanted to be a professional athlete when I was growing up…but then once I knew that I couldn't I thought, right well I want to work in sport then. And I was able to because I had worked hard. But he is basically saying that it is not as worthwhile to do education as it is to be a professional cricketer. Fair enough that might work out for some, but for most you either do not make it and struggle; do make it and struggle when it is not going well; or you make it and struggle when you retire. And it is not just a back-up, it is about having something else, it could be anything, but something else so that you are not just a cricketer, because if you are and then it all falls apart, then you are fucked. You have nowhere to go".

After breakfast, I pondered the conflicting messages available to players on this subject. We invested a lot of time and effort in supporting players with their education, which symbolised a genuine value for it as an important part of the player's lives. Yet, there were moments, like this, when it was ultimately acknowledged as being little more than a back-up plan for a player. I was confident that George was strong in his values and beliefs about education to be unaffected by Roberts comments. However, I was not so sure that Mo, or many of the others, would not be influenced. My sense that the environment provided positive messages about the dual career pathway was therefore shaken, and I realised I may

have provided some education on the value of education, a broader sense of identity, throughout the environment. Beyond this, I felt that support staff, such as Robert, who may join for brief periods of the programme, may need to be educated on the programme's stance on issues such as this, and that I would have to be vigilant and ready to challenge certain beliefs as they presented themselves.

George the captain

In preparation for the tour to Australia, the support staff held a preparation meeting, which included selecting a captain for the trip. The staff reflected that George had proven himself to be a very reliable player, in particular with regard to batting. He had scored 2 centuries during the trip to Dubai, and the coaches had responded very positively to his determination, work ethic and focus. He had also shown great maturity throughout and proved to be a very impactful role model who players had looked to as a guide for how they should behave. As a result, the coaches, decided to name him as captain of the side for the tour, something which was rare for someone who was relatively young within the playing group. This had of course made him extremely proud, and he was very excited by the prospect. The captain's responsibility included being the link between the coaching staff and the players out on the field in terms of match tactics, a lot of public speaking and facilitation of match reviews, supporting the other players as people and players and having a key role in setting the behavioural tone for the other players. The coaching staff saw this as a very important role which when carried out well, went a long way to creating the type of environment that they hoped for. All-in-all, this was a big responsibility and required a degree of maturity, self-awareness and organisational skills.

At London Heathrow airport, for the second time that winter, the squad was set out to board a flight. This time, it was to Australia and for almost twice as long. Myself and George sat together for 30 minutes to discuss his new leadership responsibility and to understand what strengths he could bring to the role, and what areas he might need support with. We had agreed that the public speaking and review facilitation would be a particular strength for him, as well as his level of strategy, composure and game analysis. We also agreed that him simply being himself rather than trying to emulate some set of behaviours, would provide an excellent example in terms of behaviour and professionalism. Finally, he was confident that his own cricketing form was currently good, and he felt confident he could maintain this over

a long tour. However, we discussed that it would be a challenge for George to manage his priorities of schoolwork, his own cricket game, and the responsibilities of being captain. Following a personality preference workshop which was carried out at a training camp in January, he also suggested that his more introverted character may find the energy demand challenging when trying to communicate with all players regularly and coaches. In order to re-energise, he felt that some time alone, or at least in small groups was necessary and he would look to have these opportunities where possible. We agreed that helping to monitor and manage his on and off-field priorities and his energy levels would be an important role for me to play throughout the tour.

Performance, captaincy and education on tour

Eleven days into the 32 day tour, I sat with George on the hard plastic seats in the stands at one of the most famous test cricket grounds in the world, reflecting on a very hard fought drawn match. It represented a moment of peace and reflection after four days of match engagement. The other side of the glass door just behind us, the players portable speaker played a beat which suggested there was relief and satisfaction with the end result. Indeed, the team had batted defiantly for 2 days to secure a draw, during which George had been praised for a very resolute batting performance. Although, he acknowledged he had let nerves get to him in his first innings, he was upbeat and felt that the group had learned a huge amount during the test match to help them in the upcoming One-day series. On a personal level he had enjoyed it. He felt that the group were doing well and that he had managed his energy well so far and his own off-field priorities, mainly his school work as he had hoped. I left the conversation feeling reassured that I could turn my attention over the coming days to some of the players who had struggled with not being selected for the test match, and some who were struggling to be away from home for so long at this stage.

A further seven days into this trip, we had passed the halfway point, but the buoyancy the hard fought draw afforded players had dissipated. The team lost their first two One-day games. George had struggled with his own performances having scored just 11 runs over the two games. He had also been questioned by the coaches for his tactical decisions with bowlers in one of the games where it was felt he had been too aggressive, which had contributed to the defeats. The day after the second of these matches, I was sitting in the team room, a hotel conference room, waiting for the players to arrive for their study session which

was to begin in 15 minutes time. George walked in, with his books and said, "Hi mate, I came here a little early as I thought it would be good to have a catch up beforehand, and chat about the last two games".

DD: Of course, have a seat. It has looked like a challenging couple of days?

G: Yeah, very. We just don't seem to be able to pull it all together. When we bat well we bowl poorly, and when we bowl well, we bat poorly. It's very frustrating, and the lads are struggling a bit to pick themselves up. I have been trying, and I think it has helped, but they just seem to need a win!

DD: Yeah. We can get to them in a second, but how are you first?

I had sensed George could take on the responsibility for everyone else a little too much, understandably given his role. Therefore, I felt the needed to direct attention to him before talking about the team, especially in light of his request at the start of the tour to help him manage his own energies.

G: Yeah, I am fine. A bit tired, but I am alright. Been working hard.

DD: Yeah, I can see that you have. But you also said you are tired, and I know you say you are alright, but if you don't look after yourself, then it will be tough to help all of the others, don't you think?

G: Yeah, I mean I have been staying on top of everything, and the balance we talked about, between cricket and school has been fine. It's just my own form on top of all that. I didn't play well in the last two games and made a few decisions that I regret.

DD: Ok, tell me about the decisions first?

G: It was not many really. But we had discussed creating pressure through limiting their batters over time. But I got impatient, and started to go searching for wickets, which might have paid off and we could have won. But it didn't, and they got on top of us, and then the game got away from us really fast. But I spoke with the coaches, and I have learned a lesson in that regard. They helped me with it.

DD: Ok, I am pleased they have. And you mentioned your form?

G: Well I was playing well coming here, and the test match went ok. But I just haven't been able to get any runs. I again made some poor decisions, and took on shots I didn't need to, impatient again.

DD: Ok, there are some similarities there from what I am hearing. Sounds like, you not being as patient as you usually are, and that patience and strategy was what you felt was your strength coming here. So, we know you can do it. What do you think, any reason you are not able to at the moment?

G: I am not sure. I think my mind feels cluttered, partly because of the different jobs and responsibilities I am having to complete, but also that has created a bit of extra pressure to perform, as in the captain has to be the best performer, and that has created doubt. I have been over thinking things so much, that I have almost been over thinking how to figure it out, if that makes sense.

DD: Absolutely, it makes a lot of sense. Have you experienced that before?

G: Yeah, but I was able to figure it out quicker, whereas now I feel like the responsibility keeps growing, and I don't have the space to figure it out.

DD: Yes, I see, that is a really great insight. Do you remember when we talked at Heathrow, we talked about the importance of you having time alone or in small groups to gather your thoughts and re-energise. I haven't really seen you do that a lot. What do you think?

G: No, you're right, I haven't in the last week especially. I think doing something that allows for that would be ideal. You know what be great, a game of golf. It really helps me switch off, but ideally not with everyone from the group. I think if we tell everyone, then it becomes a big group activity. Maybe just one or two of us, and you could go, so we can get a proper switch off.

Just as George mentioned this, 3 other players burst through the door laughing, disrupting the flow of our conversation. I was conscious of the fact that George would not want this idea to get shared with the rest and risk it becoming another big group activity, when all he wanted was to get away from the group and have some quieter downtime.

"Let me know afterwards who should come with us, that would keep it between ourselves and help you to switch off, and I will make sure it gets organised for us", I offered reassuringly, and got up to welcome the others into the room.

We did manage to organise the round of golf on a day when others went to a theme park. George felt that the time-out had helped him. However, the pressure seemed to keep growing. Following our interaction, we caught up every 2-3 days, to check-in on how George was managing his priorities, and increasingly as the tour went on, to talk through the different pressures which presented to him as captain and discuss how he might respond. The team performed much better, as did George in the third match of the series. However, the game was lost, and therefore the series was too. George batted better than in the first two one-day games. Further, his leadership skills were deemed to have been very impressive and his tactical decision making had improved throughout. However, the result was a heavy series defeat. The players, most notably George, were understandably disappointed.

On the last day of the tour, George and all other players had meetings with the different staff members to talk through their experiences, and what they had learned from the series. When George arrived to me, he looked exhausted. He said as much and admitted he couldn't wait for a break. George reflected that he had learned a lot about captaincy, and about how to manage himself, especially during that phase of the tour when he struggled. He had taken on an incredible amount of cricketing and personal responsibility and had needed to work incredibly hard, physically and mentally to make keep himself afloat. As I looked at him, slumped in the seat in front of me in this Australian hotel café, I felt now was the time to reassure him of what he had achieved rather than delve into what he needed to learn. I reminded him of what he had achieved in captaining an England team in Australia. I reflected that for any player that is a huge accomplishment, let alone as a young member of the squad and that he had done himself and his parents very proud. He smiled and acknowledged that it was something special, and unexpectedly shed a tear. I suspected it was a tear in some ways out of pride, out of relief, and perhaps out of sadness that it had come and gone so fast. I passed him a napkin, told him to enjoy his last day in the sunshine and that we could catch up soon. He stood up, shook my hand, and thanked me. I thanked him for our time over the four and a half weeks. I had a moment to myself, before my next player would arrive. I felt a great sense of pride for the maturity, dignity and growth which had been shown by George. However, I couldn't help but reflect on the huge element of responsibility this young man had held for the last month, for himself and for others. I felt I had learned that supporting those who take on this responsibility is an important task, especially when at such a young age, players may carry such high expectation across cricket and education. For George specifically, I was relieved that I was there to provide a sounding board for a player learning

to manage this challenge. The support from the coaching staff for George as a captain had been huge, and he had appreciated that too. But I couldn't help but feel the personal weight of this challenge ought not to be underestimated.

EDP Selection during the A-Level year

In the months that followed, the county cricket season was in full flow, and I would not see much of George. We met once during a county match which afforded us a brief catch up. We talked about how he felt his season had been going quite well, but that he needed "to kick on a bit" to try and earn a first team place. He also reflected that he had found his exams a little harder than expected. He was selected for the Under-19 side to play a home tour during the summer. However, I spent very little time with the squad that summer, due to staff restrictions placed on the programme in terms of how many staff could be with the squad at any time. This had appeared to come about as a result of anxieties regarding an impression that there were too many staff. This did not appear to be the opinion within the programme, but the impact was that I would only be with the squad for 8 days of the home tour. Within this limited time, I understood that George had continued to impress off the field but had still not managed to play to the best of his ability in matches. During the series, he had also received his exams results, which were grades of A, B and C for his AS levels. He had been quite disappointed with this, due to his goals and expectations of achieving three A's. As a result, he shared a willingness to return to school with renewed vigour at the end of the cricket season.

Although it was felt that he had still not shown the best of his potential within our games on tour, he was again selected for the coming winter programme. He was one of a small group of players selected for the squad who were still completing their A-levels during what was going to be an incredibly busy Under-19 schedule. The programme would include a month in Sri Lanka, before Christmas, and up to five weeks after Christmas for the Under-19 world cup. Due to the timing of the tours, those players who were in full time education would miss up to 9 weeks of school time, which was a significant concern for all players. For George, this was especially so given his high expectations for achievement and relative disappointment from the previous year's results. Therefore, a visit to his school to discuss his holistic programme with his teachers, parents, and county representatives was a very high priority for me.

School visit for A-levels

As a backdrop to the school visit and aligned to the anxieties about staff numbers the just weeks earlier, there had been discussions with regard to which staff would travel on the two upcoming tours. These discussions had led to disagreement within the organisation about whether or not a number of staff should be the point of debate rather than function. The idea of reducing staff numbers for staff numbers sake was unanimously unpopular within our staff team. However, four days prior to my planned visit to George's school, I was frustrated to hear that I would not be travelling on either tour that winter. This meant that my involvement with players would be limited to just 3 training camps, and remote support for players when they were on tour. The coach acknowledged that he would have loved to have me there, but that his hand had been forced, but that he wanted me to feel valued and motivated about the support I could still offer. Although appreciative of the comments, this represented a marked difference from the plan for the previous year, where I travelled on both tours, and did not miss a single day on the programme. The rationale did not appear to be driven by any disappointment with what the role delivered. It appeared that the decision was taken to limit the members of staff and that given those constraints, the PDW role was chosen as the one to be sacrificed. To add to my own professional frustration of considering how to continue the work I had been doing with players, I was also left with the task of explaining to George and his school that we were requesting that he miss at least nine weeks of school, and that the primary source of academic support within the programme would not be present during those weeks. Frustrated though I was with this responsibility for sharing a decision with which I disagreed, I started the conversation inside the office of the Head of Sixth form at George's school:

DD: Thank you everyone for making the time to meet today. As you all know George has been selected for our programme again which is a credit to how impressed everyone has been with him since he started with us a year ago. The purpose of this meeting is to share with you the schedule for the coming winter including dates overseas, and to troubleshoot how this schedule fits with George's important school year. Hopefully we can leave with a shared understanding and plan of what George's winter priorities will be, and what support will be available for him.

As the meeting continued, it became clear that the dates of the programme did not necessarily clash with any important dates or examinations, which was a relief for everyone

in the room. However, there was concern from everyone in the room for the amount of time missed and the pressure this put on George to complete a lot of work of his own accord:

Head of Sixth form: This will put a lot of responsibility on you George, and having known you as long as I have, I have no doubt in your ability to shoulder that. In most circumstance like this, I would be trying to motivate you or make you aware as to what the circumstance might be if you do not do the work. However, I have no doubt that you already have that motivation, so instead my message is a different one. You need to prioritise the time you have, and you need to tell us what you need from us and use the support that is available to you. Otherwise, you will struggle to achieve in both, and to look after yourself.

County Coach: I would echo that. I have no doubt that you can manage it, but you need to let us know what you need along the way. Even if that means me coming to you for some training sessions, just let me know so that we are not wasting all of your time whenever you will have so little by the looks of it.

George's mother: Yes, I agree, I think it is important you listen to that George. I know you better than anyone, and you have such high standards for yourself, but sometimes you can tend to try and go it alone and not ask for help along the way. I worry that if you do that this winter, you may struggle.

George replied that he agreed, thanking everyone for the support, before saying that the previous year in the programme had taught him a lot about asking for help when needed. As I listened, I was delighted to see the understanding and support available for George. I was also delighted to hear him refer to some of the great learning that had taken place over the previous 12 months. That is, being a young man with such high standards who can seek and accept help when necessary. I was indeed proud of having been one of the people who had provided such help. However, this fact made it all the more frustrating to share the news that whilst the previous year, I had been on all tours and had supervised the study sessions, this would not be the case this winter. This fact seemed to be met with some frustration by all.

"Why not?" George spontaneously called out, looking concerned that this support had changed so radically.

I explained the reasons, showing as little of my personal frustration as I could, and could tell that this had changed some of the tone of the meeting. I reassured George that I would still be

in contact throughout the tour, and that all study sessions would still be supervised, and work monitored by the staff team.

The meeting finished, and as George left to return to class, the head of the year shared his disappointment at the fact that I would not be going on the trip, and that it made him a lot more nervous about George's ability to balance it. He felt there may not be the same value placed on the educational components of the trip in my absence. Whilst I completely agreed, I reassured both George's mother and the school staff that I would be doing everything that I could to ensure that it was valued. I struggled to shirk the feeling that I was selling the player short, but that I could do nothing about it. The conversation finished with a lasting feeling of concern, and I walked out the door. Stood in the school car park, George's mother again shared her disappointment that I would not be on the tour, as she felt the role had been a very good influence on George over the previous year. I again reassured her as she got into her car and departed. As I walked to the train station to catch my train up north, to another school, I repeated the conversation in my mind, and whispered under my breath the frustrated response I would have liked to give to the question "why not?"

What's next: Contract or University

I saw very little of George that winter, other than brief catch-ups during the three training camps at the national cricket centre. We also spoke by message when he was on tour, and he reassured me that he had been performing well, but that he had been struggling to get enough work done given the busy cricket schedule he was faced with, and the resulting fatigue. As a result, he had been doing some extra school work outside of the supervised study sessions in his own room. By late February, the under- 19 side had just returned from the world cup and were to attend their last camp of the winter, designed to provide players with an opportunity to discuss and reflect on their development over the winter. I had not seen any of the players in person over the previous two months as a result of not going on the tour with the squad. For George, returning from the world cup and returning to school meant he had two and a half months to catch up on the work he had missed as a result of the tour. During this time, he would be preparing for exams and to achieve his goal of 3 A-grades. George would also have to balance this with preparing for the beginning of the cricket season. A particular challenge he felt he might face was that he may have to be ready to take any opportunities in 1st team cricket which become available as a result of his good

performances at the world cup. It was also a chance to discuss any support that George might benefit from over the coming months whilst they were back at their counties.

Late on the first afternoon of the camp, I met with George. Within seconds of his entering the room, I picked up on a feeling of unease. We spent the first fifteen minutes taking about the winter programme, and the world cup, as he shared stories of how he led a revival during a very difficult game against India to eventually help the team cross the line and win a place in the semi-final. As he finished, summarising his five weeks as an amazing experience, he lowered the tone:

G: But now that I have got back, I have been thinking that we need to talk about a few things. About university mainly. But also, my contract position.

DD: Ok no problem, tell me what's on your mind?

G: I just don't know what am going to do Daz, I really don't. First of all, I don't know if I am gonna get a contract from my county. I hope so, but they have not said anything to me yet! So that's the start of the problem.

DD: Ok, well let's start there. How are you feeling about the contract from your end?

G: Well, I have just had a good world cup, or I think I did anyway. I was happy with my performances. But I haven't really been told by the county what would be good enough. I guess I just need to get into the season and do well. I mean, last year I did alright in the second team. In my first two matches for the second team, I scored a couple of fifties. Fair enough after that I got a duck, but overall, for the first three matches I was not too bad. But I guess, this year, I just have to get in that team more, and play well. It is simple as that really. Fingers crossed with that and my decent world cup, they might offer me one [contract].

DD: Ok, have you spoken to the coaches to let them know how you feel, or get an idea of what they are thinking?

G: No, I haven't yet. They have literally said nothing to me about it, which makes it difficult. Do you think I should speak to them? I guess I could ask what they think I would need to do to earn a contract? Or is that too cheeky to ask?

DD: Well I mean it is your career we are talking about, and you seem to be unsure about where you stand and what is required of you. Do you feel like you could have that conversation with any of the coaches there?

G: Yeah, I suppose. It lets them know where I am at, and they can always say "no, we don't know what you need to do". I could with one of the coaches I reckon. Yeah, I guess I need to at least try and get some idea because right now I have no idea what might or might not be good enough, and as you say it is my career isn't it. Besides, it is quite hard to focus on cricket at the moment when I don't know what they (coaches) are thinking. Plus, the pressure to earn a contract is not making doing the basic things on the field any easier…(pause). But then, I also finish school in a couple of months and I am thinking about going to university. I have been accepted conditionally to do Law, and to two of the MMCU's, to do either coaching or coaching and geography. But I don't even know why I put those others down, well I do, it's because everyone thinks I should do something like law, but I am sure it is coaching that I want to do. I would love to do what Jon [one of the coaches] does, coaching and leading a team because I love people, I love working with people and I love sport, especially cricket obviously, and I would just love that if my cricket never came to anything. I guess the best way to work towards that would be to do a sports coaching degree.

DD: Well for me it is great that you have thought that, you seem to understand what excites you and you have thought about what you could enjoy that isn't playing cricket. And you know, it doesn't always have to be education or cricket. It can be both depending on what you want at different times?

G: Yeah, but then, I really don't think I would like the university lifestyle, you know, going out and getting pissed, that's just not me, I have never even been in a nightclub. So, I don't really think I would enjoy being at university that much, but that's just the image I have.

DD: What is you preferred lifestyle? What are you afraid won't fit?

G: I guess I just love being active you know. Sporty. I mean, regardless of cricket, or training or anything else, I will always be active. Go for runs, go to the gym.

DD: Ok, you know you can live that lifestyle at university too. There are so many clubs, training groups, and competitive. Maybe it would be good to speak so some people you know who is at University, like your brother, or even to go and see some of the universities?

G: Really, ok. I guess it could just be the image I have. I just don't want to be going out and getting wasted the whole time. Maybe I should see what it is like.

DD: Where have you applied to?

G: I have applied to two, one is closer to my county and not too far away from home, and my brother is there. That would make any county commitments easier, you know if I do get a contract, but I am still not sure.

DD: It might be a good idea to speak with your brother about life there and get a clearer picture of what it would be like, as my experience of university was certainly not just going out and getting wasted? But also, I noticed that you talked about the degree in case your cricket career never came to anything, and that you started off by talking about a contract. How do you see cricket and study fitting together for you in this plan?

G: Well, I mean my cricket is so important to me. That won't change regardless of whether or not I get a contact. So, in that sense an MCCU could be good, or could almost be a stop gap if I don't get a contract?

DD: What would it mean if you didn't get a contract?

G: Well, it wouldn't be the end. I guess I would definitely go to university and try to develop my cricket that way if that was the case. I mean Alan, at my county, he went to university, got a degree and then didn't get his first professional contract until he was 23. I am sure when he was at my point, he was probably exactly the way I am, not knowing what to do, or where to go, but you look at him now and he has it all sorted doesn't he. So, it would not be the end, I am still young. It is just tough now. I mean, I don't even know what the coaches would think if I did go to university, if I did or didn't get a contract.

DD: Is that worrying you, what they would think?

G: Well, yeah, I mean, I don't know what commitments I would have to make to both university and cricket if I did both, as either way both are going to be new experiences for me. And I don't know what they think if I chose to go to university. Do you know what I mean, like, would they think I am not that serious about cricket? I feel like it could limit my cricket development if I did go to university, and that might look like a lack of commitment to the coaches. There is a lot to think about. But so much depends on that contract first, don't you think?

DD: Yeah, a lot does depend on that. But I also think at this point you don't know what you have to do to get it. And if you do, you still don't know what you need to make the decision about university. So, I worry, that you have to wait for others to make decisions for you.

G: Yeah, that's true. I need to speak with a few people, and the coaches I think. I have to get to my physio appointment in a few minutes…

DD: Of course. I can tell this is worrying you, and it is tough to know what to do. But you have to recognise that you only worry because you care a lot about both options. That's important, and a good thing. Unfortunately, we don't have a lot of time today, but we can keep talking after this. But I think it would be good for you to talk with Alan and find out about his experience. You could also speak to your brother and try to find out a little more about the lifestyle at university? Finally, as you said, I think you would really benefit from speaking to the coaches, when you feel you can. And I can help you with preparing for that? That could at least let you know what they are expecting of you and what your possibilities are for the future before you decide. Hopefully if you at least have clarity, then some of the pressure can disappear, because you have a better idea of what you have to do.

G: Yeah, that's all true. Thanks for listening, it has been worrying me, but it feels good to talk about it. I will plan to do that. But I think it will be good for us to keep talking, and as you say, prepare for that conversation with the coach.

DD: Of course, that is what I am here for. Just let me know what can help.

As George walked out of the room, and I waited for my next player to walk in. I quickly noted down the summary that we had come to, so that I could send it to him later that evening. I felt frustrated that the meeting had to come to an end, albeit, happy that George had left reflecting that he felt better about the situation. I couldn't help but think that for someone who had made such a big commitment to both cricket and education over the previous 2 years, the decision about what would happen next was a complex one. Even though, his grades were good enough to get into any university, and most courses, and his cricketing development had been so positive, here still was a young man feeling rather lost about what the future might hold for him. I felt confident that whatever direction he did take, he had the skills to thrive. However, I was struck by how which direction he did take, seemed to depend on the decision and impressions of so many others, even for someone who was quite clear about what he wanted from life.

I did follow up on our conversation with a phone call and helped George to prepare for his conversation with the coach a week after our conversation. However, I did not see George again until later that summer. We had messaged each other during his exams, and I congratulated him on finishing them and maintaining high levels of play at his county at the same time. Toward, the end of the summer we caught up during a county game which was delayed by rain. He informed me that he had been offered a two year contract at the club and had decided to defer his place at university having achieved 2 A's and a B at A-level. He had not been selected for the following winter programme, as the programme had limited its selection of players who were in the last year of Under-19 cricket, in order to start preparing for the upcoming world cup in two years. George decided to go to Australia for the winter, before returning to take part in first professional pre-season. As it happened, this meeting represented the last of our work together as a result of this selection decision. Our last conversation was a brief exit process conversation we had by phone. We had planned to do it in person, but his plans to travel to Australia meant this wasn't possible. We reflected on what he had learned and established that no specific support was necessary moving forward. I wished him success, and we both commented that fingers crossed, we would see each other again when he gets selected for the England Lions programme in a few years.

Narrative 2: Alex

Meeting Alex

It was mid-August, and I found myself at the national cricket performance centre. The England under-17 squad were coming to the end of a home competitive series against Sri Lanka. That squad had been changed significantly from the previous winter, changes that included four players from the previous winter being dropped from the squad. Frustratingly for me (and the player), those who were deselected included a player with whom I had conducted a significant amount of work seeking to develop his ability to manage himself away from home and better cope with setbacks on the pitch. Nonetheless, the show had to go on and 4 new players had joined the squad for the series. Getting to know new players during a summer series in the PDW role had proven to be difficult. The competitive focus and busy schedule meant there was no formal profiling process during which you could start a working relationship. Instead the schedule demanded that players turn up, settle quickly and then play matches. However, I did look to create opportunities to informally sit down with players and get to know them, a process which would help if they remain a part of the squad into the following winter. On this beautiful, dewy August morning, I planned to do exactly this with Alex, one of the four new players. I just had to hover, as I often did, until he finished his batting session and would have a 35 minute gap in his training schedule.

The generalised narrative of Alex's time so far on the programme according to staff, could be described as an emotional roller coaster, with one staff member saying it was more up-and-down than any other player he had worked with. For example, the first night of the schedule, he had broken the curfew which dictates that players are required back at the accommodation by 10pm. Earlier on that evening, he had also left the team dinner early and gone back to the training centre, meaning he also missed the end-of-day team meeting. Allowing Alex the benefit of the doubt, staff accepted that he may not have known what to expect. So rather than a punishment, he was educated on the expectations of the programme holds for behaviour. Nonetheless, the fact that Alex did not look to establish team rules so early on had caught the support staff's attention. They were more used to players doing everything possible not to stand out for any reason when they would fist join. During the first few days, Alex had also experienced a short-term injury. He had become quite angry with the physio when receiving the news that he would be required to sit out a training session, claiming that the physio was ruining his chances of selection. Finally, having been given a

consequence for breaking a team rule on his fifth day of the programme, he delivered a public attack to the staff, chastising their "need to control everyone". Although Alex had challenged the programme norms off the field, his performances had also been outstanding, and the coaches where excited about the potential he may hold. I had been struck by how firm the staff team had been in addressing the player's behaviour. They had remained patient with some of the more emotional elements of his behaviour, they had worked to clarify with Alex what the boundaries within the environment were and make it clear that these would apply to everyone. The fast bowing coach who had been working with Alex remarked:

"...I think it is a sign of how far we have come in terms of helping these types of guys. 5-6 years ago, guys like him would have just been out the door straight away. I think that is a sign of how far the programme has come in that we have the right structures and the right people in place now to be able to deal with and help those types of characters..."

I was curious to see how Alex would relate to me in my role, given that he had experienced such a hot and cold relationship with the support staff so far. I found myself somewhat halfway between the staff and the player. On the one hand, I was there to support the player and I was eager to understand how he had felt about the boundaries and the fact that the staff had remained so strict with him. On the other hand, I was part of the group deciding what the behavioural boundaries should be, and I hoped that this would not affect Alex's willingness to engage with me.

As I watched the end of Alex's batting session. He was aggressive and confrontational with the bowlers he faced, but ultimately very impressive. At the end, he walked bullishly out of the net to the back of the pitch. He removed his gloves, and helmet. As I approached, he looked up at me from his kit bag on the grass, with droplets of sweat dropping from his chin, and nodded to acknowledge my arrival. His patchy stubble, and often stern expression did not disguise the boyishness of his 17-year old face. I reminded Alex of our plan to catch up and asked if that still worked for him.

"Yeah definitely, we can do it there, on the benches at the back of the nets, once I get my pads off", he replied.

I was struck by the fact that he suggested we chat for the first time in the open in front of everyone. I was used to a behind closed doors meeting for the first time as players often seemed cautious not to give the impression that they needed to talk about a problem they had.

However, I was eager to break down such a stigma, so I could only see this as a positive. I picked up two bottles of water, strategically placed in the shade under a tree, before making my way to the benches and waiting for Alex to join me.

Alex was very open with me, and he enthusiastically described his family and background. His family, including his two older brothers, were mad about cricket. He described his "working class family life", within which he had two older brothers. He had completed his GCSEs the previous year but said that he really only enjoyed art and PE as subjects. He explained that he left school after his GCSE's were completed:

"I couldn't wait to get it done, as even if cricket didn't work out, I am more likely to do something practical rather than academic".

He laughed nervously, before adding:

"I am not exactly the brightest. Coming from my background, school was never really the most important thing".

He stressed that he was desperate to make it as a professional cricketer - he wanted to make a difference for his family and give him and his girlfriend a good life. I asked him how he had felt about his time with the squad so far.

"...yeah, I mean I have really enjoyed this couple of weeks. I obviously have had a few events like the consequence and that, where I have lost it. But I think it is good, you all really held the line with me. I think I might need that you know. I need to learn to just get on with these things if I am going to be part of squads in the future and learn to keep my cool a lot better. I think I have learnt a lot about myself and some of the things that I have struggled with…"

I began to describe what he can expect from my role, but he interrupted to explain that he already knew a lot about the role as he has already done quite a lot of work with the PCA practitioner in his county. He found this work really helpful and was appreciative of the fact that he could have similar support when he is with England. He explained that the role is something he was expecting to be useful:

"I am not used to this kind of environment here, the structure and demands. So that is something I will probably struggle with, and that might be somewhere I can use you, you know to help me whenever I am out of line or struggling."

We both finished the last of our water, and Alex got up to join the rest of the group for a fielding session. I pointed out that he didn't have long until it started. He shook my hand and gave me a youthful grin, before claiming:

"There is loads of time. "

I felt assured by the openness of our conversation, and relieved that I was not seen as "the bad guy" for being a part of the staff team delivering the consequence. This was important, as Alex's high levels of performance on the pitch suggested he would be in the programme for some time to come. I had enjoyed our dialogue and had felt a strong connection early on. He had seemed forward, confident. He almost bordered on cocky, but in a very likeable way, likeable, because he was humble enough to remain aware of his fallibility and the fact he could benefit from support. I was struck by his mature outlook, and desire to support his family and provide for his girlfriend. However, combined with his desperation to be successful as a cricketer, this made me wary to the pressure he may have to carry as he looked to do so. I walked casually towards the fielding session, where others had already gathered, and I felt a desire to learn more about this young man.

October camp: Coffee and identity

Alex, as I predicted, was selected for the U19 squad for the following winter, and about 8 weeks after our initial conversation, we were both attending the October camp (Death camp!). Unbeknownst to Alex, there had been 4 staff made redundant during that 8-week period, 3 of which were re-hired, alongside the appointment of a new head for the programme. Further, the Under-17 programme for which Alex had initially been selected for was extinguished as part of the re-structure. Consequently, selection for the squad had been delayed, and the entire profiling camp had to be squeezed into just one day allowing for only a 15 minute meeting between each player and I. Alex and I met on that day, but we both felt that 15 minutes was not really enough to catch up on everything we needed to ahead of the coming winter. So, we had agreed to meet again at this camp to give the conversation the time it deserved. Having previously observed Alex's resistance to the rules, timings and structure that comes with being on the programme, I had suggested that we meet at a local coffee shop rather than within the training centre, and that we do so after the days training had finished.

Before we met, I had sat jotting down the supporting info which may have informed the conversation. Despite the critical observations of his behaviour during the summer, the staff had felt that he was a very energetic fielder, with a really aggressive attitude. However, it was felt that the positives of this attitude were not always best used for the team, and at times he could become a negative influence. In an attempt to better develop the positive qualities, he brought, Alex had been informed earlier that day that he would take on the responsibility as a leader in the field. It was described to me that this would involve setting the standards for fielding, influencing tactical decisions in the field and holding others accountable for energy, effort and standards in the field. I was interested to understand how he would relate to this new role. However, before we got to that, I wanted to understand how he was finding being on the programme, now he had a bit more experience. Despite my agenda, we spent the first 15 minutes just chatting. Alex appeared to try and keep the conversation informal like this. We talked about football, family, his girlfriend, even who I was and what I do when not at work. The conversation came easy, and I found his curiosity for my life away from cricket engaging, but also felt it to reflect the importance to Alex of developing a close relationship. However, I eventually got to asking the questions:

" So how are you finding it now?"

He smiled a little before answering as if to suggest that he was considering telling me what he really thinks:

A: Yeah, it's alright. I love the cricket stuff, it's been great. But it's just the rules, and the structure and the meetings. I am not used to that. And I get some of it, but it just feels sometimes that we are having meetings for the sake of it. Like, don't get me wrong, the workshops with you and the others, I enjoy them. It's the de-briefs, and the planning, and the reviews, it's just boring. I haven't been anywhere that does so much before. But I guess that it has to happen, and I just have to get used to it, but I do struggle with it.

DD: I can see that would be a change if you haven't been used to it before, it is very thorough here, and I will get back to that in a second, but I am interested to also hear about the new leadership role you have in the field?

A: Oh, yeah, that. I haven't given it too much thought to be honest. It sounds like they just wanted me to know that I was a good fielder, and that they wanted me to set that standard for others as well. So, I guess it will just be leading by example.

DD: Ok, when I was told, it sounded like you would also have to support and encourage others and have to speak to the group at times about fielding plans.

A: Yeah, they said that, but I don't think it will need to be… (Long pause)

I noticed Alex stop to think, as if he was noticing his own hesitation on this point, as he paused, and I stepped in to ask:

DD: What are you thinking about? You seem to be unsure on that point.

A: Well, I didn't say it to the coaches, but I don't really want to have to do that to be honest. Like, be a vocal character within the team, and be responsible for speaking up a lot; it's just not really me. I am just not very good that way, like I am not the brightest.

DD: I appreciate when you say it is not you, in the sense that you are a bit quieter than some of the group. But, I wouldn't go along with saying that you are not very good at it, or even the brightest. I have seen some great examples in the summer of you speaking up in team meetings, and honestly, you made some great points and people got it.

A: Nah, I mean I have got better, I know that. Mate, if you saw me 3-4 years ago, you wouldn't have even been able to understand a single word I say. But like, you look around the group, and boys like George, like they are so smart, well-to-do and their lives are a bit easier, like they are in control. Like, I haven't always had the easiest upbringing you know, it has been tough at times. So, it's tough for me to speak up to those lads. Like, I get the feeling that if I do, they would just look down on me.

DD: Do you think they do?

A: Sometimes yeah, I do. Not in what they say, but they might laugh, or not take you too seriously.

DD: That must be a difficult thing to have to feel? So, given that, how are you settling in now that you have had some time with us?

A: Yeah, I mean it is not like I don't get on with them at all. They are mostly decent lads; just some don't seem to trust me because of that difference. But I am settling in quite well now, there are a few top lads here that I get on great with, so I just spend my time with them. It has taken me a long way outside my norm. I am learning about myself, and I think I am still trying to figure myself out to be honest, who I am and that. I am having to think quite

carefully about what I want to show people, and also who I want to be both here and away from here… that will take some time I guess, and I might talk to you about that at certain times, if that's alright. I enjoy these chats, like some of the chat with the boys is just bullshit and banter. But I like sitting down properly and chatting like this.

DD: I always enjoy the conversation with you. I also think the point about you being prepared to speak up or not, based on others' perception of you could be a really valuable thing for you to work on. I get when you say that you are not the type to speak a lot. However, I also think that you have ability to bring a lot to the team; but perhaps it is getting blocked by your worry about whether or not others respect you, which would then be a loss for the team and for you. Would you be prepared to work with me on that?

A: Yeah of course. You are right, it would be a shame, but it will be tough for me. However, I guess we can work on it and how to improve.

DD: Yeah definitely, and it will be tough at times, but all things worthwhile often are. So, back to the meetings and structure…

A: Yeah, I just have to get used to that, so don't worry about that. It's fine, I think I just need to get used to it. Can we make sure we get back in time for the football?

DD: Yeah, if you wish, shall we start making our way back to the common area?

A: yeah, thanks!

We exited the coffee shop and commented on how it had become so dark so fast while we were inside. Alex described for me, his usual Saturdays at this time of year. We continued along the narrow pathway, doing our best to avoid the soggy brown leaves which late October had brought. I joked about how the best thing about being on the programme was that you got to spend two months of the winter in sunnier climates. He laughed, but then commented that he loved it (England in Winter) and didn't need to go anywhere else. After a few minutes, we approached the accommodation, the sound of 17-18 year olds, playing ping pong and pool became audible. Alex commented that he wasn't sure he could be bothered with it all, and was off to his room, to watch the match there. He left, but only after a firm handshake. Alex began walking towards his room. As he did so, he called back over his shoulder:

"Cheers for the coffee."

Alex impressed the coaches during that week. His quality stood out in training. The support staff team had also been pleased that some of the behavioural concerns seen previously were nowhere to be seen. However, on Wednesday, three days after our meeting, Alex had presented to the physio with some shin pain after some bowling drills. A scan was carried out and highlighted an injury which would require 6 weeks of complete shutdown, followed by 6 weeks of significant rehabilitation. The end result being that he would do nothing until the tour in Dubai and be just about back to bowling by the time of the South Africa tour. Alex was devastated when he found out the results of his scan. I had attempted to talk to him, but it was a brief exchange that only highlighting how defeated he had felt. The decision was taken that Alex would still travel on both tours that winter, as completing his rehab under supervision in Dubai would provide the best possible opportunity to be ready for South Africa. It was stressed that it was a tight timeline, and amongst the staff, there were some concerns over Alex's lifestyle choices and ability to stick to the rehabilitation programme based on observations from his county. I was particularly concerned that Alex would struggle with the rehab process, given how much he identified with the role of cricketer, which had now been disappeared beneath his feet. Other than the support of his family, I worried that there was little else in Alex's life which could act as a buffer against the frustration of being injured. Following our previous tense exchange, I cautiously looked to engage Alex on the last day of the camp. I was relieved to establish he was now beginning to accept his circumstances. Before we parted, I assured Alex that we could stay in contact and continue the work we had set out to do in an attempt to help him retain a positive mind-set were possible, and that he could get in touch any time he was finding it particularly challenging.

I had not seen Alex since the news of his injury before we went to Dubai. However, I had attempted to call and message on a number of occasions which had remained unanswered. I had hoped we might have had the chance to catch up at the hotel, the night before our flight. However, he had retired to his room very quickly after our meal, so I resigned myself to catching him over the course of the journey. There would after all be three hours at the airport, a seven hour flight, and an hour and a half on a bus. The first opportunity that presented itself was standing in a queue, outside the airplane toilet, roughly halfway across Ukraine. We both stood stretching our legs, his based on physio encouragement, mine prompted by seeing him available for a conversation which I had not been able to have for the previous 4 weeks.

DD: How is your flight going then?

A: It's alright, few decent movies which helps. But I hate flying. Not scared or anything, I just hate not being able to go where I want for 8 hours, stuffed into a row of seats. But what can you do?

DD: What movies have you watched then?

A: I actually watched a Christmas one, I love Christmas me. I'm going to hate being away from home in the run up to it. It is my favourite time of the year with the family. But I'm going to try and get a little sleep now, once I stretch my legs enough to keep the physio happy.

DD: Yeah, do so. It's important mate, he wants you to do it for your benefit you know.

A: Yeah, I know, but I am getting told what to do constantly at the moment.

DD: It is frustrating when you are injured, I can appreciate that, it removes a lot of the fun that comes with playing the game.

A: I bloody hate it, but you've gotta get through eh?

DD: Yeah, that's why I had hoped to see how you were finding it, and had tried to get in touch a few times, but struggled to get an answer. I was concerned that meant you struggling?

A: yeah, sorry mate, I am rubbish with phones, don't take it personally, I don't respond to most people. I just can't be bothered being tied to it. But I am alright, I don't like it obviously, but I am alright. I wouldn't say that I am struggling, just not enjoying it, and there's not much else without cricket to keep me entertained…

DD: Yeah, I understand. I have seen your programme for this next few weeks. Lots of physical work on the agenda. I am conscious that can be tough on your own, so I have agreed with the coaches that I will join you for a lot of it, as I have to do my own training out here and it is very similar to what you are doing.

A: Yeah that's sound, be good to have someone with me. Cheers. I hope you don't expect to beat me though. Haha. Anyway, I best get to my seat and get some sleep. See you in a bit

Dubai: Warning signs for Alex

On the third morning of the two-week tour, I went for a walk with Mike, Alex's roommate. We were both waiting for the team bus to take us to the training ground, and that presented an opportunity for me to catch up with him for the first time since we arrived in Dubai. Our initial conversation stuttered as we slowly walked along the beautiful beach. To be fair, we were both distracted by the glistening steel high-rise buildings casting welcome shade upon us, and the extravagant cars which passed with reliable regularity. Once we became accustomed to our surroundings, I was pleased and reassured to hear that Mike was enjoying the trip so far, especially given how challenging he had found the step up in performance levels during his early days on the programme. As we approached the hotel again and Mike had finished sharing his time on the tour so far, I asked Mike what Alex had been up to this morning and whether or not he would have liked to join us. Mike sniggered and said that he was likely just in his room as that is all he has wanted to do since we got here:

"...don't get me wrong, we get on really well. But he can be tough to room with sometimes. He just stays in the room constantly, is up really late, and speaks on Skype to people at home all the time, like until midnight last night. I have tried to tell him he might not ever get the chance to come out here again, but he is not interested in going out or anything, just gets room service every night..."

I asked Mike if he thought Alex had been dealing with the tour ok:

"...nah, I don't think so anyway. He just says he missed people a lot, but that he is fine, and that he doesn't really want to spend time with some of the lads anyway. So, I have been a bit stuck in the middle at times, so I just go and do my own thing..."

As we arrived back to the hotel, the players and staff were all now in the lobby, waiting for the bus which was due to arrive in 5 minutes. Most of the players were sitting on the backless sofas which filled the right side of the reception area, adjacent to the computers which were positioned to allow guests to communicate with the rest of the world. However, local internet regulations had meant many of our means of communication were blocked, which had only served to exacerbate the usual level of homesickness which would pervade a camp for players of this age. It was a peculiar hotel. Quite modern in its finish, with beautiful high functioning rooms stacked on top of each other for 24 floors. However, it had lacked the

homeliness which the players claimed to miss during this run up to Christmas. We stood within the reception as the front door of the hotel lead straight into the car park where our team bus would pick us up for training. This gave the illusion every time that you were in the lobby that it was already night time, despite the 28 degree searing sunshine waiting for you outside. Nonetheless, the hotel provided a lot of what we required for such a tour, good food, a good gym and close to enough restaurants that players (and staff) could feign a sense of novelty and spontaneity through your restaurant choice, on what was ultimately a repetitive and at times mundane experience on tour.

Mike joined the players by the sofas, and I stood with four staff members who were discussing the day ahead. The players would have 90 minutes of training up first after a 20 minute warm up. Following this there was lunch, and then a rotation where half the squad would do 90 minutes of study, rotated with 60 minutes in the gym and a break before a final hour of cricket training. For Alex, this schedule would look quite different. He would instead have a running session, the gym session, and instead of education, he would, alongside 3 other players not in education, have the task of organising a charity project to deliver on the South Africa tour later in the winter. I was quite familiar with the schedule and instead allowed myself to observe the players across the room. I was pleased to see that by and large their interaction was still as we had come to expect, full of laughs, either bantering or defending oneself from the banter. The atmosphere was very much dictated by a group of about four players who based on the amount of time they had been on ECB programmes, had been granted an informal seniority. The players were gathered around a phone, watching highlights of a recent One-day international match. However, I noticed Alex separate himself from the group, and stand almost exactly halfway between the coaches and the players, staring intensely at his phone. I walked over to the group, and as I passed Alex, spotted that he was having a text conversation, most likely with someone back at home, I decided.

"Daz, settle it, who is more of a gun player, Jos, or Virat?" demanded Gerard, one of the four "senior players".

I suggested we would find out when they play against each other in the summer, before turning back and asking Alex if he was alright.

"Yes mate", he replied, briefly looking up from his phone.

I suggested that we could use his rest time in the afternoon to catch up if it suited.

"Yes, sounds good mate", he replied, before putting the phone to his ear and walking beyond the computers for some silence.

It was only a momentary pause, as the identifiable call to attention was heard:

"The bus is here lads".

As I made my way into the bus seat which had become mine on this trip, third from the front and to the right as you walk down the aisle, I asked our strength and conditioning coach if he had the daily monitoring scores for me to check the reporting of mood.

"Just finished uploading them now mate", he said as he passed me his laptop.

I looked through the scores and saw Alex's reports of 1 out of 5 for mood, and 1 out of 5 for sleep before quickly handing back the laptop.

"Have you seen Alex's score mate", he asked.

"Yeah, that's what I was looking for, I am going to have a chat with him this afternoon", I replied.

"That's a good idea I reckon, he has been working hard to be fair, but his reporting has just got lower and lower since we got here. Let me know if I can do anything to help", he claimed, before turning back to his laptop screen.

I thanked him for his info, and then fell back into my seat, and thought to myself:

"I think I better create some time for him (Alex)"

Rehab "therapy"

Later that morning, I found Alex lying on his back, stretching in the Dubai morning sun as I approached him to join in his running session. The heat was more forgiving at this time of day, but it was still about 28 degrees; hot enough to make you sweat within minutes of stepping outside. The running session would be on the outfield of one pitch, the one closest to the impressive adjacent cricket centre. The squad at that moment was split between the cricket nets just about within hearing distance, but not visible, and a middle practice simulating match conditions on the second pitch. The two pitches were separated by the two

sets of changing rooms, both of which the player had occupied. Between the changing rooms was a gazebo sheltering about 12 seats that helped players relax between sessions. Finally, there was a physio-bed which was seldom unoccupied, 2 boxes of iced water and a table displaying an array of snacks to help maintain energy on long days like these.

"What is that shirt Dazza?" called Alex, poking fun at my training shirt, clearly judging my retro football jersey to be significantly out of date.

I shrugged it off and joked that we would see which shirt moved fastest. The running session was intense, including efforts of 40 seconds running split by 40 seconds of rest for a period of about 30 minutes. After dipping for the line in our final 40 second race, we gave each other a five and thanked the physio for the session. We walked towards the changing rooms and I suggested we might dry ourselves and take a cool down walk for our catch up, by doing a couple of laps of the boundary. The boundary lap, I had now realised, being the "go to" way to have a private conversations within this game.

We spent the first quarter of a lap discussing our struggle to cool down and how different it felt to be running there in Dubai rather than on the damp fields at home. Eventually I moved the conversation on to a more purposeful one:

DD: So how are you finding it here now then, like the programme, not just Dubai?

A: It's alright, I enjoy some of it. I still struggle with the rules and the meetings and constantly having to be on a time schedule. That just winds me up. But like, I get that we have to do it, and I have to adapt to it. One thing that really winds me up is the whole consequence thing, I just don't get it. Honestly, and the fact that players get to decide what the consequences are, that's stupid. The lads just look after themselves, and their mates. People spend their time trying to get each other consequences, and winding each other up, it does my head in. You're a team, just get on with it and do your own thing and leave people be. I get you have got to have rules and that, but it's how the lads use it, they become like snitches, where everyone is trying to get each other rather than just help each other. Or at least that's how I see it. But I can't be bothered with all that, so I just keep myself to myself.

DD: Is it just you that is thinking that, or everyone else too?

A: It's not just me that they try to get caught if you know what I mean. Everyone thinks the same, just some seem to enjoy it, like it's a game, whereas I can't be bothered. It just seems a

bit childish to me like. But that's alright. I think I am just a bit more mature than a lot of the others. Like, when they come to camps, they are like best mates who haven't seen each other in ages. Whereas I am like, you're just my teammates. I have some really close friends in here, who I am close with and who I speak to all the time. But it just seems like a fake friendship at times where you don't ever speak to each other but then because you are here, you are best mates and you try to catch each other out and that. But some of these guys I am like, we are not good enough mates for you to do that to me. But that's life isn't it, some of the guys I click with and some I don't, But the way I see it is, we are a team, and we don't have to.

DD: Ok, I guess I just want to check that on that social level, you feel able to manage that frustration?

Al: Yeah, yeah. I'm alright, but thanks.

DD: And what about the programme, as in the coaches, the staff and all that?

A: Similar actually, some staff I really like. Like, the S&C, you, the psychologist, and the physio as well actually. Basically, that is it, I really like all the non-cricket stuff, for a couple of reasons. They are the people I feel have my interests. Like you want me to be me and help me with what I want. The coaches are good coaches, but it annoys me when they want to change me. Like I don't know why they come to my county to work with me. There are already top coaches there. It feels like they are saying, "we are England, and we know better". That's something that annoys me, but I have been warned about that by others who have been involved in the past. They said just don't get caught up in it, and forget that your county employs you, you know. I am not going to change what I do just because I get selected for England, and then go against what the county says.

DD: Ok, and I guess you have a responsibility within that to say what you think you need to work on?

A: Yeah, I agree, and I do. But it just feels like all the others don't do that. Like they will just enjoy doing what the coaches say and changing for them. Like I get on really well with the bowling coach, but even now he seems to suggest we start changing things, and I am like I got on here because of what I do, I didn't get on here for you to change that. It sometimes feels like "I am going to say something now for the sake of saying something", instead of nurturing what you have a little bit. It feels like, "right this is the way I want you to do it",

But I just don't, and I think that winds the coaches up at times, that I am not just easier to work with. You know, as in, I don't just do what they want.

DD: Yeah, I can see what you mean. My worry is that your success on the programme could be limited if you do not look to build those relationships with staff, so that you can both be clear on what you need to do, rather than just resisting it?

A: Yeah, I know what you mean, I do. This trip will be good for that, and South Africa I guess, but then the coaches will just change again. Like, it is going to be a different bowling coach and a different batting coach in South Africa to what it is here. So, I feel like, "what is the point?" The coaches keep going on about building a relationship and all that, but I am not batting or bowling here, and then the two coaches will change anyway, so I don't bother. The coach in South Africa, will be my third bowling coach in 9 months on this programme. And I will have had 3 different batting coaches as well. So…

DD: Yeah, listen, I can understand that frustration. My advice is to keep that independence that allows you to be clear on what you want, but just don't switch off from the relationships you can have here, or you won't get the most from it.

A: Yeah that's fair.

DD: But also, listening to you it does sound like there is a significant amount of frustration there, which can't be easy to carry. So, you know you can always talk it through with me, and see if there are things we can do to help, or maybe just talking it through can help?

A: Yeah of course, I am fine for now, but I will mate.

As we arrived back to the point where the changing room splits the two pitches, Alex asked if we should go one more or go in. Acknowledging that neither of us was exactly cooling down, and gesturing to the sweat stain on my shirt, I suggested that one more might be good, as the conversation was proving helpful for me. He agreed.

DD: So, the other thing I wanted to check in on was how you were finding this trip. I noticed this morning that you put a 1 down for mood, and I don't feel like I have seen you that much around the hotel to be able to tell if you are enjoying yourself.

A: Eh, I have been finding it hard to be honest. I just miss home a lot. I think it being Christmas is worse, because I can tell I am missing out on loads at home, and I hate that.

Like I know my missus is out having fun, and family are out having fun, and I am stuck here in Dubai in a hotel with limited internet. Like some of the lads love it here, but I am bored of it already, I just want to be home.

DD: I am sorry to hear that, it is a tough time to be away. Especially if it is the first time being away like this on your own?

A: Yeah, it is for me.

DD: It's a big sacrifice, but it is a sacrifice that the game demands of you. Like, the trip to South Africa is more than two weeks longer, so it could be even tougher. I don't say that to make you feel down, I just want to be realistic in discussing what you may have to deal with.

A: I don't think it will be as hard, even though it is longer, because it is competitive. Like there will be matches to focus on. Here I am just running and lifting weights, it's boring mate. So, I am not too worried. Plus, I won't have the problem of my Skype not working and all that…I hope.

DD: Yeah, I get that this is a really tough tour for you given the training you have to do and the fact that you can't play any matches. But also, matches brings more days off, so I think it's important that we try to find a productive way to occupy your time. Like the other lads spend a lot of time on their education, which whilst not always fun, it does at least occupy their minds. My concern for you is that without it, you could spend the time on your own, and get in a bit of a vicious cycle. Do you know what I mean?

A: Yeah, I mean understand that, but I don't know what, like, the only things I have ever done are sports, and I can't do other sports because I need to rest, so what are you thinking?

DD: Well, as crazy as it sounds, my research helps give me a focus which allows me to fill my time, but I also try to plan what I need from people. You know, like, who I do I need to call? Who can I speak to here to help me stay in the present, you know?

A: Well the first thing is I am not going to start reading books like you. But yeah, I get what you mean. I think making sure I can speak to home is hugely important. I think here, speaking to you is important, and I guess being a bit more outgoing with the lads I do get on with might help take my mind off it.

DD: I do think it might, and why not tell them that it would, the ones you are close to, at least, then maybe they can help you too?

A: Yeah, I might do.

DD: The other thing, Gerard the coach has spoken to me about how much he struggled when he spent 6 months in Australia. How about I set you up to have a chat with him about how he got past it, because he is fine with being away now?

A: Yeah that would be good, he is a top bloke. Cheers Daz.

DD: No worries, anything else on your mind?

A: Nah, that's been good mate, good chat. Cheers.

Alex continued to struggle with the tour. However, he managed to complete training at a very high level. Nonetheless, in the moments we spoke after this, he was still counting down days until he was able to go home. He did speak to Gerard and following his advice, Alex felt excited that filling his time with something productive could help him to manage his homesickness when on tour. I was concerned that when we spoke, he talked about getting through this tour, but seemed avoidant of the fact that the next tour would be longer and with an even more challenging time difference. Although he had agreed that having other parts to his identity that are not cricket could help, I was struck by how difficult answering the question as to what that is, was for Alex. We had agreed on our last conversation in Dubai, that it would be worth spending some time together to review how he coped in Dubai, and to plan for the next trip to give him the best chance of coping. We also felt we could then consider what he could spend his time doing to help the trip go easier.

"Let's stay in touch before South Africa"

One month after we had returned from Dubai, and 6 weeks prior to the upcoming South Africa tour, I initiated contact with Alex. I had hoped following our last conversation that he may have contacted me first, however this was not the case. I first tried texting but did not receive a response over the first week. Frustrated that he was again difficult to contact, I instead tried calling, leaving two missed calls over a 5 day period, but still received no response. I had received reassurance from the physio, that his training had been going quite

well and that he was on track to be available to play throughout the upcoming tour, which at least alleviated some of my concerns. However, now four weeks from the trip, I was concerned that Alex was avoiding the topic as a result of his own worry, but also that in chasing him and seeming to be trying to get him to do things for me may not help our relationship ahead of that very tour. Nonetheless, I decided to call once more, and he answered the phone, and agreed to meet up the week before we were due to leave, at his county ground. We also informally agreed that becoming more contactable would be a helpful skill to work on, for his benefit.

I arrived at Alex's impressive county ground, one of the biggest in the country, and waited for him in the club reception. Having arrived at 11.50, Alex arrived at about 12.15. He apologised for his lateness, explaining that he had a gym session at a private gym away from the ground, before inviting me up to what he I assumed would be a private meeting area. Alex led me into the changing room and match viewing area. I was struck by the usual cricket changing room smell as I walked in and the usual array of bats and pads spread across the individuals seating areas. Regardless of size shape, or décor, I commented on how all changing rooms share so many characteristics, further gesturing to the notice board with the gym training plan for all players, and the inspirational quote painted just above it, all in the proud county colours. Although Alex laughed and agreed with me, he added: *"none are quite like this, I fucking love it here"*.

Although I was enthused at the chance to chat in this space which made Alex feel more at ease than any formal meeting room, in the corner of the room was the club's performance analyst hard at work. I hesitantly suggested to Alex that maybe a more private room would be easier for him. He replied:

"Nah, nothing we will speak about that this guy doesn't already know, isn't that right Will" Will, the performance analyst, simply smiled and shook his head. I sat down on the sofa located in the middle of the changing room. Alex exceeded my expectations of his hosting and offered to make me a cup of tea. The kettle in the corner of the room which Alex sent to the boil, only added to blurred lines of high performance, and home comforts in the room. The informality that Alex liked about this room seemed to match the informality he liked n the nature of our relationship. I found myself wondering if this informality was always helpful, and if over time a more professional and arguably less comfortable type of dialogue

might actually better serve Alex's needs. The difficulty was that I sensed earning his trust was just as hard as losing it was easy.

"I would have to pick my moments", I thought before Alex interrupted my train of thought with my tea.

I was growing agitated, as it was nearly 12.30 by the time Alex and I sat with our drinks. Once we did, he explained that he wouldn't have long as he had a bowling session at 1 which he didn't want to be late for. I hid my frustration that with all the time I had put aside, this next 30 minutes was all we would have together. I asked how he had been since the turn of the year, and Alex stood up and explained that we could keep speaking but that he realised he had forgotten his bowling shoes. He explained that he had been good, that training had been going really well, and that he was now cleared to go and play a full role in the South Africa tour. As he raided the open locker of one of the other young players at the County (with similar sized feet it seemed). Alex pulled out a rather worn out looking pair of bowling shoes, claiming:

"these will have to do!"

Finally, we got the chance to sit still, and although heavily conscious of the analyst's presence in the room, I began to ask about how Alex felt after the Dubai tour that he struggled with, and what he planned for the South Africa trip. Although seeming comfortable with the question in this public space, Alex began talking more about the problems with the programme; the fact that coaches tell him what to do, that he has to follow so many rules and his frustration that most of the other players just do it, which he explained made him think they were a bit childish. Explaining that here at his county, he gets treated as an adult, but that with England he feels like he is constantly being watched. He went on to say that this was evident in the coaches coming to see him at his county, and in how the players played in the matches in Dubai, where he felt they buckled under the slightest bit of pressure. He appeared to be carrying quite a bit of frustration, angst, and anger with the programmes demands on him. He talked about anything but what was on my agenda, including the players being soft, the coaches changing too much, the rules not allowing him to enjoy himself. I afforded him time to share his frustrations, in the hope that we could then speak about how he would manage these frustrations to help him perform over a 5 week trip. However, before I got the chance to steer the conversation down this road, he explained that his bowling session was a five-minute walk away and that he would need to leave now at 12.50 in order to get

there on time and warm up. As I walked him to the session, I felt there was less anger and defences up, than in the changing room. I finally shared that I was concerned that we would need to plan for how to ensure he manages the time away from home better on the upcoming trip in order for him to get the best out of himself. He agreed that would be good and that there is loads of time to do so at the airport, on the plane or over the first few days there, before saying his goodbyes and running into the indoor cricket school to start his session.

As I walked off in the other direction, towards the cities central train station, I felt frustrated by the nature of the conversation. It had felt like a rant about the programme, which I understood had been challenging for Alex. However similar to the last trip, I had felt it was a build-up of frustrations, for which had had not allowed himself an outlet, despite my offering of one over the previous few weeks. It had felt a repeat of our experiences in the run up to Dubai, where he had been quite avoidant of the conversation and his emotions regarding the trip, yet very appreciative of our time together when we finally spoke. Finally, I was concerned that his presentation did not suggest a positive mind-set prior to a highly challenging (on and off the field) tour. Nonetheless, I was relieved that we had restarted our conversation before departing, and that here would be time to pick up with each other in the early stages of the trip. Further, it was at least nice to see him running into a cricket training session having been injured for the previous 4 months.

"You better have a look at me Phys"

Following the long travel to the first destination in our South Africa tour, the build-up to the first test match had been good for the whole squad, who had trained well, and remained injury-free. It was late March, with the weather offering a relatively forgiving temperature, something closer to a warm English summer's day. The first week of the trip had flown past, with players spending a lot of time training, a lot of time studying. They had also arranged the "social responsibility" activity for just after the test match. Or the majority of the squad, the first test match was their first experience of a youth test match played over 4 days. It was being played at a much fabled and historic cricket ground, adding to both the prestige and the psychological dynamic of the occasion. The players had visited the ground the day before the game for a training session, and also to allow some of the sense of awe to be diluted before they were required to perform. The stadium was unique in its combination of standing space and stadium seating with inspirational messaging cleverly threaded throughout the player's

areas screaming high performance and highlighting the local teams shared identity. For the playing team, this only added to the sense of atmosphere for the game. For the five players not selected, it served as a painful reminder of an opportunity missed which they had struggled to accept. Alex was one of the fortunate 11, and as we passed in the corridor after the selection meeting, he acknowledged that it had made the long winter of rehabilitation worth it.

Early on the second day of the test, after batting for most of the first day, Alex bowled competitively for the first time since the previous summer. I sat with David, the team's physio, in the stands, when after bowling his third over of the day, we observed Alex sit down, to stretch and massage his shin, prompting some initial concerns. For the next fifteen minutes, he looked very agitated and eventually turned down the opportunity to bowl further overs, before coming off the pitch to be assessed. He walked off the pitch, up the 35 steps and into the changing rooms.

"You better have a look at me Phys" he politely demanded, before taking off his boots and throwing them at his locker.

David (the physio) got up and began preparing the physio bed. I stayed seated, nervously waiting for either Alex or David to return and provide an update. Eventually, it was David who came back to his seat. Holding his voice just about over his breath, so that only the two of us could hear him, he said that Alex had been feeling pain in his shin again, which was similar to that which he had felt when he had his injury. He explained that it was not severe, but that Alex's level of worry about the pain was so high that Alex did not think he should carry on bowling. Alex was now in the medical room, speaking with the head coach to decide what he could contribute for the rest of the game. As the level of pain was relatively low, the decision was taken to not bowl for the rest of the test, but to continue as a fielder, and as a batter.

That afternoon, David and I went for a lap of the pitch, and he described the next steps for Alex before we had reached the bottom of the steps down to the ground.

Physio: It's tricky, because we know he is really anxious about the injury, and we know that will exacerbate the feeling of pain that he feels. Because of his recent history, you do worry that it is a repeat, and he is definitely worried about that and he would like a scan to reassure him. However, the pain he is reporting is really not consistent with the injury he had before,

but he is saying it's exactly what he previously felt. My worry is that if we want to get him to trust his body, getting an MRI just because he has a bit of soreness, might only add to the level of anxiety and distrust in his body. But at the same time, if there is something wrong, it would be good to know as soon as possible. So, my preference would be for him to have a rest, see how quickly it calms down, and then see if he can prove his bowling fitness before the ODI matches.

DD: I get all of that. He is definitely carrying a lot anxiety about it. That isn't helped by the fact that we can see he struggles being away from home too. Do you think you could share that perspective with him, that all of these aspects can influence the pain felt, and that we feel this is the best way forward to give him a chance to gain that trust in his body, as it could be very normal to feel the pain he feels without such a serious injury.

Physio: Yeah, I think we should try, and follow that plan. In the meantime, I am under the impression he has a chance of getting in the side as just a batter, so it might not mean the end of his tour just yet, but let's see where we get to. But I look at him out there fielding, and he appears to move very well. So that is optimistic.

I caught up with Alex that night after his conversation with the physio and the head coach. He felt reassured that it is normal to feel the pain and seemed to buy in to the idea that there was value trying to get trust in his body without an MRI scan every time he hurts. However, I was not sure he had understood the link between his worry and anxiety and the feeling of pain that he experiences. Nonetheless, he was excited to spend the rest of the game as a batter and felt he could make a significant contribution in the game, and he was right. He batted for 4 hours on the final day of the match and made a huge contribution to earning a draw for the team. This performance had seemed to give him a level of optimism and excitement moving forwards. He would now have two days off, before having to test his bowling prior to the ODI series. After this, he would have greater clarity on what the rest of the series would look like for him.

After two days of rest, Alex attempted to prove his bowling fitness during a training session. I could sense the tension in Alex, the physio and the head coach. I had been asked to assist the batters training session by standing in the field and acting as a fielder for some power hitting batting training. This helped to take my mind off the bowling session which Alex would be in about 80 meters to my right. About 25 minutes into our session, I turned towards the bowling session, to see Alex and the Physio walking back towards the pavilion.

They both looked like they had their heads down. They arrived at the steps of the pavilion entrance. David appeared to be speaking to Alex, but he did not look in a mood to listen to him, instead gesturing to the physio that he would be upstairs in a minute. As David started up the steps, Alex took his shoes off and hurtled them towards his kit bag, for the second time this tour. Fifteen minutes later, the physio came to me on the pitch, to say that they had taken the decision to get an MRI, as by now they had no choice but to investigate the pain further. He reflected that Alex was ok for now, worried about the outcome of the scan, but ok. However, until the results came back, he would be unavailable for the first ODI match.

"I just wanna go home"

The first two matches of the ODI series were being played on the campus of a beautiful, albeit somewhat reclusive boarding school about an hour into the countryside. The accommodation was in stark contrast to the more luxurious comfort of hotel rooms and restaurant food. The school provided canteen food, a single recreation room set within a beautiful handmade timber outhouse, and dorms of accommodation within 3 bedroom chalets. The chalet bedrooms were closed off from each other by a simple curtain which hung from the top of the door, stopping at about knee height. As such, privacy became a premium. The contrast from the monotony of city hotel accommodation was a relief for staff, but the positives in the situation were certainly lost on the players. The staff enjoyed the wilderness, walks in the evening under the striking sky full of stars, and regular reminders of wildlife in presence, even if we were not sure what or exactly where it was. For players, the contrast had added to the homesickness, and rather than provide a welcome distraction, served more as a reminder that they were missing their regular home comforts.

On the night before the second ODI, staff and players squeezed into the recreation outhouse to discuss the upcoming game and selection. Despite the wide range of support, I had been providing for all players on this trip, I had become accustomed to keeping one eye on Alex in particular, as I sensed his vulnerability this far into the tour and still lacking in clarity about his playing possibilities. He had been told earlier in afternoon, that the review of his MRI had not come back from the UK yet, due to the time difference and the fact it was sent on a Saturday. The head coach shared (or warned depending on your confidence) that the team selection for the following morning was to be announced. Alex was sat on one half of an arm-chair with table tennis bat still in his hand. George sat on the other half. I was perched

on the corner of a pool table, taking care not to disrupt the game that had been paused for the meeting. The eleven selected, was called out, and it was announced that if George won the toss we would look to bowl first. Alex had known he would be in the side until he got his MRi result, yet the announcement had seemed to have still hurt him, as if it had provided a reminder of his current frustrations. The game plan for the following day was passionately discussed, throughout which, I watched Alex chewing his bottom lip, and avoiding eye contact with others around him, as I had now often observed him do before his emotions would get the better of him. I knew he was struggling and wanted the meeting to end so I could get to him as soon as possible.

The team meeting was adjourned, and each player returned to their own individual thoughts and stories of their tour. For me, all of these stories created some need to support, but some needs felt more prevalent than others. Right now, I felt Alex's was top of the list. Some players and staff left the room and two players turned the TV back on to re-commence their game of FIFA. I was ushered off the pool table by the nudging of Gerard's cue into my back. I laughed and said I would only get up if I can play the winner, knowing this would allow me a chance to speak to Gerard, who had also been left out of the squad for the next day. Alex sank into the arm chair, alone with the bat still in his hand. Alex stood up and moved towards the exit at the other side of the room. I watched as he moved through the crowd like a ghost, unnoticed except for George, who called out:

"Alex, if you aren't playing can you give us the bat mate"

Without so much as turning around, Alex through the bat over his head sending it crashing off the ceiling and back onto the table, before forcing the door open aggressively, leaving with a cry of:

"I fucking hate this place"

It was just about heard over the noise of the door recoiling back off its own hinges. The room stopped in shocked silence briefly. George stood with arms outstretched by his side looking at me, and I gestured to him that he should leave it. I followed Alex out the door, which closed just as the sound of FIFA, table tennis and pool got going again. Feeling that I needed to speak with him, I firmly called out to Alex before he reached his chalet:

"Alex mate, can I chat for a second".

To my relief, he stopped and turned around.

"I am just fucking fed up mate, this place, this game, all of it. I just want to go home", he said, shuffling his feet and rubbing his hand through his hair.

DD: Listen, I know it's hard as hell at the moment, and you are not sure what is around the corner, but let's try and stay calm until we know what you have to do. Tomorrow, is Monday, the results will come back, and we can plan for the rest of the trip from then, can you do that?

A: I want to, but it's just going to come back injured isn't it, I know it. They won't let me play with an injury, so they might as well just send me home now (looking more defeated than angry). What's the point?

In an attempt to buy some patience, and to regain some regulation, I asked him to just sit down on the bench adjacent to the recreation room.

DD: Alex, I know this is so hard. I don't doubt that. But no one is trying to stop you from playing. I know it doesn't always feel like it, but the physio is only trying to protect you and your future. But he genuinely doesn't know the results yet, and as soon as he does, you will too. Once we have that we will make a plan. That plan may be going home, or you might be able to continue playing, even if just as a batter, and you have already shown you can do that. But all we can do now is wait, can you do that? If you can't, please let me know, and we can try to support you as best we can, because I can see you are finding this tough.

He had calmed down, by now, but he was sat with his elbows on his knees, staring straight into the ground. After a break of 30 seconds, he sat back up:

A: Yeah, I can. It's just shit being here and not being able to do anything. I am fine here when I am playing, but now I have just been feeling like I could be at home, and it just didn't feel like I would be playing again, and I still don't think I will. But yeah, I am fine mate, thanks though. But nothing to worry about, just me an' my anger.

We stayed seated.

D: Listen, tomorrow is the game, during which we will get your results sent through. We then head to the city again. Can I suggest we have a bit of time tomorrow evening together, once we know where we are, as I think either way it will be helpful?

He agreed, and we both stood up. We bumped fists and wished each other good night. He walked towards his chalet, and I returned to the recreation room, hoping to catch Gerard, and one other player who had not been selected for the game. Looking back at Alex as he entered his chalet, I was worried:

"Please let the results be positive"

I entered the room again. The room was busy and seemingly oblivious to the actions of the last five minutes. Harry, who I had hoped to see, had already gone to bed, so I sent him a message to say:

"sorry the selection hadn't worked out, let me know if it useful to chat".

Putting my phone in my pocket, I accepted an invite from Gerard for my game against the winner. As I set the balls up, I couldn't help but worry about Alex and his upcoming results. But I also felt reminded of the unpredictability of this role, and the importance of being right here in the middle of it in order to support those who are struggling and learning. Gerard took the opening shot. As I set up to play the second, I asked:

"how are you feeling about the selection decision?"

We played two games and Gerard talked through his frustrations at how little he played so far on the tour. As we talked the room slowly emptied as players went to bed, and we both soon followed.

The next day, the scan of the results came back to reveal, that there had been no new injury, but that there was some scarring on the bone. A decision was taken for Alex to stay on the tour as a batter only, and to restart a new "return to bowling" programme after the tour in the UK. The team lost their third ODI game, as Alex watched on, buoyed by the news during the game that he was not severely injured, and that he could compete for a spot in the team for the next 10 days or so. That evening we returned to the city, and I invited Alex for a coffee with me the following morning, to talk about playing as a batter and how he felt. He agreed, and I went straight to my room. The previous 4-5 days had been difficult for the group, with homesickness creeping in for the players. Homesickness was creeping in for me now too and I could recognise that I had expended a lot of emotional energy thus far trying to support players as they lived out their own individual journeys on the tour. I had felt like I needed to conduct my rest and recuperation in private, drawing on my own coping

mechanisms where possible so that I could go back out and support the group of 16 players and 8 other staff I was with. Tonight, this rest and recuperation was simple, quietness, isolation, and at least 9 hours sleep.

Return(!) to the City

We travelled back to the city the morning after the third game. On the first morning back, the group had a relative lie-in. We would meet for a 9.30 breakfast, before a 10.15 study session prior to lunch and an afternoon of training at the local University facilities. I suggested to Alex that we meet prior to breakfast for a coffee in the hotel coffee shop at the back of the hotel, where we could sit in the sun where the hotel opened up onto the central business district. The spectacular setting provided some novelty and respite from the missing of home comforts which had set in hard for many on the third week of the tour. However, the worst seemed to have subsided now that the tours end was now not so far away. I was pleased to see Alex there, 5 minutes early as I arrived and asked what he wanted. *"Cappuccino please Daz"* he responded, showcasing a smile which I had not seen since the first day of the test match.

As I sat down, and we waited for our coffee to return, we discussed his excitement at the possibility to play during the rest of the series. He had also had an uplifting conversation with the batting coach, who had sought to reassure Alex that he had more than enough capability to compete for a place as a batter only, but that he would have to show it in training. Our coffees arrived with a side plate of biscuits.

"Don't tell the physical guys if I have one will you", he joked, laughing in a way to suggest it wouldn't matter to him if I did.

Alex got to talking about his relief about the scan and that he was not injured. He also talked about his confusion about what was causing the pain, given there was no real sign of injury. I took this as an opportunity to explore:

DD: You know you had spoken to me quite a bit about how much you were worried about getting injured again?

A: Yeah, I was mate. I still am.

DD: Well, I have seen it before, that when we have a level of worry or anxiety about something like that, it can make us hyper-sensitive to any feeling which makes us think it has happened.

A: What do you mean?

DD: Well, have you ever had a paper cut, but not realised it is there until you have seen it, and then when you do see it, it starts to hurt.

A: yeah, I have actually.

DD: Well, we know that this is because our brains don't really perceive there to be a risk for us. We didn't see it, we didn't expect it, and we were not worried about getting it, so it has not hurt, yet. However, it also works the other way, where if we do worry and expect it might happen again, even the slightest sensation in that area gets magnified. Does that make sense?

A; I think so. So, are you saying my worry made it sore?

DD: Well maybe. But more, because of your worries, any pain or sensation you do feel, will be exaggerated. I am not saying at all you don't feel it, it is 100% there, but it's not quite reflective of the damage done. This is what the physio was explaining to you last week.

A: Ok, yeah, I can see that. I know I have been really worrying anytime I have felt anything in my back. The physio keeps telling me that it is normal for a bowler to hurt, but I need to learn what is hurting and what is injured. But it hard for me to trust that I am not…

DD: I can see that, and I am not surprised because it has been a tough injury at an important time for you. So, I thought, it might help for you to consider where your worry comes from, as it might be helpful to focus on that to help get rid of the pain you feel.

A: You mean why I am worried. Well, I don't want to be injured again. Is that not normal, no one wants to be injured.

DD: It is normal. However, it sounds like the worry is impacting you more than before your injury, as in, now when you hurt you think you are injured, whereas before you didn't, and perhaps as a result, you could ignore the sensation you were feeling. So, you might need to think about what would it mean if you got injured again?

A: Well, like it's my whole career isn't it. Like, I don't have a contract or anything yet. So, this whole year, needs to go well if I am to earn a contract.

DD: Has to? That sounds like a lot of pressure?

A: Well, like, I am not like the rest of the lads Daz. I am not the brightest. Like I left school after my GCSE's to focus on cricket, and then this is what happened. So, like, the other lads have lots of other things they could do. Like, look at George mate, if he doesn't become a cricketer, he will probably be even more successful and rich from something else. Not to make it about money and all, but a lot of the other lads come from money too you know. I have got so much more to lose than the rest of the lads, do you know what I mean by that? I mean, they all come from private school, rich families, I mean Tom is probably the richest, it's ridiculous. But without cricket, I have nothing, you know. Don't get me wrong, I love my family. I mean where I come from, my family are all really close together, and nearly everyone knows us within the locality, which is great, I love it. But then it is difficult, you have to understand, I mean I go out with some friends and they get into fights or get in trouble with the police. I am so used to that…but then the expectations on me are higher. I mean I could get sacked for getting in trouble like that, so it's really hard. You can see that in me all the time, but I am getting better aren't I? I am learning. But it still happens, like that night after the team meeting, I just couldn't control it. And I would much rather stay calm, like I don't enjoy it.

DD: I can understand that is tough, both in terms of your behaviour and what you call "where you come from", which can make it tough for you in this group. Right now, I want to focus on what you said about this being your only option. Can you see how that puts a lot of pressure on you, which might make performing hard, but it also makes the risk of injury even greater?

A: Yeah, I can. But that's reality isn't it.

DD: Well it is, but it's still just one perspective. Another perspective would be that you want to make it, but if you don't you could have a back-up plan, or even acknowledge that you have time to make a back-up plan. My worry is that at the moment, the phrase "I have to" puts a lot of expectation on you to achieve something you can't completely control. There could be a perspective that suggests, you really want to make it, and you are committed to doing everything you can, but that you don't have to treat it as such a fall if you don't make

it. I think if you could achieve that, then you might worry less about it not happening…and maybe even worry less about getting injured. That might even make it less scary every time you feel something in your back.

A: Yeah, I get it. I can try, I don't want to care less, but I guess I can look to take some of the pressure off myself. I really don't know what else I would ever do though, I find it hard to imagine that.

DD: That's ok, most people your age don't. But can we at least think about it?

A: yeah why not, maybe there is something in coaching or something?

DD: Yeah, maybe. But being open to it is all I expect. But I am not saying this is all easy, just that you can make it easier for yourself. We better get to breakfast, I have just seen a few of the others walk in, and we don't want to get a consequence for being late!! Thanks for catching up with me. I really hope you enjoy batting and get a chance during the rest of the tour to make an impact.

A: Yeah thanks mate, I enjoyed that. Good to get this stuff off your chest sometimes. Let's get in before we get a consequence!!

This conversation would prove to be the last meaningful conversation myself and Alex would have on what had proved to be an extremely challenging trip, on a physical and emotional level. It challenged me a lot a as a practitioner due to the richness of our dialogue at times, but also trying to handle a combination of the performance, the physical and the psycho-social development of a player all at once. But I would grow increasingly aware that these three were almost always interrelated and separating one from the other was next to impossible in this setting. Alex had a hugely successful rest of the tour as a batter only. At the end of the series, we had 10 minutes together where we briefly summed up the conversations we had had. These had been widely varied but had provided a huge element of emotional content for a player so young. I had seen both a willingness to look at his inner experience, but it had also highlighted a slight dependence on support of this nature to help him get through a tour, at least until he learned to be able to regulate himself. I was however pleased that we had developed a relationship over the course of the tour which allowed for such support to be delivered and highlighted the value of this support for Alex to the rest of the staff team. Finally, there had been some ground work done to help explore how Alex could relate to sport in a way that helped him become less dependent on achieving cricket success

(whatever that meant) for him, and for his family. We thanked each other for the time we spent on the trip, and I congratulated him for getting through such a difficult experience. As a closing comment, I suggested that in between now and the summer series, he could get in touch at any point, but that I thought it would be good to explore options away from the game, and how to manage his emotion better by himself. However, I sensed it would need to be me who gets in touch. I thought as I said it, that perhaps we could get his ability to maintain communication with his support network as an area for him to develop

Summer series (from afar)

Alex had returned from South Africa and gone straight into batting training and a second attempt to get him back to bowling with his county, which by halfway through the season had appeared to have been a success, or at least, he had said that it had been when we spoke on the phone. It had proven successful enough to have earned him a professional contract. I had looked forward to spending some time with him and continuing to meet his psycho-social support needs during our summer tour 4 months after returning from South Africa. My intention was to use it and the positive development he had shown since to try and develop in him the ability to self-regulate better without the assistance of a practitioner and explore his relationship with the sport and his life outside of sport. However, about six weeks after the South Africa series, the argument regarding the number of staff who travelled with the squad had raised its ugly head again. As I suspected would be the case, once the decision to reduce staff numbers had been taken, my role would be the most heavily hit. This, despite my reflection in that outhouse in South Africa, of how important it was to be there to help players right in the middle of their difficult times. I had felt the work with Alex had been a good example of this, but ultimately other areas of development and other stages of development were given greater priority. That summer, I found myself only spending 9 days with the squad, 6 of which were when Alex was not in the squad, something which had infuriated Alex, when I told him by text that I would not be there when he arrived. Although not reflecting specifically on this making it difficult for him, he did show symptoms of his resentment for the programme once more as a result, saying:

"...bloody typical of the programme". They don't get it mate. I know you say you will be on the phone if needed, but it's not the same. You know that. You need to be here…".

I sought Alex's permission to share how best to support him with the other support staff, and we agreed that this would be useful, so I did prior to the tour beginning.

When I did eventually join up with the programme at the back end, I was struck by the withdrawn attitude of Alex, even towards me and my offering of support. Further, the staff had reflected that his attitude had been poor, and that he had really struggled on the tour. So much so, that the general consensus was that he may not get selected for the coming winter. I was left so frustrated and could not help but reflect on how his tour may have gone if he had been better afforded the support and access to relationships that we knew he valued. This seemed pertinent, especially in light of my reflections that we had helped him to manage himself in South Africa (just about), but that we could build on that to help him manage himself.

Alex was indeed not involved in the programme moving forward. As part of his transition out of the programme, I spent some time with him and his county coaches trying to embed the support that he had come to appreciate within his county programme. This, as could be expected was difficult, as his PDW was not full time, nor travelled with the squad, exactly what infuriated Alex about my role that previous summer., He did not have access to any other regular psycho-social support of any form. I was left to turn my attention to the group who had been selected, and the building of a relationship with those new players coming in, and to struggle to contain my drive (mostly based on the sense of responsibility which I now held as a result of our relationship) to continue supporting Alex. But I had to accept, if he was not on the programme, it was no longer my job, beyond the handover with his county.

Narrative 3: Tom

"Most of all, they need to be able drive their own development"

"Morning Dazza, mind if I join you for breakfast."

Jon, a highly charismatic technical coach for the Under-19 side asks, reassuringly placing one hand on my shoulder to let me know he was there. His gentle gesture hides the strength and many years of stories that lie in the gnarly hands of an ex-wicketkeeper. With his other hand, he gently moves his cutlery towards the centre of the table and places an iPad to the far right edge of the table. Jon is an ex-county cricketer who had been coaching since his relatively early retirement.

"Of course,", I replied.

He smiles and turns towards the buffet breakfast at our East Midlands hotel where we are about to spend the second of two days on this profiling camp. As Jon turns from the table, he pleasantly greets the waitress and request that fresh coffee be delivered to the table. I observed from the unlocked screen of his iPad that Jon had been watching some video footage of Tom. Tom was a batter who had been with the Under-17 programme for the previous two years and had now progressed to his first year with the Under-19 side. The footage is paused just as Tom begins his move towards the ball which has just come into the shot. This early morning analysis from Jon did not surprise me, as like many of the coaches I engaged with, I had come to know him as an incredibly passionate coach. He has an obvious love for the game and showed great joy in seeing young players fulfil their potential, on and off the field. It was this passion for players' off-field development which had helped us develop a strong relationship during our time together on the programme.

Jon returned to his table, with a plate with just two poached eggs, one slice of toast, a banana and an apple, as healthy I had come to expect. Catching a glimpse of Tom on the screen, he turned the conversation towards work as he often would:

"...I listened to a podcast last night that I think you would love. I will send it to you. The general message was that if you have the right environment, you develop the person, and the performer in equal measure with every action and decision you take. I thought it was interesting, and it got me thinking about what we want from our lads…"

This type of conversation was common with Jon, who had previously reflected on how much he appreciated his well-rounded development as a young player. We discussed a wide range of personal qualities that we value in our players, and Jon described his appreciation for players who are independent and self-driven:

"…That to me is so often the difference. The guys who are really on route to making it, are the ones who are driving their own development, they are strong enough to challenge the coaches…they are taking the lead. They are independent, whereas the opposite is someone who is just hearing it, doing bits here, doing bits there, no real direction from them…I think a large part of our role, is trying to encourage that, create that independence…"

According to Jon, this independence applied to both a player's life in cricket, and away from cricket, saying that he felt it was as much about knowing who you want to be in and away from the game. Opening his point up to life away from the game, he commented that it was this "all-round human quality" that he looked to develop and saw himself as a role model for players:

"…Without blowing myself up, I think I can be somewhat of a role model for those coming out of the game, in terms of getting qualifications and the skills that I knew I would need to move on… you also look at some of the guys, ex- and current players, that we have brought in to the group. They are absolute top blokes, as well as being incredible cricketers and coaches. They serve as a great example to these players for two things. First, that there is no shame in being prepared to have something outside of cricket. But also, that you can have a very long and very successful career…you are still not even halfway through your working life when you leave the game. So, you will have to do something, and that might be in cricket. But it doesn't have to be…"

Our conversation got cut there, as we were both required to be in our individual profiling meetings. These conversations were uplifting, and I left feeling excited by an example of the belief some of our staff have in the personal development of young players. I walked towards my meeting room where I would meet Tom, and briefly reflected on whether or not he would live up to Jon's description of what he thinks is needed. I had previously noted how others often commented that he seemed to lack the ability to drive his own development and wondered why that might be.

Meeting Tom

That morning, Tom and I had a chance to get to know each other more than we had previously. Tom was currently 17 years old, although he would soon turn 18. He joked (I think) that this means he would soon have to "enter the big bad world" - a joke, with a hint of truth about what this milestone represents perhaps. At about 5-foot-9-inches tall, he was relatively short compared to the group, but was one of the strongest. He described himself as being quite introverted. This surprised me having observed his ability to enter this conversation with me. He stressed that he still loved spending time with people, but that he appreciated some "real conversation" in smaller groups. He described himself as a real family person:

"...being brought up like the way that I have by mum and dad, you know they have always looked after me, and I love them for it. But also, my sister, my girlfriend along with a couple of close friends, that is all I need..."

Tom had just joined a new school, a boarding school, which meant moving over an hour away from home. He had moved because of a cricket scholarship at what was a very prestigious school. The move allowed him to train more at his county, which was much closer to his school than his home. It had not been a very long time since he started there, but he had found it tough so far. However, he had expected that, and felt that it would get easier with a little more time. Despite moving to an environment where he was required to take academic success much more seriously, he said that it was not a big priority for him:

"...I understand that I need to do it in case cricket doesn't work out, and I do agree with that. But I just find it hard to get excited or motivated about it. Cricket is what I want to do. But if I didn't do cricket, I would probably consider university later, and maybe set up my own business – I don't know really. But yeah, I know I will have to do it, everyone reminds me of that, but cricket will be the big focus for me. I love it…"

I was struck that Tom did not talk much about cricket or being on the programme during our time together - other than that he loved it and it was his main priority. However, he was very open to talking about himself, his family and his inner world. In fact, he seemed to enjoy having the chance to do so. When I directed conversation towards cricket, he often turned it back to him as a person, who he was and how his environment affected him. As our time

ended, he said that he would enjoy catching up regularly and talking through what was going on for him. When I reflected that managing his transition to boarding school could be a good place to start the next time, he nodded in agreement.

That afternoon, I had one short break between player meetings, I walked out onto the balcony which overlooks the indoor centre. Tom was batting in the nets below against the bowling of Jon and Tom's county academy coach. I only caught the last 5-10 balls of the session. The intensity was clearly high, given that this was Tom's first time playing in a number of weeks after the end of the cricket season. Leaning against the cold steel railing, I watched as Tom ducked to avoid a ball whizzing past his left ear. He nervously stood up and shook out his limbs and re-marked middle stump with his boot.

"Woooh!!!!", the academy coach yelped as he exhaled and smiled at Tom, before asking if wanted it faster.

The coach turned and winked at Jon as he walked back to his mark to deliver the next ball. In the debrief that followed, I watched Tom remove his helmet as his county coach finished talking. Jon spoke briefly. I could not hear what was said, but Tom rubbed his eyes as if to hide that he had shed a tear. Afterwards, all three went in different directions. I looked at my watch and figured I could use the five minutes before my next meeting to quickly catch Jon, to gauge how Tom had played. Jon had got the same sense that I had regarding the level of challenge which Tom had faced, and his emotion afterwards:

"...The poor boy, he has just had it from his county coach. He asked him how he thought his last season had gone the year, and then completely shot him down and disagreed with him, and actually said he thought the opposite. He gave him a lot of feedback about needing to be better now that he was in an England programme. Quite direct he was. When he was done, I told Tom that I felt he had done a great job and showed some real ability in our net together. I swear, I think I saw him well up, in tears I mean, more out of relief than anything. But he didn't say anything to the coach, he just nodded. The boy can play, though, he really can... "

"That's a useful layer of insight" I thought to myself, as I climbed the stairs to my next meeting. Tom's reaction worried me, especially when coupled with the degree to which Tom was relieved to hear the compliment from Jon. I reflected that he hadn't necessarily shown

those qualities Jon had described over breakfast. But then, I wondered, how he could have, stuck between two conflicting views of his play.

"I am finding it really hard to be here"

Four weeks later, the squad united again for the first training camp after profiling - another "death camp". The players arrived and were "buzzing" to catch up with each other over a game of pool and/or table tennis at the accommodation. I often took this opportunity to do the same, discreetly gauging how people were doing. For whom had circumstances changed since we last met and with whom should I look to spend time with over the next week. I had become quite good at "hanging around" - like a private investigator trying to figure out what was going on in these individuals lives. Tom seemed quiet during our brief engagement. I suggested to him that it might be good to get some time together, identifying that on the 3rd evening of the camp there was an earlier than usual finish, which could allow us some time together without any tight time restrictions. We agreed to meet then in one of the offices at the centre. I was pleased to get our time together organised, but I sensed a lack of enthusiasm from him at being here. This was further amplified when I observed him head to his room soon after whilst the rest stayed and enjoyed the company of their teammates for the remainder of the evening.

On that third evening, at half past 5, I sat and waited for Tom to arrive. I was in one of the centres meeting rooms overlooking the cricket ground outside. The evening showed itself to be getting shorter, and the pitches lush summer green of six weeks ago was now overshadowed by the failing evening light, and the gatherings of wet brown leaves that dominating the outfield. This pitch would now hibernate for the winter, as cricketers around the country moved their training indoors. Alternatively, many went to pastures more accommodating at this time of the year to continue their cricketing development, such as Australia or South Africa. The pitch was a perfect reflection of the transition which Tom and his teammates were now going through. The county season, full of matches and travel had passed, giving way to a development programme for the winter which would combine training indoors and tours overseas, all built around their day-to-day school existence. These were long days that start in the dark, and end in the dark. Waiting for Tom, I was particularly keen to hear how this day-to-day existence was playing out for him. I also hoped, conversation permitting, to bring up my observation of his batting session a few weeks

earlier. However, as Tom entered the room, it became quite obvious that he had brought his own agenda:

T: I really need to speak to you.

DD: Ok, what's going on? How have things been?

T: Not that great to be honest. I had told you that I was quite nervous about boarding school, mostly because I had struggled so much away from home on tour last year. I have continued to find it really tough to be honest.

DD: Yes, you did, and I am sorry to hear that. Can you tell me a bit more about it?

T: The difference in schools is just crazy. I was at a state school before, and the expectations of people now are so different. I am not sure I really fit in there or am cut out for boarding at all to be honest. I changed because it is a great school, it is better logistically for everything really in terms of being able to get to my county ground, and I guess it is also a good training environment for my cricket. But I have been missing home a lot and I have not really settled there.

DD: How does that feel?

T: It's quite lonely. I miss my friends, my girlfriend and my family a lot. But also, I feel like I don't really get along with the new people…and for the first term I don't have any cricket as it only starts after Christmas so that has made it harder to fit in. This week is the first bit of time off I have had, and I have to spend all of it here on training camp; except for one afternoon at home. Because of that I am finding it really hard to be here (on the training camp).

DD: I can see that must be quite tough for you. Have you tried to speak to the school to see if you could go home during time off more regularly?

T: Well, because of county cricket training being at weekends, I am already using up most of my time off school. I think I need to go home before the end of this camp because otherwise I will not get home for a period of nearly four months, until after the Dubai tour.

DD: Is that what you want to do?

T: I don't know. Last year, when I was really struggling on tour with homesickness, I discussed with the PDW that I needed to pre-empt any challenges and start to get support or help before it became a big issue. I kind of feel, that's what I am doing now. I feel I might really begin to struggle when I go back to school if I don't get time at home now. But I don't know what the coaches will think? It's not really a normal thing to do, to come to an England camp, and not want to be here. I just don't think the coaches, or anyone really would think too much of me if I did leave.

DD: Tell me what you believe "everyone" would think.

T: Well, I am worried everyone would just think I am soft and that I don't want it enough. But I do, and maybe I am soft, but it's just really hard at the moment. I feel like I am doing what I learned to do last year, but it's not just that easy to say, "I should go!"

DD: So, you are thinking, they will think I am soft, that I don't want it enough…and that will lead to staff not selecting you in matches or for the programme?

T: Yeah. I mean I don't know really, maybe both. More just I don't think people would understand, and they would make a judgement on me because of it. I don't really know what that would lead to, but I don't want to be unfairly judged or let people down.

DD: I understand. The one thing that I am hearing though, is that you think it could be the right thing, but you don't think others will feel the same way. So, maybe tell me more about what you think would be the right thing to do?

T: Hmm, well I think I am doing the right thing in recognising that it is tough. Because in the past I haven't done that, and then it goes boom, like I just can't cope at all and everything goes including my performance. So, I guess I am trying to protect that as well as my feelings.

DD: Yeah, I can completely see that. Listen, I will back you 100% in what you decide to do and help you. But the one thought I am having is that you will be faced with more of this as the winter goes on, in Dubai, and after Christmas on tour again. So, if we could find a way to get through it, that could be really helpful.

T: Yeah, I know. I have thought about that, but I am just looking after me "right now". I would like to, you know, I would love to be fine with it, I will need to be fine with in the long term. I guess I am just caught between taking time now, and then I might feel better…or getting through it and then maybe I learn to do that?

DD: That is a very difficult situation for you? Could we go one step at a time. Like I said, if you go, I will help you, if you stay, I will help you too. But what if we took it a day at a time, see how you feel in the morning and build from there?

T: Ok, I think I should see how I feel tomorrow morning and decide then, but maybe it would be good if you spoke to the head coach, to see what he thinks about the idea too.

DD: Ok I can do that. You have my number too, so if you find it tough his evening, message me. Otherwise, we can speak in the morning.

After having taken a night to sleep on it, the following morning Tom met me as we arrived at the dining hall to eat breakfast. As the rest of the group rushed to the buffet, Tom and I stepped to the right just inside the door:

DD: I have spoken with the head coach, and he has remained discreet, so only the three of us know at the moment. But, he is happy for us to decide whatever we think is best for you. He did remind me that if you miss training, you miss development time, but he would not judge you on leaving when it comes to selection. We can also have some more time if needed to discuss it this morning. Have you had more time to think about it?

T: I think I need to stay. It will be hard, but I think I need to show that I can do it. I think I will let down my teammates and coaches if I do not stay, and I think I need to show myself that I can do it, if I am to keep doing it for the rest of the winter. But it is going to be tough

DD: Ok, I think that is great. I am here to help if you begin to find it tough during the rest of the week, and when you are back at school, do not hesitate to come to me. Do you want to talk through where it comes from, or strategies to help?

T: No, I think I am ok. I would like to try and figure it out for myself.

DD: Ok. Well, can I suggest that I check in on you at the end of the day for the rest of this camp.

T: Yeah, that would be good. Thanks.

Tom did stay for the camp, and actually went from strength to strength over the training days that remained. He grew more comfortable with his decision, and we discussed the challenges he would face when he got back to school. We agreed that I would check in on him once a

week by text and he could phone me if it felt helpful to do so. I felt pleased that he had taken on this personal challenge, but also wary that it could be a difficult winter ahead for him. However, this difficulty can only be better managed now that we had developed a positive relationship with a shared awareness of what he was going through. I was relieved also, as despite the fact that the coach was open to Tom leaving if he had to, I felt sure there would be a level of judgement which may have impacted how others viewed him.

"I am just worrying about upsetting people"

In the weeks after "death camp", Tom remained at school and trained during the weekends at his county. I went to visit him once at his boarding school. We sat for an hour in the housemasters high-roofed office in an old-fashioned yet beautifully decorated accommodation and discussed how Tom was now feeling about his new school. It had improved. Slowly. Nonetheless, Tom felt that it was getting better and easier for him to be away from home. We discussed the fact that he does miss time with his family, and that perhaps if he communicated this with them, and his girlfriend, they might come and see him around his busy schedule. To Tom's surprise, this is exactly what happened as his parents agreed to visit him every few weeks. By November, Tom was in a better place, socially and mentally. This was important in the lead up to the Dubai tour. There was one domestic training camp prior to the tour.

As the camp played out, Tom performed poorly according to the coaches, most noticeably in the highly pressured sessions on the last day of the camp. Tom had assured me that we would not need to check in on a daily basis during that camp, but that we should have some time together to chat through how things were going. We did so on the second day when players would do two out of three rotation slots over a two-hour period. This meant that Tom had one slot free, between his batting time and his time in the gym. I discreetly placed myself at the back of the indoor net during the last 5-10 minutes of Tom's batting session. He looked (to me) brave and bold in his striking, creating immense power as he hit ball after ball over the coach's head time and time again. Jon did not seem as impressed as I was, and there was mostly silence between balls. I watched Jon as Tom played an aggressive sweep, elegant and powerful.

"Well played Tom, but given the scenario, is that the smartest choice", Jon asked, clearly unhappy with Tom's reckless approach despite the quality of his shot.

Tom shrugged, as if to say, "I guess so". This was the last ball of the session. After a brief chat with Jon, Tom walked in my direction. He removed his gloves and tucked them under his arm and gave me a fist bump

"...I am ready once I get rid of this", gesturing to his pads and bat. *"Shall I meet you upstairs on the sofas...?"*

I nodded and told him to make the tea as I would be up in five minutes. As Tom walked toward the changing room, Jon approached me, and claimed that Tom would benefit from my help. Concerned that perhaps Jon was aware of something I wasn't, I curiously asked Jon what he meant by that comment:

"...he just doesn't seem to get it. I mean, he has all the talent in the world. He can do anything in here, but when it comes to playing the game and making decisions he is all over the place. I am trying to work with him on his defence and making smarter decisions, but he just wants to play the whole time, hit big shots and experiment. That crosses into the game, he looks great, but from what I have seen, he hasn't turned that into scores. He just doesn't make good decisions. He can't afford to do that in South Africa. They will wipe the floor with him. I don't know what you two do talk about, but if you can help in any with that, it would be great..."

I had heard this opinion of Tom before - he can struggle to turn his ability into match winning performances. But I had not really engaged with him as a performer in our time together so far. But given the strength Jon's the view, it felt like something I ought to address in our work together at some point. Pondering Jon's feedback, I walked upstairs to find Tom stirring two cups of tea. He handed one to me as I walked into the room, and I joked that his mum would be so proud of him. He laughed and sat down on the sofa. I closed the door and sat down opposite him. As I observed his growing comfort in our relationship, he started the conversation:

T: How are you?
DD: I am good thanks. I enjoyed watching you play out there. How are you doing?

T: Thanks, but I am not sure Jon did. But I will get to that. But, yeah, mostly ok. Been working hard and been hitting it well; there have just been one or two things I have struggled with. I have always played the game a certain way, very attacking. I tend to take on a lot of big shots; when it's good it's great, when it goes wrong, I get out. Well, the coaches want me to change the way I play and take fewer risks. But to me it feels so unnatural, it's like, I have to really think to play the game that way, which causes me to make mistakes. I am at my best when it's just natural and I keep it simple. I can see why the coaches want me to become safer, but I just feel like it changes all of the good things I have to offer.

DD: Have you spoken to the coaches about it?

T: Well that's the thing, I don't really know if I can? So, I thought I should ask you about it first? I don't want to seem like I am being arrogant and just saying I don't want their advice, but at the moment I feel it's making things more complicated when I want to keep it simple. What do you think?

DD: What makes you think that you cannot speak to them about it?

T: Well it could seem like I am questioning them, or not showing them respect. I feel like I need to make them think I am improving, and to them, making this change would be improving. So, I worry that if I don't, they won't pick me. I get on really well with the coaches, and I want to keep that. But I also want to feel better about my batting. So, I don't really know what to do?

DD: Well, I would ask why you are here. What are you trying to get from being here?

T: Well I am here to improve and eventually play for England. Right now, I am here to get better as a player, but I am not sure I am at the moment. So, do you think I should speak to the coaches, I am afraid they won't appreciate it?

DD: Well to me, it seems like this current situation is not really good for either of you. Both you and the coaches just want improvements. What's your view? Which of the coaches might you feel most comfortable speaking to?

T: I think they need to know why I am struggling. I need to help them understand why I find it tough to change. If I do maybe they can help, or we can work on it together. I think I could speak to Jon. I get on well with him, but it will still be quite difficult to do, and let him know what I am thinking. I might wait until we are in Dubai, and we have a bit of time to sit and chat. That would be good.

DD: Ok, and I can help you prepare for that? Are you sure you want to wait?

T: Yeah, I would rather do it when we have time. It would be good to prepare, as well.

DD: Ok, let's make sure we do that when we are there. How have things been otherwise?

T: Good in terms of me being away from home. But I have been worrying a lot about stuff!

DD: Worrying? Ok, tell me about it…"

T: Yeah, well I mean I have been feeling quite overwhelmed recently, like I just have a lot on my plate. Like at school, my teachers are telling me I have to do more and there is all the other extra-curricular stuff you have to do at my new school. Then my England commitments mean there is a lot of things to be done. Plus, the coaches at my county have been pushing me hard and have been having a go whenever I forget to message them or turn up late for training or something. It feels like I have just been making one mistake every day. Like, I have basically been making someone angry every day, and I have really been worrying, like worrying that I have done something wrong. So, whenever I start to get a little overwhelmed, like I can't get everything done, I am just worrying about upsetting people, or about what I have not managed to get done.

DD: That sounds like a lot of pressure to have to deal with?

T: It can be, like I don't feel I have been able to just chill out in quite a long time, just always with stuff to do or worrying about getting stuff done.

DD: Yeah, and then I guess that is linked to your ability to organise which we have talked about, because that just feeds it, doesn't it?

T: Yeah, I mean that is my goal, to get more organised and take the lead for myself more. That's what everyone says I need to do. But then at my meetings at school, it is always just the consequences being stressed. As in if I don't get all my school work done then I don't go to Dubai. But that consequence just doesn't motivate me, if anything it just makes me panic, or worry more, and then I am almost more likely to not do it. Whereas help, or instruction can really help

DD: Ok, let's just slow down for a moment. First of all, that is a lot for you to deal with, and I think it is important we can get those who are putting pressure on you to get a better understanding of the pressure on you, don't you think. Perhaps having a conversation with those around you, to explain what it feels like for you?

T: Yeah, I guess so. Most don't know to be honest, that I have so much to do. So maybe I can do that. Like at the moment, when I don't do something for someone, I just ignore them, or avoid them. But I might have to just tell them what is going on for me. Because most of the time, there is a reason I don't do it.

DD: I think that is important. But also, in terms of organisation, and you learning to manage yourself and your priorities. How can I help?

T: Yeah, I think you can. I had a chat the other night, which you probably already know about, with the coaches?

DD: I didn't realise.

T: Well, it was basically about being organised and communicating well with those on the programme when I am not here. Which was good, but it was basically saying that I cannot afford to keep making those same mistakes. It was good because last night I was having another one of the evenings where I am just a little stressed about all of the things that I have to do. So, I called my mum, which didn't really help to be honest, I think because she can also get frustrated. But she agreed with them and kind of had a go at me. Which was right, but I kind of already had all of that. So, I then called my dad, and he was really good, he is kind of the best person for me to speak to about those kind of things, him and you to be honest, because both of you are able to just listen to me, you know, just hear my side. He suggested that you might be able to help me and send me some emails each week to get me organise my priorities. He said that could be really good, because he said that is how he managed to get organised when he was my age. He eventually just had to start using diaries, calendars and that kind of thing...Yeah, because when I do what I did the other day and turn up late because I basically have not organised a lift for myself, I feel like I have let people down, and they are annoyed with me, so it is good to speak with someone who is removed from that.

DD: Ok, so you want us to work together to help you plan your priorities and make a diary of activities for you to refer to. You mentioned email. Is email ok, or does it need to be in person?

T: Email is ok, and then we can phone if needed. Maybe if I try to plan each week, you can give me feedback on if it makes sense and ask me questions to ensure it can work.

DD: Ok, I am happy to do that. I am also conscious you have just committed to a lot of conversations. With the coach in Dubai, teachers, parents and county coaches. Can I help with that?

T: No, just planning for the conversation in Dubai would be good. The rest I can do. Thanks. I better go and get myself ready for the gym. See you later.

DD: No problem, enjoy the gym.

As Tom walked out, I reflected on how much he felt was on his plate, and the demands being placed on him by each of his environments. I also reflected back to Jon's comments, and wondered if he will feel differently when he understands the demands Tom feels he has to meet, and that he clearly cares and worries about coming up short. Once again,

I was interested in how much of our conversation was about Tom the person, but it now seemed the line between performance and the personal was getting blurred. I was worried that Tom tended to try and please everyone, and not necessarily share his worries and needs. I remembered that this was similar to what he said he had learned with the PDW from last year about bottling up emotion and then it would go bang. Over the coming weeks, I assisted Tom in organising his weekly plan, and once he learned to take the time to do it, he began to find it quite simple to do, and it alleviated some of his anxieties about forgetting something, or someone. However, it was only about 3 weeks until his planning was interrupted by our tour to Dubai, so we agreed we would pick it back up in the New Year when he would return to school.

Dubai tour and selection

Tom's time in Dubai was interesting but provided him with a significant personal and cricketing challenge. He continued to frustrate the coaches with his decision making regarding shot-choices, which I often heard them talk about on the bus journeys to and from the training ground. He did have the conversation with the Jon as we had discussed, which from his perspective felt very productive. He enjoyed having the opportunity to share his feelings and frustrations and felt that this could only help the staffs understanding of why he plays the way he does. The coaching staff similarly felt better knowing the level of demands he was under and appreciated the maturity he had shown. This seemed like a positive step forward in my eyes, in terms of the level of open communication between Tom and his coaches. However, I sensed some cynicism from the staff about whether it would lead to real action, based on the belief amongst some that he simply doesn't like it when things get tough.

During the second half of the tour, I had a coffee with Jon. He shared that the selectors had not picked Tom for the upcoming tour to South Africa. He was the only member of the EDP not selected.

"...It's tough. But compared to the others, he just hasn't shown enough. He has failed to show the ability to manage his innings and protect his wicket..."

There was some consolation for Tom - he was selected for a trip with the younger Under-17's team. Although the younger squad had been removed from the programme during the restructure the previous summer, this trip had already been organised and so, would go ahead.

However, the squad would consist of players, with a three exceptions, who were not members of the EDP and were identified as potential Under-19 players in the year to come. It was not a part of the EDP schedule, and therefore had a reduced staff team of six. Unfortunately, from the perspective of my on-going work with Tom, I would not be part of this team.

I was sure the blow would hurt Tom, especially after the challenging few months he had gone through. He had grown so much in that time, and I worried that this might knock him backwards. To double the blow, there had been a communication error. When I spoke with Tom, he seemed to believe that he could still force his way onto the South Africa trip as well. But I already knew the squad for South Africa. I spoke to Jon about the confusion, and he confirmed what I had thought, and clarified the situation with Tom. Tom was confused and angry with the programme but handled this in quite a mature fashion. He addressed his frustrations with the coaches who ultimately apologised for the miscommunication and affirmed that he would not be going on the tour to South Africa. In the hours after it had been clarified, he again showed great maturity in re-appraising the situation for himself:

T: It has been handled so unprofessionally. That has been disappointing and has made it hard to maintain that relationship with the coaches. But I feel I handled it well and spoke about my own frustrations. I spoke to my dad, and he reminded me that my having a career in cricket will ultimately come from having success for my county. So that needs to be my focus. I think that the opportunities I will get here can help a lot with that. So, I just need to focus on what I can learn from the chances I get and take all the learning that I can.
DD: That is a very positive approach to take to what has been a deeply frustrating situation for you. I can't tell you how impressed I am with the way you handled this. You handled the situation so well and asserted yourself in a way I really don't think you would have a few months ago, so well done.

I felt a sense of pride for how Tom had responded, both to the confusion, and to the setback. I was struck by the perspective he had taken to help get through this tough moment –

"...my having a career in cricket will ultimately come from having success for my county…"

I had heard this said before. Players had shared with me that this is what older players (who had not progressed through the international pathway to the England Lions) had said to them, almost as a warning as they set off to join this second environment. I had perceived it

as, "don't forget who your employers are". But there was some truth in it, I believed as I reflected on Tom's current frustrations. The purpose of the programme after the recent re-structure, was to "add value" to what the counties do and prepare players for a future career in international cricket. But the international pathway was such that regardless of the success that players would have during their time on the EDP, it was success in the county game that gets you selected for the England Lions, or the England team. But then, the level of support at the counties was less that that at England, so sometimes the value added wasn't just tours or experiences but even having access to support, like performance psychology. In Tom's case, he had not had 1-2-1 contact with his county PDW, but he seemed to value it from the second he arrived at the EDP. My concern for players in the pathway is that they needed to perform without a full programme of support, in order to get access to a full programme of support.

During the remaining 15 days of the Dubai tour, Tom and I continued to work on his ability to manage his priorities for himself. The tour had proved so valuable for our relationship, and the work we did together felt powerful as a result. The PDW role could thrive on tour, where the time pressures were reduced, and the relationships with players could grow through the time spent together. As we prepared for home and the Christmas break, I was still concerned by Tom's level of motivation for his school progress, in what was his final year. With me going to South Africa, and Tom going on the Under-17 trip, there would be limited supervision and support for Tom to balance his priorities over the coming months. I worried that his improvements might not last.

"At least we have a relationship now, we can communicate", I tried to reassure myself. But my experiences thus far were that this never allowed for the same support as being there does.

Months apart

Tom performed very well on the Under-17 tour, and improved his reputation amongst the coaches, especially with regard to his ability to manage an innings. He also had seemed to convince most of the staff hat he does in fact enjoy the difficult moments, through a hard fought draw where he put in a particularly resilient performance with the bat over a number of hours on the final day. Our contact had been quite good during his trip, given that we were thousands of miles apart. Just 10 days after Tom returned, I travelled to South Africa. This had proved to be an immensely challenging and busy trip, meaning I did not speak much with Tom during March and April. I was frustrated that I could not continue the continuity of

support since Christmas. However, Tom assured me in our brief interactions that he was managing things better. From a distance, I was not sure what exactly this meant.

By July, we had engaged in little more than intermittent catch ups on how things were going rather than any meaningful work. In those months, Tom, had completed his exams at school, and left the school (for the big bad world as he had previously put it). This came with a positive and a negative. The negative was that he did not get the grades he had hoped for and underachieved significantly in relation to his school's expectations. However, he had been offered a professional contract by his county and would enter the big bad world as a full time professional cricketer. This contract had been a reward for the quality of his performances on tour, and during the early summer. He had also been re-selected for the Under-19 summer series. The series would include five days training at the national centre. Following this, there would be a single test match, and five one-day matches, played at different venues all over the country. This summer represented the first time the "staff numbers" debate had actually impacted the PDW role. In a brief meeting at the national centre, the head coach and operations manager informed me (regrettably it seemed) that I could not be with the squad for much of the series.

"...we are having to keep staff numbers down, so we will have different staff coming and going at times where they can have the most impact…"

"But I don't know yet when I can have most impact!!!", I thought to myself.

Not to mention the fact that so far, I have done a lot more meaningful work right in the middle of the performance pressure. That's when players came to me. As I left the conversation, I then realised that I would once again not be around for much of a tour that Tom was on. The meaningful work may have to wait once again. I wasn't quite sure how to feel. Inevitably, it felt isolating. I felt under-valued – well, either me, or the role was under-valued. Equally, I knew the head of the programme valued me and the role. They seemed sincere when they said that their hands were tied. I trusted the value was seen, but ultimately a decision had to be taken (under pressure from where I was not sure), and coaching would always win. Despite this, I looked forward to a chance for myself and Tom to meet face to face during the early stages. I had not spoken to Tom, since around the time he finished his school exams. We would have lots of time during the first five days.

"I assumed he was good, never assume"

Given the news of his contract, and his reselection, I had expected him to be in a good place. During my "hanging around", Tom seemed quiet during the over first two days. I had seen this before. Then, it was a sign that Tom was struggling. During the evening of the second day, we managed to find some time to sit down together in one of the living areas adjoined to the player's recreation room. It became obvious that life had not been as rosy, or as optimistic as his positive cricket performances had led everyone (me included) to believe.

We sat down on opposite sides of the same sofa. The door slowly closing, drowned out the sound of table tennis in the next room, until there was complete silence. Tom looked at his phone, paused awkwardly, then shared that his parents had decided to get a divorce, 6 weeks previously, around the time he had been given his first team debut. He had observed tension between them for some time but didn't think it would lead to this. He described how it had been difficult, sure for him, but even more for his younger siblings who he felt were more vulnerable in this situation. He had been worrying, feeling unsure over what he could have done to have stopped it from happening. He reassured himself, before I got the chance to, that these things happen, and he is not to blame. His cricket form had not been as good in the last 3-4 weeks, but that there had been fewer matches so most people wouldn't have really noticed. He had only shared this info with me, and Jon, and one of his county coaches, who had offered him time off if he wanted. I asked if he thought that could help. He was very reluctant to link his personal life to his cricket performance, as he felt it would afford him an excuse for his poor play.

I listened to him discuss the previous six weeks, and how he and his sibling had adjusted. I asked questions, but for the most part, I just listened – he had shared how important that was in the past. I then asked how he felt he would be able to cope with the 4-5 weeks which lay ahead, playing international youth cricket all over the country:

T: I think I will be fine. I have accepted it a lot more now and am actually looking forward to being here and working with the coaches. It's strange though, because I have spent the whole year away from home, and now having moved back, everything is different, and it will change again. I am due to move in with my mum, to my new home, which is about 40 miles away from my dad. The move is effectively happening over the course of this series. Most of my stuff is packed, so that's fine, it will just be a new place waiting for me when I get back.
DD: That must be tough, having to move home.

T: Yeah, well, what makes it tougher, is that because I have been given a professional contract, I am going to move away again to live at accommodation based at the county ground with some of the other young players at the club. I will be moving in there in September, so like 3 weeks after the series.

DD: Wow, ok. So, you will have lived at home with both parents, at boarding school, a home with just your mum and then at the county ground, all within four months or so?

T: Yeah, I hadn't thought of it liked that, but yeah. That's a lot of change. Thank god I got a contract eh? At least that feels set at the moment.

DD: Absolutely. So, when the time comes, we can discuss your moving and any help you might need, because that can be quite a new and sometimes difficult experience, figuring out how to look after yourself. But let's just focus on the here and now, first. You said you are accepting it now. Is there anything we can look to do to try and support you over the coming weeks? Although, just for your knowledge, I will not be with the squad for much of the series, but I can be on the phone whenever you want.

T: You, won't? Why not?

A good question, I thought to myself, before giving my censored reply.

DD: Well, the programme is under pressure to keep staff numbers lower, and as part of that, it was decided that all my time would be during the prep, rather than the competitive phase, and then again at the end.

T: Really? That seems stupid. Why bother having you if they don't use you. Plus, I would say it is smarter to have you during the competitive phase, that's when it gets tough, but it would be even smarter just to have you throughout. I mean, people can't plan when they will find it tough and not, you know. I don't think any of the lads would think's it's a good idea, but I guess they probably don't know. Plus, I know you said it before that we can speak on the phone. But it's different (talking on the phone). I know you will always get back to me, but I don't want to speak about it on the phone. And sometimes, it's just a chat, you know, not "Oh I need help, so I will give him a call".

DD: I know, I know. And I regret the situation.

T: Ok well, I think just check in with me. With everything going on, I get caught up in cricket, or home. My biggest concern right now is my sister, and she is going on holiday with mum for a couple of weeks which will help. I am supposed to speak to a guy that the PCA put me in touch with. Tomorrow I think.

This caught me off guard.

DD: Oh really, who is it?

T: I don't know, he is like a counsellor, or a psychologist. Some others at the club have spoken to him when they have been going through stuff, so I was told I should too. But I am not really that keen. I guess I will give it a try.

DD: Interesting, have you been speaking to the PCA PDW about it, or have they just given you a number?

What I really meant was, why on earth have they done that? But I hid my frustration, and confusion at how his concern had been handled. I guess aside from the more emotional reaction, I wondered did his county know he was struggling more than he was letting on to me and decided he needed help for a more clinical level of concern. Or, did they just pass the support need on to someone external.

T: The coach spoke to the PCA guy after we spoke, and he gave me a number. I don't really know the PCA guy that well. Well, I kind of do, and I like him, good guy. But we haven't really spoke the way I have with you. But, it can be hard. I don't see him a lot, so it feels like you have to arrange it, a bit formal at times. Like I described when you say you can be on the phone. Not like here, where you are just around the place, and part of it all, well most of the time

Tom rolled his eyes referring to my absence on this series I assumed.

T: But at the county, because we don't see them that much, it's more like, you would need to build up the stuff, arrange a meeting and go from there, and maybe not have that relationship from the work and seeing each other on a daily basis. But I guess I will speak to the guy they gave me the number for, and get back to you from there

I am now confident that it was not that the county knew something that I didn't. It was just the way of supporting the issue, which I couldn't really agree with. What Tom needed was a trusting relationship, to support him at a difficult time. What he got, was passed on to someone he didn't know. He didn't even know what they were. I was pleased to know he

could speak to me, and I could offer what I felt was necessary. Well, at least for these few days before I was no longer with the squad. I felt trapped.

"For fuck sake" I thought, *"why do we make it so hard to do the right thing?"*

DD: So, could we maybe catch up tomorrow after the call, and see if there is anything else that we should plan before you start the tour, and we don't see each other for a couple of weeks. Is that ok? And I really, I am sorry, that's a difficult situation for you.
T: Yeah that sounds good. It's ok, but thanks.

In the end, Tom did not make the call to the external referral and told me that he did not think he would. However, he reflected that he would have the number if he needed it. He added, that he would call me before this third party, as he felt more comfortable having the conversation someone he knows…As I knew he would!

We agreed that he could call anytime if he felt like he was struggling during the tour before I would see him in two weeks. Further, I said I would check in on him by text every now and again as a prompt. It was a difficult conversation, and I was pleased that Tom was able to share it with me, and with Jon, his coach who he had clearly kept a relationship with. That also showed me how important it was for him to have people around him who understood what he was going through. I felt frustrated at the decision to pass him on to an external professional, whose identity I did not clarify. I felt Tom needed a relationship which could support him, not necessarily an external professional. Further, I felt that this could have over-problematized everyday life struggles, even big ones like this. I did not think this was a clinical concern, but a difficult and emotional one which needed support, primarily just empathy and understanding, rather than an intervention. Tom had previously outlined the value of someone who listens, so that's what I did. Listened and cared. Further, it was an added frustration that despite having the resources within our staff team (the resources not necessarily available at the county), we were deliberately creating a block to players having access to it at a time when evidently, their life circumstance are changing all the time and they are learning how to deal with that

When I caught up with Tom two weeks later, it was very brief. My time with the squad in the middle of the tour was limited to two days, and one of those was spent traveling., Both days were dominated by another player who had gotten involved in a disciplinary

process, through which, he had highlighted his need for a high level of support away from cricket. The time I did spend with Tom, he assured me that he was coping better, and better as the series went on. He had also regained some form on the pitch and was starting to show more of the performance people had seen earlier in the summer. As a result, he was very confident of getting selected for the following winter.

As the series ended, we had ten minutes together on the last day before everyone went home. However, I could tell from all of the players that the long series meant there was little appetite for conversation. Increasingly, I felt frustrated that I was often only around for long enough to hear Tom's challenges, offer some quick-fire ideas and then be removed from the environment. The busy schedule and the performance focus meant that he seldom had the reflective space to seek out the conversation when I was not there. What added to the frustration was that when we did, it felt meaningful. I would not see Tom for six weeks, until profiling for the following winter. We spoke on the phone (despite his reservations) after he had moved in with his mum, and just prior to moving to his new second home, adjacent to the county ground and training facility. He had seemed to be relaxed. The changes he was going through were evidently not settled. Yet, he was comfortable, and enjoyed the break at the end of the busy season.

Profiling as a pro.

In early October, the staff and players reunited once again for another round of profiling meetings. The winter schedule that lay ahead was designed as preparation for the Under-19 World cup, starting in January and with some good performances, would last until late February. Tom had been selected to a squad of 16, although only 15 would go to the World cup – a threat of de-selection that Tom knew all about.

In preparation, I reflected on what had been a dramatic 12 months for Tom. There had been a lot of change. As a practitioner, it seemed that every time I planned to review with him how things had gone since the last time we had spoken, there had presented a new, and often bigger challenge for him. These challenges had most often presented themselves on a personal level, but over time had become intertwined with his performance on the field. Thus, I had come to expect things were likely to have changed by the time we met again that October.

As opposed to the county ground where I had Tom's coach bowl rockets at his head, a full 12 months earlier, profiling was happening at the National performance centre. Tom and

I would meet on the same sofa we sat on as he shared with me his struggles trying to adapt to his new school. How things had changed?

Once again, we found ourselves preparing for the transition from summer season to winter training. Underneath the blue sky, just visible through the glass doors 20 feet from where we were sat, the cricket pitch glowed bright green, resisting its own transition. What I liked, was that this year, it was some of the players from last year's squad who had now outgrown the Under-19 programme and would make the trips to Australia or South Africa, while those in the UK moved their training indoors. For Tom and me, we found ourselves back in this familiar position. Not making any assumptions about what it was that could be occupying Tom's mind, I simply asked how he had been:

T: Ok. The situation with my parents has gotten easier. My sister is also handling it better now. So that is a relief.

DD: So how has living with your mum been?

T: To be honest, I haven't really been there. After the tour, I moved in, but then was travelling with the first team for the last weeks of the season. I then went on holidays for a bit. I had a week with mum, and since then have been at the county ground, trying to settle in.

DD: And have you?

T: Hmm, not really to be honest. It's just so boring. There are a couple of problems.

DD: Ok, well lots start with the first.

T: Its training. The coaches have been having a go at me again for the way I am training. They say I need to lead it myself. But I didn't really know what that means. Like, I am used to school, and then academy sessions…or being here, where it is a programme with structure. But it seems that because it is a senior dressing room I am in now, and there are not many support staff, people do what they have learned works for them. But I have no idea what it is that works for me.

I had heard past players from this county comment on a similar struggle. There was an expectation that the environment would be player-led, autonomous, and that you should drive it yourself. But, there did not seem to be a transition from having a structure at the academy, to there being no structure. I reflected back to Jon's comments a year ago, almost to the day:

"…That to me is so often the difference. The guys who are really on route to making it, are the ones who are driving their own development, they are strong enough to challenge the

coaches…they are taking the lead. They are independent, whereas the opposite is someone who is just hearing it, doing bits here, doing bits there, no real direction from them…I think a large part of our role, is trying to encourage that, create that independence…"

I wondered if the players who have what Tom described, thrive because it is a necessity in environment lacking in this structure. But also, Jon's closing comments where that we need to work to create that independence. Tom seemed to be creating helplessness at the moment, not independence.

DD: Hmm, ok. That sounds difficult. How have you dealt with that?

T: Well, I have just joined other people for sessions that they are doing and done that. That has allowed me to get by. But it's a bit odd. I guess I was just expecting there to be more of a programme, or someone telling me what to do. But it's just men, with families, who have been coming in, doing what they know works for them and then leaving. It feels like I am yet to figure out what works. While I am doing that, it looks like I am not that focused or something

DD: Do you feel you are?

T: Well I want to be, but I have been unsure what to do. I don't know what I am focusing on, if you know what I mean.

DD: Ok, to start that process of figuring out what works for you, why don't you look to have a conversation with Jon? He might be able to help you build an awareness of what has worked in the past. He might even be able to sit with you and county coaches and come to some agreement that is led by you?

T: Yeah that would be good. I hadn't mentioned it to anyone yet, so maybe that would be good.

DD: Yeah. That reminds me of a bit of a pattern.

T: What do you mean?

DD: Around this time last year, lots of people were expecting you to take the lead on a lot of things, and you tended not to seek help with it. But when you did, it seemed to make it a lot easier for you.

T: Yeah, I think I just try to please people you know and put a lot of pressure on myself that way. Hmm, your right. I do that a lot you know.

DD: Would you like to do anything about it?

T: Well, I think I do have some ideas about what to do, I just don't say. I wait, for others. I would like to start telling people, it just doesn't come naturally to me.

DD: So, like assert yourself?

T: Yeah.

DD: Well I think that's a great thing to notice in yourself. Maybe you can work with Jon to kind of, consolidate what you want, and then from there you can assert yourself?

T: Yeah, that would be good.

DD: Good, so what was the second thing?

T: Well actually, they might be kind of linked. But I have been so bored. Like, everyone else that's a part of the senior team has their life sorted. Like, they have families, or 1 or 2 have Uni to go to, or are doing something. I have been really bored. I am now starting to regret not getting better grades last year. Because I can see that it might be something I would like to use in the future, and my options are really closed now. But I now realise there is so much time to use, and I am bored as anything. I think it is worse because I am away from home as well. Like some local lads are in the same stage as me, but they have got their own friends around them or their families around them. So, I have just been hanging around with them, but I am doing what they want to do, not things for me.

DD: Ok, I mean I think the educational development is something you can look to for the future, definitely and maybe that would be a good way to start a bigger conversation with your PCA practitioner? Would it help if I started a bit of a conversation between the three of us about that?

T: Yeah that would be good.

DD; But you said they were linked, how so?

T: Well, I am so bored, that it is hard to get myself in the right frame of mind for training. I have no structure to my day you know. Like, the senior players come in on their own terms, maybe after dropping kids to school, and I just wake up. I need some structure to build training around, but at the moment there is only training.

Not only was there no support for what it now meant to train through the day as a professional cricketer, but there seemed to be so little attention to everything else that this transition would entail. I sensed what the county were trying to create a sense of autonomy in the professionals at the club in a player-led environment. But Tom, and no doubt many other young players, did not know how to do this. Couple with the fact that his life away from cricket was now just a void.

DD: Ok, I get that. That makes a lot of sense. Are you happy for me to pass that on to Jon, to set up that conversation for you before you leave this week, and he can help you put a bit of a structure in place. I will also set up the meeting with your county PDW, about the education work you would like to pursue. Maybe it would be worth me sharing the boredom element with him too, as they might be able to get one of the senior players to discuss with you how they got their structure so specific for them.

T: Yeah that would be really helpful. Thanks.

DD: Perfect, I think that is a good plan.

Support from afar, my final act

One week after this meeting with Tom, the staffing for the entire winter programme was decided, with the "staff numbers" question once again presenting a barrier to providing immersed support of players from a psycho-social perspective. There was a requirement for a doctor, and a member of security during both of the overseas trips that winter. As a result, the decision was taken that there would be no PDW presence on either trip. The performance psychologist would only be attending the trip before Christmas, but not for the world cup. I as PDW, would instead provide support to players on camps in the UK only, and this would include a new second group of players who would do three camps at the national centre to prepare for a potential future selection for the under-19 squad. I would also look to provide remote support to players where possible and interact with staff where possible to inform their support of the players.

I began to wonder how the expectation to deliver effective support to players, as they seemed to require it could ever be achieved. The isolation, frustration, and feeling of not being valued began to pervade my entire experience, and over time, resentment could set in. My experience with the players was where the meaning came from, and the staff that I worked closest with. But, the connection between me and the organisation was wearing thin. I observed the same thing happening for others as the lack of autonomy for how we deliver as a programme was becoming diluted, and there was little explanation other than:

"...we have got to keep the numbers down…"

This meant that I would only have one more camp with Tom, and others, before he would go on one or both tours (depending on selection). In order to plan support, I shared this fact with players. The players with whom I had done less work were disappointed, but

relatively unaffected. But, for the majority, who I had worked with, or had worked with the performance psychologist, they felt frustrated and misunderstood in terms of the support they had come to benefit from. Tom displayed his frustration at the decision, just like the summer before, highlighting the importance of having on tour a support role which was able to understand the context:

"that's a joke, I mean I know I can call you, but it's not the same, because you won't be involved, you won't be seeing what is happening and be as able to relate to it, it just doesn't make sense. To be honest, if I was struggling in the tour, it would probably be you that I would go to, but you won't be there".

I listened to Tom and struggled more than ever to remain censored. I didn't know how it would help to not, so I looked at him apologetically, and just said "I know". Once again, I thought:

"...Why do we make it so hard to do the right thing..."

I once again felt the frustration of having these physical barriers to doing the role exist and having to share this information with the players in order to help us plan our support over the winter for concerns we don't necessarily now exist yet. As it was, Tom was not able to identify what he might like from remote support. Therefore, we continued the rest of the winter without much conversation beyond texting. The time difference and busy schedule made it difficult to speak on the phone, but when we did Tom generally said things were ok. I was encouraged that this was the case, but also reflected that when I had been there, he had always seen value in discussing things further and that the distance between us felt like the primary reason that our conversations did not go any further.

Tom did have a relatively successful winter on the programme on a personal and performance level. However, he did not become a member of the starting XI for the world cup. Despite this, his performances in the games he did play meant that he returned to the UK with his reputation having improved from the end of the previous summer. This world cup would represent the end of Tom's involvement with the England Under-19 squad. The lack of an Under-17 programme at this stage meant that the selectors had to start prioritising players who were eligible for the next world cup as early as possible, starting with the next summer

tour. This combined with the likelihood that Tom would be playing first team cricket meant that it was clarified early in the cricket season that Tom would not be part of the squad again.

One positive was that this somewhat controlled exit from the programme allowed for a clear handover of support responsibility between me and the PCA practitioner at Tom's county. In other cases, the lack of clarity about player's future involvement often meant that attempts to transition support from me to the county practitioners was more of a tick-box exercise. About three weeks after the World cup, myself, Tom and his county practitioner met together. We discussed Toms desire to put himself in a position to consider further education, which the two of them had already discussed by now. I had already agreed with Tom that it would be worth sharing that he did not want an external referral at the time of his parents' divorce and preferred to be supported by someone that he already had a relationship with, which moving forwards could be the county PDW practitioner. We shared his difficulties of living at the county ground and discussed the value of Tom developing a life in the area beyond his cricket engagements. Early on this was going to include some school coaching, and the potential to do some charity work during the following winter. We also reflected on the fact that Tom had experienced a lot of change during the previous 2 years, and at times may look to please others by taking on too much, which he tended to avoid further down the line. So being mindful of this, sharing his concerns with people around him would be important for his on-going development. However, for now, his focus was on cricket, and that cricket would be at his county. Our journey together had ended.

Chapter 4

Discussion

The discussion section that follows will be organised in a way that addresses the three research questions separately. The implication of the answers to the three research questions will then be identified. For the purpose of reminding the reader, the three research questions were:

A. What is the nature of and personal meaning ascribed to elite youth cricketer's lifestyle concerns?

B. What demand does the nature of elite youth cricketer concerns place on the PDW practitioner with regard to skills, philosophy of practice and organisational integration?

C. How did the broader ECB socio-cultural context and environment influence the provision of support to elite youth cricketers on a national talent development programme?

Research question A: What is the nature of and personal meaning ascribed to elite youth cricketer's lifestyle concerns?

As can be deduced from the 3 narrative representations in the results section, the players that I encountered within this project sought support for a wide range of lifestyle concerns. In the published journal article (Devaney, Nesti, Ronkainen, Littlewood & Richardson, 2017) drawing on the data from the initial 15 months (see appendix), the nature of the player's concerns was categorised as falling under three broad themes; (1) adapting to the EDP environment, (2) managing competing demands, (3) educational choices and professional contracts. This clearly covers a very broad spectrum of specific concerns which an individual experiences and allows for an equally broad spectrum of meaning that the individual may ascribe to their concern. The players further highlighted the degree to which the players appreciated having a source of support for their lifestyle concerns. It was further evident that players did not distinguish (nor discriminate) between issues of a lifestyle or wellbeing nature, and issues of a performance nature. Although the findings highlighted such a wide range of concerns (some of which may apply to any elite youth athlete in any talent development environment and some of which were specific to the cricketers in the EDP), players negotiating their identity provided the central thread throughout the players' lifestyle concerns and the meaning ascribed to them. I will briefly discuss the three categories of concerns outlined above, before a more critical discussion of the negotiation of identity and the meaning of concerns with regard to notions of performance and wellbeing.

Adapting to the new environment

The "high challenge and high support" programme approach appeared to be embraced by many players who had learned how to cope and access the "high support". For those who hadn't learned to access the support, or who were new, there was a sense of feeling overwhelmed at what was perceived as a high-octane, action packed milieu (Devaney et al. 2017). This sense of being overwhelmed could relate to any of what players highlighted as the; physical demands, performance expectations, organisational and social dynamics or behavioural expectations. For example, George initially struggled with the standard of cricket required, fitting in with a group as he initially felt himself to be an outsider; the physical demands of training; and the organisational judgement placed on all of these which led to him consistently accruing consequences. Alex primarily struggled with the organisational and behavioural demands and degree to which discipline and structure were central components

of the programme whereas Tom, struggled to meet the organisational demands, to maintain coach relationships and struggled with the need to be away from home for long periods of time. These were just a few stories of how adapting to the elements of day-to-day existence on the programme stretched and challenged the players in different ways.

The programme and its principled delivery created what was often experienced as a harsh culture shock; "a psychological phenomenon which may lead to feelings of helplessness, irritability and disorientation" (Bourke, 2002, p. 383) which players would have to accept and learn to cope with in order to keep progressing. Players were required to make the necessary sacrifices and endure the necessary hardships in order to succeed on the programme, something they were acutely aware of, even at this early stage of their career when many of the players had yet to receive a professional contract. This reality for elite athletes is consistent with previous reports of organisational demands and struggles and sacrifices (Fletcher, Hanton & Wagstaff, 2012; Sarkar & Fletcher, 2014) where the athlete must endure and make sacrifices (Carless & Douglas, 2009; Nesti, 2007) in order to achieve goals at the highest level. However, the struggle that is reported here is earlier in the athletic career, and perhaps shows a harsher view of what it means to be in the development stage of your career, than the transition models would suggest (Wylleman, Reints & De Knopp, 2013). This harsher reality within a development environment is consistent with the research of Christensen and Sorensen (2009), with the consistency being that this research provided a more applied and contextualised insight of real-world talent development environments. This harsher reality includes making significant personal and social sacrifices to balance sporting and educational commitments, as well as coping with high levels of judgment and pressure that accompany the expectation on them to perform at a high level.

Players' experiences in this study were more consistent with what Relvas, Littlewood, Nesti, Gilbourne and Richardson (2010) termed as the "developing mastery" stage of development for football players. Relvas *et al.* (2010) outlined this stage of the career in a critique of previous developmental models of transition (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2003) as lacking the contextual details and specificity that is critical to understanding the unique social and cultural features within many sports. Relvas *et al.* (2010) suggested that players in this stage had already progressed through the development stage of the Wylleman *et al.* (2004) transition model yet lacked the attributes and experiences to be considered the finished article of a mastery stage. Further, it was suggested that players in this stage still required focused and continued developmental work. The transition to the EDP for players in

the current study undoubtedly involved a similar step up in performance (and other) expectations for players, and in the standards on and off the field that were tolerated. There were still contextual differences from Relvas and colleague's (2010) football participants, in that these young cricketers had stepped up to a new level in International youth cricket, as opposed to the next level within their football clubs. However, the players in this study did still experience what Relvas *et al.* (2010) labelled as social insecurity and continual social comparison on a psychological level, new coaches on a psycho-social level and uncertainty and isolation on an environmental and cultural level. On a financial level, there was inconsistency with regards the degree to which players aligned to Wylleman, Reints, De Knopp's (2013) model, as players were supported by parents, school scholarship programmes, ECB programme provisions, county academy programme provision. Some players had moved beyond this to achieve a professional contract at their county and become (relatively) financially independent, yet were considered by significant cricket stakeholders, and considered themselves to still lack the attributes and experiences of a mastery stage player. This suggests that current literature on transitions and career development, does not necessarily reflect the lived reality of athletes at this stage the career within a talent development programme. Therefore, there is a risk that practitioner education and training will not provide early career practitioners with an accurate understanding of the lived experiences of elite youth athletes on talent development programs, who they may be preparing to support. As a result, the support provided may be compromised. The disparity outlined also risks creating a situation where programme administrators cannot design support infrastructure based on evidence, due to the discrepancy between an athlete's experiences in the literature, and their knowledge of athlete's lives in the applied world. It is therefore considered important that future research attempts to capture the lived experience of athletes within talent development programmes across different sports, to ensure we get an accurate understanding of player's lives in order to inform programme administrators, and the practitioners working on such programmes.

Managing competing demands

Players, who were selected to the EDP, were required to take on this new commitment alongside what was already a considerable investment of time. They would now be required to balance school, county cricket training, their social lives, their family lives, and the significant commitment involved with joining national development programme. Players found themselves stretched across their different environments, with balancing education and

cricket proving a particular challenge. This brought not only physical demands and fatigue, but also organisational complexity. Players found themselves having to collaborate with a huge number of stakeholders across these different environments. Similar to what Richardson, Gilbourne and Littlewood (2004) observed in football academies, the cricketers in the current research were exposed to a high number of significant development stakeholders, each with a (potentially) different agenda or investment in the player's development. It was of course valuable for players to have access to a wide network from which they could seek support or advice. However, the different roles and motivations of these stakeholders created a risk of the players hearing mixed or conflicting messages or having to work to maintain contact with staff across a range of environments. This was viewed by players and staff as having the potential to be detrimental for player development.

The risk of mixed messages and resulting incongruence between different stakeholders across different environments was also perceived as (potentially) anxiety-provoking by several players. Tom shared his worries about possessing the level of independence required in order to maintain positive relationships with the different staff. For example, players may have to report training loads and injuries to a number of physiotherapists in different environments which may include school, county or the national programme, whilst also keeping coaches, teachers and their families aware of their movements between environments, and the support they require as a result. Alternatively, they may need to negotiate, and/or clarify what they should do in response to receiving conflicting advice from coaches in their county and national programmes. The requirement to meet the demands of all staff had the potential to create pressure and stress for players, as they felt the need to keep all these stakeholders happy and manage their impression with those who were ultimately in a position to pass judgement on the player as cricket-career gatekeepers (e.g. County coaches or Directors of Cricket, EDP selectors, EDP coaches etc.).

It has been highlighted that coaches are one of the most important actors within a youth sport context and that they play an influential role in either facilitating or hindering the development of young athletes (Camire, Forneris, Trudel, & Bernard, 2011). This is reflected in the level of importance that players placed on the task of maintaining a positive relationship with their coach(es). However, as the number of stakeholders and their competing demands increased, players found it difficult to retain positive coach relationships. In particular, the turnover of coaches within the EDP, made the establishment of a long term trusting relationship very difficult for players. In Alex's and others case, this took them to the

point of disengaging with some members of the coaching staff that they worked with, in an effort to simplify the message that they were trying to take on board. This disengagement was often viewed negatively by the staff working on the programme as it was perceived that this reflected a lack of commitment, or care towards their cricket career, or their role in the success of the team.

Jon, an EDP coach, highlighted during Tom's narrative that the maturity, independence and ability to drive your own development were the qualities needed to navigate this complex diversity of developmental environments and served as an indicator of whether or not a player might "make it". In fact, it was stressed that developing these qualities ought to be a primary focus of the programme. However, in conflict with this belief, the requirement to keep stakeholders happy, manage their impression and negotiate mixed messages actually seemed to limit the degree to which players could develop this quality.

Educational choices and professional contracts

At any time during their involvement on the programme, the players' education commitments were viewed by coaches and players as welcome intellectual stimulation, a backup plan, or as something which simply got in the way of playing cricket (Devaney et al., 2017). The diverse range of feelings that came with trying to balance education and cricket, for him and others, was richly discussed by one former EDP player, during an interview:

"So, for the last, well I am 21 now, at least 5 years, the two main threads to my life have been education and cricket... so many times, if one is not going well, you can either be distracted by or focused on or doing well in the other... So, not beating yourself up about failing in results or failing on the pitch because you are always like, well, you know as much it feels like the end of the world, you have got something else on your plate the next day, because you have got to go to school...(but) I had to keep telling people, 'well actually, that is something that I want to do'...Which I guess is the reverse of most of the others, who are on the programme, the guys who weren't worried about going to Uni. The expectation from their side was you would just go and be a cricketer. And then I guess the challenge (for a PDW) would be to encourage them to think of... if it doesn't work out, what do you do, or do you have any other interests outside of the game which you can go back to and do in your time off, and that keeps you interested and moving forward with your life."

The permanence with which a player could view education as a life project providing welcome intellectual stimulation was dictated by a number of factors, which most notably included their academic ability and the player's family background. Typically, the players appeared to value the pursuit of gaining an academic grounding upon which they could fall back on if they did not achieve the cricket career they wanted. This was evident in the significant time and resource invested in the prioritisation of practical educational support through the PDW and the vast majority of players completing secondary qualifications. However, for most players retaining focus and motivation for the academic development was still challenging given the amount of time invested in cricket development. This was particularly the case during and immediately after overseas competitive tours, and during the period where the early cricket season overlapped with school exams.

Despite the challenges and varying academic motivation of players, the majority of players placed significant importance on completing their education as they looked to balance educational demands with the demands of the programme. This appears to contrast with findings from other professional team sports, such as football where Richardson (2003) suggested that the "seductive nature of the football environment may dilute the desire for educational development" (p-58). However, cricket has long been recognised for its middle-class culture and close affiliation with independent schools (Tozer, 2012). This, it can be argued, was reflected in the cricketers in this study who were often planning for the future and open to discussing their educational plans either as a dual-career or as a back-up plan in case they did not receive a professional contract. For many players in the current study, their educational aspirations were treated with a lot of importance. This was reflected in many player's sense that they would be required to make a full commitment to cricket or education, creating a genuinely troubling dilemma regarding whether or not they could go to university - despite available evidence within the game that it was possible to do both and still succeed. This finding contrasts subtly with findings from football by Christensen and Sorensen (2009) which highlighted that although players worked hard to meet their obligation in both football and education, what they would use their education for in the future was not given significant consideration, as what mattered in the here and now was football.

Elite youth cricketers on the EDP therefore develop within a socio-cultural landscape that is relatively supportive of players pursuing both secondary education and cricket. However, the players' decisions regarding further education were heavily influenced by their contract status and the beliefs of coaches who acted as gatekeepers to a professional career.

There was a concern for players that choosing to go to university could be perceived as a sign of a lack of commitment by the coaching staff who would ultimately decide if they would get a career in cricket or not. Further, it was often not clear what access to development for their cricket they could maintain if they decided to pursue further study. As a result, players showed confusion in terms of what they "are supposed to do?" regarding educational decisions. The conversations I had with players on the subject of further education often reflected their hesitations of discussing (or even considering) the prospect of not getting the career in professional cricket that they desire. As such, Henry's idea of "taking a gap year to focus on my cricket" appeared to become code for "I need to try and earn a contract and I am not sure how going to university might affect this". In other words, players were reluctant to commit to a further educational pathway before knowing what commitment their counties would make to them as cricketers. However, this commitment from counties was often not forthcoming leaving players to take a gap year as they tried to earn a professional contract. This blurred line between different stages of an athlete's career within and outside of sport is not a feature of the current transition and career development models. Whilst the models could never claim to capture every possible journey of athletes across different sports, it is important to recognize this fact and speak to the fact that athletes lived experience and career journeys are complex, non-linear and riddled with decisions that are laced with uncertainty in order to ensure that support provision for athletes reflects their individually unique journeys.

A further challenge for these young athletes is that in cricket, unlike many Olympic sports (Aquilina, 2013) (i.e. aligned to specific dual-career pathways), going to the university is not typically seen as a mutually beneficial part of the developmental pathway, but as a very separate pursuit. It can be argued that the majority of dual-career research to date, has been carried out in sports where the higher education pathway and elite performance pathways are more mutually compatible. This compatibility may relate to the presence of performance programmes on a university campus, or even sports where university scholarships are the most-funded next steps on the athlete career pathway for athletes. This is not necessarily the case for all sports, in particular, for professional team sports. Players in the current study do have the option of going to an MCCU (already explained within "The Setting" section) to pursue a dual career. The MCCU has been reported to produce up to 20% of first class county cricketers and is therefore a recognised pathway into the county game. However, for many players, especially those attached to counties not in the proximity of the MCCU's, it did not represent the preferred pathway due to the (perceived) limitation that comes with not having

regular access to their county environment. The compatibility of further education and sporting pursuits for cricketers appears to contrast with that of athletes within many Olympic sports, given that over the 20 years up until 2012, 60% of Team GB athletes had been products of the higher education system (Aquilina, 2013). This lack of compatibility between their cricket and educational pathways was a significant limiting factor for players who wished to pursue higher education, and often led to players considering a part time degree at a later stage during the career or completing their degree via the Open University throughout their career. The current findings highlight the socio-cultural differences between sports and the impact this has on the athletes' career and dual-career decisions in the sense that some sports may be socio-culturally more facilitative of dual career than others. This will inevitably influence athlete support needs within different socio-cultural and socio-economic landscapes. However, there remains a lack of research investigating the dual-career experiences and decision making of athletes in sporting careers where pursuing a dual-career is less compatible than it is for others.

Appreciating support of the "Personal"

The (very) broad categories of concerns for which players sought support, and the meaning attached to them reflects a range of concerns that ultimately exist as a result of the player's stage of life, their pursuit of a career in professional cricket, and/or their involvement with the programme. It is important to highlight that this was added to, and deeply integrated with the on-going developments within their personal lives and any concerns of a wellbeing nature which could arise within it. For example, Tom required support with his struggles to be away from home at boarding school, the resulting loss of his closest relationships on a day-to-day basis, his difficulty to fit in and settle at a school where he sensed himself to be something of an outsider plus the requirement for him to attend and perform at England level training camps and tours. This would be later complicated by a parental divorce which in turn had a negative impact on his performance and ability to transition to be a professional cricketer upon receiving his first professional contract. Alex, at different periods of his journey, struggled to be away from home on tour and the more modest nature of his upbringing brought with it a pressure to gain a playing contract. His background was also peppered with elements of violence and of a deviant lifestyle away from the game which he (and his career gatekeepers) believed he would need to avoid in order to achieve the career he wanted. George, quite differently, shouldered an expectation to perform at an exceptional level across education and cricket as a result of his background and the emotional challenge

of wondering if he had done the right thing when he gave up on a potential career in other sports to focus on cricket. Each represents the richly varied and unpredictable lives that the players lived, reflecting the harshness for players of living with such high sporting expectations and pressure when combined with their unique personal circumstances. It also reflects how individuals' backgrounds, life circumstances and personal challenges, make providing support and creating positive change and development for each player within the group, a unique and complex task for practitioners.

Indeed, the players experienced a whole array of personal life issues and concerns which were a consequence of who they were outside of the game, but due to the degree of investment they had in their cricket development, these concerns became deeply integrated with their cricketing lives. It is not the purpose of this research to simply list all of the things that had an impact on a player's wellbeing and personal life, as it could be argued that a definitive list of what might impact on a player's life is unrealistic. However, it is the purpose of the current research to recognise that overtime these parts of a player's life would become inseparable from their experiences on the programme and as a cricketer more broadly.

It was identified in the introduction, that previous literature had recognised the requirement for athletes to be supported with what has been described as off-field personal factors (Dorfmanm 1990), personal issues that interfere with performance (Ravizza, 1990), issues of a more general nature related to athlete wellbeing (Poczwardowski, Sherman & Ravizza, 2004) or issues that reside outside performance based topics or which are lifestyle in focus or personal in orientation (Gilbourne & Richardson, 2006). However, what these issues are or how they are experienced by athletes has not been discussed (specifically) in the literature, especially not in a way that represents the athlete's voice. It is hoped that this research has provided significant insight into how athletes' experience these issues, and how embedded and integrated with their sporting lives these areas of concerns can be. More specifically, the current research provides a very rare insight into the nature of elite youth athletes' lives on a talent development programme. In doing so, the findings have highlighted the degree to which the players appreciated support for the non-sporting domain of their lives, and therefore the importance for this and future research in elite youth sport, to adopt methodology that allows for the representation of the athlete's voice.

Players expressed their appreciation for the support they received for their lifestyle concerns both for the benefit of their wellbeing, but also their performance. Just as it has been

reported that the player's lifestyle concerns were integrated with and inseparable from their performance goals and experiences, players recognised and articulated that support for their wellbeing improved performance, and support for their performance improved their wellbeing. As such, the concerns were less about performance or wellbeing, and more about them as a person trying to perform. This is aligned with Gilbourne and Richardson's (2006) suggestion that although it is the performance agenda that will attract coaches to the idea of psychological support for young athletes, they state that successful practice is "held together" by the practitioners "capacity to care" which embraced the self-awareness and empathic qualities that engender compassion. They also suggested that a symbiotic relationship exists between the performance and caring agendas. Indeed, Nesti (2004) suggested that there is no such thing as a non-performance concern. The findings of the current study support this and suggest that the concerns which players held instead hold the potential to impact performance more or less directly depending on the proximity to the game – but that all concerns impacted to some degree both wellbeing and performance. Further, this point is not as simple as when you feel bad, you perform bad, or vice versa. But rather, the player's narratives suggest that their concerns within and outside sport become integrated and inseparable as a result of the depth of personal investment that each individual makes in their sporting development.

Negotiating identity

It has been mentioned earlier that there were a wide range of experiences that were identified as lifestyle concerns. However, a more fundamental issue with the players concerns has not been discussed as of yet. This issue relates to the reason that these issues were challenging for the players on the programme. The overarching theme that linked players concerns and the integration of these issues with their personal concerns was their "identity". In other words, the concerns that players presented with (or raised) often left their sense of identity in a state of flux and required constant negotiation of their identity in order to move forwards.

Identity has been discussed and understood from a number of perspectives across a number of domains (e.g., psychology, sociology, anthropology). One such perspective is social and role identity ((Tajfel, 1978, 1981, 1982). Theorists in this area view the self, not as an autonomous psychological entity, but as a multifaceted social construct that emerges from people's roles in society (Stryker, 1968, 1980). In contrast Erikson's psychodynamic (1968) work on identity provided a theoretical framework built around eight stages of Psychosocial

Development where the eight stages represent key developmental crises that must be resolved in order to develop with a strong sense of identity. In sport psychology, identity has been discussed through the conceptualisation of athletic identity as "the degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role'' (Brewer, Van Raatle & Linder, 1993, p 237). Research has most often sought to measure the strength of athletic identity using the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (Brewer & Cornelius, 2001). There has been a significant amount of research on athletic identity that has often sought to understand the impact of a strong athletic identity, or the exclusivity of the athletic identity (identity foreclosure) on an athlete's sporting experiences. For example, Park (2012) reported that as a consequence of their narrowly focused lifestyles and identity, those athletes who had strong athletic identities tended to experience a higher degree of career transition difficulties and identity crisis during the career transition process. It is not the purpose of the current research to analyse and critique these different perspectives of athletic identity. However, it is important to acknowledge that when discussing identity negotiation in the current study, a different perspective is taken. The current study adopts a perspective of identity that is aligned with existential psychology and adopts a more fluid perspective towards identity and meaning.

According to Hacker (1994), the existential perspective differs from Erikson's (1968) theory of identity development, in its view that the person exists not only in the present but is inextricably linked to a past childhood that leads imperceptibly to a future adulthood. According to the existential perspective, human beings are constantly faced with; the freedom to make certain choices, the responsibility for each decision we make (the outcome of which cannot be predicted), the finitude of our world and our own being, and the anxiety which is caused by all of these conditions, throughout our existence. This perspective suggests that one's identity development and structure is dynamic and changing over time (Nesti et al., 2012). Nesti et al. (2012, p-28) also outline that this perspective emphasises the importance of "tough questions that human beings are faced with during their life" which relate to their sources of meaning and who they are as individuals. Relating this perspective to the world of sport, Nesti et al. (2012, p-28) suggested that these questions may arise during times of intense pressure, transitions or critical moments – "when one's identity is being directly threatened."

The existential view is that the search for meaning might require the player to reassess their values and deepest beliefs which may change or become more central to who they are. This will help them to align their core self with decisions and behaviours they intend to

pursue. Identity therefore can be seen as an important source of meaning and something beneficial to the player's health, wellbeing, and ability to perform at their best. Indeed, Nesti and Littlewood (2009) stressed the importance of developing a strong sense of self in order to perform in elite sporting environments due to their volatility and the regular challenge they provide to an individual's identity. This perspective certainly applies to players in the current study. It has been discussed how life on the EDP and in pursuit of a professional cricket career left players sense of self in a constant state of flux, requiring on-going negotiation of their identity; who they were, who they wanted to become and what they valued, in order to successfully move forward.

For players on the EDP, the concerns that required negotiation of their identity were interrelated with significant transitions that are aligned with the existing career transition research, such as, finishing secondary education or entering professional cricket. However, the concerns that needed support were better aligned with what Nesti and Littlewood (2011) referred to as 'critical moments' which need to be viewed in the context of career development, rather than focusing primarily on specific career transitions themselves. In other words, the career transition model (Wylleman, Reints & De Knopp, 2013) was better conceptualised as a backdrop for the career journey, against which the athletes experienced lifestyle concerns during critical moments that threw their identity into a state of flux and required (further) negotiation (Devaney et al., 2017).

In an attempt to bring this to life, we can use the example of Tom. Tom at the beginning of his narrative, was in the development stage of his athletic career, the psychological stage of adolescence, the academic level of secondary education and on a psycho-social level, peers, parents and coaches provided his support network. However, a cricket-based decision to attend a boarding school had removed his support network on a day-to-day basis and left him in a new socio-cultural environment that challenged his view of who he was. This made him more cognizant of factors such as class, academic values and how they would influence decisions he may take regarding his future in cricket and in education. The removal of his immediate support network led to him experiencing homesickness. This tainted his achievement of being selected to the EDP side as he was struggling to stay for the entirety of the first camp. He worried that others would perceive this as a lack of commitment. He was also acutely aware that a significant part of who he wanted to be, a professional cricketer, required spending prolonged periods away from home and that this was a concern that would not go away for as long as he continued to pursue this career. In the

short term, this was further complicated by the fact that who he was as a cricketer and how he played the game was being challenged by the coaches. He therefore felt like he had lost another element of his support network (i.e. the coach) and was required to look at his approach to the game and decide how he was going to move forward. All of this was experienced over a matter of weeks, with a huge range of stakeholders who had beliefs about what he ought to do, but ultimately were not him and could not therefore understand the complexity that each other layer of his life provided to their engagement with him. The critical moments that players experienced (like this one) were complex, a (potential) threat to one's identity and often required support in negotiating identity and a way forward. The moments that shaped all three narratives were often equally complex and demanding of the individual. For example, Alex's realisation that "who he was a person", was different from the majority of the rest of the squad, as he tried to establish who he was and what he was prepared to show others (players and staff) within the environment. Similarly, George's realisation of the performance standards that he was now expected to meet having been selected for the Under-19 side, and his sense that he too was something of an outsider within the group: all the while trying to invest fully in both his academic and athlete roles.

The concept of critical moments better recognises the dynamic environments that the young cricketers operate in and the potential for seemingly mundane day-to-day events to hold significant influence over their development. From an existential perspective, the anxiety associated with critical moments is not simply the result of the impending need to perform, but the uncertainty of the player's current situation, as well as the responsibility and freedom to act. From an existential view, to live authentically is to face this anxiety, be true to oneself and act according to one's core beliefs and values (Ronkainen & Nesti, 2017). The concept of critical moments also emphasises that challenging moments within the career are not inherently negative experiences and may actually provide an exciting opportunity for personal growth, self-awareness development and the development of existential courage (Nesti & Littlewood, 2011). For example, Tom decided to stay at the camp utilising the 1-2-1 practitioner support that was available and that embraced the existential understanding of Tom's current situation. As a result, Tom became more assertive, and sought out the conversation about how he played the game with the coaches in an attempt to find a positive way to move forwards, reflecting a positive negotiation of the critical moment he was in.

The context of adolescent development

Finally, it is important to discuss the relevance of the stage of development that players in the current study are in, namely, adolescence. Nurmi (2004) described adolescence as a crossroads from childhood to adulthood and suggested that the adolescent years are the most critical for the formation of identity, development of cognitive motivational strategies and the social and organisational skills that may impact the educational choices and career aspirations of individuals. Further, Nurmi outlined how during adolescence, individuals begin to know themselves and to make reflections about who they are and who they want to be. Career transition literature has outlined adolescence as a stage of development on the psychological level. However, given Nurmi's (2004) portrayal of adolescence, it must be acknowledged that adolescence could itself be conceptualised as one long transitional period. Therefore, challenges, career decisions and defining moments previously described occur during a phase of life which is itself transitional in nature. There is therefore a requirement for players to negotiate their identity during a period of development when that identity itself is just developing. Therefore, it could be argued that there is an even greater requirement to understand athlete's lifestyle concerns as critical moments requiring the negotiation of the individual's identity during the adolescent stage of development. Finally, it could be argued that the magnitude of this developmental transition from adolescence to adulthood is somewhat understated within the transition literature, particularly with regard to identity negotiation and development. It also ought to be acknowledged that the transitional nature of this period of development (adolescence) itself has not been fully captured in existing literature within sport psychology.

Summary

Players sought support for lifestyle concerns that were deeply personal and psychological in nature. These were broadly categorised as relating to: (1) adapting to the EDP environment, (2) managing competing demands, (3) educational choices and professional contracts. It has been acknowledged that the themes are integrated with and inseparable from their life circumstances. Specifically, these concerns relate directly to their (personal) life. The concerns that players sought support for were not strictly related to matters of performance or wellbeing and suggest that separating the two is impossible given the individuals' personal investment in their cricket performance. Therefore, the concerns were less about performance or wellbeing, and more about them as a person trying to

perform. The players' appreciation of lifestyle support reflected this and reflected their understanding that supporting wellbeing tended to improve performance and vice versa. This is not just because one may lead to the other, but because they were (in the main) inextricably linked.

It is argued that the experience of players during their time on the programme created a challenge for players, in that it often threw their identity into a state of flux. Players were then required to negotiate their identity in order to move forwards and confront the normal anxiety (May, 1983) associated with navigating (challenging / demanding periods of their life) critical moments (Nesti et al., 2012). The recognition that a multitude of critical moments may exist, or be experienced, is believed to better reflect the complex day-to-day existence of those on the EDP than is the career transition literature. However, it is suggested that the career transition model (Wylleman, Reints & De Knopp, 2013) can provide a helpful backdrop to help frame the players' experiences. Moreover, the transition models can help position the players' journeys with regard to the age and stage of their holistic development, however, critical moments would appear to better reflect the more refined, individual and highly complex individual experience on a day-to-day basis. Finally, adolescence is articulated as a stage of development for athletes to navigate within the transition models. However, adolescence in the current research is itself framed as being transitional in nature, something that is not necessarily captured (in detail) within the previous transition research. Given Nurmi's (2004) portrayal of adolescence, it is suggested that understanding adolescent lifestyle concerns of athletes from the perspective of critical moments that require negotiation of their identity is particularly pertinent. To date, research during this stage of development has not paid sufficient attention to the transitional nature of adolescence itself from childhood to adulthood, in particular, the importance of this phase of development for identity development. It is hoped that this research has helped to understand the significance of both adolescence as a stage of development, and the inability to separate the sporting and non-sporting elements of the players lives. Further, it will be important for the training and education of practitioners who may provide support for elite adolescent athletes, to reflect this insight

Research question B: What demand does the nature of elite youth cricketer concerns place on the PDW practitioner with regard to skills, philosophy of practice and organisational integration?

The discussion of question A outlines the nature of concerns that athletes sought support for during their time on the programme. These concerns were individual and psychological in nature as well as deeply integrated and inseparable from the personal lives of players. Players explicitly appreciated support with issues of this nature and did not differentiate between issues of performance and non-performance. Finally, it was suggested that the concerns were difficult and required support because they represented critical moments that required a negotiation of their identity. Before discussing the demand that supporting these lifestyle concerns places on the PDW practitioner, it is worth revisiting how support is delivered by PDW practitioners as was outlined within the methodology section. Educational support for players was provided through meetings and continuous liaison support with the player, his county coaches (if necessary), the player's school and the player's parents. On all camps, the PDW coordinated the supervision of 2 hours supervised study per day, up to 10 hours per week. On tour this was replicated, albeit over a longer period of time due to the length of the tour. This involved the planning and delivery of up to 40 hours supervised study. When the PDW was not on the tour, these sessions and the work to be completed by players was planned by the PDW ahead of the tour but supervised by other members of the team's support staff on the trip on a rotational basis. During camps, and sometimes tours, the PDW practitioner would deliver whole or smaller group workshops to players, or if necessary organise for a suitable external presenter to deliver a specific workshop. The content of these workshops was broad with content normally led by a combination of the specific group of player's needs, and the overall goals of the PDW programme. The PDW would also co-ordinate the preparation for and delivery of a community-based project during the overseas tours. Finally, the PDW provided individual, 1:1 support, which may be sought out by players, proactively initiated by the practitioner, recommended by a coach or discussed and agreed upon during initial profiling meetings with players.

Together, this is a comprehensive and diverse provision of support that is all heavily related (in different ways) to the nature of individual concerns that players have. For example, an educational workshop on how to practically balance cricket and education, or transitioning to first team cricket undoubtedly helped players, and may have helped alleviate

some concerns, or at the very least, make players more aware of the challenges that they would face. Other workshops provide players with information that they will need to know in order to enter a career in professional cricket, such as social media and anti-doping awareness. The community project developed a wide range of life skills and often provided a sense of perspective that enabled players to reflect, recognise and appreciate their privileged position (as aspiring professional cricketers) and helped them re-frame the pressures they face in a positive way. Finally, the practical educational support provision was hugely important in helping players to balance their student and cricketer roles and acted as a symbolic representation of the value of continuing academic development alongside cricket.

The delivery and management of these elements of support placed significant demands on the practitioner's personal qualities and skills, many of which are outlined in the recruitment criteria discussed in the introduction for PDW or Performance lifestyle roles. For example, it was stipulated that the EIS performance lifestyle candidate would require; an understanding of education systems, negotiating and influencing skills and understanding of the principles of effective planning, goal-setting and time management. The PCA's PDW candidate would require; high level inter-personal, presentation and facilitation skills and project management experience. Therefore, it is suggested that the findings of the current study with regard to the qualities and skills required of a successful PDW practitioner are consistent with what organisations believe that a candidate, who is applying for a lifestyle practitioner role ought to possess. These areas of support also appear to be consistent with the limited descriptions of athlete lifestyle programmes within the literature with regard to the proposed purpose of the work. Due to the lack of insight into what athlete lifestyle practitioners actually do to deliver in line with these purposes, it is hard to compare these findings with other real-world applications of support within programmes on a day-to-day basis of delivery. The current research therefore provides a unique insight into the group-based, prescriptive delivery of an athlete lifestyle programme in a talent development environment.

However, the elements of support provision described do not claim or aim to help athletes with their own individual lifestyle concerns such as those outlined within the narratives of George, Alex and Tom. The findings of the study suggested that the individual lifestyle concerns that players experienced were challenging because they were deeply personal and required a negotiation of their identity. Neither the workshops, nor the educational support, nor the community projects in and of themselves met this need. Yet they

still need to be recognised for the very significant part of player support that contributes to the whole support picture. The finding that the proactive, prescriptive programme of support is important but incapable of meeting the individual lifestyle support needs of players is consistent with Priestley's (2008, p-459) doctoral research findings. Priestley outlined that:

> *"Whilst acknowledging the value of a proactive educational workshop programme for academy players, data exposed how a workshop culture could only ever remain one small part of a wider lifestyle agenda. In light of findings, a workshop culture would appear ill-equipped, too far removed from the reality of life as a professional cricketer and could not pretend to offer prolonged support required to make significant lifestyle change."*

It is important to recognise that the more prescriptive elements of support do demand those skills and qualities of a practitioner that are outlined in the introduction. However, it is important to discuss the demands that the individual player support placed on the PDW practitioner. The following discussion will draw on the three narratives and the answer to research question 1, in order to answer research question 2 and understand what is required of the lifestyle practitioner in order to meet individual player's lifestyle concerns. This will be broken down into the following themes; counselling frameworks, immersion, context & relationships, training and philosophy of practice; personal qualities and finally self-care and supervision.

Value of counselling frameworks for player support

In Priestley's (2008) doctoral research (the only known research to address the requirements of athlete lifestyle practitioners in practice), players identified altruistic characteristics and personal qualities aligned to counselling skills when describing what they believed was needed from a lifestyle practitioner. These included, empathic listening, development of honest and trusting relationships, knowing players as people and a genuine capacity to care. Priestley (2008) continued to outline the need for a greater emphasis on the value of more "on-going and long-term, practitioner-focused and counselling based blueprint/ for the future roles, training and practice of supportive practitioners." He included both lifestyle and sport psychology practitioners in this recommendation adding that counselling and counselling psychology offers a grounded framework from which to learn how they (i.e., athlete lifestyle practitioners and/or sport psychologists) might better support the lifestyle based needs of athletes. More specifically, Priestley outlined the value of a

humanistic/person-centred approach to counselling. Rather than expecting clients to submit compliantly to "treatment", an approach grounded in person-centred counselling would advocate an alternative perspective where there is a need for the player to engage with the practitioner as a collaborator (McLeod, 2003). This would require a shift from "any notion of doing something to clients" to a perspective of being with and for clients (Spinelli, 1996), and an understanding and acceptance of the healing power of the relationship between the player and the practitioner (Friedman, 2002; Myers, 2003). A therapeutic relationship through which change can occur would resemble Buber's (1958) "I-thou" relationship that is direct, open, present and absent of power hierarchies. This contrasts with what Buber referred to as an "I-it", relationship where the practitioner acts as a scientific observer and maintains distance in the relationship in order to better see the problem. However, this way of working would require a shift in the athlete lifestyle support agenda as outlined in the literature that would go beyond the educational and practical support to focus more on the relational and transactional. This would have significant impact on the support infrastructure that a programme would put in place, and the training or educational needs of practitioners, as will be discussed later in the discussion.

The current findings reinforce the message within Priestley's (2008) findings. However, the findings add further contribution by suggesting that existential psychology (Nesti, 2004) may provide an alternative perspective that is, at certain times, is more applicable given the nature of the demands facing these young players and the need for identity negotiation in response to the occurrence of critical moments during their developmental journey. Many of the elements described by Priestley (2008) remain important to this process. For example, Nesti (2004) described how a practitioner must unreservedly give themselves over to the player they are working with. Nesti (2004) outlined the need for the personal qualities of presence, authenticity and empathy when supporting through an existential framework. Further, van Deurzen (2002) described the fundamental aim of an existential approach as being to understand and embrace the complexities of human life, not to fix or conquer it.

However, the existential approach does differ from the person-centred humanistic approach. It suggests that whilst the "encounter" (Ronkainen & Nesti, 2017) can be uncomfortable for the athlete, as embracing the responsibility to act is personally demanding, the normal anxiety associated with the concerns described by players above can be viewed as a positive experience. This is not to say that the situation is simply reframed as a positive one,

but that the normal anxiety indicates that the athlete values some potential version of their future. As a result, the challenge can lead to the development of a greater sense of self, personal growth and courage through facing the challenge. This perspective better captures the requirement of players to frequently re-negotiate their identity to find a positive way forward, within a context where their identity is often in a state of flux.

Supporting athletes from a person-centred and/or existential perspective does create challenges regarding how the practitioner can operate in the environment. Supporting players using this approach can take time and cannot act as a quick fix. Corlett (1996) acknowledged this tension within applied sport psychology support of athletes, the tension being the demand for short term solutions and the time demands required to deliver effective support. Corlett (1996) argued that if sport psychologists exclusively seek to meet this short-term demand and offer a quick alleviation of symptoms through mental skills training (what he describes as a Sophist approach), they risk the prevention of more long-term personal development that has self-examination and self-knowledge as its foundation (what he describes as a more Socratic approach to practice). In order to adopt the more Socratic approach, there is requirement for a strong and trusting relationship to create the level of dialogue described in "the encounter" (Nesti, 2004). However, it has been suggested that elite athletes and coaches in particular are in capable of understanding the need for a long term commitment in order to improve as this belief in long term focused work is accepted as a given in the path to becoming a professional athlete (Nesti, 2010). Further, providing counselling from this perspective requires the athletes to be assured of confidentiality due to the sensitive and often personal nature of the dialogue. These factors require trust and buy-in from programme managers to allow access of players to the practitioner and vice versa, and an understanding that a meeting with the practitioner cannot simply "fix" the problem. However, the findings of the current study do highlight how brief encounters with players can still be heavily influenced by the existential perspective, in the sense that it may shape how you understand the issue that is facing you. For example, the understanding I took of Alex's overwhelming anxiety during our brief conversation after the selection meeting in South Africa, or, the difficulty that Tom was having being away from home during out first training camp together; both players were experiencing anxiety, but as opposed to trying to fix the problem and make the feeling go away, the approach was to understand what the anxiety meant for them, who they are and who they want to become. This is consistent with (Cooper, 2003) who suggested that brief interactions can create meaningful change for the existential perspective

It has been suggested that entering into the level of dialogue involved in the existential "encounter" requires maturity and reflection that may mean it is unlikely to be possible (or potentially more challenging) with younger athletes. The current findings suggest that this is not necessarily the case. The players in this study, between the ages of 16 and 19 were quite capable of entering dialogue of an existential nature. It may look different at this age compared with the dialogue of older athletes, but the fundamental givens of existence and the negotiation of identity were still at the heart of the conversations. This is consistent with Fitzgerald's (2005) recognition that there was very little literature related to the applications of existential-informed support of adolescents. Fitzgerald (2005) argued that this was a disservice to adolescents given the "stark similarity between what they experience and the concepts of existentialism" (p.793); for example, an increase in freedom, choice, responsibility, an awareness of isolation and a search for meaning. Fitzgerald also recognises the major task of adolescence as identity formation and the importance of meaning and purpose within this. Further, it has been suggested that the period of adolescence and its transitional nature actually creates opportunity and a need for answering questions such as "Who am I" and "Who do I want to become." So, on the contrary, adolescence may provide a highly appropriate stage for which to draw upon an existential framework when providing athlete lifestyle support.

Practitioner's immersion and contextual understanding

Throughout the research, and as relationships with players grew, the complexity and contextual relevance of their concerns became more and more prevalent. For example, George's decision regarding whether or not to go to university required consideration of family background, dual career possibilities, perception of coaches and/or teammates as well as the question of what he wants from life. Further, Alex's difficulty when trying to cope with his injury on tour was interrelated with his family life and his sense of pressure to achieve for them. This was further influenced by his long-term anxiety that injuries might prevent him from having a cricket career combined with the fact that he had foreclosed on other career avenues (e.g., education) in pursuit of a cricket career. Without this context and appreciation of the complexity of concerns, an appropriate understanding of what presenting concerns actually meant to players would be impossible. Further, any attempt to help players resolve issues and move forwards would have likely been misguided, and superficial. This level of contextual relevance and personal meaning is

only possible through the development of long term relationships with players and staff, trust and an understanding of what it is like to be that individual on a daily basis.

It is important to appreciate that the degree to which a player's concerns were recognised, was often informed by observations within the day-to-day environment either by me directly or passed onto me by others. For example, the observation of Tom's desperation to please his county coach amidst the pressure of his training session provided an early insight into how he relates to external pressure and struggles to authentically assert himself in an environment where players are under constant judgement. Similarly, my initial observations of George's tears during the October camp, and the observations passed on by the coach of that session was the information upon which my support for George was initiated. This type of information often led to the start of a conversation with a player, as was the case for George. Alternatively, the information may help the practitioner to build the picture of how a player feels, as was the case when watching Tom struggle in the nets at the profiling camp. For me in my attempts to help players, this information acted like the life-blood of contextualised and meaningful lifestyle support. It was striking as a practitioner that when I was not in the environment, this information and understanding was simply not available and as a result, the conversation would not (likely) assume the same direction and depth. I did not get to understand the context, and others did not seek to share it. Further, players reflected that they would be unlikely to seek out support by phone or other means when the lifestyle practitioner was not 'in' the environment. Players appeared to appreciate the practitioner understanding the context, and the informality of "just having a chat", even though both parties seemed to know that there was a purpose to this chat. This was pointed out as a difference of the support within the England environment (when it was made available) from the support at the counties where the formality of planning for and seeking out support from a practitioner who was not immersed within the environment was felt to be at odds with the nature of their dynamic and quick-changing day-to-day lives.

It was regularly reflected upon during the narratives, that I was (and felt) like a private investigator at times. I often found myself observing, paying attention to details that indicate how people are doing and seeking to understand them. These may be reactions after a training session, or a conversation between two players at lunch. But delivering meaningful individual support required a constant building of the picture of the player's lives. Over the course of my time immersed as a practitioner in the environment, I

felt that I became highly skilled at just 'hanging out' and building this picture of the context and the player's experience of it. Although sounding simplistic, the understanding of how, where and when to "hang out" was actually infirmed by a finely tuned understanding of the environment and the lives of those individuals acting within it. Over time, the picture becomes clearer, and what it is that is going on for a player becomes clearer. In a sense this blurred the line of practitioner and researcher and suggests that an element of ethnographic engagement was a necessary element to the successful delivery of the athlete lifestyle practitioner. This aligns with the doctoral research findings by Rowley (2013) who described the need to be "professionally embedded" (p.323) as a professionalization of the process of hanging around in an attempt to understand the contextual factors at play for an individual before assuming the ability to positively impact them. This skillset is also reminiscent of what the character Derek felt was central to the success of his role, within Richardson and Gilbourne's (2004) reflection on the applied delivery of the role of Heads of Education and Welfare within football academies.

It is argued that in order to ensure that athlete lifestyle support meets the player's needs, lifestyle practitioners should be immersed within the performance environment as opposed to being situated on the periphery of the support infrastructure. This position has been proposed before by Anderson and Morris (2000) following their observation of programmes remaining on the peripheries. It is therefore frustrating that removal from the performance environment remains as a potential block to the integration of support for the person with support for the performer, and therefore, the provision of genuinely holistic support. This fact suggests that the belief in the value of supporting the person to help them perform, is still at risk of being discarded when it comes to institutions making decisions about what they ought to prioritise. My need to be immersed as a practitioner was understood by other support staff such as physiotherapists, coaches, performance analysts and S&C staff. Further, considering the level of interaction that existed between me as lifestyle practitioner and those in other support roles (e.g. coaches, medical, psychology) regarding how to best support players, the immersion of the lifestyle practitioner also appeared to be valued by the other support staff that I worked with. However, a fully immersive approach is still not necessarily readily embraced or prioritised by the environments (and their budgetary constraints). As will be discussed in relation to the third research question, the opportunity to deliver the support role in this way was sometimes not afforded to me as practitioner, and this provided the most

significant challenge to my ability to perform my role as was required by players and staff within the programme.

Practitioner philosophy of practice

The importance for sport psychology practitioners to develop and work coherently in line with a philosophy of practice has been argued for within the literature (Poczwardoski, Sherman & Ravizza, 2004; Lindsay, Breckon, Thomas & Maynard, 2007). However, it has been argued that the value of a philosophy of practice for athlete lifestyle practitioners has not similarly been acknowledged, either within academic literature or within organisations description of the role. The current research represents a rare example of a practitioner outlining a training background that links to a philosophy of practice for providing lifestyle support. Further, there was a discussion of how this philosophy of practice links to the understanding of players concerns providing a theoretical grounding for the nature of support provided. Moreover, this link created congruence between philosophy, understanding player concerns, providing support and considering the long term development of the player. This is consistent with Poczwardowski, Sherman and Ravizza (2004) who outlined that practitioners within helping professions have recognized the importance of philosophy of service as a fundamental factor driving the process of behaviour change.

During the introduction, it was highlighted that there is some confusion within the literature with regard to the training and educational background of the practitioners who deliver athlete lifestyle support. For example, Stambulova & Ryba (2013) appear to assume that the programmes are delivered by sport psychology personnel. For those actually delivering on applied lifestyle programmes, it appears that there is no formal educational or specific training background required, unlike similarly aligned professions, like sport psychology. This has similarities to the role of Heads of Education and Welfare within football academies (Gilbourne & Richardson, 2005), where again it was recognized that the practitioners required an extremely eclectic skill set yet had limited explicit specific training and skills to deal with the vast array of issues that they encountered. There is some, albeit non-committal recognition of the value that training in a helping profession (e.g., counselling) might bring to the role. By extension of the diverse training requirements, it can be assumed that many practitioners may not acquire a psychologically-informed philosophy of practice upon which to base their work with athletes. This would appear to be a significant shortcoming given the psychological and deeply personal and relational nature of support required with a view to impacting performance and wellbeing.

There has been increasing attention paid to practitioners' theoretical grounding and philosophies of practice within the field of sport psychology (Ravizza, 2002, Nesti, 2004, Poczwardosi, Sherman & Ravizza, 2004). Despite, being a similarly aligned support role with a view to supporting athlete welfare and performance, there remains no such insight into the work of lifestyle practitioners. Given the nature of concerns for which players sought support within the current study and the importance of linking player concerns and necessary support through a philosophy of practice, it is argued that the current status quo of training and personal development for practitioners could be acting as a disservice to those on the receiving end of support. This point is directed at two audiences. Firstly, it is directed at those Universities providing formal sport psychology education, whom it is argued ought to ensure that the breadth of athlete experience (wellbeing, lifestyle and performance) and not predominantly mental skills training is reflected in their training programmes. It is also argued that the breadth of theoretical grounding required by neophyte practitioners to provide the necessary support should form an important part of this training. The point is also directed at sporting organisations, sport governing bodies and sport institutions that have created a split between performance and lifestyle/wellbeing in their support infrastructure; but have not aligned the personal development and training of practitioners (lifestyle practitioners in particular) with theoretical grounding, philosophical underpinning and subsequent skill set required to support the psychological, personal and relational concerns of athletes when performing the role.

As a result of the wide range of training and experiential backgrounds from which lifestyle practitioners are recruited, there will exist a diverse range of skill sets across the lifestyle support industry. Depending on the nature of requirements of the lifestyle role in specific environments at a certain time, this may be appropriate. However, it was outlined in the introduction that lifestyle practitioners often assume responsibility for support that is well-being orientated in nature. In the current study, these concerns were complex and (predominantly) psychological in nature. At times, players sought the support of the lifestyle practitioner (sometimes instead of the performance psychologist) for concerns of this nature. It appeared that (some) players were more likely to seek out the lifestyle practitioner for certain concerns, due to their assumption that the performance psychologist only supported the "on-pitch" experience, and not psychological concerns that the player was experiencing off-the-pitch, even though these were impacting performance. It is argued that a lifestyle practitioner who holds a responsibility to provide such support, also has a responsibility to assume a philosophy of practice upon which is grounded in such meaningful and important

work. If there is no such expectation, there is a risk that players may not go to the practitioner who has specific training and/or a philosophy of practice (the performance psychologist) due to their explicit alignment to the performance agenda and may instead go to a practitioner without appropriate training and/or a philosophy of practice (perhaps aligned to a theoretical framework/professional practice accreditation/ grounding) to provide support. This is not to say that lifestyle practitioners are not capable of often meeting this demand, but rather that appropriate training and a philosophy of practice upon which to ground this important work ought to be a (minimum) expectation.

It has been argued that any practitioners in a position to provide the deeply personal, and relational support required to help athletes with the concerns that they have expressed in this study, should engage in training and on-going development plans which help them to ground this work and create congruence between their relationships with athletes, their understanding of athletes concerns, and the support they provide. This research represents a first example of illuminating a lifestyle practitioner's theoretical grounding and guidance within their work. Although some of the content may come as a surprise to others who have not shared the same developmental pathway, this would only highlight the importance for those in the industry (both within sport psychology and lifestyle support) to do the same for their work. Given the complexity of player concerns and the degree to which wellbeing and performance are interrelated, a practitioner's ability to theoretically and philosophically ground their work will be necessary to help clarify how they, and the organisations they work within can provide genuinely holistic support for athletes.

Personal qualities (and practitioner identity)

In the introduction, it was outlined that although there was no specific training requirement for athlete lifestyle practitioners, there was a requirement for practitioners to possess a range of personal qualities, such as the ability to maintain credibility, an ability to work in an integrated manner with the rest of the multi-disciplinary team as well as the requirement for high level interpersonal, facilitation, counselling and communication skills. It was recognised that this appeared to mirror what some literature suggested were the personal qualities required for/by applied sport psychologists. Chandler, Eubank and Nesti (2014) identified the qualities of relationship building and professionalism within the applied environment as well as recognising the caring nature of the role and the importance of the person behind the practitioner on having a professional impact. McDougall, Nesti and Richardson (2015) also discussed the challenges of delivering Sport Psychology in elite sport,

highlighting the challenges to congruence, the broader role of working within the environment, being able to manage multiple relationships and the influence of elite sport cultures. My experiences as a practitioner certainly reflect these requirements, as can be observed within the three narratives in the results. This fact is worthy of further discussion.

The challenge of managing and working with multiple relationships and maintaining credibility was evident from my very first involvement within the programme as I became aware of the links between schools, county coaches, parents and the EDP itself. Further, day-to-day life on the EDP required integrating with a huge range of coaches and support staff. I was required to establish productive working relationships and establish credibility for both me and my role, whilst appreciating what Anderson and Morris (2000) recognised as the challenge's lifestyle programmes and practitioners face in achieving central roles within support infrastructures. Further, the practical delivery skills of communication, counselling and facilitation were inevitably a staple requirement of carrying out the role demands.

It has been acknowledged that elite sport can be a hostile and fast-paced and dynamic environment (Fletcher, Rumbold, Tester & Coombes, 2011; McDougall, Nesti & Richardson, 2015). For example, in my experience in the current research, there were 2 organisational restructures and a significant turnover of staff (36 in total over the total 3 year period). As a result, there was a requirement to not only establish credibility and build relationships, but to adapt to change and do it on a year-to-year basis as staff came and went. The regular turnover, and in particular the uncertainty caused by organisational restructuring placed a further personal demand on the practitioner, as I found myself faced with the same uncertainty as others during such moments, yet also in a role whereby I could (should) provide support during such difficult moments. This appeared to also be true for players, where in a fast-changing environment with huge staff turnover, I often found myself as one of the few constants in the player's lives through which they could reflect and adapt to the change. As McDougall, Nesti and Richardson (2015) identified, this made it difficult to remain calm, congruent and authentic to myself, the very thing that I was looking to help others do during the moments where everything (including my practitioner identity) was (continually) thrown into a state of flux.

Beyond the obviously important personal qualities and skills required to perform the role, there was a need for high levels of self-awareness and a strong practitioner identity in order to face the challenges that existed within the environment, just as there was for the

players. This is aligned with the proposals for sport psychologists by Williams and Anderson (2011), who stated that the task of understanding "who you are?" as a practitioner was a significant challenge for practitioners, but one that is essential to undertake (creating a need for supervision, as will be discussed in the next section). In essence, my experience as a practitioner was beset with critical moments, just as with the players, during which I was required to answer this question for myself, sometimes for players, but more often for the organisation that was undergoing significant and ongoing change and required me to constantly re-clarify my role and purpose. It is therefore suggested that without a strong sense of who we are and what we are doing (with reference to a practitioner philosophy / framework), a lifestyle practitioner will struggle to survive and thrive in such an ever-changing environment. Being able to answer the 'who are we' question will ultimately relate back to the earlier discussion regarding the need for lifestyle practitioners to establish a philosophy of practice, to which they can remain philosophically congruent, move through the critical moments as a practitioner, and continue to provide appropriate theoretically informed support for players (and staff).

Practitioner's self-care & supervision

Within the results, it was outlined that as a lifestyle practitioner, I often found myself acting like an investigator trying to understand the different stories and narratives that were playing out within the players' lives on the programme. For example, hanging around the pavilion on the evening that players arrived for a training camp to informally gather insight into what was going on in the lives of the players, or watching players for whom I held a concern interact with their peers or coaches. On just one occasion, I noticed that Tom was quieter and more withdrawn than usual – it was these observations that led me to initiate the organising of a more in-depth "catch-up" during the camp at a more appropriate time and place. This approach was also evident during the tour to South Africa, when I tried to balance my support for Alex's struggles, and the support of others who were getting good and bad news on the night of selection – all of which played out in and around the recreation outhouse. These two moments served as good examples of the ongoing and endless reconnaissance work that was carried out through remaining vigilant to players needs at all times. The information gathered through this reconnaissance provided the foundation for my understanding of player's needs and my prioritising of actions regarding where I need to provide support. This, unstructured but very deliberate process (as outlined in the above section describing the need for immersion in the

environment) was a vital part of the role that drastically improved the quality of lifestyle support that could be delivered.

This level of vigilance and responsibility for supporting the emotional lives of the players did come at a cost. This level of vigilance was exhausting over short camps, and even more so over long tours of 4-5 weeks. Further, as a lifestyle practitioner, I often became the go-to member of staff upon whom individuals could offload, both for players and staff. Over time, this meant that the vigilance became more and more informed, and observing became more like watchful waiting as the story of the player's (or staff member's) lives became clearer. This often resulted in feeling completely drained after training camps. Or, as was evident as we returned to the city in South Africa, the feeling that I was no longer able to provide the best support for players until I took some time for myself. There was a significant need to manage myself as a practitioner, in order to remain fresh and available for others, as was the need for my role. This was identified by the head coach prior to the trip to South Africa, when he encouraged me to first look after myself, in order for me to be able to care and provide support for the players and staff on the trip. This perspective of helping yourself so that you can help others, has been reflected in other helping professions (Kelly, Campenni & Muse-Burke, 2010; Trotter-Mathison & Skovholt, 2014), and is becoming increasingly recognised in sport psychology (Chandler, Eubank, Nesti, Tod & Cable, 2016; Knowles, Gilbourne, Tomlinson & Anderson, 2007). However, due to the lack of literature available to inform the role of applied lifestyle practitioners, this has not previously been discussed with regards to this specific role.

Performing such a process for a period of three years required significant personal development with regards to my own self-care and long term engagement with expert supervision from a practitioner perspective, and a reliance on critical friends. Gilbourne and Richardson (2006) previously described engagement as a practitioner as demanding work for the reasons outlined above and warned that a tired practitioner may not be able to perform the role at the level required. Anderson, Van Raalte & Brewer (2001) further highlighted that the sense of being on call or available around the clock can be exhausting. This demand on me as a practitioner to manage and make sense of the stories that players presented to me, and to manage my own well-being on a personal level, created a necessity for supervision. In this practitioner-researcher study, I had access to supervision within the applied context, and through the engagement with critical friends in the research team as a part of the research process. These two sources of supervision were

mutually beneficial and represented an appropriate network of support with which to meet the significant personal challenge. Supervision has been described as a relatively long-term interpersonal relationship with the primary purpose to ensure the care of the athlete client, and a secondary purpose of developing competent, knowledgeable and ethical practitioners (Van Raalte & Anderson, 2000). The demands on a lifestyle practitioner with a view to supporting players concerns (as described above) required self-awareness, theoretical engagement, and philosophical congruence. It is suggested therefore that within the applied context that I and others (it can be assumed) operate, meeting these demands consistently and over the long term will require significant engagement with supervision. Within the current project, this supervision was provided in some ways through the ECB's support for their practitioners, and the supervision wrapped around the role as a result of its practitioner-researcher positioning. I therefore always had the rest of the research team available to me as a significant support network. However, it has to be acknowledged that this supervision will not always be provided to practitioners operating in similar contexts. There is therefore a two-pronged recommendation for practice. Firstly, that organisations acting in their and their employees' interests, ought to provide significant supervision for their lifestyle (and psychology) practitioners operating in similar contexts. Secondly, lifestyle (and psychology) practitioners ought to surround themselves with influential supervisors who can support their self-care, personal development and reflexivity in their role.

Supervision is widely accepted as a feature of the sport psychologists' training pathway. This has also become a growing area of sport psychology research and applied practice literature, as the importance of supervision throughout the career and especially during the early career has become increasingly appreciated for its essential role in practitioner development and ethical practice (Anderson & Williams-Rice, 1996; Holt & Strean, 2001; Knowles, Gilbourne, Tomlinson & Anderson, 2007; Tod, 2007; Sharp & Hodge, 2011). Despite the personal and theoretical demands of the role, and the responsibility for athlete wellbeing that falls on the lifestyle practitioner, there remains no discussion of such practitioner's engagement with supervision. Indeed, there appears to be no professional requirement for it - given the diversity of training pathways from which lifestyle practitioners enter the industry, and the lack of any professionalization and/or accreditation of the role, it can be assumed that the majority have not completed a period of supervised practice either prior to or during their fulfilment of the role. This is again

deemed to be to the detriment of the athlete's experience of support provision and to the practitioner's individual capacity to manage themselves within an emotionally, and professionally demanding role.

The Performance or Lifestyle debate

The discussion above regarding the value of counselling frameworks and of a practitioner's philosophy of practice and supervision would appear to suggest that the training requirements and on-going personal development of lifestyle practitioners ought to be more overtly aligned with, and committed to, psychology, in particular counselling psychology. Given the assumption within the literature that sport psychology personnel deliver athlete lifestyle roles in practice (Stambulova & Ryba, 2014) and the significant alignment between lifestyle support and large sections of sport psychology literature (e.g., career transitions), a sport psychology training pathway may provide an appropriate training pathway. However, in light of the on-going debate within sport psychology regarding the degree to which practitioners ought to exclusively focus on performance factors or adopt a more holistic focus of support, this pathway may still not provide adequate grounding for lifestyle practitioners. For example, much of the neophyte practitioner literature (Holt & Strean, 2001; Tod, Andersen & Marchant, 2009; Tod & Bond, 2010) suggests that early career practitioners are insufficiently prepared for the breadth of athlete concerns that they encounter in practice due to the excessive focus on mental skills training within their training pathway. Finally, the suggestion by players that their concerns cannot simply be separated as performance and non-performance brings into the question the separation of support roles into performance psychology and lifestyle programmes.

The lack of clarity regarding an appropriate training pathway for lifestyle practitioners, and the debate within the sport psychology community, unfortunately reflects a rather cloudy image of practitioner training backgrounds to meet athlete welfare and performance concerns. There is: 1). disagreement over the degree to which sport psychology practitioners ought to support holistic concerns and a resulting lack of training in how to do so in sport psychology training; 2). limited requirement for the psychologically-informed training required to support more holistic concerns for those who are responsible as lifestyle practitioners for doing so; 3). Player's experience of 'concerns' appear to suggest that the division created by support structures between lifestyle issues and performance issues is an artificial divide that does not reflect their experience or their concerns. In other words, those that have a specific training pathway might not develop the knowledge required nor believe

that they should support issues of a more holistic nature; and those that do support issues of a more holistic nature, do not necessarily have to have a specific training to prepare them to do so. Meanwhile, it would appear that the players believe that both performance and wellbeing issues significantly overlap and cannot always be understood separately.

<u>Intersectionality of practitioner training</u>

There has already been some discussion of the findings with regard to practitioner training. Specifically, there was discussion about lifestyle practitioners training being grounded in Psychology; the responsibility for a practitioner to have a philosophy of practice that underpins their work; and the importance of a training pathway for practitioners that includes applied experience and supervision in order to develop high levels of self-awareness, self-knowledge, and an understanding of their own requirements for balance and self-care. Whilst recognising that psychology can provide an effective educational grounding for practitioners, there are implications for what psychology, or sport psychology educational pathways might benefit from adopting within their programmes. These implications are related to what it meant to provide support for an individual within a specific context.

Firstly, it has been argued that being a contextually embedded practitioner is a necessity for the delivery of effective support. Further, for me as practitioner, this often felt and would have looked like a professionalisation of the process of "hanging out". However, it could be argued that "hanging out" has already been professionalised through the carrying out of ethnography. In this sense, it is argued that carrying out ethnography is akin to doing the appropriate socio-cultural and contextual investigation required to inform applied practice. Although there has been increased awareness of and use of ethnography within sport psychology as a discipline (Krane & Baird, 2005; Wagstaff, Fletcher & Hanton, 2012; Champ 2018), it remains relatively novel. It is argued here that learning to become an effective ethnographer would prove very helpful in attempts to become an effective applied psychology practitioner, and therefore ought to be considered a significant part of a training pathway for practitioners.

Secondly, although psychology can prove an appropriate grounding for practitioners, something that shines through the findings is that those on the receiving end of support where not just psychological entities, but were people - and people are complex in their make up as an individuals with agency who are socio-culturally situated (regardless of whether we assume a thick-thin, or thin-thick assumption of an individual's identity creation). As a practitioner, my work with players required an appreciation of their life histories, and an understanding of who they wanted to be in the future. All of this could be influenced by and

interwoven with class, socio-economic status, religion, race amongst many other factors including the micro-cultural factors within specific settings (like the EDP). For example, Alex's working class background and limited value of education interacted with an environment where this was not the norm and where he was surrounded by people that he felt different from, and at times, leaving him to feel like he did not fit in. Each part of this example was important to shape his experience of the programme. It is argued that in our attempts to support the person, we would be ill-guided in any attempts to box off the psychological, the sociological, the anthropological, the theological and the philosophical, if we are to be effective applied practitioners. The findings of the current study suggest that supporting an individual (and their identity) requires an understanding of them on each of these levels (and perhaps more). There is also an appreciation for the fact that these levels are not really levels per se, but elements of what it means to be a person that are interwoven to the point of being inseparable. It has already been suggested by Corlett (1996) that a greater degree of engagement with philosophy and the arts would be to the benefit of sport psychology practice, however this has not appeared to be reflected in the training and development of applied psychology practitioners.

Therefore, the findings of the current study call for a much greater degree of intersectionality within practitioner training pathways that can expose potential practitioners to a wider understanding of what it means to be a person, in order to better inform their future practice. Without this, it is feared that getting to the crux of how they can help those that they support in the applied world will prove very difficult, and do the potential benefit of applied support an injustice. It is argued that a formal level of training in ethnography would help practitioners to appreciate this importance and to develop the know-how of studying and revealing these levels of what it means to be a person, and appreciate the interwoven-ness of those they support as individuals with their own story, operating across specific contexts.

Research Question C: How does the broader ECB socio-cultural context and environment influence the provision of support to elite youth cricketers on a national talent development programme?

The nature of players concerns that players sought support for have been discussed, as have the requirements and demands placed on me as a practitioner in my attempts to provide the necessary support. However, neither the players concerns, nor the support provide occur within a socio-cultural vacuum. It is therefore important to consider how the broader ECB socio-cultural context and environment influenced the concerns expressed, and my ability as a practitioner to meet these with effective support. The discussion that follows seeks to do so and discusses the influence of the broader context in four sections; 1) influence of staff numbers on the PDW role, 2) valuing the educational over the relational elements of support, 3) the cost of staff turnovers and restructures, and 4) the divide between performance and lifestyle.

Influence of staff numbers on the PDW role

It was highlighted within the results section that there was a shift in beliefs about programme staffing within the ECB over the course of the research. During my earliest observations, I was struck by the amount of staff resource that existed on the programme, but also the degree of role clarity that they each had. Towards the end of the first year of the research, there began the development within the broader environment of a belief that would significantly impact the programme. The belief was that there was a need to keep the number of staff to a minimum, to ensure that players retained a level of individual responsibility and protect against players becoming over-reliant on support staff. There had grown a fear that the number of staff available to help, or 'spoon-feed' the players was partially a cause of creating players who were judged to lack independence and problem solving skills, in comparison to their international opponents. This perspective had (anecdotally) spread through mainstream media, through the county game, and had appeared to create a resentment of too many 'laptop coaches', that risked "cluttering player's minds with too much info and doing everything for them". This had created a pressure to reduce staff within England pathway programmes. The staff around me within the EDP, a programme that had carried a relatively high number of support staff, did not agree with this belief, arguing that

role clarity and programme principles aimed at nurturing player responsibility, was the antidote to this problem; not reducing staff numbers.

The impact of this belief was that decisions were taken that would influence the staffing of the EDP during the second and third years of data collection. It became a requirement for EDP management to reduce the number of staff available to players during programme delivery. This mostly related to competitive phases and tours, with domestic training camps remaining relatively unaffected. These requirements were most impactful on the PDW role, although the performance psychology role was also heavily affected. During the second year, the psychologist did not attend the pre-Christmas training tour, and only attended a third of the post-Christmas competitive tour. I (as PDW) attended all of both. Later that year, during the domestic competitive tour, the performance psychologist attended about half of the tour, but I (as PDW) only attended five days that included the preparation phase and the review at the end. The strength of this new belief was such that when I attended a game outside of these days, I was required to not wear team kit, and did not have access to the players. During the third year, I did not attend any of the two tours, due to the requirement for a doctor and security, who took up two of the limited places on the staff team, and the performance psychologist attended only the pre-Christmas tour. This meant that both the psychologist and I would not attend the Under-19 world cup, with players that we had worked with over the previous three years.

I made a number of critical observations with regard to the decisions to reduce staff numbers, and the implications for psychology and PDW support. The first observation was of the discontent and frustration that players showed when told that the support that they had come to appreciate and benefit from was being removed during what they considered key moments in the programme. The second observation was of the fact that staffing was primarily being driven by a number, rather than any principle regarding what player support was necessary. As a result, I was being informed by the head of the programme, that he "regretted" the fact that I could not attend when the decision was taken to exclude me from the staff team. A third observation was that when allocating my time on the programme, there was a pattern of removing me from the competitive phases and limiting my attendance to the preparation phase. Interestingly, players expressed their belief that this was back-to-front, highlighting that the bigger challenge for them as players and people, existed during the competitive phase. The final observation was that ultimately, despite stating the importance of providing holistic support informed by the PDW and Performance Psychology roles, these

two were the first to be removed from the programme when under pressure to reduce staff numbers. In particular, the PDW role was often deemed most disposable. This was despite the fact that the players I interviewed often stated that they benefited most from PDW and psychology support on the EDP, as these were the support roles that they had least access to when at their counties.

The end result of such decisions was that it became more difficult and at times impossible to deliver the PDW role to meet the needs of the players. For example, the requirement for long term relationships was impacted by my intermittent attendance in the programme. The requirement for immersion and contextualised understanding of player concerns was not possible due to my intermittent attendance within the context. Further, the interrelatedness of player's performance and wellbeing concerns is not represented in the decisions that removed the roles most aligned with wellbeing and support of the person. The decisions ultimately denied the PDW's access to players (and vice versa) during moments where performance is prioritised, moments that according to the players increased the personal demand on players and were filled with concerns. The perspective (and resulting decisions) regarding staff numbers that developed towards the end of that first year was incongruent with the value that the organisation stated it had in holistic development of players. Despite stating a strong value for developing the player holistically, it was ultimately the roles that were most aligned with this goal that were removed from the performance environment when staff number needed to be reduced. For example, George was entering the most important period of his time on the programme with regard to balancing his education with his increasing cricket demands. However, this was the first time that he would not have the PDW practitioner on tour with him at all over the 6-month period of the programme schedule. The degree of concern held by George, his mum and his school were therefore understandable and left me feeling frustrated as I tried to justify decisions that I disagreed with and sought to support George from a distance.

Eighteen years ago, Anderson and Morris (2000) described the difficulties experienced by lifestyle programmes when attempting to become an established area of athlete support. They described many programmes as being located on the periphery of sports infrastructure, being given limited funding and not being strongly promoted with athletes and coaches. It was identified that programmes would need clear policies and to be integrated with other athlete support programmes. It was felt then that a greater appreciation for the lives of athletes beyond sport was needed, and that this was threatened by the need to fight

for survival by achieving the performance agenda. Stambulova and Ryba (2014) outlined how the ability for athletes to access support was heavily influenced by the economic situation in their country and resulting funding limitations. In many ways, it can be argued that there has been progress in this regard within the context of cricket, as is evidenced in the PDW role being considered as a member of the support infrastructure that is provided to the players. However, stakeholder buy-in remains the biggest threat to players accessing support, due to the fact that it remains the first role to be removed from the performance environment and therefore continues to be considered a desired luxury for player support rather than a non-negotiable. Further, the findings of the current study suggest that, given the interrelatedness of issues of a wellbeing and performance nature, removing lifestyle-orientated support for the protection of the performance agenda is a false economy. The end result being that there is a greater need created to "patch up" (Priestley, 2008, p. 31) the problems that build up as a result of support removal, as opposed to creating environments that alleviate them. It is frustrating that these challenges persist, and that despite a growing appreciation for genuinely holistic support or player and person as one, ultimately, this appreciation still does not survive the pressure to allocate resources and prioritise elements of the player's support infrastructure.

Valuing the educational over the relational elements of support

There remained a strong belief within the broader context of the ECB (but not so much within the EDP) that despite the limiting of staff numbers, there was still opportunity for effective delivery of PDW support. I reflected that this showed a lack of appreciation for the complex relational element of effective PDW support. It was implied or expected that you could still turn up for the preparation phase of a tour, deliver the content necessary to allow for player development, and leave in time for the competitive phase. Indeed, this was similar to the previous discussion point with regard to the information-dominated nature of delivery; with the assumption that successful delivery was based on what you tell players, as opposed to contextualised understanding of player needs combined with trusting relationships through which to provide support. This perspective that lived within the broader context also contrasted with the players' understanding of how they benefitted from support - articulated as being a result of having a trusting, caring and confidential relationship present during their difficult moments on the programme. The decisions therefore, appeared to be ill-informed and were viewed by players as ultimately having a potentially negative impact on their holistic development and performance.

The environmental expectations of the PDW role, that was information-dominant and did not sufficiently acknowledge the relational components of effective player support, appears to mirror the positivist and reductionist nature of research that has been most prominent in the sport psychology literature. It has already been discussed that the sport psychology literature has focused too much on mental skills training through an "I-it" relationship, as opposed to person-centred support through an "I-thou" (Buber, 1958) relationship; and that this is problematic for practitioners (neophyte or experienced) looking to develop a better understanding of how they can support athletes in the applied world. It is argued that an "I-it" perspective of what support for the person might look like existed in the broader ECB socio-cultural context as well, and influenced decision making about how to position support roles within the organisation. This became particularly evident in response to the external pressure to reduce staff.

In line with what players' concerns were, and what was required of me as a PDW practitioner to support them, it is suggested that greater education and reflexivity regarding support for the person is required within the broader ECB socio-cultural context (and perhaps other sporting bodies) to better understand the required nature of player support and how it ought to be positioned. More specifically, support ought not to be limited to education and delivery of mental skills training, and ought to focus more greatly on the development of a relationship with the player, and of a contextualised understanding of player needs in order to be effective. An overly information-dominant provision of player support can be related to what Corlett (1996) described as a sophist approach to creating change. According to Corlett (1996), sophist approaches would focus exclusively on the desired performance in line with the sophist philosophy of offering skills to meet the challenges of turbulent times, without enduring the demands of traditional virtues and the philosophy underlying them. Corlett argued that sport psychologists (and lifestyle practitioners it is argued here), like the sophists of long ago, risk limiting their work to the instruction of athletes in techniques that lead to success in sport. However, Corlett argued that this is not enough for applied psychologists and that as a practitioner, "if one does not have the kind of broad and deep philosophy that familiarity with intellectual tradition brings, answers to important counselling questions can be extremely difficult to find" (p. 91). As an alternative to this technique-based work, Corlett argued for a Socratic approach promoting hard self-examination as the pathway to knowledge of self and real happiness, as opposed to "contrived or unwarranted self-confidence building" that is "nothing more than a sophist exercise in making everyone feel better for the time being

for no concrete reason", yielding only "empty affirmations with no emotional depth" (p. 91). Finally, Corlett argued that the Sophist approach would produce only occasional and intermittent short-term results at the expense of long term success.

Corlett's (1996) discussion represented a call to sport psychologists (and other supporting practitioners) to engage in more philosophically-orientated, and long-term development approaches, as opposed to a quick fix approach that brings short term gains but little sustainable success. This call appears to be equally relevant 12 years on, based on the reflections of early career psychologist's experiences in the role (Collins, Evans-Jones & O'Connor, 2011; Holt & Strean, 2001; Lindsay, Breckon, Thomas & Maynard, 2007; Tod, Andersen & Marchant, 2009; Tod & Bond, 2010). In the sport psychology literature, neophyte practitioners have often reflected feeling prepared to deliver mental skills training to athletes, only to find that this was inadequate to meet the complex and holistic needs of athletes. As a result, these practitioners have written about their philosophical alignment shifting towards a more holistic, counselling-based approach as a result of these experiences. The answers to research questions one and two certainly appear to reinforce this message. However, it is interesting that the expectation of the organisation appeared to often better reflect the Sophist philosophy, and as such, decisions were taken that made it very difficult to continue to adopt a Socratic approach to my (and the performance psychologist's) work. There has been relatively little sport psychology literature, and none from a lifestyle practitioner's perspective, that has outlined the difficulty experienced by practitioners adopting a more Socratic philosophy, as a result of beliefs and expectations for the role that exist within their organisation. From a sport psychology perspective, McDougall, Nesti and Richardson (2015) called this a 'challenge to congruence' whilst recognising that the challenges encountered by practitioners within elite sporting organisations has been inadequately considered. It is hoped that my experiences as a lifestyle practitioner within the current study, alongside this recently emerging literature (e.g., McDougall, Nesti & Richardson, 2015) can raise awareness for lifestyle practitioners challenges, and take the discussion of both lifestyle and psychology practitioner's philosophy of practice towards a new level, where the influence of the socio-cultural landscape that practitioners operate within is recognised as being a major facilitative (or debilitative) force in a practitioners ability to carry out their role as they (philosophically) believe they should.

The challenges facing sport psychologists within elite sport have been described, including the ability to fit in, develop relationships and surviving and thriving by ultimately

gaining buy-in and remaining in post (McDougall, Richardson & Nesti, 2015; Chandler, Eubank, Nesti, Tod & Cable, 2016). This has not been discussed previously from an athlete lifestyle practitioner's perspective, but the findings of the current study certainly recognise the importance of this for lifestyle practitioner roles and the similarities faced by practitioners of both roles. The findings of the current research also recognise the importance of stakeholders understanding the mechanisms of how support roles can make an impact in order to protect against decisions which inhibit the ability for practitioners to deliver the role. Further, it highlights the risk for practitioners working within organisations to fall foul of inconsistencies between espoused beliefs and values (Schein, 2010), such as a belief in providing holistic support, and the behaviour and decisions which are taken. The findings within the current study suggest that the drive towards achieving the performance agenda combined with a limited understanding of how lifestyle support can be effective, leads to a risk of decisions being taken that get in the way of effective genuinely holistic support for athletes.

The organisational challenges that create a barrier to performing the role, are (sadly) consistent with what Priestley (2008) found 10 years ago, including a pre-occupation with workshop delivery at the expense of one-to-one support, the requirement for localised practitioners to facilitate the patient building of trusting relationships, the lack of clear training and development for lifestyle practitioners that draws on counselling psychology as a blueprint and the lack of appreciation for how practitioners philosophically ground their practice. Priestley (2008) also identified the inability of mental skills training and technique based symptom relief to alleviate the concerns due to the complexity of player concerns. Priestley also concluded that separating the lifestyle practitioner and performance psychology roles would be best guided by "modality of practice, training and competence and operational philosophy" (p. 462) as opposed to a separation of support in and out of sport. It is frustrating that 10 years on, the same challenges exist. It is hoped that the current research stimulates conversation and can provide a reference point to inform discussion regarding the provision of player support, the requirements of effective practitioners and the influence of the broader organisation towards enabling (or not) effective player support. Most importantly, it appears that organisations ought to engage in their own conversation and look to align these three factors, as evidence suggests that without this alignment, the holistic support and development of players will continue to be stifled.

The cost of staff turnover and restructures

Earlier in the discussion, it was highlighted that coaches are one of the most important actors within a youth sport context and that they play an influential role in either facilitating or hindering the development of young athletes (Camire, Forneris, Trudel, & Bernard, 2011). During the research, this was reflected in the level of importance that players placed on the task of maintaining a positive relationship with their coach(es). For example, Tom outlined the difficulties he faced when there seemed to be a difference of opinion between England coaches and his county coaches, regarding what he needed to improve in his game. He also reflected that having the necessary conversation to resolve this difference of opinion required a strong trusting relationship, and a lot of courage on his part. Further, he found the time, work and organisation required to maintain relationships with coaches stressful; and the personal challenge of experiencing the tension within such an important relationship to be anxiety-provoking. Alex outlined that he found it hard to work with a coach unless they exclusively had his interests at heart and that he could trust them to do so over the long term. The opposite for him was a coach with whom he would not work with for very long and who sought to change his technique without knowledge of the history that sat behind it. For Alex, the split between county and England also seemed to reflect a difference in having his interests at heart, in the sense that he had a more long-term relationship with his county coaches and therefore felt that he could trust them with his development more than those at England. Finally, George was highly independent and capable of driving his own development. However, there was concern that the coaches in his life would not understand or appreciate his want to achieve a balance between cricket and education by choosing to go to university. This all appeared to highlight the importance for coaches to gain an in-depth understanding of a player's broader life in order to understand how cricket fit into who they wanted to be. This is especially important given the perspective from players outlined earlier, that the two (cricketer and person) cannot be separated, and that decisions and progress in one heavily influenced decisions and progress in the other.

Through these findings, it became evident that the quality of relationships that the players were able to establish with staff, and coaches in particular, was viewed by players as having an impact on their wellbeing, performance and on-going development. The level of trust within the relationship and the sense that the coach had their best interests at heart influenced some player's preparedness to take messages on board (especially in light of the mixed messages which they could receive). The quality of the coach-player relationship also

influenced the player's ability to have the challenging conversations that were sometimes necessary to continue learning and/or overcome differences of opinion regarding the direction of a player's development. Having the ability to do so could help players to maintain alignment between their direction of development and the plan which coaches had to support it. Finally, the quality of the relationship also appeared to impact the players sense of authenticity and ability to "be themselves" in the environment, which was perceived by players and coaches as having the potential to impact performance.

The majority of staff that I encountered on the programme shared the player's belief in the power of the coach-player relationship to positively influence player development. However, the degree to which staff turnover was a part of year-to-year life on the programme created a very real barrier to the development of long-term trusting relationships between coaches and players. Over the course of the 3 years on the programme, there was a total of 36 staff who delivered on the programme. These 36 are staff that players engaged with on top of the staff they worked with at their counties, or on their school's cricket programmes. Further, this only accounted for significant stakeholders within cricket, and does not take into account teachers, family or friends that were also a part of their lives. A manifestation of staff turnover could be seen in Alex's narrative, as he worked with three different bowling coaches and two different batting coaches, over the course of a single EDP winter programme schedule. It was therefore no surprise, when he reflected that he was hesitant to take advice from any of them when it contradicted advice that he had received from a county coach, with whom he had enjoyed a more consistent and long term engagement. For both the players and staff, getting to know each other and establishing trust was central to them making progress. However, the level of coach turnover meant that developing the impactful relationships was difficult, or for some, impossible. As a result, Alex (and some others) came to believe that he should disengage from the coaches in order to protect the clarity that he had established with his county coaches from becoming diluted by different messages. Inevitably this would have a negative effect on the uptake of messages that the England coaches wanting to convey in order to shape a player's development.

Players (and coaches) recognition of just how important the coach-athlete relationship was to successful player development is consistent with literature in the area. Jowett & Cockerill (2002) described the coach-athlete relationship as a platform from which the coach and the athlete interact in unique ways in order to bring about performance accomplishments, success and satisfaction. Further Jowett (2003) outlined that although there is no conclusive

evidence to suggest that a causal relationship exists between the quality of the coach-athlete relationship and performance accomplishments, there is some evidence to indicate that successful relationships are likely to include positive interpersonal qualities such as trust, respect, commitment and understanding (Hemery, 1986; Vernacchia, McGuire, Reardon & Templin, 2000; Greenleaf, Gould & Diffenbach, 2001; Jowett & Cockerill, 2002;). The importance of trust within a working alliance has long been recognised within sport psychology, and other helping professions, but has perhaps been less emphasised within coaching literature, that instead focused heavily on topics such as leadership and motivational climate (Jowett, 2003) and passion (Lafreniere, Jowett, Vallerand & Carbonneau, 2011). However, the emphasis placed on trust by players in the current research, and the difficulty of establishing and maintaining it within the transient day-to-day reality of a talent development programme would provide a valuable area for study in the future, both a player and coach perspective.

As a practitioner-researcher engaging with both players and coaches (as well as other support staff), I came to understand the staff turnover as something of a contradiction between the beliefs of those working on the EDP programme, and the decisions taken by the broader organisation. The importance of developing long-term relationships was consistently identified as a strong principle of the programme and was often stressed as being particularly important during the adolescent stage of development which the EDP players were in. However, this principle was not reflected in decisions taken by the broader organisation that created a high level of staff turnover on the programme and directly impacted the coaching (and other) staff's ability to develop relationships with players. These decisions were often a knock-on of the two significant re-structures that occurred during the three years. The number of full-time members of staff working exclusively on the programme was reduced by the restructures and the resulting redundancies. As a result, staff from the county game were contracted to work on the programme for whole winters, or parts of a winter. For example, one fast bowling coach may cover from September to December, and another may then cover from January until the end of the tours in early spring. However, as well as the impact of reducing the full-time staff, some decisions were also taken or justified, through beliefs about what players needed. It was often stated that players would benefit from being exposed to as many different voices and experiences as possible, from those who have played the game at the highest level. Ensuring that this was the case often came at the cost of a more consistent presence of a coach, engaging with players over the long term. This (again) appeared to

reflect an information-dominant view of what players needed to develop and conflicted with what players and staff believed was necessary; the development of long-term trusting relationships.

From a programme and PDW perspective, there was a further cost of high staff turnover. The programme was described in the results as a strongly principled programme. However, with increasing levels of staff turnover, and brief intermittent presence of staff on the programme, it became harder and harder over time to maintain the strength and consistency of these principles. A good example of this was outlined in George's narrative, as one coach outlined a belief regarding player's educational decisions which strongly contradicted the stated principle of the programme that players should develop themselves within the game, and within their educational/vocational direction. Increasingly throughout the research, this became a concern for programme management (and me) with regard to the programmes ability to live its principles through the actions of its staff. As a result, significant time and effort had to be dedicated to educating staff on the programme principles and the beliefs that underpinned them. With decreasing levels of staff permanency, these attempts at getting people on board with the programme principles decreased in their efficacy, and in the amount of time for which the education could have an impact for.

Finally, it was outlined in the results how important it was for providing effective support as a PDW, to have multiple ears on the ground through the other staff on the programme. However, the ability for these staff observations to lead to effective player support depended on my relationship as a PDW with the coaches (which also required time to develop in strength and trust) and the individual's understanding of adolescent development and how the PDW role could support players. Both of these things took time to develop and nurture. However, it was increasingly the case during my time as a practitioner-researcher, that by the time this point was reached (or sometimes beforehand), the member of staff left and a new one arrived, only for me and the programme to start the process of educating and relationship building again. This created a revolving door which made continuous improvement as a staff team difficult and gathering insight to inform player support through the other support staff equally challenging.

In summary, the programme, its staff and the players placed significant value on the consistency of staff presence on the programme, and the opportunity to develop long term trusting relationships through which to positively contribute to player development. However,

decisions taken within the broader ECB socio-cultural context, which sometimes aimed to reduce the number of full-time or permanent programme staff, and sometime aimed to expose players to as many different experts as possible, provided a significant barrier to doing so. This contradicted the principles embodied by the programme, and was reflected on by me, players and programme staff as being detrimental to player development.

The divide between performance and lifestyle

At several points throughout this thesis, there has been discussion of the relationship between sport psychology and athlete lifestyle programmes. Within question 1, it was outlined that an athlete's wellbeing and performance are not necessarily dichotomised and are, in fact, heavily interrelated. Therefore, the divide between performance and lifestyle/wellbeing that is created by support structures that include performance psychology and lifestyle practitioner roles, may reflect a false dichotomy, and hinder some elements of genuinely holistic support. It could be argued as a result, that athlete lifestyle and performance psychology roles need not be so clearly separated. Within the discussion of research question 2, the significant overlap between the two roles was outlined. It was suggested that lifestyle support would benefit from being more explicitly aligned with the discipline of psychology given the nature of concerns that lifestyle practitioners may find themselves supporting, or proactively looking to support. However, the discussion regarding the overlap between the two roles was described as being complicated by the debate that exists within the discipline of sport psychology regarding the degree to which practitioners have a responsibility to provide support beyond the athletes sporting performance. Therefore, the divide between concerns of a lifestyle or wellbeing nature and those of a performance nature is not as clear as organisational support structures, that include performance psychology and athlete lifestyle practitioner roles, might appear.

Within the organisational context of the current research, the two roles are separated, administrated and delivered by different practitioners for different purposes. The primary purpose of the PDW role was to provide "integrated, impartial support to players and the team environment, to develop resilience in and out of cricket;" whilst the performance psychology role was designed to "work with coaches, as well as directly with players, to help optimize the mental development, mental readiness and ongoing mental performance of players in the England squads". It is argued here that these two missions significantly overlap and are interrelated. Indeed, my experiences suggest that I, as the PDW, and the performance

psychology practitioners that I worked with acknowledged (informally) this overlap and interrelation. Communication between the two practitioners was a necessity to planning support, as the two roles were most effective when closely co-ordinated and operating from a shared perspective and collaborative approach. Those within the environment also appeared to acknowledge (informally) the need for both practitioners to work closely together, and often referred to the area that both operate across as the "psych-social" area. As such, it was consistently my experience within the three years that I would operate in an informal "psych-social" team with the performance psychologist, with dynamic and unwritten rules evolving about how we would collectively go about meeting the player's holistic needs.

There were elements of our (PDW and Performance Psychologist) two roles that we each performed independently. For example, conducting school visits was clearly the duty of the PDW, and creating pressure scenarios alongside coaches in training was clearly the duty of the performance psychologist. However, in order to understand the player as a person and best establish their support needs, it often required a conversation to share perspectives on player's current reality across their whole lives, in and out of cricket. This conversation was facilitated by both practitioners being in a position to articulate their philosophies of practice and how these can best work together to provide holistic support to players and did often prove very effective. However, the risk with this structure of holistic support is that its effectiveness depended on the shared belief that this whole understanding was necessary, and through the establishment of a working relationship and philosophical understanding between the two practitioners. It also depended on both practitioners sharing theoretical reference points through educational backgrounds. It did not occur through any formal structures or requirement of the two roles. In other words, this was achieved by chance and individual negotiation, not by structure and design – something that therefore, cannot be controlled for.

With regard to the relationship between lifestyle practitioners and sport psychologists, the findings of this study suggest that it would be ill-guided to consider "on-field" and "off-field" issues as two separate areas to address in isolation. Instead the findings suggest that issues away from sport required careful consideration of sporting elements of the players lives, and vice versa. This dispels any notion of issues being strictly either performance, or non-performance in nature. This is important, as it suggests that truly holistic support of athletes by performance psychologists and lifestyle practitioners is not simply about dividing roles and responsibilities into performance and personal concerns, but about understanding the person and the meaning they ascribe to their lived experiences. This suggests that

practitioner philosophies of practice and the theoretical underpinnings of support provision could prove a better guide for practitioner support roles, than dividing or assigning responsibilities with regard to their perceived level of on-field influence. The alternative, and current status quo risks a situation whereby athletes are not sure who they should speak to regarding their concerns, or, whereby certain athlete concerns are not being considered by either practitioner as a necessary element of the support they offer due to their training or practitioner philosophy.

Therefore, the findings of the current study do raise questions as to why the two roles are so independent of each other within the organisational structure. The findings suggest that the necessary communication between supporting practitioners that is required to provide genuinely holistic support occurs as a result of need and practitioner philosophies, not currently as a formal requirement of the job. The findings of this study would therefore suggest that the delivery of genuinely holistic support would be improved by one of two options. The first option is to operate as a formally recognised psych-social team whose success in delivery is formally recognised as requiring collaboration and shared perspectives. This could be informed by individual practitioner's philosophies of practice that are grounded in psychology, as opposed to dividing different elements of the players' psychological experiences into different roles and responsibilities for each practitioner to try and meet the needs of the player through role specific tasks. The second option could be to put in place a single practitioner role that provides psych-social support which treats performance and non-performance as one and the same and therefore does provide truly holistic support. Whichever option an organisation pursues, it should be acknowledged that separating the personal and the sporting is ill-informed; and that a practitioner's training, personal development and philosophy of practice will influence the practitioner's ability and willingness to provide holistic support more so than dividing roles and responsibilities into two clear cut support roles. This creates a significant responsibility for sporting bodies to understand what they are getting from individuals that they recruit, as opposed to relying on a job description to ensure genuinely holistic support is provided.

It is hoped that the discussion above makes an important contribution to our understanding of what genuinely holistic support is and how it might be provided. This discussion has not previously existed from the perspective of a lifestyle practitioner. However, there has been significant discussion in the literature regarding the value for, and/or the responsibility of sport psychologist to support performance or wellbeing (Brady & Maynard, 2010), or both through a client-centred approach (Ravizza, 2002; Nesti, 2004). This

debate so far, has not accounted for the fact that practitioners may be employed as performance psychologists alongside lifestyle practitioners, or in my case, as a lifestyle practitioner alongside a performance psychologist. The debate has often discussed the issue from the perspective of practitioner ethics and responsibilities, yet there has been little discussion with regard to what this debate would mean for practitioner roles within organisations, and what the implications might be for the division of support roles by organisations into performance psychology and lifestyle. It is believed that this is the first piece of research that has looked to use findings to inform the debate from this perspective, and it is actively encouraged that others should look to do the same. This is especially pertinent given the (incorrect) assumptions within the literature that "sport psychology personnel" deliver the lifestyle programmes in practice (Stambulova & Ryba, 2014), and the findings that suggest the splitting of support into performance and non-performance to be a false dichotomy. It is important for this to be discussed and debated more broadly to ensure genuinely holistic support for athletes and protect against the risk of breaking up the athlete's holistic experiences into different roles and responsibilities for different practitioners, without consideration of how those practitioners will need to meet the support need.

Conclusion & Applied Recommendations

This research project attempted to seize the opportunities to develop the current literature base with regard to talent development, dual career athlete experiences, adolescent support needs, organisational demands of athletes and practitioners, career development and transitions and understanding the holistic athlete experience. The research project also makes a significant contribution to applied support of cricketers, and athletes across other sports. Given the complexity of the research it is considered important to provide a succinct answer to the question that can be asked of any project, "So what?" Therefore, what follows is a summary of the aims of the research and the findings that have been discussed in order to clarify the recommendations, and take-home messages for two primary groups. Firstly, the findings are considered important for practitioners who occupy player support roles such as lifestyle practitioner, or Sport/Performance psychologist. Secondly, the findings are considered important for the sporting organisations and/or national governing bodies that design, recruit for and administrate the support infrastructures that aim to meet athlete's needs, contribute to their positive development and ultimately help athletes to deliver high performance.

In the introduction, it was outlined that there were a number of project aims as a result of these opportunities. Firstly, the project aimed to understand the lifestyle concerns of elite youth cricketers within the context of a national talent development programme and the player's adolescent stage of development. Secondly, the project adopted a methodology that would allow for the cricketer's voices to be presented, and to prioritise individual experience and meaning making, something that was deemed to be missing from previous research. Thirdly, a practitioner-researcher approach was adopted to allow for the researcher to become an active member of the projects socio-cultural context, enabling a uniquely applied perspective to permeate the research. In doing so, it is believed that the project meets the need for more socio-culturally and contextually informed research, and the need to blend the theoretical and the applied (Stambulova & Ryba, 2014). Finally, in recognition of the absence of research that is explicitly aligned with athlete lifestyle support during adolescence or within talent development programmes, the current study explicitly examined the nature of concerns for which young cricketers sought support within a national talent development programme, and within the context of the player-practitioner relationship. Aligned with these aims, the project sought to answer three research questions:

A. What is the nature of and personal meaning ascribed to elite youth cricketer's lifestyle concerns?

B. What demand does the nature of elite youth cricketer concerns place on the PDW practitioner with regard to skills, philosophy of practice and organisational integration?

C. How did the broader ECB socio-cultural context and environment influence the provision of support to elite youth cricketers on a national talent development programme?

Regarding question A, the findings outlined that the players sought support for lifestyle concerns that were specific to the individual, deeply personal and psychological in nature. These were broadly categorised as relating to: (1) adapting to the EDP environment, (2) managing competing demands, (3) educational choices and professional contracts. It has been acknowledged that the themes are integrated with and inseparable from their life circumstances and the player's adolescent stage of development. The concerns were less about performance or wellbeing, and more about the players as people trying to perform, suggesting that the idea of separating performance and non-performance was a false dichotomy. The player's appreciation of lifestyle support reflected this and reflected their understanding that support for their wellbeing tended to improve performance, and vice versa.

Answering the second research question (Question B) included a discussion of skills, philosophy of practice and organisational positioning. It was suggested that the training and personal development of practitioners ought to be grounded in psychology. With regard to counselling approaches in psychology, it is acknowledged that a wide range of approaches could be drawn upon to carry out effective support. However, the findings in this project highlight that although an existential-humanistic psychology approach is less often discussed, it too can offer a very valuable perspective for applied lifestyle (or similarly aligned) practice. Further, practitioner work should adopt a "Socratic" (Corlett, 1996) approach of self-examination and long term personal development, as opposed to looking for quick fix solutions to the challenges faced by players. It was argued that in order to have the desired impact, practitioners would require the level of contextual awareness that can only be achieved through being embedded in the performance environment. It was argued that due to the psychological component of lifestyle practitioner's work, practitioners have a responsibility to ensure that their work is underpinned by a philosophy of practice that is

grounded in psychological theory. This responsibility should be a driving force behind lifestyle practitioner training and on-going personal development. Finally, it was reflected that the challenges faced by practitioners within elite sporting environments, meant that alongside the personal qualities and skills required to deliver the role (e.g., counselling skills, communication skills), practitioners would require a strong sense of identity and high levels of self-awareness. As a result, it has been stressed that high levels of self-care and supervision are required for practitioners due to the personal cost of performing a role that was at times all-encompassing and required high levels of vigilance and personal responsibility. This includes supervision during the training of practitioners, and also the engagement in supervision as a form of "critical friend (Sparkes & Smiths, 2002) or other similar mentorship within a (more professionalized) industry.

There was discussion with regard to the influence of the broader ECB socio-cultural landscape (Question C) on the ability of the player-practitioner relationship to lead to effective support and positive player development. It was highlighted how the pressure to reduce staff numbers within the performance environment, led to the reduced access of the PDW practitioner to players, and vice versa. This was believed by me (as the practitioner) and the players, to be detrimental to performance, wellbeing and the player's long term development. The decisions that reduced PDW access highlighted the fact that the actual provision of player support is still not reflective of the organisation's (and presumably others) stated values of providing genuinely holistic support. In other words, lifestyle and/or psychology support was generally the first to be removed from the environment when staff numbers needed to be reduced, despite the fact that many players reflected that they valued these elements of the programme due to the limited consistent support that was available at their county. It was highlighted that the organisation's expectations of lifestyle-orientated support were heavily information-dominant and appeared to understate the relational elements of effective player support. Paradoxically, the relational elements of support were highlighted as being most important by both players and me as a practitioner. It is argued that the significant stakeholders within the broader socio-cultural context would benefit from developing a greater awareness of the more relational elements of support and how they contribute to player development. If this is not developed, there is a risk that the recruitment of athlete support staff (such as athlete lifestyle advisors and sport psychologists) as well as the day-to-day decisions and/or actions of people fulfilling these roles may not prioritise the elements of support that have been outlined in this study as making a significant contribution

to the player's professional and personal development. It was highlighted that the impact of organisational restructuring and staffing decisions, which created a high level of staff turnover, was considered (by players and support staff) to be detrimental to the development of long-term trusting relationships between players and support staff. Players and staff reflected that it was through these long-term trusting relationships that coaches (and other support staff) could create the positive change and player development which everyone aimed for. It is suggested that the organisation within this study (and presumably others) would benefit from giving greater priority to the players' and staff member's opportunities to develop long-term relationships when making decisions that impact the day-to-day delivery of talent development programmes. Finally, it was highlighted that the splitting of a player's psychological experiences and concerns into the two separate roles of performance psychology and a lifestyle practitioner risks reducing the ability for players to access genuinely holistic support. It is therefore suggested that support organisations recognise the false dichotomy between wellbeing and performance and choose to build a support infrastructure that recognises the holistic nature of the athlete's experiences; and that is underpinned by practitioner philosophies of practice and their theoretical underpinning. This would be a shift from a provision of support roles that reflect a division of roles and responsibilities between the wellbeing or non-performance areas of an athlete's life, and the performance areas. This false dichotomy is considered to be a risk to the provision of genuinely holistic person-centred support that starts with the human experience of athletes, rather than the division of roles and responsibilities of practitioners.

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<u>Appendices</u>

<u>Appendix 1.0: Stambulova's 5-step career planning strategy</u>

The 5-step plan below, is taken from Stambulova's (2010) article that outlined this process as a structure for helping athletes with career planning.

Step 1: Make a Framework

- o Draw a life/timeline and mark your birth (e.g., the year) as an initial point

on the left.

- o Mark your current age (or year) as the second point on the line. Now you

have a framework: the past, the present, and the future.

Step 2: Structure Your Past

- o Please take some time to think and then tell about the most important

events in your life before now. When did these events happen? Mark their
time points on the lifeline.

Step 3: Structure Your Present

- o What are the most important parts of your life right now? Write them down as a
column.
- o Please rank these parts of life on three different scales:

(a) personal importance
(b) time spent
(c) stress level

Use 1 as the greatest importance/time/level. Analyse your ranking: Do you devote enough time to your priorities (i.e. the most important areas)? How stressful are your priority areas? Why?

Step 4: Structure Your Future

- o Think and then tell about the most important events you wish for/expect
- o in the future?
- o During your whole life. Mark them on the lifeline

- o During the next 10 years (a bit more detail)

- o During the next 5 years

- o During the next 3 years

- o During the next year (the most detailed)

Step 5: Bridge Your Past, Present, and Future

A. From the present to the past and back:

- o What were the most difficult moments/periods in your life before today?

- o How did you cope?

- o What lessons did you learn from your hard experiences?

- o What were the most successful moments/periods in your life before

- o today?

- o What lessons did you learn from your positive experiences?

B. From the present to the future:

- o What do you want to achieve in the priority areas for you right now?

- o Let's formulate your goals (e.g., for the nearest six-month/one-year

- o period).

- o Analyse your internal/external resources (helping conditions/factors) to

- o reach your goals in your priority areas.

- o Analyse your internal/external barriers (interfering conditions/factors)

- o to reaching your goals. Think about how to overcome them.

- o Make an action plan to reach your goals. Think about how to best use

- o the lessons you learned from your past experiences.

C. From the future to the present (balancing present and future priorities):

- o Come back to your plans (wished for/expected events) for the next

- o 3–5 years. Can you do anything today to prepare for the coming

- o events/demands/challenges?

- o Do you still think that you have the right priorities right now? If not, try

- o to adjust them to your future plans.

Appendix 2: Job Descriptions

Appendix 2.1

England and Wales Cricket Board and

Professional Cricketers Association Personal Development & Welfare Coach

1. PURPOSE OF THE JOB

Responsible for the provision of world class Personal Development & Welfare support to County Academy and Professional Cricketers at designated first class counties in the North Region (to include Lancashire & Yorkshire) & England Pathway Programmes where designated.

2. ORGANISATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

The ECB/PCA Personal Development Coach will report directly to the National Lead for Personal Development & Welfare on all matters. In addition, he or she may sometimes be required to liaise with the ECB's Head of Science and Medicine Manager (HS&M) and Professional Cricketers Association (PCA) with reference to the ECB/PCA Personal Development & Welfare Programme delivery

3. PRINCIPAL RESPONSIBILITIES

- Lead the delivery of Personal Development & Welfare (PDW) support to designated County Academies, Professional Staff and Teams.
- Deliver individual PDW support to players as agreed with County Academy Directors and Cricket Coaches on an as needs and prioritised basis.
- Provide a signposting and referral mechanism for players identified with specific needs outside of PDW's core remit (e.g. psychological, clinical presenting problems).
- Agree an appropriate PDW workshop programme with County Academy Directors. Plan the delivery of workshops and source appropriate facilitators when he / she does not possess the requisite skills or experience. Encourage other county support staff to co-deliver and / or participate whenever appropriate or possible.
- Deliver the Lifestyle units of the Apprenticeship in Sporting Excellence (NVQ: Achieving Excellence in Sport Performance) to County Academy players.

- Work as a member of an integrated support team with cricketers, Academy Directors and Coaches, ECB Science and Medicine Team, PCA, and other support staff to identify and support players' needs.

- Regularly report to the National Lead for Personal Development & Welfare on the delivery of support at his / her counties in relation to the PDW discipline's objectives.

- Regularly support identified county players who are also on England Pathway Programmes & report to members of the PDW team with a remit & responsibility for that particular England team.

- Attend regular PDW Team meetings as directed by the National Lead and promote ECB/PCA Personal Development & Welfare within the game

- Work closely with the PDW Team to ensure a consistency of delivery across all County Academies and work with Professional Staff.

- To contribute to the future development & innovation of the ECB/PCA Personal Development & Welfare Programme within cricket.

- Complete the Graduate Certificate in Careers Counselling for Elite Performers within the first 18 months of employment if not already in possession of this or similar Lifestyle Management or Coaching qualification.

- Undertake continued professional development in order to continually strive for excellence within this field.

- Liaise closely with the National Lead for ECB/PCA Personal Development & Welfare and be prepared to undertake any other duties relating to the work of these functions as required, e.g. England Teams' support, administration, project work.

- Self-managed & directed work programme in consultation with National Lead

- Understanding of working Weekends & weekday evenings as part of regular winter work with academies.

- Undertake work from time to time with teams outside the northern region, at training camps and on tour as designated by the National Lead for Personal Development and Welfare.

4. NATURE AND SCOPE OF JOB

a) Job Context

The aim of the ECB Science and Medicine Department is to maximise England's best player's availability and performance. Enabling players to excel and develop sustainable

performance within and outside cricket through the delivery of PDW services is a core component of achieving this aim. The ECB/PCA Personal Development Coach is responsible for the delivery of the ECB/PCA Personal Development & Welfare Programme to First Class Counties in a designated region under the guidance of the National Lead for the ECB/PCA PDW Programme.

The Personal Development and Welfare Programme is a joint venture between the ECB and Professional Cricketers Association. It is a personalised support service which recognises that cricket is likely to be the main focus in a player's life. The ECB/PCA Personal Development and Welfare Programme is a nationwide, seamless, continual support throughout the Elite player pathway in English cricket that supports transitions, ensures review of learning and personal development (induction/exit points) and empowers and develops players and coaches to be acutely aware of what it takes to be sustainably and consistently able to perform in relation to expectations within these seven key areas:

- Professional Player Preparation
- Personal Welfare Support
- Self-Awareness & management
- Interpersonal skill development
- Transitional Support
- Experiential Learning
- Dual Aspirations Support

b) Working Relationships

- Cricketers, parents and teachers
- Academy Directors, Cricket Coaches & Support Staff
- ECB and PCA colleagues
- ECB Head of Science and Medicine
- PCA Group Director i/c of Player Services
- Coach Education Department
- PLAN coordinator
- External Partner organizations & facilitators
- PL Advisers from the Home Country Institutes and other professional sports

4. KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE

Essential:

- Sound knowledge of and experience in personal, career and education guidance.
- Good undergraduate honours degree in related field
- Excellent experience & competence at high level inter-personal, presentation, facilitation, negotiation, counselling and communication skills.
- An in-depth understanding of the issues facing high performance people and the challenges of career change.
- Computer literacy, including MS office.
- Experience of working with young & adult performers.
- Knowledge of the UK education system.
- Flexibility towards work schedule and willingness to travel within the UK.
- Full Driving Licence.

Desirable:

- Knowledge of the essential structure of the ECB and its relationship with the major counties.
- Knowledge of essential operations of the PCA.
- Experience of playing sport (ideally cricket) at an elite level
- Undergraduate or Postgraduate Qualifications in Career Counselling /Counselling /Psychology/Coaching / Learning & Development/ Performance Lifestyle
- Project management experience
- Highly developed analytical skills.

Appendix 2.2

JOB DESCRIPTION – PERFORMANCE LIFESTYLE ADVISOR (working with GB Wheelchair Basketball and GB Para Table Tennis)

Grade: Level 2 (All Sciences)

Hours of Work: Such hours as necessary to carry out your duties. This will involve a minimum of 30 hours per week (4 days) and may include working outside normal office hours at evenings and weekends and on Public Holidays.

Location: The normal place of work is the English Institute of Sport in Sheffield, however the EIS may from time to time require you to travel to and work at other offices and attend camps and competitions.

Responsible to: EIS Performance Lifestyle Technical Lead (recruiting manager) and the relevant Heads of Performance Support from both sports.

ROLE SUMMARY

This role will provide the delivery and development of Performance Lifestyle support to world class programme athletes complimenting the objectives of each sport and working as part of a multi-disciplinary team.   As a member of the Performance Lifestyle team at the EIS you will contribute to knowledge sharing and development across the organisation to support the development of world class Performance Lifestyle services.

All Performance Lifestyle practitioners, as with any other EIS practitioners, are expected to work within the HCSI Professional Code of practice to ensure the highest standards of practice are met at all times.

PERFORMANCE LIFESTYLE DELIVERY PRINCIPLES

Performance Lifestyle works with a person first approach, to provide an individual service to funded World Class Programme (WCP) athletes that centres upon:

- Proactively engaging athletes in future life planning and career development, with the emphasis on early intervention and continued personal and professional development

throughout their time on the WCP.

- Encouraging and facilitating dual career aspirations with effective management of the balance between sporting and non-sporting commitments, to protect performance potential.

- Promoting the importance and impact of athletes creating and developing broader identities and interests beyond their sport in maintaining personal well-being.

- Providing support and education around finding and managing the optimal personal balance for conflicting demands e.g. from education, employment, family, financial etc. to protect performance potential.

- Supporting athletes from a lifestyle perspective as they transition on to, through and from the WCP.

- Providing proactive exit support for athletes leaving the WCP for up to 6months after funding cessation.

- Providing a safe, impartial and where appropriate confidential space to support athletes – sign posting and referring onward as appropriate to safeguard the welfare and well-being of the athlete.

- Working in partnership with athlete and high performance stakeholders to support and encourage a culture that delivers performance and responsibly cares for its people.

- Contribute to knowledge development, aggregation and sharing across the organisation to support the development of world class performance lifestyle services and the high-performance system #CollectiveBrilliance.

Associated Responsibilities:

1. Work closely with the Performance Lifestyle Technical Lead and EIS Head of Performance Lifestyle to assure the quality and consistency of support to World Class programme athletes.
2. Attend, contribute to and provide regular reports at appropriate meetings associated with the above sports and to key stakeholders including other EIS colleagues and NGB staff

This job description is not to be regarded as exclusive or exhaustive. It is intended as an outline indication of the areas of activity and will be amended in the light of the

changing needs of the organisation.

PERSON SPECIFICATION – PERFORMANCE LIFESTYLE ADVISOR LEVEL 2

COMPETENCY AREA	ESSENTIAL / DESIRABLE	ASSESSED BY
Qualifications		
Degree level (or equivalent) in sports management, sports science or a discipline relevant to the management and personal development of high performing individuals; or significant experience of education systems or elite sporting systems from an athlete or coaching perspective.	Essential	Sight of certificates / assessment of experience
Higher degree level (or equivalent) in sports management, sports science or a discipline relevant to the management and personal development of high performing individuals.	Desirable	Sight of certificate
Professional coaching and mentoring qualification (level 7 equivalent) and/or individual accreditation (i.e. EMCC or ICF).	Desirable	Sight of accreditation
Talented Athlete Lifestyle Support Qualification, Level 3	Desirable	Sight of qualification
Experience		
Significant exposure to high performance athletes' issues and the experience and credibility to facilitate solutions which impact on wellbeing and performance	Essential	Application Interview
Experience in contributing to the design, content, delivery and evaluation of education and development interventions for individuals and groups	Essential	Interview
Experience of supporting personal development of clients through coaching and mentoring	Essential	Application Interview

Experience of working within a multi-disciplinary team in the delivery of support services in a high performance environment.	Essential	Application Interview
Experience of developing and implementing innovative ideas and putting them into practice, including working in an applied and integrated manner.	Essential	Application Interview
Experience in providing education and career management development advice and guidance.	Essential	Application Interview
Exposure to World, Olympic or International level coaches, support services and athletes in competition or camp environment	Desirable	Application Interview
Experience of mentoring athletes within the TASS network	Desirable	Application Interview
Knowledge and Skills		
An understanding of the needs of elite athletes and coaches in a high performance environment	Essential	Interview
A good understanding of how UK further and higher educational establishments currently deliver education	Essential	Interview
An understanding of the principles of effective planning, goal-setting and time management	Essential	Interview Assessment
An understanding of the multi-disciplinary practice of various sports science and medicine disciplines surrounding elite athletes	Essential	Interview
Highly developed interpersonal skills, communication and self-awareness with the ability to build rapport quickly, leading to strong and productive relationships	Essential	Interview Assessment
Basic coaching and mentoring skills	Essential	Interview Assessment

Strong negotiating and influencing skills	Essential	Interview Assessment
An interest in sport and recognition of the importance of promoting and supporting equality, safeguarding and anti-doping within sport.	Essential	Interview
An understanding of career management and development theory and practice	Desirable	Interview
Can demonstrate knowledge and awareness of Athlete Support Personnel roles and responsibilities under the 2015 World Anti-Doping Code	Desirable	Interview
Having the willingness to engage with and support continuous professional development in anti-doping, i.e. UKAD Accredited Advisor Certification	Desirable	Interview

Essential Requirement:

Please note: there is an absolute expectation that any new Performance Lifestyle practitioner will wholeheartedly engage with our professional training programme which includes undertaking the Institute of Leadership & Management's Level 7 Certificate in Executive Coaching & Leadership Mentoring and will work towards completion of this within a strict 2yr period, the dates of which would be clearly agreed as part of commencing employment. Failure to engage as expected or to complete the programme in the agreed timescale may lead to a full or partial recoupment of the costs and a potential review of continued employment.

Appendix 3: Interview guide

Introduction

The interview will aim to capture your experiences of your time on the England Development Programme right from the beginning, through until the end whenever you left the programme. I will look to focus on when you got selected, the staff and people who supported you, your thoughts on the environment there, the major challenges you faced, the role of the PDW and finally the period of time when you left the programme.

Early stages

The aim of this section is to explore the time of you getting selected for the EDP, and some of your first experiences of it.

- Selection and its impact on you?
- How you felt?
- First impressions of the programme
- Any particular challenges in first experiences of the programme
- Balancing workloads? Conflict?

Including a discussion of importance of selection, the impact it had on them, and some of the new demands and expectations this brought. Also, what were the differences of the EDP from what they had known previously.

EDP and other Environment

The aim of this section is to understand your experience of the EDP environment, and the factors specific to the ECB and the EDP which seemed important to you. Also, I am interested in knowing how you managed yourself across the different environments you were involved in.

- What was it like for you day-to-day within the EDP?
- What was it like moving between different environments and staff?
- Being yourself across environments? What were the differences?
-

Include a discussion of adapting to demands of environment & Managing different environments and coach r'ship – individual experiences of the number of staff involved in their development, the need for autonomy and independence (how this could be stifled). The need for (sometimes not yet developed) communication skills as well as conflict between county and England.

Biggest Challenges

The aim of this section is to understand some of the main challenges for you along your journey during your time within the EDP, both in the game and outside of the game, and understand how these played a role in your development?

- Effect these challenges had on you?

- Support which helped you?

- How did you cope, or overcome these challenges?

Identity development and critical moments & Managing different environments and coach r'ships – Explore the highly influencing individual moments, challenges and events including within education, getting a contract, family, friends, selection on tour, etc.

People supporting you

The aim of this section is to discuss the most influential supporting people you had around you during this time. What was it about them that stood out? How where they different from others?

- Main people involved?

- Major influencers?

- What were they like? Qualities

- How did they help?

Incl. discussion of players need for lifestyle support

PDW (If necessary)

The aim of this section is to discuss your experience of having a PDW working with you at various times. We will focus on their qualities, their help and support, and how they fit in with the rest of the support staff?

- How did support you?

- What was the value of having a PDW?
- **What was it about the PDW that was different from the rest of the support staff?**

Including a discussion of players need for lifestyle support. Value of having a PDW. What were the specific qualities of a PDW that made them helpful.

<u>Leaving EDP</u>

The aim of this section is to discuss your leaving the EDP. How did leaving make you feel and how did you reflect on your time within the EDP helping you and your development

- Under what circumstances? How did it feel to leave the EDP
- What happened next?
- What were the challenges faced upon leaving?
- What could have helped? Necessary support

Identity development and critical moments. Impact of involuntary deselection, or injury related deselection. How did the next stage of the career unfold? As expected? With reflection time, what was the view of the EDP experience as a whole?

Appendix 4: Published journal article

The published article below, is based on the initial 15-month period of data collection. Its full citations are:

Abstract

The 15-month ethnography reported here investigated the culturally and contextually relevant lifestyle concerns for which national level youth cricketers seek support, and the personal meanings ascribed to them. Players discussed lifestyle challenges and support, with five themes emerging: (1) players appreciating lifestyle support, (2) adapting to the new environment, (3) managing competing demands, (4) educational choices and professional contracts, (5) identity negotiation in critical moments. The challenges impacted players' sense of self, wellbeing and ultimately performance. The findings suggest lifestyle practitioners should support players through counselling approaches, strong player relationships and environment immersion with a view to impacting performance.

Keywords: career transitions, ethnography, identity, sport psychology, lifestyle

Athlete lifestyle support of elite youth cricketers: An ethnography of player concerns within a national talent development programme

Research and literature within the area of career development and transitions has evolved considerably since early research investigating athlete retirement (see Mihovilovic, 1968; Ogilvie, 1987; Baillie & Danish, 1992; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993). This evolution has

provided a view of career development and transitions that now adopts a lifespan perspective encouraging a focus on within career transitions as well as retirement, a more holistic approach to athlete career development and transitions (Wyllemann, Alferman, & Lavallee. 2004; Wyllemann, Reints, & De Knopp, 2013) and increased interest in dual career experiences of athletes' combining an athletic career and academic study (e.g. Ryba, Stambulova, Ronkainen, Bundgaard, & Selänne, 2015).

With regard to youth athletes, there has been increased attention to dual career experiences, highlighting the challenges of finding an optimal balance between the demands of the athlete and student roles (e.g. McKenna & Dunstan-Lewis, 2004; Stambulova, Engstrom, Frank, & Linner, 2015) and identifying the costs and benefits of combining study and sport during adolescence (e.g. Jonker, Elferink-Gemser, & Visscher, 2009; Wyllemann, Reints, & Wanter, 2007; Aquilina, 2013). Research has also highlighted how the challenges of pursuing a dual career during development stages overlap with matters such as relationship challenges, life skill development, social life, identity (Tekavc, Wylleman, & Erpic, 2015), and how pursuing a dual career connects to an athlete's sense of identity, purpose and wellbeing (O'Neill, Allen, & Calder, 2013). Further, Christensen and Sorensen (2009) highlighted the role of sport specific cultural factors, finding that although young footballers in their study worked hard to meet both their study and footballing demands, the underlying assumption within football culture emphasised the expectation that young footballers would show complete dedication to football, over and above other concerns, such as their education. This often resulted in the early foreclosure of identity and a rejection of further educational development.

Aligned to these findings, there have been arguments for the delivery of holistic and ecological applied practice within talent development environments (Henriksen, Stambulova, & Roessler, 2010). There have also been arguments for the mutual benefits of supporting performance and personal development simultaneously (Miller & Kerr, 2002; Gilbourne & Richardson, 2006). This research has provided applied sport psychologists with a more complete understanding of the different areas of athletes' whole lives and how transitions within these can overlap and interact at key stages along their career journey.

A wide variety of approaches a practitioner may take to transition intervention have been described, for example the Life Development Intervention (Danish, Petitpas, & Hale, 1992; 1993; 1995), and Stambulova's (2010) Five Step Career Planning Strategy. These

approaches have generally emphasised the development of goal setting skills, as well as situating the present demands of an athlete between a past from which the athlete can learn lessons, and a future towards which the athlete is motivated to progress. Alongside these developments, athlete lifestyle programmes (sometimes referred to as career assistance or athlete life-skill programmes) such as the Career Assistance Programme for Athletes (CAPA) (Petitpas, Danish, McKelvain, & Murphy, 1992), the United States Olympic Education Centre (USOEC) and the Australian Athlete Career and Education (ACE) programme, have been developed to help alleviate athletes' anxieties regarding their future and prepare them for retirement from their sport and the pursuit of a new career. In the UK today, national sport institutes, for example, the England Institute of Sport (EIS) deliver the Performance Lifestyle programme to Olympic sports, and some professional sports. Other professional sporting bodies such as, the Welsh Rugby Union, have developed their own similarly aligned support services. In cricket, the Personal Development and Welfare programme (PDW) is currently delivered by practitioners working for the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) to the England National teams, and a similarly aligned PDW programme delivered to professional domestic county clubs by practitioners working for the Professional Cricketers Association (PCA).

There has been limited academic literature which has explicitly focused on the nature of support provided by lifestyle programmes. However, Stambulova and Ryba (2014) acknowledged that there is great diversity in the "more than 60" programmes they have identified worldwide (p.7). Yet, they suggest that most often it is the sport psychology personnel who deliver these programmes with the primary focus on providing education, guidance and skills with a view to helping athletes prepare for life after sport and to help manage athletes' demands outside of their sport.

There have been various accounts of what lifestyle support should look like, yet there has not been a description or analysis of what lifestyle practitioners actually do. The ECB's Personal Development and Welfare Programme which is the context of the present inquiry, is described in official documents as providing: "integrated, impartial support to players and the team environment, to develop resilience in and out of cricket as a personalized service within the three areas of wellbeing, lifestyle and personal development" (ECB, 2017; see also EIS, 2017). This suggests that this organisation promotes a more immersed, relational, psychologically informed and performance oriented provision of support than is described in the academic literature. Moreover, in this particular institution, lifestyle support is not within

the remit of sport psychologists, but a practitioner who might be an ex-athlete, or have a degree in a non-sport or non-psychology related field. Despite the diversity that is likely to exist also in other sport organisations, the most relevant guiding literature for lifestyle programmes has been conducted from a sport psychology perspective. This has created a lack of role clarity for both lifestyle practitioners and the sport psychology practitioners they work alongside and may have contributed to the portrayal of lifestyle support within the literature as focusing on practical skill development as rather than some of the more relational elements of the role.

Therefore, there is a need to better understand the actual practices of lifestyle practitioners and the contextually and culturally specific concerns for which elite athletes seek lifestyle practitioner support. Nurmi (2004) suggested that the adolescent years are the most critical for the formation of identity, development of cognitive motivational strategies and the social and organisational skills that may impact the educational choices and career aspirations of individuals. This suggests adolescence would provide a valuable context for such research. Due to a lack of previous research that uses methodology allowing for the presentation of athletes' voices and capturing of their daily existence in specific contexts (Ronkainen, 2014), it is also felt that a focus on the personal meanings athletes bring to these lifestyle concerns is also necessary. Further, Stambulova and Ryba (2014) called for research aligned to career development, transitions and assistance which was more socio-culturally and contextually informed, as well as research which blend the applied and the theoretical.

Rather than focusing on a specific within-career transition, such as from youth to senior sport, the present study seeks to understand the daily existence and the holistic lifestyle concerns of youth cricketers embedded in a talent development environment. Using a practitioner-researcher ethnographic approach within a national talent development programme, our research was guided by two research objectives:

1. To understand the nature of contextually and culturally specific lifestyle concerns for which elite youth cricketers seek support, and the personal meaning they ascribe to them;
2. To gain an understanding of how athlete lifestyle support ought to be positioned within this context and at this stage of young cricketers lives.

Methodology

Theoretical positioning

The current study used an ethnographic approach to data collection, with the aim of understanding individuals' experiences' of lifestyle concerns within the broader context of a national cricket talent development programme. The philosophical underpinning of the study lies a in critical constructivist perspective (Richert, 2010). Critical constructivism maintains that the reality in which people live is constructed by the efforts of people to understand and make sense out of living. The distinction between social constructionism and critical constructivism is that the latter maintains that personal mental activity makes an important contribution to the reality that is constructed (Richert, 2010). In other words, both individual and social processes contribute to the construction of reality. The current study aligns with critical constructivism in trying to study how individuals make sense of their experiences and lifestyle challenges within a specific context and culture. By maintaining that the individual makes important contributions to the meaning-making process, this perspective allows for a more traditional concept of self as located within the individual. This approach subscribes to ontological realism (i.e. there is a world which is independent of our knowledge of it) combined with epistemological constructivism (i.e. our knowledge remains subjective and incomplete).

Participants

The talent development programme examined in this research consisted of two squads of players between the age of 15 and 19 who had been selected as players with the highest potential nationally within their respective skill areas. The participants in the study were members of one of these squads. At the beginning of the research, there were 16 players in the squad, 12 of whom were on their second year on the programme, and four were in their first year. After 12 months, four players were deselected, and four new players joined the programme. As such, members of the setting over the course of the research included 20 players selected from their First Class Counties (professional clubs playing national domestic game who are awarded First Class status), and fourteen support staff including a head coach, operations manager, six different skills coaches, two physiotherapists, two strength and conditioning coaches, a performance analyst and a performance psychologist. Membership of the programme involved attendance at residential domestic training camps, overseas

competitive and non-competitive tours and home competitive tours. The finer details of the programme will be described later in the paper. Of the 20 players involved in this study, 16 were in full time secondary education throughout the period of data collection.

The Researcher and Reflexivity

It is often the mission of ethnographic research not to interfere with the environment under study. The practitioner-researcher status simply did not allow for this. Indeed, I could often be perceived as taking on the role of action-researcher, as data uncovered, and practitioner interventions became more and more interrelated over time. However, this was deemed a symbiotic relationship as the insights derived from research improved player support, and the improved relationships and trust aided the continued collection of data. Yet, this increased the requirement for self-reflexivity throughout all stages of the research. According to Day (2012), reflexivity concerns three interrelated issues. These are: 1) the researcher underlying assumptions about knowledge production (epistemology), 2) issues of power, researcher identity and positionality, and 3) reflexive techniques to produce good quality, rigorous qualitative research. Schinke et al. (2012) further highlighted the importance of self-reflexivity when fulfilling the role of both researcher and practitioner. Given the practitioner-researcher approach in the present study, engagement with self-reflexivity is particularly important. It is considered appropriate to discuss how my own background, training and philosophical positioning may have contributed and shaped the research process.

I have completed a degree in Psychology, and a Master's degree in Sport Psychology. Although I have a competitive background in both individual and team sports, I had no involvement within the game and culture of cricket, either as a player or a practitioner prior to entering the research setting. My experience as a sports performer provided me with an understanding of the experiences and challenges involved with youth talent development. However, I had no previous experience within cricket and entered the setting as a cultural outsider. Although this created challenges when entering the setting, it also provided me with a more critical perspective with regard to the cultural norms and daily practices for those operating within the sport. My approach as a practitioner is particularly grounded in humanistic and existential psychology where the individual's existence and the experiential knowledge that they obtain in their pursuit of excellence are paramount with a particular focus on meaning, responsibility and freedom (Ronkainen & Nesti, 2017) I did not aim to begin the research process with a theoretical framework or set of research questions to

answer. However, I did bring a sensitivity and curiosity for what I would understand as psycho-social and cultural challenges and lifestyle-based concerns. This will inevitably have been influenced by a number of factors, most significantly my educational background and philosophy of practice, and what Day (2012) referred to as the researchers theoretical traditions and perspectives as well as methodological practices.

My philosophy of practice will have shaped my interactions with staff and players as a practitioner and in doing so shape the nature of data which was co-created through these interactions. I will also have interpreted the players experience and identified their lifestyle-based challenges through this lens. This placed a high value on my practitioner reflection and the role of the research team as critical friends (Smith & Sparkes, 2002) to challenge my interpretations and some of the biases which inform them. Further, my educational background in psychology and sport psychology means that I effectively performed the role of lifestyle practitioner from a holistic sport psychology perspective. However, this is not the only training route for lifestyle practitioners. Therefore, my interpretation of what concerns players faced may contrast with the interpretation of practitioners who possess an alternative training background. Consistent with the paradigmatic positioning of the study, the findings ought to be viewed as one insight into the lifestyle experiences of elite youth cricketers, from the perspective of a practitioner-researcher with a specific philosophy of practice and educational background. Finally, use of "I", "me" or "my" will refer to the first author throughout the remainder of the manuscript, whilst "we" will denote the research team (Tedlock, 2000; Foley, 2002).

Procedure

I entered the setting as an ethnographic outsider (Ely, 1991), which can provide a challenge in gaining entry. However, my role as PDW practitioner allowed for a seamless and natural entry, establishment of trust and familiarisation with the participants. The dual-role of researcher and practitioner was deemed to be symbiotic, given the requirement for strong practitioner-player relationships, confidentiality and trust to succeed in both. However, it placed considerable importance on my commitment to maintaining a diary of personal reflections. Practitioner-researcher ethnography of this nature has occurred previously (Faulkner & Sparkes, 1999; Peters, McAllister, & Rubinstein, 2001a). Similarly, Peters *et al.* (2001a) reflected that the approach was to the benefit of their research in cancer care as for

them, simply hanging out and observing waiting rooms in a cancer clinic would be highly challenging and awkward otherwise.

My role as a PDW practitioner involved the development, delivery and case management of individual and group support for the squad. This included pro-active academic support and group education as well as one-to-one support that were more player-led and emergent in nature. Over a 15 month period, I attended eight residential training camps, ranging from 3 to 10 days, a home competitive series, an overseas competitive series, an overseas development camp and provided occasional support for players outside of the programme activity. I was based at the main development headquarters consisting of practice areas and residential accommodation, typically 5 days per week. This allowed for a uniquely practitioner based approach to the research, while still drawing on ethnographic research principles. For example, when not delivering support to players or coaches, the first author was fully immersed within the environment, allowing for a more typical ethnographic position of hanging out and observing events as they unfolded (Woodward, 2008).

Data Collection

Observations of the setting, daily practices within the programme and the sport more broadly, and of the day-to-day lives of players, provided the backbone to the ethnographic research process (Ely, 1991). These were supplemented by informal conversations with players and staff and formal conversations occurring through my activity as a practitioner within the setting. Notable moments and interactions were written down in a notepad in the form of keyword entries (Krane & Baird, 2005) as soon as possible after they occurred, but normally away from the scene. Observations and conversations were then captured fully in the form of a research log (Krane & Baird, 2005), typically at the end of each day of engagement and never more than 24 hours after the original observation (Emerson, Frets, & Shaw, 1995). These entries were then supported by practitioner-researcher reflective diary entries, during which I could attempt to make sense of key observations, conversations and their implications (Krane & Baird, 2005). My reflections occurred regularly after periods of time with the squad, and on a more ad-hoc basis. All data extracts presented are taken from field notes, capturing the scenes and conversations that occurred. Although this meant capturing data from memory, it was felt that audio recording dialogue would have jeopardised the relationship development with participants and would have been at odds with the practitioner role delivery.

Assuming a critical constructivist perspective to achieve the purpose of the research, the focus of data collection was on how individuals experienced and made sense of their lifestyle concerns, but also how this was shaped by the broader cultural and contextual factors associated with membership of the programme, and the sport. Initially, my focus was quite broad capturing what daily life looked like for players. As relationships developed and the breadth of experiences became clearer, daily life began to provide the backdrop against which more individually relevant concerns played out. In that sense, the observational lens narrowed from the contextual and cultural, towards locating individual experience within these. The research team acted as "critical friends" (Sparkes & Smith, 2002) throughout data collection and analysis, challenging the first author to discuss the interpretations and methodological concerns as they arose. For example, this included helping to position the data within theoretical frameworks, appropriately challenging and/or focusing the first author's observational lens, and negotiation of arising ethical dilemmas as a result of the practitioner-researcher role.

Data Analysis and Representation

Data analysis was based on a qualitative description approach (Sandelowski, 2000). In this sense, although data coding was systematically applied, the codes were generated from the data themselves, with collection and analysis mutually shaping each other (Sandelowski, 2000). Thematic analysis was completed, in alignment with guidance provided by Braun and Clarke (2006). This involved: (1) familiarisation through repeated reading whilst searching for meaning and patterns amongst the data, (2) generating initial codes and organising data into meaningful groups, (3) sorting different codes into potential themes and collating extracts from the data into themed groups, (4) reviewing themes in line with Patton's (1990) dual criteria of internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity, (5) defining and naming themes before (6) using data extracts to produce the report. These steps allowed for the organisation of themes within the three groups. These were: player concerns; programme factors; and PDW support factors. Player concerns were the primary focus of the research and therefore provided the themes for presentation within the manuscript. However, the broader programme factors and PDW support factors played a secondary role in helping to position the discussion of the themes presented in this paper within the broader context and culture. The data analysis allowed for description and interpretation of player lifestyle concerns within their specific context with an attempt to theorise patterns of description (Patton, 1990)

with regard to previous literature (Frith & Gleeson, 2004) and the researcher's contextual awareness.

Ethical considerations

This study was approved by the University ethics committee and the programme manager was identified as an appropriate gatekeeper to provide consent to overt research access to the programme. This was facilitated by the researcher's entry to the setting as a new practitioner within the staff team. All members of the setting were provided with a verbal briefing of the practitioner-researcher's role, aims of the research, data collection procedures and were offered assurances regarding anonymity and confidentiality. Players and staff were also informed that they maintained the option to withdraw from participation at any time. However, no participants opted out of research at any point throughout the study.

Ethics can be a complicated subject when it comes to conducting ethnographic research, due to the unpredictable nature of the work (Goodwin, Pope, Mort, & Smith, 2003; Ferdinand, Pearson, Rowe, & Worthington, 2007). There were a number of ethical dilemmas to negotiate during the study. One concern was that despite the overt research stance, it was felt that participants came to view me more as a practitioner than a researcher as trust and rapport was developed over time. This could have resulted in participants sharing a level of information not intended to be included in the research. However, I was open about my research work and players frequently saw me carrying out research work within the setting. They frequently asked me about the purpose and progress of the research I was doing with them. Further, it is important to appreciate that when players disclosed concerns to me, such as feeling homesick, struggling to meet expectations or not knowing what to do after finishing secondary school, it became my responsibility to support them as a practitioner, ensuring a mutual benefit and thereby reducing the power imbalance inherent in research settings. In general, when working within the applied setting, I felt that the ethical practice as a practitioner equated to good ethical practice as a researcher, for example, non-judgemental support, a primary focus on player welfare and confidentiality. However, it was also explained to participants that what was considered confidentiality in practice would be considered anonymity in research.

<u>Findings and discussion</u>

What follows is the practitioner-researcher's tale of the "self" and the "other", whilst trying not to let the "self" dominate and allow the "other", in this case the players collective story of cultural and contextually relevant lifestyle concerns and the personal meaning ascribed to them, to be presented. The first section offers a description of the environment that the players experienced on the development programme before presenting the players' experience of support and the lifestyle concerns they required support for. Pseudonyms are used for participants throughout the discussion. The data extracts represent one individual's experiences at a given time, however, the narrative attempts to recreate a holistic view of experience which is representative of what any individual may experience in the programme at a point in time.

Entering the national development programme

I met the staff team the night before the first day of a camp, referred to as profiling and used as a means of gaining an understanding of the players' strengths and areas to work on for the coming winter. At the pre-camp meeting, I was initially struck by the high number of staff involved (14 people sitting around the table), their attention to detail and their demanding standards. I attempted to control my emotions and wondered if players struggle to control theirs during their first taste of the environment. However, I sensed that staff seemed to buy in to the idea of supporting players on and off the pitch through their descriptions of the players' home life, previous struggles and character. Over time, I often heard staff state that they aimed to uphold 'unashamedly high standards' through 'high challenge and high support' where players would learn to understand the demands of their aspirations as potential international cricketers. What this meant in practice became clearer at the following training camp. It was a 10-day, very intense training camp right at the end of the post-season break. The goal was to provide a level of 'culture shock' regarding what was expected and demanded, through exposure to levels of training and performance under pressure that players would not have experienced before.

The content of days on camp included strength and conditioning sessions, various skill development sessions, and classroom sessions normally with a performance psychology, personal development or tactical theme. Player schedules also included academic study sessions of up to 2 hours per day to compensate for the time missed at school. Players could use their spare time to benefit from any specialist staff support if they wished. Everyone would eat together, train together, study together and enjoy their limited downtime together

in what is an incredibly immersive experience, often including 6.30am alarm calls, and ten to twelve hour days with performance and behaviour demands right on the edge of the players' capabilities.

Players were held accountable for a high level of performance. Training would follow a cyclical pattern of developing skills, training under pressure and being tested under pressure in specific scenarios. From a behavioural point of view, coaches told me that they expected players to hold a high level of professionalism, including time keeping, having the right kit at the right time and taking responsibility for tidying the environment. Failure to meet behavioural or performance demands could result in "consequences" such as a 5-minute physical challenge for performance shortcomings. For committing a "behavioural" faux pas such as arriving late to a session, the culprit may be required to clean everyone's dishes after lunch or may not be allowed to take part in training. Staff sought to lead by example and create enthusiasm for the challenging nature of the programme. For example, it soon became obvious that consequences could also be delivered to any staff member, all in pursuit of "unashamedly high standards". Beyond these camps, there were overseas tours, lasting from two to four weeks, aimed at exposing players to competition and playing conditions beyond what they had experienced before, and which would challenge them in all aspects of the game; hence maximising their development and enhancing their ability to "tour" successfully.

For players, the programme represented a new environment to balance with their first class county academy or professional programmes, their educational aspirations and in many cases, their ambitious school cricket programmes or scholarships, all while striving to maintain a social balance with families and friends. The dual role of student and cricketer meant missing many days of school, sometimes sitting mock exams in foreign countries and carrying out two-hour study sessions in hotels and press rooms on tour before returning to the UK to prepare for exams during the early cricket season. Alongside these unique demands on players, the programme was committed to developing players on and off the field, respecting the player's educational aspirations, assisting players in the delivery of a charity project overseas and seeking to support the welfare of players through the performance psychologist and the personal development and welfare practitioners.

Players Appreciating Lifestyle Support

On the first morning of profiling camp, I met each player formally for the first time. I was surprised by their readiness to engage and discuss concerns that they currently had. This seemed to reflect their respect and appreciation for the PDW role and their enthusiasm to

develop a relationship from the off. Kieron arrived into his first meeting with me, and without introduction announced his recent frustrations and need for support:

> I really need to speak to you…I have just moved to a new school and the difference in schools is just crazy. I was at a state school before, and the expectations of people there are so different. I am not sure I really fit in, or am even cut out for boarding [school] to be honest. I changed because it is a great school, better logistically for everything really, and I guess it is a good training environment for my cricket. But I have been missing home a lot and I have not really settled.

The coaches had suggested that players often responded very differently to the array of challenges that lay ahead, and that the player's response would play a key role in furthering, or stifling their development. However, this first insight highlighted how the array of challenges would include the private and personal, and not just cricket. Kieron was struggling to adapt to his new life at a new school and was expressing a sense of loneliness, isolation and homesickness. It also highlighted how the personal and the performance were strongly interrelated for players as personal decisions were taken for the sake of cricket development. Craig later recognised the importance of the off-the-field factors and the value of having the PDW to talk to about "problems", as a player may feel the need to separate the personal from cricket so that their lives are not seen as interfering with performance:

> I think it's really good having a PDW. It gives you someone to talk to about the stuff that you can't really tell the coach. Stuff that you don't want them [the coaches] to know, or what you think if they did know, they might think of not playing you. Like stuff about school, or problems that you have, or even if you are really tired and are just struggling to keep going!

In their work with young footballers, Gilbourne and Richardson (2006) suggested that although it is the performance agenda that will attract coaches to the idea of psychological support for young athletes, they state that successful practice is "held together" by the practitioners "capacity to care" which embraced the self-awareness and empathic qualities that engender compassion. They also suggested that a symbiotic relationship exists between the performance and caring agendas. Rob, a second year player, summarised this relationship very simply:

> I think it is one of the most important roles to be honest. If you don't have that (PDW support) some people could really struggle…I would even say it is linked to

performance. The stuff you (PDW) help us with is not performance, but by helping us it directly helps…by me being on top of everything else and my mind being in the right place, I can then go out and play. But if not, it can be really hard.

Rob's comments suggest that there are no non-performance factors, just some areas of support that influence performance (perhaps) less directly than others. Although there is a growing awareness of the value of supporting both the person and the athlete (Ravizza, 2002; Nesti, 2004), this is not currently represented in all research or practice. There is overwhelmingly more research investigating the psychological elements of successful skill delivery, than research investigating how supporting athletes on a more personal level can contribute to both wellbeing and performance. Further, there has been no previous literature that has discussed the relationship and overlap between support of a lifestyle nature and a performance psychology nature. The player discussions cited earlier would appear to suggest that the divide between the two is more blurred than support infrastructures and current literature seems to suggest.

When talking to players, I was struck by the value many players placed on developing a trusting relationship with me from the outset. Kieron openly shared the depth of his struggles and his perceived importance of the PDW role when he had first joined the programme:

At times last year I was coming into PDW meetings in tears. I used to really struggle. It took time to be able to speak about it [personal issues] as well, like at first she [PDW] would have been asking me a lot of quite touchy feely questions, but I didn't really want to talk about that stuff with someone I didn't know or trust yet. But once I could, it was a lot easier and you begin to feel better and be yourself a bit more. I hope that with time together on the programme, I can show you that trust as well.

Kieron identified the difficulty, and value of discussing issues of a personal and emotive nature without a strong trusting relationship in a highly competitive, unforgiving and rather masculine high performance environments (see Parker, 2001). Nesti (2004) stated that such a strong relationships allowed for what he referred to as, 'the encounter' to occur, where both parties are at ease and can converse freely, yet the nature of the conversation is intense and focused. Nesti (2010) stressed how this should not be mistaken for simply a conversation as it has a clear aim, which is clarification of the issues at play. This important element of counselling (Nesti, 2004) is missing from descriptions of lifestyle support roles within the

literature, which has instead focused on the more practical elements of the role, like career guidance or educational support. Further, as discussions of practitioner philosophies of practice (Poczwardowski, Sherman, & Ravizza, 2004) and of counselling approaches (Hill, 2000) for sport psychology practitioners have emerged, this has not been applied to athlete lifestyle practice.

Adapting to the new environment

The "high challenge and high support" programme approach appeared to be embraced by many players who had learned how to cope and access the "high support". For those who hadn't, or for new members of the group, the high-octane, action packed milieu could be overwhelming. Players' sense of being overwhelmed could relate to physical demands, organisational demands or behavioural demands. It was further fuelled by the level of emotional investment which players attached to their place on the programme and the demand to meet expectations in order to maintain it. One evening, John, a coach, highlighted that George may be struggling to cope during his first week in the programme:

> He has had a bit of a wobble today, after a tough session he just got a bit emotional and said he wasn't sure if he was cut out for this. He has done ok, he has just been hit with a few consequences and his technique has been a bit exposed at times. He might need a chat [with you], just to break the ice a bit. He has had a really tough introduction this week and he won't be used to this level of demand.

There was minimal judgement from this coach, just empathy with the challenge the player was facing and how important him overcoming this would be for his long-term development. George shared his shock at the intensity of the programme, and his investment in the programme:

> I am not really used to this type of environment, the intensity, and judgement and consequences. So, it has just been quite hard to take in the first week. It's tough because I have had to make a commitment to cricket and drop rugby which has been a tough decision, but I still think it is the right decision, I guess this is just what I need to do, I just need to get used to it and get better.

George appeared to doubt his ability to compete at this higher level. He also shared that he also had to make a decision with regard to what sport to focus on as a result of his selection. His difficult experiences early in the programme appeared to create a sense of

doubt about whether he had made the right decision, probably one of the first life decisions he had been required to take regarding his future.

George's description of his challenges in adapting to the new levels of performance expectation are consistent with what Relvas, Littlewood, Nesti, Gilbourn and Richardson (2010) termed as the "developing mastery" stage of development for football players. Relvas *et al.* (2010) outlined this stage of development in a critique of previous developmental models of transition as lacking the contextual details and specificity critical to better understand the unique social and cultural features within many sports Relvas *et al.* (2010) suggested that players in this stage had already progressed through the development stage of Wylleman *et al.* (2004) transition model, yet lacked the attributes and experiences to be considered the finished or polished article and still required focused and continued development work. The transition to the national development programme in the current study undoubtedly involved a similar step up in performance expectations for players, and in the level of performance which may be tolerated. There were still contextual differences from Relvas et al.'s (2010) football participants, in that these young cricketers had stepped up to a new level in International youth cricket, but not necessarily a step towards a professional role at their counties. However, the players in this study did still experience what Relvas *et al.* (2010) labelled social insecurity and comparison on a psychological level, new coaches on a psycho-social level and uncertainty and isolation on an environmental and cultural level.

Players' experiences of adapting to the programme appeared to align with what Bourke (2002) referred to as a form of culture shock, a psychological phenomenon which may lead to feelings of helplessness, irritability and disorientation which players would have to accept and learn to cope with in order to keep progressing. Finding a way to endure the malaise that could accompany the personal demands of balancing these multiple roles could begin to have an effect both when on camps, and when at home as Jack revealed:

> Yeah, I have been really tired, more worn out I suppose…like I never have time to just sit and chill for a bit...and even here (at the development centre) actually, sometimes when you get back, you can feel like you need to just chill or else you will not get to sleep, you just need a break…when we finish late like we have done for the last couple of days, it can really knock you off…you almost get energised by having a little down time, or even a game of pool, just having a laugh.

Jack's personal sacrifices resulted in fatigue, and a lifestyle which was significantly different from his adolescent peers, similarly to professional golfers in Carless and Douglas's study (2009). However, for them, golf was already a professional career. Jack was describing how cricket was at risk of feeling like a job, even though it wasn't a career yet, and there were still many areas of typical adolescent development unfinished, both educationally and socially.

For other players, including Kieron, the time spent away from home, on tours or long training camps and away from those people close to them provided a particular challenge::

> Last year I found it really tough because the first half of the tour is all training and then its matches. And when I reached the halfway point last year, I just couldn't see how I would reach the end…I had a few conversations actually with the PDW, and with one of the players I roomed with, which just about helped me get there…I think I was just missing home.

Kieron explained how, on a personal level, the programme was really challenging him, yet, it was important for him to persevere as the career he wanted would require him becoming much more comfortable and able to spend large parts of his life living like this.

In their study on the development of mental toughness at one of the biggest soccer clubs in the world, Cook, and colleagues (Cook, Crust, Littlewood, Nesti, & Allen-Collinson, 2014) described how coaches sought to foster independence and resourcefulness within their players. Given the demands of the young cricketers in this study these are certainly two characteristics that players are required to possess (or acquire) in order to successfully navigate their way through the programme. However, one coach, Gerard recounted that it was the challenge for the coaching team to recognise where each individual was 'developmentally' with regard to coping with these demands and identify how the coaches and support team, could help these players to evolve:

> Basically, we are asking these guys to behave like adults. With where they want to go, there is no shame in that, because I think that is what they need, but sometimes we have to remember that they are still teenagers, some only 16, and they will not always be ready for that developmentally. For me that is a constant tension in the programme, balancing their demands, our education of them and the challenges we put in place with where they are in terms of their individual development.

Without attention to the personal stories and challenges that sat behind observable behaviour, there was a risk of coaches misjudging the lived experience of the player who in the context of their development might be showing significant toughness in persevering through tough challenges even when they might not necessarily appear to be. Current literature describes athlete lifestyle programmes as predominantly helping athletes with life skill development or career and education guidance (Stambulova & Ryba, 2014). However, these findings suggest that practitioners may find themselves more often supporting challenges which are more personal, psychological and emotional in nature. This suggests that the positioning of support provision ought to prioritise the ability to support issues of this nature, as should the desired skills and knowledge of practitioners performing the role.

Managing competing demands

Players, who were selected to the programme, were required to take on this new commitment alongside what was already a considerable investment of time. They would now be required to balance school, county cricket training, their social lives, their family lives, and this significant commitment involved with joining national development programme. Soon after being selected onto the programme, I as PDW organised a meeting for players who are in full time education at their school. For Simon, a first year player, this brought him together with his parents, representatives from his county cricket club, representatives from the school and me. We met to ensure that everyone understood the commitments necessary when joining the programme and discussed plans to cope with the weeks of missing school whilst away on tour. The conversation would often divert towards discussion of skill development and cricketing needs, the different coaches he would be working with and how his training needs could be met around his class times. This often required further input of even more members of the players' support network. I considered how aligned these stakeholders could actually be in supporting the player.

Similar to what Richardson, Gilbourne and Littlewood (2004) observed in football academies, these young cricketers were exposed to a high number of significant development stakeholders. This created a risk of the players hearing mixed or conflicting messages, or having to work to maintain contact with staff across a range of environments. This was viewed by players and staff as having the potential to be detrimental for player development. Brian, a physiotherapist commented on the programmes occasional need to simply clarify and bring together the variety of messages players received, rather than add to them:

You think of these players, the number of people with an invested interest in them is insane. You have the academy director, academy S&C, academy physio and academy bowling or batting coach. Then you have the second team staff, maybe the first team, maybe school cricket staff and then you add out programme staff, plus parents who are obviously at the centre. So, you are looking at about 17 or maybe even 22 people if the player is at a cricket school…If we can get everyone pulling in the same direction it might work, but if they are pulling in different directions, it just becomes very hard for the player.

The potential incongruence between different stakeholders across different environments was perceived as potentially anxiety-provoking by several players. Rob, a player in his second year on the programme shared his worries about possessing the level of independence required in order to maintain positive relationships with the different staff. For example, players may have to report training loads and injuries to a number of physiotherapists in different environments which may include school, county or the national programme. Alternatively, they may need to clarify what they should do in response to receiving conflicting advice from coaches in their county and national programmes. Further, the requirement to meet the demands of all staff began to create pressure and stress for players, as they felt the need to keep all these stakeholders happy:

I have been feeling quite overwhelmed recently. I have a lot on my plate with school, the programme and then having changed clubs. That has led to a lot of things to be done. It feels like I have just been making one big mistake every day. Basically, making someone angry every day, and I have really been worrying, like worrying that I have done something wrong or forgotten to do something I should.

Coaches are one of the most important actors within a youth sport context and play an influential role in either facilitating or hindering the development of young athletes (Camire, Forneris, Trudel, & Bernard, 2011). Therefore, it is no surprise that for players, maintaining a positive relationship with their coach(es) is thought to be highly important. However, it was striking that as the number of stakeholders' rose, this relationship could also become a source of stress, with players like Rob worrying that he was letting others down by not meeting his commitments rather than seeing the network as a source of support. Reid, Stewart and Thorne (2004) recognised the importance of developing a highly functioning multi-disciplinary team. However, there remains no discussion of the challenges of multiple teams working with a

player, perhaps with different approaches or philosophies. Relvas *et al.* (2010) acknowledged the challenge of maintaining consistency in approach, communication and culture between first team and academy structures within football clubs. Players in the current study operated across anything from two to four cricket environments, in addition to school and home environments. This appeared to have the potential to impact the coach-athlete relationship and their subsequent working dynamics, something not discussed in the literature.

The players' attempts to manage relationships with such a high number of coaching staff often appeared a stressful and dysfunctional dynamic where players could be left wondering who they need to keep happy and confused by what could appear to be conflicting messages. The potential for players to feel insecure and confused amidst this need to *keep others happy* appeared to present a risk to players as they struggled to maintain a sense of personal authenticity (Ronkainen & Nesti, 2017). As Guignon (1993, p. 227) suggested, everyday existence may become "fragmented into a series of means-end strategies governed by the latest public attitudes about what constitutes success". In this case, the "public" refers to the coaches and stakeholders within the various environments that the players perform. This could impact the players developing sense of self (Nesti, 2004), place their identity in a state of flux (Richardson, Relvas, & Littlewood, 2013) and negatively influence their ability to take responsibility for their own development, both as people, and performers.

Somewhat paradoxically, coaches discussed their desire to encourage players to take responsibility for their development, as Gerard recognised:

> The guys who are really on route to making it, are the ones who are driving their own development, they are strong enough to challenge the coaches…they are taking the lead. They are independent, whereas the opposite is someone who is just hearing it, doing bits here, doing bits there, no real direction from them…I think a large part of our role, is trying to encourage that [empowerment], create independence.

The coaching staff made efforts to tackle the challenge of aligning player support across different environments. However, the number of differing support options offered to the players often resulted in a disconnection between how coaches wanted players to develop independence and a sense of responsibility, and the players feeling the need to please those overseeing their development.

Education Choices and Professional Contracts

At any time, players' education commitments were viewed by coaches and players as welcome intellectual stimulation, a backup plan, or as something which simply got in the way of playing cricket. Typically, there was respect for the value of gaining an academic grounding on which players could fall if needed. This resulted in prioritisation of practical educational support and most players completing secondary qualifications successfully. However, players often remained unsure regarding further education and its value beyond secondary qualifications, as was highlighted by Jack:

> I mean I have never really thought about university before, but I have started to now, just because you don't know if you are going to get a contract or not. So, I will apply, but if I get a contract I will turn down the place, it is just in case I get released, everything really hinges on the contract.

Conversations with players on the subject of education often reflected their hesitations of discussing the prospect of not getting the career in professional cricket that they want. At times, there was confusion in terms of what they "are supposed to do?" regarding educational decisions. As such, Henry's idea of "taking a gap year to focus on my cricket" appeared to become code for "I need to try and earn a contract and I am not sure how going to university might affect this".

However, for Conor, it was a more complex decision given his academic ability, his upbringing and his concern regarding the impression it could give:

> For me, I can't see me not going to University, because of my up-bringing; it's just really a question of what is the right time? I am quite keen on going to University, but there are some problems with that…Do you have to compromise cricket or your education, because I really don't want to do that. Also, how does it play into county consideration, being available to play or being noticed and considered by the coach?

The players in this study placed significant importance on their education as they looked to balance educational demands with the demands of the programme. This appears to contrast with findings from other professional team sports, such as football where Richardson (2003) suggested that the "seductive nature of the football environment may dilute the desire for educational development" (p-58) after signing a one or two-year professional contract. In contrast, cricket has long been recognised for its middle-class culture and close affiliation with independent schools (Tozer, 2012). This was reflected in Conor's reference to his family upbringing when considering his university options. Further, cricketers in this study were

planning for the future and open to discussing their educational plans either as a dual-career or as a back-up plan in case they did not receive a professional contract. This also contrasted with findings from football (Christensen & Sorensen, 2009) in that for many players, their educational aspirations were afforded significance and the requirement in the future for a full commitment to cricket or education did provide a troubling dilemma which they would have to confront. This said, the cricketers were still worried about the perception that going to university might create among coaches. Moreover, education was still often viewed by players and coaches as an ethical responsibility and back-up plan as opposed to something which may offer the individual a life project, creating a more rounded sense of identity that would subsequently limit the risk of identity foreclosure and its negative impacts (Pummel, Harwood, & Lavallee, 2008). This seems an important point given Nurmi's (2004) portrayal of how important the adolescent years are.

The current findings suggest that elite youth cricketers develop within a socio-cultural landscape that is relatively supportive of players pursuing both secondary education and cricket. However, the players' decisions regarding further education were heavily influenced by their contract status and the beliefs of coaches who acted as gatekeepers to a professional career. A further challenge for these young athletes is that in cricket, unlike many Olympic sports (Aquilina, 2013), going to the university is not typically seen as a mutually beneficial part of the developmental pathway, but as a separate pursuit. The current findings highlight the socio-cultural differences between sports and the impact this has on athletes career and dual-career decisions. This will inevitably influence athlete support needs within different socio-cultural landscapes.

Identity negotiation in critical moments

Given Nurmi's (2004) portrayal of adolescence, it must be acknowledged that the challenges, career decisions and defining moments previously described occur during a phase of life which is itself transitional in nature. It could be argued that the magnitude of this developmental transition from adolescence to adulthood is somewhat understated within the transition literature, particularly with regard to identity negotiation and development. For Kieron, the need to negotiate identity in the face of challenge came in recognising that the perception his peers have of him is inconsistent with who he felt he wanted to be, and who he was previously:

You see, I have been a captain in everything else I have done prior to this, at my county, at my school, but now I realise that because of my character, because people do not see me as someone who can be serious, I will never be captain in this environment… I think it came from when I first joined the programme, I felt like an outsider, there was a big group from just a couple of counties and I think I realised that using my comedy was a way for me to be accepted and to get in with the group, so I just kept on doing that.

Many coaches commented on the struggle players have in finding their feet, and learning to simply be themselves within national squads. They reflected that this seemed to be a barrier to them playing freely and eventually proving themselves to be capable of playing at that level. However, given the players investment in cricket, this often created a personal cost too, both during time on the programme and in their broader lives. Kieron, having already shared his struggle to be himself in this environment, later went on to highlight the struggle of another player in his first year on the programme:

He just doesn't seem comfortable here…because I captained him before, and he wasn't like this, and I think that's maybe why he isn't performing as well as he can. It's like one of those two things needs to happen first, you need to get a performance and then you feel comfortable, or you feel comfortable and then you can perform.

The players concerns were interrelated with significant career transitions, for example, entering the national level programme or finishing secondary education and entering professional cricket. However, the concerns players described fit better with what Nesti and Littlewood (2011) referred to as "critical moments" which need to be viewed in the context of transitions, rather than just the specific transitions themselves. Nesti & Littlewood (2011) suggested that a critical moment could range from something to nothing, could be large or small, intended or unintended and may have a negative or positive effect on a person's sense of self (self-awareness and self-knowledge). In other words, they are the frequently experienced moments in our lives where we must confront the anxiety associated with an important change in our identity. Critical moments may include a player's recognition of what is expected from them in order to be successful in the programme, or the experience of struggling to maintain a positive relationship with a number of coaches. From an existential perspective, the anxiety associated with critical moments is not simply the result of the impending need to perform, but the uncertainty of the player's current situation, as well as the

responsibility and freedom to act. From an existential view, to live authentically is to face this anxiety, be true to oneself and act according to one's core beliefs and values (Ronkainen & Nesti, 2017). These cricketers were faced with demanding situations beset with uncertainty that require a responsibility to act, but within an environment which made authentic decisions challenging, leaving their sense of identity in a state of flux. As has been suggested, the existential element of career development has remained absent from the literature. Instead, discussion of support for athletes tends to revolve around barriers to transition, coping techniques and mental skills. There is limited discussion of supporting athletes with a holistic approach focusing on their identity negotiation throughout adolescence despite the fact that this would appear to provide an important addition to ensure support for the whole athlete experience.

The concept of critical moments better recognises the dynamic environments that the young cricketers operate in and the potential for seemingly mundane day-to-day events to hold significant influence over their development. It also helps emphasise that challenging moments within the career are not inherently negative experiences and may actually provide an exciting opportunity for personal growth, self-awareness development and the development of existential courage (Nesti & Littlewood, 2011). However, the potential to see personal challenge as an opportunity for growth, self-awareness and development is something inherent to an existential philosophy of practice as opposed to a suggestion that tough experiences could instead be somehow reframed for athletes as nice, or pleasant. For example, Mike, who particularly struggled with the level of structure and discipline required on the programme, reflected that although going through the challenge had been really difficult, he had learned a lot about himself with regard to the negative impact of a lack of discipline:

> I obviously have had a few events…where I have lost it. But I think it is good, the coaches all really held the line with me, and I think I need that. I have never had that. I need to learn to just get on with these things if I am going to be part of squads in the future… I think I have learnt a lot about myself and some of the things that I struggle with, but it was hard

Other players reflected that with the right support, certain skills, such as organisation and time management were learned through necessity created by the challenge of managing

demands. Players also acknowledged the value of gaining clarity over what they want to become, when faced with tension created as a result of uncertainty and identity negotiation.

Conclusions

The first research objective was to understand the nature of contextually and culturally specific lifestyle concerns for which elite youth cricketers seek support, and the personal meaning they ascribe to them. Participants discussed the value of being supported with experiences which were personal, psychological and emotional in nature which were related to their on-going negotiation of challenges within and outside of cricket. This is in contrast to the sometimes ambiguous and practical support highlighted previously in athlete lifestyle programme research (Wylleman *et al.* 2004; Stambulova & Ryba, 2014). This support was viewed as being instrumental in maintaining wellbeing and improving performance. There also appeared to be a disconnect between coaches desire for players to develop independence, freedom and choice, and the players experiences of feeling constrained by cultural practices in their attempts to do so. The concerns appear to fit the concept of critical moments more so than transitional challenges, due to their everyday nature, their requirement for identity negotiation and their potential to lead to growth and development in players. The second research objective was to gain an understanding of how athlete lifestyle support ought to be positioned within this context, and at this stage of young cricketer's lives. Supporting these concerns requires the development of deep and meaningful practitioner-player relationships, trust and confidentiality as well as a perspective of the practitioner as being somewhat removed from the performance agenda. This appears to create a paradox between the perception that lifestyle concerns are removed from the performance agenda, and the realisation that lifestyle issues, and lifestyle support are often explicitly linked to performance. Through these findings, this study fills a gap in the literature regarding the nature of concerns for which elite youth cricketers (and perhaps other athletes) may seek support from lifestyle practitioners. This provides greater direction regarding what practitioners will be required to do in practice. These findings have important implications for research, sporting organisations and individual practitioners.

In order to ensure that athlete lifestyle support meets player's needs, we suggest that lifestyle practitioners be immersed within the performance environment as opposed to on the periphery of the support infrastructure. This position has been proposed before by Anderson and Morris (2000). However, it is still recognised that such an immersive approach is not readily embraced or prioritised by such environments (and their budgetary constraints). We

also argue that the value of psychological knowledge and counselling approaches may be worth embracing more explicitly than they currently are in lifestyle support, and have indicated that counselling which draws on existential psychology can be applicable with young athletes when they strive to form authentic life goals and identities. The findings also suggest a need to shift the athlete lifestyle agenda beyond the educational and practical support described in the literature.

The nature of lifestyle concerns expressed by elite youth cricketers alongside the perceived impact of lifestyle support on performance and the value counselling psychology can offer lifestyle support provision, suggests that the lines of role division between lifestyle support and performance psychology may be more blurred than support structures imply. It would appear that dividing roles and responsibilities without appreciation for their interrelatedness could in essence, break up the whole experience of the athlete, at the cost of truly holistic support. The emphasis on more direct performance support within the sport psychology literature and the wide ranging training backgrounds of lifestyle practitioners may leave both practitioners under-prepared for the nature of holistic support needed. For athletes, this could result in neither practitioner recognising the support need, or not having the required skills and knowledge to provide effective support when it is sought out. It may also leave practitioners unprepared for the demands of the role, negatively impacting their own wellbeing and their chances of retaining their position in a competitive environment which requires visible impact from the role.

For future research, it is suggested that investigating individuals experience of the critical moments (Nesti & Littlewood, 2011) identified here and the lifestyle practitioner support provided during these would be valuable. Continuing to use methodology which captures the day-to-day lives of athletes in other sports and stages of development is necessary to further our knowledge of athlete support needs across different sports, different sporting cultures and different stages of the career. It will also be important to further investigate the relationship between the performance psychologist and the athlete lifestyle practitioner, given their somewhat ambiguous overlap and the apparent psychological elements of lifestyle support.

In this study, the practitioner and researcher roles were symbiotic in their dual-focus on athlete care and wellbeing, but did create a sense of role conflict between active practitioner and (a more) neutral researcher. The combination of practice and research created ambiguity regarding confidentiality as a practitioner and researcher, requiring careful

management of data and a limited presentation of the broader lives and backgrounds of participants. Representing participant stories from memory was a necessary limitation, in order to not compromise the trust involved in performing the practitioner-researcher role. However, the practitioner-researcher approach was considered a major strength of this research as it provided a uniquely applied insight into the player's experiences. Having the role of the practitioner who was there to support the players rather than just gather observations facilitated the gathering of rich, emotional and honest insight into player's lives. The longitudinal nature of immersion also acted as a strength in terms of the depth of data accrued and researcher credibility, helping to advance understandings a relatively under-studied topic.

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