1 Abstract

2 The 15-month ethnography reported here investigated the culturally and contextually relevant

3 lifestyle concerns for which national level youth cricketers seek support, and the personal

4 meanings ascribed to them. Players discussed lifestyle challenges and support, with five

5 themes emerging: (1) players appreciating lifestyle support, (2) adapting to the new

6 environment, (3) managing competing demands, (4) educational choices and professional

7 contracts, (5) identity negotiation in critical moments. The challenges impacted players'

8 sense of self, wellbeing and ultimately performance. The findings suggest lifestyle

9 practitioners should support players through counselling approaches, strong player

10 relationships and environment immersion with a view to impacting performance.

11 *Keywords:* career transitions, ethnography, identity, sport psychology, lifestyle

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23   **Athlete lifestyle support of elite youth cricketers: An ethnography of player concerns**

24   **within a national talent development programme**

25   Research and literature within the area of career development and transitions has

26   evolved considerably since early research investigating athlete retirement (see Mihovilovic,

27   1968; Ogilvie, 1987; Baillie & Danish, 1992; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993). This evolution has

28   provided a view of career development and transitions that now adopts a lifespan perspective

29   encouraging a focus on within career transitions as well as retirement, a more holistic

30   approach to athlete career development and transitions (Wyllemann, Alferman, & Lavallee.

31   2004; Wyllemann, Reints, & De Knopp, 2013) and increased interest in dual career

32   experiences of athletes' combining an athletic career and academic study (e.g. Ryba,

33   Stambulova, Ronkainen, Bundgaard, & Selänne, 2015).

34   With regard to youth athletes, there has been increased attention to dual career

35   experiences, highlighting the challenges of finding an optimal balance between the demands

36   of the athlete and student roles (e.g. McKenna & Dunstan-Lewis, 2004; Stambulova,

37   Engstrom, Frank, & Linner, 2015) and identifying the costs and benefits of combining study

38   and sport during adolescence (e.g. Jonker, Elferink-Gemser, & Visscher, 2009; Wyllemann,

39   Reints, & Wanter, 2007; Aquilina, 2013). Research has also highlighted how the challenges

40   of pursuing a dual career during development stages overlap with matters such as relationship

41   challenges, life skill development, social life, identity (Tekavc, Wylleman, & Erpic, 2015),

42   and how pursuing a dual career connects to an athlete's sense of identity, purpose and

43   wellbeing (O'Neill, Allen, & Calder, 2013). Further, Christensen and Sorensen (2009)

44   highlighted the role of sport specific cultural factors, finding that although young footballers

45   in their study worked hard to meet both their study and footballing demands, the underlying

46   assumption within football culture emphasised the expectation that young footballers would

47   show complete dedication to football, over and above other concerns, such as their education.

48   This often resulted in the early foreclosure of identity and a rejection of further educational

49   development.

50   Aligned to these findings, there have been arguments for the delivery of holistic and

51   ecological applied practice within talent development environments (Henriksen, Stambulova,

52   & Roessler, 2010). There have also been arguments for the mutual benefits of supporting

53   performance and personal development simultaneously (Miller & Kerr, 2002; Gilbourne &

54   Richardson, 2006). This research has provided applied sport psychologists with a more

55   complete understanding of the different areas of athletes' whole lives and how transitions

56   within these can overlap and interact at key stages along their career journey.

57   A wide variety of approaches a practitioner may take to transition intervention have

58   been described, for example the Life Development Intervention (Danish, Petitpas, & Hale,

59   1992; 1993; 1995), and Stambulova's (2010) Five Step Career Planning Strategy. These

60   approaches have generally emphasised the development of goal setting skills, as well as

61   situating the present demands of an athlete between a past from which the athlete can learn

62   lessons, and a future towards which the athlete is motivated to progress. Alongside these

63   developments, athlete lifestyle programmes (sometimes referred to as career assistance or

64   athlete life-skill programmes) such as the Career Assistance Programme for Athletes (CAPA)

65   (Petitpas, Danish, McKelvain, & Murphy, 1992), the United States Olympic Education

66   Centre (USOEC) and the Australian Athlete Career and Education (ACE) programme, have

67   been developed to help alleviate athletes' anxieties regarding their future and prepare them

68   for retirement from their sport and the pursuit of a new career. In the UK today, national sport

69   institutes, for example, the England Institute of Sport (EIS) deliver the Performance Lifestyle

70   programme to Olympic sports, and some professional sports. Other professional sporting

71   bodies such as, the Welsh Rugby Union, have developed their own similarly aligned support

72   services. In cricket, the Personal Development and Welfare programme (PDW) is currently

73   delivered by practitioners working for the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) to the

74   England National teams, and a similarly aligned PDW programme delivered to professional

75   domestic county clubs by practitioners working for the Professional Cricketers Association

76   (PCA).

77   There has been limited academic literature which has explicitly focused on the nature

78   of support provided by lifestyle programmes. However, Stambulova and Ryba (2014)

79   acknowledged that there is great diversity in the "more than 60" programmes they have

80   identified worldwide (p.7). Yet, they suggest that most often it is the sport psychology

81   personnel who deliver these programmes with the primary focus on providing education,

82   guidance and skills with a view to helping athletes prepare for life after sport and to help

83   manage athletes' demands outside of their sport.

84   There have been various accounts of what lifestyle support should look like, yet there

85   has not been a description or analysis of what lifestyle practitioners actually do. The ECB's

86   Personal Development and Welfare Programme which is the context of the present inquiry, is

87   described in official documents as providing: "integrated, impartial support to players and the

88   team environment, to develop resilience in and out of cricket as a personalized service within

89   the three areas of wellbeing, lifestyle and personal development" (ECB, 2017; see also EIS,

90   2017). This suggests that this organisation promotes a more immersed, relational,

91   psychologically informed and performance oriented provision of support than is described in

92   the academic literature. Moreover, in this particular institution, lifestyle support is not within

93   the remit of sport psychologists, but a practitioner who might be an ex-athlete, or have a

94   degree in a non-sport or non-psychology related field. Despite the diversity that is likely to

95   exist also in other sport organisations, the most relevant guiding literature for lifestyle

96   programmes has been conducted from a sport psychology perspective. This has created a lack

97   of role clarity for both lifestyle practitioners and the sport psychology practitioners they work

98   alongside, and may have contributed to the portrayal of lifestyle support within the literature

99   as focusing on practical skill development as rather than some of the more relational elements

100   of the role.

101   Therefore, there is a need to better understand the actual practices of lifestyle

102   practitioners and the contextually and culturally specific concerns for which elite athletes

103   seek lifestyle practitioner support. Nurmi (2004) suggested that the adolescent years are the

104   most critical for the formation of identity, development of cognitive motivational strategies

105   and the social and organisational skills that may impact the educational choices and career

106   aspirations of individuals. This suggests adolescence would provide a valuable context for

107   such research. Due to a lack of previous research that uses methodology allowing for the

108   presentation of athletes' voices and capturing of their daily existence in specific contexts

109   (Ronkainen, 2014), it is also felt that a focus on the personal meanings athletes bring to these

110   lifestyle concerns is also necessary. Further, Stambulova and Ryba (2014) called for research

111   aligned to career development, transitions and assistance which was more socio-culturally

112   and contextually informed, as well as research which blend the applied and the theoretical.

113   Rather than focusing on a specific within-career transition, such as from youth to

114   senior sport, the present study seeks to understand the daily existence and the holistic lifestyle

115   concerns of youth cricketers embedded in a talent development environment. Using a

116   practitioner-researcher ethnographic approach within a national talent development

117   programme, our research was guided by two research objectives:

118   1. To understand the nature of contextually and culturally specific lifestyle concerns for

119   which elite youth cricketers seek support, and the personal meaning they ascribe to

120   them;

121   2. To gain an understanding of how athlete lifestyle support ought to be positioned

122   within this context and at this stage of young cricketers lives.

123   **Methodology**

124   **Theoretical positioning**

125   The current study used an ethnographic approach to data collection, with the aim of

126   understanding individuals' experiences' of lifestyle concerns within the broader context of a

127   national cricket talent development programme. The philosophical underpinning of the study

128   lies a in critical constructivist perspective (Richert, 2010). Critical constructivism maintains

129   that the reality in which people live is constructed by the efforts of people to understand and

130   make sense out of living. The distinction between social constructionism and critical

131   constructivism is that the latter maintains that personal mental activity makes an important

132   contribution to the reality that is constructed (Richert, 2010). In other words, both individual

133   and social processes contribute to the construction of reality. The current study aligns with

134   critical constructivism in trying to study how individuals make sense of their experiences and

135   lifestyle challenges within a specific context and culture. By maintaining that the individual

136   makes important contributions to the meaning-making process, this perspective allows for a

137   more traditional concept of self as located within the individual. This approach subscribes to

138   ontological realism (i.e. there is a world which is independent of our knowledge of it)

139   combined with epistemological constructivism (i.e. our knowledge remains subjective and

140   incomplete).

141   **Participants**

142   The talent development programme examined in this research consisted of two squads

143   of players between the age of 15 and 19 who had been selected as players with the highest

144   potential nationally within their respective skill areas. The participants in the study were

145   members of one of these squads. At the beginning of the research, there were 16 players in

146   the squad, 12 of whom were on their second year on the programme, and four were in their

147   first year. After 12 months, four players were deselected, and four new players joined the

148   programme. As such, members of the setting over the course of the research included 20

149   players selected from their First Class Counties (professional clubs playing national domestic

150   game who are awarded First Class status), and fourteen support staff including a head coach,

151   operations manager, six different skills coaches, two physiotherapists, two strength and

152   conditioning coaches, a performance analyst and a performance psychologist. Membership of

153   the programme involved attendance at residential domestic training camps, overseas

154   competitive and non-competitive tours and home competitive tours. The finer details of the

155   programme will be described later in the paper. Of the 20 players involved in this study, 16

156   were in full time secondary education throughout the period of data collection.

157   **The Researcher and Reflexivity**

158   It is often the mission of ethnographic research not to interfere with the environment

159   under study. The practitioner-researcher status simply did not allow for this. Indeed, I could

160   often be perceived as taking on the role of action-researcher, as data uncovered and

161   practitioner interventions became more and more interrelated over time. However, this was

162   deemed a symbiotic relationship as the insights derived from research improved player

163   support, and the improved relationships and trust aided the continued collection of data. Yet,

164   this increased the requirement for self-reflexivity throughout all stages of the research.

165   According to Day (2012), reflexivity concerns three interrelated issues. These are: 1) the

166   researcher underlying assumptions about knowledge production (epistemology), 2) issues of

167   power, researcher identity and positionality, and 3) reflexive techniques to produce good

168   quality, rigorous qualitative research. Schinke et al. (2012) further highlighted the importance

169   of self-reflexivity when fulfilling the role of both researcher and practitioner. Given the

170   practitioner-researcher approach in the present study, engagement with self-reflexivity is

171   particularly important. It is considered appropriate to discuss how my own background,

172   training and philosophical positioning may have contributed and shaped the research process.

173   I have completed a degree in Psychology, and a Master's degree in Sport Psychology.

174   Although I have a competitive background in both individual and team sports, I had no

175   involvement within the game and culture of cricket, either as a player or a practitioner prior

176   to entering the research setting. My experience as a sports performer provided me with an

177   understanding of the experiences and challenges involved with youth talent development.

178   However, I had no previous experience within cricket and entered the setting as a cultural

179   outsider. Although this created challenges when entering the setting, it also provided me with

180   a more critical perspective with regard to the cultural norms and daily practices for those

181   operating within the sport. My approach as a practitioner is particularly grounded in

182   humanistic and existential psychology where the individual's existence and the experiential

183   knowledge that they obtain in their pursuit of excellence are paramount with a particular

184   focus on meaning, responsibility and freedom (Ronkainen & Nesti, 2017) I did not aim to

185   begin the research process with a theoretical framework or set of research questions to

186   answer. However, I did bring a sensitivity and curiosity for what I would understand as

187   psycho-social and cultural challenges and lifestyle-based concerns. This will inevitably have

188   been influenced by a number of factors, most significantly my educational background and

189   philosophy of practice, and what Day (2012) referred to as the researchers theoretical

190   traditions and perspectives as well as methodological practices.

191   My philosophy of practice will have shaped my interactions with staff and players as a

192   practitioner and in doing so shape the nature of data which was co-created through these

193   interactions. I will also have interpreted the players experience and identified their lifestyle-

194   based challenges through this lens. This placed a high value on my practitioner reflection and

195 the role of the research team as critical friends (Smith & Sparkes, 2002) to challenge my

196 interpretations and some of the biases which inform them. Further, my educational

197 background in psychology and sport psychology means that I effectively performed the role

198 of lifestyle practitioner from a holistic sport psychology perspective. However, this is not the

199 only training route for lifestyle practitioners. Therefore my interpretation of what concerns

200 players faced may contrast with the interpretation of practitioners who possess an alternative

201 training background. Consistent with the paradigmatic positioning of the study, the findings

202 ought to be viewed as one insight into the lifestyle experiences of elite youth cricketers, from

203 the perspective of a practitioner-researcher with a specific philosophy of practice and

204 educational background. Finally, use of "I", "me" or "my" will refer to the first author

205 throughout the remainder of the manuscript, whilst "we" will denote the research team

206 (Tedlock, 2000; Foley, 2002).

207 **Procedure**

208 I entered the setting as an ethnographic outsider (Ely, 1991), which can provide a

209 challenge in gaining entry. However, my role as PDW practitioner allowed for a seamless and

210 natural entry, establishment of trust and familiarisation with the participants. The dual-role of

211 researcher and practitioner was deemed to be symbiotic, given the requirement for strong

212 practitioner-player relationships, confidentiality and trust to succeed in both. However, it

213 placed considerable importance on my commitment to maintaining a diary of personal

214 reflections. Practitioner-researcher ethnography of this nature has occurred previously

215 (Faulkner & Sparkes, 1999; Peters, McAllister, & Rubinstein, 2001a). Similarly, Peters *et al.*

216 (2001a) reflected that the approach was to the benefit of their research in cancer care as for

217 them, simply hanging out and observing waiting rooms in a cancer clinic would be highly

218 challenging and awkward otherwise.

219   My role as a PDW practitioner involved the development, delivery and case

220   management of individual and group support for the squad. This included pro-active

221   academic support and group education as well as one-to-one support that were more player-

222   led and emergent in nature. Over a 15 month period, I attended eight residential training

223   camps, ranging from 3 to 10 days, a home competitive series, an overseas competitive series,

224   an overseas development camp and provided occasional support for players outside of the

225   programme activity. I was based at the main development headquarters consisting of practice

226   areas and residential accommodation, typically 5 days per week. This allowed for a uniquely

227   practitioner based approach to the research, while still drawing on ethnographic research

228   principles. For example, when not delivering support to players or coaches, the first author

229   was fully immersed within the environment, allowing for a more typical ethnographic

230   position of hanging out and observing events as they unfolded (Woodward, 2008).

231   **Data Collection**

232   Observations of the setting, daily practices within the programme and the sport more

233   broadly, and of the day-to-day lives of players, provided the backbone to the ethnographic

234   research process (Ely, 1991). These were supplemented by informal conversations with

235   players and staff and formal conversations occurring through my activity as a practitioner

236   within the setting. Notable moments and interactions were written down in a notepad in the

237   form of keyword entries (Krane & Baird, 2005) as soon as possible after they occurred, but

238   normally away from the scene. Observations and conversations were then captured fully in

239   the form of a research log (Krane & Baird, 2005), typically at the end of each day of

240   engagement and never more than 24 hours after the original observation (Emerson, Frets, &

241   Shaw, 1995). These entries were then supported by practitioner-researcher reflective diary

242   entries, during which I could attempt to make sense of key observations, conversations and

243   their implications (Krane & Baird, 2005). My reflections occurred regularly after periods of

244   time with the squad, and on a more ad-hoc basis. All data extracts presented are taken from

245   field notes, capturing the scenes and conversations that occurred. Although this meant

246   capturing data from memory, it was felt that audio recording dialogue would have

247   jeopardised the relationship development with participants and would have been at odds with

248   the practitioner role delivery.

249   Assuming a critical constructivist perspective to achieve the purpose of the research,

250   the focus of data collection was on how individuals experienced and made sense of their

251   lifestyle concerns, but also how this was shaped by the broader cultural and contextual factors

252   associated with membership of the programme, and the sport. Initially, my focus was quite

253   broad capturing what daily life looked like for players. As relationships developed and the

254   breadth of experiences became clearer, daily life began to provide the backdrop against which

255   more individually relevant concerns played out. In that sense, the observational lens narrowed

256   from the contextual and cultural, towards locating individual experience within these. The

257   research team acted as "critical friends" (Sparkes & Smith, 2002) throughout data collection

258   and analysis, challenging the first author to discuss the interpretations and methodological

259   concerns as they arose. For example, this included helping to position the data within

260   theoretical frameworks, appropriately challenging and/or focusing the first author's

261   observational lens, and negotiation of arising ethical dilemmas as a result of the practitioner-

262   researcher role.

263   **Data Analysis and Representation**

264   Data analysis was based on a qualitative description approach (Sandelowski, 2000). In

265   this sense, although data coding was systematically applied, the codes were generated from

266   the data themselves, with collection and analysis mutually shaping each other (Sandelowski,

267   2000). Thematic analysis was completed, in alignment with guidance provided by Braun and

268   Clarke (2006). This involved: (1) familiarisation through repeated reading whilst searching

269   for meaning and patterns amongst the data, (2) generating initial codes and organising data

270   into meaningful groups, (3) sorting different codes into potential themes and collating

271   extracts from the data into themed groups, (4) reviewing themes in line with Patton's (1990)

272   dual criteria of internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity, (5) defining and naming

273   themes before (6) using data extracts to produce the report. These steps allowed for the

274   organisation of themes within the three groups. These were: player concerns; programme

275   factors; and PDW support factors. Player concerns were the primary focus of the research and

276   therefore provided the themes for presentation within the manuscript. However, the broader

277   programme factors and PDW support factors played a secondary role in helping to position

278   the discussion of the themes presented in this paper within the broader context and culture.

279   The data analysis allowed for description and interpretation of player lifestyle concerns

280   within their specific context with an attempt to theorise patterns of description (Patton, 1990)

281   with regard to previous literature (Frith & Gleeson, 2004) and the researcher's contextual

282   awareness.

283   **Ethical considerations**

284   This study was approved by the University ethics committee and the programme

285   manager was identified as an appropriate gatekeeper to provide consent to overt research

286   access to the programme. This was facilitated by the researcher's entry to the setting as a new

287   practitioner within the staff team. All members of the setting were provided with a verbal

288   briefing of the practitioner-researcher's role, aims of the research, data collection procedures

289   and were offered assurances regarding anonymity and confidentiality. Players and staff were

290   also informed that they maintained the option to withdraw from participation at any time.

291   However, no participants opted out of research at any point throughout the study.

292   Ethics can be a complicated subject when it comes to conducting ethnographic

293   research, due to the unpredictable nature of the work (Goodwin, Pope, Mort, & Smith, 2003;

294   Ferdinand, Pearson, Rowe, & Worthington, 2007). There were a number of ethical dilemmas

295   to negotiate during the study. One concern was that despite the overt research stance, it was

296   felt that participants came to view me more as a practitioner than a researcher as trust and

297   rapport was developed over time. This could have resulted in participants sharing a level of

298   information not intended to be included in the research. However, I was open about my

299   research work and players frequently saw me carrying out research work within the setting.

300   They frequently asked me about the purpose and progress of the research I was doing with

301   them. Further, it is important to appreciate that when players disclosed concerns to me, such

302   as feeling homesick, struggling to meet expectations or not knowing what to do after

303   finishing secondary school, it became my responsibility to support them as a practitioner,

304   ensuring a mutual benefit and thereby reducing the power imbalance inherent in research

305   settings. In general, when working within the applied setting, I felt that the ethical practice as

306   a practitioner equated to good ethical practice as a researcher, for example, non-judgemental

307   support, a primary focus on player welfare and confidentiality. However, it was also

308   explained to participants that what was considered confidentiality in practice would be

309   considered anonymity in research.

310   **Findings and discussion**

311   What follows is the practitioner-researcher's tale of the "self" and the "other", whilst

312   trying not to let the "self" dominate and allow the "other", in this case the players collective

313   story of cultural and contextually relevant lifestyle concerns and the personal meaning

314   ascribed to them, to be presented. The first section offers a description of the environment

315   that the players experienced on the development programme before presenting the players'

316   experience of support and the lifestyle concerns they required support for. Pseudonyms are

317   used for participants throughout the discussion. The data extracts represent one individual's

318   experiences at a given time, however, the narrative attempts to recreate a holistic view of

319   experience which is representative of what any individual may experience in the programme

320   at a point in time.

321   **Entering the national development programme**

322   I met the staff team the night before the first day of a camp, referred to as profiling

323   and used as a means of gaining an understanding of the players' strengths and areas to work

324   on for the coming winter. At the pre-camp meeting, I was initially struck by the high number

325   of staff involved (14 people sitting around the table), their attention to detail and their

326   demanding standards. I attempted to control my emotions and wondered if players struggle to

327   control theirs during their first taste of the environment. However, I sensed that staff seemed

328   to buy in to the idea of supporting players on and off the pitch through their descriptions of

329   the players' home life, previous struggles and character. Over time, I often heard staff state

330   that they aimed to uphold 'unashamedly high standards' through 'high challenge and high

331   support' where players would learn to understand the demands of their aspirations as

332   potential international cricketers. What this meant in practice became clearer at the following

333   training camp. It was a 10-day, very intense training camp right at the end of the post-season

334   break. The goal was to provide a level of 'culture shock' regarding what was expected and

335   demanded, through exposure to levels of training and performance under pressure that

336   players would not have experienced before.

337   The content of days on camp included strength and conditioning sessions, various skill

338   development sessions, and classroom sessions normally with a performance psychology,

339   personal development or tactical theme. Player schedules also included academic study

340   sessions of up to 2 hours per day to compensate for the time missed at school. Players could

341   use their spare time to benefit from any specialist staff support if they wished. Everyone

342   would eat together, train together, study together and enjoy their limited downtime together

343   in what is an incredibly immersive experience, often including 6.30am alarm calls, and ten to

344   twelve hour days with performance and behaviour demands right on the edge of the players'

345   capabilities.

346   Players were held accountable for a high level of performance. Training would follow

347   a cyclical pattern of developing skills, training under pressure and being tested under pressure

348   in specific scenarios. From a behavioural point of view, coaches told me that they expected

349   players to hold a high level of professionalism, including time keeping, having the right kit at

350   the right time and taking responsibility for tidying the environment. Failure to meet

351   behavioural or performance demands could result in "consequences" such as a 5-minute

352   physical challenge for performance shortcomings. For committing a "behavioural" faux pas

353   such as arriving late to a session, the culprit may be required to clean everyone's dishes after

354   lunch or may not be allowed to take part in training. Staff sought to lead by example and

355   create enthusiasm for the challenging nature of the programme. For example, it soon became

356   obvious that consequences could also be delivered to any staff member, all in pursuit of

357   "unashamedly high standards". Beyond these camps, there were overseas tours, lasting from

358   two to four weeks, aimed at exposing players to competition and playing conditions beyond

359   what they had experienced before and which would challenge them in all aspects of the

360   game; hence maximising their development and enhancing their ability to "tour" successfully.

361   For players, the programme represented a new environment to balance with their first

362   class county academy or professional programmes, their educational aspirations and in many

363   cases, their ambitious school cricket programmes or scholarships, all while striving to

364   maintain a social balance with families and friends. The dual role of student and cricketer

365   meant missing many days of school, sometimes sitting mock exams in foreign countries and

366   carrying out two-hour study sessions in hotels and press rooms on tour before returning to the

367   UK to prepare for exams during the early cricket season. Alongside these unique demands on

368   players, the programme was committed to developing players on and off the field, respecting

369   the player's educational aspirations, assisting players in the delivery of a charity project

370   overseas and seeking to support the welfare of players through the performance psychologist

371   and the personal development and welfare practitioners.

372   **Players Appreciating Lifestyle Support**

373   On the first morning of profiling camp, I met each player formally for the first time. I

374   was surprised by their readiness to engage and discuss concerns that they currently had. This

375   seemed to reflect their respect and appreciation for the PDW role and their enthusiasm to

376   develop a relationship from the off. Kieron, arrived into his first meeting with me, and

377   without introduction announced his recent frustrations and need for support:

378   I really need to speak to you…I have just moved to a new school and the difference in

379   schools is just crazy. I was at a state school before, and the expectations of people

380   there are so different. I am not sure I really fit in, or am even cut out for boarding

381   [school] to be honest. I changed because it is a great school, better logistically for

382   everything really, and I guess it is a good training environment for my cricket. But I

383   have been missing home a lot and I have not really settled.

384   The coaches had suggested that players often responded very differently to the array

385   of challenges that lay ahead, and that the player's response would play a key role in

386   furthering, or stifling their development. However, this first insight highlighted how the array

387   of challenges would include the private and personal, and not just cricket. Kieron was

388   struggling to adapt to his new life at a new school and was expressing a sense of loneliness,

389   isolation and homesickness. It also highlighted how the personal and the performance were

390   strongly interrelated for players as personal decisions were taken for the sake of cricket

391   development. Craig later recognised the importance of the off-the-field factors and the value

392   of having the PDW to talk to about "problems", as a player may feel the need to separate the

393   personal from cricket so that their lives are not seen as interfering with performance:

394   I think it's really good having a PDW. It gives you someone to talk to about the stuff

395   that you can't really tell the coach. Stuff that you don't want them [the coaches] to

396   know, or what you think if they did know, they might think of not playing you. Like

397   stuff about school, or problems that you have, or even if you are really tired and are

398   just struggling to keep going!

399   In their work with young footballers, Gilbourne and Richardson (2006) suggested that

400   although it is the performance agenda that will attract coaches to the idea of psychological

401   support for young athletes, they state that successful practice is "held together" by the

402   practitioners "capacity to care" which embraced the self-awareness and empathic qualities

403   that engender compassion. They also suggested that a symbiotic relationship exists between

404   the performance and caring agendas. Rob, a second year player, summarised this relationship

405   very simply:

406   I think it is one of the most important roles to be honest. If you don't have that (PDW

407   support) some people could really struggle…I would even say it is linked to

408   performance. The stuff you (PDW) help us with is not performance, but by helping us

409   it directly helps…by me being on top of everything else and my mind being in the

410   right place, I can then go out and play. But if not, it can be really hard.

411   Rob's comments suggest that there are no non-performance factors, just some areas of

412   support that influence performance (perhaps) less directly than others. Although there is a

413   growing awareness of the value of supporting both the person and the athlete (Ravizza, 2002;

414   Nesti, 2004), this is not currently represented in all research or practice. There is

415   overwhelmingly more research investigating the psychological elements of successful skill

416   delivery, than research investigating how supporting athletes on a more personal level can

417   contribute to both wellbeing and performance. Further, there has been no previous literature

418   that has discussed the relationship and overlap between support of a lifestyle nature and a

419   performance psychology nature. The player discussions cited earlier would appear to suggest

420   that the divide between the two is more blurred than support infrastructures and current

421   literature seems to suggest.

422   When talking to players, I was struck by the value many players placed on developing

423   a trusting relationship with me from the outset. Kieron, openly shared the depth of his

424   struggles and his perceived importance of the PDW role when he had first joined the

425   programme:

426   At times last year I was coming into PDW meetings in tears. I used to really struggle.

427   It took time to be able to speak about it [personal issues] as well, like at first she

428   [PDW] would have been asking me a lot of quite touchy feely questions, but I didn't

429   really want to talk about that stuff with someone I didn't know or trust yet. But once I

430   could, it was a lot easier and you begin to feel better and be yourself a bit more. I

431   hope that with time together on the programme, I can show you that trust as well.

432   Kieron identified the difficulty, and value of discussing issues of a personal and

433   emotive nature without a strong trusting relationship in a highly competitive, unforgiving and

434   rather masculine high performance environments (see Parker, 2001). Nesti (2004) stated that

435   such a strong relationships allowed for what he referred to as, 'the encounter' to occur, where

436   both parties are at ease and can converse freely, yet the nature of the conversation is intense

437   and focused. Nesti (2010) stressed how this should not be mistaken for simply a conversation

438   as it has a clear aim, which is clarification of the issues at play. This important element of

439   counselling (Nesti, 2004) is missing from descriptions of lifestyle support roles within the

440   literature, which has instead focused on the more practical elements of the role, like career

441   guidance or educational support. Further, as discussions of practitioner philosophies of

442   practice (Poczwardowski, Sherman, & Ravizza, 2004) and of counselling approaches (Hill,

443   2000) for sport psychology practitioners have emerged, this has not been applied to athlete

444   lifestyle practice.

445   **Adapting to the new environment**

446   The "high challenge and high support" programme approach appeared to be embraced

447   by many players who had learned how to cope and access the "high support". For those who

448   hadn't, or for new members of the group, the high-octane, action packed milieu could be

449   overwhelming. Players' sense of being overwhelmed could relate to physical demands,

450   organisational demands or behavioural demands. It was further fuelled by the level of

451   emotional investment which players attached to their place on the programme and the

452   demand to meet expectations in order to maintain it. One evening, John, a coach, highlighted

453   that George may be struggling to cope during his first week in the programme:

454   He has had a bit of a wobble today, after a tough session he just got a bit emotional

455   and said he wasn't sure if he was cut out for this. He has done ok, he has just been hit

456   with a few consequences and his technique has been a bit exposed at times. He might

457   need a chat [with you], just to break the ice a bit. He has had a really tough

458   introduction this week and he won't be used to this level of demand.

459   There was minimal judgement from this coach, just empathy with the challenge the player

460   was facing and how important him overcoming this would be for his long-term development.

461   George shared his shock at the intensity of the programme, and his investment in the

462   programme:

463   I am not really used to this type of environment, the intensity, and judgement and

464   consequences. So it has just been quite hard to take in the first week. It's tough

465   because I have had to make a commitment to cricket and drop rugby which has been a

466   tough decision, but I still think it is the right decision, I guess this is just what I need

467   to do, I just need to get used to it and get better.

468   George appeared to doubt his ability to compete at this higher level. He also shared

469   that he also had to make a decision with regard to what sport to focus on as a result of his

470   selection. His difficult experiences early in the programme appeared to create a sense of

471   doubt about whether he had made the right decision, probably one of the first life decisions

472   he had been required to take regarding his future.

473   George's description of his challenges in adapting to the new levels of performance

474   expectation are consistent with what Relvas, Littlewood, Nesti, Gilbourn and Richardson

475   (2010) termed as the "developing mastery" stage of development for football players. Relvas

476   *et al.* (2010) outlined this stage of development in a critique of previous developmental

477   models of transition as lacking the contextual details and specificity critical to better

478   understand the unique social and cultural features within many sports Relvas *et al.* (2010)

479   suggested that players in this stage had already progressed through the development stage of

480   Wylleman *et al.* (2004) transition model, yet lacked the attributes and experiences to be

481   considered the finished or polished article and still required focused and continued

482   development work. The transition to the national development programme in the current

483   study undoubtedly involved a similar step up in performance expectations for players, and in

484   the level of performance which may be tolerated. There were still contextual differences from

485   Relvas et al.'s (2010) football participants, in that these young cricketers had stepped up to a

486   new level in International youth cricket, but not necessarily a step towards a professional role

487   at their counties. However, the players in this study did still experience what Relvas *et al.*

488   (2010) labelled social insecurity and comparison on a psychological level, new coaches on a

489   psycho-social level and uncertainty and isolation on an environmental and cultural level.

490   Players' experiences of adapting to the programme appeared to align with what

491   Bourke (2002) referred to as a form of culture shock, a psychological phenomenon which

492   may lead to feelings of helplessness, irritability and disorientation which players would have

493   to accept and learn to cope with in order to keep progressing. Finding a way to endure the

494   malaise that could accompany the personal demands of balancing these multiple roles could

495   begin to have an effect both when on camps, and when at home as Jack revealed:

496   Yeah, I have been really tired, more worn out I suppose…like I never have time to

497   just sit and chill for a bit...and even here (at the development centre) actually,

498   sometimes when you get back, you can feel like you need to just chill or else you will

499   not get to sleep, you just need a break…when we finish late like we have done for the

500   last couple of days, it can really knock you off…you almost get energised by having a

501   little down time, or even a game of pool, just having a laugh.

502   Jack's personal sacrifices resulted in fatigue, and a lifestyle which was significantly different

503   from his adolescent peers, similarly to professional golfers in Carless and Douglas's study

504   (2009). However, for them, golf was already a professional career. Jack was describing how

505   cricket was at risk of feeling like a job, even though it wasn't a career yet, and there were still

506   many areas of typical adolescent development unfinished, both educationally and socially.

507   For other players, including Kieron, the time spent away from home, on tours or long

508   training camps and away from those people close to them provided a particular challenge::

509   Last year I found it really tough because the first half of the tour is all training and

510   then its matches. And when I reached the halfway point last year, I just couldn't see

511   how I would reach the end…I had a few conversations actually with the PDW, and

512   with one of the players I roomed with, which just about helped me get there…I think I

513   was just missing home.

514   Kieron explained how, on a personal level, the programme was really challenging him, yet, it

515   was important for him to persevere as the career he wanted would require him becoming

516   much more comfortable and able to spend large parts of his life living like this.

517   In their study on the development of mental toughness at one of the biggest soccer

518   clubs in the world, Cook, and colleagues (Cook, Crust, Littlewood, Nesti, & Allen-

519   Collinson, 2014) described how coaches sought to foster independence and resourcefulness

520   within their players. Given the demands of the young cricketers in this study these are

521   certainly two characteristics that players are required to possess (or acquire) in order to

522   successfully navigate their way through the programme. However, one coach, Gerard

523   recounted that it was the challenge for the coaching team to recognise where each individual

524   was 'developmentally' with regard to coping with these demands and identify how the

525   coaches and support team, could help these players to evolve:

526   Basically, we are asking these guys to behave like adults. With where they want to go,

527   there is no shame in that, because I think that is what they need, but sometimes we

528   have to remember that they are still teenagers, some only 16, and they will not always

529   be ready for that developmentally. For me that is a constant tension in the programme,

530   balancing their demands, our education of them and the challenges we put in place

531   with where they are in terms of their individual development.

532   Without attention to the personal stories and challenges that sat behind observable behaviour,

533   there was a risk of coaches misjudging the lived experience of the player who in the context

534   of their development might be showing significant toughness in persevering through tough

535   challenges even when they might not necessarily appear to be. Current literature describes

536   athlete lifestyle programmes as predominantly helping athletes with life skill development or

537   career and education guidance (Stambulova & Ryba, 2014). However, these findings suggest

538   that practitioners may find themselves more often supporting challenges which are more

539   personal, psychological and emotional in nature. This suggests that the positioning of support

540   provision ought to prioritise the ability to support issues of this nature, as should the desired

541   skills and knowledge of practitioners performing the role.

542   **Managing competing demands**

543   Players, who were selected to the programme, were required to take on this new

544   commitment alongside what was already a considerable investment of time. They would now

545   be required to balance school, county cricket training, their social lives, their family lives and

546   this significant commitment involved with joining national development programme. Soon

547   after being selected onto the programme, I as PDW organised a meeting for players who are

548   in full time education at their school. For Simon, a first year player, this brought him together

549   with his parents, representatives from his county cricket club, representatives from the school

550   and me. We met to ensure that everyone understood the commitments necessary when joining

551   the programme and discussed plans to cope with the weeks of missing school whilst away on

552   tour. The conversation would often divert towards discussion of skill development and

553   cricketing needs, the different coaches he would be working with and how his training needs

554   could be met around his class times. This often required further input of even more members

555   of the players' support network. I considered how aligned these stakeholders could actually

556   be in supporting the player.

557   Similar to what Richardson, Gilbourne and Littlewood (2004) observed in football

558   academies, these young cricketers were exposed to a high number of significant development

559   stakeholders. This created a risk of the players hearing mixed or conflicting messages, or

560   having to work to maintain contact with staff across a range of environments. This was

561   viewed by players and staff as having the potential to be detrimental for player development.

562   Brian, a physiotherapist commented on the programmes occasional need to simply clarify and

563   bring together the variety of messages players received, rather than add to them:

564   You think of these players, the number of people with an invested interest in them is

565   insane. You have the academy director, academy S&C, academy physio and academy

566   bowling or batting coach. Then you have the second team staff, maybe the first team,

567   maybe school cricket staff and then you add out programme staff, plus parents who

568   are obviously at the centre. So you are looking at about 17 or maybe even 22 people if

569   the player is at a cricket school…If we can get everyone pulling in the same direction

570   it might work, but if they are pulling in different directions, it just becomes very hard

571   for the player.

572   The potential incongruence between different stakeholders across different

573   environments was perceived as potentially anxiety-provoking by several players. Rob, a

574   player in his second year on the programme shared his worries about possessing the level of

575   independence required in order to maintain positive relationships with the different staff. For

576   example, players may have to report training loads and injuries to a number of

577   physiotherapists in different environments which may include school, county or the national

578   programme. Alternatively, they may need to clarify what they should do in response to

579   receiving conflicting advice from coaches in their county and national programmes. Further,

580   the requirement to meet the demands of all staff began to create pressure and stress for

581   players, as they felt the need to keep all these stakeholders happy:

582   I have been feeling quite overwhelmed recently. I have a lot on my plate with school,

583   the programme and then having changed clubs. That has led to a lot of things to be

584   done. It feels like I have just been making one big mistake every day. Basically

585   making someone angry every day, and I have really been worrying, like worrying that

586   I have done something wrong or forgotten to do something I should.

587   Coaches are one of the most important actors within a youth sport context and play an

588   influential role in either facilitating or hindering the development of young athletes (Camire,

589   Forneris, Trudel, & Bernard, 2011). Therefore, it is no surprise that for players, maintaining a

590   positive relationship with their coach(es) is thought to be highly important. However, it was

591   striking that as the number of stakeholders' rose, this relationship could also become a source

592   of stress, with players like Rob worrying that he was letting others down by not meeting his

593   commitments rather than seeing the network as a source of support. Reid, Stewart and Thorne

594   (2004) recognised the importance of developing a highly functioning multi-disciplinary team.

595   However, there remains no discussion of the challenges of multiple teams working with a

596   player, perhaps with different approaches or philosophies. Relvas *et al.* (2010) acknowledged

597   the challenge of maintaining consistency in approach, communication and culture between

598   first team and academy structures within football clubs. Players in the current study operated

599   across anything from two to four cricket environments, in addition to school and home

600   environments. This appeared to have the potential to impact the coach-athlete relationship

601   and their subsequent working dynamics, something not discussed in the literature.

602   The players' attempts to manage relationships with such a high number of coaching

603   staff often appeared a stressful and dysfunctional dynamic where players could be left

604   wondering who they need to keep happy and confused by what could appear to be conflicting

605   messages. The potential for players to feel insecure and confused amidst this need to *keep*

606   *others happy* appeared to present a risk to players as they struggled to maintain a sense of

607   personal authenticity (Ronkainen & Nesti, 2017). As Guignon (1993, p. 227) suggested,

608   everyday existence may become "fragmented into a series of means-end strategies governed

609   by the latest public attitudes about what constitutes success". In this case, the "public" refers

610   to the coaches and stakeholders within the various environments that the players perform.

611   This could impact the players developing sense of self (Nesti, 2004), place their identity in a

612   state of flux (Richardson, Relvas, & Littlewood, 2013) and negatively influence their ability

613   to take responsibility for their own development, both as people, and performers.

614   Somewhat paradoxically, coaches discussed their desire to encourage players to take

615   responsibility for their development, as Gerard recognised:

616   The guys who are really on route to making it, are the ones who are driving their own

617   development, they are strong enough to challenge the coaches…they are taking the

618   lead. They are independent, whereas the opposite is someone who is just hearing it,

619   doing bits here, doing bits there, no real direction from them…I think a large part of

620   our role, is trying to encourage that [empowerment], create independence.

621   The coaching staff made efforts to tackle the challenge of aligning player support across

622   different environments. However, the number of differing support options offered to the

623   players often resulted in a disconnection between how coaches wanted players to develop

624   independence and a sense of responsibility, and the players feeling the need to please those

625   overseeing their development.

626   **Education Choices and Professional Contracts**

627   At any time, players' education commitments were viewed by coaches and players as

628   welcome intellectual stimulation, a backup plan, or as something which simply got in the way

629   of playing cricket. Typically, there was respect for the value of gaining an academic

630   grounding on which players could fall if needed. This resulted in prioritisation of practical

631   educational support and most players completing secondary qualifications successfully.

632   However, players often remained unsure regarding further education and its value beyond

633   secondary qualifications, as was highlighted by Jack:

634   I mean I have never really thought about university before, but I have started to now,

635   just because you don't know if you are going to get a contract or not. So I will apply,

636   but if I get a contract I will turn down the place, it is just in case I get released,

637   everything really hinges on the contract.

638   Conversations with players on the subject of education often reflected their hesitations

639   of discussing the prospect of not getting the career in professional cricket that they want. At

640   times, there was confusion in terms of what they "are supposed to do?" regarding educational

641   decisions. As such, Henry's idea of "taking a gap year to focus on my cricket" appeared to

642   become code for "I need to try and earn a contract and I am not sure how going to university

643   might affect this".

644   However, for Conor, it was a more complex decision given his academic ability, his

645   upbringing and his concern regarding the impression it could give:

646   For me, I can't see me not going to University, because of my up-bringing; it's just

647   really a question of what is the right time? I am quite keen on going to University, but

648   there are some problems with that…Do you have to compromise cricket or your

649   education, because I really don't want to do that. Also how does it play into county

650   consideration, being available to play or being noticed and considered by the coach?

651   The players in this study placed significant importance on their education as they looked to

652   balance educational demands with the demands of the programme. This appears to contrast

653   with findings from other professional team sports, such as football where Richardson (2003)

654   suggested that the "seductive nature of the football environment may dilute the desire for

655   educational development" (p-58) after signing a one or two-year professional contract. In

656   contrast, cricket has long been recognised for its middle-class culture and close affiliation

657   with independent schools (Tozer, 2012). This was reflected in Conor's reference to his family

658   upbringing when considering his university options. Further, cricketers in this study were

659   planning for the future and open to discussing their educational plans either as a dual-career

660   or as a back-up plan in case they did not receive a professional contract. This also contrasted

661   with findings from football (Christensen & Sorensen, 2009) in that for many players, their

662   educational aspirations were afforded significance and the requirement in the future for a full

663   commitment to cricket or education did provide a troubling dilemma which they would have

664   to confront. This said, the cricketers were still worried about the perception that going to

665   university might create among coaches. Moreover, education was still often viewed by

666   players and coaches as an ethical responsibility and back-up plan as opposed to something

667   which may offer the individual a life project, creating a more rounded sense of identity that

668   would subsequently limit the risk of identity foreclosure and its negative impacts (Pummel,

669   Harwood, & Lavallee, 2008). This seems an important point given Nurmi's (2004) portrayal

670   of how important the adolescent years are.

671   The current findings suggest that elite youth cricketers develop within a socio-cultural

672   landscape that is relatively supportive of players pursuing both secondary education and

673   cricket. However, the players' decisions regarding further education were heavily influenced

674   by their contract status and the beliefs of coaches who acted as gatekeepers to a professional

675   career. A further challenge for these young athletes is that in cricket, unlike many Olympic

676   sports (Aquilina, 2013), going to the university is not typically seen as a mutually beneficial

677   part of the developmental pathway, but as a separate pursuit. The current findings highlight

678   the socio-cultural differences between sports and the impact this has on athletes career and

679   dual-career decisions. This will inevitably influence athlete support needs within different

680   socio-cultural landscapes.

681   **Identity negotiation in critical moments**

682   Given Nurmi's (2004) portrayal of adolescence, it must be acknowledged that the

683   challenges, career decisions and defining moments previously described occur during a phase

684   of life which is itself transitional in nature. It could be argued that the magnitude of this

685   developmental transition from adolescence to adulthood is somewhat understated within the

686   transition literature, particularly with regard to identity negotiation and development. For

687   Kieron, the need to negotiate identity in the face of challenge came in recognising that the

688   perception his peers have of him is inconsistent with who he felt he wanted to be, and who he

689   was previously:

690   You see, I have been a captain in everything else I have done prior to this, at my

691   county, at my school, but now I realise that because of my character, because people

692   do not see me as someone who can be serious, I will never be captain in this

693   environment… I think it came from when I first joined the programme, I felt like an

694   outsider, there was a big group from just a couple of counties and I think I realised

695   that using my comedy was a way for me to be accepted and to get in with the group,

696   so I just kept on doing that.

697   Many coaches commented on the struggle players have in finding their feet, and learning to

698   simply be themselves within national squads. They reflected that this seemed to be a barrier

699   to them playing freely and eventually proving themselves to be capable of playing at that

700   level. However, given the players investment in cricket, this often created a personal cost too,

701   both during time on the programme and in their broader lives. Kieron, having already shared

702   his struggle to be himself in this environment, later went on to highlight the struggle of

703   another player in his first year on the programme:

704   He just doesn't seem comfortable here…because I captained him before, and he

705   wasn't like this, and I think that's maybe why he isn't performing as well as he can.

706   It's like one of those two things needs to happen first, you need to get a performance

707   and then you feel comfortable, or you feel comfortable and then you can perform.

708   The players concerns were interrelated with significant career transitions, for example,

709   entering the national level programme or finishing secondary education and entering

710   professional cricket. However, the concerns players described fit better with what Nesti and

711   Littlewood (2011) referred to as "critical moments" which need to be viewed in the context

712   of transitions, rather than just the specific transitions themselves. Nesti & Littlewood (2011)

713   suggested that a critical moment could range from something to nothing, could be large or

714   small, intended or unintended and may have a negative or positive effect on a person's sense

715   of self (self-awareness and self-knowledge). In other words, they are the frequently

716   experienced moments in our lives where we must confront the anxiety associated with an

717   important change in our identity. Critical moments may include a player's recognition of

718   what is expected from them in order to be successful in the programme, or the experience of

719   struggling to maintain a positive relationship with a number of coaches. From an existential

720   perspective, the anxiety associated with critical moments is not simply the result of the

721   impending need to perform, but the uncertainty of the player's current situation, as well as the

722   responsibility and freedom to act. From an existential view, to live authentically is to face this

723   anxiety, be true to oneself and act according to one's core beliefs and values (Ronkainen &

724   Nesti, 2017). These cricketers were faced with demanding situations beset with uncertainty

725   that require a responsibility to act, but within an environment which made authentic decisions

726   challenging, leaving their sense of identity in a state of flux. As has been suggested, the

727   existential element of career development has remained absent from the literature. Instead,

728   discussion of support for athletes tends to revolve around barriers to transition, coping

729   techniques and mental skills. There is limited discussion of supporting athletes with a holistic

730   approach focusing on their identity negotiation throughout adolescence despite the fact that

731   this would appear to provide an important addition to ensure support for the whole athlete

732   experience.

733   The concept of critical moments better recognises the dynamic environments that the

734   young cricketers operate in and the potential for seemingly mundane day-to-day events to

735   hold significant influence over their development. It also helps emphasise that challenging

736   moments within the career are not inherently negative experiences and may actually provide

737   an exciting opportunity for personal growth, self-awareness development and the

738   development of existential courage (Nesti & Littlewood, 2011). However, the potential to see

739   personal challenge as an opportunity for growth, self-awareness and development is

740   something inherent to an existential philosophy of practice as opposed to a suggestion that

741   tough experiences could instead be somehow reframed for athletes as nice, or pleasant. For

742   example, Mike, who particularly struggled with the level of structure and discipline required

743   on the programme, reflected that although going through the challenge had been really

744   difficult, he had learned a lot about himself with regard to the negative impact of a lack of

745   discipline:

746   I obviously have had a few events…where I have lost it. But I think it is good, the

747   coaches all really held the line with me, and I think I need that. I have never had that.

748   I need to learn to just get on with these things if I am going to be part of squads in the

749   future… I think I have learnt a lot about myself and some of the things that I struggle

750   with, but it was hard

751   Other players reflected that with the right support, certain skills, such as organisation and

752   time management were learned through necessity created by the challenge of managing

753   demands. Players also acknowledged the value of gaining clarity over what they want to

754   become, when faced with tension created as a result of uncertainty and identity negotiation.

Conclusions

756   The first research objective was to understand the nature of contextually and culturally

757   specific lifestyle concerns for which elite youth cricketers seek support, and the personal

758   meaning they ascribe to them. Participants discussed the value of being supported with

759   experiences which were personal, psychological and emotional in nature which were related

760   to their on-going negotiation of challenges within and outside of cricket. This is in contrast to

761   the sometimes ambiguous and practical support highlighted previously in athlete lifestyle

762   programme research (Wylleman *et al.* 2004; Stambulova & Ryba, 2014). This support was

763   viewed as being instrumental in maintaining wellbeing and improving performance. There

764   also appeared to be a disconnect between coaches desire for players to develop independence,

765   freedom and choice, and the players experiences of feeling constrained by cultural practices

766   in their attempts to do so. The concerns appear to fit the concept of critical moments more so

767   than transitional challenges, due to their everyday nature, their requirement for identity

768   negotiation and their potential to lead to growth and development in players. The second

769   research objective was to gain an understanding of how athlete lifestyle support ought to be

770   positioned within this context, and at this stage of young cricketer's lives. Supporting these

771   concerns requires the development of deep and meaningful practitioner-player relationships,

772   trust and confidentiality as well as a perspective of the practitioner as being somewhat

773   removed from the performance agenda. This appears to create a paradox between the

774   perception that lifestyle concerns are removed from the performance agenda, and the

775   realisation that lifestyle issues, and lifestyle support are often explicitly linked to

776   performance. Through these findings, this study fills a gap in the literature regarding the

777   nature of concerns for which elite youth cricketers (and perhaps other athletes) may seek

778   support from lifestyle practitioners. This provides greater direction regarding what

779   practitioners will be required to do in practice. These findings have important implications for

780   research, sporting organisations and individual practitioners.

781   In order to ensure that athlete lifestyle support meets player's needs, we suggest that

782   lifestyle practitioners be immersed within the performance environment as opposed to on the

783   periphery of the support infrastructure. This position has been proposed before by Anderson

784   and Morris (2000). However, it is still recognised that such an immersive approach is not

785   readily embraced or prioritised by such environments (and their budgetary constraints). We

786   also argue that the value of psychological knowledge and counselling approaches may be

787   worth embracing more explicitly than they currently are in lifestyle support, and have

788   indicated that counselling which draws on existential psychology can be applicable with

789   young athletes when they strive to form authentic life goals and identities. The findings also

790   suggest a need to shift the athlete lifestyle agenda beyond the educational and practical

791   support described in the literature.

792   The nature of lifestyle concerns expressed by elite youth cricketers alongside the

793   perceived impact of lifestyle support on performance and the value counselling psychology

794   can offer lifestyle support provision, suggests that the lines of role division between lifestyle

795   support and performance psychology may be more blurred than support structures imply. It

796   would appear that dividing roles and responsibilities without appreciation for their

797   interrelatedness could in essence, break up the whole experience of the athlete, at the cost of

798   truly holistic support. The emphasis on more direct performance support within the sport

799   psychology literature and the wide ranging training backgrounds of lifestyle practitioners

800   may leave both practitioners under-prepared for the nature of holistic support needed. For

801   athletes, this could result in neither practitioner recognising the support need, or not having

802   the required skills and knowledge to provide effective support when it is sought out. It may

803   also leave practitioners unprepared for the demands of the role, negatively impacting their

804   own wellbeing and their chances of retaining their position in a competitive environment

805   which requires visible impact from the role.

806   For future research, it is suggested that investigating individuals experience of the

807   critical moments (Nesti & Littlewood, 2011) identified here and the lifestyle practitioner

808   support provided during these would be valuable. Continuing to use methodology which

809   captures the day-to-day lives of athletes in other sports and stages of development is

810   necessary to further our knowledge of athlete support needs across different sports, different

811   sporting cultures and different stages of the career. It will also be important to further

812   investigate the relationship between the performance psychologist and the athlete lifestyle

813   practitioner, given their somewhat ambiguous overlap and the apparent psychological

814   elements of lifestyle support.

815   In this study, the practitioner and researcher roles were symbiotic in their dual-focus

816   on athlete care and wellbeing, but did create a sense of role conflict between active

817   practitioner and (a more) neutral researcher. The combination of practice and research created

818   ambiguity regarding confidentiality as a practitioner and researcher, requiring careful

819   management of data and a limited presentation of the broader lives and backgrounds of

820   participants. Representing participant stories from memory was a necessary limitation, in

821   order to not compromise the trust involved in performing the practitioner-researcher role.

822   However, the practitioner-researcher approach was considered a major strength of this

823   research as it provided a uniquely applied insight into the player's experiences. Having the

824   role of the practitioner who was there to support the players rather than just gather

825   observations facilitated the gathering of rich, emotional and honest insight into player's lives.

826   The longitudinal nature of immersion also acted as a strength in terms of the depth of data

827   accrued and researcher credibility, helping to advance understandings a relatively under-

828   studied topic.

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