

Talented but Disruptive: An Exploration of Problematic Players in Sports Teams

Date of submission: 30/05/2018

Date of re-submission: 24/09/2018

Manuscript Accepted: 14/11/2018

Abstract

This study aimed to enhance the understanding of problematic players, who have been identified as highly talented but negative influences in team sport. Using semi-structured interviews, 15 players and coaches' experiences of problematic players were explored. Results were divided into features, causes of behaviour, impacts and managerial considerations surrounding problematic players. Findings revealed problematic players share characteristics with narcissists. From an applied perspective, the negative impacts from these players are recognised, such as negative role modelling and lower team morale. Managerial considerations for these players are discussed, which could be beneficial for coaches working with problematic players and their negativity.

Keywords: group dynamics, coaching, team sport, conflict

Lay Summary

We explored coach and player experiences of individuals who are highly talented yet problematic. Such players can now be understood further, in terms of behaviours such as blame shifting, and their impacts such as negative role modelling and creating team divides. Creating stronger coach-player relationships were suggested for effective collaboration.

Talented but Disruptive: An Exploration of Problematic Players in Sports Teams

Across multiple disciplines, negative team members within groups can be observed (Cope, Eys, Beauchamp, Schinke, & Bosselut, 2011; Cope, Eys, Schinke, & Bosselut, 2010; Felps, Mitchell, & Byington, 2006; McGannon, Hoffmann, Metz, & Schinke, 2012). Researchers in the organisational psychology domain have labelled such individuals as ‘bad apples’ (Felps et al., 2006). ‘Bad apples’ have been shown to have a negative impact, including increased negative affect (Cole, Walter, & Bruch, 2008), decreased group cohesion (de Jong, Curşeu, & Leenders, 2014), increased co-worker withdrawal from work (Eder & Eisenberger, 2008), and effort reduction in co-workers (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008). In contrast to the healthy body of research in organisational contexts, in sport, limited research has examined how players who are perceived as ‘bad apples’ might impact group functioning.

Within sport, Cope and colleagues (2011) were the first researchers to explore ‘bad apple’ team members. Informal roles were analysed from articles in Sports Illustrated Magazine, and multiple roles were identified including the negative role of a ‘team cancer’ [sic]. The ‘team cancer’ is defined as “an athlete who expresses negative emotions that spread destructively throughout a team” (p.24). Given that little research has explored the negative impact of such roles in sport, Cope et al. (2010) focussed their research on examining the ‘team cancer’. Ten coaches described their experiences of players who fit the ‘team cancer’ role and characterised the ‘team cancer’ to be negative, manipulative, and exhibit blame shifting behaviours towards others. Players were proposed to emerge into the role owing to external pressure and leeway from coaches. Consequences of the ‘team cancer’ were divided into seven sub-categories: negativity, cohesion, distractions, clique formation, performance, attrition and coach empowerment.

In further consideration of the ‘team cancer’ player, McGannon et al. (2012) examined the social and cultural narratives of such a player within a professional team sport context. The

authors focussed on a professional ice hockey player's (Sean Avery) most controversial team conflict and how the media portrayed derogatory comments Avery made about a relationship between an opposition player and a former girlfriend. Avery was seen as narcissistic, his behaviour was seen to distract the team and reduce team unity, and the 'cancer identity' was viewed as a character flaw that directed this poor behaviour. However, unlike Cope et al.'s (2010) findings, Avery was also seen to have positive impacts on the team (e.g., how his trash talking might entice opponents to make bad decisions which would benefit his own team). Within the articles, the coach also noted that Avery's talent was an important factor to consider during the management of the conflict, as Avery made positive performance contributions, and thus was difficult to leave out from the side. These findings suggest talented 'team cancer' players can have both positive and negative group-related consequences, and can impact upon the management of such individuals.

Given that 'team cancer' players appear to impact on group dynamic processes such as conflict, it is important to understand more about why this may occur. The concept of conflict as a group dynamics principle is well established (see Holt, Knight, & Zukiwski, 2012; Mellalieu, Shearer, & Shearer, 2013; Paradis, Carron, & Martin, 2014; Wachsmuth, Jowett, & Harwood, 2017; 2018a, 2018b). For example, in considering the negative outcomes of conflict, Paradis et al, found it appeared to bring out negative emotional states (e.g., frustration) and behaviours (e.g., verbal fighting), whilst Holt et al. (2012) found relationship conflict to be more destructive within the successful female teams, than performance conflict. Furthermore, a conceptual framework of interpersonal conflict in sport relationships (Wachsmuth et al., 2017) has been developed to explain both athlete-athlete (i.e., peer conflict) and coach-athlete conflict. This framework proposes a variety of conflict determinants (e.g., athlete personality; interpersonal communication), external factors (e.g., team selection), and conflict consequences (e.g., clique formation, withdrawal, and performance decrease). However, while

previous research (e.g., Cope et al., 2010; McGannon et al., 2012) suggests that the ‘team cancer’ player may cause interpersonal conflict, Wachsmuth et al.’s (2017) framework does not specifically include difficult/‘team cancer’ players as a source of conflict. Thus, examining such players could add to Wachsmuth et al.’s (2017) framework by explaining more fully why conflict occurs in sports teams, and the outcomes of conflict on group functioning.

When considering how a coach works most optimally with such a negative player, Cope et al. (2010) suggested that the ability of the ‘team cancer’ player may be a moderating variable. In practical terms, if a ‘team cancer’ player has lower ability, it is easier for the coach to drop such a player. However, a more high-skilled player is much more difficult for a coach to leave out of the side, due to the greater on-pitch contribution such a player can make. Within the elite sporting environment, anecdotal examples of such players exist, such as Kevin Pietersen, a highly talented cricket player who was permanently excluded from the English cricket team because of the supposed negative impacts his behaviours had on team functioning (Mole, 2015). Nevertheless, research has highlighted how the ‘team cancer’ player’s bad behaviour is tolerated due to their talent, and contributions to the team (McGannon et al., 2012). While it is possible that participants in Cope and colleague’s (2010) research implicitly discussed such talented players, this is not reported by the authors. Thus, we aim to build on the work of Cope et al. (2010) by having a specific focus on ‘team cancer’ players who are highly talented.

In summary, the purpose of the present study is to expand on Cope et al. (2010) and McGannon et al.’s (2012) research on the negative ‘team cancer’ player in a number of key ways. First, we will examine a particular type of ‘team cancer’ player who is also extremely talented within their respective team (in light of the sensitive issues surrounding the word ‘Cancer’, we will hereon in use the term ‘problematic player’ to describe the talented, but negative player). In addition, Cope and colleagues (2010) only interviewed male coaches about

their perceptions of the problematic players, and McGannon et al. (2012) only used media articles to explore the portrayal of their sporting celebrity. Given this we aimed to use a diverse sample that also included female coaches, and team members (i.e., captains, senior and junior players) to provide a more complete first-hand understanding. In line with previous exploratory research into both informal roles and group dynamics principles (e.g., Cope et al., 2010, Wachsmuth et al., 2018a, 2018b), the primary aims of the research were to understand the characteristics and behaviours of highly talented problematic players; the consequences of such players on the team; and the potential causes of their behaviour. From an applied perspective, we aimed to raise awareness for leaders and practitioners concerning issues when working with problematic players in team sports.

Method

Philosophical Perspectives & Design

The present study took a qualitative descriptive approach that aimed to understand and summarise athlete and coach experiences of problematic players. Qualitative descriptive studies are particularly useful when exploring applied topics and used to understand the “who, what, and where of events or experiences” (Sandelowski, 2000, p.338). Given that this study was interested in understanding the characteristics, behaviours and impacts of problematic players, alongside understanding how to work with problematic players, a qualitative descriptive approach was deemed appropriate. Qualitative descriptive research is not associated with a specific philosophical perspective (Sandelowski, 2000). The design and analysis of this study were consistent with the researcher’s post positivist philosophical view, which recognises that some aspects of the social world cannot be measured, and therefore interpretivist assumptions are embraced (Weed, 2009). The rationale for this approach was to understand participants’ lived experiences of problematic players, whilst acknowledging that their views are reflective of their own sporting contexts. As problematic players warrant

exploration as a phenomenon, this approach was deemed suitable. In conjunction with this approach, the research adopted common qualitative traditions in the methodological and analytical processes (e.g., thematic analysis, Braun & Clarke, 2006). The design of the study incorporated components including the iterative process and memo writing (Corbin & Strauss, 2015), which have been used within qualitative research in sport and exercise (e.g., Martin, Evans, & Spink, 2016). The iterative process outlines a sequence whereby data analysis begins as soon as the first data is collected (Holt, 2016). The analysed data was therefore able to inform future data collection through interview guide modifications and participant recruitment. This element allowed the development of knowledge in line with the exploratory nature of the research, (Holt, 2016), in aiming to create a more comprehensive picture of the problematic player phenomena. The taking of memos assisted the iterative process by enabling the lead researcher to detail new ideas, concepts, and linkages (Weed, 2017), and how the findings compared to previous literature.

Sampling and Participants

Theoretical sampling was employed due to its comprehensive nature in allowing for different participant types to be sourced as new concepts are identified, and to cover emerging gaps in the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). In conjunction to the theoretical sampling process, all participants were required to meet a sampling criterion. This stipulated that participants had to have experience of a problematic player within their interactive sports team for at least one full season. Participants were approached in line with purposive sampling (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012) in order for data from a wide array of sports and experience levels to be gathered. This allowed for the exploration to be wider and more rounded. Sampling occurred in three phases. The first phase used five heterogeneous coaches to expand on work of Cope et al. (2010), who also used coaches to explore the cancer role. Within the memos created from the coaches' data, it became apparent that players in the team may have a better knowledge of the problematic

players' impacts on the team, as the coaches were directly experiencing some of the perceived impacts. Due to players with more seniority often having a deeper knowledge of the team and how the team functions, it was therefore decided that the second sampling phase would focus upon senior players. Senior players were deemed as those who had competed within the team for at least two seasons, and who held formal leadership responsibility. The third and final sampling phase addresses junior players (defined as players who had been involved with the team for no longer than a season and a half and who had no leadership role) after data from senior players suggested that their seniority in the team may cause the impacts to be perceived differently by them in comparison to new or more inexperienced players.

The final sample (See Table 1) comprised 15 participants (5 coaches, 5 senior players and 5 junior players) ranging from 19 – 56 years of age ($M = 24.9$, $SD = 9.2$) and of both genders (8 male and 7 female). Participants had an average of 2.1 years of experience with their respective team containing the problematic player, with senior players an average of 2.8 years and junior players of 1.4 years. A wide range of team sports were represented (e.g., football, netball, basketball, American football, cricket), whilst participants competed or coached at varying standards. This provided a broad sample from which to understand the phenomena.

Procedure

Institutional research approval was obtained prior to participant recruitment and all participants provided informed consent prior to the commencement of data collection. Participants were drawn from contacts of the first author, and contacted via email to assess their ability to meet the sampling criterion, and to explain the aims and requirements of participating in the research. Upon clarification of meeting the sampling criterion, participants were invited to take part in the research. Participants were individually invited to take part in semi-structured interviews that were conducted at the researchers' institution. Prior to

interviews starting, participants were given a demographic questionnaire and an informal role questionnaire (Cope et al., 2011). The informal role questionnaire was given to participants to ensure they were familiar with the problematic player definition, and as a form of clarification that they had experience of such a player. Participants were then asked to rate the impacts of their chosen problematic player from -5 (very detrimental) to +5 (very positive). This was to ensure a negative influence had been experienced in their problematic player in alignment with the definition of such players. Finally, participants were required to verbally confirm they had experienced such a player. If such confirmation was given, and the participant had rated the player's impacts between -2 and -5, the interview was then initiated. Confidentiality was assured to participants at this point. Interviews lasted between 26 and 65 minutes ($M = 46.93$; $SD = 11.25$). All interviews were recorded on a Dictaphone and transcribed resulting in 140 A4 pages of text.

Interview Guide

Prior to data collection, a semi-structured interview guide was piloted. Semi-structured interviews were chosen so participants could guide the process and expand on topics whilst ensuring all topic areas relating to the research aims were covered (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The structure was guided from the interview guide used by Cope et al. (2010) which examined similar aims to this study. Pilot feedback from a coach, indicated that the questions were suitable at gaining data related to the research aims; however, the feedback did allow for the addition of follow up questions and clarification probes. The pilot question language was deemed participant friendly, as the pilot participant understood the terms given. The final interview guide contained questions based upon the four main aims of the study surrounding: (a.) behaviours and characteristics of problematic players, (b.) causes of problematic players' behaviour, (c.) consequences of the problematic players' behaviour (e.g., "how did the player affect team functioning?") and (d.) considerations when working with problematic players

(e.g., “were there steps taken to manage this player? And, if so, how?”). Based upon the iterative process principles (cf. Corbin & Strauss, 2015) interview guide modifications occurred following each interview, depending upon different factors, such as the discovery of any data that had not previously been mentioned or to add detail to the findings from earlier interviews; memos were used to detail this information during the audio analysis process. Modifications were made in many different areas of the interview guide in line with the findings from participants. For example, one addition to the interview guide, ‘do you think the player was aware of their impacts?’, was made after a participant implied that problematic players may not be aware of their own impacts. A second example of a modification was made in the managerial considerations section of the guide. A coach made a managerial suggestion to get to the know the player, and this was therefore included in the guide to ask player participants ‘what are your thoughts on that?’.

Data Analysis

Preliminary audio analysis and initial memos were made immediately after each interview, due to the nature of the data informing future decisions (Chinkov & Holt, 2016). However, transcriptions were created by the lead researcher after the data collection ceased. This was due to the compressed time frame whereby transcription was not possible between each interview. An inductive and deductive thematic analysis was used to examine the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method of analysis was deemed appropriate as it can provide an analysis of peoples’ lived experiences in relation to issues, factors and processes that underlie and influence a phenomena (Braun, Clarke, & Weate, 2016); in the present case problematic players. Braun and Clarke's (2006) process of thematic analysis is also theoretically flexible, allowing it to be adopted by researchers of varying philosophical viewpoints, including the post-positivist philosophy that underpins the design of the current study By adopting both a deductive and an inductive approach, the research aims could be addressed deductively, whilst

also allowing for the inductive generation of novel data themes not accounted for by the researcher or the literature relating to problematic players. Although thematic analyses express themselves as flexible processes, several phases from Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines were followed.

The initial stage involved the lead researcher transcribing and immersing them self in the data; transcripts from participants were read several times for deeper immersion (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994) and sensitivity to subtle features of the data (Tuckett, 2005). The second phase involved the production of initial codes from the data, and basic segments deemed meaningful, were attached labels (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This happened with pre-existing research aims in mind (deductive), such as impacts, alongside openness to new segments (inductive), such as leadership impacts, and was completed manually by-hand. In phase three, themes were created by addressing concepts, and sorting codes into themes. Constant comparison (Weed, 2009) was employed, leading to the amendment of themes for the initial phase four grouping of overarching themes, themes and subthemes. Once themes were reviewed and defined, phase five involved going back through the data to name the identified themes in a more representative demise (e.g. unattainable personal performance expectations).

Enhancing Rigor

In line with the methods employed, multiple factors were considered to assess and enhance methodological rigor. Chiovitti and Piran (2003) determined that when using theoretical sampling, it is necessary to use a strong and well explained justification for participant selection. This was achieved across, and within the three phases of participant recruitment whereby participant recruitment was determined by the prior data collected. A second strategy used during data collection was researcher reflexivity, which is a crucial practice of qualitative research (Tracy, 2010). This reflexivity was achieved through the lead researcher who reflected upon her own biases throughout the process with reflective notes to

ensure they did not interfere with the data collection process. In combination to written notes, critical friends (Sparkes & Smith, 2014) were utilised throughout the data collection and data analysis process. Within data collection, the second author regularly discussed memo content with the lead researcher to modify the interview guide and to check understanding and interpretations. The data analysis phase was regularly checked by both the second and third authors, who challenged the lead researcher's decisions and constructions of knowledge (c.f. Cowan & Taylor, 2016), developed interpretations, and offered alternative explanations (Smith & McGannon, 2018); an example of this was deciding upon several higher order theme names. The final factor which was considered was the naturalistic generalisability of findings (Smith, 2018). Natural generalisability occurs when research resonates with the reader's personal or vicarious life experiences (Smith, 2018). Responses were invited from peers at the second and third authors' institution and from external colleagues when the initial research was presented at an international academic conference (i.e., 5th International Conference for Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise). The audiences reported that their own experiences of problematic players did overlap with the findings reported. By using a variety of strategies, this further contributes to the enhancement of methodological rigor (Mayan, 2009).

Results

The results represent the collated interview responses of the 15 participants and are presented using rich quotations to illustrate the themes. The findings are divided into four overarching themes: (a) the characteristics and behaviours of the problematic player, (b) the perceived causes of the problematic players' behaviour, (c) the perceived consequences from the problematic players on the team, and (d) potential considerations for individuals operating alongside problematic players. Participant numbers are included to indicate at what stage in the iterative process they were interviewed; participants 1-5 were coaches, 6-10 were more senior players, and 11-15 were more junior players.

Characteristics & Behaviours of the Problematic Player

When discussing their experiences of problematic players, participants highlighted a range of characteristics associated with, and behaviours typically exhibited by problematic players. The following section highlights findings which can be divided into two themes: (a.) self over-appreciation, and (b.) minimising error.

Self over-appreciation. This theme concerns the problematic players' heightened perspective of their own ability. This was both perceived by participants and observed through different behaviours witnessed. Having high unrealistic self-expectations was distinguished as a characteristic common in problematic players. A participant reported that these high expectations in such players may be based on a premise that they perceive themselves to have a greater ability than reality suggests:

It can be their expectations are out of sync with what's achievable at that time that's when they get really angry and sometimes they get really hard on themselves and they really expect themselves to be able to play at a much higher level . . . They've set themselves goals that are too high. (Participant 5)

Other groups of participants also mentioned that problematic players appeared to think that they were superior to other members in the team due to their richness of talent. An identity rooted in being the best was reported by a participant describing the problematic player they experienced. This problematic player appeared to acknowledge that they were the best player, and resultantly, wanted the rest of their team to similarly acknowledge:

[The problematic player had] a big personality. She was a good player, a really good player and she knew that. She was very authoritative, but she wasn't a good leader. My problem was that yeah she was a good player, but she was also used to everyone seeing her as that good player, so she wanted everyone to think she was funny and everyone to look up to her playing wise. (Participant 7)

Such a desire for self-appreciation led problematic players to have an intense focus on themselves and, as such, being deemed to have little interest in the team. Indeed, one participant described how the problematic player in their team had very little awareness of others:

I don't think he realised how annoyed with him we were and how it made us feel like we didn't want to be there ourselves. . .he was so arrogant and up his own arse, I reckon he was just too busy thinking about himself the whole time. (Participant 8)

In conjunction with a disregard for teammates, problematic players also disregarded coaches and their advice to other players. Such players believed they knew better than the person who was in charge. Problematic players would contradict a coach during a training session, undermining the coach to show off their knowledge to teammates. A player explained:

She [the problematic player] would try and help but she would normally hinder because she'd contradict the coach. It would hinder players because she'd try and help in one way and she'd say the coach was wrong, almost like she knew better. (Participant 10)

Alongside such disregard for others, problematic players were discussed as being unable to admit wrongdoing; they perceived themselves to always be right. A coach explained that their problematic player could never apologise or accept any wrongdoing:

"They could never see their opinions as being invalid or wrong . . . this player was just unable ever to be able to do that and admit she was wrong or apologise and not just to the coaches but also the players." (Participant 3)

A lack of trying or a lack of willingness to exhibit effort in training was explained by participants as a very visible behaviour of problematic players. One participant discussed that this is due to such players' views that because they are so much more talented than their teammates, they don't need to put as much effort into practice games:

He just wouldn't play very well, but it was a like a big fish in a little pond type thing. He knows he can play at a higher level and he knows he's better than everybody else, and so, yeah, he doesn't think he needs to work as hard as everyone else because of that. (Participant 9)

Minimising error. Despite a superior level of talent, problematic players appeared to want to minimise and mask any weaknesses they possessed in terms of ability. A high level of ability was perceived to be an aspect problematic players were very protective of. One coach described how a problematic player was unreceptive to being coached on a weakness:

I tried to teach her a very fundamental pivot . . . she continued to do it forwards, so I had to stop her, show her again, she had another couple of goes at it and then because she couldn't do it or grasp it to start with, she just said it was pointless and that it made no difference . . . she just tried to brush it aside. (Participant 4)

Problematic players were further described as open to blaming others for their mistakes. This was to mask their own wrongdoing and any noticeable imperfections, in order to preserve the highly talented views other players had of them. One player explained:

I feel like where people have noticed that she is a good player, that if she did make a mistake, then it isn't normal for her to make mistakes so then she will blame it on someone else to make out that she still is that really good player herself still.

(Participant 15)

One participant explained in more depth how far problematic players are prepared to go to cover up any inability on their part. It appears that such players are not averse to emotional outbursts directed at other people, when they are unable to showcase their ability.

Participant 10: Basketball is very much a team thing, and sometimes I think she [the problematic player] did put it upon herself to try and score more points and when she

couldn't, that was when she'd get frustrated and that's when the blame game would start.

Interviewer: So, when she was playing the blame game how and what did she say?

Participant 10: It was kind of like she was shouting at you . . . it was like a negative, I'm pissed off with you and you're going to know about it kind of voice. And you could tell she was annoyed with you, because she'd give you this look or she'd start swearing.

Perceived Causes (of problematic players' behaviours)

Whilst discussing the potential antecedents of the problematic players' behaviours, several participants reported different perceptions as to why such players may behave in such a manner. These factors fall under one theme, threats to the high talent ego, with two sub-themes: shifts in power and poor performance.

Threats to the high-talent ego. Shifts in power and responsibility at various levels within a club can enhance the onset of negative behaviours in problematic players, should it filter down to and influence them in an adverse manner. Problematic players may perceive a reduction in responsibility as a signal that they do not have the necessary ability:

Before I became manager at the club and before my group of coaches came in to coach the team, I'd say that she was a lot more influential on the decision making in the team and of things in the club . . . I feel like we took a bit of power and responsibility away from this player and instead of just seeing it as positive and just be able to just play the game, she saw it as a bit of a negative and a bit of a power shift. (Participant 3)

Poor competitive performance from the whole team also appeared to stimulate negative behaviours in such players. Winning could be described as ego enhancing due to the success that it is assimilated with, while losing may be perceived as a threat to an onlooker's perception of their ability. One participant reports such a story:

What I've found is that they are only really a problem when they aren't winning. Like if the team is successful and winning then I find you don't have as many problems because they're happy and there's no issues. Obviously when things go downhill, that's when you get more problems and they become more negative in what they're like on and off the pitch. (Participant 9)

Consequences of the Problematic Players' Presence

Problematic players created a range of negative consequences that not only affected the team, but also the coaching staff and themselves. These were explained as being directly due to either their problematic player characteristics or behaviours, and comprised of three themes: (a.) team mentality, (b.) team divide, and, (c.) negative behaviour spread.

Team mentality. The psychological characteristics of team members, particularly less talented players, were impacted by problematic players' actions. This was often because of a problematic player's emotional outburst. One participant explained how a player resulted in a drop in confidence after being shouted at for a mistake:

I've found like when they're a talented member of the team and that when people who aren't as good mess up then they get like that. They get frustrated and say stuff and it makes those weaker players feel even worse about themselves. (Participant 8)

Psychological impacts occurred in training as well as competitive performances. The emotional outbursts of problematic players at team mates' mistakes in training made players feel uncomfortable and on edge, as one participant explained:

Everyone just seemed to be a lot happier when he wasn't there. Especially the younger player because they weren't being shouted at as much. . . But when he was there everyone used to be worried about messing up because they knew he's then be on their back. (Participant 9)

Problematic players were also seen to negatively impact upon enjoyment of team mates. For example, this participant described the effect on the training environment:

[The problematic player] also just made them not enjoy training as much as they could have done and not play with the smile on their face that they should have done. So, yeah, even though we were successful in what we did. . . looking at my players' smile now, and having formed really good bonds and really good relationships with them, have we done as well as before? Probably not. But have we enjoyed it and each other's company more? Then, yes, definitely and the atmosphere has certainly been better.

(Participant 3)

Additionally, problematic players' talent could be forgotten due to the negative influences they had on the team environment being at the forefront of peoples' minds instead, with one participant commenting:

He's done some great things, it's just those negative parts of him that overshadow it. People forget how he plays so well in a game because of how he behaves at training. I reckon if he stopped that then he really would be a star in the team, but because he acts the way he does he just kind of ruins it for himself. (Participant 8)

Team divide. Problematic players were also perceived to have a divisive impact on the team. In some examples, such players caused a split within the team, whereby players sided either with or against the problematic player. Players and coaches noted how definite small groups were established within the side: "There was 2 or 3 people in the problem player's corner and then there were a couple in our captain's, and then a few of us in the middle just floating and not really sure what to do really" (Participant 10)

A coach further explains how the severe divide they witnessed went on to impact the team's physical performance in competition:

You either sided with the problematic player or with the rest of the team, and then there were a couple in the middle who drifted from side to side because they didn't like being in the controversy. . .it wasn't so bad to the extent where they thought 'oh, yeah, I'm not going to pass to them', but instead of the team gelling and there being a fluid offense with the ball always moving, you can see that it's all disjointed. (Participant 4)

Negative behaviour spread. The behaviours of problematic players were copied by team mates and thus, spread throughout teams. One participant explained that they found the negative emotional outbursts so contagious they found themselves adopting them:

Interviewer: So how did this experience of him affect you personally?

Participant 9: Umm, well, I think I've become more annoyed with people myself. Like I'm a goalkeeper so my role in the team involves lots of shouting and lots of communicating, so as things went downhill for us, I found myself becoming more negative. I started having a go at people and I was having full on rows. . . It just kind of changed my personality a bit because that's what everyone else started to do and without thinking about I slowly became that too.

One coach added that the whole effort of the team in training appeared to reduce once players had started replicating negative attitudes exhibited by the problematic player:

It filters through from training as well so they see that she's got away with something. So, she's got a back injury and they see her not doing something, and then next week oh this person's got an injury and this person has this so they don't want to do this bit. And you can see players just getting lazier and lazier, and it's kind of flowed through now even into this current season. (Participant 4)

The same participant noted how such a spread of negative behaviour can go on to have further impacts. For example, coach scrutiny from a problematic player impacted upon the coach having to explain themselves to more and more players after making a choice:

I've just found I've had to explain myself more, so if I don't pick someone for a game or someone gets fewer minutes, I have a lot more people questioning my decisions and why. (Participant 4)

Considerations for Working with Problematic Players

Participants discussed several factors that should be considered when working with problematic players. Two themes were highlighted, whereby participants suggested considerations at two levels: (a.) leadership and (b.) environmental.

Leadership considerations. Effective communication appeared important when working with problematic players. One player suggested that coaches of problematic players should be both strict and friendly in their management style:

Everyone needs to be stricter on him, like the coaches, but that could really go the other way and force him to be more negative and possibly like make him want to quit. So you need to have like an autocratic leader who says look you're doing it my way but then you need to be motivating and friendly with him at the same time. . . it would have to be delivered in such a way where it then doesn't get his back up. (Participant 8)

It was stressed that although communication is beneficial, getting to know the player could be of equal importance, as this may inform improved communication, with a two-way open communication channel suggested as a way to facilitate working effectively with problematic players. One participant highlighted that a relationship developed through communication is effective for them when working with such players:

I would always try to learn about that individual, talk to them, open up the communication channels and see if I could work out what was behind the behaviours because everyone behaves in a way for a reason. So without probing and becoming personal you just listen and watch and talk to them and then work out your strategy from there . . . You just have to work it out from each individual. (Participant 5)

In response to this, the interviewer questioned further participants about the creation of good relationships, in terms of providing a foundation to coping with problematic players' behaviours. In empathising with the problematic player, one participant explained that it would be important for a coach to get to know them before working with them, and acting upon any negative behaviours:

If I was one of these players, I wouldn't want a coach to start dealing with me if I didn't feel I knew him and he didn't know me. So, yeah I completely understand that [coaches wouldn't want to do anything until they know the player] . . . and again that's one of the reasons I think our coach didn't do anything, as he didn't know her at all, he didn't try to get to know her. (Participant 7)

Players suggested that shared leadership (e.g., from individuals in both formal and informal leadership roles) was important when considering how to work alongside and manage problematic players. For instance, a player suggested that it might not matter who manages the player, so long as the individual has authority over the player, and has their respect:

The captain's input would probably be the most profound, actually . . . I think he would talk to him [the problematic player] on a regular basis, during the game and off the pitch. Either telling him to go and apologise or go to apologise to the other teams; and he had to do that on several occasions . . . So, from the captain's point of view, yes, it did work then, just because the captain was a figure of authority to him, unlike the coach and the manager who he didn't have such a good rapport with. (Participant 14)

Considerations regarding strategies to minimise negative impacts and behaviours were discussed. Imposing tangible consequences was proposed as a strategy for individuals considering suppressing problematic players' negative behaviours. However, participants suggested that this needed to be enforced, and not just threatened, for it to have an impact on

the problematic player. For example, one player explained how the use of fines was successful in reducing the problematic player's negative behaviour within their team:

The president actually brought one in where if you violated it you had to pay fines. And it was really enforced so in the first week the fine jar was up to like £200; just because the first team players were swearing and throwing equipment. . . you'd have to make it really obvious to everyone, though, with a captain or chairman or manager, and then I think it would make a difference. And yeah just reinforce the consequences and carry them through, don't just promise things that won't happen, otherwise it won't work.

(Participant 14)

Environmental considerations. Within the team environment, several factors were mentioned that had an impact on the management of problematic players. Participants discussed how the ability of the problematic player and the rest of the team had an impact on selection (i.e., made it difficult to deselect problematic players) and the application of problematic players. For instance, one coach described how a lack of talent in the same position made decisions altering the team tricky:

Interviewer: Okay, so, you said that she didn't miss a game, if you'd had had another keeper who was as good as she was, would that have influenced your team selection?

Participant 3: Yeah it would have. It would have been easier for me to say, "reign in your behaviour because otherwise I can chop and change this team how I like." So, that would have been easier, and yeah her having that bit of competition and knowing she can't mess up might have changed something at least. It might have made it easier for me to make solid decisions.

Another factor that may impact on the ability of leaders to successfully work alongside problematic players is contact time. Participants suggested that understanding any player and getting to know them may be a strain on coaches and captains as it takes a long time:

I do think that you need to know a player to understand what makes them tick. But I do think that you can't just figure that out and that it is a lengthy process, so you do need to stick it for the long haul and take some of those ups and downs. (Participant 10)

Finally, coaches suggested that group values and goals of the team should be carefully evaluated when considering cooperating with problematic players. A coach described how management of problematic players may provide short-term success, but that it was important to consider the long-term impacts of indulging problematic players:

If I'm brutally honest I'd say I was a bit weak at times because again this is my objective that this is a bloody good player in this team, and I have nobody else to replace her so that's where I was chasing materialistic values and trophies too . . . It was also because we all had that one clear objective: we all wanted to perform well and win the league. And this player was an unbelievable player, so I could deal with it. But deal with it short-term because short-term was just until the end of last season. Longer term I knew that if anything was to erupt again I'd have to make strong decisions. And, so, I could deal with it knowing it was short term, however, I knew that knowing the long-term picture something did have to change. (Participant 3)

Discussion

The present study sought to identify the characteristics and behaviours of problematic players. In addition, the study also examined the consequences and potential causes of problematic players' behaviour. In line with findings from previous literature, participants noted problematic players displayed negativity, engaged in distracting/interfering behaviours and were seen to be selfish, manipulative and shift blame to others (Cope et al., 2010; McGannon et al., 2012). These findings extend literature through the acknowledgement that both coaches and teammates perceive problematic players' behaviours and characteristics in the same way, even when such individuals are highly talented. The consequences of

problematic players identified by participants also mirrored previous findings (Cope et al., 2010; McGannon et al., 2012). Specifically, problematic player behaviour was seen to decrease group performance and cohesion, and could lead to other players dropping out. Although negativity was briefly highlighted by Cope and colleagues (2010), the present study identified further negative psychological consequences of problematic player behaviour, including lower confidence and less enjoyment for their teammates. In addition, increased role modelling of the problematic players' behaviours were reported, which has not previously been identified as a consequence within the literature. As well as outlining characteristics and consequences of problematic players, causes of problematic player behaviour were identified including threats to such a player's ego (e.g., removal of power or poor performance).

In addition to highlighting the characteristics, consequences, and causes of problematic players' behaviour, the findings of this study add to the group dynamics literature by suggesting links with concepts that may explain the negative impact of problematic players' behaviour. In accord with previous research (e.g., Cope et al., 2010; McGannon et al., 2012), the findings from this study suggest that problematic players possess narcissistic traits. However, the present study contributes to the literature by highlighting potential links with narcissistic traits not previously identified such as an inflated beliefs of self, superiority, setting of unattainable expectations, indifference to coach knowledge, and lack of acceptance to wrongdoing (American Psychiatric Association, 2000; Campbell, Reeder, Sedikides, & Elliot, 2000; Rhodewalt & Eddings, 2002). Consequently, given the narcissistic characteristics highlighted within the results, intuitively it could be suggested that narcissistic traits may cause problematic players' disruptive behaviour.

In highlighting the link between narcissism and problematic player behaviour, the present study also contributes to the emerging body of literature on group conflict (e.g., Wachsmuth et al., 2017; 2018a, 2018b). More specifically, the causes of problematic player

behaviour (e.g., removal of power or poor performance) suggested by participants in this study appear to provide a theoretical suggestion that might explain how narcissistic traits cause intra-group conflict. For instance, poor performance from problematic players could be seen as a threat to their sense of self as they have failed to meet their high expectations (Morf & Rhosewalt, 2001; Raskin & Terry, 1988). Thus, to protect their fragile sense of self, problematic players may display negative behaviours (e.g., blame shifting) either to prevent a knock to their ego or out of frustration due to the threat to their ego. As a result, this leads to negative group consequences (e.g., reduced team cohesion, lower collective efficacy) and conflict. Thus, this contention extends literature by suggesting that problematic players may behave and create the resultant consequences in the way they do, because of the narcissistic traits they possess. Consequently, this contributes to our understanding of group conflict and would extend the current framework of interpersonal conflict in sport relationships, by suggesting that narcissism, alongside extraversion, may be a stable intrapersonal determinant of conflict (Wachsmuth et al., 2017).

Although the present study sought to explore consequences of problematic players, the findings highlight three potential mechanisms that might explain how problematic player behaviour impacts on group outcomes (e.g., confidence, anxiety, performance). Firstly, role modelling (i.e., the undesirable spread of negative behaviour to other teammates) was identified by participants to be a negative consequence of problematic player behaviour. Given that problematic players are highly talented, it may be unsurprising to uncover that their often less talented peers view them as a role model. This impact may be explained through social identity theory whereby individuals who represent group values can have a large impact on the rest of the group (See Slater, Coffee, Barker, & Evans, 2014 for a review). Thus, if part of a team's identity is related to striving for high performance, the problematic player who is highly

talented may be considered prototypical of this value and thus be seen as a role model by the rest of the group, having a negative impact on other athletes' behaviour.

Linked to role modelling, a second potential mechanism explaining the negative impact problematic players have on group consequences may be through the formation of cliques; for instance, participants in this study identified that problematic players can create a team divide during times of conflict. To explain, by potentially being viewed as prototypical of group values, some teammates may side with problematic players in times of conflict, thereby creating a team divide with an in-group and an out-group. Wagstaff, Martin, and Thelwell (2017) suggest that such cliques can have detrimental effects on a team, similar to those identified within this study (e.g., increase likeliness of poorer performance). Though Wagstaff et al.'s (2017) study examined the development of cliques in sports teams, their findings did not indicate the potential for one player to have the influence to create cliques. Thus, our findings appear to expand the literature on cliques in sport; specifically, they may be formed by the contribution of one player. The third mechanism suggested to explain the negative impact of problematic players is conflict. That is, problematic players' behaviours lead to conflict (possibly as a result of clique formation) which subsequently may have a detrimental effect on outcomes (e.g., performance). This is supported by the previous finding that conflict can negatively impact group functioning (see Wachsmuth et al., 2018b). Additionally, the findings surrounding clique formation appear to further our understanding of conflict by suggesting cliques to be both a determinant and a consequence of conflict. At present the framework of interpersonal conflict created by Wachsmuth et al. (2017) suggests cliques are only a consequence of team conflict.

Applied Recommendations

An aim of this study was to discuss managerial considerations for individuals working within team sport environments who have a problematic player within their team. Several

recommendations can be made in terms of working effectively with problematic players in a team environment. These are drawn from the findings of the present study, alongside group dynamics literature, and intended for practitioners and coaches working within team sport.

1. Enhance the coach-athlete relationship with increased communication with such players. As narcissism is a relatively stable personality trait, it is difficult to change; however practitioners could seek to understand the narcissistic traits possessed by problematic players. This would allow the practitioners to understand what the players view as a threat, and therefore such factors could be minimised or avoided. Such a suggestion is in line with Jowett and Carpenter (2015), who propose open communication helps maintenance of coach-athlete relationships, and Wachsmuth et al. (2018b) who suggest good communication as a strategy to minimise conflict.
2. Provide problematic players with individual consideration, which could include praise or opportunities for glorification. Literature examining the relationship between leadership and narcissism has identified that narcissists respond well to individual consideration but not to group goals (Arthur, Woodman, Ong, Hardy, & Ntoumanis, 2011). However, practitioners should note that too much individual consideration may act as reinforcement for such players' ego inflation. Enhanced ego inflation may result in more chronic negative behaviours towards others and consequences to the team (e.g., conflict).
3. Involve the problematic player in leadership/group decisions. In line with social identity theory, team members may naturally follow an individual who is highly talented, and therefore including problematic players within a shared leadership group should be encouraged. This may also encourage the problematic player to buy into group goals if they are part of the group creating the goals and values. Having a team of leaders has been shown to empower athletes and increase social support (Slater &

Barker, 2018). Such a strategy may also improve problematic players' social bonds with team mates, which has in turn been shown to enable more effective conflict resolution (Holt et al., 2012).

4. Referring to players as “problematic” or “team cancers” suggests that these players are problems to be dealt with and thus may colour staff and team member perspectives on, and interactions with, these players. Indeed, the language we use can often impact upon our thoughts and actions towards the problem we perceive (cf. Lindsay, Pitt, & Thomas, 2014). Our findings illustrated how such players were seen to contradict coaches and were unable to take on board the opinions of others. An alternative explanation to this might be that the coach is unwilling to take on board player feedback. Consequently, individuals (e.g., leaders, teammates) are encouraged to reflect upon why they perceive these players as problematic, and focus their efforts on working more effectively alongside such players.

Limitations & Future Directions

The current study provides an in-depth exploration of problematic players from the experiences of coaches and team mates. A strength of the study was the iterative process used, with constant amendments made to the interview guide. This allowed for newly discovered concepts in the data to be explored more fully with subsequent participants with different social experiences of such players. For example, one of the coaches recommended not trying to manage a problematic player's behaviours until a greater understanding of the player and a stronger relationship with them is reached. Such a contention was supported when further participants were asked for their perspectives. Several study limitations must also be acknowledged. Firstly, problematic players were not interviewed, which would have given a further perspective on the phenomena. Future research might allow such players themselves to shed more light on their own awareness of their problematic nature, and consider the cause of

their behaviours, which currently have only been speculated by others. Secondly, a very diverse demographic was sampled which included some inexperienced coaches. This was purposively done to gather a more holistic rich exploration of problematic players in various settings and from the perspectives of different types of individuals. Finally, while we ensured participants recalled a problematic player who displayed negative behaviours and emotions, we didn't measure their severity which would have further confirmed the relative levels such players impacted on group functioning.

In addition to collecting data from problematic players themselves, several other propositions for future research can be made. Observation methods may be employed to explore the behaviour and impacts of problematic players within their team sport environments. This approach could be further utilised in interviews or focus groups with teams to stimulate recall of different experiences. Appropriate situations that a problematic player is involved in could be recorded, thus highlighting incidences that may not always be apparent to other players and coaches. These stimuli could encourage discussion of strategies to work optimally with such players. Moreover, further research might use these ideas to develop and examine interventions. From the present study's findings, recommendations for interventions with problematic players could be constructed, and future research could examine the efficacy of such interventions. These could be employed in case study designs (see Sparkes & Smith, 2014), as present study findings suggest problematic players may differ from individual to individual. This would allow for longitudinal monitoring of an intervention aimed at reducing negative consequences and behaviours of such players.

Conclusion

To conclude, to our knowledge, this study is the first that has investigated problematic players who are very talented in relation to their teammates. It was also the first study to consider team mates' perceptions of such players. The study has highlighted many pertinent

723 issues with problematic players. These include characteristics of the players, which include self
724 over-appreciation and talented ego protection, and negative consequences which affect the
725 team, such as a team divide. Threats to the high talent ego, including poor performance and a
726 loss of personal responsibility/power, were described as proposed causes of these negative
727 behaviours. Improving the coach-athlete relationship and providing leadership opportunities to
728 problematic players are important points from this study that coaches should consider.

729

References

- Arthur, C. A., Woodman, T., Ong, C. W., Hardy, L., & Ntoumanis, N. (2011). The role of athlete narcissism in moderating the relationship between coaches' transformational leader behaviors and athlete motivation. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology*, 33(1), 3-19. doi: 10.1123/jsep.33.1.3
- American Psychiatric Association. (2000). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (4th ed.). Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. doi: 10.1191/1478088706qp063oa
- Braun, V., Clarke, V., & Weate, P. (2016). Using thematic analysis in sport and exercise research. In B. Smith & A. Sparkes (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of qualitative research methods in sport and exercise* (pp. 191–205). London: Routledge.
- Campbell, W. K., Reeder, G. D., Sedikides, C., & Elliot, A. J. (2000). Narcissism and comparative self-enhancement strategies. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 34(3), 329-347. doi: 10.1006/jrpe.2000.2282
- Chiaburu, D. S., & Harrison, D. A. (2008). Do peers make the place? Conceptual synthesis and meta-analysis of co-worker effects on perceptions, attitudes, OCBs, and performance. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 93(5), 1082-1103. doi: 10.1037/0021-9010.93.5.1082
- Chinkov, A. E., & Holt, N. L. (2016). Implicit transfer of life skills through participation in Brazilian jiu-jitsu. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 28(2), 139-153. doi: 10.1080/10413200.2015.1086447
- Chiovitti, R. F., & Piran, N. (2003). Rigour and grounded theory research. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 44(4), 427-435. doi: 10.1046/j.0309-2402.2003.02822.x

- 753 Cole, M. S., Walter, F., & Bruch, H. (2008). Affective mechanisms linking dysfunctional
 754 behavior to performance in work teams: a moderated mediation study. *Journal of Applied*
 755 *Psychology*, 93(5), 945-958. doi: 10.1037/0021-9010.93.5.945
- 756 Cope, C. J., Eys, M. A., Beauchamp, M. R., Schinke, R. J., & Bosselut, G. (2011). Informal roles
 757 in sport teams. *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 9(1), 19-30. doi:
 758 10.1080/1612197X.2011.563124
- 759 Cope, C. J., Eys, M. A., Schinke, R. J., & Bosselut, G. (2010). Coaches' perspectives of a
 760 negative informal role: The 'Cancer' within sport teams. *Journal of Applied Sport*
 761 *Psychology*, 22(4), 420-436. doi: 10.1080/10413200.2010.495327
- 762 Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2015). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for*
 763 *developing grounded theory* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- 764 Cowan, D., & Taylor, I. M. (2016). 'I'm proud of what I achieved; I'm also ashamed of what I
 765 done': A soccer coach's tale of sport, status, and criminal behaviour. *Qualitative Research*
 766 *in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 8(5), 505-518. doi: 10.1080/2159676X.2016.1206608
- 767 de Jong, J. P., Curşeu, P. L., & Leenders, R. T. A. (2014). When do bad apples not spoil the
 768 barrel? Negative relationships in teams, team performance, and buffering mechanisms.
 769 *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 99(3), 514-522. doi: 10.1037/a0036284
- 770 Eder, P. & Eisenberger, R. (2008). Perceived organizational support: reducing the negative
 771 influence of coworker withdrawal behaviour. *Journal of Management*, 34(1), 55-68.
 772 doi: 10.1177/0149206307309259
- 773 Felps, W., Mitchell, T. R., & Byington, E. (2006). How, when, and why bad apples spoil the
 774 barrel: Negative group members and dysfunctional groups. *Research in Organizational*
 775 *Behavior*, 27(3), 175-222. doi: 10.1016/S0191-3085(06)27005-9

- 776 Fletcher, D., & Sarkar, M. (2012). A grounded theory of psychological resilience in Olympic
 777 champions. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 13(5), 669-678. doi:
 778 10.1016/j.psychsport.2012.04.007
- 779 Holt, N. L. (2016). Doing grounded theory in sport and exercise. In B. Smith & A. Sparkes
 780 (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of qualitative research methods in sport and exercise* (pp.
 781 191–205). London: Routledge.
- 782 Holt, N. L., Knight, C. J., & Zukiwski, P. (2012). Female athletes' perceptions of teammate
 783 conflict in sport: Implications for sport psychology consultants. *The Sport Psychologist*,
 784 26(1), 135–154. doi: 10.1123/tsp.26.1.135
- 785 Jowett, S., & Carpenter, P. (2015). The concept of rules in the coach-athlete relationship. *Sports*
 786 *Coaching Review*, 4(1), 1-23. doi: 10.1080/21640629.2015.1106145
- 787 Lindsay, P., Pitt, T., & Thomas, O. (2014). Bewitched by our words: Wittgenstein, language-
 788 games, and the pictures that hold sport psychology captive. *Sport & Exercise Psychology*
 789 *Review*, 10(1), 41-54.
- 790 Martin, L. J., Evans, M. B., & Spink, K. S. (2016). Coach perspectives on the 'groups within the
 791 group': An analysis of subgroups and cliques in sport. *Sport, Exercise, and Performance*
 792 *Psychology*, 5(1), 52–66. doi: 10.1037/spy0000048
- 793 Mayan, M. J. (2009). *Essentials of Qualitative Inquiry*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.
- 794 Maykut, P., & Morehouse, R. (1994). *Beginning qualitative research: A philosophic and*
 795 *practical approach*. London: Falmer Press.
- 796 McGannon, K. R., Hoffmann, M. D., Metz, J. L., & Schinke, R. J. (2012). A media analysis of a
 797 sport celebrity: Understanding an informal “team cancer” role as a socio-cultural
 798 construction. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 13(1), 26-35. doi:
 799 10.1016/j.psychsport.2011.08.001

- Mellalieu, S., Shearer, D. A., & Shearer, C. (2013). A preliminary survey of interpersonal conflict at major games and championships. *The Sport Psychologist*, 27(2), 120-129. doi: 10.1123/tsp.27.2.120
- Mole, G. (2015). *Kevin Pietersen frozen out by England over 'lack of trust': as it happened*. Retrieved from <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/cricket/kevinpietersen/11598957/Kevin-Pietersen-England-rejection-live.html>.
- Morf, C. C., & Rhodewalt, F. (2001). Unraveling the paradoxes of narcissism: A dynamic self-regulatory processing model. *Psychological Inquiry*, 12(4), 177-196. doi: 10.1207/S15327965PLI1204_1
- Paradis, K. F., Carron, A. V., & Martin, L. J. (2014). Athlete perceptions of intra-group conflict in sport teams. *Sport and Exercise Psychology Review*, 10(3), 4–18. doi: 10.1080/1750984X.2016.1184698
- Raskin, R., & Terry, H. (1988). A principal-components analysis of the Narcissistic Personality Inventory and further evidence of its construct validation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 54(5), 890-902.
- Rhodewalt, F., & Eddings, S. K. (2002). Narcissus reflects: Memory distortion in response to ego-relevant feedback among high-and low-narcissistic men. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 36(2), 97-116. doi: 10.1006/jrpe.2002.2342
- Sandelowski, M. (2000). Focus on research methods-whatever happened to qualitative description?. *Research in Nursing and Health*, 23(4), 334-340. doi: 10.1002/1098-240X(200008)23:4<334::AID-NUR9>3.0.CO;2-G
- Slater, M. J., & Barker, J. B. (2018). Doing social identity leadership: Exploring the efficacy of an identity leadership intervention on perceived leadership and mobilization in elite disability soccer. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*. doi: 10.1080/10413200.2017.1410255

- Slater, M. J., Coffee, P., Barker, J. B., & Evans, A. L. (2014). Promoting shared meanings in group memberships: A social identity approach to leadership in sport. *Reflective Practice*, 15(5), 672-685. doi: 10.1080/14623943.2014.944126
- Smith, B. (2018). Generalizability in qualitative research: Misunderstandings, opportunities and recommendations for the sport and exercise sciences. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 10(1), 137-149. doi: 10.1080/2159676X.2017.1393221
- Smith, B., & McGannon, K. R. (2018). Developing rigor in qualitative research: Problems and opportunities within sport and exercise psychology. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 11(1), 101-121. doi:10.1080/1750984X.2017.1317357.
- Sparkes, A. C., & Smith, B. (2014). *Qualitative research methods in sport, exercise and health: From process to product*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Tracy, S. J. (2010). Qualitative quality: Eight 'big-tent' criteria for excellent qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(10), 837-851. doi: 10.1177/1077800410383121
- Tuckett, A. G. (2005). Applying thematic analysis theory to practice: A researcher's experience. *Contemporary Nurse*, 19(1-2), 75-87. doi: doi.org/10.5172/conu.19.1-2.75
- Wachsmuth, S., Jowett, S., & Harwood, C. G. (2017). Conflict among athletes and their coaches: what is the theory and research so far?. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 10(1), 84-107. doi: 10.1080/1750984X.2016.1184698
- Wachsmuth, S., Jowett, S., & Harwood, C. G. (2018a). On understanding the nature of interpersonal conflict between coaches and athletes. *Journal of Sports Sciences*, 36(17), 1955-1962. doi: 10.1080/02640414.2018.1428882
- Wachsmuth, S., Jowett, S., & Harwood, C. G. (2018b). Managing conflict in coach—Athlete relationships. *Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology*. Advance online publication. doi: 10.1037/spy0000129

- 849 Wagstaff, C. R., Martin, L. J., & Thelwell, R. C. (2017). Subgroups and cliques in sport: A
 850 longitudinal case study of a rugby union team. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 30(1),
 851 164-172. doi: 10.1016/j.psychsport.2017.03.006
- 852 Weed, M. (2009). Research quality considerations for grounded theory research in sport &
 853 exercise psychology. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 10(5), 502-510. doi:
 854 10.1016/j.psychsport.2009.02.007
- 855 Weed, M. (2017). Capturing the essence of grounded theory: the importance of understanding
 856 commonalities and variants. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 9(1),
 857 149-156. doi: 10.1080/2159676X.2016.1251701

858 **Table 1.**
 859 *Participant Demographic Information*
 860

Participant	Sampling Phase	Sport	Age (yrs)	Gender	Playing Level	Team Tenure (yrs)	Role within Club
1	1	Football	21	M	University	1	Coach
2	1	Volleyball	22	M	University	3	Coach
3	1	Football	29	M	National	3	Coach
4	1	Basketball	30	M	University	3	Coach
5	1	Netball	56	F	Regional	1	Coach
6	2	Netball	22	F	University	2	Senior Player
7	2	Football	26	F	University	4	Senior Player
8	2	American Football	21	M	University	2	Senior Player
9	2	Football	22	M	Club	3	Senior Player
10	2	Basketball	20	F	University	3	Senior Player
11	3	Rugby	22	F	University	1	Junior Player
12	3	American Football	22	M	University	1	Junior Player
13	3	Football	21	F	County	2	Junior Player
14	3	Cricket	21	M	Club	2	Junior Player
15	3	Football	19	F	University	1	Junior Player

861