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Navigating the athlete-to-coach transition: understanding the experiences, philosophies, and practices of British orienteering coaches

Thomas M. Leeder and Lee C. Beaumont

School of Education and Lifelong Learning, University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK

ABSTRACT

The sport of orienteering has been largely absent from the outdoor and adventure coaching literature. Therefore, we know little about the experiences of orienteering coaches, specifically their journeys into coaching and the influences on their development. Consequently, the aim of this research is to explore British Orienteering coaches' experiences of the athlete-to-coach transition, with an emphasis on understanding how an athletic past might shape future coaching beliefs, philosophies, and practices. Data were collected via an online qualitative survey involving 84 UK-based orienteering coaches and analysed using a *reflexive* thematic analysis process. Findings indicate that participants' routes into and reasons for becoming an orienteering coach varied. Previous orienteering experience functioned as a socialising agent, while enabling individuals to develop technical knowledge, alongside empathy and relatability. Participants articulated the values and beliefs informing their coaching philosophies, which centred on inclusivity, fun, holistic development, and transferable skills. Practical recommendations to support the athlete-to-coach transition and enhance coach education are discussed.

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Athlete transitions; coach development; coach learning; coach education; coaching philosophy

Introduction

Orienteering is an endurance sport where participants (orienteers) use a map and compass to locate control points in a predetermined order, following an unknown course to the orienteer until the start of competition (Bergström et al., 2021; British Orienteering, 2023a). Orienteering can be competitive and non-competitive (i.e. recreational), however, the general aim is to complete a course in the quickest time, which requires accurate navigation skills alongside efficient decision making at high intensities (Bergström et al., 2021; Eccles & Arsal, 2015). The sport's flexibility enables it to be participated across several terrains and locations including forests, heathlands, moorlands, parks, and urban areas. Moreover, while foot orienteering is the most common, across the globe ski, mountain bike, and trail disciplines are also practiced. Orienteering has also been proposed as a worthwhile inclusion within school physical education curriculums due to its bespoke and adaptable nature (e.g. limited equipment required, can be delivered on school-site), potential for social interaction, and ability to develop problem solving and critical thinking skills in students (Hammes, 2007; Leeder & Beaumont, 2021).

CONTACT Thomas M. Leeder Tom.leeder@uea.ac.uk School of Education and Lifelong Learning, University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK

Problematically, orienteering like many outdoor sports has suffered from a lack of definitional clarity, which poses challenges to both researchers and practitioners (Collins & Carson, 2022). For example, while recognising the blurred lines which exist with some terminology, over the past 15 years orienteering has been classified as an adventure sport (Draper & Hodgson, 2008; Sport England, 2015), lifestyle sport (Leeder & Beaumont, 2021), and as a route or journey (travel) sport (see O'Connor et al., 2022). Indeed, Collins and Carson (2022) have recently identified issues with adventure and lifestyle sport terminology, instead proposing delineation through a consideration of the environmental and regulatory constraints which might exist. Consequently, in drawing upon their conceptualisations, orienteering can be positioned as a sport involving both maintained to natural environmental constraints, with external regulatory constraints present (see Collins & Carson, 2022).

While traditionally popular across Scandinavia and other European countries (Bergström et al., 2021), within the United Kingdom (UK) orienteering's low profile and perception of it being 'a non-competitive walking and map-reading pastime' has posed challenges to reaching wider audiences and increasing participation rates (Newton, 2019, p. 48). Nevertheless, figures from British Orienteering's (2021) annual report have suggested that in 2021 alone just under 88,500 orienteers participated in over 1000 competitive events across the UK. Furthermore, there are roughly 120 active orienteering community clubs in the UK (British Orienteering, 2023b), which offer opportunities for participation regardless of age and performance level, with the character, structure, and culture of orienteering seen to encourage life-long involvement within the sport (Bergström et al., 2021). Although orienteering might encourage prolonged athletic participation, it has been argued that the sport lends itself to independent learning and performance, since training (and competition) can occur without the need for coaches and fellow competitors, with the practice of self-coaching a common phenomenon for orienteers (Newton & Holmes, 2017). However, to support both competitive and recreational orienteers within UK community clubs, volunteer coaches are paramount to facilitate sessions and support new members. Indeed, recent data from UK Coaching's Coach Survey (2019) indicated that orienteering coaches make up a weighted representative sample of 3% of all sport coaches in the UK, demonstrating that an orienteering coaching workforce does exists and is needed to continue the sport's development.

Orienteering research: what do we know?

Although empirical research from the UK exploring sport coaches who operate under the umbrella terms of adventure, action, and extreme has increased over recent years (see Barry & Collins, 2021; Christian et al., 2017; Collins et al., 2015; Eastabrook & Collins, 2021; Gray & Collins, 2016; Mees & Collins, 2022), the sport of orienteering, and orienteering coaches specifically, has been overlooked. Globally, while orienteering research may have included coaches as participants, the focus of this literature base has been geared towards improving athletic performance. For example, research topics include the periodisation of orienteering training plans (Tønnessen et al., 2015), psychological development and skill acquisition (e.g. Eccles & Arsal, 2015; Newton & Holmes, 2017), orienteering speed strategies (Gasser, 2018), and the sociocultural and environmental factors contributing to excellence in orienteering performance (Celestino et al., 2015). Further research has explored individuals' motivations to commence and continue athletic participation within the sport (e.g. Bergström et al., 2021), however, the motivations and reasons for becoming an orienteering coach remain unknown.

While there is evidence that orienteers might start 'coaching others in their free time after ending their elite careers' (Bergström et al., 2021, p. 8), we know little about the experiences and beliefs of orienteering coaches, specifically their journeys into coaching and the influences on their coaching philosophies and practices. This is especially pertinent, because the athlete-to-coach transition represents a period of intense pressure, uncertainty, and vulnerability for individuals, who may begin to question their sporting identity and suitability for the role (Chroni et al., 2020). As

orienteering's character, structure, and culture encourages lifelong involvement (i.e. as both athlete and coach), it would seem worthwhile to understand the transition from orienteer-to-orienteering coach, to help enhance education and support mechanisms, while critically challenging the assumption that athletic experience will naturally result in coaching expertise (see Blackett et al., 2018, 2021; Chroni & Dieffenbach, 2022; Chroni et al., 2020; Rynne, 2014; Watts & Cushion, 2017).

Athlete-to-coach transitions

When attempting to understand the process of becoming a sport coach, coaching journeys and transitions have been described within the literature as a series of steps, a ladder, or a prescriptive pathway individuals must follow (Ronkainen et al., 2020). Indeed, becoming a sport coach is often seen as a progressive career (Christensen, 2013), which is represented by generic, linear, and chronological events or milestones which individuals encounter at similar stages throughout their life course (see Erickson et al., 2007). However, such one size fits all staged approaches to developing coaching knowledge and expertise have been challenged, as they fail to appreciate the idiosyncratic and socially constructed nature of coach learning and development, involving cultural, political, and economical pressures which influences coaches in variable ways (see Blackett et al., 2018, 2021; Christensen, 2013; Ronkainen et al., 2020). While one-dimensional and stepwise models of coaching careers are flawed (Christensen, 2013), coaches themselves have reported that the process of learning to coach is structured and embedded within former athletic experiences, impacting future beliefs, practices, and philosophies (Blackett et al., 2021; McMahon et al., 2020; Watts & Cushion, 2017).

Hiring and fast-tracking former high-performance athletes into coaching roles with limited coaching experience is common practice across several sports including association football, rugby union, and swimming (Blackett et al., 2018; McMahon et al., 2020), which is often fuelled by the valorisation of athletic experience as the basis for coaching knowledge, at the expense of expertise developed through formal coach education courses (Blackett et al., 2021). For example, within outdoor and adventure contexts such as paddle sports, being able to share stories and previous experiences as an athlete may function as a method to enhance trustworthiness, enabling the development of rapport between athlete and coach (Gray & Collins, 2016). Furthermore, evidence suggests that for coaches with experience competing as a high-performance athlete, coach education courses are often considered to be 'an inconvenience to negotiate rather than viewing them as opportunities to up-skill themselves for future coaching careers' (Blackett et al., 2018, p. 220), representing passive as opposed to active transitions into coaching (see Blackett et al., 2018). Yet, without critically reflecting and interrogating previous athletic experiences, it is likely a coach's development will be structured by philosophies, values, and practices they have come to embody before their athlete-to-coach transition (Blackett et al., 2021; McMahon et al., 2020). Indeed, these embodied philosophies, values, and practices may be inappropriate, unethical, and have limited impact on athlete learning, yet become entrenched and normalised (McMahon et al., 2020). Thus, coach education would appear vital, as it provides the knowledge needed for individuals to become critical readers of their athletic experiences and understand how this might shape and recycle coaching philosophies and practices (Chroni et al., 2020; McMahon et al., 2020).

However, we are still at a stage where we have a 'limited understanding of the processes associated with coaches' career development' (Ronkainen et al., 2022, p. 323), where the transition from athlete-to-coach has received insufficient research attention (Chroni et al., 2020). Specifically, while an emerging body of research has begun to explore coach transitions, these studies do not consider 'the transition lived experience itself such as how the athletic past and the process may impact the new coach's philosophy, behaviours, effectiveness or development' (Chroni & Dieffenbach, 2022, p. 30), with the sport of orienteering largely absent within the coaching literature. This is surprising, given the fact previous researchers have argued that personal biographies, formative experiences, and career trajectories significantly structure coaching philosophies and

practices (e.g. Cushion et al., 2003; Lorimer & Holland-Smith, 2012; Watts & Cushion, 2017). Consequently, the aim of this research is to explore British Orienteering coaches' experiences of the athlete-to-coach transition, with an emphasis on understanding how an athletic past might shape future coaching beliefs, philosophies, and practices.

Methodology

Research design

This research is positioned within the interpretivist paradigm and assumes individuals' perspectives are varied, negotiated, and developed over time through socio-cultural interactions (Creswell, 2013). Specifically, this research is guided by social constructionism, defined as a framework which 'sees the world, and what we know of it, as produced (constructed) through language, representation, and other social processes, rather than discovered' (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 336). Social constructionism attempts to explore how multiple realities are constructed by individuals (Patton, 2015), emphasising a relativist ontology (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Furthermore, epistemologically a subjectivist stance is assumed, highlighting how knowledge is co-constructed through the subjective experiences of others (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Creswell, 2013). Accordingly, due to being positioned within the interpretivist paradigm, a qualitative research approach is adopted to uncover the perspectives, meaning, and understanding of British Orienteering coaches in relation to a designated social phenomenon i.e. the athlete-to-coach transition (Creswell, 2013).

Data collection method

To obtain nuanced and in-depth data related to British Orienteering coaches' experiences, a qualitative online survey was used (Braun et al., 2021). Despite online surveys often being portrayed as a neglected qualitative method (Braun et al., 2021; Terry & Braun, 2017), it offers exciting potential for researchers. For example, while the logistical benefits of online surveys such as reduced cost, enhanced geographical reach, ease of use, and accessibility are evident (Evans & Mathur, 2018), qualitative online surveys can also produce rich accounts of participants' subjective experiences, narratives, and practices (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Braun et al., 2021). Qualitative online surveys can address sensitive topic areas due to their unobtrusive nature and increased social comfort, with participants managing the pace, duration, and location of survey completion (Braun et al., 2021; Terry & Braun, 2017).

A qualitative online survey was developed using Google Forms and structured via five sections. Before starting the survey, a participant information page was provided which included information related to the aim, background, and intended outcomes of the research, participant confidentiality, and completion instructions. As a form of procedural ethics (Palmer, 2016), having read this information participants progressed to Section 1 which contained a series of statements where participants provided their informed consent. Section 2 included questions related to participants' demographic information, involving a blend of open and closed questions regarding participants' age, gender, country of residence, and ethnicity.

Section 3 focused on the participants' coaching background, with seven open and closed questions focusing on who the participants were coaching (i.e. athlete age and level), their coaching qualifications and experience, and their current coaching roles (i.e. number of sessions delivered weekly, and events attended monthly). Section 4 included nine topic-based questions (Braun et al., 2021; Terry & Braun, 2017), geared specifically towards addressing the research aim, with these questions explicitly focusing on participants' coaching journeys and biography (see Table 1). Due to the focus on participants' lived experiences, perceptions, and beliefs as orienteering coaches, nine topic-based questions were considered an appropriate amount to provide sufficient depth, while minimising disengagement (Braun

Table 1. Online survey topic-based questions (section 4 of survey).

Questions
(1) In as much detail as possible, please explain how and why you became an orienteering coach? Examples might include it's always been an ambition, being in the right place right time, or due to an athletic career ending.
(2) How has your previous or current experiences as an athlete (in any sport) shaped your coaching behaviours and practice within orienteering? Please provide examples where possible.
(3) How would you describe your coaching philosophy and what factors have shaped its development? e.g. what are your values and beliefs as a coach, and where have they developed from?
(4) In what ways have your wider life experiences (e.g. work, family, other interests) impacted upon your coaching journey to date?
(5) Do you believe any skills, characteristics, or traits you have developed through orienteering coaching have influenced your life outside of sport?
(6) Throughout your coaching journey, can you recall a critical incident which has significantly impacted upon your learning and development as a coach? Examples might include having a mentor, attending a formal coach education course, or experiencing/overcoming a challenging situation. Please try to explain why this incident was significant.
(7) In reflecting upon your learning as a coach, how has formal coach education and CPD delivered by British Orienteering, or the Scottish Orienteering Association influenced your development? Please provide examples where possible.
(8) When considering your personal development as a coach, how could formal coach education delivered by British Orienteering, or the Scottish Orienteering Association be enhanced further to meet your individual needs?
(9) If you are not actively coaching, please can you explain your reasons for stopping and whether you see yourself coaching again in the future? If you are actively coaching, you can ignore this question.

et al., 2021). Section 5 concluded the survey with a space for participants to provide any final comments.

Recruitment, sampling, and participants

Following institutional ethical approval, the lead author developed initial drafts of the online survey, which were shared with British Orienteering to ensure the correct terminology and phrasing was used to reduce any ambiguity within each survey question. The primary method of participant recruitment was through email, with the online survey link disseminated by British Orienteering to their mailing list of qualified coaches (circa 150 registered coaches to the mailing list). Sampling within this research was broadly purposive (Braun & Clarke, 2013), as participants needed to be a qualified orienteering coach in the UK and over the age of 18. Nonetheless, sampling involved both convenience-based (i.e. whoever completed the survey was recruited) and snowballing (i.e. participants sharing the survey within their networks) strategies to increase the response rate (Braun & Clarke, 2013). While larger sample sizes do not always translate into 'better' data within qualitative survey research (Braun et al., 2021), bigger sample sizes may compensate for shorter responses which lack depth. Nevertheless, sample size within qualitative survey research should be dictated by the research aim, breadth of topic area, and population diversity (Braun et al., 2021). In total, 84 participants completed the online survey (see Table 2), which was deemed an appropriate sample.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis is a theoretically flexible method of qualitative data analysis which develops and interprets patterns across datasets (Braun & Clarke, 2022), while aligning with the paradigmatic assumptions of interpretivism (Braun & Clarke, 2023). Multiple orientations towards thematic analysis exist, however, a *reflexive* approach has been advocated which emphasises researchers' subjectivities and encourages critical reflection on their role in knowledge production (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2023). Consequently, to identify patterns of meaning across the qualitative online survey dataset, a *reflexive* thematic analysis process was utilised in an iterative manner, involving progression and regression through six distinct phases of: familiarisation; coding; generating initial themes; reviewing and developing themes; refining, defining, and naming themes; and writing up (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2022).

Initially, the lead author immersed themselves within the data through reading all survey responses multiple times to understand the broad content and identify tentative ideas and concepts

Table 2. Participant demographic information.

Individual-Level Variables	*N*	Percent	Mean	SD
Age	84		59.1	12.0
Sex	50	59.5		
Male	34	4.5		
Female				
Ethnic Group	79	94.0		
White—English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British	2	2.4		
White—Irish	2	2.4		
White—Other	1	1.2		
Other Ethnic Group				
Country of Residence	65	77.4		
England	1	1.2		
Northern Ireland	16	19.0		
Scotland	2	2.4		
Wales				
Years Coaching Any Sports			21.1	14.8
Years Coaching Orienteering			17.8	12.6
Current Orienteering Coaching Age Group	33	39.3		
Children (5–18 years)	5	5.9		
Adults (19–64 years)	14	16.7		
Children and Adults (5–64 years)	2	2.4		
Adults and Older Adults (19–65+ years)	10	11.9		
Children, Adults, and Older Adults (5–65+ years)	29	34.5		
Current Orienteering Coaching Context	27	32.1		
Participation	6	7.1		
Development	1	1.2		
Performance	4	4.8		
Participation and Development	1	1.2		
Development and Performance	16	19.1		
Participation, Development, and Performance				
Not Coaching				
Highest Level of Orienteering Coaching Qualification	3	3.6		
Level 5	6	7.1		
Level 4	20	23.8		
Level 3	32	38.1		
Level 2	17	2.2		
Level 1	6	7.1		
Unknown				
Orienteering Coaching Sessions Taught (per week)			1.1	1.3
Orienteering Event Engagement (per month)			3.6	2.6

(Braun & Clarke, 2022; Braun et al., 2017). Following this familiarisation process, survey responses were inductively coded in an unstructured and subjective manner through researcher interpretation, resulting in both latent and semantic codes evolving in relation to the research aim (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Codes (as labels highlighting insightful content) were then clustered together to generate candidate themes, demonstrating higher-level patterns of meaning as analytical outputs (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Braun et al., 2017). After continued interpretative engagement with the evolving codes and initial thematic ideas, theme generation progressed with further processes of refining, defining, and naming of themes to capture the essence and to build a strong analytical narrative, before the writing up phase occurred (Braun et al., 2017).

Results

Following a *reflexive* thematic analysis process of the survey data, three themes were generated: (1) Routes into and reasons for becoming an orienteering coach; (2) The influence of orienteering experience in supporting coaching practice; and (3) The construction and enactment of a coaching philosophy. Rather than merely highlighting a topic area, these themes capture shared meaning representative of a central concept produced by the researchers (Braun & Clarke, 2023).

Table 3. Theme generation process.

Themes	Subthemes	Example codes
Routes into and reasons for becoming an orienteering coach	Self-initiated routes	Looking for coaching roles
	Naturalised transition	Fast tracking
	Wanting to give back	Fell into coaching position
		No coaching qualifications
		Passion for the sport
The influence of orienteering experience in supporting coaching practice	Developing technical skills	Embodied knowledge
		Building rapport and relationships
	Personality traits	
	Role of previous coaches	Perceptions towards 'good' coaching
		Coaching behaviours
		Emulating previous coaches
The construction and enactment of a coaching philosophy	Being inclusive	Underpinning values
	Having fun	Coaching beliefs
	Learner-centred	Holistic development
	Importance of life skills	Self-reflection
		Personal experiences

While each theme is presented distinctively around a central concept, all three themes are integrated and address the overall research aim, contributing collectively to the presented narrative (see Table 3). The themes are discussed below and include a combination of data extracts and analytical commentary.

Discussion

Routes into and reasons for becoming an orienteering coach

Within Chroni et al. (2020) athlete-to-coach transition model, it is argued that athletes initially enter a 'career shift' phase, where they develop an exit plan from athletic competition and engage in self-initiated entries into coaching. These self-initiated entries might also be considered active pathways into coaching, where individuals proactively seek coaching opportunities towards the end of their athletic careers (Blackett et al., 2018). Several participants exemplified this self-initiated approach when describing their routes into orienteering coaching.

> As a long-term athlete, I had experienced quite a lot of coaching myself. I helped my children in the sport and through them was involved as a helper at various training camps and coaching days. I enjoyed this but felt I had much to learn in the 'how to coach' and was persuaded to undertake a coaching qualification. (Participant 39)

> I was a successful junior but was not personally motivated by performance. Was motivated as part of a team and making people better. At university I started working with regional junior squads and then progressed to coaching/lead coaching summer tours. From there my ultimate ambition was to coach orienteering at the Olympics. Progressed to coach the junior squad and lead juniors to minor international competition. (Participant 58)

> In my 20's I got injured and couldn't compete internationally myself but wanted to stay involved so coaching was my way … I was asked to support the GB Junior Squad in 1997 and I worked through my coaching qualifications whilst climbing the ranks there. (Participant 64)

Whereas the above extracts demonstrate self-initiated and progressive routes into orienteering coaching, other participants experienced the athlete-to-coach transition to be a 'relatively swift process, facilitated by little to no formal professional preparation' (Chroni et al., 2020, p. 769). While the term fast-tracking explains how high-performance athletes are often accelerated through coach education courses (see Blackett et al., 2018; Rynne, 2014), some participants were fast-tracked into coaching positions within regional and national squads, despite possessing no prior qualifications and still actively competing as a high-performance orienteer.

> When I became too old for my regional junior squad, but was still resident in the area, I was asked to help hang controls and shadow/coach some of the younger athletes (as I was a GB and England international by this time) at squad training events … This happened whilst I was still competing internationally myself. (Participant 18)

> I think it is worth pointing out that many orienteering coaches are also active, and often high level, competitors in their own age classes. (Participant 39)

> I coached alongside being an elite orienteering athlete and then continued after retirement from international events. I have coached junior and senior beginners all the way through to being at **** and mentoring members of the senior squad. (Participant 54)

The athlete-to-coach transition was considered by some participants to be natural, fuelled by a rhetoric which normalised the decision to coach either during or after an orienteering career (Ronkainen et al., 2022), where a sudden transition or invitation into coaching is evident, without formal coaching experience or qualifications (Christensen, 2013).

> I was in the GB Junior Squad for five years and as a young senior I was invited to help on training camps and tours - initially as control hanger and getting more involved with the coaching eventually ending up as the lead coach of the GB Junior Squad. (Participant 33)

> Being part of a regional junior squad was a very important part of my own teenage years, so enabling other junior athletes to have that experience has always felt a natural way to express the gratitude to my own coaches. (Participant 48)

> When I finished in the regional junior squad, I began to coach that squad and then moved on to coach on national junior tours throughout my 20's. (Participant 57)

> Was involved in setting up training sessions while an athlete, took roles with Scottish and British Teams during 1983 to 1997. Natural progression from competing as an athlete. (Participant 72)

Athletes require time, space, and significant support to successfully facilitate transitions into coaching (Chroni & Dieffenbach, 2022), however, within orienteering this does not always appear be the case, with orienteers presented with high-performance coaching opportunities without prior coaching experience or engagement with formal coach education (Rynne, 2014). Nonetheless, it is suggested that the 'character, structure, and culture of orienteering seems to both enable and encourage former top athletes … to stay in the sport' (Bergström et al., 2021, p. 12). Echoing this sentiment and existing research (e.g. Lorimer & Holland-Smith, 2012), participants indicated how their routes into orienteering coaching were fuelled by a desire to give back to the sport.

> I would say I'm naturally inclined to give something back to the sports I'm involved in, in whatever way best suits my skills. So, for example I also plan, organise, and control orienteering events. But being a strong orienteer as a junior and through into seniors I felt I was in a good position to pass on my knowledge to coach others. (Participant 26)

> The enjoyment I got from coaching and giving back to the next generation of orienteers prompted me to get more involved in regional squad and club coaching. I was never going to be an elite athlete in orienteering, but I wanted to remain heavily involved in the sport and for me that means coaching. (Participant 74)

> I love orienteering and want others to experience the benefits. I really enjoy helping people and discovering something new. I felt I should give something back to our club having supported our children for many years. (Participant 77)

Embodying a strong connection and passion for a sport are motivating factors behind not only initially becoming a coach, but also continuing as one (Abrahamsen & Chroni, 2021). The data extracts above suggest that for these coaches, coaching was perceived as a hobby or vocation, emphasised by a desire to give back, help others, and pursue a passion for personal enjoyment (Ronkainen et al., 2022). However, the athlete-to-coach transition signifies a fundamental shift from an athletic career to a vocational career as a coach, which often involves an immediate pressure to adjust and deliver (Chroni & Dieffenbach, 2022). As such,

early career coaches are likely to draw upon their experiences as an athlete to help navigate this transition.

The influence of orienteering experience in supporting coaching practice

It has been suggested that formative athletic experiences within outdoor and adventure sport contexts supports the development of coaching practices, alongside the underpinning ontological and epistemological assumptions of a coach (Collins et al., 2015). Fundamentally, experience as an athlete provides a lens for making judgements on what is valued as effective coaching (Cushion et al., 2003; Watts & Cushion, 2017). Indeed, within high-performance sport, embodied knowledge developed through athletic experiences is valorised over knowledge obtained within formal learning environments, such as coach education (Blackett et al., 2021). As Rynne (2014) outlines, an extensive athletic career within high-performance sport might facilitate the development of contextualised sporting and technical knowledge, which can only be accessed through exposure to that environment. Within orienteering, Eccles and Arsal (2015) have indicated how high-performance orienteers are able to develop cognitive (e.g. avoid peaks of demand on attention by processing map reading progressively) and behavioural strategies (e.g. reducing the need for visual search when mapping reading) through extensive experience. Thus, participants supported these sentiments, by explaining how competing as an orienteer has enabled them to develop technical strategies and skills, which they can now demonstrate to their athletes.

> Competitive experience at orienteering helps me explain and demonstrate techniques and set up relevant practices. (Participant 9)

> My orienteering experience as a competitor, organiser, planner, and controller gave me a good grounding in the sport before I started coaching. Much of this experience I built into my coaching, not just in terms of planning technical exercises, but also into developing the supportive team environment that is crucial throughout orienteering. Technical exercises would include elements of how a planner sets courses and the problems they can set an athlete in completing a leg, e.g., controls on convex slopes which force the athlete to go down the slope when they can't see below and are reluctant to go too far down in case they have to climb back up. (Participant 28)

> Understanding how I have learnt the sport and have appreciated advice from others has influenced my planning of activities and style of presentation e.g., breaking down techniques to details that can then be set up as an exercise, post event analysis identifying the state of mind when things went very well and comparing with when errors were made. (Participant 62)

Eastabrook and Collins (2021, p. 12) have indicated that participants within adventure sports believe good coaches should possess knowledge which stems 'from a coach's extensive experience of the activity and environment.' While it would seem prolonged exposure as an orienteer supports the development of sport-specific technical knowledge, participants described how their athletic experiences have enabled them to become more empathetic and relatable as a coach, through the sharing of stories which helps to develop trust and rapport (Gray & Collins, 2016).

> I have struggled as an orienteer. I never had much coaching. I understand that there are lots of people who also struggle with the techniques, so I have empathy and I want to help. (Participant 43)

> I have been orienteering for ~46 years and was involved in the British junior squad as a junior. I have throughout this time been competitive for my age group. It was then easy to relate my experiences in top competitions to juniors trying to improve. (Participant 44)

> My experiences of attending coaching sessions early in my orienteering career made me appreciate the benefit of learning skills and how to apply them. I understand that many people can't take time out to go to a full coaching session, but they like to go to events regularly. (Participant 69)

> I feel like I can relate to a lot of juniors … who struggle with the physical side of orienteering, as I did so too at that time. The first time I went to Scotland, I was 14, so often tell stories from that time to my athletes, in order to be a bit more relatable. (Participant 74)

These findings contrast those of Rynne (2014) in suggesting that high-performance athletes who progress into coaching roles often struggle to empathise with athletes who are not like them. Alongside the development of sport-specific technical knowledge and empathy, participants articulated how reflecting on their orienteer careers enables them to explore personal constructions towards effective coaching practices (Watts & Cushion, 2017). In line with contemporary research on coaching journeys (e.g. Blackett et al., 2018, 2021; Watts & Cushion, 2017), participants discussed their experiences of good coaching and outlined how they try to emulate these approaches.

> As an athlete involved in sport, I have always recognised that the better I perform the more I enjoy the sport. I have therefore had to work my way through each sport from a base level, understanding what will make me better. At times this has been through self-discovery (e.g., sea kayaking, learning about tides and wind) at other times this has involved being coached (e.g., acquiring skills with the paddle). I have transferred this learning to orienteering, ensuring that the athletes I coach have good basic skills which they can rely on in any situation so have found ways which engage the athlete is working on these basic skills so they become as good as they can be. (Participant 13)

> Certainly, in my early coaching days, I would often do things in a similar way to how coaches worked with me. Over time, as I gained experience, I developed my own skills and techniques. (Participant 18)

> The coaches who worked best for me were the ones who saw their role as getting the best out of me by seeing the world from my point of view, rather than those who had a set idea of what a successful athlete should look like/be doing. I have always tried to be that coach. (Participant 22)

Alongside highlighting previous coaches who they wish to emulate, participants also provided examples of individuals who 'they did not want to become as coaches' (Chroni & Dieffenbach, 2022, p. 769), explaining how they strive to avoid certain behaviours and practices of poor coaches they have experienced across various sports.

> I've seen good and bad practice in coaching in various sports, especially at the junior level. I take great exception to the 'you are training to race' philosophy of some coaches … I hope I provide appropriate coaching for everyone. (Participant 39)

> At high school I was subjected to rugby coaching from a brutal obsessive who had no interest in the pain and distress inflicted on the children involved. Since then, I have been taught, instructed, and coached by good quality mentors and bad. I have tried to profit from the good quality lessons and filter out the rubbish. (Participant 49)

> I have encountered coaches (not in orienteering) that created and colluded with a bullying atmosphere. I believe all should be encouraged and helped to achieve the best they can. Winning is not the only goal and a pyramid of happy participants enjoying the sport ensures a good future. (Participant 55)

Thus, the process of observing other coaches during an athletic career acts a filter, shaping individuals' perceptions and behaviours towards appropriate coaching practice when embarking on a coaching role (see Cushion et al., 2003). The findings within this theme demonstrate how the athlete-to-coach transition in orienteering is facilitated by 'strategies of observations and mimicry of influential characters' (Gray & Collins, 2016, p. 168). However, without thorough reflection on previous athletic experiences, coaches may come to embody specific philosophies, values, and practices uncritically, which may pose problems in the future (see Blackett et al., 2021; McMahon et al., 2020).

The construction and enactment of a coaching philosophy

An individual's coaching philosophy includes values and beliefs which are representative of their axiology (i.e. what they value as necessary) and ethics (i.e. what they believe is morally right or

wrong), with the phrase 'coaching philosophy' often used to depict a coaches' identity (Blackett et al., 2021; Cushion & Partington, 2016; Hardman & Jones, 2013). Indeed, it has been suggested that formative experiences and significant others are influential in the development of personal values which inform a coach's philosophical approach (Benish et al., 2021; Blackett et al., 2021; Lorimer & Holland-Smith, 2012). Coaching philosophies inform coaching practices (Benish et al., 2021), however, while coaches spend time honing technical and tactical knowledge, the importance of their underlying values and beliefs are frequently overlooked (Widdowson & Sproule, 2022). Although coaching philosophies may operate at a subconscious level (Cushion & Partington, 2016), it has been argued that 'clearly articulating one's philosophy is a prerequisite to good practice, as it provides direction and focus in relation to how one goes about doing the job of coaching' (Carless & Douglas, 2011, p. 2). Consequently, participants described the values and beliefs which inform their espoused coaching philosophy, with inclusivity and participation for all frequently highlighted.

> I believe that orienteering should be available to all regardless of background, financial situation, or local space. My mission is to give as many people as possible a positive experience of orienteering from a young age so when they are adults, they are more likely to pursue it as a sport. (Participant 19)

> Everyone matters, if they turn up, they deserve the best a coach can offer to meet their individual needs. My basic values came from my parents and the example they set for my brother, sister, and myself. Life experiences developed these further, but a major factor was a desire for lifelong learning and its sharing. Helping others was also a key factor. Hence stepping in to take over the regional squad. (Participant 28)

> I want to give everyone the chance to develop to the level they are aiming for. This means highlighting opportunities for people who don't know about them, but also making sure that expectations are realistic … I wanted to give others the opportunity to have the experience, while always remembering that not everyone wants to reach the top. (Participant 29)

Furthermore, participants articulated how their coaching philosophies were underpinned by values associated with fun and enjoyment, which echoes previous literature (e.g. Collins et al., 2011; Super et al., 2018).

> I think my main belief has always been that it should be fun for the youngsters to help encourage them to want to stay involved. (Participant 11)

> I want others to build on their own strengths and weaknesses, and my role as a coach is to help point them, and provide advice, but not to be too prescriptive. I also aim to encourage and make training fun for the participants. (Participant 26)

> Fun! Otherwise, it is a waste of time. I find the social aspect is very important at lower levels and with children. Regularly gauging how your coaching is reflecting in the response of participants is important - not everyone is looking for the same thing. (Participant 77)

Research within outdoor and adventure sport contexts has suggested that coaches with a sophisticated epistemological chain (or coaching philosophy) are more likely to adopt an athlete-centred approach, which resonates with principles of humanistic psychology and notions of athlete empowerment (Christian et al., 2017). This was evident within the findings, where some participants described how their coaching philosophy includes values related to holistic development, encompassing a rhetoric around developing the whole person, not just the athlete (Callary et al., 2013).

> My coaching philosophy is to value the individual as a person as well as an athlete. To work with them to form their goals and to work with them to help them to achieve these goals. They have been developed through a lifelong learning path and much has been gained by working with others in a collaborative environment. (Participant 13)

> I believe the whole person is developed through sport. This is the individual, and the person as part of a team. I believe I as a coach also have a lot to learn, too. (Participant 21)

> My values as a coach are allowing each athlete to achieve their own goals. Understanding that each athlete is unique and one person's physical and mental needs and measures of success are not the same as another's. This developed from my own experiences of being coached as a junior in the national system where too much pressure was put on conforming to a norm e.g., xx hours of xx training a week. (Participant 57)

In accordance with valuing holistic development, participants discussed how their coaching philosophies were often centred on ensuring their athletes developed life skills which can transfer away from orienteering, with the assumption these can be explicitly taught and are also a by-product from involvement in the sport (Camiré et al., 2012; Super et al., 2018).

> I come at coaching from a predominantly personal and social development standpoint. Through engaging in the 'adventure' of trying new things; the effort and practice to improve and the 'success' and achievement that brings, people of all ages derive benefits of wellbeing, resilience, and self-belief. (Participant 31)

> I believe in developing the athlete as a whole person - combining technical development with other aspects of their person such as emotional and social development. This includes things like encouraging leadership and team skills, communication, and personal organisational skills. I have been influenced by the coaching I have received myself as a junior and elite competitor, coaching I have observed others deliver, discussions with other coaches . . . (Participant 48)

> Developing skills in outdoor activities are essential to a young person's development. It encourages confidence, independence, and endurance. These are all transferable to other aspects of life. (Participant 71)

While participants were able to articulate how their coaching philosophies were constructed and informed by values associated within inclusivity, fun and enjoyment, athlete-centred approaches, and life skills development, we acknowledge that an epistemological void might be present, resulting in a disconnect between theory and practice (Collins et al., 2015). Thus, coaches' espoused values and beliefs are more likely to represent statements of interpretation, rather than evidence of their actual coaching behaviours and practices (Cushion & Partington, 2016).

Limitations and future research

The findings from this research contribute to the broader sport coaching and more specific orienteering coaching literature in highlighting coaches' perspectives towards, and experiences of, the athlete-to-coach transition, alongside the influence of past athletic careers on coaching practices and the construction of a coaching philosophy. Nonetheless, we acknowledge that some limitations are present. For example, only one research method was used which relies upon self-report data from a select group of orienteering coaches situated within the UK. Thus, future research which seeks to understanding coaches' development and philosophies should involve the use of multiple methods, be conducted longitudinally, while being grounded *in situ* 'to move beyond coaches' subjective perceptions' (Cushion & Partington, 2016, p. 863).

Furthermore, it has been suggested that self-coaching within orienteering is a common occurrence (Newton & Holmes, 2017). Therefore, although not explicitly highlighted within this study, future research may wish to compare the espoused values and beliefs of coaches who are self-coached, in comparison to those with more traditional routes into coaching. Finally, we recognise that only one participant within this research project identified as an ethnic background other than White British. Thus, future research should do more to explore and understand the athlete-to-coach transitions and experiences of other ethnic groups within outdoor and adventure sport contexts such as orienteering (see Christian et al., 2022).

Concluding thoughts and recommendations

This researched aimed to explore British Orienteering coaches' experiences of the athlete-to-coach transition, with an emphasis on understanding how an athletic past might shape future coaching beliefs, philosophies, and practices. The findings indicate that participants' routes into and reasons for becoming an orienteering coach varied, with the athlete-to-coach transition either self-initiated,

considered a natural progression, or fuelled by a desire to give back to the sport (Chroni et al., 2020; Ronkainen et al., 2022). Participants' coaching journeys commenced idiosyncratically, yet, a recurrent theme was the significance of previous orienteering experience, which helped individuals to develop sport-specific technical knowledge, alongside becoming empathetic and relatable, with previous coaches' behaviours acting as a socialising agent which shaped perspectives towards coaching (Blackett et al., 2021; Cushion et al., 2003; Watts & Cushion, 2017). Finally, while acknowledging the potential presence of an epistemological void (Collins et al., 2015), participants articulated the values and beliefs which inform their coaching philosophies. These values primarily related to inclusivity, fun and enjoyment, holistic development, and transferable skills. Considering these findings, recommendations can be made for coaches, coach developers, and sport governing bodies within orienteering and beyond which centre on two primary areas: (1) initiatives to support the athlete-to-coach transition, and (2) incorporating coaching philosophies within formal coach education.

Recommendation 1: initiatives to support the athlete-to-coach transition

Granting the transition from athlete-to-coach might be perceived as a natural progression, designated support mechanisms are required to facilitate this career shift and change in professional identity (Chroni et al., 2020, 2021). Sport transition does not typically become a consideration until the end of an individual's athletic career (Chroni et al., 2020), however, orienteering breaks this norm, with several participants adopting a dual role of coaching while still competing at a high level. Therefore, to support individuals in negotiating these occupational and personal challenges, enabling athletes to access coach education resources which 'provide an introduction to the professional knowledge and skills of the coaching profession' (Chroni et al., 2021, p. 324), would seem beneficial. An assumption cannot be made that prior orienteering experience will seamlessly translate into appropriate, meaningful, and effective coaching practice. Hence, in challenging the notion of fast-tracking alongside advocating professional development opportunities for athletes prior to engaging in a coaching role (e.g. Blackett et al., 2018; Chroni et al., 2020, 2021), a cognitive apprenticeship model may prove valuable for experienced orienteers who are neophyte coaches (see Barry & Collins, 2021; Mees & Collins, 2022).

A cognitive apprenticeship resembles a mentoring model, where novices work collaboratively with more experienced individuals through processes of guidance, modelling, and scaffolding which occur within 'a practice environment that has sufficient authenticity, validity and contextual accuracy' to facilitate learning, understanding, and reflective practice (Barry & Collins, 2021, p. 8). Therefore, mentorship and cognitive apprenticeship opportunities will facilitate contextualised learning *in situ* and help support the athlete-to-coach transition within orienteering, preventing individuals from uncritically relying upon previous athletic experiences as the basis for their coaching behaviours (Barry & Collins, 2021; Cushion et al., 2003).

Recommendation 2: examining coaching philosophies within coach education

This research has shed light on how knowledge, athletic experiences, and coaching philosophies are constructed and translated into coaching practices and behaviours within orienteering. Problematically, these themes are not presently integrated on a regular basis within formal coach education provision across outdoor and adventure sports (Widdowson & Sproule, 2022). When they are included within coach education, discussions regarding coaching philosophies are additive (i.e. a recital of espoused philosophy), rather than transformative, involving a critical interrogation of coaches' underlying values and beliefs, alongside the factors which have shaped their development (Cushion & Partington, 2016; Widdowson & Sproule, 2022). As Callary et al. (2013) argue, 'coaches should have opportunities to learn to reflect and better understand how their values were learned from various

experiences and further, how those values guide their current actions' (p. 228). While recognising it is difficult to articulate implicit values, an enhanced philosophical approach within formal coach education which uncovers coaches' axiological and ethical assumptions would be worthwhile to enhance coaching practice (Cushion & Partington, 2016; Hardman & Jones, 2013).

In attempting to adopt a philosophical approach, coach developers may support coaches in revisiting critical incidents within their formative experiences as an athlete or coach, to deconstruct and understand how specific events may have influenced the creation of their coaching philosophy (see Hickman & Stokes, 2016). Another method might involve the use of reflective stories within coach education programmes to support novice (and experienced) coaches in linking their practical actions to their underpinning values (Carless & Douglas, 2011). Sharing stories with either a mentor (a cognitive apprenticeship) or other coaches, can enable reflection on personal embodied experiences (e.g. connecting the what to the why) and understand the impact of socio-cultural factors, while acting as a tool to explore how coaches behave and importantly the reasons why (Carless & Douglas, 2011; Widdowson & Sproule, 2022).

In summary, research seeking to understand the athlete-to-coach transition is increasing, nevertheless, limited work has focused on 'how the athletic past and the process may impact the new coach's philosophy, behaviors, effectiveness or development' (Chroni & Dieffenbach, 2022, p. 29), specifically within outdoor and adventure sport contexts. We believe this research has helped to address this aspect by critically exploring the integrated components of the athlete-to-coach transition, the role of previous athletic knowledge and experience, and the construction and enactment of coaching philosophy within the underrepresented sport of orienteering.

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Notes on contributors

Thomas M. Leeder is a Lecturer in Physical Education & Sport Pedagogy in the School of Education and Lifelong Learning at the University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK. His research interests focus on understanding and exploring coach learning, coach education and development, and coach mentoring, via the use of qualitative research methods and sociological frameworks.

Lee C. Beaumont is an Associate Professor in Physical Education in the School of Education and Lifelong Learning at the University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK. His research interests lie in the area of physical education and sport pedagogy, with a particular emphasis on health-related policy and practice within physical education, the promotion of healthy active lifestyles in young people, sport coaching, outdoor education, and lifestyle sports.

ORCID

Thomas M. Leeder http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7456-2175
Lee C. Beaumont http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0345-4246

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