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Passion and paranoia: An embodied tale of emotion, identity, and pathos in sports coaching

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Abstract

In response to the wider call to put the person back into the study of coaching, this paper addresses my, the lead author's, understandings of coaching an amateur women's football team. Specifically, my co-authors and I critically consider how my embodied emotional experiences and meaning-making were produced in, as well as through, the interaction of the self and other in the club context. Following the presentation of my storied experiences, the complementary works of Burkitt (1997, 2014) and Scott (2015) are deployed as the primary heuristic devices. Here, our interpretation focuses on the interconnections between emotion, identity, and embodied experience. Rather than seeking to provide a singular truth, however, theory is, instead, used to reveal, clarify, and make ambiguous experience more apparent to the reader. In concluding the paper, we advocate a greater integration of emotion into ongoing and future coaching scholarship.

Key words: emotion, identity, social relations, coaching.

Introduction

In response to the wider call to put the person back into the study of coaching (e.g. Jones, Potrac, Cushion, and Ronglan, 2011; Potrac, Jones, Gilbourne, & Nelson, 2013a; Potrac, Jones, Purdy, Nelson, & Marshall, 2013b), this paper addresses my, the lead author's, understandings of coaching Erewhon Town FC (a pseudonym), an amateur women's soccer team. On one level, my co-authors and I seek to provide a highly personalised and embodied tale of the excitement, joy, guilt, anxiety, and frustration that I experienced as a part of everyday life at the football club. On another level, our intention is to illustrate how these emotions were interconnected with my identity as a coach (Purdy & Potrac, 2016; Scott, 2015; Thompson, Potrac, & Jones, 2015). Here, we critically consider how my emotional experiences and sense-making were produced in, as well as through, the interaction of the self and other in a particular social context (Nelson, Potrac, Gilbourne, Allanson, Gale, & Marshall, 2014; Potrac, Nelson, & O'Gorman, 2016; Scott, 2015). Rather than viewing emotions as solely "internal to an individual and his or her biological constitution" (Burkitt, 1997, p. 127), we hope to illustrate how they might be generated, experienced, and expressed through an individual's interdependent relations with others (Burkitt, 1997, 2014).

The significance of this paper lies in the breaking of new ground in the theorisation of coaching as a problematic, emotional, and ethical activity (Jones, 2009; Potrac et al., 2013b). Despite calls to recognise emotion in sports coaching, there remains, aside from some notable exceptions (e.g. Jones, 2006; Nelson et al., 2014; Potrac & Marshall, 2011), a paucity of literature addressing how emotions such as guilt, joy, anxiety, frustration, and anger are enacted, embodied, and produced in social relations with others (Jones et al., 2011; Potrac et al., 2013b). In many ways, this state of affairs could be understood to reflect the scale and maturity of coaching scholarship. However, we believe the failure to meaningfully engage with emotions, as well as their interconnections with "cognition, self, context, ethical

judgement and purposeful action” (Kelchtermans, 2005, p. 996), leaves the field open to the accusation of producing strangely inhuman and asocial accounts of practice (Burkitt, 2014; Jones, Armour, & Potrac, 2004; Jones, Edwards, & Viotto Filho, 2016; Potrac et al., 2013a, 2013b). From our perspective, consideration of these issues can also contribute to a better understanding of what it means to be a coach, including the intersections between professional and private selves. Relatedly, such inquiry could be used to support coaches’ professional development, personal wellbeing, and continued engagement in this role (Potrac et al., 2016; Potrac et al., 2013b).

In terms of its structure, this paper is organised into four sections. Following this brief introduction, background information relating to my coaching role at Erewhon Town FC, the construction of my story, and the definition of emotion that we subscribe to in this paper are provided. My storied experiences of coaching at the club are then presented. Reflecting the sociological purpose of this paper, the discussion section provides a suggested reading of my experiences in the field (Jones, 2009). Here, complementary relational and interactionist ideas regarding emotion (Burkitt, 2014) and identity (Burkitt, 1997, 2014; Scott, 2015) are utilised as the primary sense-making tools. Importantly, we do not claim to provide a singular truth or a definitive theorisation (Jones, 2009). Instead, we use theory to reveal, clarify, and make ambiguous experience more apparent to the reader (Denison, 2016; Huggan, Nelson, & Potrac, 2015; Jones, 2009; Potrac et al., 2013a). Finally, we conclude the paper by advocating for a greater integration of emotion into ongoing and future coaching scholarship.

Constructing my story

The principals of collaborative inquiry (Jones & Ronglan, in press; Ngunjiri, Hernandez, & Chang, 2010; Toner, Nelson, Potrac, Gilbourne, & Marshall, 2012) guided the methodology employed in this study. While not a unified approach in social science research, this form of inquiry is generally understood to entail the collective, collaborative, and

“critical examination of one’s actions and the context of those actions” (Samaras, 2002, p. xxiv). On one level, this perspective not only requires individual reflection on personal practice, but also the reframing of these experiences to develop a conscious understanding of professional activity that goes beyond “habit, tradition, and impulse” (Samaras, 2002, p. xxiv). It also entails the sharing and joint examination of personal accounts with knowledgeable colleagues, which is seen as a valuable means for developing rich embodied and relational accounts of practice, as well as advancing our theoretical sense-making in a particular topic area (Samaras, 2002; Ngunjiri et al., 2010).

The data for this study were generated through a 12-month period of critical reflection, debate, writing, and interpretation (Jones & Ronglan, in press; Haleem, Potrac & Jones, 2003). The process began with me, the lead author, providing a verbal presentation of the emotional nature of my work as a football coach. Following the presentation, I shared an extended written narrative of practice with my co-authors. This was informed by entries from my coaching journal, as well as my memories of the incidents, relationships, and interactions described within it. These accounts formed the basis for our monthly meetings, which took place in-person, via skype calls, and email. Our collaborative exploration of the narrative, as well as my responses to their questions, informed the ongoing refinement of the emotional experiences and social interactions contained within it. The analysis of the data entailed both emic and etic approaches (Tracy, 2013). The former was concerned with the emergent reading of the data and entailed the analytic coding of the data (Tracy, 2013). The latter entailed us seeking to make theoretical sense of my experiences. Here, we found the relational writings of Scott (2015) and Burkitt (2014) to be especially useful interpretive frameworks. Ultimately, our methodological approach entailed combining theory and narrative description in a manner that mutually enhanced and reinforced the contribution of each other (Tracy, 2013).

The context that provides the backdrop to my story is that of amateur women's football. Here, my various coaching roles were primarily concerned with designing and implementing the physical, tactical, and technical training programme, leading two training sessions per week, selecting the team, and managing the playing squad on match days (normally once a week). I was often supported in the administrative aspects of the role by a volunteer, who co-ordinated these features of team affairs. In the narrative below, this person is represented by Barry (pseudonym). While I received some remuneration from a club to cover the expenses I incurred when performing these duties, my engagement in these roles is best understood as a form of 'serious leisure' (Elkington & Stebbins, 2014). That is, in my non-work time, I chose to pursue a leisure career in an activity that I had found to be substantial, important, interesting, and fulfilling (Elkington & Stebbins, 2014). However, as my story demonstrates, my participation in this role was often characterised by a blurring of the boundaries between my professional and personal lives, as well as 'good' and 'bad' decision making (Ritter, Powell & Hawley, 2007; Scott, 2015)

Although the story presented in this paper is based upon recalled events, it is not beholden to them; dates, timelines, happenings, interactions, and relationships have been fashioned and dramatised (Denzin, 2014; Gearity, 2014; Holman Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2013). Aside from my family members, the individuals featured in my story are composite characters, who have attributes like those I encountered in my various amateur football coaching roles (Bochner & Ellis, 2016). The names of other teams mentioned in my story have also been fictionalised. The emphasis is, then, as much on evocation as it is on the provision of a 'true' representation (Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Denzin, 2014; Gearity, 2014; Jones, Potrac, Haleem, & Cushion, 2006). Ultimately, however, the story seeks to illuminate "what coaching meant to me" (Jones, 2009, p. 379), especially in terms of the

interconnections between my coaching identity, the emotions I experienced, and my embodied relations with others (Denison & Markula, 2003; Scott, 2015).

My story: At tale of passion and paranoia

(2nd October 2012) Beginning near the end

Me: I can't do it anymore. I'm going to tell them to start looking for someone else.

Susi: Why? I thought you were enjoying it there?

Me: I know, but I'm not feeling the buzz anymore. It's just not the same.

Susi: What's happened?

Me: Everything and nothing. I'm tired of the whole charade.

Susi: What charade?

Me: You know, the politics of it all; the false enthusiasm, the fake smiles, having to be seen to listen attentively to people talking shit! Having to be seen to care when no one seems to care in return. I know I wanted to have one more go, but I just haven't got the energy or the desire anymore.

Susi: But that's how it is. You know that. You're there to take the flak and to not complain about it. Just like any other coaching position you've had.

Me: I know. But I don't want to spend my spare time doing it anymore. It's doing my head in. Being spoken down to. Always doing a bad job from someone's perspective. Having to bottle things up all the time. I'm tired of being 'professional' and 'nice'. I want to tell people what I really think and feel! I want to be me.

Susi: Well, stop doing it then. I'll be pleased to see you at home a lot more. And it hardly makes you good company either! You're snappy and short-tempered, just like before. And you still haven't painted the walls in the baby's bedroom, despite promising you would for weeks now.

Me: I'm going to. I'm not going to put myself through it anymore.

Susi: Good! Now switch the light off and let's get some sleep.

(16th January 2012) I want one more go

I wondered how many people appreciated the angular white lines and the smell of fresh grass as much as I did. He was pointing, instructing, praising. He exchanged a 'high five' with a player. The player smiled and returned to his team-mates. The events rekindled feelings from my coaching and playing pasts. Having an impact. Being valued by others. They were good times. No, they were better than that. A feeling of warmth emanated from my chest. I had an urge to be out there. That's what I wanted to be doing. I quickly reminded myself of troubled times gone before; being burned and burning others (metaphorically speaking, of course).

The anxiety, guilt, and anger. But I wanted one more go; this time without the politics of the performance programme.

(23rd February 2012) Joining Erewon Town FC: "Just do the usual things please, Paul"

"So, we're agreed that the priorities for the coming season are the adoption of a player-centred approach to the tactical and technical development of the players, an improvement on last year's disappointing results, and equitable playing time for the squad members. Just the usual things for a club like ours really, Paul," the Chair of the interview panel summarised.

"Of course, we expect you to conduct yourself professionally in your dealings with players, parents, and club officials at all times. But that's taken for granted." Nods of agreement came from the remaining members of the interview panel seated alongside him. He leaned across the worn and rickety wooden table that separated me from them, with a broad smile and an outstretched hand. "Welcome aboard, Paul. It's good to have you here." "Thanks for giving me the opportunity. I'm looking forward to working with you all," I replied as we shook hands. Underneath my glossy smile and encouraging words was a strong sense of curiosity, excitement, and, indeed, anxiety. I felt beads of sweat running down my arms and my pulse increased. Contradictory thoughts reflecting my past engagements as a coach and my future

hopes raced through my head: I can't wait to get started! How will events actually pan out? Things could be great here. Will they 'buy into' me as a coach? I've got a lot to offer the club. Will it be like I want it to be? Come on, Paul. Stay in the green. You want this!

(25th February 2012) First impressions: This feels comfortable.

The players seemed a friendly and positive bunch. Judging by the number of BMWs and Mercedes that passed through the gates of the training ground, they hailed from 'well-heeled' families. While blessed with considerable enthusiasm, the talent on display was limited to say the least. They certainly lacked the technique, understanding, and speed of thought and movement that I had grown used to working with in the high-performance programme. Only one or two showed any potential of being able to play at a higher level. Still, I didn't mind. Their attentiveness and willingness had genuinely energised me. The feedback from players and parents had been great. By and large everyone seemed impressed with what I was doing. I enjoyed the warm smiles, the frequent 'thank yous' and compliments that I received. I felt really comfortable being there. The heat radiating through my chest confirmed my inner conversation. After all that had happened before, this mattered most to me. I'd enjoyed my can of cola after training. Caffeine, sugar, and assorted other things that are bad for my health. But I liked the sugary sweet taste. It gave me energy; made me feel good. I turned the music up loud in the car on the way home. My shoulders felt light. Life was good.

(2nd March 2012) That's Eric. Whatever you do, don't piss him off.

As I tidied the balls and cones used in the session, Eric, the team sponsor, who was also a parent of one of the players, wandered over to me. "So, do you think we can win the league with this group?" he enthusiastically enquired. I began to respond with a broad and dismissive smile as I initially thought his question was humorous in its intent, but I could see by the look in his eye that he was, in fact, serious. For a split second, I was lost for words and could only laugh nervously. I regained my composure and replied, "We'll try and win every

game but I think we should be realistic about what is achievable”, in as reassuring a tone as I could manage. After all, they had finished last in their league by some considerable distance in the previous season. Did he not see what I saw on the training pitch? Of course, I never asked him that question. He then proceeded to spend the next 45 minutes informing me of the strengths and weaknesses of each player and what we could achieve with the right formation. I nodded and smiled in the right places but my jaw and facial muscles increasingly tightened as I did so. I’d met people like Eric before. I found it was easier to listen, well, to be seen to be listening at least. Really, I just wished he would stop talking. I had other things to do. Spotting a natural gap in the conversation, I seized my opportunity. “Let’s see how things go, Eric,” I warmly suggested. “Anyway, I’ve got to dash, as I need to organise some player registrations with Barry in the clubhouse. I’ll see you later on.” I grabbed the bag of balls and stack of cones and made my escape.

I mentioned my encounter with Eric to Barry. His response was not the one that I was hoping for. He informed me of the different priorities that Eric and the other parents had for the team. By all accounts, it seemed that informal coalition groups had formed around shared interests. Unsurprisingly, some wanted to play to win. Others wanted playing time to be strictly monitored and shared. Some felt that their daughters should be encouraged to play in a variety of positions. Others didn’t. The difficulty of the situation was further added to by Barry’s warning that without Eric’s considerable financial generosity the club would encounter serious problems. “We can’t afford to piss him off,” Barry bluntly advised. Apparently, I was expected to bring some balance to these conflicting expectations. I nodded. “Well, I can only try,” I stated in as upbeat a manner as I could muster. But my tightening shoulders and slightly sweating palms were symptomatic of my internal conversation. I knew where things were heading and I really didn’t want to go there. I clung to the positivity of my interactions and sessions with the players. I didn’t want to lose that feeling. “I’m sure it will

be fine,” Barry replied, giving me what I considered to be a rather knowing smile. The quiver in my stomach led me to push the pack of crisps to one side and gulp down the remainder of my can of cola. No wonder the other guy quit. “Onwards and upwards then, Barry. See you Thursday,” I said with the biggest smile that I could manage. As I opened the door to my car, I wondered if Barry really bought into the bravado that I had just displayed. Or had he seen all of this before?

(16th May 2012) We’re not winning but (most) people seem happy. Perfect!

Eight games in and we hadn’t come close to winning a game. But there had been no complaints. In fact, only the opposite! Losing by a lot fewer goals was seen as massive progress. The effort put into transferring the lessons learnt on the training ground to match situations was clearly visible. It was great. I was getting to concentrate on what I really liked doing, which was working with the players. Trying to influence improvement. Everybody got some game time too. If I’m honest, I also enjoyed the continued praise and gratitude that I’d received from many of the parents. I always waved off the compliments and passed on the credit to the players. But I can’t deny their recognition meant a great deal to me. It made me feel stronger and better as a coach and as a person. Even Eric seemed excited by the way things were going with the team. He was convinced the new formation would pay dividends in the form of a win soon. Apparently, “It’s just a matter of time”. But what in life isn’t!

(25th May 2012) Behind a closed door.

I closed the office door. I wanted some privacy. The research paper I was working on could wait for now. I grabbed a pen and opened my session planner. This was my newly established routine on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Barry had texted me to say that we would have between 12 and 16 players at training tonight. I’d have liked a full squad but that didn’t matter now. I wanted it to be good. I wanted it to flow. Every detail had to be considered. It’s what they expected. It’s what I wanted. My fingers tingled as I compiled the order of activities and key

messages to be reinforced. My mind raced forward to the session. I visualised each activity and the players' responses. Two hours later, I had addressed all my nagging concerns. I closed the session planner and returned it to my kitbag. I re-opened my office door and returned to the paper on the screen. Well, at least I tried to. As I watched the clock slowly tick round, I couldn't stop thinking about the session to come. In the end, I decided I'd get down to the training ground a bit earlier. Nothing wrong with having more time to set up. Besides, I could carry on with the paper tomorrow.

(1st June 2012) When a good result makes life more difficult.

Our first point of the season! A 3-3 draw with Mornington Athletic (pseudonym) and the girls seemed really happy with their efforts. Their enthusiasm and energy made me smile and feel warm inside. They'd really bought into the team structure and patterns of play. It was making a difference. I was making a difference. That is what I wanted. As we gathered in the clubhouse for the post-game speeches, player awards, and some well-earned refreshments, the reception from Eric and some of the other parents wasn't quite as warm as I expected it to be. There were some smiles and 'well dones', but I could see that some of the parents wore a look of disappointment. I tried to figure out what was wrong. We'd drawn with a team that had resoundingly won the corresponding fixture last season. The girls had received positive feedback from the opposition players, coaches, and parents, and I'd rotated the players in order to share the playing time as equitably as I could.

Eric soon gave me the answer. "3-nil up with 20 minutes to go and we only get a draw, that's a real shame." His words cut me to the quick. It wasn't just what he said, it was how he said it. It was the accusatory tone of his voice and the hard look that he gave me. I felt the heat rising in my body. Despite being unsettled by his comments, I consciously maintained eye contact with him. I tried to be upbeat in my reply: "Come on, Eric, these things happen in football. But the girls seem to have enjoyed themselves and everyone got

some playing time. So quite a pleasing morning all round really.” Inside my head I was telling him that he was really irritating me. That he should take himself and his fantasies off for some psychiatric help. I had a telephone number he could use! “Well, I’m hoping for more from my investment in you,” he retorted. “Ars*h*I*!” I muttered under my breath as I watched him return to the conversation at his table. I took a sip from my can of cola. It helped relieve the uncomfortable dryness in my throat. I rubbed the back of my neck and sighed. This should have been a high point but it wasn’t. “Everything OK, Paul?” Barry asked. I almost immediately switched back into ‘coach mode’. I made the smile appear. “All good, cheers, Barry. Just been a long week with work and stuff. You know how it is. Can I get you a drink?”

(14th June 2012) Who really matters? What really matters?

“I’d better call home and let people know. Will you be ok?” I asked. Susi nodded in reply. “Love you,” I said as I closed the door to the doctor’s office. I wanted to cry. I fumbled with my phone, almost dropping it as I searched through the directory of numbers. We’d lost our baby. I’d just assumed all would be fine. As the phone rang, the thoughts intensified in my head. Who really matters? What really matters? My conscience reminded me that I never did paint the baby’s bedroom. Too busy with football stuff (again). A wave of heat flushed through my body. The dryness in my throat felt sharp, like a razor blade. “Hello, Anne. It’s Paul. Listen. I’ve got some really bad news. I’m afraid...”

(21st July 2012) From elation to gloom in 30 seconds

As I pulled up the handbrake and turned off the engine I had an almost uncontrollable urge to (repeatedly) bang my head on the steering wheel. Against all the odds, the girls managed to win a game. Not only did they win, but they’d scored a goal with a counter attack move that we’d worked on in training. I should have been feeling happy, but instead I couldn’t shake

the cocktail of thickness in my throat and tightness in my chest. Guilt and frustration were eating at me in equal measures.

I recalled my genuine excitement as the match entered the last 30 minutes. My pulse raced. My voice grew increasingly hoarse. They were giving everything they had. The parents were visibly caught up in the game too. They cheered and shouted encouragement to the girls on the pitch. Seemingly from nowhere, Eric appeared next to me. “Are you going to rotate the players now, Paul?” The lack of enthusiasm in his voice left me in doubt as to what he thought. The players standing a few yards behind me were completing their warm-up. It was nearly the designated time, as it had been in previous weeks. Naturally, they wanted to be part of it. I could see the glint in their eyes. If I’m honest, I agreed with Eric. The on-field situation always deteriorated when these players were on the pitch. I didn’t reply. Instead, I continued to focus my gaze on the game. Inside, my stomach was rolling and my chest tightened. I knew I would lose that day no matter what the score was.

Belying the awkward feeling in my stomach, I confidently instructed the substitutes to “Keep warm, as you’ll be coming on soon”. That hadn’t been strictly true, as I’d decided that, this time, I’d wait for the opposition to score the equalising goal before making the changes. Given the pressure they were mounting on our goal, I couldn’t help but think it would be soon. But I wanted to give the players the chance to hold out for as long as they could. I felt their efforts deserved that. After all, I know something of what it feels like to succeed after giving your all. Thoughts scatter, muscles tremble, warmth radiates through the body. Somehow you feel stronger, better, and taller. Wanting to be surrounded by family and friends. It’s an amazing and powerful sensation. One to be enjoyed. I re-focused my thoughts and energies on what was happening on the field of play. Then, what seemed like only moments later, the shrill burst of the referee’s whistle signalled the end of the game. For a few seconds, I felt ultra-awake, the adrenaline pumping through my body. They’d actually

done it! They'd won the game! I shook hands with the opposition coach and thanked the referee for his efforts. The parents and the players on the pitch celebrated. I exchanged high fives with the player nearest me, and said, "Well done, Alice. That was brilliant!" Her wide smile and Eric's accompanying pat on the back gave me a temporary feeling of weightlessness. "Great stuff, Paul. That was really great," he added. High praise indeed!

Then it struck me. As I turned around I saw two of the substitute players and their parents already making their way to the car park. The adrenaline was replaced by a sinking feeling in my stomach. I knew something like this was likely to happen but it was still deflating. The bubble of false hope popped. "Paul, can I have a word please?" the mother of the third substitute firmly asked me. "Why didn't you put Hilary on? That's really not fair at all!" Her words only served to increase the tightening in my chest. I couldn't tell her the truth: that, on this occasion, I'd put what I thought to be the interests of the other girls ahead of Hilary's experience. I doubted that the club committee would have wanted me to share such an honest appraisal, especially with their (financial) concerns about maintaining membership numbers. "Is my daughter's development not as important as the others? What's the point in coming if she isn't going to play?" she continued, with an increasingly reddening face and a prodding finger. I could empathise with her situation. Who wouldn't? I tried to defuse the tension by apologising, explaining that I had got caught up in the flow of the game, that I was only human, and that I would make mistakes from time to time. "Yes, well, it's not bloody good enough! Do you hear?" she retorted.

As I nodded attentively to her ongoing criticisms, my teeth clenched. My pulse quickened. I wished I was able to make my feelings clear in such an unrestrained manner. Instead of nodding attentively, I wanted to ask the stuck-up 'so and so' if she had finished yet! Tell her that she should stand in my shoes and try keeping everybody happy! It's not just about Hilary, or her! As she stomped away, I saw the tears welling up in Hilary's eyes. Now

that was different. A lump formed in my throat. My heart ached. I knew that I'd let her (and the other substitutes) down. That's the part of the job that I didn't like, that I didn't want to have to keep doing. You see, I also know how it feels to be excluded, to be on the periphery. That had happened to me many times and will likely do so again. Playing, coaching, working: it always feels the same. My face flushes. My skin crawls. That enveloping, horrible nauseous sensation that just won't go away. Feeling broken inside. Betrayed even. The urgent need to be alone. It isn't pleasant. It never is. "I'll see you Tuesday, Hilary. Thanks for coming and I'm really sorry that you didn't get to play today but you'll start next week. OK?" The heat and tingling in my face magnified with every word. I meant what I was saying but I'm not sure how comforting or useful such words were. Probably not at all, if truth be told.

I trudged back to the clubhouse for the post-match activities. The mood in there was very different. It was noisy. Busy. Happy. Eric was involved in an animated discussion with some of the parents, and the girls had beaming grins etched across their faces as they enjoyed the post-match sandwiches, drinks, and banter. I quickly tried to shift my melancholy mood. Why shouldn't they enjoy the moment? Why shouldn't I? I took a deep breath, composed myself, and put on that smile. Several of the parents offered to buy me a drink from the bar. I accepted with thanks, returned their smiles, offered compliments and congratulations, and laughed at their jokes. But ultimately my heart wasn't really in it. I wanted to, but I just couldn't make myself feel happy. For years I had been able to. But I couldn't do it anymore. Eric came over to where I was sitting alone. "It's great that the girls get to feel what a win is like. It has been such a long time," he said, grinning. I agreed with him as I opened a can of cola. But as I looked around the room, I felt the cold, dropping sensation of recognition intensify. I just wanted to coach. But it wouldn't be like that. It never could be. It was just like times gone before. That week I was onside with the majority but I wondered who I'd be offside with next time. My shoulders tightened and that familiar but uncomfortable feeling

grew stronger. The clammy hands. The constant feeling of butterflies in the pit of my stomach. My head began to ache. I was long way from the version of coaching presented on the courses that I had attended. Thoughts raced in my mind; ‘You’re not good enough’, ‘I bet it’s just you that makes such a mess of things’, ‘Why can’t you be better at this?’, ‘You’re letting people down again’, ‘Idiot!’.

I wondered what Eric would say if he knew how I truly felt. Of course, I’d never tell him or the others. Hardly the actions of a competent or so-called ‘effective’ coach. Not a particularly manly thing to do either. Best to say nothing. They’d only think I was odd. Eric continued his monologue on the merits of the 4-3-3 playing system. I glanced down at my watch. The ache in my head grew stronger. My attention wandered. I just wanted to get away from there, from everybody. You just don’t get it do you! There’s more to it than bloody formations! If only it were that simple. I’d heard enough. “Sorry, Eric. I’m just going to nip up to the bar. Can I get you anything while I’m there, mate?” I smiled. I always had to smile.

(15th August 2012) Where are their manners?

I threw the balls and cones back into my garage with unnecessary venom. The cones fell messily onto the floor but I slammed the door shut anyway. Sod it! They could be tidied up tomorrow. Who do these people think they are? Why didn’t anyone tell me (or Barry)? It was embarrassing; no, humiliating! Couldn’t they extend that simple courtesy? If I did the same to them, I’d be branded ‘unprofessional’, ‘unreliable,’ and probably much worse. The vein in my neck pulsed as I reflected on the farce that had played out. The planning, preparation, and an hour’s drive each way to the game, and what for? Only eight players turned up!

Apparently, most of the others are going to a concert. Why have they treated me in this way?

And to add further insult to injury, I knew what would happen on Tuesday night at training. There would be a group of parents expecting me to accept their apologies with good grace. Promises would be made. It wouldn’t happen again. Well, until the next time at least.

And I'd get that smile out again and say no harm done, that these things happen from time to time. Unlike Hilary's mum, I wouldn't be able to raise my voice, wag my finger, and be generally critical of them. Not without consequences, anyway. Coaching certainly doesn't seem to be the privilege that others had told me it is. I needed a cola.

(3rd October 2012) Thanks, but that's enough

As the girls began their warm-up, I looked around the training ground. I knew I wouldn't miss the creaky, damp, changing rooms, or the musty smell of the clubhouse bar and lounge. Nor would I mourn the end of the continual debates with Bill, the head groundsman, as to why the girls deserved to use the main training pitch as much as the boys did. But I did know that I'd miss working with the players. They'd been good company for the past year or so. Sure, there had been some ups and downs along the way, as Hilary (and others) could certainly testify to, but overall, I'd enjoyed my time with them. Hopefully, they'd enjoyed the coaching sessions and understood a bit more about the game than they did before. That's what I wanted to help them with. That's where the warmth and energy came from. I'd taken a great deal of satisfaction from seeing the improvement and being recognised for my part in that. But I didn't want to pick teams anymore. I didn't want to do the club politics. The butterflies had gone. My shoulders felt light again. Eric and Barry joined me on the side of the pitch. "Gents, I'm glad you're here. There's no easy way to say this, but I'm going to have to stop coaching." Susi was pregnant again and I was going to paint the bedroom. That mattered. As I drove home, I turned the radio up.

(Two years later) What does he have to moan about?

The players were highly skilled. They moved the ball around the training pitch with great speed and accuracy. Concentration and enthusiasm were simultaneously etched on their faces. They were attentive to his instruction and guidance. As I leant forward on the barrier that separated me from them, I wished I was out there. Being a part of it. He'd said to bring

my kit and lead part of the session. I'd politely refused. I was worried about getting back on the horse. Could I still do it? What would people think of me? More importantly, what would happen if it went well? I feared that I wouldn't be able to leave it alone. And then what?

The more I watched, the more I questioned why he had seemed a little down and tired beforehand. What did he have to moan about? Didn't he realise how good he had it here? He just needed to harden up and get on with it. I decided that I'd tell him that when we grabbed a drink after the session had finished. Then I remembered and decided that I wouldn't. I shouldn't. Hypocrite!

Making sense of my story: A suggested reading

In this section, we focus our attention on the ways in which my emotions could be understood as being experienced at the nexus of self-understanding and social relations that are “dynamic, unpredictable, and co-created” (Burkitt, 2014, p. 19). Here, the discussion is primarily inspired by the scholarly works of Burkitt (1997, 2014) and Scott (2015), which explore the issues of identity and emotion respectively. In line with their insightful arguments, we also deploy the inter-related concepts of identity commitment and salience (Stryker, 1968, 2002), role embracement (Goffman, 1961), emotional management (Hochschild, 1983; Burkitt, 2014), and role exit (Lindesmith, Strauss, & Denzin, 1999) as additional sense-making tools.

According to Burkitt (2014) and Scott (2015), identities are not constant things that people have but are, instead, entities that are continually unfolding and evolving throughout our lives. For example, Scott (2015) highlighted how our identities are created, maintained, challenged, re-invented, or exited through the process of social interaction. She posits that an identity is mediated by an individual's sense-making and responses to the symbolic meanings of other social actors' behaviours within a particular network of social relationships and

interdependency (Scott, 2015). For Burkitt (2014), the self is not only socially constructed, but is also something that we feel. He noted:

...the I is not only a linguistic marker...it is also a deeply felt entity. Central to the formation of the self are feelings of self power that give the term 'I' its emotional animus whenever we perceive, think, and speak. The sense of 'I' has an emotional force behind it which is the 'my feeling', and if this were not the case then 'I' would be a purely linguistic expression devoid of all life and feeling. (Burkitt, 2014, p. 110)

In reflecting the position outlined above, Burkitt (2014) suggested that our feelings, emotions, and bodily sensations are “always fused with social meanings in the patterned relational weavings of our immediate social encounters” (p. 8). He believes emotion should not be regarded as a static entity as it is, in contrast, a “movement itself within relations and interactions” (Burkitt, 2014, p. 9). Instead, he argued that, within our network of social relations, “we are constantly affected by others, being moved by them to other actions, in the process of constantly feeling and thinking – being moved from one feeling or emotion to another” (Burkitt, 2014, p. 9). Importantly, Burkitt (2014, p. 16) highlighted how individuals' emotional experiences in the present cannot be separated from their “bodily disposition to feelings and thoughts stemming from past patterns and relationships” in their respective biographies. Here, past emotional (and embodied) experiences are understood to “orient, motivate, and adapt” our sense-making, choices, interactions, and behaviours (Burkitt, 2014, p. 55). From the complementary perspectives of Burkitt (2014) and Scott (2015), it could be argued that the emotional and embodied experiences of a particular role or identity are grounded in dialogical social relations.

Such theorising has considerable utility in making sense of my desire to rekindle my coaching identity and my subsequent experiences in the role. For example, having reflected upon my emotional and embodied memories of previous coaching encounters, I believed that

the coaching position at Erewon Town FC could provide opportunities for self-enrichment and self-gratification, as well as serving to enhance my self-image (Burkitt, 2014; Elkington & Stebbins, 2014). However, the achievement of these positive personal outcomes could not be understood separately from the network of relations that comprised the club setting (Crossley, 2011; Scott, 2015). Indeed, my feelings of self-worth were inextricably linked to a sense of being needed by others, of belonging, and of having an important and valued role to play within the collective activity of club life (Elkington & Stebbins, 2014; Scott, 2015). Here, I arguably demonstrated what Crossley (2006) referred to as the desire to be desired; that is, my efforts to perform well as a coach were simultaneously grounded in my past experiences, associations, and relations as a coach and my wish to obtain the approval and recognition of others in the present (Burkitt, 2014).

Importantly, the emotional-evaluative tones of others played a pivotal role in how I ultimately gave meaning to my coaching self (Burkitt, 2014; Scott, 2015). How I felt about myself and others during my time at the club was never separate from the ways others felt about me, as “expressed in their actions, looks, gestures, words, and intonations” (Burkitt, 2014, p. 111), or, indeed, how I imagined and interpreted them to feel about me. My positive readings of events and relationships were not informed by just the words of praise and gratitude that I received from others, but also by my reading of the embodied manner in which they expressed such sentiments and evaluations (Burkitt, 2014; Scott, 2015). For example, I afforded considerable symbolic value to the handshakes, smiles, and pats on the back that featured in these interactions (Scott, 2015). The rewarding features of my relationships with various contextual stakeholders were accompanied by a variety of emotions. These included enjoyment, pride, fulfilment, excitement, and elation, among others. Notably, it was the embodied experiences of these emotions, such as ‘swelling’ with pride, the radiating heat of happiness, the heightened senses of excitement, and the

rejuvenating adrenaline rush of elation, which proved to be particularly intoxicating (Burkitt, 2014). Indeed, I still live with the legacy of these sensations, as my recalled embodied experiences inform my ongoing contemplations about a possible return to coaching in the future (Burkitt, 2014).

My embodied understanding of my coaching self featured heavily in my choice to, at times, prioritise coaching ahead of other identities and roles. For example, I frequently put the planning of coaching sessions and other club business ahead of my writing as an academic and the undertaking of household tasks. My behaviour here could, to some degree, be understood using Stryker's (1968) concepts of identity salience and commitment. The former refers to the probability of enacting an identity and its standing within a hierarchy of identities (e.g., coach, academic, partner), while the latter is concerned with the depth of commitment that an individual ascribes to a particular role that he or she performs (Scott, 2015). In a related vein, Goffman's (1961) notion of role embracement also offers some explanatory utility. For Goffman (1961), role embracement refers to the deep level of commitment and dedication that an individual affords to a given role and, relatedly, the intense concentration that is given to the execution of role-related duties (Scott, 2015). In Goffman's (1961) own words: "To embrace a role is to disappear completely into the virtual self available during the situation, to be seen fully in terms of this image, and to confirm expressively one's acceptance of it" (p. 94). This is certainly a sentiment I could subscribe to in terms of my approach to coaching for much of my tenure at the club.

However, it is important to acknowledge that my decision making here was not an example of unfettered agency. Nor did it take place in a social, relational, and biographical vacuum (Shulman, 2017). Instead, my choices arguably reflected my subscription to wider socially constructed ideas about the 'goodness' of sport and coaching. Through my participation in various relational networks, I came to define and understand my obligations

as coach in a particular way (Shulman, 2017). For example, my romanticised memories of playing sport and of being coached, as well as my understanding of sport's entwinement with contemporary notions of volunteerism, community, and being of service to others, were very much at the forefront of my thinking, feeling, and acting (Burkitt, 2014). As such, I believe I was complicit in reproducing dominant cultural (and capitalist) norms regarding 'what you should do', 'how you should feel', and 'what you should or should not show to others' (Burkitt, 2014; Ilouz, 2007; Shulman, 2017; Thoits, 2004). While not an explicit aim of this study, a consideration of the inter-relationships between emotional socialisation, the core values associated with coaching roles, and the wider power relations that shape and inform the field of human action represents a fruitful area for future inquiry (Burkitt, 2014; Zembylas, 2014). In drawing upon the work of Fineman (2008) and Tracy (2008), such inquiry might consider the "mechanisms of power and control that bear down" on coaches, the potentially "identity eroding capacity of these discourses and processes" (Fineman, 2008, p. 7), and, relatedly, their impact on coach attrition and burnout.

Unfortunately, my time at Erehon Town FC was far from the straightforward, unifying, and positive experience that I had desired. Navigating the micro-political features of club life was, from my perspective at least, fraught with dilemmas and challenges (Jones & Wallace, 2005; Potrac & Jones, 2009a, 2009b; Potrac et al., 2013a). My efforts to pursue the often-contradictory goals of winning games, developing players, and equitably distributing playing time ultimately proved to be particularly problematic in terms of my relations with others, the emotions I experienced, and, relatedly, my thoughts about my self (Crossley, 2006; Jones & Wallace, 2005). For example, the respective criticisms that I received from Eric and Hilary's mother were not only a source of personal frustration, but they also brought a sense of tension to our ongoing relations. My embodied experiences of these encounters (e.g. heat flushing through my body, tightening of the stomach) reflected the affectively

charged nature of my self and my understanding of their comments and behaviours as representing an attack upon it (Crossley, 2006; Burkitt, 2014). Similarly, the guilt and sadness I experienced regarding my choice not to allocate playing time to Hilary (and other players) in a particular game, as well as her embodied reaction to it, led me to question the ‘goodness’ of my coaching self (Scott, 2015). Here, the guilt emanated from my choice to engage in behaviours that I understood to violate the situational and moral codes against which I (and some others) judged my enactment of this role (Turner & Stets, 2007). Similarly, my sadness reflected my own recollections of being excluded by others in the past and what this had meant for how I had understood my self on those occasions (Burkitt, 2014). From an embodied point of view, the physical sensations included a feeling of heaviness, a tight chest, a thickness in the throat, and the inward retreat of my thoughts. The latter was also accompanied by the need to provide compensation to those whom I perceived myself to have wronged (Turner & Stets, 2007). In this case, I promised Hilary that she would start the next match.

It was my embodied experiences of these problematic situations and my subsequent reflections upon them that fuelled my questioning of the inherent pathos of the situation in which I found myself (Burkitt, 2014; Jones & Wallace, 2005). Despite my conviction that I should be able to, it was just not possible for me to keep everybody happy all the time (or even most of the time). I concluded that, regardless of the choices I made, I would ultimately fail to live up to the levels of conduct that were valued by at least some of the parents, players, and administrators at the club (Scott, 2015). The anxiety that I subsequently experienced was rooted in my understanding of my previous problematic experiences as a coach, as well as in my anticipation of future unwanted tensions with others (Burkitt, 2014; Potrac et al., 2013a). Here, I understood such interactions to be inescapable and uncomfortable, and as having the potential to damage or spoil my coaching self (Jones, 2006;

Scott, 2015). Relatedly, my gloomy outlook could also be related to my belief that I would ultimately be unable to enact the coaching role in the manner that I had longed for and which I had initially (albeit briefly) experienced in the club setting (Scott, 2015). Despite my efforts to navigate a “careful path between the demands of the occasion” (Scott, 2015, p. 84) and my personal coaching agenda, I felt defeated. In addition, I recognised that I no longer possessed the emotional stamina or desire to respond to the ongoing and fluid challenges that I believed would comprise social life at the club (Hochschild, 1983; Nelson et al., 2014; Elkington & Stebbins, 2014). My increasing disenchantment with the coaching role finally culminated in my exit from it (Scott, 2015). I arguably engaged in a process of emergent self-loss (Lindesmith et al., 1999), where my “private feelings of discomfort” culminated in my desire to be free from the role in hand (Scott, 2015, p. 166).

In addition to experiencing various and contrasting emotions in my relations with others, my role also required me to engage in emotion work (Hochschild, 1983). Specifically, this entailed hiding or showing situationally expected emotions during my encounters with others in the club setting (Nelson et al., 2014; Potrac et al., 2016). For example, at various times, I felt obliged to offer a smile to individuals while simultaneously hiding my inner feelings of frustration or anger. My engagement in such forms of surface acting (i.e. intentionally deceiving others through bodily displays to mask how we are feeling without deceiving ourselves) reflected, on one level, the club’s (and wider societal) expectations of me and the service that I should provide to the players and their parents (Hochschild, 1983; Potrac & Marshall, 2011). I understood the exhibiting of anger and frustration to contravene the display rules (i.e. what, when and how overt expressions of emotion in particular situations are to occur) that the club administrators, parents, and players expected me to comply with. However, my behaviour was not solely driven by these externally imposed expectations or obligations (Hochschild, 1983; Potrac & Marshall, 2011). Instead, my

outlook also reflected my own socially and biographically constructed views about how a ‘good’ coach ought to behave, as well as my desire to avoid ‘falling out’ with people at Erewhon Town FC (Potrac et al., 2016). Indeed, while I certainly felt angry and frustrated at various times, avoiding the public display of these emotions was an integral feature of my self-identification as a coach, as well as my hopes and desires regarding the nature of my relations with others (Bolton, 2004; Scott, 2015).

Finally, it would be erroneous to suggest that my emotional experiences at the club were characterised only by emotion work and inauthenticity (Burkitt, 2014; Potrac et al., 2013). There were many occasions where I authentically expressed my true emotions in my interactions with others. These included, for example, celebrating the team’s victory with Alice and Eric and the guilt and sadness I experienced when not affording Hilary some playing time in that same game. Here, the emotions I experienced were not imposed by external feeling rules (i.e. the emotions we ought to feel in a particular situation), but were, instead, the consequence of me genuinely feeling moved by events, other people, and their emotional circumstances and predicaments (Burkitt, 2014).

Conclusion

This paper addresses the flesh and blood emotions that I experienced in my efforts to cope with the everyday demands, contingencies, and challenges of my coaching role. Through the curving of narrative time and an honest and vulnerable engagement with emotion, the text aims to do more than depict recalled personal experience (Denzin, 2014). We very much hope the reader can extract a deeper sense of meaning, especially in terms of the interconnectedness of my coaching identity, my embodied experience, and my relations with others in the club setting (Burkitt, 2014; Potrac et al., 2016; Scott, 2015). From our perspective, the significance of this paper lies not in the generalisability of my emotional experiences to the wider population of coaches. Indeed, Burkitt (2014, p. 149) argued that our

engagement with the contradictions, paradoxes, and dilemmas of social life, as well as our “dialogic reflection upon conflicting impulses, means that it is not always possible to always predict in advance how people will respond”. Instead, its utility is in providing a lens for considering the embodied, emotional, and relational features of coaches’ lifeworlds (Jones, 2009; Potrac et al., 2013). We believe that a greater engagement with these topics has much to offer if our accounts of coaching are to capture better “the bodily being in the world that defines what it is to be human” (Burkitt, 2014, p. 172) than has been achieved to date. We are not advocating that emotion and embodied experience should be prioritised or, indeed, studied separately from other topics of coaching research. Rather, we hope that, wherever appropriate, future inquiry better recognises the interaction of these topics with other dynamics, issues, and priorities (e.g. learning, reflective practice, power relations, and the health and wellbeing of practitioners, among others) in sports coaching scholarship (Goodwin, Jasper, & Polletta, 2001).

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