



Creating a facilitative environment: A coach's diary approach

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Abstract

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<p>This diary-based thesis explores the author's personal and professional development during 2024-2025 season in Finland, as a part of the Degree in Coaching and Management in Vierumäki. Thesis was conducted during the third school year work placement, this thesis documents the author's reflections in her job as a strength and conditioning coach.</p> <p>The aim of the thesis was to create a facilitative environment that fosters resilience in athletes. The process of the thesis consists three main themes: building high challenge, building high support and lastly finding the balance between those two. The themes were chosen based on the theoretical framework and the importance in the author's coaching development.</p> <p>Reporting of the diary entries begin in 2025 February and lasted until 2025 end of march with total of 8 weeks, resulting of total 20 diary reports. Each week contains a theme with specific objectives and personal development is analysed through the weekly reports.</p> <p>Through this process, the author improved key personal and professional skills in sports coaching and gaining valuable understanding into athlete-centered coaching practices.</p> <p>The author improved her personal and professional skills through the thesis and is able to use this experience in the future as a part of her coaching and as a learning experience. The experience contributed to her personal and professional growth, and provided a foundation for continued learning in the future coaching contexts.</p>
Keywords Coaching, Facilitative, Resilience

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Kommentoanut [MV1]: Korjaa ohjeen mukaiseksi!

1 Introduction

The main objective of my diary-based thesis is to foster professional growth through the lens of coaching. The chosen topic for my diary-based thesis is "Creating a facilitative environment: A coach's diary approach". The goal of the thesis is to learn as a coach how to set facilitative environment with both high challenge and high support for the athletes to better support their improvement.

As a coach, my role is to support and help athletes in achieving their full potential. Although, reflecting on my coaching experience now as a strength and conditioning coach, I have acknowledged important area for both my personal and professional growth: my ability to set facilitative environment with high demands and high support for athletes. I recognize my coaching approach has been lacking how to continually create the optimal environment for athletes' growth and improvement. Establishing facilitative environment for athletes helps to build their resilience by providing progressive challenges with high support.

A facilitative environment aims to build resilience in athletes by providing high support with high challenge, that promotes psychological safety, trust and commitment. A facilitative environment is a setting that actively supports their learning and growth, environment where athletes feel safe and encouraged to push their limits through trust, support and active engagement.

During the third school year my work placement takes place in Hämeenlinna, where I am working in Hämeenlinna Pallokerho for the women's ice hockey team as a strength & conditioning coach. Hämeenlinna Pallokerho is notable sports club based in Hämeenlinna, Southern Finland, offering variety of sports, including ice hockey.

Strength & conditioning coach's responsibilities include designing training programs to improve muscle strength, power, agility and endurance depending on the teams' objectives for the season. Responsibilities entail injury prevention, recovery and rehabilitation. It is important to also monitor athletes through wellness assessments and testing. Most importantly planning and periodization, making an annual plan including off-season, in-season and transition phases with objectives.

To reach the goal of this thesis I will be utilizing the Challenge-Support Matrix (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2016, 142) as a framework to build resilience to achieve the objectives of my thesis.

Methods from Morgan, Fletcher & Sarkar (2019, 5) will be implemented as a part of the thesis. Methods may vary depending on the theme, with the topic of building support and relationships with the athletes include the following methods:

- Hold regular discussions about errors to encourage learning and problem solving

- Promote the importance of enjoyment and wellbeing during challenging situations
- Promote a sense of belonging and emotional attachment during difficult circumstances
- Nurture quality, supportive squad relationships during setbacks

Methods that I will be using then for setting high standards to balance support and challenge include:

- Use humor and encourage banter during challenging situations
- Practice 'resetting' the team's focus following challenging situations
- Reinforce high standards, shared expectations, and team values during stressors
- Communicate with enthusiasm and express confidence in the team during setbacks

2 Theoretical framework

2.1 Resilience

Resilience stands for the ability to cope and adapt positively under pressure or during setbacks. In sporting environment specifically can look like encountering performance mistakes, injuries, pressure or mental -or physical fatigue. Resilience is a psychological skill that helps the athlete to concentrate and manage emotions despite the pressure or setbacks. It is an essential skill for an athlete to handle challenges and maintain long-term progress in their athletic careers (Galli & Vealey 2008, 316.)

2.2 Developing resilience

Building a facilitative environment is essential to foster resilience in athletes. Developing resilience requires a well-structured environment where athletes receive consistent challenge with necessary support. It is essential to balance both high challenge and high support to support the growth of the athletes (Sarkar, Fletcher & Brown, 2015, 478.)

2.2.1 High challenge

Creating a high-challenge environment is important part of developing resilience in athletes. By setting achievable standards, coaches' responsibility is to encourage athletes to push them out of their comfort zone and build mental toughness. Implementing high-challenge methods requires the balance of both high challenge and high support that combines psychological support and progressive challenge (Sarkar & Page 2022, 47.)

The methods that will be implemented to set high standard are outlined by Morgan, Fletcher & Sarkar (2019, 5) as a part of the framework for setting high standard to create facilitative environment:

- Reinforce high standard, shared expectations, and team values during stressors
- Communicate with enthusiasm and express confidence in the team during setbacks
- Role model by leading by example during pressure situations
- Exchange honest feedback and avoid blame
- Hold regular discussions about errors to encourage learning and problem solving
- Practice 'resetting' the team's focus following challenging situations
- Take ongoing action, analysis and adjustments to continuously improve despite setbacks

2.2.2 Constructive feedback

The role of self-reflection in learning from mistakes together with providing feedback, fosters athletes to engage in self-reflection is important for both professional and personal growth. Self-reflection supports athletes to analyze their performance, understanding mistakes and develop strategies for how to improve (Morgan, Fletcher & Sarkar, 2019, 5.) In coaching settings, coaches can foster self-reflection by asking athletes questions such as:

- “What was good and went well?”
- “What could be improved next time?”

Questions can be applied in various contexts, reflecting as a team on the team’s overall performance, evaluating a teammate’s technique during strength and conditioning exercises, or simply encouraging athletes to reflect on their own individual performance. Encouraging constructive feedback and reflection by encouraging athletes to reflect on their performance by asking what was good and what could be improved next time. Emphasizing learning from mistakes and seeing failures as opportunities for their own growth. It has been found that Olympic champions perceived failures and adversities as a valuable experience to develop resilience (Sarkar, Fletcher & Brown, 2015, 476.)

A stronger coach-athlete relationship

A strong coach-athlete relationship is important for creating a high support environment as a coach that builds resilience in athletes and supports personal growth and long-term athletic development. A strong relationship between the coach and the athlete builds trust, respect and commitment. Investing time into building a strong relationship with the athletes establishes high support environment offering consistent encouragement, empathy, constructive feedback and individualized approach based on the athlete’s own needs. A high support environment ensures athletes feeling safer and therefore allowing them to be more willing to take risks and challenges and engage deeper with their development process. Athletes perceive challenges more as an opportunity for their growth rather than a threat. A high support environment can influence stress, allowing athletes to recover more effectively and maintain motivation better (Sarkar & Hilton, 2020, 214.)

Coaches who have invested time in building a strong and supportive relationship with the athletes, can set more demanding expectations because their athletes have better trust and understanding with the coach. Similarly, when facing adversities, athletes in a facilitative environment are more likely to overcome the fear of failure, and they view them rather as an opportunity to learn and grow.

The article (Sarkar & Hilton, 2020, 215) discusses the coach-athlete relationship and how it supports building resilience in athletes. A strong coach-athlete relationship is viewed as a foundation in building resilience in athletes, especially in high-pressure environments. Developing a strong coach-athlete relationship is identified as one of the main strategies for developing resilience in athletes. The methods that were mentioned in the article to build better bond with the athletes such as:

- Building trust
- Creating open and honest communication
- Collaborative leadership style
- Individualized approach
- Encouraging learning from failures

The importance of adversities in building resilience in athletes

Adversities are very important part of training and competition. Setback and different challenges in every athletic career are inevitable and they serve an important part for personal and professional growth, and for building resilience. Athletes can learn to overcome their challenges more effectively and adaptive to meet the demands of the sport (Galli & Vealey 2008, 329.)

The common adversities that athletes face are performance failures, selection disappointments, training obstacles, personal and relationship issues. Improving mental fortitude, problem solving and growth mindset in athletes can support them with overcoming the adversities that they face during their athletic careers (Sarkar, Fletcher & Brown, 2015, 478.)

Athletes improve resilience by overcoming adversities, through qualitative research including interviews with athletes from different sports, it was identified that adversity plays an important role in fostering personal growth and development (Galli & Vealey, 2008, 328.)

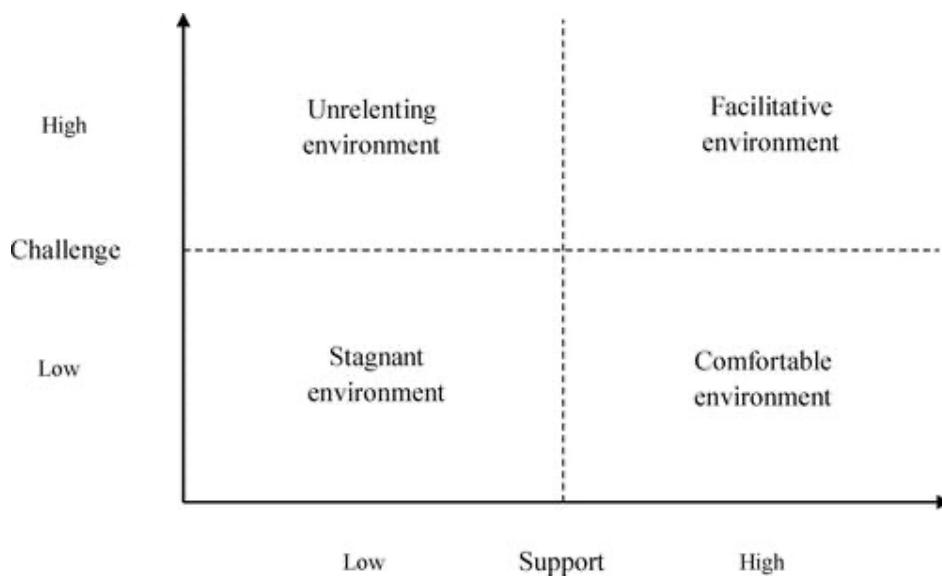
2.2.3 High support

Building a strong relationship with athletes is important aspect of creating a facilitative environment that builds resilience in athletes. Athletes are more likely to thrive when they feel valued and supported by the coach. Athletes who feel supported are more likely to develop resilience, cope with pressure, maintain concentration and motivation through their training (Sarkar & Page, 2022, 45.)

Building a strong foundation of support and trust allows coaches to set higher performance standards, creating an environment that promotes development and success. By fostering support,

athletes can improve their engagement and increase sense of belonging and commitment to the team. There are plenty of strategies to building support and trust with athletes; however, the methods I have to implement in my diary-based thesis are drawn from (Morgan, Fletcher & Sarkar, 2022, 48) the following methods:

- Hold regular discussions about errors to encourage learning and problem solving
- Promote the importance of enjoyment and wellbeing during challenging situations
- Promote a sense of belonging and emotional attachment during difficult circumstances
- Nurture quality, supportive squad relationships during setbacks



3 Description of the initial situation

The next chapter in the report is a description of the initial situation that analyses the current work, stakeholders, and workplace interaction situations.

2024 spring when I was looking for coaching opportunities, I received a great opportunity to coach as an off-ice coach in Southern Finland in Hämeenlinna Pallokerho. After couple of phone calls with the coaching staff and head of coaching we set a meeting together in April. During the meeting we discussed the objectives for the upcoming season, schedules and how would the job tasks and responsibilities look like for me. In the beginning of April, I accepted the job offer and moved to Hämeenlinna. During April I planned the season's annual plan to follow through the season.

In May new season started and my job as a strength and conditioning coach began. I was introduced to all the players, staff and facilities. The team consisted variety of different ages of players with different backgrounds and experience. I was guided the first weeks of my workdays and allowed me to get more comfortable with the new team and environment. It was easy to get familiar with the environment and facilities since most of the players come in August after the summer due to their work life.

3.1 A strength and conditioning coach's work in ice-hockey

A strength & conditioning coach in ice hockey supports athletes in developing physical skills such as strength, speed and power that improves their performance on-ice. Their responsibilities include physical preparation, injury prevention, improving performance and long-term development. The role requires careful planning, coaching interaction and daily adaptability. A strong S&C coach improves the athletes not only physically, but mentally as well. The coach builds psychological skills such as mental toughness, discipline, concentration and resilience. With encouraging goal setting, self-reflection and teamwork, the coach supports their mental and personal growth that is needed on high-level performance and training (Tudor & Carlo, 2018, 53-83.)

The S&C coach prepares the annual plan that supports strength, speed and endurance improvement while reducing the injury risk of the athletes. It includes physical testing with regular monitoring to track physical process and track fatigue. One of the core responsibilities is to tailor the annual plan based on physical demands of ice hockey. It requires to divide the season into off-season, pre-season, in-season and transition phases and each of those phases have specific goals. The S&C coach collaborates with the head coach to ensure that the training loads and goals aligns with on-ice practice plans, travel schedules, and tactical and technical improvement.

Physical testing is important for evaluating athletes and tracking their progress. Common testing includes strength, speed, power, aerobic and anaerobic capacity measures. In addition, other monitoring tools such as wellness questionnaires, session RPE rating and sport watches for heart rate monitoring can be used as a part of ongoing monitoring (Tudor & Carlo, 2018, 125-155.)

S&C coaches run off-ice practices such as strength workouts, sprint and agility drills, or recovery sessions. Often, they are involved in warm-up and cooldown delivery, both off and on the ice. Throughout the season, training plans, and loads may be adjusted based on the athletes' injuries, fatigue levels and game schedules. One of the most important skills for S&C coach is adaptability and flexibility.

3.1.1 My professional knowledge and development

The knowledge and skills that I have gained for that specific job have been built through education in Sports Coaching and Management, included with practical coaching experience in different sport camps, junior football and S&C clinics. I have developed my know-how through reading scientific literature such as articles and books, and by continuously reflecting on my coaching approach and adjusting my coaching practices and plans.

I have gained work experience through both my studies and work placements as a strength and conditioning coach. These practical experiences have given me a foundation in coaching principles, methods and athletic development. I consider myself at an early stage in my professional career in sport coaching. I will continue learning, gaining more practical experience and developing my professional and personal growth to grow into a more experienced coach.

To continue improving myself, I must invest in gaining more knowledge in areas such as annual planning, psychological skills coaching and leadership. As a strength and conditioning coach cooperating with physiotherapist and nutritionist may help me to gain valuable knowledge and provide better support for athletes.

As a strength and conditioning coach, I'm still developing toward becoming a real expert who has larger experience in strength and conditioning coaching and coaching in general. As a coach I can independently manage planning and running the practices, and delivering effective coaching that supports the goals of the team. To improve myself toward the experienced expert level, I aim to improve my abilities to use innovative training methods and share experiences and reflect with other coaches.

3.2 Stakeholders

In this chapter, I will be introducing the stake holders that are related to the job I am working in. Several stakeholders are involved in my daily work as a strength and conditioning coach in ice hockey. These stakeholders include, the head coach, goalkeeper coach, players, physiotherapist, team manager and possible assistant coaches.

Players of the team are the center of my work as a strength and conditioning coach. My responsibility is to help and support their development of their physical abilities such as, speed, power, strength and endurance, and in addition support their psychological skills like resilience and discipline.

Coaching staff of the team, including head coach, goalkeeper coach and assistant coaches are colleagues in my work who I work together with. I work closely with them to make sure that physical training supports the on-ice goals and loads. Game schedules and individual player needs are also discussed together with the coaching staff.

The club owners are involved in the overall success of the team, although I may not work directly with them. The club owners manage the finances and marketing.

3.3 Interaction situations

My interaction with stakeholders is a significant part of my job. I am interacting daily with the coaching staff to align training and monitoring plans and I'm communicating with players through feedback, physical and psychological monitoring. My responsibility is to collaborate with coaching staff to manage improvement of the players and to discuss individual needs of the players.

Interactions with stakeholders can be challenging and requires flexibility and emotional intelligence. Balancing different expectations and meeting different coaching approaches from coaching staff needs communication and discussions. Adapting also my communication style and coaching approach to suit different players with different personalities demands reflection and flexibility. Conflicts can arise when there's different opinions about athletes' needs, training load or overall planning which therefore requires negotiation skills. In order to meet and overcome these challenges, I need to improve my ability to deliver my message and expectations clearly and strengthen my leadership skills. Overall, interactions with stakeholders is an important part of creating a safe and supportive environment for athletes and the whole team itself.

4 Diary entries

This diary-based thesis consists of 8 observation period comprising total of 40 working days. A Weekly report will be submitted after each theme for evaluation and reflection. First two weeks will focus on building support with the athletes to strengthen the coach-player relationship, which is essential for fostering resilience and establishing higher performance expectations. A strong and trusting coach-player relationship enables the enforcement of higher training standards.

In the following weeks I will be utilizing the Challenge-Support Matrix (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2016, 142) as a framework to build resilience to achieve the objectives of my thesis. Methods from Morgan, Fletcher & Sarkar (2019, 5) will be implemented as a part of the thesis, employing following strategies:

- Hold regular discussions about errors to encourage learning and problem solving
- Promote the importance of enjoyment and wellbeing during challenging situations
- Promote a sense of belonging and emotional attachment during difficult circumstances
- Nurture quality, supportive squad relationships during setbacks

4.1 Observation week 1 – Support #1

Monday 3.2.2025

The first two weeks the developmental focus is on building support and establishing a safe and constructive environment. Strengthening the coach-athlete relationship serves the foundation for athletic development and creates a supportive environment (Sarkar & Hilton, 2020, 215). Previously mentioned methods will be implemented such as recognizing various forms of success—including effort, respecting game rules, attitude and concentration—and providing positive feedback accordingly. Additionally, one-on-one conversations to discuss both their athletic and personal lives will be prioritized, while peer coaching will be implemented into practice sessions to enhance team connection and cohesion (Morgan, Fletcher & Sarkar, 2019, 5).

The first observation day began with off-ice training session with HPK women's ice hockey team involving 12 players. Due to the ongoing national team break, the attendance was half of the amount what it would be on a regular practice day and as a result the atmosphere was noticeably calmer, more focused and easier to manage and organize. The practice began with a team gathering in the locker room, followed by an overview of the warm-up schedules, training place and other details.

Prior to the practice, I invested time in a one-on-one conversation with an injured player discussing her rehabilitation progress and personal life, such as studies and current living situation. After the off-ice I spoke with two other injured players who were skating independently on the ice, inquiring about their recovery state and their perception of their skating (Sarkar & Hilton, 2020, 215.)

The training session took place on a tatami mat and was focused on speed and agility, including various drills and games designed to improve these aspects. All the participants contributed to a concentrated training environment allowing me to provide more individualized feedback and ensuring they all receive individual feedback (Sarkar, Fletcher & Brown, 2015, 476).

Throughout the session, I acknowledged positive behaviors such as effort, respecting rules of the games and sustained concentration. It was essential to recognize even minor achievements in maintaining engagement, however during a small-sided game, I observed that not all players followed the established rules which left some of the players with feelings of frustration. The issue of it could have been addressed better by reinforcing the rules and even implementing consequences (Sarkar & Page, 2022, 48). Providing more individualized feedback could have enhanced the effectiveness of the practice (Sarkar, Fletcher & Brown, 2015, 476).

Tuesday 4.2.2025

The second observation day continued with the same topic, building support with the athletes and providing a safe environment (Sarkar & Hilton, 2020, 215). The off-ice practice started at the gym with maximum strength program. Each player maintains their own training sheet where they write down the repetitions and weights of each exercise. The intention of the sheets is to monitor progress, ensuring increase with weights and to receive proper stimulus for strength development. The players work in pairs or small groups to encourage peer support (Morgan, Fletcher & Sarkar, 2019, 5).

During the session, I was mostly assisting the youngest players, since they have less experience with maximum strength training, helping them to identify their maximum weights. These players often need encouragement to push in terms of the weights that they use. To assess their effort, I asked them how heavy the load felt and how many repetitions were in reserve, helping them to determine an appropriate weight progression. For most of the players I referenced their maximum test results to ensure they were pushing at their maximal intensity. However, a few players did not have their results for being absent at the testing. The maximum test results can be utilized for the specific exercises in which they were measured, making it difficult to identify your maximal test result in all the other exercises.

With the youngest players I incorporated short video analysis as a coaching tool to help to identify the correct form. I recorded three different players while they performed deadlifts and reviewed it with them, enhancing self-reflection by asking how they perceived their form and therefore identify some areas of improvement (Sarkar, Fletcher & Brown, 2015, 476). Recording is highly beneficial since it allows visual feedback and reinforces self-reflection to assess their own form. I recognized that video analysis could be implemented more frequently especially into gym training sessions when wanting to correct someone's form.

I provided positive feedback to players who had progressively increased their weights within the past weeks in accordance with their training sheets. My aim is to maintain constant feedback by engaging with each pair, monitoring their progress and offering guidance if needed (Sarkar, Fletcher & Brown, 2015, 476). Nevertheless, each pairs active engaging in peer coaching could have been emphasized more in the beginning of the season to increase player involvement and reinforce active participation -and presence.

An area for improvement is to provide feedback on players' attitudes, body language and mindset (Sarkar, Fletcher & Brown, 2015, 476). There is significant difference between some players in these aspects, which is because the motivations and priorities are different for everyone. In my own coaching approach, I aim to enhance my own ability to identify and adapt to various mindsets of the players, adjusting my approach to support their individual needs with training.

Thursday 6.2.2025

The process of building support with athletes continued with gym practice today with the topic of maximum strength training. Due to the ongoing national team break and the absence of games on the following weekend, I decided to add an additional maximum strength training session before we start to decrease the load of the practice before the play-off games. The primary objective for today was to integrate discussions about the goals of the players', being present and providing individual feedback and attention, but otherwise continue with the same main goal of fostering support (Sarkar & Hilton, 2020, 215.)

In today's practice, I put my energy and focus on engaging in player-coach conversations regarding their personal goals by asking about the objectives they have set for themselves for both off-ice and on-ice training in the beginning of the season (Sarkar & Hilton, 2020, 215). Encouraging self-reflection by asking whether they have noticed any improvements in their own development areas and how consistently they have maintained their focus on their goals throughout the season (Sarkar, Page 2022, 48). Unfortunately, it was not possible to have these discussions with every player individually, so I will be continuing these conversations during the next gym practices.

Throughout the session, I assisted players determining their maximum weights and encouraging them to increase their loads by attempting higher weights with fewer repetitions. Notably, two players had been having difficulties in increasing their weights and improving their maximal lift result. Addressing this issue and discussing with these players about it (Galli & Vealey, 2008, 328). I offered individualized support and motivation to help them further in the future and achieve greater progress with their training (Sarkar & Hilton, 2020, 215).

Weekly analysis

The main objective for this week was to build support and strengthen the relationships with the athletes to foster a facilitative environment for training (Sarkar & Hilton, 2020, 215). It is crucial to establish a strong bond with the players as it creates psychological safety and builds trust which then allows for the implementation of setting higher straining standards. Athletes feeling more supported and comforted, are then more receptive to challenges therefore making it more possible to push them out of their comfort zones and reinforce higher training demands (Sarkar & Page, 2022, 48).

During the week, I observed challenges in adjusting my approach to different players and particularly in recognizing the diverse personalities within the team. Some players need more encouragement and guidance, while some others are more independent with more experience, needing less constructive feedback. It is important to discover different ways to approach the players who need less guidance or those who are less communicative to find ways to connect with them as well and showing you care for them too.

Another key takeaway from this week was the importance of developing more individualized approaches that match the personality and motivation of the player. Understanding their unique needs as a player, communication styles and source of motivation will allow me to offer more effective coaching that supports their individual needs and goals.

I noticed I tend to focus to provide feedback to players who require technical corrections while unintentionally offering less attention to those who consistently perform with great form and growth mindset (Sarkar, Fletcher & Brown, 2015, 476). In the future, I aim to place greater emphasis on acknowledging all players regardless of how much they need guidance and correction.

The reflection of this week has reinforced the importance of balance between challenge and support. In future sessions, I plan to refine my ability to adapt my coaching strategies to each athlete's individual needs, ensuring that they get the necessary attention to maximize their full potential.

4.2 Observation week 2 – Support #2

Tuesday 11.2.2025

For the second observation week, the primary focus remained on building support through continuous feedback, individualized conversations, tracking performance and motivational encouragement (Morgan, Fletcher & Sarkar, 2019, 5). The aim was to be actively present and demonstrating genuine care towards both the athletes training and well-being beyond the sport (Sarkar & Hilton, 2020, 215). Aiming to engage more with players I had interacted less with and to find effective strategies for approaching those who lack motivation, making it difficult to articulate their goals and self-reflection.

Today's practice was a gym-based practice with the focus on maximum strength development. To enhance my ability to monitor their progress, I had their previous strength test results on my phone making it easy to go through each pair allowing me to assess the amount of weight in their sets. This actively involves me to interact with the athletes.

Recognizing progress throughout the last weeks from the training sheets where they put their weights and repetition, I was providing positive feedback for their improvements (Sarkar, Fletcher & Brown, 2015, 476). However, a few athletes had not made progress within the last weeks, with their strength levels remaining unchanged for an extended period. With these players, I engaged conversations with them to discover the reasons for regression and therefore provided guidance with strategies to overcome the issue (Galli & Vealey, 2008, 328). I emphasized the importance of progressively increasing the weight and performing fewer repetitions. It is important to acknowledge that the strength development is very much individual and influenced by various factors.

The gym sessions are structured with peer coaching with the athletes working in pairs or small groups. Peer coaching encourages mutual support, correction and skill improvements. Reinforcing peer coaching by checking each pair and prompting players to give feedback on their partner's form, emphasizing active support and responsibility (Sarkar & Page, 2022, 48). The aim was to foster an environment where athletes learn to analyse movement patterns, learn to communicate and give constructive criticism (Sarkar, Fletcher & Brown, 2015, 476). I will continue discovering individualize my coaching approach and particularly addressing motivation levels, and tailoring feedback to fit with the athlete's needs.

Thursday 13.2.2025

Today's practice began with a quick transition from kids' sport club to our off-ice practice. My second job running kids' after school sport club requires me to shift my mindset from coaching kids to working with adult athletes in more high-performance setting. Quickly changing from one role to another and arriving to the gym while the players were given instructions to perform warm-up independently. The training session was held in the gym and focused on developing explosive strength.

One of our athletes endured a concussion a week ago, necessitating a Buffalo Concussion Test (BCTT) to assess and guide the return to activity. The test helps to determine exercise tolerance and detect persistent post-concussion symptoms. The test begins with evaluation of baseline symptoms, followed by gradual increases in intensity. The result serves a foundation for an individualized return-to-practice plan to ensure safe recovery without overexertion for the athlete. This was my second time running the test, following prior guidance from our team's physiotherapist. The test provided positive results about the athlete's recovery status, confirming that she has recovered and could return to on-ice activities after few days. I prioritized engaging in conversation with the athlete discussing about her well-being and making sure she felt supported throughout the process (Sarkar & Hilton, 2020, 215).

After the test, I had approximately 15 minutes left to engage with other players before our practice time ends, and the players return to locker room to prepare for the on-ice practice. I focused on monitoring the athletes' weight selection and assessing their movement technique with the explosive strength exercises. I quickly observed that many of the players were using excessive weight, which decreased the speed and sharpness of their explosive movements, therefore losing the primary objective of the practice. I provided feedback about the importance of adjusting to load to optimize the explosive part of the movement (Sarkar, Fletcher & Brown, 2015, 476). In the session where we focus on improving explosiveness, my aim is to ensure that the athletes are performing the movement with the intended explosiveness to achieve to aimed physiological benefits.

Off-ice sessions typically lasting around 45-60 minutes, and the concussion assessment taking significant amount of time of today's practice, I was unable to engage with many of the players but instead putting the focus on fewer players today. Despite that, I put my focus on maximizing the efficiency of the time available and ensuring to make the most out of 15-minute window to enhance the development of the players. Continuing to improve my ability balance multiple responsibilities, while ensuring that each practice contributes to the athletes' athletic progress.

Friday 14.2.2025

The last training session of the week was placed on tatami and focused on speed and agility by integrating active games, and aiming to reduce the stress of the players, boost overall motivation and promote sense of belonging (Sarkar & Page 2022, 48). My primary goal for today was to foster a positive and motivational training environment by recognizing effort, attitude and mindset, providing continuous feedback to the athletes. Particularly noticing to provide enough positive feedback (Sarkar, Fletcher & Brown, 2015, 476).

During our practice, I faced a challenge with two players who exposed a noticeable lack of motivation, which was shown through their negative body language and bad attitude. I believe it is important to address such behavior quickly to uphold the set standards of the team and maintain a positive atmosphere (Morgan, Fletcher & Sarkar, 2019, 5). Following the off-ice session, I initiated a private conversation with these two players to provide feedback on their behavior and emphasizing the impact on both themselves and their teammates (Sarkar & Hilton, 2020, 215). This not being the first time these same athletes had received similar feedback about the same problems. Both players responded negatively, and the discussion became heated. I observed feelings of frustration in myself and these feelings affecting my coaching attitude throughout the practice. With the limited time available between off-ice and on-ice sessions further complicated the situation, preventing us to completely solve the issue. As a result of this, the tension remained high, and I recognized that further effort will be needed to rebuild the trust and connection.

After the off-ice, I met the coaching staff of the team in our locker room to discuss the issues that had arisen during the off-ice practice. It was valuable to share my experiences and challenges to receive advice and insight from more experienced coaches, discover potential strategies for solving the issue during the next days. Because of this difficult interaction with two of the players, I left the practice feeling a sense of intensity and stress, since all happened very unexpectedly, and I had not anticipated this level of conflict during the practice before. Continuing with the intention to focus another week on fostering supportive environment and building trust.

Weekly analysis

The aim of this week was to continue building support and strengthening relationships (Sarkar & Hilton, 2020, 215), with the athletes using the same methods while emphasizing individualized approaches for different players. Since each athlete possesses their own individual motivations and unique personalities, it is essential to adjust interactions accordingly to maximize engagement. The progression of reaching this objective was positive during the first two training sessions, however a setback occurred during Friday's practice.

Trying to focus more on how to approach different players since they all have their own personalities and motivations to play and need different type to approach each of them. The progression continued well on the first two practices until there was a setback on Friday's practice. I felt like it took our progression with building the connection further backwards with specific players which affects the overall connection with the team and atmosphere. Therefore, I decided to continue with this same topic for the next week with the aim to repair this trust and connection since it serves a foundation for athletic development and trust (Sarkar & Hilton, 2020, 215.)

Through my coaching experience, I have learned valuable insights into my role. It is my responsibility to push players to reach their maximal potential, while also to acknowledging that their motivations differ, needed various approaches. I have come to recognize that I cannot maintain control over each individual and significant amount of my energy has been given to athletes who lack motivation and don't fully engage in practice. I have learned to shift this focus towards the players who consistently give their full effort and show a strong desire to improve. Although it has been challenging to ignore negative attitudes -and body language, it has been excellent place for me to learn to either shift the focus on players with higher motivation or to confront to uphold higher standards (Sarkar & Page, 2022, 48).

Through my coaching experience with diverse athletes, I have learned that players who exhibit lower levels of motivation or enjoyment, often times require more personal attention and support to feel noticed and valued. Despite them being less communicative, by providing individualized attention it can enhance their sense of belonging and engagement (Morgan, Fletcher & Sarkar, 2019, 5). Offering more individualized support and attention based on the needs of the athlete will be one of the key objectives for the upcoming week (Sarkar & Hilton, 2020, 215).

To continue to build support and connection in the team within the next week, I will be utilizing methods Morgan, Fletcher & Sarkar (2019, 5) as a part of the framework of the thesis. The following adjustments will be implemented into my coaching approach:

- Use humor and encourage banter during challenging situations
- Practice 'resetting' the team's focus following challenging situations
- Reinforce high standards, shared expectations, and team values during stressors
- Communicate with enthusiasm and express confidence in the team during setbacks

4.3 Observation week 3 – Support #3

The third observation week exceptionally continues with the same topic of building support and repairing connection (Sarkar & Hilton, 2020, 215). I aim to understand athletes' motivation and

therefore personalize my approach. Focusing on providing more encouragement and individual attention to the players who need it by spending time to connect on a more personal level. In addition, I aim to put more effort on reflecting on my sessions through the references. Being more intentional about documenting and analyzing my sessions, I can better identify patterns that work more effectively in my coaching.

To create a facilitative environment by fostering support within the next week, I will be utilizing methods (Morgan, Fletcher & Sarkar, 2019, 5) as a part of the framework of the thesis. The following methods will be implemented into my coaching approach:

- Use humor and encourage banter during challenging situations
- Practice 'resetting' the team's focus following challenging situations
- Reinforce high standards, shared expectations, and team values during stressors
- Communicate with enthusiasm and express confidence in the team during setbacks

Monday 17.2.2025

Monday's practice session began on the tatami, with some uncertainty regarding the team's atmosphere following the disagreements that occurred on the previous weekend's game, which had left the team with a tense state. The focus of the session was speed, agility, and plyometrics. The session included agility ladder drills, speed and reaction exercises, and small groups relay competitions. Including efficient speed training on the tatami has given challenges throughout the winter months due to the limited court reservations for proper sprinting, together with the weather conditions that restricted opportunities to train speed outdoors.

Despite the concerns, I observed an improvement in the specific players' attitudes and body language, the overall atmosphere was notably more positive and concentrated compared to the previous week. There was a noticeable improvement in the connection between the players, as well as between the players and me as their coach.

During the speed drills, I observed that a few players were not giving their full effort, however, I chose to prioritize reinforcing the efforts of those players who were fully engaged, aiming to build an environment that encourages concentration, positive attitude and body language (Sarkar & Page, 2022, 48). This approach of mine aimed to foster more focused and encouraging training atmosphere. I included methods such as reinforcing high standards (Morgan, Fletcher & Sarkar 2019, 5) by providing individual feedback and recognizing desired behaviors to encourage their repetition.

During the practice, I observed these two players with whom I had engaged in a difficult conversation last week showing improved attitude and body language, which was reflected in their increased engagement and self-reflection. Their expressions of joy and improved focus were visible, proving a shift in their mindset compared to last week's practices. Following the off-ice session, I provided both players individualized feedback acknowledging their improved attitude and therefore expressed my appreciation to their positive change (Sarkar, Fletcher & Brown, 2015, 476). I further asked whether they recognized a difference in their attitude between this and last week, both players agreed that they had improved their mindset and behavior. Holding regular discussions about errors to encourage learning and problem solving was one of the methods (Morgan, Fletcher & Sarkar, 2019, 5), that I implemented to further solve the conflict. Providing this positive reinforcement was important in showing that, despite our prior disagreements, I continued attentive to their progress and provided support in their development. Promoting to see learning from mistakes as an opportunity for growth (Galli & Vealey, 2008, 328).

Tuesday 18.2.2025

The practice session began with independent warm-ups, followed by the countermovement jump test. The topic for today was developing explosive strength. During the warm-ups, I engaged in one-on-one conversations with some of our younger players, discussing about school and their day prior to practice. This intentional interaction aimed to build trust and provide social support (Sarkar & Hilton, 2020, 215).

After the CMJ test, the players transitioned to working in pairs, using a pre-written program written on the gym's white board. Since the exercises were familiar to the athletes, no additional explanations were needed. Considering the playoff games approaching us, I intentionally refrained from introducing new exercises at this point to avoid disrupting established routines.

During the practice, I approached a player with whom I had a difficult conversation the previous week. I checked in with her to ensure that she was doing well without any problems and had clear understanding of all the exercises. We discussed a specific medicine ball throw drill, and I provided feedback on how to increase the explosiveness when performing the exercise (Sarkar, Fletcher & Brown, 2015, 476). I continued to ask how the movement felt and whether she noticed any improvement following my advice. Some of the players may be hesitant to seek help when they need it, often due their younger age or more shy personality. For this reason, I make effort during each gym practice to monitor all pairs to provide the required support and feedback (Sarkar, Fletcher & Brown, 2015, 476).

Peer coaching has been implemented into our training since the beginning of the season, though the emphasis of it has varied over time. Encouraging players to provide feedback on their peer's form, offer help, and support their peers remains essential (Sarkar, Fletcher & Brown, 2015, 476). Peer coaching strengthens the players' sense of belonging and emotional attachment, and nurtures supportive squad relationships (Morgan, Fletcher & Sarkar, 2019, 5). This strategy has become important considering the conflicts among players and between players and coaches.

Thursday 20.2.2025

The practice session today commenced with the objective of explosive strength. It began with the transition from working with the kids' afterschool sports club to coaching the strength and conditioning of the women's team, which requires a quick mindset shift from one setting to another. My main objective for the session related to my thesis topic was to apply methods (Morgan, Fletcher & Sarkar, 2019,5), particularly reinforcing high standards by having a clear communication, setting higher performance expectations and demonstrating expected work and attitude.

To begin, I introduced the topic of explosive strength to the players, followed by organizing the players into small groups of two or three to build a sense of belonging, increase responsibility, and encourage peer support. Encouraging teammates throughout the session to help and motivate each other to reach their full potential to nurture quality and supportive squad relationships (Sarkar & Page, 2022, 48). However, it was notable that only few small groups provided feedback consistently and supported one another genuinely (Sarkar, Fletcher & Brown, 2015, 476). For the younger players, I demonstrated an exercise to highlight expected level of explosiveness we are aiming for and provided positive reinforcement to increase the level of their effort and performance.

The challenge in these sessions is to ensure the appropriate selection of the weights for the exercises. Many players selected weights that were notably too heavy since they lack explosiveness within their movements. I had to instruct several groups to reduce the weight, explaining that selecting lighter weights was key to achieve the desired objective of the session. Holding regular discussions about errors to encourage learning and problem solving (Morgan, Fletcher & Sarkar 2019, 5.)

Additionally, I acknowledged the need for individualization in the training program. A few players showed signs of appeared fatigue due to lack of sleep, so I advised to reduce the number of exercises and spare time at the end of the session for mobility. Given the overall fatigue of the group, I decided to adjust the load for the upcoming practice and implementing more enjoyable aspects to decrease the physical and mental exhaustion.

Friday 21.2.2025

The last practice of the week was placed on the tatami, with a focus on incorporating fun games, explosive movements, and core strength. The session included games such as, dodge ball and team tag game. These games quickly elevated the enjoyment and excitement levels of the team, contributing a noticeable decrease in fatigue — An important factor considering the game on the following day.

Implementing enjoyable games like dodgeball proved to be effective method also for incorporating explosive movements into the training session. The sharp, explosive throwing motion that is required in dodgeball matched well with the principles of developing quick and powerful movements. Earlier discussion with the coaches of the team highlighted the importance of implementing some explosive exercises before the game day to maintain readiness. However, implementing enjoyable activities promoted the importance of enjoyment and wellbeing during challenging situations (Sarkar & Page, 2022, 48.)

The session included 10-15 minutes of developing core strength exercises, containing side and standard planks held for 30 to 60 seconds. During this time, I observed a small group of younger players having a trouble to maintain proper plank form due to a lack of focus. By reinforcing high standards and emphasizing that these exercises were for themselves and their improvement rather than for me, these players gradually reset their concentration and improved their performance towards the end of the session (Morgan, Fletcher & Sarkar, 2019, 5.)

To further increase the autonomy of the players, players were given an option to choose between holding the plank for 30 or 60 seconds. This approach encouraged players to take responsibility and autonomy of their effort level (Sarkar & Page, 2022, 48). Impressively, every player chose to continue till 60 seconds, reflecting the team's shared standard and challenge themselves and strive for improvement. Ending the session with positive feedback that highlights the importance of their effort and mindset to uphold higher training standards (Sarkar, Fletcher & Brown, 2015, 476.)

Weekly analysis

Over the past week, I have continued to build support and trust, particularly focusing on individualization when approaching a player, providing support, and applying theoretical frameworks to address coaching challenges. One key takeaway from this week has been my improved ability to personalize my coaching approach and understanding players' motivations. By spending more time to provide individualized attention, I have been to understand better each player's goals, motivations and performance capacity. This has allowed me to provide more individualized feedback and

guidance, adjusting my approach to better match their individual needs (Sarkar, Fletcher & Brown, 2015, 476).

Given the different background of players that ranges in terms of age and training experience, their individual needs differ a lot. While some may benefit from positive encouragement and being challenged to push their limits, some other players may need emotional support and guidance to improve their self-reflection regarding their performance, exercise form or recovery. More experienced players who have spent more years of training, often hold better well understanding of their body's needs and capabilities. The players who have less training years are still in the process of learning about their physical and psychological potential through experience and trying.

In addition, to improving my coaching approaches and strategies, I have used my theoretical frameworks to address and solve coaching challenges that I have faced. When observing that some players were struggling with achieving the desired effort during strength straining, I applied methods (Morgan, Fletcher & Sarkar, 2019, 5) to reinforce positive encouragement, individualized approach, demonstrating desired performance levels and setting expectations. These methods encouraged players to adjust their weight selection and improve their performance to meet the objectives of the session.

In summary, this week has been refining and adjusting my individualized coaching approaches and methods, implementing theoretical frameworks to solve my issues within coaching, and strengthen the relationships with players (Sarkar & Hilton, 2020, 215). I am dedicated to further enhancing this progress by creating an environment that balances support and challenge to promote positive performance outcomes.

For the next three weeks, my focus will shift to establishing higher standards within performance, effort, attitude, and mindset. Establishing higher standards and balancing support with appropriate challenges, intending to create a more facilitative environment that encourages players to push their effort while maintaining trusting and supporting environment. (Sarkar & Page, 2022, 48) By setting higher standards and reinforcing accountability, the goal of mine is to foster growth and development within the team and players as individuals (Sarkar & Page, 2022, 48).

Observation week 4 – High challenge #1

The fourth observation week introduces a new theme: Setting high standard. Establishing high standards includes highlighting structured and challenging expectations that guide athletes' performance and effort (Sarkar & Page, 2022, 48). Creating a facilitative environment requires fostering concentration, accountability, and commitment to continuous improvement.

As a coach, it is essential to define what constitutes high-challenge performance and clearly communicate these expectations to your athletes to ensure they understand the desired outcomes. Emphasizing correct technique, quality of the movement, and reflection skills (Sarkar & Page, 2022, 48). Additionally, encouraging athletes to push their concentration level and physical limits play a key role on promoting learning and growth (Galli & Vealey, 2008, 328).

To create a facilitative environment by setting high training standards and to balance support and challenge within the next weeks, I will be utilizing methods Morgan, Fletcher & Sarkar (2019, 5) as a part of the framework of the thesis. Using the following methods:

- Reinforce high standard, shared expectations, and team values during stressors
- Role model by leading by example during pressure situations
- Exchange honest feedback and avoid blame
- Hold regular discussions about errors to encourage learning and problem solving
- Practice 'resetting' the team's focus following challenging situations

Implementing self-reflection questions to support the athletes to reflect of their performance, promoting understanding mistakes and learning from them (Galli & Vealey, 2008, 328). Encouraging constructive feedback and reflection to foster growth and learning together with setting short achievable goals and the ability to reflect helps to push the athletes out of their comfort zone and therefore setting a more challenging environment (Sarkar & Hilton, 2020, 7, 215).

Tuesday 25.2.

The first practice of the week focused on explosive strength and took place in the gym. At this stage of the season, during the play-offs, gym sessions prioritize developing explosiveness through powerful movements to ensure that the training load stays low and therefore prevents fatigue and overload.

The objective for this session in the context of my diary-based thesis was to implement methods from (Morgan, Fletcher & Sarkar 2019, 5) to establish higher performance standards to set higher challenge. The key methods applied including holding discussions about mistakes to encourage learning and growth, fostering self- and peer reflection, and guiding players to reset their focus as a team.

During their warm-up, players were instructed to perform their warm-up routines independently before starting the program itself that was displayed on the whiteboard. While observing the warm-up, I noticed some of the players engaging in static stretching and so I took the opportunity to explain

the benefits of dynamic stretching before practice and how static stretching is better for post-training recovery.

Once the players formed into small groups, I provided assistance to players who required help setting up their exercises correctly. I reinforced high-performance standards by offering positive reinforcement and encouraging players to reflect on their teammates' performance and form (Sarkar & Page, 2022, 48). Players were asked to highlight positive aspects and suggest improvements in explosiveness or form (Morgan, Fletcher & Sarkar, 2019, 5).

Observing a small group of players enhancing their teammates' performance with the exercise of banded broad jumps. The players demonstrated strong concentration and teamwork by marking the landing points with their feet and encouraging each other to jump further. Therefore, I provided positive feedback to them, recognizing their mindset and supportiveness (Sarkar, Fletcher & Brown, 2015, 476). Building on this observation, I aimed to implement similar strategies for engagement with younger players to foster involvement and raising the standards (Sarkar & Page, 2022, 48).

Reflecting on this session, I acknowledged my tendency to focus on multiple objectives, which can hinder my effectiveness. Moving forward, I plan to prioritize 2-3 key focus areas per practice to make sure I can deliver impactful coaching.

Thursday 27.2.

Following a game day, today's session focused on recovery. The session took place on the tatami and included activities such as hurdle stepovers to enhance groin and hip mobility, and this exercise aimed to promote movement in those areas supporting overall recovery of the athletes. For this session, I set personal coaching objectives aligned with methods (Morgan, Fletcher & Sarkar, 2019, 5), emphasizing promoting learning by having regular discussions, encouraging problem solving, and reinforcing higher standards (Sarkar & Page, 2022, 48).

To make players understand the purpose of the session, I encouraged them to reflect on why performing the exercise at a slower tempo was beneficial and how it contributes to their recovery. This approach aimed to encourage their reflection skills and engagement. In addition, I introduced short-term goals to increase focus and motivation by asking players to raise their vision and slow down their movements, targeting improved coordination and overall balance (Sarkar & Hilton, 2020, 7, 215). Players responded positively to this challenge, demonstrating increased focus and engagement to achieve the desired outcome.

During the session, I noticed two players struggle to achieve the desired movement due to limited groin mobility. I provided constructive feedback and encouraged them to increase their focus and focus on moving the legs rather than twisting the torso (Sarkar, Fletcher & Brown, 2015, 476). As a result, their movement improved significantly. After reflecting on this, I realized this situation could have been an ideal opportunity for the players to engage in self-reflection, encouraging to assess what adjustments they could make and why. To further promote accountability, I addressed one player's lack of effort by instructing her to repeat the hurdle stepovers again with now improved concentration, reinforcing the importance of high standards (Morgan, Fletcher & Sarkar, 2019, 5).

The practice included series of full-body mobility exercises to support recovery. Players followed demonstrations of the exercises, and I aimed to provide individual feedback where necessary to help them improve their range of motion. Although the session today was relatively short, the emphasis on concentration successfully created a focused, goal-oriented environment that aligned with the session's topic of recovery.

Weekly analysis

This week's focus was on establishing high standards by using methods suggested by (Morgan, Fletcher & Sarkar, 2019, 5). The approach included holding regular discussions to promote learning and problem solving, and reinforcing higher performance expectations (Sarkar & Page, 2022, 48). The sessions were conducted in the gym and on the tatami, emphasizing two themes: explosive strength and recovery. To balance high standards with support, I implemented the following strategies into my coaching approach:

1. Reinforcing higher standards
2. Hold regular discussions about errors to promote learning and growth.
3. Setting achievable short-term goals for exercise
4. Resetting the team's focus

This week's experience in setting higher standard within the training environment highlighted the importance of balancing both pushing for higher expectations while offering the necessary support to maintain motivation and well-being. By combining constructive feedback in pairs and between the athlete, meaningful discussions, and individualized adjustments, I was able to emphasize higher standards to create a more facilitative environment (Sarkar & Hilton, 2020, 7, 215).

One challenge in this week was the limited number of practice sessions, with one of the being a recovery focused practice. I find it more challenging to implement certain methods for raising the standards during this type of practice. However, this experience taught me to maximize the available time by identifying specific areas of focus, such as maintaining and improving concentration to

ensure that even recovery practices contribute to maintaining high standards (Sarkar & Page, 2022, 48).

By experimenting with different methods, I can make informed adjustments for the upcoming week that will have the same focus area. This allows me to tailor my coaching approach more effectively by selecting methods that align with the intensity and topic of the session, whether it's recovery focused or explosive strength-based practice, I can apply methods that best support the desired outcomes and the objectives of the practice.

4.4 Observation week 5 – High Challenge #2

Monday 3.3.

Today's session was focused on improving explosiveness and took place at the gym. Players once again had given time for independent warm-up, during which I encouraged some players to engage more efficiently, as they were distracted by having conversations. My aim was to create opportunities for players to provide constructive feedback to each other, fostering teamwork responsibility, and engagement (Morgan, Fletcher & Sarkar, 2019, 5). Feedback highlights areas for growth, allowing teammates to correct mistakes and refine techniques. This process fosters learning and improvement, essential for setting higher standards and challenge (Sarkar & Page, 2022, 48).

The players worked in groups of 2-3 players, following a structured practice plan from the whiteboard, which outlined the exercises, intensity and rest time. While observing their performance, I concentrated on ensuring players remained engaged and active in their groups. I provided additional encouragement to younger players, guiding them to be more present and involved in their small group to help their teammates (Galli & Vealey, 2008, 328.)

During the banded broad jumps exercise, I encouraged players to push their teammates by marking their previous landing points and motivation them to aim to jump further. Although it required some guidance at first, the players gradually embraced the concept and began actively supporting their teammates and setting short-term goals (Sarkar & Hilton, 2020, 7, 215). I observed some more experienced players demonstrating positive support, and I then reinforced their positive behavior with positive feedback. Emphasizing the importance of setting higher standard for active participation helped to set higher expectations and improve active engagement (Sarkar & Page, 2022, 48).

At the start of the session, I intended to pair younger players with older teammates to help them understand the exercises better and connecting English exercise terms. However, two older players declined, claiming they were too tired and were having a bad day. As a result, I personally guided the younger players instead. Following the session, I addressed the older players privately, explaining why supporting younger players is responsibility that they should embrace, and that demonstrating leadership should be more of a privilege. Both players apologized even before the discussion, explaining their tiredness, and I acknowledged their feelings while emphasizing the importance of promoting inclusiveness and ensuring that younger players feel welcomed and supported in the future from this on.

Overall, the session today was good, despite this one setback, but I recognized the need to improve accountability by communicating expectations more clearly at the beginning of the practice. Moving forwards, I will try to tailor my coaching methods based on the individuals. For example, for groups with stronger reflection skills, I will set additional challenges to enhance their presence, support for peers in their group, and efforts to motivate teammates during explosive strength sessions.

Friday 7.3.

The focus of today's session was recovery, incorporating hurdle stepovers for groin and hip mobility, followed by fun activity such as dodge ball to reduce the stress levels, and including a small mobility routine to prepare for the following ice session. The primary objective for this session was to emphasize the clear communication of expectations, both at the start of the session and consistently throughout while also explaining the importance of the exercise Morgan, Fletcher & Sarkar (2019, 5).

The session began with setting up two hurdle stepover lines. I provided a clear demonstration to emphasize the importance of performing the movements at slow and controlled pace, highlighting the benefits for improved mobility and recovery. Setting clear expectations by clear communication. While most players responded positively to the instructions and met the expectations, couple of individuals continued to perform the movements too quickly despite receiving individual feedback about it (Sarkar, Fletcher & Brown, 2015, 476). As a coach, I decided to shift my focus towards the players who demonstrated positive mindset and were actively engaged in meeting the objectives of the exercise. For these players I provided positive reinforcement to acknowledge their efforts and attitude (Sarkar, Fletcher & Brown, 2015, 476). The hurdle stepover routine included movements forward, backward, and sideways.

Following this, we transitioned to a game of dodgeball with the goal of promoting enjoyment, reducing stress and foster team cohesion (Sarkar & Page, 2022, 48). The goal of having a fun and competitive game was intended to boost motivation while encouraging players to commit to the rules of the game. The activity was successful, and players demonstrated engagement, teamwork, and positive energy throughout the game (Morgan, Fletcher & Sarkar, 2019, 5).

Lastly, the session included small mobility routine to prepare players for the upcoming ice session. Although recovery practices involve lower-intensity exercises, I recognize the challenge in setting specific performance goals for those sessions. However, emphasizing clear communication, engagement, positive reinforcement proved to be effective today in maintaining concentration and achieving the desired outcomes.

Weekly analysis

This week's coaching focus was on reinforcing high standards to create a more facilitative environment. Both sessions provided key insights to improving my coaching methods. On our strength session, I encouraged teamwork by implementing constructive feedback to increase problem solving (Morgan, Fletcher & Sarkar, 2019, 5.)

While some groups were supportive and present in their groups, others needed more guidance, especially younger players required more encouragement. During our recovery session, clear communication and expectations were emphasized. Demonstrating the exercise helped most players, but couple of them struggled despite the given feedback. I chose to put more focus on players who listened the instructions, reinforcing positive behavior.

Through this week's challenges and obstacles, I have improved my ability to address difficult situations, communicate clear expectations, and encourage accountability. Learning to adapt my methods has improved my coaching skills. Moving forwards, I aim to foster accountability and set higher standards consistently, which will help me to create more facilitative environment and build resilience in athletes (Sarkar & Page, 2022, 48).

4.5 Observation week 6 – High challenge #3

Last week of setting higher standards within the performance, attitude, mindset and effort (Sarkar & Page, 2022, 48). The aim for the week is to continue communicating expectations and reinforce great performance effort and self-reflection skills to raise the standards and balance high support

with high challenge to create a facilitative environment for athletes as a strength and conditioning coach.

Tuesday 11.3.

Today's practice took place in the gym in the evening, with a focus on explosive strength. My main goal for the day was to encourage both self-reflection and peer reflection among the athletes to increase their problem solving (Galli & Vealey, 2008, 328), while individualizing my own coaching approach based on the player's biological -and training age.

To support the goal I have set, I organized the players into small groups or pairs and encouraged them to be actively engaged with each other by giving and receiving feedback. I asked the players questions like, "How does the form look?" followed up with, "Why does it look good?" to improve their ability to reflect critically and increase problem solving. (Galli & Vealey, 2008, 328) I took a moment as well with one or two pairs to explain why I have consistently asked these questions throughout the season, emphasizing that reflection skill is one of the key skills for athletic development and therefore very important for them to have (Sarkar & Hilton, 2020, 215). However, I observed that a few players seemed disengaged and lacked effort for reflections, so moving forward, I plan to find more effective ways to involve them as well, such as preparing individualized questions, as they often give short answers.

Overall, the players gave thoughtful and constructive feedback about their peers' explosiveness and form, commenting on things like maintaining a straight back, proper posture, and keeping the gaze forward rather than downward (Sarkar, Fletcher & Brown, 2015, 476). In addition to reflections of the players, I also made time to check in with players about their personal lives, asking about their school, how they're feeling, and whether they feel recovered from play-off games (Morgan, Fletcher & Sarkar, 2019, 5). A few individuals reported feeling fatigued, so I advised them to perform extra mobility at the end of the session to increase recovery.

Going forward with the practices, I will continue fostering reflective sessions, using purposeful questioning and individual conversations to support athletes' growth. By consistently integrating these strategies, I am to create more facilitative environment that better support resilience development (Sarkar & Hilton, 2020, 215).

Friday 14.3.

Today the practice session took place on the tatami, with a focus on recovery. However, since the team has an upcoming weekend off, I decided to increase the intensity slightly and integrate

sprints into the session, taking advantage of the free floorball court. The emphasis for this session was effort and concentration.

The team began to start with a warm-up tag game to bring energy and enjoyment into the session and prepare the players for more intense work. While the game was fun and engaging, it didn't fully prepare the players for sprinting. We transitioned to the floorball court, where we performed a short warm-up with activations and warm-up sprints. I also asked the players for input on what they felt like they needed in order to feel ready. We added more warm-up sprints with 60-80% intensity, based on their feedback before moving into the main sprint session.

The main sprint section started with paired sprints as a light competition, followed up by a team relay competition. Throughout the sprint section, I encouraged full effort, emphasizing sprinting through the finish line with full effort and using the arms as a part of the movement. The players showed good commitment, and the atmosphere remained calm and concentrated.

After completing the sprints, we returned to the tatami for a more autonomous part of the practice. Players were given the choice to perform hurdle and box jumps, medicine ball throws or both. The jump section included various box jump combinations with small hurdles, while medicine ball side involved different throws. Most players chose the medicine ball throws. Due to the soft surface of the tatami and the instability of the boxes, I had to physically support the box for safety reasons which then limited my ability to engage equally with the other group, but I was still able to provide some constructive feedback (Sarkar, Fletcher & Brown, 2015, 476). Despite the limitations, players stayed focused and created an environment that supported learning, and the opportunity to make and learn from mistakes.

This session today highlighted the value of athlete autonomy. Allowing players to contribute to warm-up decisions and choose exercises in the later part of the practice, promoted motivation and ownership. In the near future, I aim to implement more players' autonomy within the practice to increase motivation and engagement.

4.6 Observation week 7 – Balancing high challenge and high support #1

This week's focus on balancing both high support and high challenge to create a facilitative environment. My aim is to integrate both elements into training through my coaching approach.

As I reflect on my coaching style, I notice that offering support tends to come more instinctively. I regularly engage in conversations with players about their sport and personal lives, aiming to show

care and build trust. throughout the season, I've consistently encouraged both self-reflection and peer reflection, particularly during pair work in the gym. These strategies have been effective in fostering a supportive atmosphere and offering high support.

However, to create a more facilitative environment by balancing high support and high challenge, I recognize the need to place greater emphasis on the high challenge side. Specifically, I need to be more intentional about pushing the players to increase their effort and maintain a concentrated, high-performance mindset. Setting and consistently maintaining higher standards is an area for growth in my own coaching. I plan to set higher challenge by increasing task complexity, refining their concentration, or simply raising expectations of effort and attitude. By holding them to a higher standard while continuing to offer high support, I aim to prepare them better for physical and psychological demands of the sport.

Monday 17.3.

Today's off-ice practice began in the gym, with the focus on explosive strength in preparation for the upcoming finals. The team is currently competing for the Finnish Championship in the Women's ice hockey Liiga, which brings added intensity to the whole atmosphere with the team. My personal coaching objective for the day was to reflect on and adjust my approach to better balance high support with high challenge.

The session started with an independent warm-up, players were instructed to either bike or run for 15 minutes, followed by activations and mobility based on their individual needs. I put emphasis on the importance of an effective warm-up to minimize the risk of injury. As a coach, I made sure to observe and ensure that the players were completing their warm-up properly before we transitioned into the main part of the session.

During the main part of the session, I found myself spending more time than planned in one-on-one conversations with the players. These discussions ranged from school schedules and higher education plans to thoughts about the next season, conversations were meaningful and extended naturally. I have come to value these moments especially now that my work placement is almost finished, and as they form the foundation of strong coach-athlete relationship and trust (Sarkar & Hilton, 2020, 215). I'm being mindful not to limit these conversations for the sake of time management, especially since they contribute to a supportive environment.

One player expressed concern about not gaining additional muscle during this competition phase, as we've focused on explosive strength during our gym sessions. I explained the reasoning behind it: the goal I being to maintain muscle and performance, and avoid excess fatigue. We discussed

how she can shift her focus to muscle development after the season. The conversation clarified the purpose of our current training but also supported her long-term planning.

To reinforce self-reflection and short-term goal setting, I encouraged couple of our younger players to identify one or two areas to reflect on during their exercise, as they are still developing these skills (Sarkar & Page, 2022, 48). For more experienced players with stronger self-reflection skills, I challenged them to be more active and present with the training partners during the exercises. It aligns with my goal to individualize my coaching approach and tailor their goal setting.

I made a point to recognize and give positive feedback to groups who showed strong peer support and engagement (Sarkar, Fletcher & Brown, 2015, 476). Highlighting these traits helps to reinforce accountability, growth and connection (Sarkar, Fletcher & Brown, 2015, 476).

Wednesday 19.3.

Today's practice was held on the tatami and was focused on recovery since yesterday the team had a game. The goal of the session was to support the players' physical and mental recovery. The session included light walking, low-intensity games, a short core workout, and extended mobility routine.

Coming again straight from coaching chaotic after school sport club for 7-11-year-olds, I noticed my own energy levels being lower than usually. Interacting with the younger kids required a lot of focus and energy, which definitely impacted my presence at our team practice as a coach. Unfortunately, this affected my ability to enforce higher training standards with our team (Sarkar & Page, 2022, 48). From the beginning of the session, the first low intensity game didn't go exactly how I planned it, the players lost their focus with following the rules, so I chose to adapt by switching to a different game to increase their engagement. However, not being entirely sure whether it was the right decision and instead of switching the game, I could have taken the opportunity to reinforce focus and higher standards (Sarkar & Page, 2022, 48). It was a missed opportunity to challenge the players and set a higher standard of concentration (Sarkar & Page, 2022, 48).

During the mobility routine, which I demonstrated alongside our team, their concentration continued to be a challenge. I had to stop a few players multiple times from talking to regain their attention to be able to give instructions. Despite them regaining their focus, the team consistently went back into low engagement.

Lastly during the core strength part of the session, the players worked in pairs, one performing the exercise and the other observing form and checking for proper core activations. For example, during the dead bug exercise, they were tasked with ensuring the lower back remains glued to the

floor. However, many of the players were distracted, talking during the work. After the first set, I paused the session and addressed the group directly, calling out the lack of focus and stating my expectations for a better engagement in the last 15 minutes. This direct approach resulted in a noticeable shift. The players finished their final sets with significantly more focus and effort, meeting the objective of the session. I gave them positive feedback for their better effort and engagement (Sarkar, Fletcher & Brown, 2015, 476).

Overall, the session did not meet the intended objectives of full engagement. Reflecting on my own coaching, I noticed I should have set and reinforced higher standards from the beginning despite my lack of energy (Sarkar & Page, 2022, 48). I missed opportunities to set the session in our team values and to model better the desired mindset for meaningful practice session. Still the experience from today was valuable and it highlights the importance of managing my own energy levels and maintaining expectations consistently regardless of the context of the practice. I can use the experience as a learning opportunity to be more intentional in reinforcing higher training demands early, which will help to create a more facilitative and resilient environment moving forward (Galli & Vealey, 2008, 328).

4.7 Observation week 8 – Balancing high challenge and high support #2

Monday 24.3.

Last practice of the whole season was placed at the gym with the topic of explosive strength. The players had time again for independent warm up and after that starting the strength program that was written on the white board. The atmosphere was a bit wistful since our season is soon coming to an end and I feel like I will miss the players and working there with the team. The practice was mostly filled with conversations related to the next season and their upcoming plans.

I tried my best to still reinforce high standards within the performance and concentration of the athletes (Sarkar & Page, 2022, 48). The effort for the concentration was there but I lacked pushing enough with their performance since I used most of our practice time engaging in conversations between the players and discussing their future plans and what they have taken away from my practices and conversations (Sarkar & Hilton, 2020, 215).

It was interesting to talk with some players about whether they feel like they have improved on the off-ice sessions with for example gaining more strength, speed or power. Some players mentioned them feeling like they have gained muscle strength that they can feel on the ice as well, while

some others felt like their reflection skills have improved. This is always valuable information for me as a coach.

Something I could have spent more time on those discussions was to use those to help them to set short term goals for themselves either physical or mental for the upcoming season and to reflect what they would have wanted to improve more on the off-ice (Sarkar, Fletcher & Brown, 2015). Setting short term goals increases the athlete's motivation and helps to set more higher standard where the athlete is part of that too (Sarkar & Page, 2022, 48).

Overall I wanted to use time today for interactions with the players as much as possible but I could have implemented more pushing the players performance more to set higher training demands to demonstrate better performance before our final games (Sarkar & Page, 2022, 48). However, today more important part was high support and discussions being a significant part of that concept, where I felt like I managed well today.

Weekly analysis

This week was the last week of the season, and I had only one team practice scheduled. It was the final practice session of the year, the practice was placed at the gym with the topic of explosive strength, but the main focus was not only on physical training but also creating and maintaining high support environment for the athletes (Sarkar & Hilton, 2020, 215).

The practice was spent mostly in engaging in individual conversations with the players to maintain the high support environment. These discussions focused on their feelings and thoughts about the ending of this season, but also about the upcoming season, as well as their plans, goals and expectations. Creating these personal connections throughout the season was important for building the coach-athlete relationship, showing care and trust, and creating high support to create a facilitative environment (Morgan, Fletcher & Sarkar, 2019, 5.)

I aimed to support the athletes' process and reflect the season and feel confident in moving forwards towards the upcoming season. The supportiveness at this point of the season is important for maintaining a strong team culture and supporting the players to stay committed with their own goals. Overall, this final practice of the season had emphasis on the importance of emotional support and therefore reinforcing the high support.

5 Discussion

Significant progress has been made in my own professional and personal development as a strength and conditioning coach in ice hockey. One of the most obvious areas of my growth has been my improved flexibility in my coaching approach. Throughout the diary thesis, I have adapted my methods to suit better players with different personalities and cultural backgrounds, and it is in an improvement area where I aim to improve further. The progress of mine has already positively impacted my coaching effectiveness.

Throughout the process of my diary-based thesis, I have found new solutions and methods that have supported my work and objectives. I have learned the importance of giving more emotional support to players who need it more and setting boundaries and expectations that are individualized to each athlete and their needs. This individualization has helped me to make more stronger relationships and create overall more safe and trusting environment.

Writing a diary-based thesis to improve my personal and professional growth has been a valuable learning experience, that has taught me that writing down regular self-reflections helps in processing possible challenges better and finding solutions to them. By documenting my experiences and thoughts with analysis on specific situations, I was able to better understand my areas of strengths and what to improve in the future. Throughout the thesis, I observed how setting clear reflections topic for myself made it easier to find solutions to my challenges. This way of structures reflection will be a long-lasting benefit for my future career, that gives a more practical tool for my self-development.

The daily diary reports allowed me to evaluate my coaching methods more deeply, and by breaking down the daily challenges and objectives, I was able to recognize where improvements were needed and where I was succeeded. This way of analyzing my work has helped me to better support athletes' improvement as a coach and increasing the quality of my work.

Looking forward, I can recognize the importance of continuing to improve my areas of growth and I aim to improve my interaction skills with players with different personalities of cultural back grounds and continue to build more individualized coaching strategies. Regular self-reflection and analysis are important tools in supporting me to grow me into being more effective coach.

6 References

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