

Lifelong learning: improving athletes' experience through dedicated continued education as a coach

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<p>This diary thesis describes the author's professional and personal development as a strength and conditioning coach in women and girls ice hockey teams. The progression focuses on improving athletes' experience of physical preparation via improving the communication and stress management of the author.</p> <p>The report consists of daily reports on tasks and objectives, as well as weekly analysis of the work and progression of the author. The diary entries cover a period of 12 weeks of work with two women's ice hockey teams, taking place between the 6th January 2020 and 29th of March 2020.</p> <p>The author tasks consist of warm-up and physical preparation planning and implementation, as well as athlete monitoring.</p> <p>The report covers three topics within each focus of communication and stress management. In communication the author learns about self-awareness, receivers and context, and in stress management about sleep optimization, meditation and imagery.</p> <p>While challenging to quantify progress in both communication and stress management in the context of a diary thesis, the author self-reports great development in autonomous continued education, as well as discipline and habits to be carried through life beyond the timeframe of this thesis and likely to be contributing to personal and professional growth in the future.</p>	
Keywords Coaching, Communication, Strength and conditioning, Stress management, Self-development	

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1 Introduction

The observation period for this thesis consist of ten weeks extending between Monday 6 January 2020, starting date, and Sunday 29th of March 2020, ending date. Due to exceptional circumstances, week 8 comprises of three calendar weeks. Additionally, the first week is represented by the introduction and framework of the thesis, and the twelfth week constitutes of the discussion and conclusions.

The report of this diary thesis comprises of daily descriptions of work tasks and weekly analyses in my position of Strength and Conditioning coach for HIFK Ishockey rf (HIFK) women and girls' teams in the season 2019-2020.

The framework needed for my work duties is five to seven days a week of work dedicated to HIFK as well as a weekly analysis session. The work is done daily at off-ice practices four to five days a week at the rink before the ice practice, once a week in Stadifit gym and sporadically before home or away games, or in other locations. Some of the work is also done remotely via text messages and on-line for preparation and monitoring. Weekly work typically amounts from ten to fifteen hours. As the thesis pertains to professional development, some of the assignments are additional to the assigned work tasks and therefor done on personal time.

The four main sources used to support the work duties are as follow:

- Bartholomew, B. 2017, Conscious Coaching. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.
- Clear, J. 2018, Atomic Habits. Avery.
- Gilbert, W. 2016. Coaching Better Every Season. Human Kinetics. Champaign, IL.
- Weinberg, R.S. & Gould, D. 2015. Foundations of Sport and Exercise Psychology. Human Kinetics. Champaign, IL.

The central content of sources is, respectively for each source:

- Conscious Coaching: Theory and practical implementations of building buy-in, focusing on individualised communication,
- Atomic Habits: Guidelines to effective habits implementation,
- Coaching Better Every Season: Condensed research and practical tools for a systemic and seasonal approach to individual, program, and coaching development,
- Foundations of sport and exercise psychology: Research based introduction to sport and exercise psychology key concepts, including communication.

We will consider the skills needed in my work duties as a strength and conditioning coach through the prism and classification of "coaches' knowledge" as defined in the article titled An Integrative Definition of Coaching Effectiveness and Expertise (Côté & Gilbert 2009).

Following the model of definition described by the authors, coaches' knowledge can be divided in three pillars: professional, intrapersonal and interpersonal knowledge. In the area of professional knowledge, my work duties require organizational skills, scientific knowledge of strength and conditioning, sport specific knowledge relevant to physical preparation in ice hockey, and pedagogical knowledge in the context of adult and older teenager women groups. In the interpersonal knowledge sphere, communication with athletes and coaches and understanding of the socio-cultural context of each team are needed. Intrapersonal knowledge is the last pillar, where introspection and reflection are considered.

Next we will look at the work environment upon which the thesis is based. I will report on tasks done with two groups: HIFK women's and academy team.

HIFK women's team was created in 2018 and started in the Mestis league in the season 2018-2019. At the end of the 2018-2019 season HIFK were promoted to Naisten Liiga. The academy team was created in 2019 and practices with B/C girls, and so both teams will be considered and described in this report as the same group and referred to collectively as the academy team. The academy competes at the Mestis level. B/C girls compete in the B/C-tyttöjen aluesarja. All teams are part of the HIFK Ishockey r.f. organisation.

The average age in the women's team is 20.77 years old with the youngest player being 15 years old and the oldest 41 years old. Players' ages range from 14 to 28 years old in the academy group with an average age of 18.12 years old. Both teams share some crossovers players who in effect mostly practice with one or the other group but may play games for either team.

Historically, the women's team also existed between 1982 and 1989 and competed in the then women SM-sarja where they won bronze in their last two seasons. Before 2018 many of the players now in HIFK women and academy teams played for Red Wings which competed in 2015-2016 in Suomi-sarja and in 2016-2018 in Mestis.

I have been working for HIFK women and girls' side since the 1st of May 2019 and it is my second season as a strength and conditioning coach in ice hockey.

Weekly I spend an average of six and a half hours in direct contact with athletes, of which two are spent with the academy team and four and a half with the women's team. Additionally, between three and a half and five and a half hours weekly are spent setting up trainings, interacting with players and coaches outside the direct practice time and working remotely via online platforms.

The key professional concepts I will be focusing on throughout this diary are stress management and communication. The central focus is on communication, with stress management being secondary.

Throughout the ten weeks of observation visible in this work, I will cover in depth a self-analysis of my communication from week 1 to 3. Between the weeks 4 and 7, I will analyse the receivers of my communication, here the athletes, via the creation of individual profiles. Finally, from week 7 to 10, I will concentrate on developing my coaching cues based on the context of the practice or situation.

The secondary focus is stress management, with a habit creation and tracking approach. From week 1 to week 3, I will attempt to improve my sleep via the implementation of a sleep routine. From week 4 to week 7, I will meditate daily in the form of mindfulness meditation. From week 8 to week 10, the final chapter of stress management will dive into preparation through imagery.

2 Framework

2.1 Analysis of current work

In this section I will analyse my current work and its different work task, as listed below:

- Warm-ups planning and implementation
- Physical training planning and implementation
- Athlete monitoring

For each task I describe and specify what is concretely done when performing the tasks, what skills are needed for and obtained through fulfilling the task, as well as what information is needed to carry out the task.

2.1.1 Warm-ups planning and implementation

For both teams I plan warm-ups either as standalones in preparation for the ice practice or games, or as preparation for off-ice training sessions, typically speed and/or agility and power sessions. The strength warm-ups are planned respectively by the head of strength and conditioning for women and the academy's team head-coach.

Warm-ups are either planned on a day by day and week by week basis based on player's recovery status and the type of practice or game following, or every four to six weeks when they precede a specific off-ice training session which will run for the same length. In the planning I select the goal of the warm-up exercises, their key points and the number of repetitions. I also plan a lay-out based on our venue's and equipment constraints.

In the implementation phase I set-up the warm-up based on both my practice lay-out and the space availability of the day. This task normally takes 20 to 30 minutes. I usually have to interact diplomatically with parents and spectators. Indeed, they are watching young players on the ice in the limited space available, which we need to warm-up and so I need to ask them to move or leave. Sometimes I will interact with other teams' coaches or players already in the space I planned on using to negotiate sharing. Due to our facility's restrictions we usually run warm-ups in two or three lines of players all on the same linear space with a few meters of space between each line. The space available for each line is usually 10 to 12 meters long by 1,5 meters large. This means that only the few people at the front of each line can see me, except when I am safely able to demonstrate things from the staircase, in which case more people can see. We warm-up in a three sheets of ice open rink, so no matter how loud I get it is very challenging for players to hear me. I rely heavily on clear movements demonstrations and hand signals.

The skills needed and developed through the experience are critical thinking, diplomacy and communication, organisation, time management, warm-up and exercise physiology knowledge, and hockey specific knowledge.

The information needed are the recovery status and number of participants, the time frame and space available, and the type of training following the warm-up.

2.1.2 Physical training planning and implementation

I plan two practices for each team (four in total), every four to six weeks on average. All these practices focus on speed or power. Aside from planning the aforementioned sessions, I either run or help running the women's strength sessions with the head of strength and conditioning. We also hold endurance or conditioning practices, but at the time of this report being written they are either individualised sessions where players are autonomous, or smaller components of the strength sessions.

Most practices held at the ice rink are planned in a circuit fashion due to our available space, which means my interactions with athletes is limited and they often work autonomously. I move around between five to six stations to provide feedback and guidance. At the beginning of each six weeks cycle I film athletes in each station which enables us to keep a record of the practice in our online platforms, which absente athletes or the ones practicing in other teams or clubs, can rely on if they do not make it to the team's training. Each station is equipped with an A4 paper which includes the drill name, the number of sets and repetitions, the rest time, the key points and the rationale. The paper is written in both Finnish and English as we have non-Finnish players in our team. The practices usually take 25 minutes for women and 25 to 40 for the academy team.

The skills needed to plan and implement practices are communication, adaptability, organisation, time management, speed, power and strength development knowledge, and hockey specific knowledge. The information needed is the number of athletes present, their health and recovery status, the season's plan relevant phase, the week's plan, and the time and space available.

2.1.3 Athlete monitoring

For the academy limited monitoring is done and it comes down to informal group polls and individual conversations. For women, athlete monitoring is done primarily via an online platform which our club subscribes to. In it, after each practice players fill in a quick feedback questionnaire which includes their mood before and after training, their physical feeling prior training, their exertion in the form of a RPE scale, their understanding of the practice goals, the overall quality of team spirit and an open box for feedback. I review their answers daily. As we started using the platform only recently, we are waiting to collect

more data and discover team and individual trends which will allow us to adjust practice based on it in the future. Additionally, we sometimes check on their status via individual chats or informal group polls (e.g. thumb up or down based on fatigue levels or overall feeling). We are also in touch via messenger apps. The combination of these information is currently the main source of training adjustment, and we also often offer options for players to take in term of volume or load based on their perceived fatigue or injury status.

This task requires rapport and trust between coaches and athletes, and from coach to coach, as well as individualised communication skills. Monitoring necessities players use the platform, and for the coach to understand training load and recovery implications. I act as the main manager of our use of the platform, which requires good organisational skills to input accurate information in the team's calendar and individual practice plans, as well as team work to interact with the platform staff and our team manager, head of strength and conditioning and head coach. As part of monitoring athletes, we test the players of the women's team a few times in the season, but as there won't be any testing in the weeks covered in this report, I won't describe these tasks.

2.2 Evaluation

In this section I will evaluate my skills against the requirements of my workplace and work tasks. I will assess how well I succeed in my tasks and justify these assessments.

There is no benchmark of success in our club for strength and conditioning coaches, other than perhaps years of experience and competitive achievements. We can assume that my employer expects me to fulfil my contract duties: planning and executing the off-ice practices of both the women and academy team. I would add that these should be performed safely and allow athletes to thrive on the ice both on a short-term level and long-term development, which can be seen through tests results and on ice performance. The evaluation will be subjective.

I have studied two years and a half for a bachelor of sports and have been implementing these teachings for two years in my experience as a professional strength and conditioning coach. I have additional experience both as a professional and a volunteer sport coach in ice hockey and roller derby, totalling my years of coaching experience to six.

I assess my overall skills to be of beginner level, as several tasks completion require for me to seek confirmation or details from books, courses or scientific references, particularly in the planning phase. I am however independent in the completion of my tasks implementation which has been noted by both our head coach and our head of strength and conditioning. I am able to seek confirmation from sources on my own without the help of a

mentor or supervisor in the planning phase, and I can organise and implement my work tasks autonomously. I am able to take initiative and create or contribute to resources and systems. I can run practices safely and efficiently. Injuries have been low this season and mostly of contact origin. While we did not reach our team's initial goal, the team has been performing very well for a first season in Liiga, and physical test results have been improving. These successes cannot be directly attributed to my work, but they seem to indicate that I am not hindering the team and instead possibly contributing to its development.

2.3 Development

I will discuss and justify my views on my professional development, the way it shows in my work, and what should be future points of focus.

As seen in the evaluation phase, I consider my stage of professional development to be beginner. I have been coaching with regularity since 2014 and professionally since 2016. This experience has brought quality to certain skills such as my group control and training planning and delivery. Last season in particular allowed me to start building my exercises database and deepen my understanding of general strength and conditioning methods and principles. In the first half of the current season I believe I have developed my active listening skills and increased my efforts in building rapport and trust with each individual athlete.

My future point of focus as covered in part in this thesis, is communication. I want to be able to reach and connect with athletes efficiently to support their experience the best I can. The best training programs are driven by human connection and are only as good as athletes' willingness to buy into them (Bartholomew, 2017), which is the drive behind this choice of focus. As an immigrant in Finland, communication and language in particular can also present a barrier to employment and overall integration.

To improve my competence in communication, I reckon developing my teaching, pedagogical, leadership and specific communication skills in the context of coaching and strength and conditioning is a must and the core of this thesis. An obvious development focus is learning to speak Finnish fluently and so along writing this report I take an intense Finnish class five days a week. Atop these areas, stress management is an important focus of development for me. Our emotions and the way we channel, control or convey them affect our communication heavily, and as an expressive person this can play a positive or negative role for me. I strive to stay authentic but believe that reducing my stress levels would free up emotional bandwidth to help athletes to a greater extent and impact them more positively overall.

Finally, I wish to consolidate my scientific knowledge by preparing for the Certificate of Strength and Conditioning Specialist (CSCS) provided by the National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA). This constitutes a future point of focus as my days are currently full between the language class, thesis and work, and my preparation will start after the completion of my degree. I wish to not only know and understand the way we train athletes, but also be able to convey these concepts skillfully and clearly to players.

Culturally, coaches are vastly considered to be lifelong learners, and that their progress and education should never stop (Jones, Armour & Potrac 2004). The more we master, the more we uncover just how little we know, and for me it is about taking one step at a time and attempting to develop incrementally every single day.

2.4 Interest groups at work

HIFK women and girls interest groups are divided in two categories in the figures below, internal groups of interest (Figure 1.1) and external groups of interest (Figure 1.2).

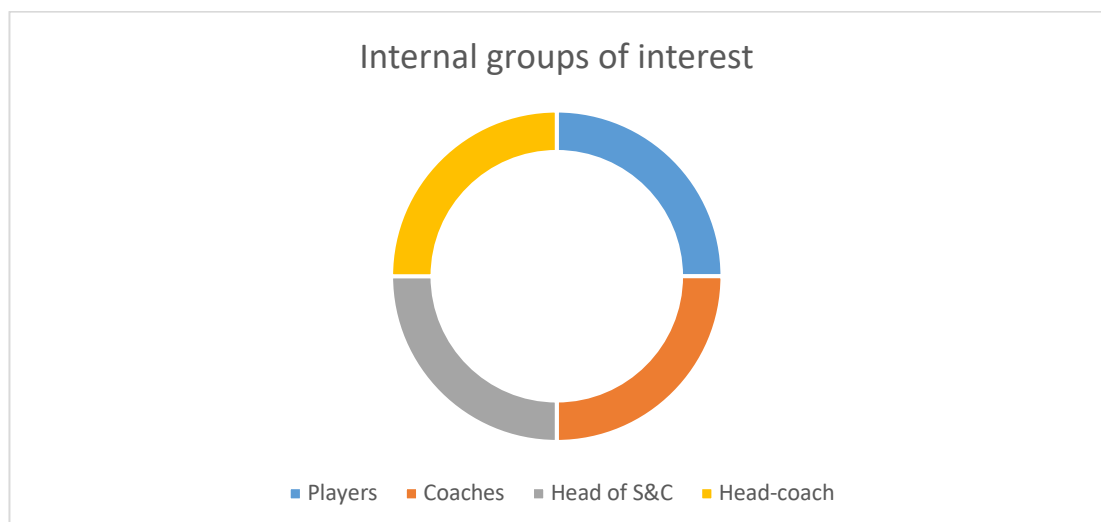


Figure 1.1 HIFK women and girls' internal groups of interest

Players are the group most central to my work. As strength and conditioning coach, my purpose is to help them prepare and perform, and most of my time is spent with them. The head-coach and head of strength and conditioning are in touch almost daily and expect me to relay information about players regarding their health and recovery. I act on their requests and wishes when it comes to overall planning or changes to warm-up and practice content, with a higher emphasis being put on the head-coach, as both the head of strength and conditioning and I work for her. Other coaches in the team including assistant coaches, goalie coach and sport psychologist are also considered an internal group and at times we interact on the team's or an individual's status.

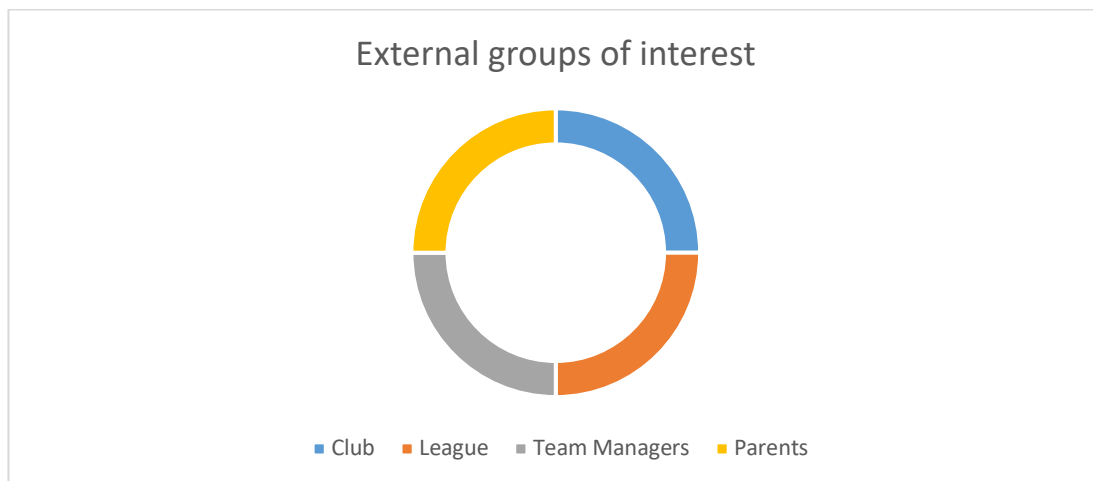


Figure 1.2 HIFK women and girls' external groups of interest

My interactions with these groups range from low to inexistent. While we interact socially, I interact minimally with team managers about my work tasks. I have no contact with the club, league or parents, but this last group could potentially get in touch with me, especially in the academy team's case. Even though I don't interact with the club or league, my work can potentially have ripple effects for them based on how well or not the team is conditioned, which is why I included them in this chart.

2.5 Interaction skills at work

Interactions with colleagues are divided between live and remote conversations. The live conversations are usually short because everyone has a job to do at the rink, and my goal is to be of help, not to add tasks on their lists. With women daily, I will check-up with the head-coach on her plan for the day's training: will there be a meeting before warm-up? Will the training on ice be intense or specific compared to normal? Are there any important news or information about players that I don't have yet? Contacts with assistant coaches, sport psychologist and goalie coach are more casual. Remotely the head-coach, head of strength and conditioning and I will interact regularly through meetings and almost daily via text messages. The head of strength and conditioning and I usually see each other once a week for the strength session happening in his gym. With academy both head-coaches for academy and B/C let me know if the weekend was particularly tiring or if important games are coming up. We always check-up together if they would like to make changes to the night's session. With the head-coach I also interact via text and email to check-up on the season and/or individual practice plans. Most coworkers are older and more experienced than I am, and while I focus on doing my job, I also learn from everyone whenever I have the chance to observe them.

Players in my work represent the "clients". I interact with them mostly through live conversation, but also at times via text messages. They also interact with all coaches indirectly

through the online monitoring platform and the use of feedback. The interactions are two ways in both teams, with the academy team leaning more toward one way communication due to both the younger age of many players and the fact I only spend two nights a week with them, which means less rapport is developed than with the women who I see four to five times per week.

The main challenges are the language and culture difference, but as I am in my fifth year in Finland, I believe I start to catch up on body language and other cultural specificities.

3 Diary entries

3.1 Observation week 1

Daily observations

Monday 6 January 2019

Beginning of the day

My goal for today is to finish preparing the new speed program for the academy to implement it with them successfully tonight.

The practice is based on the areas of focus set by the head-coach in the spring season plan. It is a 60 minutes session which includes a 20 minutes warm-up focused both on mobility and preparing the athletes for the speed training and the ice following it, a 25 minutes reactive speed and agility workout and ten minutes of longer distance sprints. For the workout section we use a circuit lay-out with five stations and I previously provided each station with a piece of handwritten paper where the name of the drill and the number of set and/or repetitions. As I have recently transitioned from this model to a more polished one with women, I want to implement it with the academy as well. The training plan was written and approved by the head-coach last week, but today I will focus on upgrading its delivery in comparison to earlier plans, both in preparation and at the actual practice.

End of the day

I made the transition from handwritten papers to better rounded A4 prints successfully overall and it helped athletes to work autonomously while I was on other stations. It was not as good as my current sheets with women however, since for the academy one I was planning alone and for women I had the help of my partner who is a native Finnish speaker. Thankfully several of the stations were either the same or similar for both teams, and I was able to use text from the women's plan. For the rest I simply wrote in English which is a problem for players not comfortable with the language. In the future I want to be able to deliver all sheets in clear Finnish. It is challenging because time consuming as my Finnish level is around A2 level (CEFR, 2001), but it is important for me to have the best delivery possible.

Overall the practice went really well, I briefly introduced it and its new system to players in the changing room, we then took time to go through each station and check the set-up and technique for each exercise. After that we went through the new warm-up as we did it and they started going through the speed workout in groups of four or five. It is challeng-

ing to check if they rest appropriately. The rest time is indicated in each station, but I believe some of them skip it either out of forgetfulness, boredom or lack of a watch. Perhaps I should consider adding “filler” activities during rest. There was a specific moment that stood out: I asked a player to help me demonstrate one of the first drills. I know she is confident and vocal, but I also know her English is limited. She demonstrated confidently but did not quite get what I asked right and she laughed it off with the group, but I could see she was embarrassed to have misunderstood. I walked over to her in front of the entire group and high fived her, telling her she had done a perfect job and then moved on to the next. I did not want her to reflect on this moment thinking she had failed or embarrassed herself. I don't think I high five or encourage players enough overall, but I think this was a good read of the situation and a natural reaction. Preparation gave me confidence, and I also had time that day to do yoga and meditate which always helps me. My messages were clear overall based on players' reactions and actions, but I forgot to remind them as a group that each station is done at once: they perform all the sets before moving on to the next exercise, rather than doing rounds. They typically know this as it has been our system for speed this whole winter season, but I still think it is important to make it part of the key information delivered before we start.

Tuesday 7 January 2019

Beginning of the day

Tonight, I will work with women only. We will have a speed workout which players have already done one to three times depending on their activity level at home and attendance to team practice during the holiday period. We will do a new warm-up, which only a handful of players have done before. Since there isn't much on the preparation side, I will focus on personal development.

In this and the next two weeks I will focus on the following points: sleep and self-awareness of communication. For sleep I will build and start applying a sleep routine and will use the Oura ring, an electronic device which employs actigraphy to estimate sleep patterns, to measure the quantity and quality of my sleep. For self-awareness I will select a profiling tool and complete it. I want my sleep routine to become a habit and so I employ the following formula: a habit should be obvious, attractive, easy and satisfying (Clear, 2018, p 54). I will use a habit tracking system to monitor my progress, which tick the obvious, attractive and satisfying components all at once (Clear, 2018, pp 197-198). Today my objective is to build a sleep routine.

I sleep lightly and can also struggle to fall asleep. Below I list what is needed for efficient sleep (Marshall & Turner 2016), and mark each criterion which I do not meet with a red cross, and each I do with a green check:


- 7 hours of sleep or more ✗
- Dark room ✗
- Silence (or white noise) ✗
- Environment dedicated to sleep (no work, phone or computer in bed) ✓
- Temperature around 18° ✗
- Regular bed and wake-up times ✗
- No caffeine close to bedtime (6 hours) ✓
- No blue light close to bedtime ✓
- Relaxing activities and/or down time close to bed ✗
- Less artificial lights in the evening ✗
- Light exposure in morning ✗
- Waking up in natural circadian rhythm ✗

I do not drink coffee after 16:00, I use blue light filters on all my devices at all times and have a rule of no electronics in bed. I am normally home from work between 20 and 21:30, so 22:00 is a good bed-time limit as I wake up at 6:00 or 7:00. This means I have to be efficient with my night routine. At home I will have dim lighting and/or candles on, unpack quickly and eat dinner right away. After that I will prepare for bed and read or go straight to sleep. In the morning I'll open the curtains right away and put lights on while there is limited sunlight.

My night routine:

19:15-21:00 Commute: read and/or listen to relaxing music
19:45-21:30 unpack, dim lights on, night snack, get ready for bed
21:30 latest, screens off
22:00 latest, lights off

For accountability and motivation, I will put a card up on my fridge with the routine written down and share the information with my partner. When home he can help me to stick to the routine by reminding me of it or joining.

On the habit tracker I will use the following marking system:  An upward arrow will symbolize being in bed on time and doing some or most of the routine, a full green square will signify I did all steps of the routine and got in bed on time. A red cross will be marked every time I exceed the bedtime, even if I did the routine.

End of the day

I achieved my goal of building my sleep routine this morning and picked up my Oura ring package.

The practice with women went well, nothing special to report.

Wednesday 8 January 2020

Beginning of the day

Objectives:

- Meeting with head of strength and conditioning about training individualisation
- Pick a profiling tool for communication
- Gym with women

End of the day

The gym training (power and strength) went well and I don't have a lot to report. I tried to avoid over-coaching while also giving attention to players who lack focus and therefore use improper form.

We had a successful meeting with both the head of strength and conditioning and the head-coach. We started picking areas of individual focus for each player, selecting one two to three areas based on their tests results and our experience with them. These focus points will be in their individual profile which I will build over the next weeks. We will have to see how the individualization will concretely happen while we are still in the season. I did not have time to pick a profiling tool for communication and will move this goal to the weekend. The team travels to away game and so I will have more time to focus on this report then.

Thursday 9 January 2020

Beginning of the day

My goals are:

- To update our online platform for January, and in particular check that the minutes are accurate since that's what the algorithm uses to calculate load.
- Prepare the power workout plans in Finnish
- To introduce the new power workout efficiently to the academy.
- Run a successful speed practice with women.

End of the day

I managed to update all practices for January in the platform but unfortunately came up short on the games as no much information is available. I do not want to add work for the team managers by asking for information so I will wait that they update the event in our calendar platform, or our team chat each week and act from there.

The practice with women was speed with a lateral focus and it went moderately well. I realized that some of the information on the paper could be improved, thanks to players

feedback as well as the challenges they faced. Adding drawings would definitely help them remember some of the movement sequences or patterns and clearing up that the number of repetitions is always per set would easily avoid problems. I would not say I reached my goal of running a successful practice, but I learned valuable information through the mistakes. I took the time before training to ask each person if they prefer to run or foam roll first or have no preference when it comes to warm-ups. Due to our limited space and amount of foam rollers we usually have to split the group in half, hence the question.

We started the new power training with the academy: we went through the explanations, warm-up and training in a similar fashion as Monday with the speed. I was pleased with my delivery, especially because I did a better job with the papers: I pushed myself (and used google translate even though it is not perfect) to write every exercise description in Finnish and as many key points and rationales as I could muster with my limited skills.

Friday 10, Saturday 11, Sunday 12 January

The team travelled to away games.

I dived into the personality assessments reviewed by Brett Bartholomew in *Conscious Coaching* (2017). The assessments all have their advantages and limitations but are understood to be taken as tools to deepen one's self-knowledge and not as absolute measurement of truth. I picked the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) because close versions of it exist for free online. I used the Personality perfect questionnaire as well as the profile description available on Truity. These free versions are not as accurate as the official full-length version of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, but since I am looking at trends rather than details, I was satisfied with using the next best thing. My result was introversion, intuition, thinking, judging (INTJ).

Weekly observations

The main areas of focus this first week were training sessions preparation, training delivery optimization, and sleep.

As coaches, we know of the importance of sleep to our athletes, but do we consider the impact of sleep on our life and work as coaches and people? We know lack of sleep to be an injury risk factor (Holmes 2015), and that increases in quantity and quality of sleep can lead to performance improvements (Mah, Mah, Kezirian & Dement 2011) in athletic population. But sleep is important to general population too, and especially to people with phys-

ical work, which is the case for strength and conditioning coaches albeit moderately, and who also tend to work odd hours, early morning and late evenings. Sleep deprivation does not only impact one's wellbeing and physical and mental capabilities but can also be detrimental to society from an economic perspective (Colten & Altevogt 2006).

As coaches, we demand from our athletes to take care of themselves and to cover all areas of preparation, performance and recovery. This can be a lot of pressure and perhaps even an unrealistic demand, especially on athletes like women hockey players who systematically combine competitive play with work or study life. Additionally, to me it brings an interesting question: how many of us coaches actually take care of ourselves the way research recommends active people to? Taylor Eckel, a third year doctor of physical therapy student and strength coach (CSCS, NSCA) challenges and supports physical therapy practitioners and coaches integrity, through her business and via her Instagram account. Eckel regularly brings up the exercise guidelines and activity recommendations of the American College of Sports Medicine and American Heart Association (ACSM/AHA) and questions physical therapy practitioners and strength coaches, including herself, on whether or not they themselves meet these guidelines which they expect patients to meet. I think this question of authenticity and integrity on taking care of yourself as a coach is important, and that is why stress management, in these first weeks in the form of prioritizing sleep, is part of this report.

In my case, I currently consider stress as one of my personal and professional weaknesses. In his "the creed I live by", John Wooden speaks of the importance of "build(ing) a shelter against a rainy day". Taking concrete steps to prioritize my sleep are part of building my shelter and preparing for difficult times, which are bound to happen eventually.

My lack of sleep is a problem, yet it has been really interesting to see more data on my sleeping patterns thanks to the Oura ring. It is motivating to have access to feedback and it really drives me to stick to the routine, even though the accuracy of the ring in its differentiation between sleep and wake phases has been challenged (de Zambotti, Rosas, Colrain & Baker 2017). In her Ted-Talk "Owning your data", Talithia Williams (2014) makes a case for general population to track data about themselves for better individual cooperation with medical professionals, which to me solidifies the interest in using devices such as the Oura ring, even outside of an athletic experience.

In the list of efficient sleep needs written in the daily reports, there are some challenging aspects over which I have little to no control such as the noise level. Even with earplugs, I am still bothered by noises in the building as I sleep lightly, and the sound insulation is very poor. The sun rises late and sets early this time of the year in Finland, so respecting

a natural circadian rhythm is challenging. However, I can act on several factors and so I bought myself a sleep mask to block all lights. Starting next week, I will wake up every day at 6:00 or 7:00 am which will regulate my waking time and will always turn out bright lights first thing upon waking up to supplant sunlight. I hope taking these additional steps will help me get restful sleep. In Figure 1 my habit tracker of the sleep routine can be seen.

HABIT TRACKER												
DAY												
HABIT	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
FOLLOW SLEEP ROUTINE							X			X	X	

Figure 2. Habit tracker for sleep routine week 1

Preparation was good this week but can still improve. Players pointed out inconsistency on some exercises' papers, or between the paper and my verbal communication, particularly in the number of repetitions per set or rest between sets or repetitions. Together with athletes we discussed that the addition of drawings to the plans could help memorize exercises. Overall, I have improved the preparation and delivery of practices compared to the start of the season.

Delivering key information in a quiet space, such as the meeting or changing room, before the start of the training has proven a lot more efficient than doing it upstairs where visual and auditory distractions from the rinks are plenty.

Even though it is time and energy consuming, I think I must up my game and always provide training sheets in clear Finnish in the future since our training venue constraints make athletes reliant on independency.

I started my self-reflection on communication by taking a personality test close to the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) and found out I fell on the spectrum of Introversion, intuition, thinking, judging (INTJ). On the official website (Myers and Briggs Foundation) this type is described as follow:

“Have original minds and great drive for implementing their ideas and achieving their goals. Quickly see patterns in external events and develop long-range explanatory perspectives. When committed, organize a job and carry it through. Skeptical and independent, have high standards of competence and performance - for themselves and others.”

I will further my self-analysis in the next week by updating my coaching philosophy.

3.2 Observation week 2

Daily observations

Monday 13 January 2020

Beginning of the day

Objectives:

- Start Finnish class
- Continue with the sleep routine
- Be motivating at the academy practice (speed)

End of the day

I fell asleep at 20:18, slept 8h 7m and spend 22% of the night in REM sleep, but only 7% in deep sleep. Last night I followed the routine and even drank some “calming” tisane and took melatonin, just to put all the chances on my side. I also started using a sleep mask and it made a big difference in the wake-up phases of the night, helping to fall back asleep immediately. Maybe taking control via specific steps also brings a placebo calming effect and helps me relax about sleep.

I started my Finnish class and it went very well. I felt it was challenging but that I understood and spoke a lot better than I had expected, which boosted my confidence. For now, I will just feel things out but might set more specific goals about this later on.

The training went well, even though only 13 players were attending because flu is going around the team. I tried speaking a bit more Finnish overall, motivated after my morning class. I've realised that this winter I have been less vocal and encouraging than in the summer and want to fix this. Finnish people are quite reserved and enjoy having space to practice and can sometimes take encouragement as “being yelled at”, which is also why I have let go of it: indoors I have to be so much louder than outdoors which changes my tone and could be perceived as more aggressive than excited or encouraging. Since this was the second week and players were more familiar with the warm-up, I started being positive right away and taking time to go through each line and giving encouragement to each player, mixing Finnish and English. Since the number of players was so low it gave me more time to go and bond with them while they were resting on their respective station. In the end we had time to do some sprints with 2 minutes rest between each and I finished with strong encouragements while they ran, and high fives to everyone when they left. Players reported feeling ready and warm for training yet not tired from the off-ice training, they also seemed in a positive mood.

Tuesday 14 January 2020

Beginning of the day

Objectives:

- Finnish homework
- Following the sleep routine
- Positive and encouraging practice with women.
- Being more efficient than last week with the warm-up groups.
- Talk to leaders/captains about fine for online feedback.

End of the day

My Finnish class was cancelled and so I had plenty of time to work through the homework. I really would like to master present and imperfect conjugation by the end of this course.

I felt stressed by personal factors prior the training but because I had prepared well and had time to meditate and move before work, I was able to manage it well. The team had a short meeting before practice which I attended. This allowed me to keep everyone seated in a quiet space at the end to let them know the plan of the day: 5 minutes jog, 10 minutes warm-up in two lines, speed workout with linear focus for 3 sets in groups of four. I also reminded them to check both the key points and rest times from the exercise sheet systematically, as they've previously told me they do not always do it. One player who usually leads a line in the warm-up mentioned I could text them the warm-up plan. I succeeded in being more efficient with it than last week but there is still room for improvement. It is of course available in the online platform, but it would be good for them to have it disposable. It would free me up to give feedback to individuals instead of constant communication with the line header/leader. I still feel that 40 minutes is way too short to get a chance to chat with everyone. I stayed in one station (12 meters sprint) instead of hopping between all of them, and this allowed me to give better feedback. As I did not have to rush, I was able to control my tone and pick my words better. I tried to be positive, but I struggle to relax with women compared to the academy. I think they have heavier weeks and more stress relating to their ice hockey experience and so it can also be hard for them as a group to relax when training, even though they may crack jokes or seem to have a good time. I managed to talk to one of the captains and ask them to pick a few "fine" options to have the team vote on. As people do not systematically fill in their feedback after the session, we want to add an extra incentive but want it to be player led.

Wednesday 15 January 2020

Beginning of the day

Objectives:

- Continue self-reflection on communication

- Finish individual groups
- Start individual profiles

End of the day

Before work I continued my self-analysis in relation to improving my communication. Internal identification comprises of three stages: Reflection - questioning who you are, inspection - examining who you are, and progression – owning who you are (Bartholomew 2017, 45). Last week I took a personality test inspired by the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator which gave me the result of INTJ, and I would consider it as part of the inspection phase of internal identification. Today, as part of the reflection phase, I revisited a coaching philosophy process I went through during my studies in 2018, as it included reflective steps on why do we coach as well as identifying one's values and coaching style with a DiSC model assessment also mentioned in Conscious coaching. The DiSC is a behavior assessment tool based on the theory of psychologist William Marston, revolving around four different personality traits (DiSC overview, DiSC profile). I cover the process at length in the weekly observations.

In the evening I did not really coach as I focused on finishing to set the individual groups with the head of strength and conditioning. I started to build the template for the individual profiles, we are clear on what will be included but I need to work on what it will look like and polish its format.

Thursday 16 January 2020

Beginning of the day

Objectives:

- Find a solution for women's warm-up

End of the day

Women went through their second speed session of the week which focuses more on lateral patterns. The need for more one on one conversation is apparent, as well as clear guidelines when sick. Players do not necessarily ring the bell when they should on their health and so I need to make sure I chat with them and find out what is happening. Our online platform and unusually high RPE or body soreness prior the training gives me good information, and when paired with an individual chat I can get a fuller picture.

I printed the warm-ups and set them next to each starting cone and it helped players a lot.

The academy went through their new power workout for the second time and their form is improving. I think I did some good communication there with the rationale of specific drills, as well as being vulnerable to the “tougher” players who might not trust me fully yet.

Friday 17 January 2020

Beginning of the day

Objectives:

-Start reading “The Warm-up” and use it to create a fresh and different warm-up

End of the day

As the team will be playing in the men’s rink tomorrow, they practice in its adjacent ice tonight. This means I have a different and bigger space to run the warm-up! I recently received Ian Jeffreys’ book “the warm-up” and was excited to implement some examples and ideas from it. I think it is easy to fall into a routine of known movements and formats with warm-up, especially when the space is restricted like our normal practice place is. I want to challenge myself to incorporate new movements, or variations from known movements, as well as double checking I am covering everything that needs to be during warm-ups. I feel I have a good grasp and experience on the basics of the RAMP warm-up, but I am sure I can still find knowledge gaps and be more innovative.

As the space in Elisa is bigger, but not exactly an open plan either, I went with a two squares set-up instead of lines on the Raise part of the warm-up. I kept all the movements simple and known, but the change of pattern was enough to challenge players and bring them a sense of novelty. In the Activation and Mobilization part I used both known and new movements, as well as slight variations on known exercises. We reverted to a line set-up for this section, but also used a circle set-up when needed, which is something we don’t have access to in winter but allows me to keep my voice lower yet reach everyone. In the potentiate phase we were able to use a reactive agility drill which players really enjoyed: I had planned something different afterwards, but they asked to keep doing this one reactive drill. This really motivated me to avoid line warm-ups at all cost during the upcoming spring and summer season, and really challenge myself to be creative whenever the space allows. However, lack of space cannot be an excuse and I am excited to re-fresh our warm-up in our winter space too.

Saturday 18 January 2020

Beginning of the day

Objectives:

-Warm-up for game at men's arena

End of the day

We used our usual game warm-up so I don't have much to report. I do feel that I would like to change our game warm-up already, but I also do not want to mess with the team's routine this far in the season. Even though not much happened that day I did make one mistake which I want to report on: I was not given a specific time for the warm-up to start by the head-coach, unlike other home games this season, but one the captains came to inform me of a time they had set, and that they would run or cycle ten minutes prior that. I thought the time was too short and it showed on my body language: I was concerned and even slightly annoyed. As I looked around the changing-room I realised almost no one had brought a foam roller with them, meaning we would skip this part of the warm-up and win 5 to 10 minutes out of it. I was still calculating mentally and felt stressed out about this change in schedule. Another leader came to discuss this and tell me that this timeframe has worked great for them in my absence, but I still was unsure and while I told them this was ok, my discontentment showed. They ended up starting earlier than they had informed me probably because of my demeanour, and as they had predicted we finished a few minutes too early. I should have trusted the players' judgment right away, especially as I knew that they were very trustworthy and had a good sense of timing. This was a big game for them, and I think I let stress get to my head: I did not want them having to rush. It is important to remember they know what they are doing, especially at this point in the season, and that the game is about and for them, not my narrow vision of scheduling. This was a good lesson and I apologized to the player in question after the game.

We had a cool down after the game which made me think I would like us to have more of a routine on this side, as we could use this time for some mobility and flexibility which might be lacking in our current program.

Weekly observations

I wish we would hustle more. Players are overall a bit phlegmatic and we lose time moving from one place to another. I am not sure this is something to fix right now though, but definitely a topic to bring up with the staff and players when the new season start, maybe in the form of expectations.

I believe we should add tablets in all stations when we get to the next training plan so players could analyse themselves when I am not around. When I stayed in one station last Tuesday, I was able to provide feedback over several repetitions and one player mentioned no one had told her so far in her entire career about a specific area of development

I mentioned. This means I had not seen her on the station so far. Instant video replays are important for feedback, and even more so in technical drills like the ones we are doing in this program, and it is valuable to keep a visual track of players progress (Tearney 2019). Video replay could also help me break down some communication barriers since images can be a lot clearer than words. I think it might help younger players become more comfortable with assessing their areas of development and seeing themselves making mistakes.

I guess this week was very warm-up oriented! Running the game warm-up on Saturday after reviewing Ian Jeffrey's book really motivated me to change our current plan. There are only so many weeks left in this season however, and I don't feel comfortable changing the team's routine at this point, but I definitely want to update the contents in the future. I hope we can move to a more individualised form, but we will have to see what is the players' understanding and knowledge base of the format and appropriate exercises.

It has proven hard to be in bed lights off by 22:00 this week and the habit tracker in figure 3 reflects it.

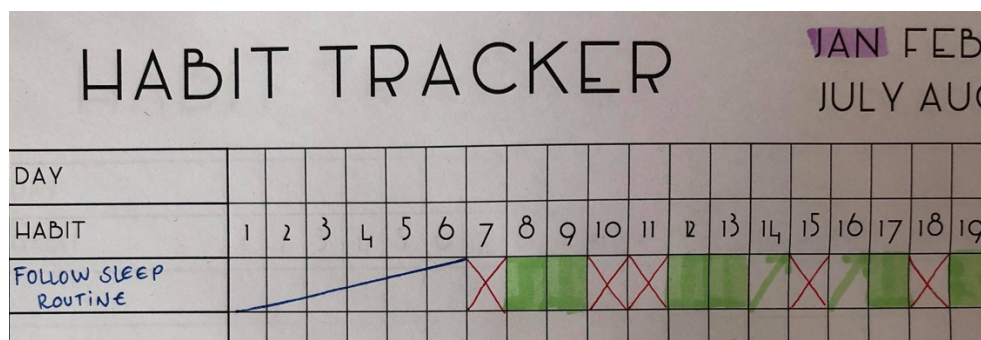


Figure 3. Habit tracker for sleep routine week 2

According to my Oura application data, I spent between 2 min and 41 min in deep sleep, or between 0% and 8% of my sleep each night. It is hard to say if these readings are accurate, but I have dealt with tiredness regardless of hours of sleep for many years, and a chronic lack of deep sleep could explain this issue. Let's look at remaining tasks on the list first viewed in week 1:

- 7 hours of sleep or more ✗
- Temperature around 18° ✗
- Relaxing activities and/or down time close to bed ✗
- Less artificial lights in the evening ✗

Next week I will focus on being in bed on time, and whenever possible earlier than 22:00 to try and increase time in bed which should lead to overall more time asleep.

I am concerned about the artificial light aspect, especially as in Finland we rely heavily on them between November and March. In their article titled The effects of light at night on circadian clocks and metabolism, Fonken and Nelson (2014) look at misalignment between the behavioral and molecular circadian clocks and the effects which stem from it:

Exposure to electric light also influences the circadian system in humans. A recent study by Wright and colleagues (116) examined the effects of electric light exposure on the circadian system in humans by measuring characteristic circadian and sleep patterns in adults maintained in a standard electrical lighting environment (ie, light that reflects daily routines of work, school, social activities, and self-selected sleep schedule) compared with a natural lighting environment (outdoor camping). People exposed to only natural light were more accurately synchronized to solar time. Furthermore, exposure to natural lighting reduced individual variability in melatonin and sleep rhythms making late chronotypes more similar to early chronotypes.

Even if I were to consistently use low lights once home from work, and even candles, I am still being exposed to artificial lights at work and on the commute back home. I think the best option might be to wear orange lenses blue blocker glasses at night, but these are beyond my budget for now.

Outside of practice my main area of focus was to revisit my coaching philosophy process as part of the reflection phase of internal identification. This process comes from "Your coaching philosophy: a 'how-to' guide to developing yours" (Hanson 2012) and has four steps:

- 1-Why do you coach and what are your values?
- 2-Reflecting on your own experience as an athlete.
- 3-Your coaching style according to the DiSC evaluation.
- 4-Discovering the philosophy

1-Why do I coach?

My previous answer covered challenge, love of sports, enjoyment of competing and leading, sense of purpose and competency, physical work environment which can be outdoors when weather permits, and desire to help athletes and people. While this is true and still applies, there is a deeper reason which I did not feel comfortable formulating earlier. I now feel more confident in being vulnerable about it, and ready to share. As stated by Brett Bartholomew (2017, 46) "Do you want to make a difference? Great. Why? Why is it important for you to do so and what experience did you have or witness in the past that set you off on such a path?". Participation in athletics was very unexpected for me. I had a certain aversion to sports both as a participant and spectator until I found roller derby as a young adult. The sport changed my life completely: it got me out of bad and even self-destructive habits and eventually opened my mind and taught me so much about myself and the world. Perhaps most importantly it brought me to respect, love and value myself, and by extension others. I now have a deep reverence and respect for this experience

and want to give back by helping to provide the same for others. Beyond performance, sport can change, elevate, and even save people. It saved me.

My values had not changed a lot, and Certainty/Clarity/Accuracy, Work, Freedom and Honesty/Integrity still made the top of the list. However, acceptance (here in the sense of me being accepted as a coach) disappeared as well as Peace/Quietness, while Order/Perfection made an entrance.

2) My own experiences as an athlete had not changed.

3) My coaching style according to the Disc evaluation: still Conscientious style mixed in with some Dominant style. I found my key strengths to be unchanged except for “strong motivator”. I have struggled to find my “frequency” as a motivator in my strength and conditioning role. My key motivations were the same (Challenges, Helping others, Environment) and it felt good to realize my current work place met these needs much better than the previous one, meaning the change was a good move. At the same time, the description of my “best environment to perform” confirmed some of the challenges I have been dealing with at times, even though they are a small part of my experience. I still identify with the previous key coaching behaviors, but decided to remove “decisive”, as this season I have taken more time to ask my colleagues’ opinions and sometimes struggled to set on decisions quickly by myself. I still question and praise athletes, but not as much as I want to or used to, so these are good ideas of focus for the upcoming weeks. Back when I first undertook the process, I wrote that the way I communicate best is “honestly and with transparency, calmly and with care, concisely.” It is interesting to me because while not perfect at it, I think I have come a long way in being more consistent with this style of communication.

4) Discovering the philosophy focused first on writing 5 statements for behavior one wishes to consistently display and then 5 behaviors to avoid. I find my coaching to match the behaviors I wish to display, but I can still improve on avoiding certain behaviors such as being over controlling or negatively intense, which can happen if I let stress overwhelm me. The last part was to tie the entire process together in an in-depth coaching philosophy and make it visible with a “headline”. Except for some reformulating, my coaching philosophy remained the same, with the headline still being “trust, prepare, serve”.

It was very valuable to revisit this process as I was able to identify progress, areas of development and re-new commitments to what truly matters to me as a coach. It is encouraging overall to find I have taken steps to be in phase with my needs and aspirations, and that I live and apply my philosophy daily.

3.3 Observation week 3

Daily observations

Monday 20 January 2019

Beginning of the day

Objectives:

- Meet with the head of strength and conditioning to clarify our plan for the next few weeks.
- Update the games to the online platform for this weekend

End of the day

In the meeting we went over the season plan for the upcoming weeks, which will focus on peaking. Players will train strength and power once to twice a week based on their individual needs, and we will continue with two speed sessions a week with a focus on reactive speed and agility. I will write speed plans for next week and the new strength and power plans will be introduced this week, to avoid overwhelming players with all new information on the same week. We also talked about developing our warm-up approach to be more intentional about movement skills development through it.

I did not have a chance to update the online platform as most of the afternoon and evening was spent driving to a testing centre where a few players had not been yet. I think it was valuable that I went as I was able to explain to athletes why we test them this way, what we do with tests results, how to read them and what are our team's goals and benchmarks for each given test. They mentioned they were pleased I went there for these reasons. It was also a good opportunity to open up about ourselves during the drive there and back.

Tuesday 21 January 2020

Beginning of the day

Objectives:

- Run both academy and women practice back to back successfully

End of the day

In my Finnish class we talked about suggestions and imperative, both important grammatical concepts in coaching. I do not think I am ready yet to use either appropriately but at least I learned the difference in Finnish between suggestions which are better suited to actions which will include me (e.g. "let's go to the gym") and imperative is important for precise and specific actions (e.g. "start from this cone").

I felt really stressed out on my way to the training because I was juggling more tasks than usual. Several players were texting me about issues they were encountering with the online platform, I was to check the feedback from Sunday's game to let the one of captains know if anyone had forgotten to log their feedback, and I had one set-up opportunity instead of two as both practices were back to back today (instead of having 15-30 minutes break in between). I also planned on reminding players on the women's team to update me on their recovery status every day, as we are entering playoffs season. I wanted to have an individual chat with three players who I knew were not recovering well. Finally, I had to remember to film the session, which I often forget when I get caught up coaching. Multi-tasking can overwhelm me, especially when there is such little time available (only 40-50 minutes with women for most of the tasks). However, I was happy to find I did not forget any planned steps, and I don't think I let my stress transpire. I felt in control the whole time and not like I was in a rush.

I set-up for the academy, which luckily share a few identical and similar drills with women at the moment, so I put women's drill's papers under the academy's drills. Because there were only 15 players attending, they moved quite quickly through the circuit while respecting the rest times better than last week. Once they were done with the circuit, they did a few repetitions of long sprints with two minutes rest in between each rep, which allowed me to set-up almost everything for women. I made it to the locker room just on time and after the head-coach had updated players on the upcoming weeks I was able to talk to them about the importance of reporting on their recovery status, whether it be being sick, having had a bad night of sleep or going through some stress outside of sports. I told them we would go through their individual problems with the online platform during the foam rolling in the warm-up, and gave them two warm-up groups, one running first and one foam rolling first based on their preferences and who was attending.

During the foam rolling I caught up with people who had technical difficulties with our online platform and had time to talk with the three under-recovered players to make adjustments to their training. I was able to finish setting-up while players warm-up. This was the last time doing this specific practice and I wish I would have had more time to check everyone on every station. I experimented with some tactile and movement-based feedback for some of the players and it seemed to help. One negative note was that a player coming back from injury asked me which interval workout she should do, and I told her to go warm-up and that I would text her some options, but I got carried away with coaching and forgot. She came back upstairs to remind me, and I took care of it, but I felt very sorry. This player is also a little more challenging to gain trust and buy in with, so I think it is particularly important to not let her down the way I did. I took videos of all stations. Overall, I would say I succeeded in running both practices back to back.

Wednesday 22 January 2020

Beginning of the day

Objectives:

- Update online platform staff on the bug we are experiencing
- Implement new strength and power training program with women
- Check-up on recovery status for three athletes

End of the day

I cleared up with the online platform that they were aware of the bug we experienced and working on it. They had a big update which created some glitches.

We started a new strength and power program with women. A few players were doing mobility instead due to low recovery status, some also had to opt for less sets than planned, and a couple were dealing with light injuries. The session went well overall but even though we had gone over it with the head of strength and conditioning on Monday, I struggled to remember a few key elements of the rest periods which made my clarifications to players quite slow and unclear at first. Some of the younger players had trouble focusing and I did not feel I was able to reach them so asked help from some of the player leadership, which did not really help either.

Thursday 23 January 2020

Beginning of the day

Objectives:

- Update games on platform
- Catch up on platform updates and our feedback to them

End of the day

I updated the games in the online platform for the next couple of weeks. It was challenging to find information as our calendar platform is usually updated at the last possible moment, but I bypassed that by using Tilastopalvelu where I found the starting time and exact location.

Updating our shared feedback sheet with the platform staff took a while. We would like them to add a wellness questionnaire that we could use twice a week: before games and after games.

In the evening we had speed training with women and power with the academy. The practice with women was ok, but better with some groups than others. Obviously, the lan-

guage has to be taken into consideration, but it is also a matter of personality and communication style. It is also important to understand their personal context better: players who come straight from work or a further away school are more at risk to be impatient or struggle with their mood than those who live nearby, had an afternoon rest or just a less stressful day. I found people had progressed and showed good technique on most drills, so the timing is right to change the plans next week.

The academy training went smoothly as many of them are still sick and so we are working with a smaller group. Their technique and effort were good, and I can see they start to be more confident with medicine balls throws for example, and really hit hard compared to throws that were “shy” when we first started. Overall, I think they need to work on some basic and maximal strength during the off season to increase their speed and power.

Friday 24 January 2020

Beginning of the day

Objectives:

- Update next week into the platform
- Cut, edit and upload speed videos into platform
- Write new speed trainings
- Warm-up for tonight

End of the day

I was only able to update one week forward into the platform and so it was easy to tick it off the list.

Cutting and editing the speed videos turned out to be quick. I used I-movie directly on the I-pad where the videos were, and it was very intuitive. The platform was bugging however and so I could not upload the videos into it.

I prepared a quick and fresh warm-up, it isn't easy to demonstrate movements when players are all in one line and I am in a staircase, and people on the edges can lose focus if they can't hear or see. We made it work though, and in a sense, I think they also appreciate for once not going back and forth on that same corridor the way we often have to do.

I did not have time to write the speed plans so it will have to be done over the weekend.

Weekly observations

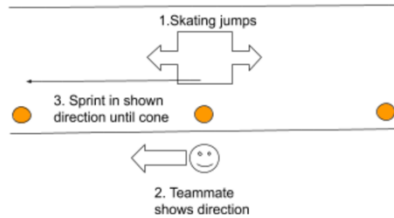
This week was about preparing for and entering the “peaking” phase for women. They clinched their playoffs spot and these games will start in a few weeks. I write “peaking” in inverted commas because in Naisten Liiga games happen almost every week and the competitive period is long. However, as we approach playoffs we increase strength and power, and raise training intensity, but lower volume (Haff, 2016, p 591). At this point it is crucial not to skip a deload week when scheduled and needed, and to stay in touch with individuals on their recovery status. I feel we succeeded this week. We spread the new information over several days and weeks to make the transition smooth for players. This week we covered the new strength plan and next week we will start a new speed and agility phase. It felt good this week to dive deeper into individualisation and check on each player’s recovery status. It is not perfect yet but for me, in comparison to my previous season, it is already much better.

I wrote the speed plans for next week over the weekend and went over these past weeks diary entries to be sure to include feedback from the players. Several drills now include drawing of the set-up and/or pattern, and I made the text descriptions clearer. I added “per set/per sarja” in the template to clarify how the number of repetitions operate, and I triple checked the rest times against total time available. I forgot to include precise distance of set-up in some of the drills, which is important for players who might do the training by themselves. The training now focuses on a reactive component and linear speed and changes of direction. Reactive changes of direction and “true” agility become challenging in our winter setting, mostly from a safety standpoint: difficult to create unpredictable situation on a less than 1,5 meters large by 40 meters long corridor with bleachers on one side. I made sure to incorporate a diversity on movement and directions, but the big focus in most drills is on first steps acceleration, and most reactive cues are verbal or visual.

In figure 4.1, an excerpt of the new speed plan is visible.

Luisteluloikista sprinttiin

Sarjat	Toistot (per sarja)	Tauko sarjojen välillä	Ydinkohdat	Miksi?
3	1	1-2 min	Asetu keskimmäisen kartion kohdalle rintamasuunta jäälle päin, hypi luisteluloikkia paikallaan (tehokkaasti!), kunnes joukkouekaveri näyttää kädellä suunnan. Käännä 90° ja kiihdytä osoitettuun suuntaan kunnes olet kartion kohdalla.	-Voimaa luistelun potkuun -Kiihdytys -Reagointi visuaaliseen ärsykkeeseen



Skating jumps into sprint

Sets	Reps (per set)	Rest between sets	Key Points	Why?
3	1	1-2 min	Facing the ice at the middle cone, side jump (skating jump) back and forth for lateral distance, after a few jumps a teammate shows a direction, immediately <u>turn</u> 90° and <u>take</u> 3-5 sprint steps in that direction.	-Powerful skating stride -Faster first sprint steps -Reacting to a directional/visual cue

Figure 4.1 Nopeus/Speed 7.1 Drill excerpt.

This is the last week of my communication introspection. While the first two weeks focused mostly on who I am and why I coach, this week I will assess how I communicate. To do so I will use the Guidelines for Sending Effective Messages by Damon Burton and Thomas Raedeke (in Gilbert 2017, pp 79-83). The assessment comprises of 16 questions rated from 1 (weak) to 5 (strong) and yield a total score ranging from “Help!” to “Excellent”. I will write the headline for each question as well as my score.

1. Messages should be direct. 4
2. Own your messages. 3
3. Messages should be complete and specific. 4
4. Messages should be clear and consistent. Avoid double messages. 3
5. Messages should clearly state needs and feelings. 4
6. Messages should separate fact from opinion. 3
7. Messages should be focused on one thing at a time. 3
8. Messages should be delivered immediately. 5
9. Messages should not contain hidden agendas. 5
10. Messages should be supportive. 3
11. Verbal and nonverbal messages should be congruent. 2 (non-verb)
12. Messages should be redundant. 5
13. Messages should be at the receiver’s level and frame of references 3 (language)
14. Messages should be checked for understanding. 3
15. Messages should be attention grabbing. 3
16. Messages should consider an athlete’s learning style. 1 (unknown)

With a score of 54 the survey rates my communication on the lower half of Good (51-60). Now I have established a base profile of my communication in the next three to four weeks I will shift my focus to the athletes: I will create individual profiles for each of them.

On the sleep side, this week I had better success in heading to bed on time or earlier than 22:00 and the sleep tracker in Figure 4.2 reflects this progress. Unfortunately, I deal with a lot of noise problems with my upstairs and next door's neighbours. I live in an old building which is poorly noise insulated, and even with earplugs I can hear everything in the staircase and neighbours' apartments. The upstairs and next door's neighbours get active every other day, and typically happen to alternate so that when one is quiet the other makes noise, between 22:00 and 2:00 but also sometimes around 3 or 4 am. I have tried to handle the situation directly with them and with my landlord, but nothing really changes for long. It starts to really take a toll on me physically and mentally.

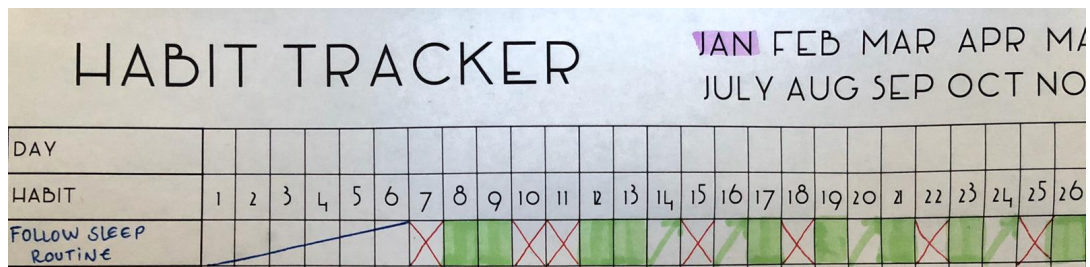


Figure 4.2 Habit tracker for sleep routine week 3

In the next few weeks I will continue to try and implement my sleep routine but will shift the focus towards meditation.

3.4 Observation week 4

Daily observations

Monday 27 January 2020

Beginning of the day

Objectives:

- Close self-evaluation
- Speed with academy

End of the day

The academy continued on their speed program and things were moving well. We will run this training plan for a couple more weeks.

Today I want to close the self-analysis part of this professional development process. In the past three weeks I have collected information about myself, but it is just as important to know why we collect this data and what it will be used for (Bartholomew 2017, 63). This concept should also transpire when building athletes profiles.

Knowing myself comes down to establishing my strength and weaknesses as a coach, to be able to capitalize on my strengths and minimize the impact of my weaknesses while developing and improving on these areas. It is about understanding myself better to build a more accurate picture of how others may perceive me and how my communication might affect them. Each leadership style presents a paradox, with dark and bright traits: for example, I identify more with the conscientiousness style which on the bright side means I can be deliberate, polite and disciplined. But on the dark side it may make me cautious, analytical and perfectionist (Bartholomew 2017, 77).

As Bartholomew explains "Coaches of all types must recognize and remember that there is no one "ideal" type of leader. Leadership is contextual." (Bartholomew 2017, 75) And so additionally to establishing a clearer definition of myself it is also about building a bigger communication literacy, to become more adaptive and flexible based on context.

Tuesday 28 January 2020

Beginning of the day

Objectives:

- New speed training with women

End of the day

Today was challenging. I felt very well prepared with the new plan but encountered challenges in introducing it. A few athletes in particular were clearly going through something and were not receptive to my message. Or rather I was not able to connect with them today. I wonder if I let my frustration show to them. I don't necessarily think we should hide our feelings from players but there are definitely productive and unproductive ways of expressing them.

In my Finnish class this morning I had an interesting argument with the teacher which led to some self-reflection on communication. Overall the teacher has been quite harsh with students, and today she started picking up on one of my classmates. She told her that the topic we were covering -and over which she had just done a mistake- was basic level Finnish and that if she did not master that by now then there was no point even coming to class. My classmate was mortified. Since it was not the first time the teacher had belittled someone for making a mistake, I decided to take a stand. We had a back and forth about learners' needs for mistakes and the stress that can come from grilling people over exercises. The teacher expressed to us that it was incredibly frustrating for her to see us go over topics repetitively without seeming to make progress.

This resonated with me and made me think about my own communication with athletes and the way it affects them. I perfectly understand the feeling of frustration the teacher was experiencing, there is probably also a sense of failure for her when we don't seem to "learn". There is a specific curriculum for Finnish learning, and I imagine it is annoying when students do not seem to fit the bill and learn each component in the recommended timeline and order. Even if we build the best possible system to teach a majority of athletes, they will not all react equally to the program, and some of them probably will even be hindered by the way we do things.

I have also taken this same class with the same teacher a few years back and she taught it in exactly the same way. I do not think she is a bad teacher, but it does question me that she has not updated her methods or pedagogy over the years. This stresses for me the importance of systematically seeking feedback from athletes and peers to avoid sticking to a comfortable teaching style.

"The best coaches understand that building successful programs and cultures of excellence requires honest feedback from everyone, particularly those who are not afraid to tell the truth, regardless of how painful the feedback might be." (Gilbert 2017, 232)

Finally, while I understood her frustration, I wondered if taking it out on my classmate was the best way to express it. In fact, in this specific context (learners making mistakes), I do

not believe she should express her frustration to us at all. We are humans and all experience a wide range of feelings. But I think that I should keep my frustrations over athletes for friends and family, especially when it concerns the athletes' development. If it is about their attitude and deliberate choices in hindering themselves or the team then maybe there is a place, time and manner to express personal frustration to them. But still I think we should be careful with this. As I am a very facially expressive person, I am sure I still have work to do in dealing with this type of feeling in a way that best support the players I work with.

Wednesday 29 January 2020

Beginning of the day

Objectives:

- Start players profiles research
- Run gym session alone

End of the day

There were around 9 players today at the gym and things went smoothly. Everyone reported a high understanding of the goals and good team spirit in our monitoring platform.

I am starting the second phase of my communication development which focuses on building athletes' profiles. Much like for my self-analysis, it is important to be able to justify these profiles and their concrete use. Bartholomew (2017) emphasise and reminds the reader that the players we work with are always people first and athletes second. Just like everyone else, and if even though they might be expected to behave in a specific "athlete appropriate" way, they too are driven by specific desires and influenced by many contextual factors and distractions. Emotions guide and impact us all, and can also be of great motivation, and so it is important to discover what drives and influence each individual on the team and how we can connect with them and understand them better based on it (Bartholomew 2017, 79).

According to Gilbert, profiling is a staple of athlete-centered coaching. While establishing profiles or cards with basic information is important, keeping up with changes in personality and life situation is key too (Gilbert 2016, 38).

In light of these principles, I want the profiles to include the player's archetype as found in Conscious Coaching (Bartholomew 2017), but also their life situation and a note section for sport or life event that can happen on a daily, weekly or monthly basis.

Thursday 30 January 2020

Beginning of the day

Objectives:

-Introduce new speed workout to women

End of the day

Tonight's speed workout was preceded by a very long meeting, which made it challenging to find enough time to introduce the new drills, warm-up and run them. We also had two visiting players and I did not even have the chance to ask for their names, let alone introduce them properly to the way we work. I kept them together by changing the groups so that at least they would find some familiarity in being with each-others. The workout went well but I had set-up some stations a bit too tightly so next week I will give more space to the changes of direction drills.

Friday 31 January 2020

Beginning of the day

Objectives:

-Pre-ice warm-up

End of the day

I ran a similar warm-up than the previous week but with some movement alternative. I kept it fresh but also wanted to make sure there was familiarity so they could focus on the quality of movement rather than novelty. They kept the pace slow on the activate and mobilize phase and I could see they were focused on executing well. After that they were able to pick between 20 minutes of steady endurance or intervals.

A discussion came up with the head-coach about the possibility of filler activities during speed workouts with long rest periods, as well as turning speed workouts into speed endurance ones with shorter rests. I cannot comment on the second idea because this is more down to where we want to take the season plan. Since currently we want to focus on speed, we have to stick to these long rest periods. As far as filler activities such as core exercises during the rest time, while I like the idea I do not think it would help us, especially during the winter: the space is already completely full and this can create tension between our players and parents watching the ice. If we want to add filler exercises it will mean using the stands as well as the speed space, which will also potentially present a safety challenge. Finally, we already barely have enough time to go over new speed drills appropriately, so I think that adding filler exercises would require additional time to demonstrate and explain.

Weekly observations

I am not happy about the delivery of the new speed workouts. I still have a long way to go with my communication, but I feel grateful for the opportunity to learn and improve.

I was able to read up and learn more on player profiles this week, so this part was a success. It is important for me to understand why I build these profiles and whether or not they will actually serve us in coaching them.

The players profiles require some level of personality analysis. According to Weinberg & Gould (2015, 28-29), personality is structured in three levels: psychological core, typical response and role-related behaviour. From regular interactions with athletes we can probably perceive their role-related behaviour and typical response but accessing their psychological core can be more challenging. We have to be more deliberate in our interactions to discover this level of the continuum. Additionally, to the aforementioned structure, personality must be considered within the continuum of behavioural determination. Both situations and psychological traits are important in understanding athletes.

As the authors put it "In essence, we need to know what makes people tick to choose the best way to help them". While personality testing exists, I will not engage players in any because it falls beyond the scope of my responsibilities or competencies, especially as we have a sport psychologist within the team staff. We are also limited with the time available to us and I believe the actual coaching takes precedence in our current situation. However, I can focus on applying the guidance given by Weinberg and Gould (2015, 46-48): consider both personality traits and situations, be an open and sincere communicator, be observant of athletes behaviours in different situations, and be knowledgeable about mental strategies that help in the learning of physical skills.

Building player profiles both in its process and its result provide opportunities to dig deeper into players personalities and communication styles. The end result will be a more visual and centralized way for us to see at glance where each person is at in their life in and out of training, what may be additional factors of stress outside of practice, what we are currently focusing on with them on the physical preparation side, and how to best support them in doing so via personality and time appropriate communication.

My personal development goal of the week was to start meditating daily again which did not happen as seen in Figure 5 below, but I will now review the potential benefits of meditation. The meditation format I use is mostly centered around developing mindfulness.

27	28	29	30	31			
					HABIT	1	2
					FOLLOW SLEEP ROUTINE		
					MEDITATE		

Figure 5. Habit tracker for sleep and meditation week 5

In the NSCA Coaching Podcast, Episode 18, Scott Caulfield discusses with Ashley Jones (2017) and brings up the topic of work life balance. Ashley Jones mentions that meditation plays a big role in his stress management and personal development routine, and Scott Caulfield brings up that strength and conditioning coaches could benefit more from the methods they recommend their athletes use, such as meditation.

Burnout is often talked about from the perspective of athletes, who are at a prime risk since their progression depend on the introduction of stress. Coaches experience burnout too, with young coaches, more caring and people-oriented coaches being more prone (Weinberg and Gould, 2015, 519-521).

While it is well known that tending to mental preparation including in the form of meditation and mindfulness is beneficial for athletes, its benefits for coaches are not well researched, but they may present an ideal population for mindfulness intervention since they are very influent to athletes. Longshore and Sachs study explores the effectiveness and applicability of mindfulness training for coaches. The participants, who undertook a six weeks long daily mindfulness training program, saw a significant decrease in anxiety and greater emotional stability (Longshore & Sachs, 2015).

Meanwhile in their publication “Meditation Programs for Psychological Stress and Well-being: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis” published in the general medical journal JAMA, Goyal M, Singh S, Sibinga EMS, et al. (2014) found for meditation programs to possibly reduce negative dimensions of psychological stress, and especially mindfulness meditation programs were found to show: “small improvements in anxiety, depression and pain with moderate evidence, and small improvements in stress/distress and the mental health component of health-related quality of life with low evidence when compared to nonspecific active controls”.

Meditation also has the advantage to be a tool I am familiar with, and I have been able to meditate for over 30 days in a row in the past, which should help me implement it on a daily basis more easily than if it was my first dabble with meditating.

Overall this was not a very productive or positive week but so is life sometimes, and I am glad I had time to dig deeper into my preparation for the next weeks.

3.5 Observation week 5

Daily observations

Monday 3 February 2020

Beginning of the day

Objectives:

- Increase time in bed
- Speed practice with academy

End of the day

I have not followed the sleep routine in a while because of the neighbours. I decided to skip school so that I could catch up on the past few weeks of missed sleep. I slept 8h51 which is a good amount but slept restlessly waking up often. Several long and quality nights will be needed to feel 100% again.

The speed practice with the academy went well. We had to wait 15 minutes for them to get a changing room, and as the situation was not evolving, I took them to start even though their bags were still in the lobby. I am worried about the fact that they are so often sick, and this will be a big topic of conversation before next season. I am with them only two days a week and wonder what the volume and intensity are like on other days as well as the ice. It would be good if they could use the same platform as women so we could monitor their load more closely.

My communication was not great with players, but I was able to analyse my mistakes in real time. For example: in one station I started asking players questions but did not follow through completely and ended up giving them most of the information they could have figured out themselves with more guidance and targeted questions. I also accidentally gave contradicting messages about the posture in one exercise. I should take a breath to gather my thoughts before talking with them individually.

Tuesday 4 February 2020

Beginning of the day

Objectives:

- Start meditation
- Bring at least one tablet to women's training for filming
- Get back on track with the sleep routine

End of the day

I slept 7h37 minutes by skipping class as the neighbours prevented me from sleeping before midnight again. It is stressful because to achieve this amount of sleep I must spend over 9 hours in bed.

I was not able to start the meditation.

Even though they barely had time to charge I managed to bring two tablets to women's training. The team had a long meeting so we only had time for one set in each drill, but some of them took videos which I will look at this week. It was good that the training time was short because it is a deload week. One of the players has been under-recovered for a long time and after talking with the player and head-coach I send her home for a few days of rest. I would have liked my communication to be more controlled and poised both when talking with the coaches and when informing the players. I think I am very expressive, and it can be misleading sometimes, especially for Finnish people whose facial expressions can be very different than French people's.

Wednesday 5 February 2020

Beginning of the day

Objectives:

- Buy a thermometer for bedside table
- Update online platform for this week
- Contact injured and under-recovered players
- Run strength session alone

End of the day

I slept 7h39 and again had trouble with next door's neighbour! We have talked three times already since I moved last summer about the type of noise coming from his flat, and even though he has been friendly and apologetic, it keeps happening. Last night I wrote him a small letter, keeping it friendly by giving him more information about my lifestyle and how his late-night bedroom activities were impacting me, asking him to keep it down from 22:00 onwards. It might have done the trick because today the noises happened in the afternoon! Let's see if it brings some silence during the night.

I finally bought a thermometer for my nightstand and was surprised to see it's around 21 degrees there. I really thought it would be around 18. This one is tricky to modulate because our windows are old and leak a lot of heat. Our heating is actually on pretty low already, it is quite cold near the windows and the bed is in the main living area but opposite the windows. I will try lowering the heating more to see if it changes the temperature in the alcove.

I spend time today chatting with an under-recovered player who keep getting sick and scoring very high RPE. We already lowered her training volume a few weeks ago and her status improved, but now she is unwell again and the RPEs haven't really gone down. Now she mentioned she has had trouble sleeping and eating for a few weeks. I created a "best sleep check-list" which I think could be useful for the entire team eventually. I will translate it to Finnish and share it with in our coaching chat this weekend. The player actually scored really well on it but we set some goal for screen usage before bed, aiming to stop 30 minutes before but progressing 5-10 minutes at a time, and trying to put the phone in a different room or a drawer or closet to help lower the temptation to check it. We also talked about not doing homework in bed anymore since school was a factor of stress and it is important overall to dedicate the bed to sleep only. We will discuss nutrition later this week.

I started mediating today. I have actually been meditating almost daily since the beginning of this year, and several days a week since last autumn, but now I have fallen off the wagon for a few days. I am using an app called Headspace and currently doing their course on Self-Esteem. In the first level made up of ten sessions the main technique was noting, and in the second one it was visualisation which I usually enjoy but found challenging this time around. Today's session begins the last ten days of the course and introduces the technique of resting awareness. In the previous two techniques there was a specific focus: be it the breath, the noting or the visualization. In this new technique we alternate between focusing in the breath lightly and letting the mind go or wander. I thought I would get very distracted but was actually very surprised to see I could navigate this with ease.

I made some changes in our online platform as we will have an extra strength session on Friday instead of ice. I was running tonight's and will handle Friday's strength sessions alone, as the head of strength and conditioning and head-coach are away at a youth national team camp.

Today there were only 4 players attending the gym session as many did the workout on their own. One of them is injured and I am waiting to hear back from her doctor and physiotherapist on what type of training may be available to her, so we focused on an upper-body workout with higher volume and lower intensity, and with more isolating exercising that did not require much overall stabilization or use of her lower limbs. The three healthy athletes continued with our current strength and power program. It was fun to be in a smaller group and while they worked hard, we also took some time to dance and joke around between sets, but in term of time spent on preparation this is not the level of delivery I expect from myself.

Thursday 6 February 2020

End of the day

Not a good day today, my communication is not ready enough and I having recurring problems with some of our younger players. The stress is building up for them with playoffs approaching and it is showing up in ways I do not know how to best handle yet.

Friday 7 February 2020

End of the day

I achieved my objective of the week which was to build the player's profiles template! I also filled in all the information I had for each player. I will go over it in depth in the weekly observations.

I was alone again at the gym tonight with the same four players and it went a lot more smoothly than on Wednesday as I took time to prepare myself better.

Weekly observations

In his article *Stress Management & Decompression Strategies for Strength Coaches*, Justin Ochoa (2020) highlights the risk of burnout for those involved in preparing athletes physically for their sports: "Coaches work extremely long hours, place high demands of activity on their bodies and even higher demands of stress on their minds. We are emotionally involved in every single person that does a single rep or set under our care." He recommends coaches tend to their training, recovery, self-talk and hobbies. I want to take closer a look at how well I am covering these four components.

I training three to four times a week, it is not ideal as mostly focused on strength training and would require more endurance training, but for now I do not want to prioritize making changes in this area as my routine works well and allows me to focus on other areas. We cannot and should do attempt to fix or improve everything at once. In term of recovery I am still working daily on improving my sleep, and now I added meditation, which was one of the techniques mentioned by Ochoa in his article. I also eat healthy meals three times a day and use the services of a meal preparation company designed for athletes and active people, which ensures the high quality of the meals and provides customers with the nutritional information for each meal. I do eat unhealthy snacks between meals so this can also be a future area of improvement. My self-talk is not good, and I am addressing it with the meditation pack I have currently picked, which focuses on self-esteem.

This week I started meditating again with the goal of doing it daily. I started on the 5th of February and managed to do it three days in a row but on the weekend, we went to a friend's party out of town and I did not follow my routines as seen in figure 6.1.

HABIT	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
FOLLOW SLEEP ROUTINE	X	█	X	X	█	█	█	█	X
MEDITATE	X	X	X	X	█	█	█	X	X

Figure 6.1. Habit tracker for sleep routine and meditation

To help me succeed with the habit, I will use James Clear temptation bundling and habit stacking formula (Clear 2018, pp 110) which works as follow: “After -current habit-, I will -habit I need. After -habit I need-, I will -habit I want.” Temptation bundling stems from Premack’s Principle “more probable behaviors will reinforce less probable behaviors”. Doing something we enjoy only at the same time as something we must do will increase the likelihood of executing the least desired routine.

Habit stacking is described by Clear as a positive version the Diderot Effect, which describes the propensity of someone’s purchase leading to another. The author advices to stack a new habit with an existing one as a form of implementation intention, therefor creating momentum (Clear 2018, pp 73-75).

Furthermore, when it comes to implementation intention, specificity of the plan is crucial, as it removes choices and chance. This means that the habit or behavior must be set in a specific timeline and location to increase its chances of occurring (Clear, 2018, pp 70-71).

In my situation the final formula for implementing daily meditation looks as such:

After I have eaten breakfast, I will meditate for ten minutes with my app, on the couch.
 After I have meditated, I will drink coffee while reading or browsing social media.

I eat breakfast every day at around the same time, and I enjoy drinking coffee while reading or browsing social media on my couch, so placing meditation immediately after something I do daily and making it a condition of something I enjoy doing should help increase my chances of success.

Last week I focused on why creating profiles is valuable. This week's biggest objective was to make the player's profiles ready, which involved figuring out how to make the profiles and which information to pick. The final template is visible in Figure 6.2.

In *Coaching Better Every Season*, Gilbert offers an example of an Athlete Profile Card, which includes their name, date of birth, family profile, the teammates they most connect with, in which circumstances the player best and worst responds, as well as which former athletes does this current one remind the coach of (Gilbert 2017, pp 38-39). Gilbert also mentions the increase use of test such as DISC profiling, but as it is both costly and time demanding, at this point I will mostly rely on observations made by myself and colleagues to fill in the profiles.

I decided to include basic information such as the athlete's picture, name, date of birth, weekly schedule and position (goalie, forward or defense). I included Gilbert's idea of the family profile but as part of their life situation to broaden the spectrum of information. We also agreed with the head of strength and conditioning to include the athlete's training and injury history, as well as their current two top training focus which are based on their test results, practice performance observations and their own wishes. Finally, their role (leadership position and playing line), current injury status, communication and learning style are visible on the profile, as well as an open comments box for anything that might not fit other boxes. Currently I believe these components to give us a good overall picture of each individual person and their potential sources of stress additional to practice and game stress.

Each player has a sheet within the same google excel, and the front page of the excel is the list of all players with their injury status easily and quickly visible. The statuses are colour-coded red for out of play/practice, orange for practice impacted by injury (entire sections or full practice changes may be required), yellow for practice lightly impacted by injury (modification of some movement may be required), green for healthy. In the box is written the specific injury site (e.g. sick, concussion, knee etc.). These profiles are only visible to the head-coach and both head of strength and conditioning and I to respect privacy.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
1	Name		Role	:		Status			
2	D.O.B								
3	Position		Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday		
4	Weekly schedule								
5				team	team	team	team		
6						Saturday	Sunday		
7									
8						game	game		
9	Training history								
10									
11									
12									
13	Injury history								
14									
15									
16									
17	Life situation								
18									
19									
20	Training focus		Strength			Mobility			
21									
22	Communication & learning style								
23									
24	Comments								
25									

Figure 6.2. Example template of women’s team player profiles

We are closing in on playoffs season which is a busy, exciting and stressful time for everyone on the team, perhaps even more so as it is the team’s first season in Liiga. This bustling situation is the main reason why I currently mostly rely on personal and colleagues’ observations for filling in the profiles. However, in the future I would like to schedule individual meetings with players. I interact with each player individually at practice, but of course some of them are more comfortable with English or with interacting with me than others. Individual meetings could help more reserved or distant players to open up and build trust between us. As coach Kim Kincer explains in *She Can Coach*, getting to know players individually is important in developing a strong relationship: “Coaches need to reach out to every player and understand who she is, where she is from, and in what type of environment she grew up. Players need to know that you are interested in them as people, not just athletes.” (Kincer, 2005, pp 193).

I realistically do not believe it will be possible for me to fill in every individual profile this season, as some of the information will necessitate individual meetings, but it is allowing me to prepare a solid base to work on through off and next season.

3.6 Observation week 6

Daily observations

Monday 10 February 2020

Beginning of the day

Objectives:

-Mobility and recovery focused warm-up

End of the day

I had planned a 40 minutes warm-up with around 15 to 20 minutes focused on foam rolling and body check-in. Players were meant to have a 20 minutes meeting prior, but it turned into a 35 min one and I had to adapt with almost half the time I had prepared for. I decided to still focus on mobility as this was what we had announced to players. We spend around ten minutes on a full body check-up going through a variety of range of motion, mobilization and activation. I took the players to a staircase nearby the meeting room to avoid losing too much time on travelling and this proved quite good as it was a lot more quiet than other areas of the rink. This left us with just under 15 minutes for the remainder of the warm-up. We took around 5 minutes to jog, which players enjoy and usually request as part of their warm-up and since we lack space indoors, I do not mind them picking this option over a more multi-directional approach. We then took under 10 minutes for a potentiation phase. This warm-up left me quite frustrated and unhappy with myself.

I went to chat about the timeframe challenge with the head-coach as it has happened before. Even though more time would be preferable I do not mind being given a short amount of time, but the variations between the timings I am told to prepare for and the actual time I am given are problematic. For example, I would hope that if a meeting is told to be 40 minutes then it takes 40 minutes, not 50.

We also had a chance to talk about developing players autonomy, and I mentioned that it is challenging for appropriate teaching and gradual autonomy opportunities to take place within regular 20-30 minutes warm-up, in particular in our space where players usually move a lot between picking up their gear, the meeting room, the changing room and the various off-ice space possibilities, all at different ends of the ice rink. I read an article about autonomy that night which I will cover in my weekly analysis.

Tuesday 11 February 2020

Beginning of the day

Objectives

- Search for a bench and squat rack
- Warm-up and speed training in different location

End of the day

Today was in stark contrast with the previous day, I almost had too much time on my hands! It was my first time in this location, and I was slightly intimidated. I was not sure where to set the practice space and so I did not do it in advance as I normally would, which meant I also had to send player for a longer jog than I would have liked since I needed to install the warm-up set-up plus the speed and agility setting.

Players jogged first at low pace for a few minutes chatting and catching up on their day, then for a few more minutes in two teams with 2 tennis balls each throwing and catching the balls as they ran. We then used for the first time with a full group a warm-up with a new setting and approach. It felt so good to be able to work creatively with space! I was also able to space the speed stations a lot more which made it safer and also allowed everyone to work at the appropriate intensity without being limited by space. I was able to see everyone and help more people with their form and technique, and of course it was incredibly easy for everyone to hear me: I did not need to raise my voice at all which I find more friendly and approachable.

Thursday 13 February 2020

Beginning of the day

Objectives:

- Warm-up women

End of the day

Tonight, we again had plenty of time before the ice with no meeting. At the player's request I sent them to run for around 10 minutes with a volley and football to pass among each-others at the same time. We then went through a similar warm-up set-up as Tuesday with a few tweaks to keep things fresh and safe, since the space was a bit smaller and there was a step between a tar space and a bare path. We were in the dark so it could potentially be more challenging for players to see the junction between the two so I made sure the direction in which they would be moving would be safe. I could hear a few players talking at the back whenever I gave instructions and had to ask them to listen a few times. Their teammates were also asking them to be quiet. I did not think much of it because I could not really see their facial expressions and I think it is quite normal and even positive that people chat with their friends during some drills and when in line waiting to do their next move. The problem is that quite often the people talking also then lack focus during their execution and end up performing the movement or drill the wrong way.

Friday 14 February 2020

Beginning of the day

Objectives:

- Speed workout in alternative location
- Address feedback about disrespect

End of the day

Yesterday via our online platform feedback, one athlete brought up that some players were disrespectful to me which affected the quality of training. The feedback mentioned that it was not the first time. I knew of a couple of players being regularly disrespectful but did not think it was impacting the group, and so this feedback worried me. I contacted the player right away and we agreed to have a chat about this situation before the practice. We also discussed by text beforehand where might the disconnect be between these athletes and I and I was able to prepare a plan for the evening to address it.

In the evening I expressed to her my reasoning up until she had brought her feedback: the players in question were young and going through their own personal problems. They regularly did not listen, rolled their eyes or downright criticized the drills, training or feedback verbally in Finnish. Taking into consideration their individual situation and after a few tries earlier in the season of raising my voice or enforcing rules without success, I decided to give them more space and simply ignore these types of reaction, while checking in on them individually later during practices, rather than calling them out in front of the group. I also sometimes took them aside to check that they understood the objectives of our practices and the importance of physical training for their development. I never took their disrespect personally and whenever they would make clear they did not want to interact with me I focused my energy on the big majority of our athletes who did. However, I failed to realize that this had now started to impact the motivation of other athletes who felt disrespected by their teammates not taking the training seriously and bringing bad mood or apathy more regularly.

After we discussed one on one about her feedback and my course of action, I was given half the group to warm-up and go over the speed workout while the other half of the athletes had a meeting. Even though we were on a tight schedule I thought it was important to correct course immediately and act, now that feedback had been brought up. I had prepared a few questions and sentences in Finnish with my partner, because some of the players involved are more comfortable in Finnish and appreciate when I make the effort to listen or speak to them in their language. I think this was a good idea in theory, and some

of them were visibly happy when I announced I would be having this conversation in Finnish, but the minute I started reading my notes I realized it was a mistake. Because the sentences were quite complex notions, I was reading rather than speaking my notes, and could not convey as much emotion or intent as I would in Finnish. It almost sounded like I did not know what I was saying. Almost all players directly impacted by this speech, except the main one, were present, but still as we moved upstairs some of them immediately started messing around again. I still felt it was a valuable lesson for me, and through the conversation ensuing I learned more about the disconnect between some players and our training or warm-up rationales. I will focus on improving this in upcoming weeks.

Weekly observations

This week I explored Bartholomew's archetypes more in depth and started to attribute them to players in the form of post-it notes stick directly in my copy of his book. I did not add these elements to the actual profiles we use with the head-coach and head of strength and conditioning yet, because many players' personalities are still unclear to me, and not being a fluent Finnish speaker is probably my biggest roadblock in this area. Additionally, I do not feel ready yet in my thought process to explain this specific nomenclature to my colleagues. I also do not want to lock individuals in one or several specific archetypes, but rather use these types as potential guidance to communication. It is a pathway to connecting with them and finding out what they wish, not a label coming with a judgment of their person. As Bartholomew points out brilliantly, in opposition to the belief that we should treat others the way we wish to be treated: "The reality is that YOU must treat people the way THEY want to be treated." (2017, p 218).

The hot topic of this week was dealing with the feedback I received on player's disrespecting me. It was definitely humbling. I will attempt to analyse more in depth what should have gone differently for me to better handle this situation.

I believe the first mistake was the lack of clear expectations in the physical training (Fry, Gano-Overway, Guivernau, Kim, Newton, 2019). The team has goals and values, and from the beginning as well as at key moments of the season, the head-coach has expressed the standards players must be setting for themselves in order for the team to succeed. However, I have not personally spoken much about these standards. At the beginning of the regular season I remember setting things straight once with the team when their behaviour was not matching the standards we expect, but that is probably the extend of me personally reminding athletes of the standards we hold them to, outside of a few individual conversations.

Obviously with most players on our team, they are intrinsically motivated to high standards and bring their best attitudes to each practice regardless of what might be going on in their daily life. This does not mean that they are not impacted by or expressing their emotions and personal situations, but that they are able to still try their best and apply themselves to the training. In the future, I will lead the section concerning the expectations of the physical side: I spend most time with the athletes daily when it comes to off-ice and so I believe it is important I be the one expressing what I expect from them in my area. It will be stated clearly that if athletes breach these standards, they will be asked to leave the training and go practice off ice or warm-up on their own, as to not impact the quality of training for the rest of the team.

A second aspect I will emphasise to the group in the future in the culture of positive behaviour. This can be challenging for the Finnish culture, which tends to be more individual and neutral, meaning people do not necessarily feel comfortable encouraging or holding other's to certain standards. They typically mind their own personal business. My idea is not to denature this culture, but to subtly and appropriately emphasise more of positive group and individual culture, through both the team standards and my personal behaviour day in and day out. It is important that I remember to celebrate their efforts and small victories, as well as when they help and praise each-others, or when they help set-up or clean up (Fry & al. 2019, 153).

Finally, when it comes to the group, I will ensure on a daily and/or weekly basis through my communication that the players are aware of what proper behaviour towards coaches and teammates is. For adults this is typically given, but for teenagers this might a line they need to push and ride at times, and so reminding everyone where the limits lie will provide them with less room to wiggle disrespect in. For example, by saying: "In the next 5 minutes you will use the foam rollers, during this time you will be able to chat with your friends. Once we move on to the guided section of the warm-up, I need everybody focusing and listening until I am done giving the instructions, meaning all eyes on me and everyone being able to repeat the information if asked." (Fry & al. 2019, 153).

In *Conscious Coaching*, the author lists letting athletes' emotions and moods dictate the session as one of the main coaching mistakes to avoid. I can confidently say that this is exactly what happened this past Thursday. It is important to manage athlete's emotions and the way they will transpire in the session and influence the entire team. Bartholomew emphasises the importance of responding rather than reacting and finding the appropriate response to the given situation while preferably avoiding extreme outcomes. I believe in an effort to respect individuals I became afraid of reacting, forgetting I had the responsibility still to respond. (Bartholomew 2017, pp 223-224).

While setting expectations and a positive environment are important factors, responding appropriately to the individuals and their actions disrupting the session is equally important. Sometimes even when we do our very best as coaches, players may still find their needs are not being met (Fry &al. 2019, 156). In this instance while the players may have been affected by factors from their personal life, I failed to engage deep enough on whether the training was fulfilling to them or not. In the future I will implement the following strategy: if an athlete misbehaves despite the environment being positive and the standards having been clearly established and understood, I will take them aside for a one on one chat at the first available moment. I will then start by reminding them calmly and in a caring way of the expectations in this practice, lay out how they were breaching these standards and finally ask them why they chose to behave that way (Fry &al. 2019, 154). From there we can hopefully have a constructive conversation and establish how I could help them find enjoyment in the current and upcoming sessions.

I asked a few questions to players on Friday and one was: “Do you understand why we practice off-ice the way we do?” Many of them said yes but several said no or not always. Conveying the rationale and why of training to athletes in ways they can understand and relate to is paramount, and upon reflection I feel this is something I have walked away from rather than towards this season. Of course, the lack of time hasn’t helped me to provide high quality teaching, yet I have taken steps especially with training sheets to always express why we do what we do. But it is not enough and especially as people respond to different approaches, the why of each training phase, session and exercise bares repeating and expressing with variety. If players say upfront that they don’t always understand why, then it is clear I have not done enough.

In the future I will start implementing a technique called the 3 R’s, which consists of re-searching the player through natural and mindful exchanges with them, relating to players by making myself accessible and creating shared rapports, and finally reframing the athlete’s image of training in a light that is engaging (Bartholomew 2017, 231-233). This approach should allow for better buy-in and hopefully respect towards the training.

I think a final thought on this is the reflection around autonomy. After we discussed this topic with the head-coach on Monday I also happened to read an article on the topic and its practical applications in strength and conditioning programs. I believe that the concept and importance of autonomy in training and coaching is clear to all of us coaches in the team’s staff, and that we haven’t been missing this component in trainings. However, it was a good reminder of systematically offering a degree of autonomy to players, and perhaps even enhancing this approach with individuals who might prove more reticent to our

program, rather than trying to tighten our control over them. At the same time, it was highlighted that athletes should not be provided with so much autonomy that they feel they are not being care for or guided, which can also lead to motivational drops (Halperin, Wulf, Vigotsky, Schoenfeld & Behm, 2018).

3.7 Observation week 7

Daily observations

Monday 17 February 2020

Beginning of the day

Objectives:

-New speed training with academy

End of the day

Tonight, it was time for a new speed training plan to begin with the academy. The focus was moved to speed and explosiveness, so only one exercise focused on reacting to a cue. The practices consisted of five stations with each aiming to cover a different movement plan or change of direction aspect. Players got the hand of it quickly. After the practice we talked as a group and I asked them if there was any movement in the warm-up or training that was unclear, and a few questions popped up which other players were able to answer for their teammates, with my help in some cases. As per usual the rationale for each exercise in the actual training part are written in each station in simple words in Finnish, but not everyone learns or understand best by reading, so it was good to discuss about the exercises out loud.

Tuesday 18 February 2020

End of the day

With coaches we discussed today the topic of players not knowing yet how to work autonomously or why we do certain things. Of course, it is disappointing that not everyone gets it by this point of the season, but I think there is no timeline on these things. I see players a few hours per week, usually on very tight schedules and in conditions that don't suit teaching well due to the noise levels and overall logistics. Some players will understand and learn quickly while others will require more time, repetitions and various approaches. The language barrier is definitely an issue here when it comes to deeper level information seeping in long term. When the off-season comes, I will focus on finding strategies to provide better teaching to everyone, and I will try and negotiate for more time in contact with athletes.

We went through a new speed warm-up and everything went smoothly. Overall the team's athleticism has gone up this season and players are better coordinated.

One player needed help developing an alternative game day warm-up as some of her movements were limited. Since she was in the gym downstairs, I left the team in autonomy upstairs, which went well as they had already done the program a few times. She cannot run and so we focused more on activation and mobilization, while supplanting the raise and end of the potentiation phases with bike.

Wednesday 19 February 2020

Beginning of the day

- Objectives:
- Present recovery tools to the team

End of the day

We had a light strength training session followed by a cool down routine with foam rolling and stretching, to be used systematically throughout playoffs. At the end, our head of strength and conditioning introduced recovery tools to the team, covering mobility maintenance, sleep optimisation, nutrition focused on recovery and hydration. We finished the session with a 5 minutes breathing and relaxation exercise in the dark with soothing music.

During the strength session the same players who had been showing disrespect in the previous week were having a negative attitude while completing the workout, and one in particular talked back to me. After the session ended, I took the player aside for a chat. I first asked her if everything was ok and how she was feeling towards the playoffs weekend ahead. I then laid out calmly what my issue was: she had been talking back and being disrespectful a few times towards me recently, which was not okay. I did not expect her to come to practice every day being cheerful, and I respected her emotions and wanted to know what might be going on in her life, but that it could not be an excuse to disrespect me or anyone on the team. I also asked if she had a personal problem with me, in which case it would be important for us to work through it. This led to a constructive conversation where the player opened up about her life, apologized for being disrespectful and agreed to up her attitude game from then on. I was glad to be able to maintain a calm composure, talk from a place of care and in a developmental mindset, which I believe helped the conversation to be successful.

Thursday 20 February 2020

Beginning of the day

- Objectives:
- Explain warm-up rationale to players

- Alternative warm-up for injured player
- New power workout with the academy

End of the day

Today we were in our alternate practice venue which has more space for physical training. Following our conversation about players' autonomy and understanding of training rationale over the past couple of weeks, I decided to tweak the format of the warm-up slightly. The team was divided in two groups working over a similar floor plan than last week. Even though it was a little less time efficient, speaking to one small group at a time made it easier to keep everyone engaged. I kept my explanations and questions very short and checked in with them on the "why" of our warm-up, and specifically the phase they were about to engage in. Since a few players were missing and coming in late, I asked each group to catch up their teammates when they would arrive, which also created some repetition and the opportunity for them to express the information in their own words. For the remaining phases I focused on explaining rather than questioning, deciding it was best to give them small pieces of information over several sessions and not overwhelming them on questions about everything.

For the speed workout I left them be autonomous to go check on players who were doing their own warm-ups.

The academy started a new power workout and I was really happy to see them really sticking to rest times. They even kept each other in check when they spotted someone seemed to be moving really quickly through the stations. We have talked a lot this season about the importance of rest during speed and power workouts for the training intensity to be efficient and lead to desired adaptations. It feels good to see players adhering to this, especially with many of them being quite young.

Friday 21 February 2020

End of the day

Tonight, we continued yesterday's conversation about the warm-up's rationale. This time we used a new set-up with raise: players were jogging around the space all together, and one leader called and showed the group which movements to do. I gave the team the movement options beforehand, sticking to 2-4 options each time. In the activation and mobilization phase we mixed led and autonomous sections, as well as in the beginning of the potentiate phase. We ended with a fun relay race of short sprints with changes of direction with the focus being on cheering and encouraging teammates.

Saturday 22 & Sunday 23 February 2020

We plan on adding learning styles to each athlete's profile which led me to research more on this topic. While I get the impression that most coaches are aware of learning styles, I had trouble finding practical applications to both assessing athletes' styles and implementing different methods of coaching relevant to each. These challenges are highlighted in *Perspectives on Learning Styles in Motor and Sport Skills* (Fuelscher, Ball, Macmahon, 2012). The VARK-athlete method (Bonwell, C., Fleming, N. 2001) appear to be the most known if not the only learning style questionnaire designed with athletes in mind. However, the test has been criticized, particularly as the questions do not pertain to motor or sport skills learning, but simply have been adapted to sport relevant contexts. Despite our understanding that a valid measurement of athletes' learning styles would be of a great value to coaches in enhancing players' learning experience, we seem to have no real options backed-up by science at this time (Fuelscher & al 2012).

I tried the questionnaire available online and found I was mostly a Kinesthetic learner. In experiencing it first-hand, the limitations of the questionnaire were clear. Identifying your learning style as a coach matters in the same way that other factors in the communication self-analysis I undertook earlier did. My preferred or natural learning style is likely to be reflected in the way that I coach and interact with athletes. Upon reflection I have often found myself telling athletes to "simply try it and see how it goes" in a true kinesthetic fashion, when in fact it would be both more respectful and productive to help them figure the movement out in the way that makes most sense to them. Most athletes appear to be multimodal or kinesthetic learners, and so prioritizing and combining both approaches is recommended. Two approaches or more are typically needed for athletes needs to be met (Braakhuis 2015).

Developing practical solutions will take time and in our specific training environment, complex. However, for now I have come up with the following possibility. Currently, each drill station is equipped with a training sheet including the what, how and why of the exercise, and often includes a drawing or graph of the drill. This approach supports visual and read/think learners. We currently use three tablets so that athletes can film and analyse themselves, which works well for several learning types but particularly for visual learners. If we could have one tablet assigned to each station, there could be a very short video - only a few seconds- on each with the exercise or technique being learned in the specific station. The video could include slow motion or key words if relevant, but also a voice over with specific cues or sounds, which would then target auditory learners. This solution would as well target the visual and read/think learner again in a different way than the paper does and provide support for the kinesthetic learner to come back to.

In the instance that we would be capable of covering all or multimodal learning styles approaches via the implementation of specific coaching strategies, would there still be value in assessing each individual's learning style? I believe this is a conversation I will need to have with our mental coach during the off season, and if he believes this to be valuable, we could perhaps coordinate to handle this together. While learning styles are also understood to be task specific and we lack data covering them in the athletic realm, it is still possible that defining personal learning styles could help target terminology when working 1 on 1 and providing feedback (Owen & Stewart 2005).

Another perspective on this topic is the identification of attentional cues. It is theorized that athletes experience varying types of attentional styles throughout performance. These attentional styles exist on two overlapping continuums of broad and narrow, and internal and external, creating four quadrants: Assess, analyse, prepare, act, referring to assessing in broad external, strategizing in broad internal process, mentally rehearsing in narrow internal and acting in narrow external (Nideffer 1976).

3.8 Observation week 8

Daily observations

The three weeks between Monday 24th of February and Sunday 15th are compiled here as observation week number 8. Due to playoffs, the early ending of women's season, sickness on my part and finally the outbreak of preventative measures in relation to Covid-19 in Finland, each individual week was very light in term of notes.

Monday 24 February 2020

Beginning of the day

Objectives:

- Define my rationale for using imagery
- Speed with the academy

End of the day

This week I shift my stress management focus from meditation to visualization, which will be the final segment of personal development in this diary. One of the factors impacting my coaching is preparation. It is important for me to arrive early enough to set things up, and sometimes rehearse part of the drills or movements, before I start working with the athletes. We usually have small windows of time together and so I want to ensure I am efficient. I sometimes feel anxiety raises up as I leave for work, or right before starting the practice. It usually relates to a fear of forgetting something important. On days where this happens, typically when I have been busy throughout the day with a variety of projects or tasks, one thing that I found helps me is to go over all the basics I need for the upcoming training: did I live home early enough? Did I bring all the material needed? What is today's training plan? What set-up will I be using? What information will I be giving to the players prior starting the training? I commute to work by bus for 20 to 30 minutes, and that is when I usually ask myself these questions. I would like to replace this questioning with a more dedicated imagery practice, visualizing myself arriving at work on time, setting the practice up and coaching, successfully. I believe this will boost my confidence and help reduce my stress.

Imagery refers to creating or re-creating an experience, usually positive, in the mind. It is a form of simulation used to prepare oneself mentally, in sports usually for performance or skills development (Weinberg & Gould 2015). I have used imagery before both as an athlete and when taking exams or tests. I feel I have a good grasp of it, and it is easy for me to form mental pictures, so I am hopefully this technique will work to my advantage.

Imagery is understood to have two functions, motivational and cognitive. In my case, I will employ it within its motivational function. I will be using it for both of the following purposes as described by Weinberg and Gould (2015, pp 299-300): motivational general-mastery (MG-M) and motivational general-arousal (MG-A), with the respective objectives of achieving positivism and focus for the first, and relaxation and control for the latter. Both types were found effective in regulating arousal, which includes calming down.

This week also marks the beginning of the final phase of professional development: contextual communication. Tonight, as I coached the speed training for the academy, I reflected on the cues I use with them in this practice. Below, an excerpt of some of the key points included in each station's paper:

- Stay on your toes
- Ribs down
- Hips forward (pistols up ;)
- Fingertips at eye level
- High knees
- Full stop at the cone level, facing the ice fully, low.
- As fast as you can in between, normal running form.
- Switch the ice you are facing each rep
- Arms up front straight during hip turns, low ready stance on toes
- Fast! 3-5 Hip turns
- Shuffle backwards at 45° angle (stay low)

On top of this I used at least the following cues: "remember to move your arms", "think you are punching something/someone with your elbows", "sprint as fast as you can to the colored cone your teammate announces". I will analyze these tomorrow.

Tuesday 25 February 2020

Beginning of the day

Objectives:

- Create visualization routine
- Analyse yesterday's speed cues
- Speed training with women

This morning I am building my imagery routine. I want my visualization to be both neutral and positive. It must be set around and at the rink. I will use internal imagery, so it will be from my perspective. As vividness is key to quality imagery (Weinberg & Gould 2015, p 309), I will attempt to involve as many senses as possible including the smells of the ice and café, the noises of music and chatter coming from changes rooms etc. The details of the imagery will vary every day based on the training plan or relevant event, but I will make a base structure so that it is easier to implement. I will store it in my phone's notes so that I can refer to it while in the bus if need be.

End of the day

Earlier today I learned more about cueing for speed and analysed the quality of my coaching cues against the information I found. At tonight's practice I attempted to be more mindful of choice of words and start applying new knowledge. I will cover this more in depth in the weekly analysis.

I used my visualisation routine for the first time tonight and found I struggled at first to get into a neutral or positive groove with the imagery, and I believe I was distracted by the noises around me. The first part of my commute goes through intense traffic and numerous stops due to big road works. I ended up putting music on in my earphones and it helped me focus on the imagery more effectively.

Wednesday 26 February 2020

End of the day

Today's session was only a warm-up with women and we used our usual RAMP format but this time with a lot of autonomy. I simply made sure players went through all phases and targeted one type of movement or body part in a progressive order.

I used the imagery on my bus ride and today it left me feeling very relaxed!

Thursday 27 February 2020

Both the women and academy teams had games tonight and so I had a free evening.

Friday 28 February 2020

As women lost their final playoffs game yesterday, their season ended earlier than we hoped. We will take a two-week break from practice, but I will continue working with the academy in the meantime.

Monday 2 March 2020 – Sunday 8 March 2020

I was on sick leave with the flu keeping me in bed the entire week. I did attend a meeting on Thursday with the head-coach and head of strength and conditioning. We reflected on the past season and started planning the upcoming one. The main takeaways were to keep building on our existing systems and develop more structure all around: for example

when it came to return to play after injury or “how-to” when feeling sick, and further development of trainings plans’ individualisation in our program.

Tuesday 10 March 2020

Beginning of the day

Objectives:

- Use imagery before training
- Use prepared cues in academy speed practice

End of the day

I used my imagery tonight again after a week break of being sick at home and I was happy to see it was going easily. This seems to be an easier habit for me to implement than meditation.

During the speed training I used prepared cues based on what I have learned in the past couple of weeks, but it is hard to quantify the potential effects of improvement. We are not testing or timing athletes, so any judgment is completely subjective and observational.

Wednesday 11 March 2020

End of the day

I went to the academy gym training for the first time this season! Normally I am at the women’s gym on Wednesday in a different part of the city. The practice plan made by their head-coach included body weight movements, jumps and split jerk. I was very interested because I have not practiced the jerk much myself and I have never taught it. As it turned out many people needed help with their jerk and so I had to dive into the deep end and figure out how to guide them.

I still used my imagery routine tonight, but it was a little hard to go into specifics of the training as I did not know what the plan was. On the other hand, as I was not the one leading the practice there was no pressure on the practice delivery.

Thursday 12 March 2020

I was preparing to go to the academy practice for our power workout today, but we learned that all club practices were cancelled for the weekend. The government starts to take measures and recommendations about the global pandemic of Covid-19 and this is likely to affect sports and possibly put our seasons on hold.

Weekly observations

In the past three weeks I only ended up using the visualization four times as seen in Figure 8.1 and 8.2, which is as many times as I ended up going to work. I did not want to use it on other days because it is a habit which I want to attach to work-days and to my bus commute. I was surprised it went so well and expected to encounter more problems with controllability. Making things vivid mentally is easy for me, and I did feel it helped calm me down to rehearse the upcoming practice. It allowed me to focus on something actionable, whereas normally as my mind wandered I either went to catastrophe scenarios or had a nagging feeling that “something was wrong”. Using imagery allows me to centre mindfully on more realistic and positive scenarios.

HABIT	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29
FOLLOW SLEEP ROUTINE	X	✓	X	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
MEDITATE	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	X	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
IMAGERY																													X

Figure 8.1. Habit tracker for sleep routine, meditation and imagery.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
SLEEP ROUTINE	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	X	✓	X
MEDITATION	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
IMAGERY	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Figure 8.2. Habit tracker for sleep routine, meditation and imagery.

In his article *Coaching and Visualization (Imagery)*: see the coach you want to be, Wayne Goldsmith (2018) also mentions the dimension of supplanting to an extend real life experience with imagery experience. In a sense, I believe this is also what I am achieving through rehearsing mentally my upcoming practice. Hopefully as my real-life experience grows, I will become more relaxed about my abilities to deliver quality training consistently.

My meditation was affected when I was sick: I was sleeping most of the day and did not meditate during that time. As we heard the first news about Covid-19 I struggled emotionally and all my routines suffered, which is visible in Figure 8.2.

On Tuesday 24 February, I started learning about cues in speed training. I dived first into attentional focus (Winkleman, 2018). A lot of the cues I listed using on Monday 24 were internal with only 3 reported cues being external, but external cues appear to be more efficient than internal ones. Internal cues matter as well but less often. For high intensity activities and due to the limitations of short-memory recall, one or two points of focus are enough when cueing athletes. This is a coaching aspect I feel I had already developed upon, and for sprinting exercises I have been focusing on one element at a time during feedback for a while now.

Winkleman (2018) reports on the characteristics of external focus cues needed in coaching. They are first divided into three components: distance, direction and description. Distance cues can be distal or proximal, with distal being more efficient, except for beginners where proximal cues have greater value, particularly in tasks necessitating accuracy. Direction cues can typically be considered towards or away from a specific object or point in space. The final component is description cue, which can be expressed through action verbs or analogy. It is perhaps the most important component as it defines the spatio-temporal aspects of movement. Both in action verbs and analogies, words have tremendous weight. They can be associated with speed or intensities, and culture, language and generational relevancy play an important role in chosen words being efficient or not with athletes.

Winkleman (2018) pointed the importance of critical position in acceleration: low trunk angle relative to the ground, extended back leg and flexed front leg are desirable. All these elements have been emphasized in our speed practices this season. I also feel we cover all four categories of posture or trunk position, front-side leg action or punch leg, backside leg action or push leg, and arm action, as recommended in the instructional framework for acceleration. Overall it is also of importance to remember that appropriate strength, and leg strength, are necessary conditions to speed, meaning that cues can only go as far as developing coordination to an extend, which will be less interesting if it is strength that the athlete is lacking. As I read this article on Tuesday I then went into the evening practice attempting to use more external cues. For example to cue better use of the arms to a player (skaters tend to swing their arms across their median line when running and skating, especially in sports with sticks like ice hockey), I told her to think she was into a tight tunnel just about the width of her body and had to swing her arms back and forth to avoid hitting them on the wall.

On Monday 9th of March I watched Loren Landow video on Coaching acceleration (2016), which offered very practical example cues to use in acceleration drills. He emphasizes posture and position, with alignment of head, shoulders, hip, knee and ankle for the first

and various limb positions during execution. He showed a few examples of exercises with cues, both internal and external. I particularly enjoyed the analogy of looking over a fence in order to avoid trunk flexion in the lean, as well as the image of punching the knee forward to break through a glass panel when marching. I was able to use both images at the next day's practice and see the light go up in some of the player's eyes.

This weekend I learned about action – observation and its potential usage in the strength and conditioning context (Sakadjian, Panchuk & Pearce 2013). The idea is to involve demonstration, directly or via video throughout the motor skill learning process. This highlights the importance of the coach being to demonstrate movement appropriately, or for them to have disposable quality model in the event that they cannot demonstrate themselves. I have used video references through motor skill learning with athletes, particularly while teaching power cleans. However this article offered a deeper perspective how why the method is effective and how to implement to truly reap its benefits. I was particularly interested in the idea of showing a novice model rather than an expert one, to involve the athlete in a problem solving process of understand how the movement could be performed better. Definitely a concept I will attempt to employ more deliberately in the upcoming season.

3.9 Observation week 9

Daily observations

This week would have marked the start of our training with women after a two weeks break period. Due to the Covid-19 situation, we are now switching to remote training for the time being. The academy's season was abruptly put to a stop as was every other sports and teams whose season were still ongoing. The academy will be on a break for two weeks until they start training remotely.

While planning and adapting for this new situation, we make the assumption that most people can only train at home or outdoors, with a few exceptions who have access to a gym or equipment at home. The practices will focus primarily on basic conditioning and strength endurance, while speed and agility will be trained once a week. Practices will amount to six per week total.

Monday 16 March 2020

Beginning of the day

Objectives:

-Come up with an alternative plan to original trainings

End of the day

We received the information today that the ice rinks would be closing.

We checked up on players individual situations as some of them were still recovering from previous injuries, have pending appointments about current injuries, play other sports outside of ice hockey or have been feeling more tired than expected. The head-coach adapted the training schedule for these specific cases in an effort that everyone would get adequate rest before starting to practice again.

We received the season feedback results from players. The form was built by our mental coach and head-coach with some input from the head of strength and conditioning and I on the questions relevant to physical preparation. Overall, I am not satisfied with the scores we received on the feedback, in the sense that I aspire to do better, but I do agree with them and believe they are an accurate representation of our situation.

Tuesday 17 March 2020

Beginning of the day

Objectives:

-Collect morning weights

End of the day

Today was very light and I only collected morning weight from players via our online platform or by text message and added them to each individual profile.

Wednesday 18 March 2020

Beginning of the day

Objectives:

-Gym pick-up

End of the day

Nothing coaching related today. As the rink is closing, I went to pick up my gear from our gym (balls, ladders etc.) and also borrowed some equipment to help me train at home. We cleaned up our "storage cages" which still had team and a few players' equipment, and finally some players came to pick-up bikes and dumbbells to practice at home.

Thursday 19 March 2020

Beginning of the day

Objectives:

-Speed workout ready

End of the day

Today I wrote the new speed workout. We are focusing on general skill development, and I took a similar approach to the plan we started with last season. The workout is around 60 minutes long and comprises of 10 minutes of coordination, 10 minutes of mobilization and activation, 5 minutes of basic gymnastics, 10 minutes of plyometrics and 25 minutes of speed and agility. The first 30 minutes of the training while being comprised of important individual components also acts as a warm-up in the raise, activate & mobilize, potentiate model (RAMP).

Friday 20 March 2020

Beginning of the day

Objectives:

-Filming and editing speed workout

End of the day

In the morning I went to film the speed practice with my partner. It was stressful to go out to a public turf during this pandemic, as I had to roll around in the synthetic field which I knew had seen hundreds and hundreds of people in the past weeks. We were quite efficient with the filming and it took around an hour with only a few takes having to be taken twice or thrice while most of them were good on the first try. I enjoyed filming and it was nice that my partner helped as he has more extensive running experience than I and was able to demonstrate better form in the sprinting section.

I had shot a few training related videos before but never for a full 60 minutes training. My rushes ended up being quite long and it took around five hours to cut and edit the video in full, plus another hour to upload it in various places so that it would be accessible to players. I thought that it might be annoying for players to have to check both the written training plan and the video and so I ended up adding the text on the video. It wasn't perfect on every section, but I was quite pleased with the end result and managed to keep it under 6 minutes. I even tried to time different songs to each part with varying intensity, and of course did not forget to make fun of myself with some crowd laugh track when I couldn't demonstrate a gymnastic move as well as I would have liked.

This positive experience brought me some relief over the distance training situation: even though it is not as good as in person training, we can still provide quality tools and opportunities to athletes.

Sunday 22 March 2020

Over the weekend in the strength & conditioning chat we started talking about players adherence and understanding of training rationales. Our head-coach shared with us a video of Teemu Silius, former strength & conditioning coach of the women's national team. I really enjoyed the format where he interviewed player Sanni Hakala about speed training (Silius, 2020). This is definitely a great resource to share with players and hopefully especially motivating as it involves women national team staff and players.

I have been thinking about ways to engage players more in their understanding of practices, but they mostly revolved around meeting in person individually and as a team. If we are going to be confined away from team practices for a while, I think I need to draw inspiration from Teemu to develop video and interactive online content for players to discover more about why we train the way we do.

Weekly observations

This week we made the switch from contact to remote training. In his article highlighting the problems and solutions inherent to coaching athletes remotely, Jace Derwin (2016) covers concepts fronting my reflection in these challenging times.

Perhaps the most important aspect of remote coaching is the access and ease of use of the trainings and platform. I find relief in the fact that we have been using an online platform for monitoring and practice sharing for the past three months already, meaning that we do not need to find an emergency solution to sharing training content with athletes, and their familiarity with the tools renders this easy, or at least easier.

The next point is communication, which could prove problematic as we mostly communicate via text. We rely heavily on players being confident enough to contact us directly with any questions or comment on the practices. I will focus my training planning on making each exercise and cue as clear as I can.

Visuals have been a part of our training content since the beginning of our season, but their quality demand is now higher as they will no longer just serve as a reminder of a movement or proper form but will entirely and simply supplant coach and live demonstration.

My only source of concern at this point is feedback, as we have offered the options for players to send us videos or request video calls, but none has done so. Particularly I wonder about how younger or less experienced athletes, as well as players joining our team now without us having assessed them yet, are currently doing form wise. At the same time I feel it is good for players to work independently from us for a few weeks, as it allows them space to self-discover and also to get a break from coaches being behind their back every day, which of course can get exhausting throughout a long season. Perhaps they will come to miss us even! It is possible that in a few weeks we will need to move to livestream or mandatory video feedback in order to keep the motivation high and the link between athletes and coaches strong, as well as ensuring everyone is training safely and efficiently.

Finally, as Derwin points out it is crucial to be adaptable in these times and offer training options that can be adjusted on the spot by the athlete based on what is available to them.

As we made rapid changes to our physical training program, we also discussed the changes in training philosophy in ice hockey which leads the rationale behind our programming choices. In his book *Complete Conditioning for Hockey*, Peter Twist (2007, XV)

already highlighted the differences in training philosophies between previous and modern approaches. Earlier approaches emphasized aerobic conditioning, linear movement speed and hypertrophy, whereas modern methods have placed increased focus on anaerobic fitness, multidirectional agility and speed and variety in the strength approaches including movements and exercises deemed more functional.

Functional training can be defined as free weight exercises, as opposed to using machines, and with feet on the ground. Since it often attempts to elicit stabilization and balance by the athletes, it typically involves a lot of unilateral work, and focus on training movements rather than muscles (Boyle, 2016).

Our general approach for training could be considered to fall within the modern side of physical preparation for ice hockey, and so this remote program is no exception, including both tempo-runs and steady state for endurance development, and primarily functional exercises in both the strength and speed workouts.

This week was an important learning experience in terms of creating video content to support athlete's training, whether it be remote or contact. As seen in figure 10.1 I attempted to give all necessary information on screen to avoid going back and forth between the video and the written plan. In the red banner is the training section, power, as well as the phase of the warm-up (as here warm-up and training content intersect), potentiate. The banners were also all consistent with the color-code I will soon be implementing for warm-ups in an effort to develop athletes understanding and knowledge of their physical preparation rationales. The video includes logistical information on the left, here the number of repetitions, sets and rest time, as well coaching cues on the right. The cue was also emphasized with repetition and exaggeration in the demonstration.



Figure 9.1. Example extract from Nopeus 1 (2020) for Hifk Naiset

The speed and agility section of the training includes backwards reach runs which lead me to seek more information on backward running. We have used backward jogging, backpedaling and backtracking regularly throughout the season as part of warm-up and speed trainings, but I will be honest and say I have not reflected on its use beyond the coordination and transfer to playing skills aspects. Skating backward is very different from running backwards or backtracking yet having the ability to move comfortably and efficiently backward is transferable from being on foot to skating. I wanted to discover more about backward running as a developmental aspect of athleticism, and I was surprised to learn that backward running could also have beneficial effects in injury resistance, muscular function enhancement and even present a metabolic stimulus at a lower volume than forward running would (Uthoff, Oliver, Cronin, Winwood & Harrison, 2019). In the volume we currently use these aspects are not as, if at all relevant, but now I know of more ways to utilize backward running in training.

This past week was very challenging on my habits, as it was as well on my mental health. I was worried about my family in France, about the situation in Finland and about work. As visible in figure 9.2 I only followed the full sleep routine twice this week.

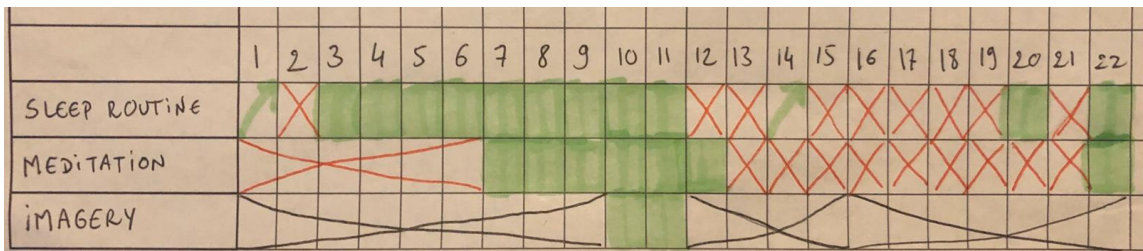


Figure 9.2 Habit tracker for sleep routine, meditation and imagery.

At the end of the week I managed to pull myself back together and hop back on the wagon of meditation and sleep routine. I think it is quite normal for life and habits to change when going through an event such as a pandemic, so I did not worry about letting go of these habits so clearly. I know I will come back to them.

3.10 Observation week 10

Daily observations

Monday 23 March 2020

Beginning of the day

Objectives:

-Online platform check-up

End of the day

Today I dived back into our feedback and questions about the online monitoring platform we use. They are supposed to launch player profiles which hopefully will eventually replace the profiles we are storing in our google drive, but we would like to know when. We also had a few more feedback points and a proposal for a wellness questionnaire. I will dive more into the questionnaire during the weekly observations. I then added new players to the platform and recapped the feedback situation to our strength & conditioning chat. Since we were experiencing a few problems with sharing training via the platform our head-coach made a neat PDF with all the practices plans which we sent to players.

Tuesday 24 March 2020

Beginning of the day

Objectives:

-Online platform administration

-Review and recap academy's season

End of the day

Today I dealt with the platform administration still quite a bit.

Mostly I went over all of training materials and did a big recap of the past season training plans with the academy, so that women's head coach and head of strength and conditioning would be up to speed. I also gave insight on player's current physical abilities and needs. In the upcoming season we will unify the programming for both women and the academy, with more variations made on the individual level based on each athlete's training age and growth.

Wednesday 25 March 2020

Beginning of the day

Objectives:

- Go through warm-up online course
- Create pre-ice warm-up template

End of the day

Our head of strength and conditioning shared warm-up course material with me, so today I focused a lot on learning. It was refreshing to see many new ideas, or new combinations of movements we already use. Overall, the structure and philosophy were closed to RAMP which is what we have been using. I then started to create warm-up templates. My idea is to have an introduction sheet which explains the rationale and how our templates work. Then one sheet for pre-ice warm-up, one for pre-gym/strength, a pre-game one and a test day one. Today I had time to finish the pre-ice one.

Thursday 26 March 2020

Beginning of the day

Objectives:

- Create strength/gym warm-up template
- Add academy players to online platform

End of the day

We encountered further problems with our online platform today which took most of my working hours, and I was not able to prepare the next warm-up template.

I called the head-coach to clarify the situation, then texted individual players for whom we had noticed the problem. I then got in touch with our contact working for the platform to check if it was okay to contact the developer directly. The developer directed me towards their online form, where I sent an explanation of our problems with screenshots of the platform, which I edited first to ensure the problems were easily highlighted. Obviously, this isn't coaching related but still relates to communication. It was interesting to catch myself reflecting immediately on my communication as I was texting and calling people, really attempting to be as efficient as possible for each person, down to the editing of the screenshots in a way that would make the work more efficient.

I did manage to add the academy players to the platform, but a few of them don't have their own email addresses yet so I will have to revisit this task later.

Friday 27 March 2020

Beginning of the day

Objectives:

- Check that women practices are suitable for the academy
- Video meeting about upcoming season programming
- Create strength/gym warm-up template
- Check in with academy's head coach

End of the day

We had a couple hours video meeting to check on our upcoming season plan. It is challenging to make exact plans as we do not know when we might come back to normal training and ice times, as well as when the season will start again compared to previous seasons. Still we were able to exchange and clarify some of our ideas as well as how we want to use the season plan.

I double checked that the current practices for women were suitable for the academy and only had to make changes to two movements where I think they would benefit from a slight regression. I think it is especially important now when they are training autonomously, and we can't monitor their form. It also fit quite well the preliminary plan the academy's head coach had in mind and so transition to joint plans should go smoothly.

I finished the strength template and the rationale page and was able to start the test one.

Sunday 29 March 2020

Beginning of the day

Objectives:

- Meeting about academy
- Update adapted training document

End of the day

We had a meeting with the women and academy head coach to clarify what the training for the academy would look like. Starting from tomorrow they use the same practice plans as women but in a different order. We also added a guided mobility and foam roller day. I updated the training document created for women so that it would have the academy's pictures and that the practices would be in the right order and include the few modifications needed, as well as technical practices for shooting and stick handling as given by women's head-coach.

Weekly observations

This week was dominated by administrative tasks with our online platform. It is particularly important in these times that our online platform run smoothly, and that our communication with the company providing this service be clear and productive. I feel that I am still

slightly too reactive and lose time and energy in handling the issues we are facing with the platform. In the future I will gather all information daily or weekly in one place prior contacting them, to avoid flooding them with many messages throughout one day. Of course it is also their responsibility to have a clear path for costumers to bring up issues, and as they are a relatively new company I think they focus mostly on our satisfaction and being friendly, rather than letting us know what would be most efficient, which they might not even know yet for themselves.

This week I updated our wellness questionnaire idea and shared it with our online platform contact. Currently we track training load daily via the platform's feedback forms attached to each training day, but we feel we lack information which a wellness questionnaire could provide. Monitoring each athlete individually for recovery is quite straining and I usually limit it to athletes who show abnormal patterns in their feedback in term of RPE or mood. A weekly or bi-weekly questionnaire given to athletes on Friday (day before games) and Monday (day after games) would help us greatly to monitor their recovery and potentially even spot problems early on, especially when it comes to overtraining risks.

I wanted the questionnaire to stay as simple and short as possible while including important markers that we could either act upon or would be useful information to engage conversation with athletes and understand their individual situations. Using John Abreu article for monitoring on a budget as a base, I included sleep duration and quality, nutrition amount and quality, soreness, mood, stress, and an open comment section (Abreu, 2014).

To the above components our head-coach wanted us to screen for more specific markers of possible overtraining and so I added a question about perceived performance and recovery levels. Using the Flowchart of Diagnosis of the overtraining syndrome (OTS) in athletes as per the Joint consensus statement of the European College of Sport Science (ECSS) and the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) on preventing, diagnosing and treating overtraining syndrome, I tried to extract the minimum yet non-negotiable markers of overtraining (2013).

Below, the exact proposal sent to the online platform:

Wellness questionnaire idea:

I am performing at my normal level (reflecting on last 2-3 days): yes/no

I feel recovered: yes/no

Sleep duration 1-5 (for example 1: less than four hours, 5: eight hours or more)

Sleep quality 1-5 (1: very restless/poor, 5: very restful/excellent)

Nutrition amount 1-5 (1: always hungry, 5: very satisfied)

- Nutrition quality 1-5 (1: poor, 5: high)
- Soreness 1-5 (1: very sore, 5: not sore at all)
- Mood 1-5 (1: very irritable, 5: very positive)
- Stress 1-5 (1: stressed out, 5: relaxed)
- Open comment section (injury, sickness, other source of stress, ideas etc.)

Having the perceived performance and recovery questions on the yes and no basis could be quite efficient but the lack of nuance could also create problems. Overall, I would need to spend further time studying the topic, as well as for example psychometric tools such as the Recovery-Stress Questionnaire for Athletes (RESTQ-Sport) developed by Kellman and Kallus (2016), to make more educated and definite decisions on this topic. As I can only suggest the addition of the wellness questionnaire and its components to the company we work with, it is ultimately in their production team's hands to dig deeper into the topic on which elements to include or not.

For the warm-up template I went with a Raise, Activate, Mobilize and Potentiate (RAMP) protocol as developed and popularized by Ian Jeffrey (2019). I have been using this model since I first studied it in our university courses, but only recently and with the help of Jeffrey's book did I start tapping on the long-term potential of structurally plan and develop athletes progress in term of specific movements and athleticism.

In figure 10 below, both meditation and sleep routine are in stark contrast with the previous week. I did not pursue my imagery routine as I am currently working from home.

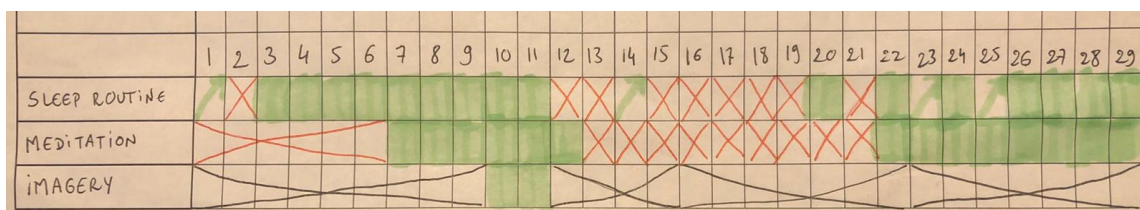


Figure 10. Habit tracker for sleep routine, meditation and imagery.

As I expected last weekend, I got back on track with the routine without problem. It was perhaps even easier to stick to the sleep routine now that I am not at the rink late in the evening. Finding my way back to the routines really helped my mood and anxiety after a difficult week earlier.

4 Discussion and conclusions

The twelve weeks of observation have passed, and it is now time for this journey to end and for me to reflect on and analyse my progression. When comparing my current self to the person described in the evaluation and development sections of this thesis, I still consider myself a beginner, as 12 weeks of work cannot make such a noticeable difference, but I believe many blocks of 12 weeks eventually will, and so the highest value of this work for me lies in the consistency of daily and weekly, organised, efforts to better myself. Echoing to the possible benchmarks for success as a strength and conditioning in our setting, the team lost in quarterfinal and landed 7th out of 10 teams, meaning we did not achieve our goals. The team stayed relatively healthy and I executed my task as a coach without problems. The team's performance was remarked publicly on numerous occasions, and even though we aimed higher, the players did make a significant mark and entrance into the league.

It is challenging to quantify my progress in these 12 weeks without a specific way of measuring either my communication or stress, as well as athletes' perception of either. I would have liked to run a before and after form with players, but as I started this project in the second part of our first season in Liiga, I did not want to distract or overwhelm the athletes who already have a lot going on in their athletic lives. I am not sure whether my communication or stress management actually improved, but my professional and personal development methodology certainly did, and to a great extent.

Specifically, on the communication objective of this report I learned a great deal about myself as a person and coach. Knowing my strengths and weakness as a communicator is an important first step to create progress on this front. I was able to learn about each athlete individually throughout the season, and while I did not make any big break through on this front during the past 12 weeks, I was able to develop tools which will help me learn more about individuals in the near future and use that knowledge more effectively than before. The staff has been using the players profiles successfully so far and seem to appreciate this tool. The third focus of the communication development was context, and as it had direct practical applications it was perhaps the most enjoyable for me. It was easy to see immediately what I was doing wrong when cueing athletes and how I could improve. As practice plans developed throughout this process, athletes came up with less and less feedback or questions about the how to and what of the practices, which showed they understood the drills better thanks to more efficient delivery. Unfortunately, I was not able to finish my intensive Finnish class as days became increasingly busy, but I did learn a lot and found motivation to continue studying as soon as possible. My understanding of Finnish in particular has grown a lot this season.

In the stress management area, results are perhaps less quantifiable, but the sense of responsibility and regained power found in routine was helpful. Knowing I was doing my best daily on this front helped me build confidence in my ability to weather stress over time. Imagery was the easiest aspect to implement and I was sad not to be able to use it more than a few times throughout this report, but I am sure I will be bringing this habit forward with me once we get back to contact work and commuting. Meditation proved to be a bigger challenge than I imagined, and the sleep routine demanded a lot of control while showing little results, mostly due to the noise problems in my building preventing me from sleeping anyway. I believe there is value in being extremely disciplined about a habit and attempting to make it daily. It is also appealing: who does not want to be the person who meditates every day and always is in bed by ten? But it is perhaps of greater importance that the habit fits in well within one's lifestyle and brings value more than it demands. Realism and sustainability matter when it comes to making long term changes. I believe I would benefit more from trying to meditate three to five times a week rather than daily, but for the sleep routine I will keep on trying and find solutions to deal with the noise. Another possible future path to take with meditation is to try and take the "packs" available in the meditation app I use, which are usually ten days, daily, and then take a few days or a week of "de-load" before starting a new pack.

As much as I would have wished for this work to have been smooth sailing, it did not in fact go as planned. I had to let go of my expectations and remind myself that mistakes and unexpected turns generate learning and progress. It was challenging to expose myself through this format of a diary, especially as I felt the stress management area of development was quite personal, but it was important for me to be authentic and truly attempt to target my weaknesses. Analysing my work daily and weekly was time demanding but incredibly valuable. It put things in perspective by truly showing whether tasks and objectives had been accomplished or not. Reflecting day by day and week by week on my work and interactions helped me put things in perspective and find more actionable aspects to both my communication and stress management, it gave me a greater sense of control over both. Things did not go perfectly for either topic, but I was consistently being proactive in analysing and bettering myself. In fact, I did not approach this diary with a particularly goal-oriented mindset, and instead often felt I was running through a never-ending to-do list of tasks or situations arising while time was flying me by. This is the reality of the job naturally, but I believe bringing a higher level of structure to my projects and to-do lists will eventually allow me to set clearer weekly, bi-weekly or monthly goals to continue develop. Reading research can be very time-consuming, but it will be important to consistently continue to make time for it going forward. Completing this work was of

course as well a first lesson into academic research and writing, despite the diary thesis format being more flexible than a more traditional research or product thesis.

At this point in time, I believe no one will demand much from a strength and conditioning coach in women's ice hockey in Finland. Women's hockey situation has evolved over the years and continues to develop at a rapid and encouraging pace throughout the world, but it will take a long time until physical coaches across teams provide similarly competitive services. One has to be intrinsically driven and motivated in this field and must take their development in their own hands. If we drive ourselves competitively professionally and personally, we will be able to better contribute to positive changes in our side of the sport.

Luckily, one of the great privileges of being a coach is that in our field, continuous education and lifelong self-development are common expectations! Parallel to this anticipation, the number of resources currently available to coaches in their quest of betterment is so impressive, it might be impossible to go through it all in an entire lifetime. Strength and conditioning also is an intersectional field of work, invoking all four major branches of science, mathematics and logic, biological, physical and social sciences, as well as pedagogy, philosophy and psychology. It truly is an exciting and never-ending playground of development!

Ultimately writing this diary only made my curiosity grow stronger, and it constitutes the first concrete steps in achieving my professional goals. My next step is to prepare for and pass the NSCA CSCS test within the next three to six months, and ultimately, I wish to complete all Finnish courses available in my city from A1.3 to B2.2 which could take minimum a year. On the stress management side, I will continue to develop my routine and will seek professional support through therapy. I have started writing and speaking more Finnish via our team chat during this time in distance training, and as we will return to contact training my objective will be to deliver key information in Finnish as well as English. Information such as the number of sets, number of players per groups and so on repeats itself very similarly every day and so I could prepare it in advance and read it from my phone or notebook until it would become more natural and solely spoken.

This process was incredibly valuable to me in exposing both strength and weaknesses in my coaching and learning. It allowed to explore a variety of concrete tools based on available research and literature and kept me honest about my progression in and out of work. Going forward in my professional life I will be able to carry many of the habits created and lessons learned throughout the writing of this report, which will surely contribute to my development as a coach and allow me to give my very best to the athletes I work with.

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