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CHAPTER SEVEN

FILTERING AND FINDING A NEW WAY: A CREATIVE NON-FICTION OF SOCCER COACHES' PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

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Submitted: 31st July 2020

Introduction

Sport settings are often seen as an arena for athletes' learning, development and performance, yet those who coach also have their own equally important and impactful professional learning trajectory. This chapter illustrates how sport coaches learn to coach through idiosyncratic combinations of situations and opportunities ranging in formality, addressing a need for a more nuanced evidence base and a learning theory specific to coaching (Cushion & Nelson, 2013). It is based on the published research 'What works in coach learning, how and for whom? A grounded process of soccer coaches' professional learning' (Stodter & Cushion, 2017). This work investigated the learning of 25 youth soccer coaches in the United Kingdom (UK) using a combination of multiple semi-structured interviews, practice-linked video stimulated recall interviews, and formal coach education course observations over the course of one competitive season. The resulting data were used to produce a substantive grounded theory explaining the 'filter process' whereby individuals adopted, adapted and rejected elements of their learning experiences. Coaches filtered ideas through a 'double-loop' at individual and contextual levels, and tried things out through practically-focused cyclical 'reflective conversations'. This process explains how individual coaches learnt different things from apparently similar situations, due to actively filtering ideas to fit in with their individual biography and coaching context. Evidencing and understanding these processes can inform more effective professional development for sport coaches.

The purpose of this story is to extend and authentically communicate a theoretical explanation of how coaches learn, grounded in empirical data. Aspects of the grounded process, presented in story form here, are not intended to present one universal 'truth' of how all coaches learn. While the work captures patterns of coaches' changing knowledge, understanding and practice that are common enough to extract and present together, as Eraut (2000, p. 133) points out, "tidy maps of knowledge and learning are usually deceptive". A more nuanced yet

accessible way of depicting the findings that acknowledges the idiosyncrasies vital to coaches' individualised learning can be beneficial. Extending the 'scenario' style adopted by Armour (2010) in her chapter on 'the learning coach', a composite case study was constructed to illustrate these patterns of learning (see also Callary, Werthner & Trudel, 2012; Cassidy, Jones & Potrac, 2009). The story aims to encourage readers, particularly those working within sport coaching and the development of coaches, to reflect upon and consider their own biographies and contexts and how these might influence their professional learning. As such, it concludes with five reflective questions that you may wish to consider. Generally, though, it is hoped that readers will be able to find resonance with events they have observed or heard about, recognising similarities and perhaps differences to their own experiences (Smith, 2017).

This research originated from the viewpoint that there is one reality that we can only ever partially approximate and understand (a realist ontology), and that there are multiple interpretations of that reality (an interpretivist epistemology). Representing post-positivist-informed, substantive grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) research findings as creative non-fiction (c.f. Kendellen & Camire, 2020) sparked worthwhile considerations about the philosophical coherence and compatibility of these different approaches. Hopefully by reflexively attending to epistemology, theory and methodology (Smith, McGannon & Williams, 2016), here readers will be allowed to draw their own informed conclusions.

For this creative nonfiction I, the researcher, am positioned as a storyteller, recasting the results of my analysis to produce a story. The central aspects of the grounded process therefore acted as a guide for the content and particular issues I chose to address in the tale. While the story was written by me as an interpretation and representation of the learning process based on research evidence, every piece of writing can be seen as a construction of the author (Ely, Vinz, Anzul & Downing, 1997). Similarly to how I constructed the original grounded theory, I drew upon my own background in coaching (soccer and rugby union) and having

undertaken formal and informal coach education, which no doubt framed my experiences of conducting the research within soccer clubs and at the courses. The scenes are chronologically ordered, highlighting particular findings that summarise the analytic theme of how coaches' learning happens. I developed this narrative based on observational and practice-linked video stimulated recall interview data (see also Stodter & Cushion, 2019) collected in youth soccer coaching and formal coach education settings. Each scenario therefore includes direct and adapted quotations from the participants and excerpts from observational field notes. Sport coaching, and coaches' learning, takes place in contexts influenced by multiple interacting social, political, historical, cultural and gendered forces (Lewis, Roberts, Andrews & Sawiuk, 2020). It is worth noting therefore that I chose to represent the main character as a man in his mid-twenties, guided by the typical gender and age characteristics of the participant sample, the data that I drew upon, and the makeup of the qualified coaching workforce in the UK (UK Coaching, 2019). The result is a constructed representation of the process of coaches' learning.

A season at Vale FC: filtering and finding a new way

The Course

Freddie watches another pristine grey tracksuit-clad football coach enter the meeting room, scanning the setup of six hexagonal tables for allies and a prime position. He sees the spark of recognition and customary jovial yet firm handshake ensue, accompanied by a solid pat above the elbow – *they must already know each other*. Yet the various club badges in pride of place on tracksuits and kitbags confirms that all the 'candidates' in the room, from grassroots to academy settings, have travelled from all around the country to be here. At another of the tables, a couple of other coaches to-and-fro with stilted small-talk from their seats, reminding Freddie of his first few days at uni a few years ago. Back then, just like last night, he had followed the same ritual: seek out his most recently washed t-shirt and training bottoms (with the Vale FC

badge showing alongside his freshly-printed initials 'FL'), fold them up in a pile ready to pull on, save time before the early morning three-hour drive.

I look the part, like I belong here, he had thought as he caught sight of his reflection approaching the building's lofty glass-fronted reception area. *Remember to contribute, make the most of the opportunity, but keep your head down - don't put yourself out there as a target, especially right from day one.*

A familiar deep red Vale FC training top catches Freddie's attention and he clocks Steve, his club colleague and coach of the under-15s, brusquely enter and take a seat near the door. Their eyes align briefly with a nod, across the piles of flipchart paper and glossy candidate portfolios adorned with sunny action shots of children playing football. Freddie feels some relief as he thinks, *At least I kind of know someone here so I look connected, and like I'm a decent enough coach to be part of this.*

As the minute hand on the clock above the projector screen approaches vertical, the seat next to Freddie is dragged back and a young woman drops swiftly into it. Hurriedly tucking in at the table, she glances up and around the unfamiliar gazes of the group.

"Morning," she says.

"Hi, I'm Freddie."

"Jill." she replies. "Just in time, eh! What's that you've got there?" she nods at Freddie's portfolio, and the laminated card resting on it.

"Ah yeah, an 'arrival activity', it says." Freddie explains, picking it up to wave in Jill's direction. "We have to write on the post-it notes some stuff about what we want to get from the course."

Jill half-smiles with amusement and rises awkwardly to reach for the pile of pale yellow sticky squares at the centre of the table. Before they can do the customary rounds with the rest of the group, the tutor moves out smoothly from behind his laptop set up with PowerPoint slides at the front of the room, hushing the buzz of conversation with a sharp whistle through his teeth.

“Welcome gentlemen...oh, and lady!” he announces, spotting Jill. “As it says up there, I’m Paul Mills – or Millsy if you like, the lead tutor for this first weekend of learning. As you’ll know, this is the start of two intense periods, framing a month back at your clubs. It’s designed to challenge you, make you think a little, and have a go at some of the latest ideas in developing young footballers.”

As Paul continues his introduction, reading out the ‘learning outcome’ slides, Freddie scribbles down some hopes and expectations with a branded pen. *Check and challenge to make sure I’m doing the right things for my players. Prove my worth as a coach. A boost.*

The Practical

“Right then fellas.” Paul barks to the collection of coaches now dispersed alongside the neat grass football pitch, his tone cutting across the warm, blustery afternoon air. “As we introduced back in the classroom, this session is going to showcase how we might apply those principles, with a focus on hitting the highest man fastest. We’ll be looking at transition of possession and zipping those passes up to our centre forward or our wingers, and playing from there.” He sweeps his hand from left to right, thumb and index finger pressed together, indicating the smooth, speedy movements required. Then gesturing to the small magnetic whiteboard propped against his shin, showing a diagram of the pitch with counters set out in team formation, he continues. “I’ll be using a realistic game-based practice and chucking in some challenges and supporting questions to recreate those learning situations. So, to start with I need seven in the

red bibs, and another seven in blue here. Oh look at this, Jill's stepping up in midfield, that's what we like to see!"

All eyes promptly shift towards Jill, who now wears a forced smile with the man-sized bib billowing and flapping around her body at each gust of wind.

"Reds shooting this way, blues defending here." Paul continues, pointing to either side of the pitch. "Normal rules, just the same as any match with offsides from half way."

The fourteen volunteers jog at pace into the playing area, some flicking their heels up, side-skipping; assorted dynamic stretches easing long-dormant muscles and joints into action. For the next couple of minutes, the onlooking candidates shuffle in small groups, finding a good vantage point on the small grassy wall alongside the pitch, while silently judging the rusty skills on show.

"Blues, who's your 'keeper?'" Paul shouts as he prepares to roll a shiny Umbro football along the grass to begin the game. "Yes Gary, let's play out from you then..."

Seamlessly moving through the linked 'bite size' phases of his session, Paul shapes his tongue against the roof of his mouth and emits a precise, looping whistle across the playing area. "Alright, bring it in then".

As the playing volunteers huff and puff their way towards Paul, the remaining candidates join up in one large group for his debrief. Freddie is one of the first to arrive, his mind as busy as the page of notes and diagrams he's attempted to scrawl down in his pocket-sized notebook while standing on the wall. *Positive interventions. Challenges for individual players. Game realistic. But how to filter through and make sense of all these new ideas?*

“So that was a demonstration right there of how you can do all your coaching *within* the game.” Paul declares, then posits, “Can we make all of our practices game related? You might think all your practices are already, but how many of you would use more than two goals in your sessions? How many goals do you have in a game of football?” he scans the group, pausing for effect.

One or two people shuffle uncomfortably, no one willing to answer for fear of being publicly caught out.

“Easy question, isn’t it?” he responds to his own probe. “*Two*. So if you’ve got four goals in your session, it’s not game related. Get rid of it.”

Scattering off into murmuring fragments of unsettled coaches, the cohort collect the debris of notebooks and water bottles and begin trudging up the gravel path back to the meeting room. Freddie finds Jill crouched by the wall, swapping her well-used football boots for flip-flops.

“How was that then, nice to get a run around?” he asks.

“Yeah, not bad once those old boys started passing it to me.” she counters with a wry smile.

“Fair play. Some of those ideas though, that came across in Millsy’s coaching points, they really chime with what I’ve always thought are the big issues within youth football.”

“Yeah? What’s that then?” Jill bundles up her boots and plods uphill with Freddie in tow.

“Well, we did a full debate assignment about it in my final year coaching class at uni. Why don’t we have any decent young English players coming through? They really need to be playing the game more, like the kids used to in the streets, that’s why. Work things out for themselves, make mistakes, let the game be the teacher.”

Jill mulls over the debrief as they catch up with Steve, trailing the rest of the group, shoulders characteristically hunched under the bag of footballs he offered to carry back in.

Freddie continues, nodding towards Steve to include him in the musings. "To be honest, I'm keen to try out something like that 'showcase' session back with the lads at Vale - I can really see it going down a storm and working with them."

"You know when he said it's got to be realistic to the game though," Jill reasons. "I get that and you know I'm fine with that but it's like those extra side goals, that practice works for me and my players – whenever I've done that, it gets them opening their body up, dragging the ball back playing out and then switch the play from one flank to the other, you know?"

"I see what you're saying," Steve contributes with a full-body shrug and a sharp inhalation, eyes focused ahead with his task of lugging the kit inside. "But you know, to pass these modules and assessments you have to do it their way, your freedom has to go out of the window, but it's just for this course. Then you take what you want, the stuff that fits, take that back to your club, use the bits you want there, yeah?"

Vale FC, the U13s

Freddie crouches down, framing the whiteboard with his squat. The players are sprawled around in a crescent-shaped gathering around him, some standing hands on hips, others resting on the damp artificial turf, propped up with their hands behind their backs. Steam rises gently from their heads, visible in the floodlit October evening. Blushed cheeks and passive early-teenage expressions are accompanied by films of sweat forming on foreheads, generated by the warm-up 'stick-in-the-mud' game they've just finished. At this relatively early stage of the season, Freddie is still getting to know the boys, the set up at Vale, everything.

“Okay lads.” Freddie begins, scanning his eyes around theirs. Beyond, through the steam-created haze, he registers Steve shouting his players into a managerial huddle on his half of the training pitch.

“To get you started tonight, we’ll be doing a quick exercise looking at passing, and the different types of passes we can use. Then we’ll be putting that into a game focused on this block’s topic, switching play. So, anyone get me started with some ideas of what kinds of passes we might look to use in a game?” he glances down at the A3-sized whiteboard and grabs the lid from the marker pen, poised to scribe. Then, scanning the generally blank expressions mixed with bemused intrigue, to Freddie’s relief, a recently-broken voice pipes up with a suggestion.

“Driven.”

Now buoyed with more confidence to speak, ideas begin to be shared aloud.

“Floated, like, just clip it”

“Zipped along the ground.”

Freddie probes, “Okay, long or short?”

“Umm, could be either.” the player shrugs.

“Yes.” Freddie jots ‘long/short’ on the whiteboard as best he can at pace, conscious not to disrupt the momentum of player input.

“A lofted pass.”

“Yep, brilliant, any more for any more?”

A pause hangs above the group like the steam still rising from their heads. “A diagonal cross?”

“Yes, I like your thinking, we’re starting to think about the areas of the pitch too now. I think that’s plenty to go with, so now find yourself a partner, and go show me. You’ve got the whole area, just go and express yourselves, give them a go, what can you do? Show me.” Freddie stands up tall, pleased with the short explanation time – *must be less than two minutes. Keep them moving, keep them thinking, exploring.* He’s eager with anticipation to see what his players come up with.

Before long, there are footballs flying in multiple directions, boys trotting around within the white-lined space, heads popping up to locate their mate, slender still-growing limbs seeking to strike and control skidding balls. There’s no pattern or rhythm as he takes a central line of travel through the area, aware of potential head-height football-missiles in the disorienting 360 degree disarray. He’s simultaneously conscious, in his peripheral vision, of a handful of players’ parents behind the 10 foot high fence that borders the pitch, quietly peering through the criss-crossed wire, cold hands stuffed into jeans or coat pockets. He imagines the murmurs between the Dads as they silently compare their sons’ abilities, eyebrows raised at the chaotic passing practice.

“What’s this guy all about, does he even know what he’s doing?”

“Not like any football training in my day.”

“They’re just running around all over the place - he needs to get them better at fronting up, defending with a bit of passion, closing out these tight games like United, you know.”

As he observes a wayward driven pass skid towards the boundary fence, Freddie senses the parents’ attention shift towards the open gate by the half-way line.

“That’s okay Carlo, what could you do differently? Have another go?” he questions, as he turns to see Don emerge from the clubhouse. *I swear the last time I saw Don he was half that size, and still he was always man of substantial proportions.*

Don’s got his big quilted academy manager’s coat on to guard against the autumn chill. It’s visibly taut across the midriff he had developed since retiring from playing professionally for Vale in the 90s, while simultaneously adding another dimension to his broad, stalwart centre-back defender’s shoulders. Don strolls statesman-like through the gate and along the half-way line, taking in the sessions either side. Reaching the centre circle, he subtly lifts his chin towards Freddie, indicating for him to come over to join him. *He wants a word.*

“Jayden, get your head over that ball.” Don instructs one of the players as Freddie picks the quickest route towards him through the untidy tangle of teenage boys and footballs.

“Alright, boss?” Freddie approaches with a nod and a chipper tone. But Don doesn’t reply, silently frowning across his empire enclosed within the artificial pitch, salt-and-pepper stubbled jaw clamped shut.

“You doing a game with the lads after this?” he asks, eyes still trained on Jayden’s movements, inspecting for the required improvements.

“Yes, I’ve got a whole-part-whole after this, exploring how we switch the play.”

Don nods. “No need for the second bit then, I’ll take the lads after your first game and join ‘em up with Steve and his lot over there. They need a proper blow out after Saturday and this session ain’t it. You can take the injured group and go through what went wrong on the weekend for their feedback portfolios, club room’s free if you want it. Probably be about half past, that alright?”

Head falling to glance down at his watch timer, Freddie nods almost imperceptibly at the rhetorical question. "Sure, I'll have them ready for you then." he responds in a low voice, directed more towards the steadily counting digital display on his wrist than to Don.

Freddie's legs feel like they're rooting him to the spot, now weighed down with Don's judgement. *This new way isn't Don's way of doing things, and he's just made it clear who's in charge here by taking the boys off me for drills and sprints.* Feeling almost comically like a new-born elephant, Freddie is unbalanced by the unplanned changes and galumphs around his thoughts to conceive of the resulting adaptations. *This wasn't the way I wanted to try out all my new ideas on challenges from the course...now I'll have to cram them all in to the first game without testing for players' understanding in the later 'whole'.* His session, which previously felt inventive and constructive, now looks muddled and broken. *Now the players are losing interest, taking the piss with ridiculous attempts at trick techniques. This wouldn't have happened if I'd just stuck the club curriculum,* Freddie thinks, as Don continues his appraising lap, turning his gaze to Steve's well-drilled group of under-15s on the other half of the pitch. They're like a bunch of moving display dummies for that recognisable, logical formula of building from the warm-up into rote-learned technical drills, a well-oiled skills practice then precise conditioned game to finish.

Better try and salvage this and get the players into a game pronto – Freddie rummages in his tracksuit pocket to grab a seldom-used whistle, using it to summon them in towards him. As his group assemble, he thinks, *At least I can still try out a couple of the individual challenges I've planned, see if the boys apply any of these passing techniques to the game situation. It's all I can do now Don's bound to hang around watching my every move for the rest of the session.*

The Drive Home

“You’ve just got to let Don be Don,” Steve reassures Freddie, pulling his delivery van out of the club car park on the way home, “remember he’s a product of the club since the glory days and all this new-fangled stuff isn’t really his bag. Too much, too soon.”

Freddie slumps down in the passenger seat, willing the regular Tuesday lift to run past his flat as soon as possible. He reflects with a sigh, “I dunno, I had all those new things I wanted to practice for the course assessment, all stuff that really made sense to me, and now I just feel a bit flat from that tonight.” Both hands open on his lap, like an old set of scales, he deliberates, “I’m kinda caught now between, do I keep trying to do it that way, or do it the old way? I’m coming away thinking, well you know, what exactly are they all looking for?”

Steve shrugs his already quite hunched shoulders, shuffling to an altered driving position as Freddie slips his phone out of the club branded rucksack at his feet. Brooding, he catches up on what he’s missed over the last two hours of coaching. Skipping over the various notifications on the player analysis app – he’ll look at those later - there’s a text message from Jill. They’d stayed in touch after the first weekend of the course as she’s coaching the girls’ development centre not too far away, in the same county. They were swapping notes and session plans from the course and Freddie told her earlier that he planned to do his practice session for the assessment tonight.

“How was your session?” She had texted.

“Bombed.” Freddie wrote back. “Boss took over in front of all the parents, nightmare!”

Jill must have been waiting on the other end of the phone as the ellipsis symbols come up right away to show she’s typing her response. “Ah, sorry mate. I’m struggling with it too, they just leave you to get on with it & no follow up. Tbh I’m just sticking to what I know at this point.”

Freddie ponders this, sitting up to peer out at the blur of passing headlights and their mirror images on the wet road ahead. He reads it back to Steve. "What do you think? Seems a bit closed-minded to me. What's the point in going on the course if you're not open to different ideas? I guess she hasn't got anyone else there to help her out. I wonder if I can just adapt some bits to fit in with Don's preferences, you know, not go too crazy."

"Yeah, well it probably doesn't hurt just to get the qualification done, tick that box. But that's not a bad shout, to tweak a few little things." Steve says, concentrating on dodging parked cars along the too-narrow, former mining town streets. "Personally, it's reinforced a lot of the good things I already do and I've just added the bits about the focus on the individual player, I quite liked that. Fits quite well with how I've seen my two daughters growing up, developing in those ways that are different from each other. They each needed different things, you know? Anyway, we've got our club curriculum and you've got all the stuff you've done before, so you've just got to find that balance of what works for you and for your lads. Evolve. And try not to piss Don off too much as you won't have a job by the end of the season!"

(Six months later)

Vale FC, the U11s

"Okay, good work boys. Last thing now, over to Freddie for a game." Steve directs the Under 11s, who have just completed a skill session on first-touch finishing under his instruction.

Now co-coaches of this younger age group, the two men have settled into a co-operative rhythm, a silently agreed way of working together that somehow balances their often contrasting approaches. The players jog light-footed towards Freddie, their shadows long in the

April evening sunlight. A handful of them laugh with each other over a surprise 'nutmeg' trick they'd managed to catch Steve out with during the practice.

"He'd never have let you get away with that at the start of the season, it's just 'cos we've only got one more session left now!"

"Nah, both of 'em are just in a good mood 'cos we're on shooting and finishing tonight, everyone knows that's a fun one."

"He won't be putting you up front for the last game of the season now you made him look daft!"

"Take a quick drink, boys, 30 seconds." Freddie instructs as they reach him, calm and authoritative. "While you're over there, give yourself a personal rating out of 10 on your finishing so far. No need to share it, but we'll be looking to see you improve that rating in the game so think about how you might do that based on Steve's part you've just done. Off you go."

As the players trot in scattered groups over to the sideline in search of their personally labelled water bottles, Freddie chats to Steve, synchronously stretching down every so often to reach the cones, clearing the playing area for the game.

"Almost there, Steve, one more session to go, eh." He says, returning upright to full stature.

"Yeah mate, I'm ready for the season to end now. Then we go all over again, probably with a new set of lads and coaching team again!" Steve replies with a sagacious smile, reminiscent of the hardiest of season-ticket holders debating the annual comings and goings in the Vale supporter's bar.

"And here was me just getting settled in with you!" Freddie quips as the players begin to gather, eyes up awaiting his instructions. "Alright, just while Steve hands out the bibs, remind yourself

about how you're going to increase that rating you gave your own finishing. Now, nothing too complicated here, just a small sided game and then once we get going I'll be dipping in and out, setting you some challenges, asking some questions, and we'll see how we go. Wide pitch, nice and short to let you get those shots off, let's set up and get ourselves going from a reds kick-off."

Steve leaves them to it as Freddie scans the unfolding game in front of him, observing team shapes and combinations, mentally noting the key points for particular individuals. *Watch out for Mo pulling that turn he does on his left foot. Ah, there's a frustrated Liam smashing the ball wildly towards the goal again.* Earlier in the season he'd have stepped in already to ask a load of questions, maybe forcing it a bit, maybe unintentionally de-railing the session. But now he's got to know the lads, how they play, and the environment at Vale. *Maybe I haven't learned much new, just those experiences of the stuff from the course last summer basically going wrong, or more accurately not quite right, It's allowed me to re-evaluate and tweak little things each time. It's easier to experiment now Don's paired me off with Steve, and he's not breathing down my neck!* He manages to take Liam aside on his way to fetch another missed shot, the ball fizzing past the crossbar and over the boundary fence.

"Do you need to smash it like that each time?" Freddie prompts, without pressing for an answer.

Liam gives an acquiescent nod, "Yeah, no, I know", as he lopes off to retrieve the ball.

"Liam's like my twin brother, he is," says Steve, joining Freddie behind the goal, "sulks a bit if you get on his back, doesn't like being wrong, certainly not in front of the others."

"Yeah, his understanding is already there, so just a probing question for him." Freddie responds while contemplating his next intervention.

I'll set both teams a challenge to 'try to play off one touch to set up attacks' – though I know they're not actually going to be able to do it every time and I wouldn't want them to do that either. The challenge gives each player the opportunity to make decisions themselves, based on what I've already said earlier in the session.

After Freddie sets the challenge and lets the players try it out for a few minutes, Steve jumps in with some supporting questions to try and draw out the coaching points from his earlier skills practice. Five minutes on, though, Mo's still doing that multi-touch turn in loads of space on the left. Freddie reasons, *it's slowing down his team's attack every time, so I'll pull him aside.*

“Mo, remember the challenge I set - next time that happens, move yourself early so you're already turned to play with just one touch on the ball. It's much quicker so it means you can get that ball up to the forwards in lots more space.”

“Okay, I'll try that.”

Sure enough, by the closing stages of the session, Freddie's done enough to step back and enjoy a satisfied assessment of the outcomes with Steve. They stand in a slowly shrinking final patch of sunlight near the fence, hands clasped behind backs.

“Liam's looking like he's getting into some nifty little areas now, he clearly gets it.” says Steve.

“Yeah, he's a good lad when he just keeps it calm.” Freddie replies. “I'm still trying to decide whether the more game-based coaching works as well for him right now as it does for a few of the others. There's a few things I'd still like to explore further and try out there. With this approach though, that whole attacking shape should work well on Saturday, if they bring it on the day they'll have come on a load even just in the past three weeks. And I'll get you a beer to celebrate!”

“Makes a change, you getting a round in, I’ll hold you to that.” Steve smiles back, as Mo sets up a slick final pass into the penalty area, connecting with a well-timed centre-forward run tipping the ball smartly into the bottom corner of the goal. Freddie blows an over-exaggerated final whistle for effect – *that’s good, for now*.

Reflective questions

- Freddie, Steve and Jill all attend the same formal learning situation (the course), but they each learn different things. Why?
- Consider your own biography – the network of past experiences, knowledge, beliefs and dispositions you bring to every learning situation. How does this influence your reading and interpretation of the story?
- How do different aspects of the story resonate with your own experiences of learning within your profession?
- Based on your reading of the story, try to come up with a set of principles important for coaches’ learning. Now compare these with the grounded process in the original paper (Stodter & Cushion, 2017) – what are the similarities or differences?
- How could the coach education course be designed differently to more effectively impact on the coaches’ learning?

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