



# “An important cog in the wheel”, but not the driver: Coaches’ perceptions of their role in doping prevention

Laurie B. Patterson\*, Susan H. Backhouse

Institute for Sport, Physical Activity and Leisure, Leeds Beckett University, Fairfax Hall, Headingley Campus, Leeds, LS6 3QS, United Kingdom

## ARTICLE INFO

### Keywords:

Anti-doping  
Coaching  
Drugs  
Education  
Policy  
Practice

## ABSTRACT

**Objectives:** Under the World Anti-Doping Code coaches have designated anti-doping roles and responsibilities. Yet, their experiences, opinions and behaviours in relation to these expectations are poorly understood. This study responds directly to this absence of evidence in order to move the field forward.

**Design:** A qualitative thematic analysis approach.

**Method:** Twelve football and rugby league coaches, working in a performance development context, took part in semi-structured interviews to explore their (anti-)doping experiences, opinions and behaviours. Nine coaches participated in follow-up interviews where particular attention was paid to existing anti-doping policy directives. All interviews were analysed using inductive thematic analysis.

**Results:** Coaches were supportive of anti-doping efforts and exerted their influence by monitoring, giving advice and creating the ‘right’ culture. Performance prioritisation rendered coaches reluctant to engage proactively in addressing anti-doping in their practice; a situation exacerbated by a lack of self-efficacy to advise/act in accordance with the rules. Consequently, coaches tended to rely on others (both internally and externally to their club) to provide anti-doping support, and anti-doping is deemed unnecessary/irrelevant. Critically, coaches’ current behaviours were not driven by policy, as they were unaware of expectations and consequences outlined in the Code.

**Conclusions:** Coaches are willing to support anti-doping efforts, but are generally passive in their everyday practice. The gulf between anti-doping policy and coaching practice raises cause for concern for anti-doping policy makers. To bridge this gap systematic programming of activities designed to ensure coaches are able and willing to take a proactive role in doping prevention is required.

## 1. Introduction

The use of prohibited substances and methods in sport (‘doping’) is not restricted to high performance sport; doping is evident at ‘lower’ levels of competition and at foundational stages of athlete development (see Backhouse, Whitaker, Patterson, Erickson, & McKenna, 2016). Consequently, efforts to detect and deter doping continue at pace and in recent years, social science research has played an increasingly prominent role in developing our understanding of the underlying mechanisms associated with doping (Backhouse et al., 2016). Such research indicates that a complex combination of factors can affect athlete doping behaviours (Backhouse, Griffiths, & McKenna, 2017). Notably, the focus of research has shifted from a concentration on individual factors (e.g., attitudes and knowledge) to acknowledging the significance of contextual factors (e.g., sport culture, career transitions, injury) (e.g., Smith et al., 2010).

The acceptance of doping as a complex behaviour has highlighted

the importance of social and cultural influences on doping in sport (e.g., significant others) (Backhouse et al., 2016). In particular, the coach has been anecdotally, theoretically and empirically verified as a ‘significant other’ and over many decades has been found to play an instrumental role in a number of doping incidents. This is not surprising given the amount of time coaches and athletes spend together (Jackson, Grove, & Beauchamp, 2010) and the mutual interdependence of athletes’ and coaches’ thoughts, feelings and behaviours (Jowett & Poczwadowski, 2007). This interdependence ranges from covering up and condoning doping behaviour to supplying and administering doping substances (Dubin, 1990; McLaren, 2016; Ungerleider, 2001). On the other hand, coaches have been shown to be a significant protective factor against doping (e.g., Goulet, Valois, Buist, & Cote, 2010). For example, athletes have reported that protection from doping is provided through secure attachments to coaches, whereby athletes have trust and confidence in their coach, who is perceived as providing continued support and guidance (Erickson, McKenna, & Backhouse, 2015). Specifically, athletes

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [L.Patterson@leedsbeckett.ac.uk](mailto:L.Patterson@leedsbeckett.ac.uk) (L.B. Patterson), [S.Backhouse@leedsbeckett.ac.uk](mailto:S.Backhouse@leedsbeckett.ac.uk) (S.H. Backhouse).

are inspired to invest effort and commit to their sport – doing so in a drug-free way – in order to repay the coaches for their effort and commitment to them. The protective influence of coaches was also articulated in a study involving five admitted dopers (Kirby, Moran, & Guerin, 2011), as one of the dopers described his coach as an important factor in why he had remained drug free for so long. In particular, the athlete had been influenced by the coach's 'anti-drugs' attitude and his beliefs that doping was not necessary, with the authors concluding that the coach was acting as a positive role model and mentor. However, the athlete went on to say that when they moved into a new training group with a new coach they began to dope almost immediately; bringing both the protective and injurious impact of the coach on doping into sharp focus.

Coach influence has been formally recognised in global anti-doping and coaching policy. For example, it is explicit in the World Anti-Doping Code (WADC, Article 21.2) (World Anti-Doping Agency, 2015) and reinforced in the International Sport Coaching Framework (ISCF) (International Council for Coaching Excellence [ICCE] & Association of Summer Olympic International Federations [ASOIF], 2012; ICCE, ASOIF & Leeds Metropolitan University, 2013). In both cases, coaches are expected to comply with anti-doping regulations and foster anti-doping attitudes among their athletes. Though, the policy document offers little explanation as to how coaches might do so. It is made clear that coaches are subject to sanctions if they engage in behaviours that violate anti-doping policy, such as assisting, encouraging, aiding, abetting or covering up the use of prohibited substances or methods, as well as use, possession, administration, attempted administration, trafficking or attempted trafficking of prohibited substances or methods (World Anti-Doping Agency, 2015). In the UK, these rules were recently applied in the case of coach George Skafidas, who received a lifetime ban for committing nine anti-doping rule violations (ADRVs) including possession, trafficking, administering and tampering (through provision of false information and intervening a letter addressed to one of his athletes regarding anti-doping proceedings) (UK Anti-Doping vs Skafidas NADP Decision 392, 2016).

In view of the expectations outlined in both coaching and anti-doping policy, it is imperative that we develop our understanding of the doping-related interactions that take place between coaches and sportspeople. To date, some studies conclude that the majority of coaches discuss doping (Engelberg, Moston, & Blank, 2017), including the negative health effects (Vankhadlo & Planida, 2013), with their athletes, but studies also suggest that doping-related interactions are infrequent (Laure, Thouvenin, & Lecerf, 2001; Mazanov, Backhouse, Connor, Hemphill, & Quirk, 2014) (i.e., two to three times per year; Engelberg et al., 2017). While the evidence base regarding coaches and their doping-related attitudes and knowledge has grown over the past ten years (see Backhouse, McKenna Robinson & Atkin, 2007; Backhouse et al., 2016), the focus of research has been on examining coaches' doping-related attitudes and knowledge. This has led to the conclusion that coaches have anti-doping attitudes (e.g., Sajber, Rodek, Escalante, Olujić, & Sekulic, 2013; Allen, Morris, Dimeo, & Robinson, 2017; Engelberg & Moston, 2016) and acknowledge their influence in doping prevention (e.g., Judge, Bellar, Petersen, Gilreath, & Wanless, 2010; Laure et al., 2001; Nicholls, Perry, Levy, & Thompson, 2015). However, they have, or perceive themselves to have, only low to average knowledge of doping-related topics (e.g., Mazanov et al., 2014; Rodek, Sekulic, & Kondric, 2012; Vankhadlo & Planida, 2013).

Currently there is little understanding of what coaches do (i.e., their behaviours) and why they do it (i.e., reasons/influences) in the context of doping prevention. Most recently, Allen et al. (2017) found that Scottish high-performance coaches could be categorised as those who appreciate the issue of doping ( $n = 6$ ) and those who do not see doping as a problem ( $n = 17$ ). The coaches who do not see doping as a problem rationalised this view through a belief that their athletes were 'safe', and this perception elicited a degree of complacency. However, the threat of inadvertent doping (i.e., through the use of medications and

nutritional supplements) was acknowledged by all coaches. Allen et al. (2017) noted that the coaches' role in doping prevention was influenced by a number of individual (e.g., clean sport values and knowledge) and situational (e.g., Scottish/British sporting culture and perceived potential for athletes to benefit from doping) factors.

These insights serve as a solid foundation for developing a greater understanding of coaches' roles in doping prevention. Yet, there remains an urgent need to increase research efforts with coaches in order to gain a more nuanced and in-depth understanding of the nature of their interactions with sportspeople. Specifically, who is involved, how frequently exchanges occur, and with what intentions and impact on future behaviours. Such research will assist in the development of evidence-informed interventions that are targeted at coaches, and tailored towards their needs (Backhouse & McKenna, 2012). Therefore, the purpose of the present study was to give a voice to this key group of support personnel by exploring coaches' roles in anti-doping, including what behaviours they undertake and what factors influence these behaviours. With regard to influential factors, the current study specifically explored coaches' awareness and fulfilment of global anti-doping roles and responsibilities under the World Anti-Doping Code in order to elicit how policy impacts practice in this domain.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Philosophical underpinnings

Situated within an interpretive paradigm, this study was informed by our relativist ontology and constructionist epistemology (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). We align with the view that reality is socially and experientially influenced and shaped; through the research process the findings are co-created through our interactions with the coaches participating in the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). As reflexive researcher-practitioners, the dynamics of this relationship is informed by our autobiographies, values and beliefs. In addition to researching doping in sport from multiple stakeholder perspectives for well over a decade, both authors are involved in the design and delivery of anti-doping education. Therefore, they engage with coaches on a regular basis and have the lived experience of applying current anti-doping rules and regulations in practice. They have also carried out doping control at several major sporting events and this has given them insights into the broader anti-doping system and its impact on stakeholders. The reflexivity of this research team is also enriched by their athletic histories. For SB this includes past relationships with an athlete who served a period of ineligibility from their sport due to doping, and a personal coach who routinely professed that you cannot succeed in sport at the highest levels without doping.

### 2.2. Participants

Twelve coaches from Football ( $n = 6$ ) and Rugby League ( $n = 6$ ) were recruited via purposeful sampling. They worked in academies and scholarship programmes of professional/semi-professional clubs, representing the top three domestic leagues in England (e.g., Super League to Championship 1 in Rugby League and Premier League to League 1 in Football). Therefore, coaches worked with players aged 15–23 years who were "emerging" due to their increased commitment to one sport (International Council for Coaching Excellence & Association of Summer Olympic International Federations, 2012). Sportspeople within this domain are likely going through key stages of moral development (Damon, 2004) and may be vulnerable to doping due to wanting to progress to high-performance sport (e.g., Mazanov, Huybers, & Connor, 2011; Whitaker, Long, Petroczi, & Backhouse, 2014). Furthermore, coaches from Football and Rugby League were targeted because both sports featured in the top three sports for ADRVs in the UK at the time of conducting the study (United Kingdom Anti-Doping, 2017). Therefore, it was anticipated that coaches working in

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7252825>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7252825>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)