

**Future of Coaching Conference Notes  
January 3 & 4, 2019, Stamford, Leicester  
John O'Sullivan, Stuart Armstrong & Mark Bennett**

**Creating a Player-Centered Experience (John O'Sullivan):**

- Don't get wrapped up with what in the sport will change in 10 years, but the things which won't change.
- 3 things which won't change:
  - Why children play
  - What children want from coaches
  - Parents
- A study (Source: Amanda Visek - Fun Integration Theory) looked into the 100 things kids prioritise from playing sport. These were the findings:
  1. Trying your best
  2. Coach treating you with respect
  3. Playing time
  48. Winning
  63. Playing in tournaments
  67. Medals or trophies
- With musicians, we never yell out their mistakes. So why do we do that for sport which is arguably more complex? Assess the situation - choose the action - execute the action - review the action.
- Least favourite experience of sport for children is the car ride home, when they are physically and mentally exhausted post-game.
- As parents, we have to take into the emotional state of athletes, and consider when is the best time for feedback?
- The group then did a post-it note exercise, where each person wrote down x5 qualities of their favourite coach. On one door the technical / knowledge of the game attributes were posted, on the other door, the connective qualities. 20% of the notes were technical, and 80% focussed on the personable qualities of the coach.
- "Players don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."
- As coaches we are sometimes guilty of spending too much on this 10-20%.
- Relationships with players often don't come because of what strategy we taught them.
- Player-centered doesn't mean 'soft.' Kids like demanding practices.
- Players and parents invest in coaches as the person first and foremost.
- Have to remember that we are coaching the child and must take into account what their needs are - not just basketball.
- What coaches/ clubs should guarantee:
  - Respect & encouragement
  - Being positive role models
  - Clear communication

- Knowledge of the game
- Open listeners
  
- What is quality coaching? (USOC Quality Framework)
  - Essential knowledge
  - Athlete Centered Outcomes focussed on competence, confidence, connection, character
  - Contextual Fit (practices designed for both the age and level of the kids)
  
- Questions to ask yourself:
  - Why do I coach?
  - Who do I coach the way I coach?
  - How does it feel to be coached by me?
  
- A significant question for players to ask = What is the one thing I wish my coaches knew about me which would help them to coach me better?

### **Value System:**

- To design a team values system, ask the players for the qualities of a great team. Then decide on a core x4 qualities.
- The above becomes the team value system. Put it on a sheet and have each player sign their name at the bottom. Send to parents to show has been agreed upon. If parents want to talk about something on the car ride home, pick one of these value.
- If coaches use quotes before practice, use one of these values. Post-practice, ask players if anyone wants to acknowledge someone behaving in-line with one of the key values.
- For the season-awards, can speak about values rather than statistical awards.
- All the above helps create the culture & environment to get buy-in first, whereby the technical/ tactical can then have an effect.
- A challenge can sometimes be converting kids upset from losing (fixed mindset) due to their previous club/ coach, into a growth mindset and wanting to improve. This is why the value system is better than just seeing success as a winning outcome.

### **Other Notes:**

- Goal is for kids to be active for life and love the sport.
- A good idea sometimes is to send emails to kids for parents to read. Shows you care.
- Parents are a big part of the process and have to be engaged - they can't just be ignored.
- Trust does not just come from the coaches having a good ability. Charles Blonden analogy about the tight rope. Trust is something that comes from connection - walking the walk and being dependable.
- Further reading = 'Power of Moments,' 'Inside Out Coaching,' 'Make it Stick'
- "Children only get one childhood. Don't be the reason that they stop playing."
- "Every kid is one relationship away from being a success. Goal of the club and the coaches is to be that catalyst."

### **Becoming a Master Talent Coach (Stuart Armstrong):**

- Stuart started coaching wanting to become a National Team coach. Then realised he wanted to prefer helping kids becoming the best they could be.
- All the money and funding is often in participation/ elite - not the middle ground where most clubs operate. It's the 'piggy in the middle' between performance and participation.
- Talent coach = people improving and helping kids overcome limitations to become the best they can be.
- Challenge for young coaches is finding information that suits and disseminating it - there is too much bad information out there!
- Player Centered = Understanding the athletes' needs first, and that everything else flows from that. Secondly, it's adapting to these needs accordingly.
- As coaches, we have to balance wants vs needs. Have to balance development with enjoyment = games approach.

### **What is Skill?**

- Technique x Skill
- Skill is not a focused property. We shouldn't use the word skill acquisition - rather it is 'skill development.'
- The moment defines the skill you need. We often confuse the word skill with technique acquisition.
- Traditional Approach = teach the technique and put it into context after. The problem with this isolation is having to wait for the opportunity for that to happen.
- Ecological Approach = combine skill & context. Start with context, and then see what technique is needed for that environment (emerging - also known as non-linear approach).
- Athletes have to process a constant flow of information in and out. A skilful performer is attuned to these sources. More we can read these sources, the more we can have the desired outcome.
- Complexity first. Complexity isn't a problem or chaotic. Assumption is we must be orderly to succeed in the game. The complexity theory is creating flexible opportunities for individuals to develop (CLA = constraints-led approach).
- Affordances = what opportunities for action emerge as a result of the constraints?
- When players don't follow the game plan, even more order, structure and coach instruction usually occurs. In reality, the players need to spend more time playing the game.
- Counter-culture = creating flexible learning within boundaries and allowing athletes to discover new solutions and techniques.

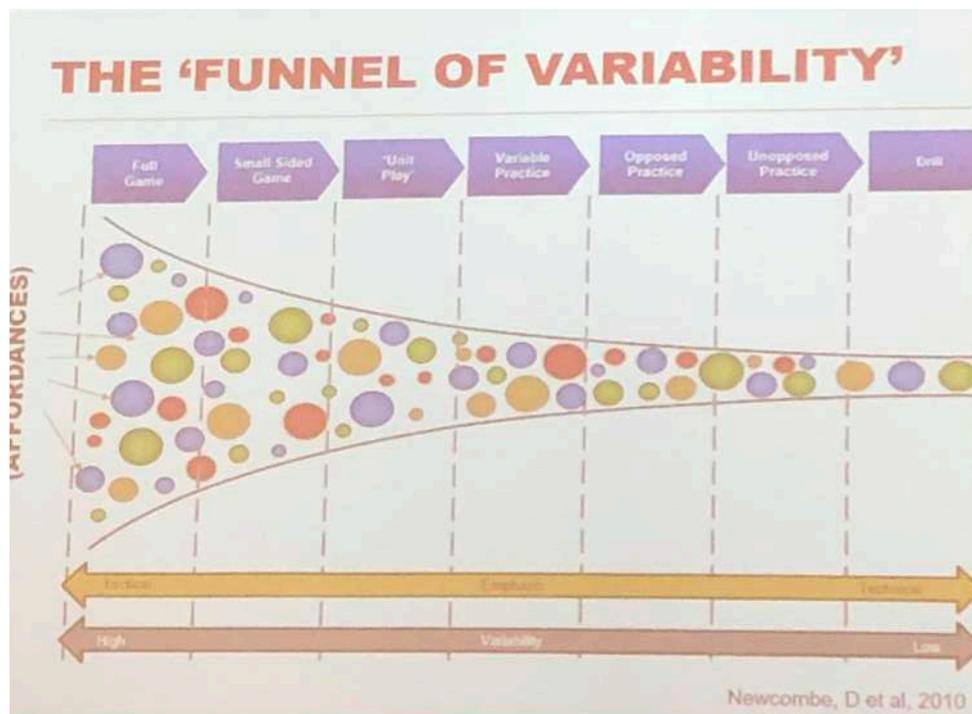
- Prof. Keith Davids - “You can’t adapt to an environment you don’t inhabit.”

### Deliberate Practice:

- Ericsson et al 1993. The idea of quality practice is lost in the 10,000 hour rule. Deliberate practice is difficult to get into.
- Deep Practice - Coyle 2003. Failure is essential to improvement. Let players fail first.
- “Play-Peration” = repetition without repetition. Perception & action coupled, safe to fail. Providing implicit feedback and co-creation not correction.
- “Designing Games for Learning” - Gee, 2015. Performance before competence. Players learn by doing. Ensure at each new level, players face new challenges. Use games to test for understanding and recall.
- Newcombe D et al - ‘Funnel of Variability.’ Need creative task design to ‘gamify’ drills and move up the funnel.
- We should use the word potential instead of talent. Everyone has this, as opposed to talent.

### Miscellaneous

- The ice-breakers for this session were ‘Cheerleader Rock, Paper, Scissors.’ Had to introduce yourself to someone new and play rock, paper, scissors. If you won, they become your cheerleader. Kept going until one person had the whole room as they cheerleaders. Worked well with a large group.



The Funnel of Variability is a great visual depiction of why we want to avoid ‘drills.’ I asked what ‘Unit Play’ and this is something only relevant to hockey - it’s basically a small-sided game (SSG).

Note that variable practice (e.g. playing with guided defenders as per the article Joerik shared with us yesterday) comes straight after the SSG. Then we have opposed and unopposed practice, then the drill. It only takes a little bit of creativity with practice design to transform a drill and move it back up the funnel. Sometimes it may look like we are running a drill but the idea is to reverse the direction as quickly as possible through loading, so we're actually spending most of the time in a different part of the funnel (e.g. variable practice).

### **The PDS System (Mark Bennett):**

- How many times do coaches ask players a question when they do something well, instead of just asking them a question when they do something wrong?
- Players are therefore used to only being asked questions when something is wrong.
- Athlete entered doesn't mean asking players questions. It's players being effective without the coach.
- To win games, Mark argues first and foremost that effective behaviours are needed.
- What is excellence? Doing the best with what you can in the here and now.
- We have to demonstrate excellence all the time as coaches. Values set at the start of the season are typically not enforced in difficult moments. This is because these aren't enforced in practice so players don't know what they look like.
- Mark suggests using an internal WhatsApp or Slack group to review behaviours post-game with coaches. Review yourself first, then the team. Junior coach should review first so they're not influenced by the Head Coach.
- Players should have the right to remind the coach if they're emotionally unbalanced.
- Hot review = review immediately after practice or a game. Cold review = review after watching film a few hours later. Critical that coaches do this themselves at practice and also during games (also pre-game, HT and Time-Out talks should be filmed by a video camera or go pro).
- If coach talks too much in practice, players and fellow coaches should have a trigger word to get back into the action. Mark uses 'pineapple.' If a player says this, it's then on them to go out and execute what the coach was talking about, otherwise coach can recall them.
- Developing the person with behaviours and values first is the most important, as the technical/tactical is easy.
- Competence is a by-product of successful behaviours.
- We're only self-critical when we're self-aware. Reason to film everything.
- Relentless = not giving up on something we decide to do. 'Plan the work & work the plan.'
- Sometimes the support staff (Assistant Coach and Team Managers) can be the biggest barriers in coaching the way you want to coach with your team.
- Sessions should be what's right for the youth athlete, not for the 40 year old coach.

## **'Knowing Our Own Baseline'**

- How often do we film ourselves managing, coaching, teaching, mentoring?
- Important to have someone impartial who can give you feedback on the video.
  - Behaviours they observe, how you interact
  - Then get someone else to add more notes onto this
  - Do detailed feedback as explained above twice a month. Should watch all practices/games anyway.
- Most effective way to give feedback to players is get them to wear the Go-Pro. Then go through the tape with them and talk about what you did and didn't say. Especially good for teaching effective communication.
- In every practice, you should clarify the critical outcome and what UAEs (Unacceptable, Acceptable, Excellence) look like within each segment.
- On feedback, player should always go first and last. All feedback is positive as a chance to improve.
- Sometimes get athletes to review for 20 seconds in groups before coming into you. Nominate someone to review or conclude for a max time-frame of 30 secs after this. Ensure they conclude not you.
- After doing these reviews, coaches must then scan to check for understanding and that they are actually doing what they said they were going to do. If not, are they recognising this and doing something about it?
- There is still time for coach intervention (T stage of TLC Canadian model). Can tell players on the whiteboard before practice what section is coach-led.
- If players nail something, make sure they recognize it and you praise it.
- On the other hand, if something wasn't accomplished, important to ask what prevented them from doing it?
- Looking for players to communicate live to adapt to the problem. This is especially appropriate to FIBA rules with our time-out system - you can't always call one!
- If players recognised something wasn't working, why didn't you do something about it?
- Shouting 'great' or 'excellent' provided no value. Then the player feedback is just based on what the coach says.
- Everyone understands what a coach looks like, but important with your club to establish what an effective coach looks like.
- Ideal athlete is someone able to do something without the coach's instruction.
- Mark uses non-negotiables as 3 values the team have to commit to in every moment of practice. These are defined to the team at the start of the season. More on this later on in the 'Rule of 3' notes - this is the crux of what the PDS system is.
- The goal of Mark's approach is to develop a team that doesn't need to stop to problem solve.
- Alan Keane - players have to earn the right to be coached tactically. If not committing to the behaviours 100%, they're not going to absorb the tactical component.

- ‘Covert Reviews’ are done by Mark to check for understanding and to see what athletes remember and reply. After the warm-up, create a scenario to recall concepts from previous sessions. Can be secret and hide the real focus by tricking them. For example, say this is a ‘transition defense drill’ but really we’re looking for their execution of 2v1.

### **Keys:**

- Be aware of your own state and manage it
- Be aware of how much, what and how you are talking.
- Don’t talk too much ‘pineapple.’

### **Time-Out Ideas**

- Two key questions: why have we called a TO and why have they called a TO?
- What does success look like with this?
- Do you need me? If players say yes or don’t know, then coach intervenes.

### **E-Colors Test (John O’Sullivan):**

- Referenced Steve Kerr’s autobiography several times - sounds like it’s worth buying!
- We did an E-Colors test which was quite fascinating. The personality tests I’ve done before didn’t really resonate with me, but this one really caught my attention. The app was free (E-Colors on the Apple Store) and took about 10 minutes to answer all the questions. After getting my profile, we were organised into groups with people that got the closest matches.
- My results came back with the following:
  - Profile - ‘The Doing Thinker.’ Tends to get bored by day-to-day routines. Have rigorous and rigid standards and demand perfection, typically being over-critical of myself and others. Task-oriented and often need to analyse situations before fully understanding them.
  - Strengths: Logical in approach, speed and quality of work, pioneer by nature
  - Coaching Opportunities: Often judgemental of others, not very good at expressing thoughts and feelings, can sometimes appear aloof, calculating and too intense.
- This was very interesting, as the 4 other coaches on my table seemed exactly like me! It generated some very fascinating discussions.
- I think this can be a good task to do with club staff. Good to get an idea of how different coaches work best and how we can improve on our own coaching points.
- ‘The more we understand each other and how we interact, the more successful our outcomes will be.’
- The way we give and take information is based on personality. This means we all react differently and have to learn when to pause, listen better etc.
- Greatest illusion about communications is that it’s taken place. Culture is about creating a common language and understanding. The more we know about us, the more we know about each other and how we can improve as a team.

## What is Talent? (Stuart Armstrong)

- The gifted and talented program set-up in England is a two-edged sword. Makes participants feel entitled and being labelled 'talented' can mean they no longer work hard (growth mindset).
- We need to redefine what talent is. 'People aspire to be what other people aspire of them.'
- We often describe the best players by looking at the scorebook instead of potential.
- Personally, I don't use the word talented much, if ever at all. I'm more in-line with John O'Sullivan's thought on this (he says he doesn't define talent as it's not something which exists). It's worth nothing Stuart's podcast is obviously called 'The Talent Equation', which is probably why he goes into such a lengthy explanation to justify the concept of 'talent.'
- We should stop calling programs 'Talent ID/ identification.' It can be almost impossible to compare kids due to absences in the system (iceberg effect).
- Nature vs Nurture (G v E) vs Nature + Nurture (G + E). It's a bit of both (especially for basketball you need the nature part!)
- Epigenetics = how genes interact with the environment. There is a dynamic interaction between G & E. We can do far more on the nurture side of the scale than people expect.
- Genes aren't switched on and off like a volume button.
- Dave Snowden - 'talent is not to be confused with ability.'
- Coaches often don't train the grit/ mindset part as well as ability. If you can do both it's the golden ticket!
- Stuart concluded by providing a definition of talent, which he considers to be a mathematical equation:
- Talent = (Ability x Grit/ Mindset) x Environment **divided by** Time



### The Rule of 3 (Mark Bennett):

- The Rule of 3 is a part of Mark’s ‘system’ which allows players to problem solve live.
- The concept of playing and identifying strengths & weaknesses in the opposition at the same time.
- Overtly recognising the positive and negative - not just the negative
- UAE = Unacceptable, Acceptable, Exceptional. What does this look compared to our values?
- The Rule of 3 is essentially players first self-recognising that something (a behaviour or technical/ tactical skill for which the UAEs have already been defined) was unacceptable. If there is no self-recognition, a peer should then step-in to recognise it and provide feedback. If this doesn’t happen, it’s then the coach who intervenes. The system is therefore all about driving behaviours to get players self-aware of themselves and each other as opposed to just relying on the coach for correction.

### Common Mistakes with the Rule of 3:

- Coach not scanning well and getting caught up in the play instead of looking for behaviours and players self-recognising and players providing peer-to-peer feedback that is effective (effective = changes the behaviour).
- For instance, say a non-negotiable is communication but there is no effective comms, looking for a player to self-recognise this by raising their hand or saying this out-loud. If this doesn’t happen, a fellow player can correct this by having a conversation with them on the fly or hand recognition (e.g comment then hi-5 or fist bump).
- Not agreeing what unacceptable, acceptable, excellent look like for the technical/ tactical components of a small-sided game.

- Checking change success by looking at performance before behaviour.
- Moving on too quickly and not allowing time for players to ‘wobble’ and adjust their behaviours. Too much context also inhibits learning.

### **Setting the Non-Negotiables:**

- These are values or behaviours - not technical/ tactical.
- Most effective when the team pick them rather than the coach. Can use John’s value sheet idea and then have 2 or 3 of these values as the behaviours that we want to drive.
- For the non-negotiables, very important to have the UAEs identified so players know and understand what they are looking for and what the excellence looks like.
- Personally, I think communication is a good non-negotiable to set as it’s easy to measure and can have a big impact. I would probably pick this as the coach, and then let the players decide the other 2 non-negotiables so it’s still led by them.

### **Effective Scanning (in order):**

- Looking for failures with non-negotiables.
- Looking for self and peer-acknowledgement by players.
- Looking to see the behaviour modification.
- Then looking for the technical/ tactical last (as subject to Mark’s beliefs, behaviours are most important). Personally, I disagree and would if I do this next year, will have 2 behaviours from the PDS system but then use the Rule of 3 concept to have players looking for 2 or 3 tec/ tac areas of emphasis that we have talked about (unless it’s a compete stage of the practice or I’m checking for recall or understanding). This may be too much for the players, but think it’s a good way to equally incorporate both.
- Remember that coach intervention can be individual or group-led. The whole idea behind this is getting players more self-aware, and then if that fails, the fact that peer-to-peer feedback is more effective than the coach instructing.
- If you have an assistant coach, have them scan for behaviours and the head coach scan for technical/ tactical. Also very good to use waiting or injured players to scan this too - keeps them engaged in the practice.

### **Rule of 3 In Practice:**

1. Already agreed what excellence looks like.
2. Athlete is aware of unacceptable and continues to adapt/ adjust.
3. Athlete is aware of unacceptable, but can’t self-manage. Teammates notice athlete is unacceptable and effectively influence the athlete (this is an example of where E-Colors are useful, as players may begin to understand best how to relay feedback that will be appropriate for their peer).

4. Athletes are not effective of 2 or 3, so the coach intervenes using effective performance coaching principles:
  - If you could do that again, what would you do?
  - Show me that
  - Remember the positive so players don't just expect questions on a negative. E.g - "Did anyone see what Johnny did?"

### **OR...**

1. Athlete has good understanding and can make effective choices and commit to them.
  2. Athlete is unsure so asks teammate for support, or teammates reach out to influence.
  3. Team mates cannot resolve issue, so the coach steps in.
- Peer to peer intervention is the most important but hardest to implement.
  - Coach can review learning through substitutions or time-outs.

### **The Reset:**

- How long can you hold an acceptable behaviour for, before dropping into unacceptable? Play any small-sided game or even 5v5, and ask players how long they think they can hold it for.
- If unacceptable, start counting down 5 seconds (can be silent or loud). If there's no adjustment, reset and have a 10 second huddle.
- Can also do it without the countdown - shout out the behaviour missing and see if there's a change.
- If players continue to not do something, ask them to come in and reduce the time period.
- When calling players in for individual feedback, a good cue is 'talk me through that last play.'
- What will success look like to you as an individual and you as a team at the end of the season? Good question to try and determine the non-negotiable to set (e.g. behaviours).
- Magic casserole idea = all players picking x5 and mixing them all in a pot. Then pick out the commonalities and use these as the non-negotiables.

### **My Concluding Thoughts on The Conference:**

- Really beneficial and worth attending. Picked up a lot of nuggets and the networking opportunity was invaluable. Met a lot of like-minded coaches in other sports (sadly my friends Alan Keane and Rob Crump were the only other basketball coaches present).
- Rugby is way ahead with their coaching development compared to basketball. Basketball England should be looking at what they are doing and implementing some of their programs. The coaches there were predominately from rugby and football.
- Stuart Armstrong had an interesting Twitter conversation the other day about this saying he doesn't believe in a middle ground - you're either two feet in or out with one approach or the other.
- Maybe we should move-away from using the term games-based coaching and using CLA instead. Games-based probably is too simplistic and implies we just roll the balls out and let them play.

### **Concluding Thoughts & Take-Aways:**

- We can't forget about parents. We have to engage, educate and inform them - not ignore them! More ideas to come on this...

- We should do John O'Sullivan's value sheet with all our teams next year. If we decide to try bits of PDS, use these to select the non-negotiables. Can also email it to the parents to get their buy-in.
- Even though I haven't 'officially' joined yet - I love our group and what everyone is about. How hungry we are, eager to learn, Kaizen mindset etc. Haven't seen anything like it in the NBA or other European clubs. I think it's important for us all to keep developing with the non technical/tactical side of the sport too. Clinic notes are great, but we should also look at the 'other 80%' John O'Sullivan talks about on the connection part of coaching (communication, leadership etc). I can happily recommend podcasts or books for anyone interested!
- Our post-season awards based on values, not just MVP, top scorer etc. This is another thing, but we should consider organising a nice post-season awards evening like I did at Goldhawks. Black-tie event, 2 course dinner etc. Great for sponsors and parents!
- We need to discuss communication with players, especially U14. I know Belgium is very liberal and this is the norm culturally, but personally I would never message a U14 player directly on Instagram or WhatsApp. This would put me in a compromising situation - all communication with my players would go through the parents. Also much more professional.
- Good to introduce a trigger word for when a coach or players talks too much.
- It is essential we start filming all our practices and games, even if it's just buying a 20 Euro video recorder and leaving it on a tripod. I know games are filmed, but for the coach education component we need to film all the team talks that take place. We then should upload these onto Google Drive along with practice plans for all the teams.
- We should invest in 2 or 3 go-pros for coaches and players to use.
- Clear role definition for assistants in practice (e.g. what are they 'scanning' for?).
- Some of these themes will tie-in well with my notes from NBA London 2019 - to follow shortly as soon as I finish typing the rest of my notes up from December/ January.
- I'll start saving all of these clinics notes and adding onto Google Drive so things don't get 'lost' in this chat. I think we should agree on a common lay-out so everything looks similar and is easy to read. If you have FastDraw, please do consider drawing your technical drawings up as opposed to writing them out - less text and much easier to recall it!