More soup less poop. Please sir, I want some more

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Keywords: talent identification, creative writing, rugby, coach education, learning

Chapter review essay


In this informative and down to earth chapter Stuart Wilkinson creates a picture about Talent Identification (ID) and Development within Rugby League based upon his extensive experience at the highest levels in the sport. He highlights areas he deems important for success and expands on these by putting them in to context that others might easily relate to.

The soup

As an undergraduate and active coach aspiring to be involved in Talent ID and development and perhaps reach the levels of coaching that Stuart has, I found his first-hand account very informative and thought provoking, raising some new perspectives around a topic that I considered myself to be fairly well read about. At university we can read all the theoretical articles we want but whether their conclusions and theories can actually be applied in practice is often alien to us in our cloistered position as students – or even as coaches. Through his vast experience as a coach and as a practicing academic, Stuart provides a link between these two worlds through this chapter, made all the more accessible for his skill and enthusiasm in creative writing and free use of coaching language. It was useful and encouraging to see many of the areas I have read about mentioned when he lists six factors he feels influence Talent ID and player development. His notes on preparation in particular has stimulated much deeper reflection on my own coaching practice and possibly a solution to an issue I have been struggling with. Although I considered preparation as part of the general puzzle of coaching, I have perhaps undervalued it until now. Despite not coaching to anything like Stuart’s level, the aspects of preparation he raises have struck a chord with me and my own team’s recent drop in performance and apparent commitment. Due to this chapter, I have reconsidered mine and the
players’ attitudes towards training and preparation and feel that I can address the problem in a more professional way now. I am hoping that changing this one thing might alter the mood and aspiration in my club - and hoping it ‘spreads like a virus’ as Stuart suggests.

Stuart identifies four types of players that coaches are likely to encounter, in regards to a combination of how much talent they have and the level of their good attitude. Again this has been relevant for me and my own team, and may well be for many other coaches out there who manage similar team sports. The descriptions given to each classification has helped me better understand my own players, which category they may fall in to, what I might expect from them and how to deal with them more effectively in the future. It comes as no surprise to me that the one player in my team who I would assess as being high in talent and high on attitude has been taken on by an Academy, as this is the category that Stuart highlights as the ‘dream ticket’. For these reasons alone Stuart’s account is invaluable reading for coaches because he speaks from the heart and from a grounded point of view as a coach. Through his writing I have been able to see aspects of what he talks about in my own experiences as a coach.

The poop

Stuart’s chapter speaks from many years’ experience providing examples I can relate to within my own coaching. This seems to be in stark contrast to many of the mainstream journal articles on this subject - usually written by academics for other academics, not for students, for example; Krüger, Booysen and Spamer (2008) and Vaeyens, Lenoir, Williams and Phillipaerts (2008). Despite the fact that I have a keen interest in the area of Talent ID and development, these authors struggle to draw me in. When trying to understand these articles it seems that they are merely exercises by academics to prove they are still active in the field and their opinion should be valued by their peers. There seems to be no consideration of reaching out to coaches ‘on the ground’ or even engaging undergraduates in to the discussion.

Despite this, these are exactly the sources we are encouraged to use in our research as evidence of learning for university assignments. The article by Vaeyens, et al (2008) is an investigation in to other peoples’ experiences, rather than it coming from the primary source i.e. a coach. They effectively perform a meta-analysis of studies and produce a ‘theoretical framework’ for how things should be done, perhaps without considering the possibility of how this might be achieved in real world scenarios, as Stuart’s chapter does. Another example of using all the ‘academic language’, but without inspiring any further questions or ideas, is that of Krüger, Booysen and Spamer (2008). Some of language they use gives the impression of trying too hard to impress which may only serve to limit its audience and practical appeal. There seems to be a great deal of assumed knowledge; leaps
over chasms in understanding are made where bridges would be more useful, bland sentences gloss over areas where more explanation is actually required, for example, Krüger, Booysen and Spamer (2008:65) state ‘from the preceding results and discussion, it can be concluded that this study adds to the burgeoning body of knowledge as it pertains to talent identification’. Can it? How? Is a burgeoning body of knowledge useful to coaches? I would describe this as a ‘non-sentence’ and could be much more usefully explained in a coaching parlance, as Stuart achieves throughout his Monograph chapter. I know many undergraduates who would be put off by this scientised kind of phrasing in the journal articles. The major point to take from these articles seems to be that they do not excite undergraduates because they struggle to communicate their relevance, again, perhaps, because they are not aimed towards us.

**Please sir, I want some more**

I found Stuart’s article much more informative, thought provoking, enjoyable to read and relevant than the typical academic journal seemed to be. The key topics of the Talent ID field are still covered and expanded upon and he shows us how these are applied in a practical sense, rather than just theoretically. I have done a small amount of creative writing at university and feel that the style is more challenging as a mode of learning. It helps you consider how theory has real influence as you try to apply it in a story-telling scenario. Writing creatively allows me to think more deeply about the topic in-hand and how all the aspects may interlink, which in turn requires greater research and theoretical underpinning to make it all plausible. This is a learning experience which a student might easily miss out on by writing the ‘standard essay’ response that seems so often to be all that a student needs to do to get by in their course. The beneficiaries of creative writing are both the author and the potential readers – as I have been in this case, so please sir, I want some more.

**References**


**JQRSS Author Profile**

Paul Swales is 27 years old [at the time of writing] and in his final year studying for a BA Honours degree in Sports Coaching. He is due to graduate from the University of Central Lancashire in 2015. Paul currently fulfils a voluntary Performance Analysis role with Bolton Wanderers Academy, coaches a local under sixteen football team and is a Preston North End
Academy scout. Upon graduation, Paul hopes to use these experiences to form his own business working in the area of Talent Identification or work for a professional football club.