

**‘An ontology of *Being* through a sporting life - How  
*might* one live well?’**

**by**

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# RESEARCH STUDENT DECLARATION FORM

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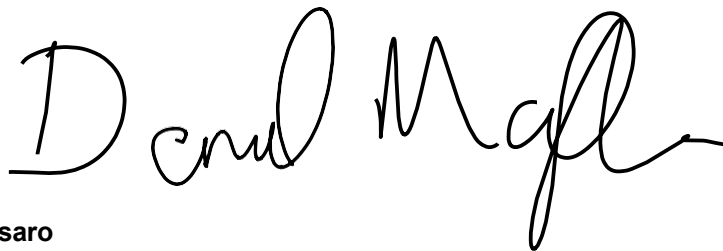
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## ABSTRACT

### ‘To live well - an ontology of Being through a sporting life’

My professional life has been one of coaching my wife on a world tour, helping professional sports performers with psychological support and lecturing sports coaching on degree programmes. This immersion made clear a contrast between the felt ‘*lived life*’ of coaching and performing, with the abstract rationality of thematic explanations about what coaching and performing is often proposed to be. In this regard the main methodological aim of this research is to reveal how both a ‘emic epistemological’ approach to living ‘inside’ a professional sporting life may be bridged and blended with an ‘etic epistemological’ view of sport from the outside of lived experience, to form a substantial broader ontological and philosophical perspective of how one might live well through it.

I utilised *existential phenomenology* and Heideggerian *Ontology* as means of recovering a more substantial understanding of a ‘*lived in*’ sporting life and presented it through four distinct Dialogues. Each Dialogue includes reflexive commentary and data analysis, providing different roles of purpose in contribution to the overall theme. Methods used were Socratic Dialogue based narrative-fiction, Historical diary-analysis, Phenomenological anecdotes & Autophenomenography. “*Getting back to the things themselves*” (Husserl) resulted in ‘*thick, rich descriptions of the more*’ of my own lived experiences, a world class renowned coach of 35 years’ experience and two former world number one performers.

The initial dialogue, which forms the basis for the subsequent three, incorporates the thinking of five existential-phenomenologists (Jean-Paul Sartre, Friedrich Nietzsche, Albert Camus, Simone DeBeauvoir, Martin Heidegger) and the ideas presented infiltrate and scaffold the subsequent dialogues and the data within. Ideas presented by these thinkers and the way in which I began to understand philosophy as an activity of *concept creation* (Deleuze), led me to forge the key question of ‘**How might one live well through a sporting life?**’ as opposed to my original thrust of ‘**How to live well through a sporting life?**’ The question of **how one might live well**, opens room for emic ontological enquiry and existential complexities of emergent life. There is less rush towards the need for certainty or neatly summarised conclusions that can be linked to the business minded practice of selling solutions for profit. Habits to over reduce ambiguities and complexities experienced through a sporting career are in line with existential themes of *bad faith, responsibility of freedom, absurdity*, and modes of being such as ‘*the serious man*’. As example I illustrate the differences between the

assumptions and connotations of the term '*athlete wellbeing*' and the more philosophical consideration '*how one might live well?*'

Conclusions drawn are that an existential phenomenological approach to understanding the complexities and pre separated multiplicity of an *unfolding becoming* during a competitive sporting career, is beneficial for coaches and performers. The methodologies applied and consequent thematic data explored are recommended for use in coach/performer education. This in line with existing coaching literature of person-centred coaching (Carl Rogers, John Whitmore) and as a way of accessing individual experience in a more substantial and meaningful (to both performer and coach) interactive process. Phenomenology has capacity to *bring alive the ordinary* and, in this respect, create wonder where it may have been forgotten or just unnoticed. Ontologically, a sporting life lived permanently well may be hard to come by, but it is possible to remain buoyant through it all if one can cope with and embrace the responsibilities of '*being here in the world*'. This takes a continual *taking part* in one's daily existence, one's own *thrownness*, not only with the sport itself but with one's own historical, current, and future perceptions of '*my existence*'. It is recommended that both emic and etic investigations can form a useful bridge for a richer understanding of the psychology associated with living sporting lives.

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To my wife (and participant!) Laura. Your confidence in me and this project has always been my main fuel. I am so proud of what we achieved together and to document much of it throughout this study has been so special. We lived it every day and I hope I have captured some of that magic here.

To my dog Woody. You feature briefly but you kept me company on all those walks where most of my ideas sprang into possibility. You were often the first sounding board.

Finally, to my parents Eunice and Peter. You started me off in the world with little baggage to carry and showed me how to grow. After this study, I now appreciate much more deeply how special those gifts are.

## **Dedication**

**To Leo,**

I hope that one day, you will enjoy reading this. May you live well.

**Dad.**

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## Reader Guide

This project comprises four separate dialogues. Each is distinct and works alone to represent the key themes explained within yet as a package they also work together to represent and reinforce elements across different contexts and participant experiences. There are four research participants (highlighted in yellow) with a ‘factional’ version of the researcher crafted in Dialogue 1 to converse with each philosopher to illuminate their existential phenomenology ideas as applied to lived sporting experiences of the researcher.



**Dialogue 1** comprises five acts, and each takes the reader into a conversational dialogue between the ‘coach’ and the philosopher.

**Dialogue 2** reveals historical diary entries from two former world number one squash players. Entries are selected to represent potential links to themes examined in Dialogue 1. Each interpretation is checked by the participant and responded to for clarification and further enhancement.

**Dialogue 3** summarises five key coaching episodes of a coach who has coached multiple world champion performers over a 35-year extensive career so far. Unstructured Interview data was distilled through the creation and utilisation of phenomenological anecdotes. Each anecdote is separate and conveys key themes related to lived experience and coaching which are further discussed and checked by research students and practicing sport coaches.

**Dialogue 4** represents the researcher's own lived experience whilst immersed in coaching situations on the world squash tour with his spouse. Autophenomenography is the chosen methodology by which data is represented in the forms of poetry and written reflections which reveal 'in time' expressions of experience and emotions associated with 'the rollercoaster' of emergent 'being in the world.'

## **Introduction to methodological positioning for this project**

“Coaches’ stories are complex, messy, fragmented and endlessly fascinating, and they demonstrate a need to understand the interconnections between coaches lives and their professional practice. We argue that coaches’ emerged life stories cast doubt on the wisdom of viewing coaching as a systematic, depersonalised set of standardised models and procedures; a trend which currently characterises many coach education programmes.” (Jones, Armour, Potrac, 2004, p.6)

I believe the opening extract from their seminal book published in 2004 (Sports Coaching Cultures – from practice to theory) which utilised “critical analysis of life stories of eight practising, top level coaches” was the original catalyst for this research. As a practising academic and ‘top level coach’ (their description) I have often found myself confused between my immersion of myself into both professions. I noticed differences between what I was talking about to students (the current ‘on trend’ research offerings) and what I was doing and feeling in myself, in my life. I noticed that it was one thing to ‘understand and explain’ researched ‘truths/proposals’ as regards coaching and leadership and another thing to apply them. Applying proposals was easy to administer ‘by the book’ yet did not necessarily work in the often linear ‘input output’ suggestions of many of the emergent theoretical models. Do this and that will happen! Well, in my experience only rarely did logic seem to fit the situation and work. Even on the occasions where things progressed, I sensed that most of the time I was just looking for confirmation biases to feel secure and reassured.

In trying to make sense of the gap between each version of reality I would blurt out to students something like this:

*“When coaching happens, I am ‘in it,’ right there in the mix of it. When I theorise, it happens from somewhere else, over here somewhere, another time. I am looking at it from over here, I am not in it. My moods do not intervene the same way, my alertness is different, my personality affected, the rationality role kicks in. When I talk to you (students) about it, I cannot get to the truth of it. I feel unable to convey the essences of being there, in that exact moment, coaching.”*

On reflection I was alluding to context and no matter how we consider it from the epistemologically etic approach, for example the thorough ‘Biopsychosocial’ model of athlete experience and well-being (DeFreese 2017, Shulze, Marquez, and Ruvalcaba, 2021) you just cannot ‘be there’ in that

experience. In simpler terms, when at work 'in the field' I felt an acute difference to the way I experienced sport compared with when I was immersed in teaching concepts and theories of sport in the 'lecture room.' This was more than the obvious practical and spatial differences; it was very much embodied.

Compelled to understand why we are prone to this obvious difference of ontology, I was inspired from Rene` Magritte's well known surrealist painting "*Ceci n'est pas une pipe*" (*This is not a pipe*, 1929) from his 'Treachery of Images' series of paintings. Consequently, an objective became to develop a body of work that could point towards a similar mistake in assuming what we can describe and represent has various depths to it. Some close and richly useful, some distant and potentially lifeless. The distinction between one's lived ontology of a sporting life and that of verbal and visual representations of it may never be matched but some are much more accurate than others.

To that end, considering my dual existence as an academic teacher and as someone immersed in a professional practical coaching life, my preliminary questions were

- *'How can we more fully extract and utilise 'lived experience' of coaches and performers so to better collaborate with existing and emerging theoretical realist-based proposals of sports coaching and performance?'*

And, if possible,

- *"How might this help people live well through it all given the existential nature of our being and the peculiarities of professional competitive sport?"*

### **Backdrop - To live well.**

At the foundation of my concern was how this related to our existence as sports performers/coaches and living well. It is evident that in recent years psychological wellbeing has become a prevalent issue across increasing sectors of society. For example, Universities in the UK (United Kingdom) are reporting upwards of fifty percent increases of students suffering with anxiety since 2015. In Sport, there are escalating narrative revelations of professional performers who suffer in their lives, their bittersweet existence. Many of the individual accounts reported have been linked together to form a consensus that professional sports performers share general problems particularly in the retirement phase. Conditions explained within their [published] narratives have included feelings of being dehumanised (Kyrgios) bullying (Varnish, Keatings, Simmonds), personality loss

(Bartoletta, Emms), depression (Wilkinson, Richardson-Walsh, Fury), anxiety (Kirkland), abandonment (Shangwu), chronic fatigue/burnout (Bisk), addiction (Gascoigne, Fallon), OCD (Wilkinson, Gerrard, and Pickering), training addiction (Jamieson). On review of such narratives, despite some common categorisations, each individual case is unique, specific, and most personal [1]. Each individual reflection reveals an individual who experiences private existential complexity, not merely concepts shared by the many. This is my own experience of working with performers too. Whether peering in from the outside or reflecting from the inside, specific investigation is required for each case. Otherwise, generic assumptions replace the complexity and ambiguity of each individualised unfolding, followed by the formations of unnecessary and simplified epidemics, particularly ones orbiting around the concept of wellbeing.

Awareness of my own wellbeing and sports performers who I continue to support include oscillating mixtures and competing ambiguities of worry, hope, joy, relief, doubt, confidence, peace, unrest, self-criticism, positivity, shame, love and more. I have noticed that most have a ceaseless need to reduce the continual complexity and uncertainty into manageable measures. With the nature of competitive sport being about dominance over others (winning) and sustaining hierarchical position over competitors, the pressure to produce is incessant and one can easily get trapped in the multitude of existential traps related to meaning and authenticity introduced in this study. Sporting performers may hold the belief they are unique and playing for the love and art of the game yet without realising it, their life creeps towards ‘performers as commodities’ mode (Agassi, Tyson, O’Sullivan, Joshua, Mourinho<sup>1</sup>), often tied up in paying people, being paid, staying marketable, and keeping their support teams happy. Performers and coaches can duly become alienated from the reasons they first participated, and this can change the existential landscape, one that is fertile for a crisis of meaning as the original joys and drivers of competing and training are covered over.

### **Aims and Methodological support**

My main methodological aim of this research is to reveal how both a ‘emic epistemological’ approach to living ‘inside’ a professional sporting life may be bridged and blended with an ‘etic epistemological’ view of sport from the outside of lived experience, to form a substantial broader ontological perspective on how one might live well through it. The work will utilise inductive reasoning of relativist data to sit aside and support the prospective data of rational deduction from realist-based deductions of lived sporting phenomena. Encouraged by the recommendations of Jones *et al.* (2004 p.3) to “develop a language” that takes time to ‘describe and interpret performers’ “lifeworlds” (after Streat, 1998, p.338) before developing generalist explanations and recommendations for ‘good practice’ and also Marten’s (1987 p.49) calls to “put the person back

into the study of people” and to “reveal each coach/performer, as a unique being,” I aimed at developing ideas and methods that reveal a more comprehensive insider's view to enable a more richly considered outside view. Utilisation of numerous combined epistemological approaches (in this case the emic and etic) are strongly encouraged by Pernecky (2016) depend on each other for support of rich and vivid revelations and understanding of lived experience of competitive sporting life. Breivik (2021 p.81) states,

“One can look at sport from the outside as an event structure, a spectacle, a visible configuration of movements and bodies, directed towards a competitive end state. But one can also take a look from the inside, from the participant point of view, and look at the capacities and skills, the strategic reasoning, which contributes to the performance as it unfolds.”

By blending inside-the-fishbowl perspectives with the views from the outside-looking-into-the-fishbowl I aim to open and include some of the complex ambiguities, existential dilemmas and absurd occurrences of existence living through emergent conditions of competition immersion, career commitment and future (goal orientated) dependency.

The title - *To live well – an ontology of being through a sporting life?* is a philosophical one. The aim is not to arrive at a theoretical endpoint, it is an invite to awaken an investigation into the concept of ‘being’ with reference to certain existential experiences of individuals. To meet this aim, I have utilised methods associated with phenomenology, particularly existential phenomenology of Martin Heidegger. Heidegger proposed “a critical process in which the traditional concepts, which at first must necessarily be employed, are deconstructed down to the sources from which they are drawn.” (The Basic Problems of Phenomenology, 1927 p.23) The reader as participant or beholder will be **shown** ideas by being presented with thick and rich descriptions of experience through; narrative Socratic style dialogues that incorporate the existential thinking of five philosophers (Martin Heidegger, Jean Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Friedrich Nietzsche, Simone De Beauvoir); historical diary representations with applied reflections to the five aforementioned thinkers and subsequent participant response; phenomenological anecdotes of significant coaching moments; and personal ‘in-time’ autophenomenographic data of moments of coaching experience of the researcher. Consequently, I aim to awaken aspects of the immersed sporting life with intention to illustrate and develop dialogue incorporating both emic ontology and existential phenomenology. The data will aim at no set prescriptive solutions to matters of ‘being’ but will reveal and summarise applied areas of relevance that readers can consider and apply to their own predicaments.

It is a distinct aim for the work to remain consistent as an **Ontologically Idealist** (Mander, 2012; Giacomini, 2010; Wrathall, 2022)) interpretation and not veer into a more **Materialist Ontology** (Delanda, 2018; Fox & Alldred, 2015; Rekret, 2016) despite the temptations and expectations to try and cement facts. It is not my aim to do the blending of both ontological approaches but to fully reveal a methodology and philosophical approach that can stand strong by itself. By standing distinct and alone, the ontologically idealist approach (by way of an emic epistemology), can be appreciated for what it is and for what it is not. As Aggerholm (2017 p.20) states:

“I will use such ideas to reveal how can be possible for athletes to reveal the lived experience through a kind of wakeful, active, aware, vigilant, or attentive involvement in practice without entering the realm of rationalisation and objectification on the shore or on the sideline.”

This is not to dismiss the ‘sideline’ perspective, not by any means. By being given its distinction it can stand confidently without threat to the existing canon of materialist ontological contributions of sporting experience (realist, brought about by etic epistemologies). Seen, understood, and accepted as alternative perspectives, rather than rivals for the same endpoint, there is more propensity for each to become effective pillars of a potential bridge. Such an approach will offer a much more comprehensive view of how one might live well through a sporting life.

## **Objectives**

The work needs to be and feel original not merely for the requirements of the PhD standard but for my own enthusiasm to construct it. David Lodge proposed that originality can be “to make us perceive what we already know, by deviating from the conventional, habituated ways of representing reality” (Lodge, 1992/2011, p55). He used the term ‘defamiliarization’ and this is a key objective for this thesis. Lodge adds “originality means that giving the reader interesting and different insights into something – an event, a social phenomenon, a text – that they might otherwise take for granted or see in a common-sense way or interpret and/or explain using already agreed language and ideas.” So, a key objective of this research was to present the ideas in a way that defamiliarizes and by doing so re awakens a freshness of the things we may have simply just taken for granted and moved on from.

To contribute to the originality in these respects self-immersion was necessary. I am the ‘being’ involved here, and to illustrate that that was of significant vitality to the thesis as a phenomenological activity. This research is not about objective, detached, non-biased, reasoning, it is about immersed experience full of obvious bias and subjective interpretation. So, the objective of



utilising and highlighting methods that can be used to immerse oneself in the data were necessary. By doing this the thesis works consistently on two levels:

- 1) that of being existentially and phenomenologically informative in terms of philosophical and ontological ideas from established philosophical thinkers
- 2) a selection and application of methodologies related to phenomenology and self-immersion (that are distinctly methodical), which offer insights into how one might investigate, and reveal lived experiences of a life lived in sport of oneself and others

These two levels contribute to the belief that *philosophy really is not something one has, but something one does*. This was another objective of the work in so much that it would reveal that philosophy is lived as much as it is theorised. This is the reason that all the data comes from direct lived experience of the four participants. In line with Hughes (2021) paper titled “philosophy for coaching rather than philosophy of coaching” an objective of existential phenomenology is to reinstate one of the primary functions of philosophy, that it can change the way a person lives their life. Philosophy is not merely ‘the history of ideas.’ Whilst it is about ideas, it is not just about learning and remembering which ideas came from where. Philosophy is something that is done; it is an activity or “work on oneself” (Wittgenstein, 1984, p.16). I want the research to prompt action from within, from realisations brought about through engaging and empathising with the data and how it has been presented to them. A gentle nudge towards an introspection that avoids overwhelm but enlightens to the point of support. Therefore, my methodological stance has pointed to appropriate methods in fieldwork to research this phenomenon.

In most general terms a phenomenological study explores what people experienced and focuses on their experience of a phenomena. Having considered the consequent variations and subsets of phenomenology from the original ‘pure intentionality’ ideas of Edmund Husserl (1859 - 1938) through to embodied contributions of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908 – 1961), I chose Martin Heidegger’s *Ontological Phenomenology* interwoven with the more applied *Existential Phenomenology* further developed by Jean Paul Sartre and Simone De Beauvoir. Heidegger (1962) alluded to this with his criticism of thinkers who displayed a ‘forgetfulness of being’ due to a requirement of convenient ‘etic’ categorisations of reality. When Heidegger proposed “don’t study Being as such, study what it is like to be a human being” he was instructing thinkers to go direct to source, the individual and their experience of ‘being here.’ This ontological phenomenology of Heidegger incorporates time (temporality and historicity) and urged that the point of phenomenology for him was to repeatedly question ‘What is it like to be the being for whose Being is an issue at all?’ Providing answers to the question of Being is less important than awakening us to it to bring us face

to face with the riddles of existence. As *an illustration of* “the tremendous contribution of Heidegger” Taylor (1995 p.12) *takes us right to sport*:

“It may make sense to ask us to focus on what we believe about something, say an analysis of a game of football; but when it comes to **playing** football, the corresponding suggestion would be absurd. The actions involved **in the game** are something quite different than people miming a game up in their heads.”

Breivik (2020 p.16) utilised Heidegger's notion of being-in-the-world (Dasein) which suggests that humans are never isolated individuals but are always in a deep way connected with a 'world'.

“By use of a phenomenological approach, I try to show that the sporting exploration of the world takes place in ontologically different dimensions or 'worlds'. There is no division between the individual and the world that has to be overcome and bridged. We are already and all the time transcending toward the surrounding world, geared into it, connected with it. Through being-already there (Thrownness) and in a specific basic mood, we project our understanding towards future possibilities and relate to our immediate present surroundings.”

This type of connectedness to my career, the matches, the results, my relationships and how I am constantly shaping the narrative of my life seemed so much ‘in play’ in my existence that it was almost missed. Time is being. I had never considered this until considering Heidegger’s assertion that *‘Dasein is forever building its past by what it aims at in its future.’* Our temporal nature as beings with the awareness that we will cease to exist (Being-towards-death) seems especially relevant for sports performers who know they have the clock ticking down on their careers. They have limited time by which to meet their potential selves thus re editing the narratives of their sporting lives. Consequently, sports performers are engaged prominently with Sartre's (1943) notion of existential responsibility of “I am that I am, and I am that I am not yet’ and subsequent angst. Breivik (2020) concluded “We thus live in a world based on projected meanings. We are world-making and creating/discovering meaning since we organize things in patterns and relationships of meaning, with an ultimate goal of taking care of ourselves in the world. Sport is a part of this world-making process.”

## **Philosophical Ideas**

Dialogue one forms a platform for interpreting the participant diary entries in Dialogue 2. Each idea presented within the initial Dialogue was selected due to its relevance to the central question of the study. In simple terms, the concepts presented form pertinent scaffolding for dialogue and analysis of the typical ‘baggage’ individuals collect and carry with them as they live professional sporting lives. Each of the five thinkers presented existential and/or ontological themes within their corpus of work and all presented proposals on how to potentially exist better, often phrased ‘more authentically.’ Their descriptions of human existence and how to potentially live well are similar yet distinct. Each thinker could set themselves apart from the other and yet would also take onboard and include parts of each other’s ideas into their own works. The intention is not to celebrate the works of each thinker as a philosophical biography of each but strictly to bring potentially complex and therefore overwhelming concepts to the fore in a digestible form for those not grounded in philosophical theory. As follows:

**Jean Paul Sartre** (1905 - 1980) – Responsibility; Authenticity; Bad faith; Freedom for Others; Existence precedes Essence, Angst

**Friedrich Nietzsche** (1844 - 1900)– Acceptance of Fate (Amor Fati): Slave Morality; Ubermensch - three metamorphoses of Spirit (Sheep - Lion- Child)

**Simone De Beauvoir** (1908 - 1986) – Modes of coping with Existential Ambiguity (Sub man, Nihilist, Serious Man, Adventurer, Tyrant, Passionate man), Freedom for Others

**Albert Camus** (1913 – 1960)– Absurdity, Meaning in the ‘struggle’ (Sisyphus), Paradox of the Absurd; Revolt

**Martin Heidegger** (1889 – 1976) – Dasein (Being-in-the-world), Everydayness (Ready to hand / Present at hand), Anticipatory Resoluteness, ‘They’ (Das Man), Being-Towards-Death, Care Structure (Facticity, Fallenness, Existentiality)

The ideas chosen and applied are included at the surface level of explanation within each narrative of Dialogue 1. They are included to probe the reader into introspective considerations of their own experiences, and this was the rationale for blending each narrative with the researcher’s own lived experience (rationale for the methodology of ‘Socratic Style Dialogue’ is included within the Dialogue 1).

## Style

Previous applications of existential phenomenology or Heidegger's Ontology with professional sport has been limited to expert examples of research (Nesti 2007, Aggerholm 2017) and rarely included or discussed on sports coaching curriculums, academic degrees, or sports psychology literature. Nesti (2007) asks "why existential philosophy and psychology have proved to be such a bitter pill for most to swallow. Existential approaches stand accused of over emphasizing the ugly and tragic side of life. With their focus on death, freedom and responsibility, isolation, and inauthenticity, it is easy to see how it has been described as an approach for the temperamentally gloomy." *Another* suspect and reasonable explanation for this may be the difficulty of the dense philosophical language, particularly Heidegger, and the abstract even tenuous relationship to professional sport. With requirements of certainty in a results-based landscape, the need to reduce complexity and provide solutions it is sports science that has been utilised, not the vaguer, time consuming, meandering, and inconclusive vagaries of philosophy. Nesti adds (2007, p.13)

"A major difficulty with existential psychology is that much of the language used in this approach sounds strange to the modern reader. For example, terms such as, 'the-world-as-lived,' 'being-in-the-world,' angst and inauthenticity, are difficult to explain easily and quickly. Immediately therefore, the person wishing to know more about existentialism and existential psychology becomes aware that this task will demand considerable patience and persistence."

Consequently, this research is about 'having a go' at illustrating what can be gleaned from such applications, if presented skilfully enough to hold a non-philosopher's attention in a more impactful way than a dense discourse does. This was present in my mind as I constructed the thesis throughout. I aimed to balance the depth of the original philosophical ideas with appealing and 'easy to digest' elements of storytelling. This is especially evident in the five narratives of Dialogue 1. The dialogues include 'light-hearted' moments, humour, incidences of rapport building amongst the questioning and probing. Each narrative is situated at a place where I was familiar, and this assisted the production of a certain tone of conversational flow constructed around the premise of Socratic style questioning, back and forth dialogue.

The blending of content and methodology to 'think through the data' is a consistent approach. Throughout, it is difficult to distinguish where the methodology and data begins and ends. This is the nature of phenomenology if presented without requirement to deduce back down to categorisations or set themes such as the method of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith, 2009). There is nothing wrong with thematic reduction and this was utilised as part of the

process of forming the five phenomenological anecdotes in Dialogue 3. The anecdotes were the end point however, they are left to be taken part with by the beholder. Highly interpretivist by nature, phenomenological data as presented in stories, poetry, dialogue, anecdotes, diary thoughts and instant reflections are meaningful when left as they are and required to be met at least halfway by the reader. By doing so, from a therapeutic or educational aspect the aim is to trigger involvement and in that involvement the reader creates new self-awareness or at least a unique way to reconsider their own experience

## **Participants**

The four participants comprise of two coaches and two performers who coach and play the sport of squash (each participant has a short biography at the start of their respective dialogues). The participants were recruited under the ethical arrangements for UCLan and were fully informed and consenting to my interventions and requests. Although there are similarities between the participants and I have previous relationships with them as (husband, friend, colleague, coach) I wanted to get to their own individual nature in the data they trusted me with. It was possible to reach more of their authentic phenomenological truth because I had already built trust. The participants revealed personal phenomena around sensitive issues (death, loss, deep joy, shock, depression, sadness, melancholy, confusion, anger etc) not least trusting me with their private historical diaries and private stories. They allowed me 'in' and close to their existential experiences amongst their sporting lives and I felt close to each of them. This reflected in their assessments of the work applied and appreciation of the perspectives it had opened for them on some historically delicate issues.

**Laura Massaro** (English: Born 2/11/1983) – Professional Squash Player (2004 -2019): Former World Champion (2014), World number One (2016), British Open Champion (2013, 2017) US Open Champion (2012, 2016), British National Champion (x4) Commonwealth Silver Medallist (x3), 21 professional tour titles, spouse of researcher (Daniel Massaro) Coached by David Pearson and Daniel Massaro

**James Willstrop** (English: Born 15/8/1983) – Professional Squash Player (2002 – present): Former World Number 1; Commonwealth Gold Medallist (2018) Former finalist of the World Championships (2010) and British Open (2005, 2008, 2009) 21 professional tour titles; coached by his father Malcolm Willstrop.

**David Pearson** (English: Born 10/6/1959)– Professional Squash Coach (1985 – present), English National Coach (1995 -2010), Coach of Laura Massaro and four other world champion and World Number 1 players, Mussabini Medal from the National Coaching Association, National Coaching Foundation Hall of Fame, Former professional player (1978 – 1990) (See Appendix 1 for more information)

**Daniel Massaro (Researcher)** (English: Born 3/8/1974) – Lecturer of Sports Coaching (1997 – present), Professional Squash Coach 2004 -present) Coach to spouse/research participant Laura Massaro for her senior career, Sport Psychologist (2006 – present) currently supporting 12 professional Squash players

### **Naivety – maintaining purity**

As this research aims at a densely emic approach to the lived experience of ontology, I was highly considerate of not veering off into the etic temptations of description and assumption from previous work in this area. This is not to degrade such work or the relevance of it to this research, it was simply a strategy I felt necessary to remain pure to the ideas emerging from the data directly and minimise preconceptions. Taking encouragement from Grounded Theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and the pivotal point they developed of the ‘discovery of theory from the data itself’ (p. 1) and that ‘An effective strategy is, at first, literally to ignore the literature of theory and fact on the area under study’ (p. 37), I proceeded with a naïve approach in terms of the existing literature. Instead, I submerged myself into the philosophies and concepts of the five thinkers and blended them with my own lived experience and the experiences of the three other participants to see what would emerge. Dunne (2011) explains; ‘The reasoning behind this sometimes-counterintuitive call for abstinence from existing literature, essentially related to the desire to allow categories to emerge naturally from the empirical data during analysis, uninhibited by extant theoretical frameworks and associated hypotheses. and thus, something that could detract from the quality and originality of the research.’ By abstaining from becoming overly submerged into some of the ‘ploughed furrows’ of this area I felt a freedom through the entire process to create work that stays as close existential phenomenology of each participant's lived experience. Had I already absorbed criticisms, limitations, interpretations, applications, corrections, categorisations, models, or diagrams of summary, I would have felt stifled to tailor the project in such a way as to conform and confirm too reliably.

Despite the intentions of my ‘naivety’ one would be foolish to think of myself as an empty vessel who can take myself or my previous knowledge out of the data, it is clear this is not the case throughout as I re-emphasise that I am entrenched in the work throughout. Also, Dialogues 1 and 2 are based on dense existing literature in the form of the original philosophies of existential thinkers, at source, so to claim naïve abstinence from ‘theory’ is flatly contradictory. For similar reasoning to the way Heidegger criticised Husserl’s ‘bracketing out’ cornerstone of his original phenomenology, for being impractical and ‘forgetful of being’ grounded theory has its limitations. Suddaby (2006, p. 635) reminds us that grounded theory itself was introduced as an attempt ‘to achieve a practical middle ground between a theory-laden view of the world and an unfettered empiricism’ and encourages the researcher to become ‘continuously aware of the possibility that you are being influenced by pre-existing conceptualizations of your subject’. Consequently, as this project developed and particularly as I drew towards discussions and conclusions of my findings it was pertinent and enhancing to compare with some of the relevant literature established around existential philosophy and sports coaching and performance (Aggerholm, 2015; Eichberg, 2014; McDougal, 2015; Nesti 2006, 2011; Martínková & Parry, 2011, 2016;). As suggested by El Hussein *et al.* (2017) in their paper ‘Grounded Theory and the Conundrum of Literature Review’ such a middle ground of self-awareness and practical intent ‘offers a reflexive, dynamic and integrative process for conducting a literature review that allows researchers to minimize preconceptions while maintaining the original intent of grounded theory methodology.’ This is where I intended this project to lay in the overall analysis.

## **Method**

**As the methodology is so strongly embedded within the aims of the project much of the rationale for the methods applied have been presented in the previous ‘*Introduction to methodological positioning*’ section, although further detail is included below. Each Dialogue also contains more specific methodological underpinning and rationale for the method applied within it.**

This qualitative study is grounded in real life observations and constructed narratives of lived experience. Consequently, the research is founded upon socially constructed knowledge that leans heavily on written interpretations based on ethnographic phenomenology.

## **Interpretivist**

This project is interpretivist. The researchers' values are inherent in all phases of the research process with proposed “Truth’s” negotiated through dialogue. Collins (2010) states Interpretivism is “associated with the philosophical position of idealism, and is used to group together diverse approaches, including social constructivism, phenomenology and hermeneutics; approaches that reject the objectivist view that meaning resides within the world independently of consciousness.” Furthermore, Saunders *et.al* (2012) suggests “it is important for the researcher as a social actor to appreciate differences between people, to focus on meaning and employ multiple methods in order to reflect different or unusual aspects of the issue at hand.” By utilising four distinct variations of qualitative methodology through critical non-fiction writing, diary analysis and member checking, phenomenological anecdote construction and autophenomenography the interpretivist aims have been fulfilled.

Cohen (2006) writes “Findings or knowledge claims are created as an investigation proceeds emerge through dialogue in which conflicting interpretations are negotiated. Fostering a dialogue between researchers and respondents is critical and through this dialectical process a more informed and sophisticated understanding of the social world can be created.” This was central to the method of member checking (see below) within Dialogues 2 and 3 and the back-and-forth review process undertaken with each research participant. Cohen (2006) added “all interpretations are based in a particular moment, located in a particular context or situation and time. They are open to re-interpretation and negotiation through conversation.” This is a perpetual problem for the interpretivist



approach in that it is impossible to take out the ‘bias’ of the moment or partiality of the memory associated with the people central to it. It is admittedly difficult to pin down the conclusive ‘interpretation’ (never mind ‘one truth’ - although interpretivism is aware of this!) of shared versions of experience or even private internal experience. From this perspective, validity or truth cannot be grounded in an objective reality and nowhere in this project does it claim to be.

Interpretivist positions are founded on the theoretical belief that reality is socially constructed and fluid. Thus, what we know is always negotiated within cultures, social settings, and relationship with other people. When researching “lived experience through a sporting life” through the lens of existential phenomenology it must be taken for granted that what is taken to be valid or true is interpretive at its core. “Creative non-fiction narratives” (Dialogue 1), “Diary analysis and participant reflection” (Dialogue 2), “Lived experience descriptions and phenomenological anecdote creation,” (Dialogue 3), and “autophenomenographic writing” (Dialogue 4) are each filtered and negotiated through the researcher and participant at whim and therefore multiple, valid claims to knowledge can exist simultaneously and often contradictorily. This may represent life as we live it, Heidegger's ‘everydayness’ and the ‘ready to hand,’ much more authentically than many a non-interpretivist objective observer may omit.

Angen (2000) offers some criteria for evaluating research from an interpretivist perspective:

1. careful consideration and articulation of the research question, carrying out inquiry in a respectful manner.
2. awareness and articulation of the choices and interpretations the researcher makes during the inquiry process and evidence of taking responsibility for those choices
3. A written account that develops persuasive arguments
4. need to see evidence of the interpretive choices the researcher made
5. an assessment of the biases inherent in the work over the lifespan of a research project
6. self-reflect to understand our own transformation in the research process

The researcher paid close attention to each above throughout. When one is undertaking such an interpretivist stance to reveal the most emic ontological view possible, by way of contrast to the etic view, there still needs to be constant consideration given elements of validity and accuracy. It sounds trite, weak to admit in a methods section of a PhD, but words needed to be extracted from the heart as much as the head. The actual ability to dig and engage in the appropriate trust and rapport of all the participants was central to the validity in respect of ‘lived experience.’ Therefore, it was vital for

the depth and validity of this project that the researcher had particularly strong bonds with each of the participants. We really got down into it and opened up! The process was trustworthy and consequently honest even if biased or doused with motivated reasoning to maintain a personal narrative that one has got used to living with comfortably well.

### **Ethical Approval**

Full ethical approval was granted by University of Central Lancashire ethics committee on 22 May 2018 (appendix 3). Both Laura Massaro and James Willstrop were both fully willing participants in the research and were each assured access to the entries and interpretations utilised in the study would only be used upon their permission. When each were provided with the selected data and its treatment both gave permission to include it in the final copy of the research for publishing. Additionally, they added their own interpretations to the data (member checking).

My spouse Laura Massaro was fully aware that details of our experiences travelling and competing on the world professional Squash tour together would be highlighted and analysed in this study. Her encouragement for me to do so surpassed the basic permission to allow it, in that she was the constant ‘sounding board’ for the writing as it appeared. There was no single incidence of anything being unethical to include or even unfavourable. She was fully supportive of every inclusion made relating to our experiences (member checking).

David Pearson was presented with each of the five anecdotes constructed from his interview data of which he was aware would-be part of the research presentation. He gave permission for them to be included in the final presentation of the work.

### **Member Checking - Authenticity and ethical checking of data**

To add a level of authenticity and validity to the data I utilised the method of member checking. Informally, throughout the process I was checking and clarifying content and interpretations with the participants but after the work was finished and summarised employed a more formal process where each participant was asked to review the work by themselves within a two-week period.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed that ‘member checking’ the most crucial technique for establishing credibility within the interpretivist realm. They claimed the following benefits

- gives participants opportunity to correct errors and challenge what are perceived as wrong interpretations
- provides the opportunity to volunteer additional information which may be stimulated by the playing back process
- gets respondent on the record with his or her reports
- provides an opportunity to summarize preliminary findings
- provides respondents the opportunity to assess adequacy of data and preliminary results as well as to confirm particular aspects of the data

In Dialogue’s 2 and 3 the results of the member checking are included to enhance the information not only provide validity and ethical approval. All participants were supportive of the data presented and interpreted with no changes requested. James Willstrop offered an update based upon his father’s recent passing but no deletions. Laura Massaro (spouse) enjoyed the process and began her own process of extracting diary entries for her book (autobiography ‘All In’ released in 2021). David Pearson simply acknowledged that the anecdotes produced were ‘perfect’ and ‘quite well done.’ I gave myself space and time from the writing before reviewing Dialogue 4 and each act of Dialogue 1. Apart from re edits of style and grammar I was positive about the content and its accuracy although I could notice the ‘constructivist’ elements much more from a distance.

### Member Check and Analysis Trail Grid

Below is a formal indication of each Dialogue was checked and from what epistemological stance was most relevant to each.

	<b>Member Checking</b>	<b>Analysis Trail</b>
<b>Dialogue 1</b>	Personal check  <b>Interpretive (epistemology)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Selection of five existentialist thinkers including Heidegger’s Ontology</li> <li>- Selection of key ideas from each philosopher</li> <li>- Construction of five ‘factional’ (Creative Non-Fiction) Socratic style dialogues between myself and a representation of each thinker</li> <li>- Analysis and synthesis of personal lived experience descriptions <b>with</b> selected ideas of Sartre, Nietzsche, De Beauvoir, Camus, Heidegger (ontological)</li> <li>- Presentation of five separate dialogues plus introductory ‘scene setting’ context of ‘Danny’ the ‘factional’ coach.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Dialogue 2 (1b)</b></p>	<p>Laura Massaro James Willstrop</p> <p><b>Interpretive (epistemology)</b></p> <p>Personal check</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participants selected due to status (world class committed/achievement), familiarity, and quantity of unprompted historical diary data FROM their sporting lived experience</li> <li>- Diary entries selected based on <b>critical incidents</b> linked to existential themes</li> <li>- Synthesis of themes from Dialogue 1 with Lived Experience Data/description (LED)</li> <li>- Member check with participants and participant response formulated</li> </ul>
<p><b>Dialogue 3</b></p>	<p><b>Internal check</b> David Pearson</p> <p>Personal checking and re honing</p> <p><b>Interpretive / Constructivist (epistemology)</b></p> <p><b>External check</b> David Grecic Level 4 Elite practice Students</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participant selected due to experience, longevity, success, and existing relationship insight</li> <li>- Initial semi structured qualitative interviews</li> <li>- Separate open data capture interviews of five potential stories from lived experience</li> <li>- Honing of the data using Van Manen’s method of <i>Phenomenological Anecdote Construction</i></li> <li>- Presentation of five distinct Anecdotes and member checked with participant (internal) and sports coaches/students (external)</li> <li>- Initial Impact of Anecdotes recorded and presented</li> </ul>
<p><b>Dialogue 4</b></p>	<p>Personal checking Post Reflexions</p> <p><b>Positivist (epistemology)</b></p> <p><b>Implications of ‘my truth’ /’lived experience interpretations’</b></p> <p><b>Constructivist (epistemology) including bias and motivated reasoning!</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Recording of autophenomenographic data in time at key moments coaching at competition</li> <li>- Construction of poems and coherent notes based on the autophenomenographic data capture</li> <li>- Personal post reflexions on the poems and notes to illuminate the impact of the autophenomenography and to consider if “<i>they do what they say on the tin</i>”</li> <li>- Discussion on <i>impact</i> and continued <i>personal meaning</i> of the poetry and notes</li> </ul>

## DIALOGUE 1

### “Socratic Dialogues”

#### Reader Entrance

After reading this Dialogue the intention is for the reader to have an enhanced grasp of key existential themes and their applications to the lived experience of a coach. The Dialogue comprises of five separate acts which include selected ideas from five distinguished philosophers: Jean Paul Sartre, Friedrich Nietzsche, Simone De Beauvoir, Albert Camus, and Martin Heidegger. The reader is presented with a rationale for Socratic style narratives and will appreciate the way in which they can be utilised as an effective method of communicating complex philosophical concepts in a narrative format which may be easier than consuming direct philosophy from the textbook. In turn, the reader may feel inspired to consider their own predicaments of lived experience in sports coaching by being shown (not told) real life applications of the various ideas presented. Each ‘act’ can stand alone and may be best left to digest or be revisited before moving onto the next. As the reader will be bringing various experiences to the narratives, the pace at which each act is understood and applied will vary accordingly. The aim is for all acts to be at one level educational and secondarily impactful in practical terms affecting how one might live well through the complexities of a sporting life.

#### Introduction

*“It is a philosopher’s duty **not to simplify things into categories** or because one cannot then we should simply give up.” Instead, philosophers must aim to rigorously to put into words what is not ordinarily put into words, what is sometimes considered **inexpressible**.” Maurice Merleau-Ponty*

These narratives take the form of dialogue. Specifically, dialogue with the exchange of philosophical ideas and therefore can be referred to as Socratic Dialogue. In the strictness of senses, Socrates himself was the only person to ever partake in a ‘Socratic Dialogue’ yet in glorious reference to his standing as the godfather of dialogue, expressed richly by Plato in over 30 recorded narratives, it remains popular and suitable to use the term. The ‘Socratic method’ will be employed between the characters as the tool to extract presuppositions, challenge existing beliefs and open potential wisdom on the topic of how one might live well through a sporting life. On the point of Wisdom, according to Plato’s Socrates in *The Apology*, Socrates himself claimed:

*“I seem, then, in just this little thing to be wiser than this man at any rate, that what I do not know I do not think I know either.” (Apology, 21d)*

Recognising one's own ignorance and being comfortable with such self-awareness, is the central current that runs through all presented Socratic dialogues. The technical basis of the approach is back and forth questioning that extracts opinions and knowledge through occasionally argumentative yet conversational mental labour. It is during the interplay between participants where data, awareness and knowledge are cultivated.

The main character is *Coach*, who is based to a high degree on my own existence. *Coach* meets five characters who embody and preach the philosophy of their own philosophical teachers: **John Paul Sartre** (1905-1980), **Friedrich Nietzsche** (1844-1900), **Albert Camus** (1913-1960), **Martin Heidegger** (1889-1976) and **Simone de Beauvoir** (1908-1996). The meetings occur at distinct stages of *Coach's* life, which is a nod to the way that the researcher's knowledge and experience has accumulated in a complex unfolding of a busy coaching and academic life. Each dialogue has been created in the setting of five conversational experiences I have lived, in the specific destination described, although the dialogue and characters have obviously been fictionalised. The style is closely tied with the creative analytic practice of Creative nonfiction which Cheney (2001) explained "*Creative nonfiction doesn't just report facts, it delivers facts in ways that move the reader toward a vibrancy and deeper understanding of a topic.*" (p. 1).

Smith (2015), adds that creative nonfiction is writing grounded in research data that draws on literary conventions:

"When researchers speak of producing a creative nonfictional representation of ethnographic data, they are making it clear to the reader that their stories are not made up or wholly imagined but are based on empirical data systematically collected. Each story is fictional in form yet factual in content. It is grounded in real events and people's lived experiences that a researcher observed in some fashion whilst 'being there' in the field."

These dialogues take the form conversational questioning, each hovering around central proposals and concepts of five separate philosophers. It is a deliberate move not to include the philosophers as direct representations, this is about their ideas not them. Also, my knowledge of their thinking is always at best an interpretation, at least once removed from their own direct meanings. I wanted to represent and embed this important distinction by introducing characters who were keen disciples of each philosophers' key ideas, again this is *not an analysis of each philosopher, it is a portrayal of how some philosophical ideas of the existential and phenomenological school, might influence the lived life of a sports coach*. The dialogues, presented as the two characters conversing

in a real situation, is also a representation of how the coach converses with himself internally as much as externally. This is how I have experienced influence from philosophers, teachers and guides throughout my own existence and my coaching life. Self-analysis through the process of thinking and examining has been part of the unfolding nature of my *being* and it has had varied emotional and practical effects on my life situations. Dialogues have altered me, they illuminated the recesses of my thoughts, my suspicions, my circling questions. They have given me joy, stimulation of energies and allowed a release of pressures I was usually unaware had been percolating. This was particularly the case whilst at tournaments, living in the atmosphere of professional competition.

As a consequence of this research, I have become particularly aware of the ontological aspects of '*being*,' underpinned by philosophies of existentialism, absurdism, and phenomenology. This has resonated loudly with me and subsequently affected the way I reflect on my life and particularly how interwoven my emergent coaching capacities are with how I interpret my existence in the world. An appreciation of the complexity of life '*Being in the World*' (Heidegger) and the '*pre-separated multiplicity*' (Gendlin, 1997) of situations that arrive and unfold in constant waves, has pointed to a truth that I have felt personally but could never quite articulate. This is the '**MORE**' of my life situations that are not easily put in words, if at all. The '*lived sense*' that more is going on beyond what I can express or even make sense of at all. My philosophical readings of existential and phenomenological ideas have afforded me to make much clearer sense of *how* I have developed and survived well through a vast and complex environment of professional coaching. I have words and structure for how experiences unfolded for me and how I attempt to move on making choices, hopefully enhancing my chances of a good life. The many conversations I have had with myself and with influencers (friends, family, coaches, strangers, academics, performers) now reveal themselves to be more significant not just in content but in the way the interactions made me feel and how they altered me through our shared relationship be it fleeting instances or longer term ongoing re visited dialogues.

The consistent character throughout each dialogue is '*Coach Danny*' who is a fictional or 'factional' representation of my own coaching Identity ('Factional' being a literary creative nonfiction technique, Smith 2015). '*Identity*' being the phenomenon of my ongoing personal interpretation of significant past and present experiences. My Identity is less experienced as a collection of things that I could collate in some version of a Curriculum Vitae, although measurable achievements and failures are strong inseparable inclusions, my senses of '*Identity*' operate in the background, as some form of energetic frequency. Sometimes the frequency has a boosting effect, sometimes it depletes. It is notable that the fluctuations are of both temporary and more permanent

too, making it hard for me to decipher between mood alterations and things that stick as ‘facts’ I hold to be true about myself. Swirling and oscillating about at the mercy of my life unfolding, the identity never feels like it settles into a specific state. Yet, there is stability with it and when severely scrutinized by my own consciousness, the interpretations, psychological constructions, and consequent feelings I hold, glue together forming a consistent structure, my base camp. Despite this, sports competition can swiftly bring chaos to this order and the fickle nature of one’s identity is put glaringly to the test; “*what is the damned point of this travelling circus, this make-believe world, what is the point of me?*”

When coaching in the environments of professional sporting competition, results of those competitive encounters begin to matter. They pull with increased necessity, winning becomes the clear aim. In these environments I experience a strange yet strong ‘blending’ between my overall sense of self, my identity, with shorter term present behaviours. It becomes disorientating, leaving one feeling fragile to the whims of fate and questioning of any forms of permanency related to my self-consideration. From this space, consciousness works in a more judgemental manner than when I think of myself across time. It feels unsettling how quickly the absurd, complex, and random events of sporting encounters can so easily permeate ones once stable version of life events leading up to this point. There are outcomes in sporting situations that go on to affect the way one feels forever about oneself, and this strongly infiltrates my own identity, despite knowing how absurd it is. A point here, a point there and bam, a whole life identity is rocked to its fragile core. This is what happens. It burns away, it gets in there so fast in a single moment. All sorts of meaning making begins. Past events are altered instantaneously, especially at the big win. Hate turns to love, sacrifice stops hurting, doubts turn to certainty, rivals to important assistants, career choices become vocations and on and on the mind reorders its interpretations of the lived life so far. With an updated and worthwhile past, my future only appears exciting. Positive possibilities emerge and assimilate leaving no room for doubts, an intoxicating addictive mix. The calm glows all the way from the belly to the fingertips and back. My *Identity* feels settled again, certain.

I become acutely aware of the altered neurochemistry inside my skull. It emerges like a drug induced state and the more I have experienced the surge of ‘neuro-drugs’ (Serotonin, Dopamine, Endorphin, Oxytocin to list the main transmitters of the *winning* kind) I can specify their effects and crave them. I have developed a keen eye on the drugs kicking in and working their forces for other people when they win. Often it is the frustration of missing the known and craved ‘high’ that lingers more with me, rather than the intrusive tentacles of a defeat. So close to it, yet no lift off, no relief of this existential misery that we must all incessantly deal with, this tender trap. That is what hurts



especially and is so cruel about competition in sport, just as one of us is getting the ‘uppers’ the loser is typically served the ‘downers.’ The chasm between these two states seems too much but that is the contract we agree to. The more we can each accept that we signed up for this evident hierarchical structure, put pen to paper on that dotted line, the less we will feel emotionally sick, physically body slammed and socially shrunken when we slide downwards. I have discovered that a reduction in the interpretation of *unfairness* is a personal responsibility and antidotally vital in times of despair. This is remarkably difficult especially with stress hormones riddling the system (cortisol overload). I have certainly improved at this over the years, a variety of philosophical readings rushing in to rescue me has been excellent armour, yet it can still sting so much. Time helps too. Distance is typically good for most over reactions.

For me, the social adoration and settling of my doubters (and I include myself as one of those) is particularly addictive, that ‘*certainty*’ high is especially potent. Another monkey jumps off my back which allows me to stand tall again, I feel more attractive too with better posture. Free of the mild paranoia and excessive apprehensions that comes from people placing faith in you, this overall boost to my identity, although mostly a temporary rush, is vital fuel for my existence and what comes next. My future and past always live with me in my present. I live in a state of future goals and what ‘*I am not yet.*’ For a brief spell, ‘*I am what I am*’ there is contentment, and it is a relief from a pressure I had not realised was upon me until it evaporated away. I sleep better and I have learned of the magic this can do.

So, here is my plight as an ambitious forward aiming coach, a man who must live well, a man who might live well somehow. My future is always here with me, and my past requires updating. Every poignant memory constantly re-edited to have meaning and utility. *Meaning* that I can recycle to use as energy to make new meaning, meaningful ‘**M**eaning’ (capital M!) as Mr. Albert Camus suggested to me recently. A ‘happy conclusion’ makes all the moments of past strife and pain reappear like intelligently slotted ‘key stones’ in the wall of every heroic life. Therefore, I incessantly quest to understand the purpose of a lived life and where competitive sport fits into this. A hero’s journey is my salvation. I have generated the life question; “*How will I inspire those I love as I go after my main passions in life?*” This question, which I devised in my early days of Neuro Linguistic Programming education, has been so very poignant and gives me drive and purpose on many levels of myself. Therefore, at the ‘pit stops’ such as Christmas, after a major success, the end of season or a summertime holiday, I feel myself emotionally relieved from an internal duty, the requirement to inspire. In such moments, Peace is my best descriptor for the sensations I feel. I escape from the binds of contract and my urges to be validated and may even allow people to look after me. I could

love myself for just *being* here, for continuing to try, continuing to cope, for simply being a decent man most of the time. Yet would I want this feeling forever, would it do me any good?

I have given up on searching for the one truth, I am more open to and accepting of uncertainty, chance, elements of chaos. I have relaxed lately around my own self-worth and reasoning for my life. It has been an internal task and one that requires constant support from my readings and reflections. The readings help me understand my existential unfolding is not merely a private issue. I have understood we all have the same condition. Each thinker has helped me personally and consequently opened me up as a coach to understand myself, why I coach and the meaning I make from it. From this heightened understanding I feel more empathy for other people and the predicaments they find themselves in. I understand the light and the dark in them a little more, I view the overall context of their situations from a better distance, and this makes me more effective with them, less rushed to convince and comply.

What is 'effectiveness' as a coach anyway? This is taking on a different trajectory nowadays, open to much more *range* of outcome. I have a more therapeutic flavour to the way I treat myself and other humans who pay me to help them. With **Simone De Beauvoir's** '*Ambiguity of Ethics*' ringing through both ears or **Friedrich Nietzsche's** proposals of '*amor fati*' and '*eternal reoccurrence of the same*' coating my thoughts, I am an altered thinker, a different person. **Jean Paul Sartre's** urges for '*authenticity*' and to be wary of '*bad faith*,' with **Albert Camus'** calls to fight for '*relative meaning*' due to the absurdity of '*absolute meaning*,' makes many more of my situations clarified, a High-Definition version. I can process the bigger picture clearly as the start point, whilst concurrently appreciating the intricacy and contextual appropriateness of specific details and instant needs, such as in perceived crisis or time pressured requirements to respond. **Martin Heidegger's** urge to consider our random '*thrownness*' and his interpretations that humans are primarily '*being there's, (Dasein)*' has stifled my usual propensity to categorise and summarise people too quickly, too assuredly. Reducing my cunning quickness to form falsified and certain judgements, probable tactics to delete perpetual anxieties or boost my evolving 'brand' (public and internal), I have been settled and relaxed by slower, patient agnostic spiced contemplations. "*I don't know to be honest with you?*" is not as terrifying a response as I once feared.

It feels like wisdom might feel.

**The dialogues in each ACT meander and vary in depth, context, and content yet each are produced to have a consistent twofold impact:**

1. to relay in dialogue format **some** of the key ideas that each existential/phenomenological thinker has contributed from their vast philosophical works on human ontology and how one might live well with meaning
2. to apply and illuminate the potential use of such ‘key ideas’ for how one **might** live well, by conveying the complexity, richness, and intimacy of portions of this coach’s lived experiences

**All 5 dialogues of each Act are presented in one column, side by side with supplementing philosopher notes from their major texts and my own reflexions where I wanted to add something contextual to the explanation in place.**

I admit bias in my attempts to include each thinker’s ideas and I admit to a vast partial understanding. I intend to **reveal ideas** from a past and **provoke** new thinking for modern times, particularly in living during a professional sporting life. It is daunting taking on such a task, yet I am encouraged by the words of Martin Heidegger who undertook his own exercise to bring Friedrich Nietzsche’s works to the 1960’s:

“Description and Interpretation are meshed in such a way that it is not always immediately clear what is taken from Nietzsche’s words and what has been added to them. Of course, every interpretation must not only take things from the text but must also, without forcing the matter, be able quietly to give something of its own, something of its own concerns.”  
 Martin Heidegger (Nietzsche Vol 3, p192)

**OPENING SCENE**

**(woodland)**

**DANNY:** ‘There is no end to it Seamus. It just does not end, does it? We never get there. No promised land for us Seamus.’”

**NARRATOR:** Seamus, looking perplexed, just stared at him.

**DANNY:** “What are you looking at...eh.... what are you looking at?”

**NARRATOR:** Seamus’s tail flickered, mouth widening a little.

**DANNY:** “You don’t care, YOU just want the ball.....get down, get down.... get it”

Dog represents the innocence of inner monologue ‘In itself’ (Sartre)  
 Unlike De Beauvoir’s “Rational Animal, thinking reed.”

**NARRATOR:** Seamus sprang away with all the zest of a firework, scattering energy vividly. Like a firework too, his chase was futile but entertaining; the ball had not even been thrown yet.

**DANNY:** “*ahh, got ya. This way get it. Get it.*”

**SEAMUS** ‘Ba da dum, ba da dum, ba da dum, ba da dum.’

**NARRATOR:** Seamus pounded past at his top speed of the day so far. The coach stood in awe at life’s capacity to produce such a creature, so spectacularly efficient, so intelligent, so coordinated and so brave. The simplicity of it was heart-warming, illuminating, there was a message in it.

**DANNY:** “*Good boy, good boy. How did you do that so fast? Eh? How did you do that eh?*”

Ever the questioner, (an expert Coach should always ask THEY say, not tell), Seamus’s human father, friend, keeper, and teacher of human rules was susceptible to repeating phrases when talking to his dog. As if Seamus would understand better if phrases and questions came in twos.

**SEAMUS:** (stilled): “*grrrrr, woof.... woof.*”

**NARRATOR:** For Danny, there was something deeply therapeutic being with Seamus. It was the outside atmospheres of the beach, the various rivers, and the muddy grounds, those strange and imposing trees. The way his dog ignored all the splendour yet play in it and just be with what unfolded for him was a joyous reminder of childhood. An endless enthusiasm to repeat actions that naturally poured out of him. Nature with nature. No questioning, no noticing, no pondering, no improving, no stress. No apparent separation between being there and being in. The joy.

*‘Who really understands the mind of someone else, especially an animal’s mind?’* pondered the coach. *‘Some animals are stressed, usually by hanging around with humans too much or not enough at all. When dogs get the correct amount of love, food and shelter they exist so rhythmically with their world. It is just marvellous. Can people be just the same? Can we live so simply? Why not? We would if we could, wouldn’t we? What gets in the way? What is the point of a life?’*

Not thinking of himself a philosopher at all, he just had a knack of always finding the next question, the layer below. He always knew there was something about life itself. Something that mattered that was not understandable but was always in touching distance, something vital. It went back to his days of solitude when he was 16, living alone. Thrown into a situation where one begins to learn how to keep oneself good company, its sink or swim time. When there is just you, you had better learn to bear yourself and if needs must

Joy of being

Dog just existing in a kind of ‘instinct loop’ unlike *Dasein* who knows of their temporality

Questioning again

The pull to ponder that leads to questioning and philosophising.

Even in the midst of simplicity and fine examples (nature, dog) of how to just ‘be’

<p>develop distractions and tricks to keep the boredom, loneliness, and panic at bay.</p>	<p>Is it a coping mechanism rather than a curse?</p>
<p>Danny was a person of high social regard and of good self-esteem. As a young boy all he ever strived to become was a teacher of sports. Getting paid to help others kick, pot, throw, catch, or hit balls was a too good to be true. Surely, there would be a catch he pondered in youth; everyone would do it as a job otherwise. Yet as the years had passed by, with hundreds helped and mighty successes achieved, he wanted to go deeper in. He lived with that nagging thirst of the ‘yet to become.’ The ‘one day when,’ that human beings tie themselves to like slaves. Slaves who could break free but choose to stay in their chains. Ambition. More please.</p>	<p>“An unexamined life isn’t worth living”</p> <p>Facticity / Transcendence Sartre - DE Beauvoir</p> <p>Goals ‘Plan – Do – Reflect’ the cornerstones of modern sports coaching guidelines</p>
<p>Where else is there to go if not up?</p>	<p>Nausea (Sartre) responsibility of existence, of purpose</p>
<p>Influenced by the talk of self-discovery, mastery, professional obligation, and the buzzword of the times in coaching ‘REFLECTION,’ he surged on in a quest to find secrets. Searching for secrets that may not exist, answers to questions that need not necessarily be questionable in the first place. Scurrying down the rabbit holes of intellect and reflection could be stifling even pointless at times but far better than falling into the void thought the young man. The void was another place difficult to grasp yet lingered in the air he breathed, under the ground he lived, on the other side of the walls he inhabited. A dark dense conniving place where laziness, guilt, insignificance, falling behind and perpetual ‘stuckness’ loomed, ready to attack one’s psyche in sharp pangs until one day there is no energy left to get back out. Failure. Uselessness, a waste of space. Lonely. Alone.</p>	<p>‘Das Man’ The ‘they’ we are part of and influenced by (Heidegger)</p>
<p><b>DANNY:</b> “<i>I got to keep going up, we don’t give up. There is always a better way than before and I’m going to damn find it. Think. Who can help? What can we do better than before? How can we get ahead of them? Think.</i>”</p>	<p>Bad Faith (Sartre)</p>
<p><b>NARRATOR:</b> We all need our correct dosages of meaning in one way or another. Danny had seen many around him slide into the void and he was petrified of going there. He had witnessed the ease of which it can take a life with its tempting yet temporary promises of peace, psychological ease, and pleasures. A steady job. A ‘what can I do?’ strategy to living. “My kids, my mortgage, my age, this country, ‘it’s all I’ve known, I’m trapped ....” He had become accustomed to watching the ‘<i>blame game</i>’ people played and the mystical evaporation of a person’s spirit, which follows. A sulk with the future, a resentment of the present and a biased nostalgia for their past.</p>	<p>Socratic Dialogue</p> <p>Sartre ‘For itself’ consciousness “Condemned to be free”</p>
<p><b>DANNY:</b> “I don’t know Seamus. Maybe ‘<i>an unexamined life is the one worth living.</i>’ Eh?”</p>	

**NARRATOR:** Yet Danny had believed in Socrates' methods and still does deep down, it was just so relentless. So hard. Moments like this where when the "ignorance is bliss" brigade had it easiest, and their simple philosophy shone temptingly like the apple on Adam's tree.

**DANNY:** *"It's no bed of roses this coaching life Seamus..."*

**NARRATOR:** Seamus glanced up, stared, stimulated by the fun tone of his voice.

**DANNY:** *(Singing) "It's been no bed of roses, no pleasure cruise.  
I consider it a challenge before the whole human race  
And I ain't gonna lose"  
And I need just go on and on, and on, and on"*

**NARRATOR:** Seamus jumped up, tail wagging now at the high pitches directed in his face.

**DANNY:** *(Singing) "But weeeeeee are the champions my friend....  
and we'll keep on fighting to the end....  
we are the champions, we are the champions  
no time for loser's cus we are the champions of the  
woooooorld"*

**DANNY:** *"Come on let's go.... Come on."*

## ACT 1

### **Danny meets Simeon on a flight to Hong Kong. He brings forth some of Jean Paul Sartre's existential philosophy**

Danny finds himself sat next to an intriguing man, Simeon, whilst travelling to a tournament in Hong Kong. Simeon is forthright in his questioning, strongly Socratic in his conversational approach. This is one of the first occasions Danny has been directly questioned at an existential level in reference to assumptions relating to why he coaches and who for?

**SIMEON:** Bonjour Monsieur.

**DANNY:** Hello there.

Singing /Song

Finally, the coach has fun, let's go...

Music and song (like poetry) is distinguishable from deep rationality yet can convey truth and meaning in an alternative and sometimes accesses the 'more' of an experience

MOOD – song affects mood (Heidegger)

Sartre

"Existence precedes Essence"

**SIMEON:** Simeon.

**DANNY:** Danny.

**NARRATOR:** Some moments passed as both relaxed into their seats, steadying for their journey into their respective futures.

**SIMEON:** Tell me Danny, what pulls you all the way to Hong Kong?

**DANNY:** Pardon?

**NARRATOR:** that was a new one. What an odd question!

**SIMEON:** What is Hong Kong promising you?

**DANNY:** Do you mean why am I going to Hong Kong?

**SIMEON:** No. I did not ask that.

**DANNY:** Well, I coach Squash and I am travelling with my wife to help her in a tournament that is held there, the Hong Kong Open.

**SIMEON:** Squash, what is Squash?

**DANNY:** It's a Sport. You hit a ball against a wall, on a court that is closed in like a four-sided room. Usually, a plaster court with wood floors but at the professional level it's played in a glass box. Have you not seen it?

**SIMEON:** I may have yes.

**DANNY:** There are some good French players who play. The male world champion is from France now, Gregory Gaultier.

**SIMEON:** I see. Not heard of him. So, you are a coach of your wife?

**DANNY:** Yes. She is the world number two now, if she wins here, she will become number one.

**SIMEON:** Excellent. Impressive. So, what pulls you to Hong Kong then?

**DANNY:** (Bemused) Well that. The tournament. My wife. I am a coach, I coach her.

**SIMEON:** Oui, yes. Why do you do what you do? You appear an intelligent and nice young man, of all the things you could be doing with your life, why are you doing this, why have you chosen this.

**NARRATOR:** BAM. The plane had barely taken off, seatbelt signs not yet switched off and the Frenchman was in with a sledgehammer of a question.

**DANNY:** Well, I love it I suppose.

**SIMEON:** Love what? It seems to me you are flying to Hong Kong today to do something that doesn't involve you directly but involves people you serve. You are not the one playing, or are you?

**DANNY:** No, I am not the one playing but I kind of am because I view us as a team, me, and my wife. I think coaches are like that. They are involved because they help people.

**SIMEON:** Oui. So, you say coaches don't help themselves directly, they live an existence through others? Is that what you mean?

**DANNY:** Well that sounds a bit sad to put it that way. I didn't mean it like that.

**SIMEON:** Pardon me, what do you mean?

**DANNY:** Well coaching is a proper job, it is a 'thing' to do. So, I coach for my profession, my occupation. I get paid for it and I like it as a career.

**SIMEON:** Yet I return to my point, you do your profession and judge its value through the actions of others?

**DANNY:** Well, yes, I can't disagree with that really.

**SIMEON:** Is it difficult to live through the consequences of the behaviours of other people?

**DANNY:** Yes, but it's a good occupation. It feels good to help people and it pays too. I am a teacher by trade, but I prefer coaching because I get to travel and do my coaching rather than just talk about it in lecture theatres.

**SIMEON:** Ahh Teaching, another of the helping professions. So, have you always been somebody who finds your purpose in helping others?

**DANNY:** I have yes. I help myself by helping others. That sounds selfish, somewhat ingenuous but I do not mean it like that. I don't do it for that.

**SIMEON:** It sounds like exactly what it is to me my friend. The morality of it does not matter really, that is a different angle on things. The point is that you do find significance in helping people with their lives and by doing so you help yourself with yours.

**DANNY:** Yes. Maybe then its more mutual than I first thought. I am using them as much as they are using me. For different things.

**SIMEON:** Perhaps. What different things?

**DANNY:** Well, that is obvious.



**SIMEON:** Is it?

**DANNY:** Yes, they are using me to help them get better and get results and I am using them to make myself feel better, about well, helping them.

**SIMEON:** And?

**DANNY:** And what?

**SIMEON:** And after you feel better about helping them what else do you take from that?

**DANNY:** I am not sure what you are getting at.

**SIMEON:** Okay let me ask it like this. What happens if you do all you can to help them and they appreciate your work and skilled efforts, yet they lose? What are you left with then? Are you still content and fulfilled with your knowledge of the fact you did all you could do to help? By your rationale thus far, it should not matter in defeat or victory, your job has been done no matter?

**NARRATOR:** Coach paused. “DING,” the seatbelts sign was now off.

**DANNY:** Well, yes, it does matter. In truth, it matters a lot. It changes from situation to situation, but it is so much better when they win. It makes me feel like I have done my job better, as I feel more authentic in some way. I have helped with what I said I could help with and now we have hard evidence.

**SIMEON:** Go on.

**DANNY:** When they lose, it is much harder to enjoy my contribution, in fact, it hurts a little, in my body, my belly and it does affect my confidence. My confidence in my abilities, what I know, whether I am helping the situation, the person, even in the reasons I am coaching in the first place. I feel almost fraudulent. I would never say that, to them and I would argue with all my power that I wasn’t if accused of it, but inside, in those quiet times after a loss it creeps in. The feel of a con artist.

**SIMEON:** Ahh, authenticity. Now we are getting to something important. You see I believe we have a duty to live authentically. A responsibility we all must accept. It is something I am deeply passionate about and at the core of human existence.

**DANNY:** I don’t follow. Please expand because I hate this part of coaching. It makes the thing so tiring, up, and down, in and out at the whims of chance.

**SIMEON:** Well, it is quite a big topic really and takes a long explanation so allow me to ask you some questions first, so we can make it easier.

*“Quietism is the attitude of people who say, “let others do what I cannot do.” The doctrine I am presenting before you are precisely the opposite of this, since it declares that there is no reality except in action. It goes further, indeed, and adds, “Man is nothing else but what he purposes, he exists only*

<p><b>DANNY:</b> Okay, we've got hours on here so fire away.</p> <p><b>SIMEON:</b> Who decides for you, who you are?</p> <p><b>DANNY:</b> Me. I do.</p> <p><b>SIMEON:</b> Just you? Is that it?</p> <p><b>DANNY:</b> Well, who else does, it must be me?</p> <p><b>SIMEON:</b> Okay, so what if all your players go about the place exclaiming your brilliance. In turn, the local media and your 'squash world' community begin to listen and treat you like a hero, some super coach figure. Does that not affect who you believe you are?</p> <p><b>DANNY:</b> Ahhhhh ..... yes.</p> <p><b>SIMEON:</b> Say, those same people suddenly turn on you after a report of your latest failure or sinful deed, would that not eventually affect how you considered yourself?</p> <p><b>DANNY:</b> It would; it has in the past. Both scenarios. So, the way other people relate to me does affect who I believe I am.</p> <p><b>SIMEON:</b> We are beings who are both 'in itself' and 'for itself.' We are what we are, and we are also what we are not yet. You have facts about who you are such as your name, your genetics, your age, your skills, and you also have things about you that are potential. What you might become, how you fit in to society, your future goals, and worries. These are all present within you just as much as the facts that are there.</p> <p><b>DANNY:</b> I've read something about this before, something to do with facticity and transcendence and how we live in a state of 'lack' if we worry too much about our transcendence.</p> <p><b>SIMEON:</b> Good. It was first explained by my teacher Jean Paul Sartre. He understood that we humans are not merely essences, like a tree may have for example. We are conscious and we know we have a future, and we live with that. We are responsible for that future, and he explained that as freedom. 'We are doomed to be free' he would explain.</p> <p><b>DANNY:</b> Doomed?</p> <p><b>SIMEON:</b> Yes doomed. He claimed that freedom brings a constant choice dilemma, an endless responsibility to live fully, authentically, and free. His most famous saying 'existence precedes essence' points to this. Our conscious choices define us, the way we choose to exist and decide upon our emotional responses to our situations comes before some set decision in our nature, our DNA (Deoxyribonucleic Acid). Therefore, existing is difficult and can even leave one feeling overwhelmed to the point of feeling sick.</p>	<p><i>in so far as he realizes himself, he is therefore nothing else but the sum of his actions, nothing else but what his life is." Hence, we can well understand why some people are horrified by our teaching."</i></p> <p>Sartre, L'existentialisme est un Humanisme (1946), p41</p> <p>Bad Faith "I am a coach"</p> <p>Waiter example applied to coach</p> <p>'In itself'</p> <p>'For itself'</p> <p><i>"What do we mean by saying that existence precedes essence? We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards. If man as the existentialist sees him is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be</i></p>
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**DANNY:** So, he said anyone could be *anything* if they chose to? If they decided to?

**SIMEON:** Not exactly. It is about choices given your facticity, your starting point. Not to be rude Daniel, but you don't look to me like you could be the world heavyweight champion boxer no matter how much you wanted to?

**DANNY:** No, not at all.

**SIMEON:** The freedom you have is dependent upon your situations yet in general Sartre suggested we all have much more choice than we care to notice or admit. And there is good reason for this. He believed that responsibility could become too much and consequently people must play an internal game whereby they shut down their freedom by denying options, trapping themselves into predicaments or most commonly playing a role that one's society recognises. He termed this 'bad faith.'

**DANNY:** Bad faith? That sounds religious to me. Like believing in the wrong God or something.

**SIMEON:** No, it's not that. Well, not strictly but in some sense, it is exactly that.

**DANNY:** Explain it to me through sport. How does this relate to me being a sports coach?

**SIMEON:** Good question. Those roles we take up for much of our lives and fundamentally act them out. We act them according to scripts laid down by society and culture. We blindly practice our acts and in *good faith* we believe playing these roles will on one level satisfy us and on a higher level fulfil us. When we bury ourselves in such acts, we eliminate options and choices outside of the role hence our freedom is shut down to an acceptable level. This means we can shed some weight of responsibility and move forwards with more certainty about our situations and feel less anxious. But Jean Paul said this was in truth an act of 'bad faith' and strategy we employ to help us tick along. We want to pretend we are not free; we feel relieved by constraints we set up, the long-term beliefs we hold about ourselves, our historical narratives, and limitations. The less freedoms we have the more automated we can feel, and this is more comfortable than shaking off these chains and accepting our actual freedom; 'existence precedes essence.'

**NARRATOR:** Coach was really intrigued now, listening deeply.

**SIMEON:** I am going to have a sleep now. I like to after take-off, especially flying East. See if you can make your own meaning out of what I have just explained. That way you may answer your own question, that way you might realise something deeper?

**DANNY:** I will, thanks. It's fascinating. I'll leave my movie till later and have a think.

*anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself. Thus, there is no human nature, because there is no God to have a conception of it. Man, simply is. Not that he is simply what he conceives himself to be, but he is what he wills, and as he conceives himself after already existing – as he wills to be after that leap towards existence. Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. That is the first principle of existentialism.*

Sartre - *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, Lecture

*"I am responsible for everything ... except for my very responsibility, for I am not the foundation of my being. Therefore, everything takes place as if I were compelled to be responsible. I am abandoned in the world ... in the sense that I find myself suddenly alone and without help, engaged in a world for which I bear the*

**SLEEP**

**SIMEON:** Well then?

**DANNY:** Hello there. Good sleep? You were out for ages; I finished my film in the end.

**SIMEON:** Ahh yes, I was tired.

**DANNY:** I had a good think and wrote a few things down if you don't mind me sharing it.

**SIMEON:** Absolutely, let me freshen up and we can continue.

**DANNY:** Thanks.

**NARRATOR:** Simeon made for the bathroom and ordered a Latte from a quite automated air steward. Bad faith popped across his mind right there but who can blame him he considered.

**DANNY:** One of the things I wrote down was how much I have asked myself "am I doing this right"? Am I a proper coach yet? It seems ludicrous now I have written it down.

**SIMEON:** Why?

**DANNY:** Well, there is a presupposition there isn't there. That there is a version of a coach out there in the world that is considered proper. I am chasing something that is actually 'made up' in my mind, like a fictional character collated from all my memories and information about what coaching is.

**SIMEON:** And....

**DANNY:** It is 'bad faith.'

**SIMEON:** How?

**DANNY:** I am living with this background, sometimes foreground, description I have concocted about THE way to be a great coach, a success which in turn will make me a good person. Everything I do plays to this, like an actor. I am not as free as I thought I was. I left my main job as an academic manager so I could travel around the world with my wife and coach her and I always felt it was an act of freedom, escaping the 9 to 5 career and salary trap. Yet now I sense I have replaced one character for another, in the same play! The play of life.

**NARRATOR:** The two men fell silent for a while.

**DANNY:** I like my life; I am quite a positive person and try to make the best of things yet even this in some ways is a role I have always played. It fits with my image as a psychologist too, which is also part of my work. I mean you can't be a depressed motivator figure, can

*whole responsibility without being able, whatever I do, to tear myself away from this responsibility for an instant."*

*"Man is condemned to be free; because once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does."*

Sartre,  
Being and Nothingness  
Part 4

*"What do we mean by saying that existence precedes essence? We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world—and defines himself afterwards. If man as the existentialist see him is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself. Thus, there is no human nature, because there is no God to have a conception of himself. Man, simply is."*

Sartre, L'existentialisme est un Humanisme (1946), p21

you? Not that I am depressed, but I certainly put on the positivity when its expected.

**SIMEON:** This goes back to my first question when we met earlier; what pulls you to Hong Kong? Are you even free to decide or are you sleepwalking?

**DANNY:** (moving in his seat) Oh you've got me thinking now. This is uncomfortable. I think I have mistaken travelling around the world for freedom. I have equated destinations visited, airmiles accumulated and the self-employed nature of my life as freedom. But am I free really? Sometimes I feel like a slave to be honest with you. No not a slave, but servant to the profession, to success itself, the whole notion. I remember watching the film "The Shawshank Redemption." Have you seen it?

**SIMEON:** Ah Oui, la Redemption de Shawshank. A lovely film, a film of existential significance.

**DANNY:** Really? Well that part where the character 'Red' explains that after a certain amount of time in prison the walls change from something you hate to something you depend on. That thought has always reminded me of what I am trying to say. It's not that I hate what I do, far from it but I do wonder how dependent myself and so many other sports people are on being in their little bubbles. How the bubble traps them and they fear it popping. I don't know it all seems so fragile. That is why the more winning you do, the more time you spend in it the harder it is to be something else. You've played the part so much, to remain in the bubble, it's hard to be without it.

**SIMEON:** Okay. That is very revealing and insightful I must say. Now for you, for YOU, what are the things the 'role' of professional coach stipulates? What lines must you learn, what moves?

**DANNY:** Oh, there's loads of things: winning - you must win or at least drive hard to win, you must be ethical, developmental, caring, holistic! Trends change depending on who is doing well at the time. Now in football for example Jurgen Klopp is everybody's cup of tea. Last year it was Pep Guardiola, before that Alex Ferguson. Then research comes out about leadership such as 'servant leadership' or 'multidimensional leadership' then there's psychological development stuff such as 'growth mindset' or 'resilience building.' All these things come in. It's not just a set script its always changing. They're not negative things, far from it, they are all useful qualities it's just that you can stop being yourself. You compromise yourself in a bid to be the all-round 'model' coach.

**SIMEON:** Mmmm. You keep saying 'you' do you mean 'I' or are you referring to all coaches when you say 'you?'

**DANNY:** Do I? Ha, I suppose I am trying to distance myself from it a bit, it is quite hard to own it. It's easier to drag others in with me. Ha-ha.

*"First, what do we mean by anguish? The existentialist frankly states that man is in anguish. His meaning is as follows-When a man commits himself to anything, fully realizing that he is not only choosing what he will be but is thereby at the same time a legislator deciding for the whole of mankind-in such a moment a man cannot escape from the sense of complete and profound responsibility."*

Sartre's WAITER  
example:

*"Let us consider this waiter in the café. His movement is quick and forward, a little too precise, a little too rapid. He comes toward the patrons with a step a little too quick. He bends forward a little too eagerly; his voice, his eyes express an interest a little too solicitous for the order of the customer. Finally, there he returns, trying to imitate in his walk the inflexible stiffness of some kind of automaton while carrying his tray with a recklessness of a tight-rope walker by putting it*



**SIMEON:** Lumping yourself in with ‘the way everybody else thinks’ is a tactic we use to shirk that responsibility a little. It is more comforting to believe you’re not the one to blame for your choices, your actions. It hurts to notice the ‘bad faith’ and so we find it easier to notice how we have all fallen for the same levels of self-deception, safety in numbers.

**DANNY:** I do this a lot and I know I do. I start to generalise across many situations trying to take that blame and guilt away, I find a coaching theory, some research, or some practical examples to hide from myself I suppose. So, comforting, so assured. Damn, there’s little place to hide is there?

**SIMEON:** There is a cost yes. One might call it ‘freedom weight.’ The self-awareness, the clarity can become heavy, but it is never as crippling in the long term as what Jean Paul claimed was the alternative, *inauthenticity*.

**DANNY:** Another word to remember? What did he mean by that?

**SIMEON:** When a person puts faith in the role more than they put faith in themselves and consequently there arises a blandness, a paralysis of personal risk and responsibility to create choice and action. They switch off, they slowly wilt. Then comes the hollow darkness and clinging to their role identity. You can sense inauthenticity in people, they are boring.

**DANNY:** I agree with that. I have observed just that. The decline of the eccentric type or maverick kind of character. These coaches didn’t care much for an idealised version of themselves they just got on with it, in their way. I really am trying to be increasingly like this. I am in many ways. It is hard when you feel pressure, it’s hard to strike out with your own instincts and ideas. I know coaches who are very ‘cardboard cut-out’ and just dull. Everything seems in place but there’s no spark, no bite. Instead of their personality blooming it closes, its fake. One guy I know changes his voice, hides his true opinions, and goes all politically smooth. It is as if he puts on his England tracksuit and bam, his soul evaporates.

**SIMEON:** Yes, authenticity is in actions. It is that responsibility again. You are prepared to take decisions on your shoulders instead of looking for somebody else’s version to copy. I mean there is nothing shameful in listening to and incorporating ideas from others, but the deeper essence of authenticity is to live your life through your own choices. It is to wake up when we catch ourselves playing a role; it is to be awake.

**DANNY:** My mentor told me once that the best thing for my coaching would be for me to ‘keep playing and improving at my own Squash game’ and to continue ‘coming up with my own coaching ideas.’ This man has always done things his own way, he hasn’t read any coaching books or attended any coaching courses, and, in some ways, it has kept him free. His levels of ‘bad faith’ are low come to think of it. There is a freedom there that until now I have not noticed.

*perpetually broken equilibrium which he perpetually re-establishes by a light movement of the arm and hand.” Sartre - Being and Nothingness*

“Some men are born committed to action they do not have a choice, they have been thrown on a path, at the end of that path, an act awaits them, their act. They are in bad faith — they are afraid — and fear, bad faith has an aroma that the gods find delicious. Yes, the gods like that, the pitiful souls.”

Being and Nothingness, Act 1

*“Listen to me: a family man is never a real family man. An assassin is never entirely assassin. They play a role, you understand. While a dead man, he is really dead. To be or not to be, right?”*

**SIMEON:** Is he useful?

**DANNY:** Not half. He has coached multiple world champions both genders and has scores of brilliant and close relationships with all standards of players. He hasn't fit in too well with the rise of all this extra professionalism and monitoring in the last fifteen years or so, he ends up speaking his mind and it doesn't go down well. He was 'sacked' from his job as the National coach of England for not completing his paperwork and getting 'on board' with the emergent culture of monitoring and analysis. He was never going to be a 'yes' man.

**SIMEON:** What else did you write down there?

**DANNY:** I often distinguish between players that I've coached that some go through the motions whilst others seem to really get on and ride the rollercoaster of it. It has always been difficult to understand for me and more so to explain it. I think this 'bad faith' concept is what I have sensed all along. Some players seem more attracted to the idea of being a professional player and all that goes along with it, you know they have all the kit, the style, they enter the tournaments, say the same things in interviews, employ a 'coaching team,' find sponsors and so on, yet when it comes to the stuff that really matters which is the competing and fighting to win and expressing their abilities they somehow get stuck. There seems a gap between the way they carry themselves and their substance, what they produce. The ones who thrive are the ones more connected with how they play and how they improve than merely keeping up by playing the part. In a way they are rough around the edges and just get on with what's next. They seek improvements more than attention, at least when they are at their best. They use others for support but don't overly care for their approval, their prize is in the feelings of growth not the ticking of a box. You get a feel for where people are at, inside themselves.

**SIMEON:** These people you mention that thrive, is there anything else you notice about them?

**DANNY:** I can be straight with them. Tell them the truth more. I don't have to tread on eggshells with them, I suppose there is more security there. It doesn't matter the standard of player or their age or gender or wealth level or culture, it's just some people 'play at it' and some people 'are it.' Does that make sense?

**SIMEON:** It does.

**DANNY:** Also, the players who get on with things contribute to their own solutions with me. It feels like a 'WE' relationship because we are two strong people who are choosing to do what we do, not forced into it. We might argue sometimes or disagree, yet it passes as quickly as it arose. Not much sulking or drama. This in turn brings humour because we can poke fun at each other and risk bringing in some harsh jokes to make a point. They aren't received harshly but the point is made, well sometimes it goes a bit overboard but that's part of it.

**SIMEON:** Choice. Responsibility. Freedom. Authenticity

**DANNY:** So simple yet so deep and complex.

**SIMEON:** As I mentioned freedom weighs very heavily on people, it is difficult to contemplate and accept. Shutting parts of it down in most cases is harmless and we all do it to some degree or other. Sartre was keen to point out that 'bad faith' should not be used for some cheap slogan regarding the stupidity or laziness of a person, he was simply explaining existence and the strategies we fall into to quell a background dizziness or 'nausea' as he termed it. So, the players you noticed aren't particularly wise or foolish they are adapting to life as they have experienced it so far and coping accordingly.

**DANNY:** I never sensed they really knew any of this it's just how they are at that moment.

**SIMEON:** That's true.

**DANNY:** I wrote this down too - What is the bottom line in knowing this stuff? What was Sartre really getting at?

**SIMEON:** Meaning.

**DANNY:** Meaning?

**SIMEON:** Yes. Although we are tied into unique facticity's and situations, it is these very conditions that allow us to transcend, and we must appreciate that. Otherwise, we would simply be floating about in space. Our conditions, our unique existential predicaments are what provides the basis for transcendence, and it is this that provides meaning. In any situation. Even in the direst conditions such as a concentration camp.

**DANNY:** I recently read Man's Search for Meaning by Victor Frankl, he was a prisoner at Auschwitz. His book is about this, he developed 'meaning therapy, logotherapy because of his experiences. He was a psychologist from Vienna.

**SIMEON:** I have enjoyed Frankl's work. He took on some of Sartre's ideas. He thought meaning in one's life to be as vital as sleep.

**DANNY:** So, is meaning at the core of Sartre's ideas? Is it the way out of *bad faith*, going after goals, victories, and medals?

**SIMEON:** Yes and no. It is 'how' you go after those goals, in what mode do you do it. Yes, it is vital to act but there must be a conscious awareness of why one is pursuing those things. Have you some authenticity around this, are you behaving as you do for the right reasons, are you avoiding excuses for your behaviours? Are you making conscious choices and accepting that your '*existence precedes your essence?*'

**DANNY:** It is interesting because me and my wife always try to move forward, even in the hard moments, after the defeats the injuries. In some ways in these times, we are more authentic than

'Sartre cites a café **waiter**; whose movements and conversation are a little too "waiter-esque". His voice oozes with an eagerness to please; he carries food rigidly and ostentatiously; *"his movement is quick and forward, a little too precise, a little too rapid"*.<sup>[3]</sup> *His exaggerated behaviour illustrates that he is play acting as a waiter, as an object in the world: an automaton whose essence is to be a waiter. But that he is obviously acting belies that he is aware that he is not (merely) a waiter but is rather consciously deceiving himself."*

Essays in Existentialism,

*'Life has no meaning a priori ... It is up to you to give it a meaning, and value is nothing but the meaning that you choose.'*  
L'existentialisme est un humanisme (1946), p. 58

**A propos de l'existentialisme: Mise**



when we win. It is a place where things are clear and you either give up or do something about it, straight away. WE have learned I suppose not to play the role of 'loser' for too long. We nip it in the bud after a day perhaps and choose some relevant actions. It's amazing how good you can feel after some good honest work. It humbles us. It's 'getting back on the horse' after falling off. Not out of duty but because it is a choice. A choice to yes face up to the responsibility of what needs to be done to improve our situation. A responsibility the sport demands directly. It makes it all feel worthwhile the ups and downs. The journey has meaning because it is hard, and it is also easy at times too. The journey is the gift. The moments are precious, the hundreds of little decisions we make, the risks the ideas. I am seeing it now.

**SIMEON:** What are you seeing?

**DANNY:** Why we enjoy our life. Why we usually do well. Why I love coaching? It is not for the end glory, which is great, its more for my own usefulness. I must do something and for me coaching is where I feel at home the most. I keep evolving and changing, it forces me to adapt and grow. Coaching is the canvas that allows me to express myself. I coach for me, and I coach for others. I am obviously influenced by others and what they think of me, what they say and how they treat me, but I am equally coaching for myself.

**SIMEON:** I can tell that.

**DANNY:** Can you?

**SIMEON:** Few people I meet can be as frank and interested as you have been. You must have let's say a certain 'pragmatism' to engage in existential reflection. It can be overwhelming, but you have taken a plunge into it. You don't seem worried to reinvent yourself as you go.

**DANNY:** I find it fascinating. I have always sensed something important in the way we construct our perceptions of life and how we behave because of them. I know we all have different stuff going on, but I have felt it vital we take responsibility for as much as we can. My parents left me to live alone aged 16 and I was ready for it, it made me. I never really felt it was their job to look after me after that. It was hard but not in a deep way, I never felt frightened or perpetrated. You must re-invent yourself, otherwise you get bogged down in the mud. Life will pass you by. In a way for me, reinventing myself is being true to myself. I know that is what life is. It's certainly true for sport if you stand still, you go backwards.

**SIMEON:** What pulls you all the way to Hong Kong?

**NARRATOR:** Simeon sensed the time to bring the dialogue to a poignant conclusion. Coach paused for a few seconds considering the realisations.

**DANNY:** Nothing. Nothing and everything.

**au Point (Action, 29 December 1944)**

*"In a world, man must create his own essence: it is in throwing himself into the world, suffering there, struggling there, that he gradually defines himself.*

*"Man cannot will unless he has first understood that he must count on no one but himself; that he is alone, abandoned on earth in the midst of his infinite responsibilities, without help, with no other aim than the one he sets himself, with no other destiny than the one he forges for himself on this earth.*

*"With despair, true optimism begins. The optimism of the man who expects nothing, who knows he has no rights and nothing coming to him, who rejoices in counting on himself alone and in acting alone for the good of all."*

*"...man, first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards.*

*"We will freedom for freedom's sake, in and through particular circumstances. And in thus willing freedom, we discover that it depends entirely upon the freedom of others and that the freedom of others depends upon our own. Obviously, freedom as the definition of a man does not depend upon others, but as soon*

**SIMEON:** Ha-ha-ha-ha

**DANNY:** I am choosing to go. I am pushing to go. What else would I be doing. I am living for me, and I am living for others and that would be the same no matter who I was or what I did. The only time that stops is when I am dead. I must exist, and I will always have time to fill.

**SIMEON:** You coach because you've nothing better to do?

**DANNY:** Ha-ha-ha. Well in a way yes! I am choosing my version of it though, as best as I can I am making it my choice, and this helps me feel free. It gives me a surge of energy. Right now, I am feeling my belly get warmer, my heart feels lighter. Less fear. It's difficult to explain. It just feels more alive. Exciting. Possibilities, joy.

**SIMEON:** You seem to have enjoyed our little talk then.

**DANNY:** I really have yes. My name is Daniel by the way.

**SIMEON:** Simeon.

**NARRATOR:** They shake hands and exchange warm eye contact smile!

**DANNY:** I have worried and pondered if I am living my life too much through my wife, it's been pressing slightly, and it can cause both of us pressure. Like we are too co-dependent but today, talking with you has made me realise that is not the way to think about it.

**SIMEON:** Yes, go on.

**DANNY:** We are both independent and dependent, of course we are. We are for ourselves and for each other and that is natural. We cling a little and we fly alone too. It is what makes us original and magic. I think I felt that confusion had to be one or the other. It does not. We rely on each other a lot and yet we are strong alone too. I do my things, she does hers and we do things joined at the hip too. It's vital we do both parts. We free each other and we bind too. I think that is what we are more like nowadays. There is Space and there is closeness. That is at the heart of all my best relationships.

**SIMEON:** By giving people their freedom, their choices, their independence, there is no forcing of them. They can return the favour only when they are free to choose to. AND, and don't forget there will be perennial anguish too. This back and forth between who we are, our responsibility for freedom, to transcend, to live, is the human condition. So, layering over another coating of frustration or anxiety is not needed. Being is this way.

**DANNY:** Thank you Simeone. You would make a good sport psychologist or coach yourself.

**SIMEON:** Maybe, maybe not. It would really depend on who it was. I may not like them!

*as there is a commitment, I am obliged to will the liberty of others at the same time as my own. I cannot make liberty my aim unless I make that of others equally my aim."*

Existentialism Is a Humanism, lecture (1946)

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## Act 1 Exit commentary

This act was constructed to reveal Sartre's main thrust that *existence precedes essence*. He puts the individual in the position of acting upon the world. For Sartre, responsibility for oneself is the key part of existence. Many sports coaches and performers will align with Sartre's doctrines for putting oneself at cause being the root of the need to constantly improve oneself in the test against opponents, records, and personal goals. Although Sartre reminds us to consider our 'facticity' or the actual ways in which we are limited e.g., size, opportunities, body type, gender etc. he proffers a 'no excuse' mentality onto people with a rejection of inaction even failures. Sartre calls for people to embrace their choices in any given situation and never to switch off into *bad faith* a state by which people make choices based on assumptions of role. In professional sport this would be akin to 'going through the motions' or copying what they think being professional is. This is something we can all slip into, but Sartre calls to 'wake up' to oneself constantly and remember one always has a choice of attitude which must then be actioned in our lives.

This dialogue was developed to reveal these aspects particularly how easy it is to switch off into automatic *bad faith* in an unconscious attempt to reduce responsibility and escape the nausea that too much free choice can burden ('*we are condemned to be free*'). Sartre is a challenging task master and whilst he understands clearly why we fall into *bad faith* he prods at us to get back on track at any point and go forwards to our potential selves despite the potential overwhelming. As a coach, I can resonate with this dilemma of being content with who I am and what I have achieved whilst striving to become more and achieve more. I am aware I play roles and operate out of habit or even fashion at times, yet I am also aware that I am unique and pave my own style. By incorporating Sartre's ideas into this dialogue, and particularly this duality of '*am I am that I am, whilst I am also that I am not yet,*' it is intended to remind the reader that it is important to ask oneself 'why do I continue to do what I do in the way that I do it?' In reasoning and searching for an answer to this question Sartre's ideas can aid sports performers and coaches to act out authentic motivations and personal desires. This can clarify existence for the individual concerned and as such be better equipped to positively experience the turbulence of sporting life.

## ACT 2

### **Danny meets Nathanael whilst running on a Monaco beach. He brings forth some of the prescriptive philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche.**

Nathanael is an ardent disciple of Friedrich Nietzsche's thinking and thus views the world very much through the lens of his key ideas. The ideas that primarily stimulate this dialogue are from Nietzsche's seminal work *Thus Spoke Zarathustra (1881)* (Übermensch, Self-Overcoming and transition phases of the Camel- Lion-Child, God is Dead) as well as inclusions from *The Gay Science (1882)* (Amor Fati) and *On the Genealogy of Morality (1887)* (Slave Morality).

The tone of this dialogue represents Nietzsche's intimidating and provocative self- proclamation that.

*"I know my fate. One day my name will be associated with the memory of something tremendous — a crisis without equal on earth, the most profound collision of conscience, a decision that was conjured up against everything that had been believed, demanded, hallowed so far. I am no man, I am dynamite."*

The content of the dialogue is to bring forth some of Nietzsche's hard to grasp ideas in the more ordinary for the purpose of understanding and applied existential thought.

*"What is familiar is what we are used to; and what we are used to is most difficult to 'know' — that is to see a problem; that is to see as strange, as distant as outside us."* The Gay Science p301

<p><b>NATHANIEL:</b> (Observing the frantic efforts of the coach training himself on a small area of beach, whilst at the Monte Carlo Classic Squash championships.) Splendid young traveller, splendid indeed? (Clapping Loudly)</p> <p><b>DANNY:</b> Smiling, gulping in air, spitting out froth from the exertion.</p> <p><b>NATHANIEL:</b> Splendid, wonderful. Again....</p> <p><b>NARRATOR:</b> Danny, encouraged by the enthusiasm and eccentricity of the man with the impressive moustache, duly completed another repetition</p> <p><b>DANNY:</b> Thanks for that. It helped me push.</p> <p><b>NATHANIEL:</b> Without pushing, what are we? What is the value in the person who sits comfortably?</p> <p><b>DANNY:</b> Good question. I often wonder why I have the urge to keep pushing on. I'm 45 years old now, not even professional but I still find it important to be fit. I am a coach and I ask performers to push themselves every day and I think it's important I do the same. It keeps me sane. Last set now.</p>	<p><b>Self-Overcoming</b> N referred to the 'Last man' who would struggle in comfort, taking no risks. The anthesis of the 'Übermensch' who creates their own meaning through personal values and work towards manifesting those values?</p> <p>Twilight of Idols (1888)</p>
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<p><b>NATHANIEL:</b> I have more to say on that! Come and join me over there on the rocks when you've finished. We can have a dialogue. You may discover something vital. If you desire, it?</p> <p><b>DANNY:</b> I will yes. Give me 10 minutes to stretch down.</p> <p>(10 minutes later, sat on the rocks, waves mildly breaking creating some volume)</p> <p><b>DANNY:</b> Phew; that was a hard session, I can feel it now in my legs?</p> <p><b>NATHANIEL:</b> I once wrote; 'Out of life's school of war – What does not kill me makes me stronger.'</p> <p><b>DANNY:</b> Yes, I have heard that, especially in my trade of competitive sport. People say it when they lose and want to feel better. Are you saying you wrote that?</p> <p><b>NATHANIEL:</b> Amongst many things yes. What have you made of that statement, in your daily existence?</p> <p><b>DANNY:</b> I have taken it to mean that we can learn from defeats and misfortune. That even in dire circumstances, if we are clever, we can improve our situations. Take today, I was coaching a player yesterday and they lost badly, heavily. So today, even during the session then, I have been thinking how yesterday's experience can make the player better because of it.</p> <p><b>NATHANIEL:</b> The player or you?</p> <p><b>DANNY:</b> The player?</p> <p><b>NATHANIEL:</b> Why so preoccupied with another's existence, what of your own? Do you even recognise that distinction?</p> <p><b>DANNY:</b> Yes, my own life is how things are for me and their life is how things are for them?</p> <p><b>NATHANIEL:</b> So why contemplate upon them? Why ponder on their predicaments, is your own life not enough? Do you live to serve, like a good man should?</p> <p><b>DANNY:</b> Yes, it is, more than enough actually. I have enough on my plate. I am distracting myself?</p> <p><b>NATHANIEL:</b> You are hiding?</p> <p><b>DANNY:</b> Hiding? From what?</p> <p><b>NATHANIEL:</b> Truth? Pain? Responsibility?</p> <p><b>DANNY:</b> I am not sure what you mean? I really care for my players, and I want to be the best coach I can be, that's all. I am distracted perhaps but not hiding.</p>	<p>Hints here towards 'Master– Slave morality' from '<i>On the Genealogy of Morality</i>' (1887)</p> <p>Master morality values power and pride whilst Slave morality values kindness, empathy, and sympathy</p> <p>Careful subversion to the master.</p> <p>In coaching there is a fine balance between master and servant. How these values are set up by the culture is important.</p> <p>This balance of 'power' in the relationship between service and being served is central to coaching relationships.</p> <p>Sometimes it's about utility and co dependence. Maybe the coaches are equally selfish. We want our players to show that greed, that mentality of being dominant and climbing the hierarchy. What is social or unselfish about that?</p> <p>Beware the '<b>Herd Mentality</b>'</p> <p>In sport, it is difficult to stray from the predominant thoughts and behaviours of the</p>
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<p><b>NATHANIEL:</b> So, you're more inclined to distance yourself from your own issues by being nice, playing the game and adopting more of a "<i>What doesn't kill them, makes them stronger!</i>" Like a detached piece of advice, an armchair expert. A man who casts assumptions, puts faith in mere words and who shields from personal action?</p> <p><b>DANNY:</b> I am not lazy, nor unkind. I believe in my advice; I want what is best for my players. It is part of my philosophy to treat them well and be there for them.</p> <p><b>NATHANIEL:</b> So, you are trapped!! Trapped in your service and your morality to suffer, serve, to live off their existence and their efforts.</p> <p><b>DANNY:</b> I really disagree that I am trapped, yet strangely your claims make sense to me somewhere in my mind. It does annoy me how much time I invest in other people, and they never appreciate all the thought and emotion I put into them. They are quite selfish at times, but they need to be.</p> <p><b>NATHANIEL:</b> Do you believe 'selfishness' is a concept at all?</p> <p><b>DANNY:</b> In what way? I mean I just said it so I must.</p> <p><b>NATHANIEL:</b> In a moral way. In a way where to be a selfish person is to be lowly conceived when compared to an opposite of 'other-centred duty' and care.</p> <p><b>DANNY:</b> Yes, I think 'selfishness' is a negative state. If we all just looked out for ourselves then where would we be?</p> <p><b>NATHANIEL:</b> Ah, and if we all only looked out for others then that would be preferable?</p> <p><b>DANNY:</b> It would be much better yes.</p> <p><b>NATHANIEL:</b> How?</p> <p><b>DANNY:</b> Well, we would have more community, more shared beliefs, cooperation, and help.</p> <p><b>NATHANIEL:</b> I add to that 'vanity,' 'inferiority,' 'medalling,' 'neediness,' 'weakness,' 'moral superiority- 'righteousness.' Is that okay too?</p> <p><b>DANNY:</b> I don't understand you.</p> <p><b>NATHANIEL:</b> I put it to you that your profession 'coaching' as you call it, appears to me a practice where one cries for a good opinion of oneself through flattery. Flattery achieved by having a good opinion of oneself through rescuing and feeding off the needy meek and the powerless. You desire compliant well-behaved followers do you not? You have set up a game you cannot lose. You win the moral high ground at each turn by putting yourself above criticism by refusing to take power and create your own morality. You sir, sound weak to me.</p>	<p>time. Originality can be stifled as we run towards the latest consensual understanding and confabulate/justify our theoretical and moral convictions. We want to 'fit in' and do it as we are supposed to as laid out by the heroes of the time. This can help and this can hinder. Going full servitude to the herd is something to avoid if one wants to maintain curiosity and originality in one's sporting life.</p> <p>“There exists in the world a single path along which no can go except you: whither does it lead? DO NOT ASK? GO ALONG IT.” (Thus Spoke Zarathustra)</p> <p>3 stages of metamorphosis</p> <p><b>SIMEON:</b> Camel Lion Child</p> <p><b>CAMEL:</b> we must struggle to strengthen, do our duties, learn to be humbled by life's strains and demands. In sport this would include losing, training, fighting to win, hurting, overcoming failures, taking them on the chin, and learning through experience. It will include learning the basics over and over, structured repetition and dealing with the chaos of competition too.</p>
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And blindly immoral yourself. You want your cake and to eat it. The meek will inherit the earth you suggest, by listening and behaving well, yet you yourself by pretending to be meek are in fact not. You can't kill and dominate without some form of oppression. There is contradiction rife here. Intentions are to dominate to suppress others and attain mastery of your environments. How may this be achieved by being wholly 'other centred' or without what you decry to be selfish?

**DANNY:** I ..... I don't ..... I mean... .....that's just not true.

**NATHANIEL:** Defend your position then. Tell me how I am wrong?

**DANNY:** I am not weak. I love what I do. I can give as good as I get, and I am demanding of players who I lead. I do understand your point. I have gone softer lately, I feel like I have lost my power these last few years. I have been 'softer' much more 'understanding' and lost what I think is my aggressive instinct to take over others.

**NATHANIEL:** SO, you do have something to say for yourself. Well done. You need to. What was this aggression you speak of?

**DANNY:** I could be straight. Angry. Lay out the facts a bit more clearly. I was in charge more and was more inclined to challenge a person directly for areas they had fallen short. It felt more emotional, more charged. I feared arguments less, I even picked an argument now and again. Sometimes it helped a lot, we got things moving quickly. We nipped things in the bud. Occasionally it caused problems too, but only temporarily and it was good to clear the air in most cases.

**NATHANIEL:** Was that the brand of selfishness you previously scorned?

**DANNY:** What do you mean?

**NATHANIEL:** Was your behaviour designed to only make things good for you even though you were cruel, argument ally forceful, highly demanding?

**DANNY:** No, it was me being demanding and assertive to help both of us. I wanted US to win. I didn't want us going down, I wanted to go up. I wanted to fight back and do it my way because I felt it was what was best based on my instincts and experience. I would include players in this, but I was noticeably clear with my own views and how I thought we needed to change.

**NATHANIEL:** Go on, continue.

**DANNY:** Well players are usually ones for excuses and self-indulgence. Even the strong ones can make excuses, it seems a natural reaction after a loss. They are down and they lick their wounds. Meanwhile time is passing, and truths aren't addressed. It is a leader's job to prevent this slide. We must get to the correct actions and quickly. No drifting. If you can't handle that then you would-be,

no-

The 'Camel' becomes disengaged and stuck in '*the loneliest desert*'

**LION:** this is the way 'N' proposed we can break away from the 'camel' phase of subordination and frustration of what can become a desert of meaninglessness, we speak our minds and understand our "WILL TO POWER" as a vital ingredient of MEANING. N claimed the OVERMAN must create one's own meaning as their lacks a universal one (GOD IS DEAD! According to N)

*"Here the spirit becomes a lion who would conquer his freedom and be master in his own desert. Here he seeks out his last master: he wants to fight him and his last god; for ultimate victory he wants to fight with the great dragon. Who is the great dragon whom the spirit will no longer call lord and God? "Thou shalt" is the name of the great dragon. But the spirit of the lion says, "I will." "Thou shalt" lies in his way, sparkling like gold, an animal covered with scaled; and on every scale shines a golden "thou shalt." My brothers, why is there a need in the spirit for the lion? Why is not the beast of burden, which renounces and is reverent, enough? To create new values—that even the lion cannot do; but the creation of*

good working with me. You must put in the work and get the basics right over and over before you can start your own additions. I get tired of all this modern stuff about creativity and everyone having an opinion WHEN they haven't made it past first base. You've got to learn to take your medicine, to shut up and take orders, do what you are told and get it damn well done. The best players I have seen and worked with do this, they have no problem being put 'under the line' so to speak. They can take the criticism and it isn't long before they realise, they need to improve and change what they've been told or else.

**NATHANIEL:** Or else what?

**DANNY:** Or else somebody else will come along and take what they want from them. They'll be swallowed up by better more organised and sophisticated rivals. People who want to keep them down and rub their faces in it. Opponents who despite being nice to their faces will covertly be plotting to extinguish them as legitimate competitors. They'll get fitter, better, more durable, better resourced, more modernised all in an attack to defeat rivals. Their coaches too, they all get on a mission to win by their own increased abilities to be better than the rest. Its ruthless, especially at the international level.

**NATHANIEL:** Okay. So why did I find you today hiding out here, pondering, pretending to be doing something? Where are you heading to? Where is your attention and what your direct actions to be? How are you leading now?

**DANNY:** I am not, really, am I? I am pondering. Hiding I suppose, as you said. I sometimes withdraw into myself like a tortoise back into its shell. I retreat. That's not just physically either it's in my ambitions and confidence. I am best when I attack back. I haven't done that today. I have pretended to myself by keeping busy, out of the way. Sometimes it's good to take myself away to devise plans or rest but today was a day for response and I did not.

**NATHANIEL:** You are back in your place. Back to where you belong. Where you deserve to be, I suspect? You are a dutiful man are you not? A person contented to behave well, to wait your turn and most of all cause no disruption to the peace of accepting your defeats?

**DANNY:** Why are you trying to arouse my anger? You are deliberately stirring a response from me, pushing my nerves. You criticise me yet offer no solutions or empathy for my predicament.

**NATHANIEL:** I intend nothing for you. I am merely reflecting your predicament back at you. You appear as a half lion half camel kind of creature. Half of you wants to roar and take and demand by your own standards of success, yet half of you bleats and carries the weight of servitude and behaving as you ought to. Which truly is it? More importantly, which does it need to be for the sake of your ambitions? For the sake of your purpose, which is your life energy, your reason to live fully and to set that example by your own actions.

*freedom for oneself for new creation—that is within the power of the lion. The creation of freedom for oneself and a sacred “No” even to duty—for that, my brothers, the lion is needed. To assume the right to new values—that is the most terrifying assumption for a reverent spirit that would bear much.”*

**Herd Mentality** – the pull of dutiful and moral behaviour for the long term good



**DANNY:** I believe I need to gather myself and show the strength, I want to roar. Though I am not used to this. I have followed the rules, played the game. I have listened to all the experts, read the books, and passed the courses. I have the badges; I have truly listened. I have kept my council close and earned loyalty from players. I have rarely upset people; I have hardly spoken my true mind. Yet in the times I have, in those rare occasions I have refused to listen to the propaganda and said it straight, argued back and fostered my own strength of action, I have felt good. I have felt more alive and truthful. In ways I cannot express I have felt less fraudulent by commanding myself to action and resisting the oppressive pull of the ‘they.’

**NATHANIEL:** The ‘they?’ Who are they?

**DANNY:** The gods of my mind I suppose. The people I don’t want to upset, the ones that cause me no intentional harm, even the ones who appear willingly helpful. The ‘they’ are all those who make me wary of trusting my own volitions. I pander to those god damn rulers, and I know I do it. The ones that will scrutinise, ghosts from my past, prison guards from my present and kin of my future. I bow to them; they rule me too often. ‘They’ must now be pushed back; I must move on without them. It is time to love myself more perhaps. To hold enough security within so that ‘they’ are mere supporters and servants not the served. I have been bubbling away with this dilemma for some time. I have desires beyond pleasing the traditions of my sport and the specific expectations of the community. I have seen fellow coaches drown in their own banality and sheer blandness. They appear mindless to me. Numb of any real force. They ride the back of other people’s passions and creative risks. I think their desires to be popular, to be faultless of criticism and play safe is weak.

**NATHANIEL:** Are you part of this herd yourself?

**DANNY:** Yes, I am. I can feel it. It has been important to ‘play the game,’ to walk step by step and have my hand held but my spirit has had enough. I am bursting to break out. I want to fly not crawl. I am powerful and effective when I summon up my own desires and act upon my choices. I see this in the best players. They trust their own spirit, they fight for their own cause, they have the look in their eyes. It is something to see, it is a lesson to the meek.

**NATHANIEL:** Did not Jesus suggest himself ‘*that the meek will inherit the earth?*’ Do you criticise the *son of God* himself? Was he wrong?

**DANNY:** I don’t know what *he* meant exactly but being meek has been important for me, yet I haven’t been given anything specific for it. I know there is a long-term promise but in combat and in ‘winning,’ beating others, I don’t see anyone being ordained in victory through a form of sustained moral effort. It is a wonderful thing to believe in, a nice narrative that one day all the appropriate and required efforts add up and consequently the ‘gods of sport’ will grant you a victory, but that narrative doesn’t apply when real humans are trying equally as hard as each other and there is only room for a few at the top of the tree. I know of many ‘meek’ who never get to prove this narrative so

Nietzsche asserted Jesus was the only true Christian as he died for his sins. All others have been a shadow of this and thus not truly Christian. Fakes.

In coaching and academic literature, it is easy to preach but not actually do. Actions are different than words.

**CHILD – 3<sup>rd</sup> stage**

*“But say, my brothers, what can the child do that even the lion could not do? Why must the preying lion still become a child? The child is innocence and forgetting, a new*

and equally some that gain disproportionately repeated victories. I notice the narrative retrofits well in the tales and autobiographies of those that win much. Their story sells, they become societies heroes, the ones to emulate. Yet we hear nothing of those ‘meek and dutiful’ people who fail in their quests for their goals. They fall short despite their adherence to the morality of their actions.

So, the meek may one day, inherit the earth but as far as I can tell they don’t simply inherit trophies or reach the top of hierarchies. No nothing is given. You must ‘take’ it from others, you must win by many means, and you must learn how to adapt and fight harder. You must tread your own path and design ways to bring down your enemies. This way they become helpful in your quest, “frenemies” so to speak. They are part friend also because they force you to react, to connive, to plan and to improve your weaponry, your strategies, and motivations. A useful ‘frenemy” is one who propels your need to grow, darkly they can bring out the worst in you which just may mean the best of you. Revenge, defiance, dignity, pride, dominance, strength, narcissism, greed, power; these things are all at play.

**NATHANIEL:** So, my friend, this is where you want to be? Can you be this even if you want it?

**DANNY:** Well, “*That which does not kill us makes us stronger?*” Is that not your own mentors view?

**NATHANIEL:** It is. You are bolstering your own self now. Might you give yourself permission to overcome your own self? Within this very dialogue you appear to have awoken to something within, the ‘they’ may be loud, but you will hear their judgements and prophecies less.

**DANNY:** Yes, I get phases like this it is within me, but I have often felt too serious a man. I roar yes but, in a sense, I become preoccupied with the fight. It is at the cost of others and even though it generates huge force of action and purpose of all kinds, I still find myself strapped to the bind of the group, the hierarchy, others. I still can’t escape it. The incessant battle that only has temporary meaning and slight relief. Most of the time I am in a state of future longing and past correction. Only at the moments of victory do I find the peace, the joy and steadiness of my existence. Must it be this way I think?

**NATHANIEL:** Hahaha (loudly with a glint beaming from his eyes) So now you are trapped in an unusual way? A stale mate perhaps? No winners on either side? In both scenarios you a feeling that you were winning only to realise that all along you were losing a game you could not conquer.

**DANNY:** That’s exactly it. I haven’t heard it explained so simply. That’s what competition feels like to me. That’s what coaching feels like in many ways when you break it down. It feels joyless at times, it loses its magic.

**NATHANIEL:** What magic?

*beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel, a first movement, a sacred “Yes.” For the game of creation, my brothers, a sacred “Yes” is needed: the spirit now wills his own will, and he who had been lost to the world now conquers his own world.”*

**DANNY:** The surprise, I mean the excitement. No, I don't mean that because I still get excited and still surprised, it's more the (pause)..... Well, it's the playfulness, I think.

**NATHANIEL:** When was the last time you felt playful in all this then? I mean you have just spent the last 20 minutes talking about anything but play, more so of war.

**DANNY:** I think that is it. Thinking about sport as a war is helpful because it is like that and you must be combative and all that brings, yet at the same time there is no utility in holding on to that metaphor.

**NATHANIEL:** Is it not more than a metaphor? You quite clearly explained that it is your 'actions' that matter not the way you think about things.

**DANNY:** Yes and No. I believe the metaphor is vital in how you 'flavour' your actions. The metaphor can change your energy around why you do what you do.

**NATHANIEL:** What metaphor helps you to bring the playfulness to your work? Presuming playfulness is what you want.

**DANNY:** I remember a time when everything felt in total balance. My skill, my intentions, my state of mind, my energy, my communication, my relationship with my wife.

**NATHANIEL:** When?

**DANNY:** It was after my wife had had a mid-career breakdown. They call it 'burnout,' but I don't know. It felt more like an overwhelming need to get away from the whole sports scene and live away from it. Her technical coach described the state as battle weariness, which my wife said made some sense to her. She couldn't face everyone trying to take her down because she had become world champion the year previously and had enjoyed a high time. I believe the realisation that despite being crowned champion of the world, people still want to take you down off that perch and replace you. You are somebody else's biggest prize scalp, and they want it. It feels unfair because you had been living with the delusion that once the promised land was reached, things wouldn't attack you anymore. It was a realisation that on top of mountains roam different beasts and to stay there or even climb new mountains, one had to fight even harder. She couldn't do it. One by one they took chunks of her flesh and before she was devoured completely, she had to exit the stage.

**NATHANIEL:** Go on....

**DANNY:** Well, after a month or so away, whilst we were resting together in Dubai, having what felt like our first holiday in years where we were 'in the moment,' just being there, a conversation sprang up about what we wanted to do with the rest of our lives. I had a few ideas relating to writing, my teaching and education but Laura was a bit

stumped for an answer. I said Well ‘what did you want to do when you were a child?’

**NATHANIEL:** Yes....

**DANNY:** Well, she went very silent, and I waited for her to say something. She said nothing, but her eyes became very tearful and before I could ask her anything else, she collected some of her things and walked off. As usual I thought I had said something wrong or had ruined the holiday by bringing up the future. All the usual things that go through a spouse’s head when one suddenly withdraws off upset.

Well about an hour later I found her in the gymnasium where we had exercised each day. We were alone. Cautiously I asked her if she was okay and what was she upset about. She began crying but talked: *“I just want to win.”* She spoke. *“When I was little all I wanted to do was win.”*

*“And why was that do you think?”* I asked.

*“I just loved trying to win, finding a way, training, fighting. I never really loved the game itself, but I just loved the battle, the competition. I hated losing but I could handle it. I just wanted to get them back. That’s it just that.”*

“Right yes, I see,” I murmured, confused where this was coming from.

*“I want to play; I want to be myself again and be a warrior. I don’t know why it all became such a pity party. I’ve gone pathetic.”*

*“(Laughter) ...”* I laughed with relief that it was not me who had ruined the holiday but more importantly that Laura had had a huge psychological wake up.

*“I’m going to play again and I’m going to attack it like I did as a kid. That’s what I dreamed of and I’m good at it. I never played for all the bullshit about what people thought I just wanted to win for money, trophies and to beat other girls. That’s the fun in it. I do love playing squash even though I don’t love the game. (Laughter) .... does that even make any sense?”*

That was it from that point on. Within 18 months Laura became the world number 1 ranked player. Everything changed from that point in a strange way. It was like she ‘got over herself’ by becoming childlike again.

**NATHANIEL:** The child is the final part of all this. The child IS the way out and it is no wonder that your wife made her way on. Senior Nietzsche called this ‘Self Overcoming’ and for a while in that domain of her life by finally liberating herself from the dragon of “Though shalt.” She returned to the importance of living in the present moment and finding her own values, ones that she could extract deep meaning from.

**Amor Fati** – to love one’s own fate:

*“I want to learn more and more to see as beautiful what is necessary in things; then I shall be one of those who makes things beautiful. Amor fati: let that be my love henceforth! I do not want to wage war against what is ugly. And all in all, and on the whole: someday I wish to be only a Yes-sayer.”*

The Gay Science, p276

**DANNY:** This was it and she began reading more books about this. “The power of now” being one of them!

**NATHANIEL:** Was this the balance you alluded to?

**DANNY:** Yes, for most of the time from then on, we had much more freedom. Everything was more about personal expression. There was less stress and far more genuine excitement to compete and battle. Losses were disappointing but didn’t depress us. We were back ‘on the horse’ much quicker, in a way we became an unstoppable force. It felt much more inspirational rather than having to motivate ourselves; a natural self-perpetuating energy.

**NATHANIEL:** As a child at play then. The magic was back.

**DANNY:** Yes. The magic was there.

**NATHANIEL:** It’s been amazing to talk with you for this brief time my friend. I will leave you now.

**DANNY:** Thank you Sir. I will not forget our dialogue.

**NATHANIEL:** You will! And you will not!

**DANNY:** I will!

**NATHANIEL:** Allow me to leave you with one final thought to ponder over: If you could live your life over and over and over recurrently, the same life eternally the same as the preceding one, would you be happy to? Might you live as to accept and appreciate all the parts, the apparent good and bad incidents and at the same time recognise the beauty of the connected tapestry of your whole life?

**DANNY:** Do you mean that everything happens for a reason?

**NATHANIEL:** I do not. Think. There is a difference. Do not put the ‘cart before the horse’ my friend. Avoid the mysticism of such pre-determined nonsense. This is ‘work to be done,’ a mountain to climb, not a convenient contraption of idle observation. A life’s meaning must be created by earning it, not granted to you. The spoils arrive after sustained efforts of action and considered thought. A personal truth, a mighty acceptance of our fate, a glorious reflection upon all your predicaments.

**DANNY:** I will try.

**NATHANIEL:** Do it.

**DANNY:** I mean yes, I will DO.

**NATHANIEL:** So long coach! Enthuse.

\* “yes sayer” was meant as ACCEPTANCE of what is.

And, a few years later, in Ecce Homo Nietzsche writes:

*“My formula for greatness in a human being is **amor fati**: that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Not merely bear what is necessary, still less conceal it... but love it.” p38*

## Act 2 Exit Commentary

In the act, Nietzsche represents the role of the existential motivator and ruthless disruptor of mediocrity and *herd* like thinking. This act has a deliberate tone of being assertive and straightforward and is the least Socratic of all the acts despite there still being a conversational investigation and evident rapport. Often misquoted with motivational intent (e.g., “What doesn’t kill you makes you stronger”) Nietzsche’s philosophy does align well with the competitive dominance aspects of professional sport and some of his ideas are applied here to illustrate how. His core belief that humans exist as *Will to Power*, to gain dominance of situations and have things go the way he wants them to, is the ‘bottom line’ philosophy of most competitive sports environments. There may be concurrent elements of Will to Pleasure (Sigmund Freud, Joseph Adler) and Will to Meaning (Victor Frankl) but competition is firstly about striving for and reaching the top of ones invested hierarchy and this is evidenced by those who win are rewarded and idolised by individuals and nations alike. Nietzsche tackles this head on with his proposals related to the ‘Uber mensch’ character he constructs who must transform through the metamorphoses of spirit (Camel, Lion, Child) and to slay the dragon of *thou shalt* which represents many of the accepted moral social and personal constraints we are subjected to as we exist. He is demanding and calls for courage and determination of one’s *Will to Power* in the face of our own naivety and unconscious dutiful compliance (slave morality).

In professional Sport there can only be so many who reach the top of their fields or who attain the dream goals they strive for. Most coaches and performers will experience defeat and falling short of targets more frequently than achievement. Consequently, dealing with this existential state of ‘lack’ or more simply felt regretfully as ‘I could have, I would have, I should have’ becomes a pressing infestation of one’s spirit and self-narrative. Nietzsche faces this head on and requests us to admit this but not lose our will. The inclusion of his idea of ‘amor fati’ in this act illustrates one of his philosophical solutions to the inevitable failures born out of ones striving to be more. In this way Nietzsche’s ideas can help individuals go for it without the fears of regret or the excuses of background morality that held one back. I have applied his ideas to the performers who I support and there has often been a clearing out of unintended limiting beliefs designed to soften the blow of failure after total commitment. This has opened clarity of purpose and a more singular energetic pursuit of what they genuinely want for themselves, unbound by the shackles of negative ‘what ifs.’

### ACT 3

**Danny meets Sarah on a train journey heading north from London. Sarah introduces some of Simone De Beauvoir's existential thinking from her book *The Ethics of Ambiguity*.**

Sarah a former mentee of Simone De Beauvoir meets Danny in England, travelling on a train journey from London heading North. Aged 72 years, Sarah sparks up conversation by enquiring about the kit bag Danny had with him. The bag produced by 'Head' was the brand of her deceased husband's favourite type of Tennis Racket, a sport they played together for 47 years. Soon the conversation turns into a dialogue as regards what constitutes a successful marriage, which then leads to relationships generally and some of the proposed tactics that people employ as they try to deal with their freedom. Sarah centre's her ideas and questions around Simone De Beauvoir's existential thinking, specifically from parts one and two of *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1947), where caricatures are created to explain how to cope with existential freedom and its ceaseless ambiguity. Applications to professional sport arise through references to Danny's coaching experiences.

*"At the present time there still exist many doctrines which choose to leave in the shadow certain troubling aspects of a too complex situation. But their attempt to lie to us is in vain. Cowardice doesn't pay. Those reasonable metaphysics, those consoling ethics with which they would like to entice us only accentuate the disorder from which we suffer. Men of today seem to feel more acutely than ever the paradox of their condition. They know themselves to be the supreme end to which all action should be subordinated, but the exigencies of action force them to treat one another as instruments or obstacles, as means." (The Ethics of Ambiguity, p7).*

**SARAH:** That's a beautiful bag you have there. Is it for Tennis?

**DANNY:** Thank you, no its for Squash. Smaller rackets, not as heavy thankfully.

**SARAH:** Right you are. My husband was always hurting his shoulders with the weight of tennis rackets. He used to carry 4 of them with him.

**DANNY:** Wow, no wonder. He must have been a keen player to have four bats with him!

**SARAH:** Oh yes, he was keen alright. We played tennis for 47 years together in total, before he died last year.

**DANNY:** Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. He must have really enjoyed it, well you both must have.

**SARAH:** We did very much. It caused many an argument too but usually because I beat him, or we lost a doubles match and I blamed him or vice versa.

*"Man knows and thinks this tragic ambivalence which the animal and the plant merely undergo. A new paradox is thereby introduced into his destiny. "Rational animal," "thinking reed," he escapes from his natural condition without, however, freeing himself from it. He is still a part of this world of which he is a consciousness. He asserts himself as a pure internality against which no external power' can take hold,*

**DANNY:** Ha. That's typical. I play Squash with my Wife; well, I coach her too, so I know all about the tension and silly arguments that pop up out of nowhere.

**SARAH:** Ooooh, now that's another level of complexity, coaching her. Does she play professionally? Do Squash have professionals?

**DANNY:** Yes, she's professional and yes there's a world tour. We travel the world together, playing tournaments. I am just returning from Egypt now. She has gone on to another tournament with the England team, that's why I'm on my own.

**SARAH:** Marvellous. How did she get on in Egypt?

**DANNY:** She lost in the semi-finals but played well. She is doing very well. She is ranked number one in the world now, so it is quite amazing really.

**SARAH:** Fabulous. That is an exceedingly rare thing indeed. To get to the top of the tree in any sport is an incredible achievement. You sound as if you make a great pair.

**DANNY:** I suppose we are. It's all Laura really. She has worked so hard and deserves what she has achieved.

**SARAH:** Yes, and don't be so modest. There are lots that goes into an expedition like that. My husband had lots of success with his writing and academic career, in fact I am returning now with a posthumous award he was given from the British Shakespeare Society for his interpretation of King Lear. It took him 20 years on and off to produce it. Yet who do you think it was who encouraged him and listened to him. Picked him up when he wasted a year's work going around in circles. (chuckling) Or when he was criticised by prominent professors at his own University!

**DANNY:** You did.

**SARAH:** I did so. Exactly where can we say that one of us ends and the other begins, when people need each other so much? Yes, we are our own person, and we are all quirky and unique BUT we are also at the same time so similar in that we are connected to others. When people say things like I feel like I've lost a part of me since my mum or dad, or partner died, it's true. People are part of us.

**DANNY:** It's funny you say that because that is how I feel, especially with my wife but I've never realised it that way before. I suppose it sounds stupid to say it because there's no actual physical links. Yet I do feel really connected to her. It worries me because I sometimes think If anything bad happened to her, I would be totally lost. Then because of that I feel panicked or at least stupid, a bit pathetic, weak, vulnerable.

**SARAH:** The world isn't purely physical, mark my words. We do not experience the world only physically although our bodies are especially important, and they are so wise. No, we experience life much more ambiguously than the atoms and molecules that make us. Your strength

*and he also experiences himself as a thing crushed by the dark weight of other things. At every moment he can grasp the nontemporal truth of his existence. But between the past which no longer is and the future, which is not yet, this moment when he exists is nothing. This privilege, which he alone possesses, of being a sovereign and unique subject amidst a universe of objects, is what he shares with all his fellowmen. In turn an object for others, he is nothing more than an individual in the collectively on which he depends." P5-6*

*"In spite of so many stubborn lies, at every moment, at every opportunity, the truth comes to light, the truth of life and death, of my solitude and my bond with the world, of my freedom and my servitude, of the insignificance and the sovereign importance of each man and all men." P8*

*"Let us try to assume our fundamental ambiguity. It is in the knowledge of the genuine conditions of our life that we must draw strength to live and our reason for acting." p8*

*"The child's situation is characterized by his finding himself cast into*



is your weakness, and your love has potential to free you and trap you all at the same time. Your brain itself so vital for your survival is both your servant and your master. We don't have the luxury that my lovely Caitlyn has.

**DANNY:** Eh?

**SARAH:** Ha. My Cat Caitlyn. She dwells on no past or worries about what might come of her, or what she *could* make of herself, what she *should* make of herself given her potential and opportunities. She basks about the place in blissful habit, God like. She needs nothing to make her more. No life advice required, no contemplation of remarkable things, none of trivial things either! She lacks nothing. She is her own God.

**DANNY:** My word, that is profound. Are all animals Gods? Are you saying the opposite for people?

**SARAH:** Well, a God lacks for nothing; they are in full control of all existence. It was my friend Sartre who claimed that most people fall into the trap of wanting to become god, wanting to rid themselves of their lack of control over their impending futures, an assured and fulfilled destiny. In contrast, there exists children and animals. What do healthy young children share with animals? In their nature, their daily outlook?

**DANNY:** Fun? Energy?

**SARAH:** Perhaps.

**DANNY:** Innocence?

**SARAH:** In what way?

**DANNY:** Well, I mean that they don't have to worry about much apart from just getting through the days, playing, eating, some sleep and that's kind of it. Day to day. Like when I was a kid summer holidays used to feel great, they felt like they went on for years it was great. I just played a lot, I didn't worry, I wasn't too bothered about the next week I just wanted to be good now. I get that feeling on holiday NOW sometimes, at Christmas too. It reminds me of childhood, I get this feeling I can't describe. My dog, Seamus seems to be carefree most of the time apart from when he wants to eat or go out?

**SARAH:** Interesting, isn't it? Is that innocence or more like freedom?

**DANNY:** I think I meant Freedom yes, which brings innocence, I think.

**SARAH:** Free from what exactly? I am Sarah.

**DANNY:** Oh, hi Sarah, Danny, pleased to meet you (shakes hands). Free from stress I suppose. Free from life. No not from life more from what life means. They are looked after and protected from the serious

*a universe which he has not helped to establish, which has been fashioned without him, and which appears to him as an absolute to which he can only submit. In his eyes, human inventions, words, customs, and values are given facts, as inevitable as the sky and the trees. This means that the world in which he lives is a serious world, since the characteristic of the spirit of seriousness is to consider values as ready-made things. That does not mean that the child himself is serious. On the contrary, he is allowed to play, to expend his existence freely. In his child's circle he feels that he can passionately pursue and joyfully attain goals which he has set up for himself. But if he fulfils this experience in all tranquillity; it is precisely because the domain open to his subjectivity seems insignificant and puerile in his own eyes. He feels himself happily irresponsible."*

*"Normally the child escapes the anguish of freedom. He can, if he likes, be recalcitrant, lazy; his whims and his faults concern only him. They do not weigh upon the earth. They can not make a dent in the serene order of a world which existed before him, without him, where he is in a state of security by virtue of his*

stuff. It's like your only job is to get up in a morning and do what's needed that day.

**SARAH:** Okay. What do you mean the 'serious stuff'?

**DANNY:** The serious stuff of what it all means. Am I living well? Am I a good person? Will I be a success? How will I pay my bills? Am I wasting my time or doing well? I think a lot about other things I could or should have done with my life or what other people think about me perhaps? Am I on track with where I should be? Am I a successful coach, a good husband? What will happen to us? All that stuff you know, kids have none of that up to a point. Seamus doesn't!

**SARAH:** Its hard isn't it.

**DANNY:** What?

**SARAH:** Being alive as an adult. Knowing we must participate in our lives to shape it the way we want it to go, yet knowing we are incapable of defending ourselves from all the chaos, complexity, and unfairness there is. We scramble around looking for scraps of approval, signs we matter and security we hope will shield us from a gaping future.

**DANNY:** Mmmm yes.

**SARAH:** I think on the whole people like you and your wife have done a wonderful job with your lives. My husband and I did our best to. We went through many phases together right from the beginning and we always found a way to move on. We moved on more on the inside than what we did on the outside which made us useful and helpful to each other and many others. My husband inspired so many people with his work and how he instructed people. He became playful as the years passed, even all the way through his illness. It has helped me tremendously to deal with his passing.

**DANNY:** What sort of things do you mean? What phases exactly?

**SARAH:** Well, my work with my mentor Miss De Beauvoir, really helped me to understand what we grew through and how we changed over time? Life never ceased to unfold in a complicated and surprising way, but our background philosophy altered, our relationship with our existence and finally an acceptance of the ceaseless ambiguity of what a well lived life is.

**DANNY:** Can you explain the phases to me, I am so interested. I love this stuff because it feels 'real' to me. I am aware there is constant confusion in me, analysis, self-reflection, over seriousness and much neediness about what I do. I say I coach to help people and all that but deep down I am suspicious of myself. I do most of it for me. They call it the ego, but it feels different than that, because I think the ego is important, helpful in many ways and I don't feel I am the classic 'egoic' type. My life feels more like a constant search for inner peace through doing things and achieving things that will make me pleased about myself. I will be pleased; others will be pleased with me and then I can be peaceful....and be pleased! Ha.

very *insignificance.*"  
p39

*"From one point of view the collapsing of the serious world is a deliverance. Although he was irresponsible, the child also felt himself defenceless before obscure powers which directed the course of things. But whatever the joy of this liberation may be, it is not without great confusion that the adolescent finds himself cast into a world which is no longer ready-made, which has to be made; he is abandoned, unjustified, the prey of a freedom that is no longer chained up by anything. What will he do in the face of this new situation?" p40*

*"They have eyes and ears, but from their childhood on they make themselves blind and deaf, without love and without desire. This apathy manifests a fundamental fear in the face of existence, in the face of the risks and tensions which it implies. The **sub-man** rejects this "passion" which is his human condition, the laceration, and the failure of that drive toward being which always misses its goal, but which thereby is the very existence which he rejects.*

**SARAH:** Well, let me say this – you are trying and that is commendable. There are many who aim to escape the predicament of their responsibilities by a simple refusal to exit childhood. This is a strategy of the ‘sub man.’ The bottom of the rung attempt to cop out of making your contribution to life. Do you have anyone you know who gives up or will not go out and try?

**DANNY:** A few people yes. Some of my family members and a few friends who have lost their way. They criticise easily and enjoy dragging people into the mud with them. Like it’s all a big con and the world is against us, especially those people doing well for themselves. Although they don’t say it out loud, you can sense their rejection of those that are enthused those that change and aim up. They are like the people who offer you a cigarette even though you’re trying hard to quit smoking. To be honest though, in sport and professional sport I haven’t seen many like that, apart from now and again which is usually due to losing or being injured or something.

**SARAH:** Well in my experience most people who play competitive sport and try improving are at least participating in their responsibility to improve the future, not avoid it.

**DANNY:** Yes, that is something good about sport I will say. It provides a challenge and if you want to compete well you must bring energy and commitment.

**SARAH:** So, at the very least you know that by being involved with people’s lives as a sports coach you are helping to bring meaning and entertainment to people. You are pushing a purpose and inviting them to join in their futures in a responsible way. You aren’t as self-centred as you thought!!

**DANNY:** That’s nice to think. A lot of sports coaches and performers get blinded by goals of success, winning and being the best and all that but by even going after it we are already living well.

**SARAH:** Perhaps.

**DANNY:** I certainly fail to notice this enough and give credit for people just being in the arena and trying. I mean we all say it in our coaching philosophies that ‘it’s the taking part that counts and giving effort’ but day to day we get so wrapped up in the future goals that we take people for granted and don’t appreciate how brave and positive they are for even just giving it a good go. I mean we all get down and feel like quitting and running back to our past or our little holes to hide but we come back. WE try again We try and better our situations. That’s commendable.

**SARAH:** Not just commendable but vital. It needs to be noted. Where would we be if we all remained in our nests bitter, bored, and dying.

**DANNY:** What is the next phase?

**SARAH:** Don’t be so serious.

*“He discovers around him only an insignificant and dull world. How could this naked world arouse within him any desire to feel, to understand, to live? The less he exists, the less is there reason for him to exist, since these reasons are created only by existing.”*

*“The fact is that no man is a datum which is passively suffered; the rejection of existence is still another way of existing; nobody can know the peace of the tomb while he is alive. There we have the defeat of the sub-man. He would like to forget himself, to be ignorant of himself, but the nothingness which is at the heart of man is also the consciousness that he has of himself.”*

*“The world about him is bare and incoherent. Nothing ever happens; nothing merits desire or effort. The sub-man makes his way across a world deprived of meaning toward a death which merely confirms his long negation of him, self. The only thing revealed in this experience is the absurd facticity of an existence which remains forever unjustified if it has not known how to justify itself. The sub-man experiences the desert of the world in his boredom.”*

*“The attitude of the sub-man passes logically*

**DANNY:** What? Sorry, I just want to ....

**SARAH:** Ha-ha. That's the next escape strategy, becoming the 'serious man.'

**DANNY:** Now this sounds like me more.

**SARAH:** I would wait yet but yes seriousness is a common and tempting strategy indeed. Partly because it is so intricately linked with production and confidence. You can get lost in your small significant world, shutting down the vast freedoms and absurdities life reveals. It's comfortable therefore to become serious, shaded from other responsibilities and possibilities.

**DANNY:** Does that mean like 'putting all your eggs in one basket' kind of thing? Or not.

**SARAH:** Well, it is partly that yes. One becomes obsessed in a domain they begin to believe it is the whole domain. It becomes a personal world that initially offers shelter and comfort and a guarantee. I have met many professors in my life and some of them were so stuck to their theories and politics and their habits that they were quite miserable people at the end of it all. Despite their effectiveness and zealous convictions in the present, they accumulated and stacked the gold they discovered and unwittingly constructed a golden cage around themselves. A beautiful and admirable cage to look at from outside, but an ugly and cruel instrument when stuck within.

**DANNY:** I have been there. I know what you mean. My wife always says I am better when I am lighter, floaty in a sense. She calls me 'dopey bee' when I am less intense, less forceful. I certainly start narrowing down sometimes, digging my heels into the ground almost obstinate. Brittle. More of a caricature and I have much less time for other people who don't understand the, yes 'seriousness' of what the situation demands. I mean sometimes it's good, it wakes people up but if I stay there, I am not in a great place. I feel myself overconfident, more readily dismissive of others. I lie more, I bend the interpretations of things to fit my models. I lose my heart as well to my head. Thinking is king. Getting things done become a bit addictive, get out of our way if you're not onboard with us.

**SARAH:** We all suffer at times with it, just some stay there. They get trapped and STUCK. My Husband used to tell me it was important to 'stick to things but not to get stuck to them.' It has helped me so much that piece of advice.

**DANNY:** How?

**SARAH:** With my friendship's, my hobbies, work, the house, my pets even him in a way. It comforts me when I miss him. I think you know everything is a passing phase, a beautiful springing up from life, good things sad things. Nothing is permanent, nothing lasts for ever, things change, we must move on. Life carries on.

*over into that of the **serious man**; he forces himself to submerge his freedom in the content which the latter accepts from society. He loses himself in the object in order to annihilate his subjectivity."*

*"The serious man's dishonesty issues from his being obliged ceaselessly to renew the denial of this freedom. He chooses to live in an infantile world, but to the child the values are really given. The serious man must mask the movement by which he gives them to himself, like the mythomaniac who while reading a love-letter pretends to forget that she has sent it to herself"*

*"He accords an absolute meaning to the epithet **useful!**"*

*"He keeps himself from existing because he is not capable of existing without a guarantee. Proust observed with astonishment that a great doctor or a great professor often shows himself, outside of his specialty, to be lacking in sensitivity, intelligence, and humanity. The reason for this is that having abdicated his freedom, he has nothing else left but his techniques. In domains where his techniques are not applicable, he either adheres to the most ordinary of values or fulfils himself as a flight.*



**DANNY:** Isn't that a cop out though, I mean surely, we must think things are important we have to have something we are serious about, something to build our lives on. Otherwise, everything is too vague, pointless. Like oh this 'world championship squash match doesn't matter, nobody will care about it in 50 years?

**SARAH:** I love my husband deeply; I love him now just as much as ever, yet he has died. I am not ill because of it though. It only upsets me; I miss him very much; I don't miss him too much. I have let his physical presence leave but he still lives with me every day. I keep part of him and leave room for other things to come into my existence. It is not easy, but life is not easy. It is life.

(SILENCE)

**DANNY:** You have been able to let go.

**SARAH:** Partly I have and for most of the time yes. Those days I feel myself too stuck, too much in my head, I know I am trying to reconstruct my perfect little narrow world again. Too clingy to the memories.

**DANNY:** You have come serious again.

**SARAH:** Yes, and at the same time I really need those memories; I hear my husband laughing around me. Things suddenly change. Colour brightens, options pop back into mind, I want to be sociable, creative. It's so quick.

**SARAH:** I think we have a lot of this in professional sport. I mean take for example the seriousness of fans and coaches and how utterly depressed they can get when they lose. Fans aren't even the ones playing yet they are so affected inside by the results and status of who they support. It is why they are fans, fanatical.

**SARAH:** Support is one thing, being fanatical is another mode. How about you? Are you overly serious with your Squash?

**DANNY:** I think overall, I am good, but things can swing so quickly. I can get a balanced philosophical perspective, let things go in an effective way but at tournaments and when results haven't been the best, I rush back to it. I now see why as well. It's a comfort blanket, a strategy. It makes me feel like I am going to take back control. It stops my private shame, and it also helps my drive. I mean after all pro sport is competitive, survival of the fittest, you know we want to win. Yet, saying that I can see how ultimately, it's not a sustainable way to experience my life. I end up reliant on opposition, confrontations, and bitterness for my fuel. I mean that can't be healthy, it's a miserable way to live. You win but only feel good at somebody else's expense because it was all about power over them. Then when the feeling of temporary supremacy dies off, I feel flat. So, we go looking for another enemy, another point to prove.

**SARAH:** (sensing the release)

*The serious man stubbornly engulfs his, transcendence in the object which bars the horizon and bolts the sky. The rest of the world is a faceless desert."*  
p47

*"If there is being only, for example, in the form of the Army, how could the military man wishes for anything else than to multiply barracks and manoeuvres? No appeal rises from the abandoned zones where nothing can be reaped because nothing has been sown. As soon as he leaves the staff, the old general becomes dull. That is why the serious man's life loses all meaning if he finds himself cut off from his ends."*

*"Serious Man escapes the anguish of freedom only to fall into a state of preoccupation, of worry. Everything is a threat to him, since the thing which he has set up as an idol is an externality and is thus in relationship with the whole universe and consequently threatened by the whole universe; and since, despite all precautions, he will never be the master of this exterior world to which he has consented to submit, he will be instantly upset by the uncontrollable course of events. The serious man wills himself to be a god;*

**DANNY:** I think there are a lot of sports people who feel unhealthy with all this. We have entered a time of ‘hyper seriousness’ in many ways. Analysis, expert advice, more analysis, winning theories, books about being tough and all of that. There’s a lot of social media self-promotion, image to keep up, followers to fish for and keep, sponsors to promote and funding expectations. It all contributes to this sense of how important sport is. The sports media perpetuate it with their headlines and news shows, as if it is as serious as the actual world news you know where people may be dying. Constant debates, endless replays, comparisons, who’s the greatest of all time? It is presented as information or as entertainment, but the consequence has been a rise in over serious conditions.

**SARAH:** You sound quite serious about this. (smiling)

**DANNY:** I am. I’ve been thinking about it for a long time and it’s a big problem I see. I.....ah.

**SARAH:** what? (Laughter at his seriousness about seriousness)

**DANNY:** You got me. (laughter) But you know, I do notice these things. People who are scared to retire, disillusioned youngsters who once loved their sports becoming anxious about it, coaches leaving their families for too long, a lack of joy in players’ eyes, like they’re missing the point of it all sometimes.

**SARAH:** Yes, I understand. I have noticed it too, in the way education is rolled out in schools. Grades rather than learning and experiences appear prioritised, more about where they end up rather than how they learn. Is this what you mean?

**DANNY:** The ends justify the means. And those ‘ends will provide all the meaning required as you move on in life. Once you achieve this or that, then you will be able to relax and feel well, Life forever solved, fairy-tale time. It doesn’t really work that cleanly, I remember my wife getting the world number one ranking in Squash, and for a few months after became strangely miserable because of the pressure she felt each time she played. I remember the way out of that was an emotional conversation we had breaking down the mythic elements of a ranking list. I mean don’t get me wrong it is a fantastic achievement but that is all it is. No more than that. I mean it is more in some ways because it leads to opportunities and it’s such a nice feeling when I think about it now, knowing we managed to achieve a rare goal and it’s nice that other people respect you for it, like just now me mentioning it, it’s nice.

**SARAH:** There is a fine line to tread because things do have to retain relative meaning, or the world can turn quickly dark. So much so that you can use it to hide in another way. This is where people can get infectiously depressing. They start denying all life and revel in draining the meaning from anything. No zest apart from the confidence in their denials of life.

**DANNY:** Are they the serious type again.

*but he is not one and knows it. He wishes to rid himself of his subjectivity, but it constantly risks being unmasked; it is unmasked.*

*Transcending all goals, reflection wonders, "What's the use?" There then blazes forth the absurdity of a life which has sought outside of itself the justifications which it alone could give itself. Detached from the freedom which might have genuinely grounded them, all the ends that have been pursued appear arbitrary and useless."*

*P48*

*"Nihilism is a disappointed seriousness that has turned back on itself."*

*"The nihilist attitude manifests a certain truth. In this attitude one experiences the ambiguity of the human condition. But the mistake is that it defines man not as the positive*

**SARAH:** Yes and no. They lean towards the nihilist approach. A thought process where in another attempt to escape the ambiguity of freedoms a person writes it all off as a big meaningless nothing.

**DANNY:** Why would they do that? That sounds suicidal, depressing.

**SARAH:** Well strangely there is a comfort to it for some people. It is like a ‘free pass’ out of the precarious and painful complexities of existing, conscious of our mortality and our probable insignificance. It also feels powerful and therefore temporarily soothing sometimes to ridicule others in the way they pursue meaning through their projects and moral beliefs. I expect you will have had flashes of it within yourself at times.

**DANNY:** Is it when I think ‘this is all a load of crap anyway.’ What’s the point?

**SARAH:** Yes, go on.

**DANNY:** Well sometimes I have feelings of ‘pointlessness’ and I get quite negative on the whole sports scene. What’s it for anyway? I become a bit nasty about people and their efforts, their useless systems. It’s an energy but it’s cheap really. I feel myself too sceptical and then cynical. I become a bit of a pain in the ass really, I get a bit hollow. If I find someone else who agrees with me in times like that, we can really bring each other into a negative place.

**SARAH:** Been there, done that.

**DANNY:** It is weird though because the more we agree on the pointlessness of things we feel good whilst we tear it all down.

**SARAH:** Yes because scepticism, useful to a point, feels powerful. You place yourself at the head of the table insinuating everyone who has something they find meaningful, must be deluded if not stupid. That in turn almost eliminates one’s freedom weight, our responsibilities to believe things are worth it despite all the fears, vastness, and possibilities we can experience.

**DANNY:** ‘Freedom weight’ I love that. I’m going to remember that. This is really explaining a lot for me all this. I jump about trying to settle on one philosophy or approach that will sort everything out. I think what happens is that when it goes wrong or doesn’t solve a problem I needed; I get all negative about every approach. I want to drag everyone into the mud, the same pointless mess. I don’t want the pain of my faith not working or the simple fact my belief was incorrect. It is difficult to accept so I collapse ALL beliefs. I do this with theories, and I attack systems that claim clarity.

I’ll never forget the phone call with my mum when I complained like an infant that “*all the books on my shelves that I had read were ALL wrong and full of bullshit!*” I mean I was giving up on knowledge full stop! The books were all kinds of autobiographies, science, fables, textbooks, fiction, stories.

*existence of a lack, but as a lack at the heart of existence, whereas the truth is that existence is not a lack as such. And if freedom is experienced in this case in the form of rejection, it is not genuinely fulfilled. The nihilist is right in thinking that the world possesses no justification and that he himself is nothing. But he forgets that it is up to him to justify the world and to make himself exist validly. Instead of integrating death into life, he sees in it the only truth of the life which appears to him as a disguised death. However, there is life, and the nihilist knows that he is alive. That's where his failure lies. He rejects existence without managing to eliminate it. He denies any meaning to his transcendence, and yet he transcends himself.”*  
P60

*“The fundamental fault of the nihilist is that, challenging all given values, he does not find, beyond their ruin, the importance of that universal, absolute end which freedom itself is.”*  
P62

**SARAH:** That's funny. What did your mum say?

**DANNY:** (Laughter) Well put it this way, she hasn't told me off as an adult as I can ever remember but she practically did that day. Something like *'Daniel, shut up now. That's not good thinking like that. Get over yourself, do not blame all those wonderful authors. You take tremendous strength from reading and just because this is a bit of a troubled time, don't turn your back on books.'*

**SARAH:** She is a wise lady.

**DANNY:** She is. We laugh at that conversation when we look back. It was important to me that. I knew the books couldn't be all wrong, but I just felt like I needed somebody I trusted to remind me. It was my way of letting out my despair perhaps because I had got myself stuck. I was almost enjoying my misery and negativity. That's not me when I feel my best although I can see a temporary value in it strangely enough.

**SARAH:** Well, the nihilist type is at least accepting of responsibility unlike both the sub-man and the serious man who refuse to notice that they are free, in the sense of being able to pick their own values. Miss De Beauvoir depicted two more types who recognise their freedom, the adventurer, and the passionate man. All three of these stereotypes at least choose their values even if she proposed that they misuse their freedom and end up not being free at all.

**DANNY:** Go on explain more please.

**SARAH:** Let's try it this way. Well, who are you at your best? What are your actions and motives? Don't overcomplicate it, just some words.

**DANNY:** Positive, energetic, looking forward to things, interested in people.... the future is bright feeling.

When I am coaching there is a natural energy there. An enthusiasm, whatever is going on or whatever the standard, the future excites me. Life is good and sport is wonderful, playful, and enjoyable. I get that balance where its enjoyable and there is a structure to it at the same time. I get things achieved; I do what I say I will do. I see myself as bit of a hero type. I know that's not very noble but it's how I feel.

**SARAH:** Interesting. Where do you get your ideas from? You're not one of these 'cardboard cut-out' 'cookie cutter' types, are you? It doesn't seem so talking with you, but we can all fall for established demure systems.

**DANNY:** I don't really understand.

**SARAH:** The character of 'the adventurer' bathes himself in projects, particularly mapped out systems for the solitude and private meaning he extracts from following it. It verges on the serious but is personally so satisfying he cuts himself off in private experiences. He believes is

*"The **adventurer** throws himself into his undertakings with zest, into exploration, conquest, war, speculation, love, politics, but he does not attach himself to the end at which he aims; only to his conquest. He likes action for its own sake."* P62

*"The **adventurer** does not propose to be; deliberately makes himself a lack of being; he aims expressly at existence; though engaged in his undertaking, he is at the same time detached from the goal. Whether he succeeds or fails, he goes right ahead throwing himself into a new enterprise to which he will give himself with the same indifferent ardour. It is not from things that he expects the justification of his choices."* P63

*".... If existentialism were solipsistic, as is generally claimed, it would have to regard the*



an original, wrapped up in his own world of duty and joyful compliance.

**DANNY:** What like a smugness? Somebody who claims to be original but just copies systems.

**SARAH:** yes. It's a subtle and fashionable way to live. You believe you are free making your independent and creative choices but underneath, all you are doing is drinking in information in the forms of doctrines, rules, templates, and the like, and mastering their requests.

**DANNY:** That's me. I think I do that. I used to do it a lot more than I do now, but I still do it. I just read a book all about "constraints led" approach to learning skills. Another on professionalism and being relentless. I find myself diving in quickly like it's the new 10 commandments or something. In my academic life I teach these doctrines and I do it so authoritatively, convincing pupils with logic and biased example.

**SARAH:** (Laughter) .... we all have our toes dipped in this, it's not just you.

**DANNY:** Why do we do this? Is it a way of making things appear simpler than they are? Like a comfort blanket for the uncomfortableness of the uncertainty, the true freedom you described.

**SARAH:** In many ways yes. The adventurer believes they only need to exist in their systems which after a while they can preach about. They eliminate the individual by putting the system as the solution. The expertise gleaned and polished feels so liberating to the adventurer because progress in those specific values and the evidence of that progress, like a trophy or rising status feels like progress in all areas. Addiction to such things combined with a dose of the serious man, fundamentalism lurks in, and its branches too. Utilitarian optimism and dystopian gloom emerge as two of the typical overflows.

**DANNY:** I must admit here that after I have experienced success, like when my wife became world champion, I became unusually overconfident for a while. It was mainly when anyone challenged my opinions or authority. I noticed it. I ended up in a fight with someone over nothing. I attacked the guy. I felt he had no right to challenge me, and the funny thing is looking back, he had every right because the situation was totally my fault. I had lied about something important to him. The day after I apologised, and he was great. I knew it was way out of my character but along with other things, not as dramatic, I had behaved like a prat. I thought I was above people. I have all the answers, my way for me my way for you. Worse, your way is wrong - you stupid idiot. Give me my respect and may let you into my secrets. Pathetic.

**SARAH:** Well, that is what can easily happen. Tyranny, the dictator. When this happens empathy evaporates, replaced by grandeur, blame and 'it's your fault.' Less freedom for oneself by denying the freedom of other people. Appreciation for others and willingness to understand them is where real personal freedom is.

*adventurer as the perfect hero." P63*

*"Doubtless, in the very heart of an action the adventurer can know a joy which is sufficient unto itself, but once the undertaking is over and has congealed into a thing, it must in order to remain alive, be animated anew by a human intention which must transcend it toward the future into recognition or admiration." p67*

*Tyrant....*

*"He understands, dominates, and rejects, in the name of total truth, the necessarily partial truths which every human engagement discloses. But ambiguity is at the heart of his very attitude, for the independent man is still a man with his particular situation in the world, and what he defines as objective truth is the object of his own choice."*

***Inflexible principles:***

*I have noticed Coaches who go this way tend towards the characteristics of the bully "My way or the highway." There may be temporary benefits gained from this form of strict control but in the long term there is cost to pay. Narcissism creeps into the coach rapidly and performers are left as mere collateral of the*

**DANNY:** Yeah, I think I know what you're saying. That warm feeling again, inside, when you connect with people. Especially when you help them.

**SARAH:** You free up from your own 'wilfully blind' and 'confirmation biased' stories that you are a sole traveller when in fact we are all totally dependent on other people. Not solely in practical terms but in being noticed as a person and of those projects we considered would fulfil us, be worthy. You see the adventurer always needs somebody to 'brag' to! They require readers and listeners to hear their solutions, their evidence of their systemic success, so like it or not they feel existence in the perceptions of others.

**DANNY:** Oh wow. Sports professionals can go this way easily. Attention seeking, wanting more. They never seem to get to where they want to go, always with new personal goals, more, more. They come across as people trying to help and, in some ways, they really are, yet the undercurrent energy is that they are boosting their image, which becomes like a product, gaining followers. In some ways they are so independent yet at the same time so hooked on adulation, external confirmation and dare I say selling for profits. It smells bad.

**SARAH:** Well don't be too judgemental Daniel, we all have it in us at some point to play this game. We profit and loss in many of these types of games. We slip in and out of them remember. Saying that, some do get more settled in one strategy whether deliberate or not.

**DANNY:** I have had a suspicion for a while about coaches, the emergent 'help industry' as I call it and to be frank about myself too. We all say we do it for others and all that but do we really? All the time? Professional coaches are so driven, there must be something going on with their own needs. We talked about seriousness before and I recognise that even though I am enthusiastic, playful and 'all action' it's still all about me, and my adventures. I think it causes a sickness because it isn't sustainable. I have really tried to move away from it as I have aged, I don't want to contribute to the rise in reports of mental health problems amongst athletes.

**SARAH:** Well, that may be a wise move but there is undoubtedly a sniff of the passionate man there too! A passionate man wraps himself so subjectively to his own desires for what he quests for, that he becomes distant. He is not a slave to adulation and systems but to the absolute object of his own creative desire. I have noticed Olympians repeat this pattern as they chase after their golden fleeces. There is goodness in it, inspiring to many and achievements are abounding, jewels produced yet these projects get way too sticky for the individual involved. They can be tragic in some sense, and this is where Nietzsche's *Übermensch* isn't so super according to Miss De Beauvoir. It remains a self-centred pursuit.

**DANNY:** Is the passionate man or the adventurer all that bad really? I mean to me you're describing most people I know in professional sport, with the serious man thrown in too. Many 'elite' types, so called 'champion mindset' people have this obsession they say is vital to get

*tyrant's behaviour and dominance. EG: This has been reported most recently in aspects of British Cycling's and British Gymnastics' procedures linked to podium achievement.*

*"Forgotten and detested, the A loses the taste for his own existence. Perhaps without his knowing it, it seems so precious to him because of others.... his fault is believing that one can do something for oneself without others and even against them." p68*

*\*Fabled golden fleece-mythic Greek symbol of the eternal authority and healing - perhaps what a gold medal promises/entices? Jason went on a quest for it...it was chalice!*

*"The Passionate man seeks possession; he seeks to attain being. He causes certain rare*

to the top. They will bend rules and trample over others in their quest in extreme cases. Win at all costs attitudes. They become heroes to people even. We aren't all bad, are we? I do see a lot of goodness and well-intentioned people in sport. But I have misunderstood it.

**SARAH:** (laughing) Don't worry, we all misunderstand philosophy. This after all is highly ambiguous. You described aspects of the passionate man and adventurer before when discussing the serious type. That is fine, because these things only point, they aren't so separate as they are explained. They mix. The last two can be slippery because they can evolve to a blind obsession, then a tyranny. The adventurer needs to keep things as they are and therefore must control others so to 'guarantees his privileges' and keep down the 'common herd,' a dictatorship. Passion on the other hand leads to a form of fanaticism if you take it too far. No room for anything else, it's all you can imagine, your world.

**DANNY:** Scary. They are useful though, even though not strictly separate. I can understand the differences still, it has already made me understand a lot about myself. Is there anything De Beauvoir suggested was freer?

**SARAH:** There is. When do you absolutely feel your best self?

**DANNY:** When I have won! That's it!

**SARAH:** of course!

**DANNY:** No, that's like a drug high. It goes in a flash. I never feel better as when I feel like I've genuinely just helped someone, had a connection. I get a warm feeling right on my solar plexus. I seem to not count as much for a while and all that really matters is other people. When someone feels better because of what we have done I feel light, it becomes balanced.

**SARAH:** So as regards your sense of feeling well you find a way to make it less about you, a lean into a shared experience.

**DANNY:** Just a person helping a person, we begin to cure each other. Our roles of coach and performer melt away for a while. It's hard to charge money when that happens. It's like an enjoyable conversation with your friends and flowing banter. It just springs up and makes both happy. You buzz off their happiness and achievements, for THEM. As I said its heart warming. I feel like a better human. I can as easily cry as I can laugh. Music means more, the words.

**SARAH:** Well at the heart of freedom for De Beauvoir is what you explain. She said, "To be free is to will the freedom of others." It's not precise practice but it regards selflessness, support, action, and liberation in ways that allows them to be free. This in turn frees the individual from their own overwhelm.

**DANNY:** So, it's that feeling of teamwork, is it? Of sharing experiences in pursuit of worthwhile and useful goals together?

*treasures to appear in the world, but he also depopulates it. Nothing exists outside of his stubborn project: therefore, nothing can induce him to modify his choices. Having been involved his whole life with an external object which can continually escape him, he tragically feels his dependence" p69*

*"The PM makes himself a lack of being not that there might be being, but to be. He remains at a distance; never fulfilled." P70*

*"That is why though the PM inspires a certain admiration, he also inspires a kind of horror at the same time." p70*

*"Passion is converted to genuine freedom only if one destines his existence to other existences" p72*

*"Since the individual is defined only by his relationship to the world and to other individuals; he exists only by transcending himself, and his freedom can be achieved only through the freedom of others" p156*

**SARAH:** Ethical aims Daniel. Be more the artist-writer type. This was Miss De Beauvoir's last type.

**DANNY:** Another!

**SARAH:** last one, good job too it's almost time to get off.

**DANNY:** oh, go on then, quickly.

**SARAH:** Well, this one is where my husband ended up. He truly composed most of his finest offerings late on. The 'ethical passion' shall I say, of the artist-writer, is defined by a generosity. Specifically, the generosity of recognizing the other's singularity and protecting the other in their difference from becoming an object of another's will.

**DANNY:** You mean help them to stay free. Encourage space, even their differences, how they are still unique despite their commonality with all other beings.

**SARAH:** Yes. An artist manages to create something real and leave it for interpretation. Good art creates subjectivity, it calls for an interpretation as does a sentence, a song, a sculpture. Thus, they illuminate the ways that the complexities of our situations can either alienate us from our freedom or open us to it. We can shut down or we can open, and it is the experiencer that must meet the object halfway and create meaning in any way they feel, now. By envisioning the future as open and contingent, artists and writers challenge the mystifications that validate sacrificing the present for the future. They establish the essential relationship between my freedom and the freedom of others.

**DANNY:** I'm not really getting this one yet?

**SARAH:** Ill para phrase; "*Embrace the ties that bind me to others and take up the appeal—an act whereby I call on others, in their freedom, to join me in bringing certain values, projects, conditions into being.*"

**DANNY:** Realise our bonds?

**SARAH:** Yes.

**DANNY:** I understand. Art is like a non-controlling but positive offering to the world. It invites people to be present, to be with it, in the place you are in. Sometimes a song means something different to me on different days never mind how its interpreted by other people. That's why music has magic.

**SARAH:** That's it. How does that fit with sport?

**DANNY:** Well sport is about expression, isn't it? that's when sport is amazing. Just people trying to express something within the confines of the sport, its rules. There's a lot of beauty in it, endless potential. People can do it in diverse ways, their way. Yet they must comply in some ways, just not do it to the detriment of their freedom. In some ways, a personal subjective take on it. A signature version. A coach can

*"The artist and the writer force themselves to surmount existence in another way. They attempt to realize it as an absolute. What makes their effort genuine is that they do not propose to attain being. They distinguish themselves thereby from an engineer or a maniac. It is existence which they are trying to pin down and make eternal. The word, the stroke, the very marble indicates the object insofar as it is an absence. Only, in the work of art the lack of being returns to the positive. Time is stopped, clear forms and finished meanings rise up." p94*

help this can't they - by staying open and being free themselves. I suppose the coach can be the artist-writer.

**SARAH:** Nice.

**DANNY:** What's the catch though? Why is it rare and not just a default setting we take?

**SARAH:** Pride!

**DANNY:** Pride?

**SARAH:** Yes, too proud, the hubris and creeping in of serious mind again! John was a sucker for it in his 40's, up on his high perch he would go, peering down on his colleagues.

**DANNY:** Ha-ha. Seriousness again. John, your husband?

**SARAH:** Yes John. Yes, particularly seriousness of the rational mind, 'Look what I created everybody, look what it means. Can you see how wise I am?' John would start believing he was wiser than he thought not just in his area but across other disciplines. Especially as more people told him how good he was! I could always tell with him because he started to force his points and opinions, a need to convince rather than an invitation to take part or just be. Too bloody proud to be wrong. He would lie and bend truths, find evidence, dig in, mock, anything really when he was stuck on his perch.

**DANNY:** I'm cringing here. Poor John, you had him nailed. Wasn't he allowed to feel good about himself just once?

**SARAH:** Oh, he was, don't worry about that, he felt good. He knew how to catch me in the act too. We teased each other a lot about it, we could straighten each other out no doubt about that.

**DANNY:** It's those fine lines I suppose between care, enthusiasm and preaching the gospel. I flip in and out of these all the time.

**SARAH:** Being Academic or Pragmatic is hard sometimes because naturally logic always tries to come in and go deeper to explain things. It becomes addictive because it feels great to uncover innovative ideas and interpretations. It's just a balance we must find because if overdone one can find themselves unable to keep touch with the whole. Don't get 'stuck up your own backside' as we used to warn each other.

**DANNY:** The number of times my mentor tells me to just leave things alone, let them rest. He says we can obsessively over analyse sport and sometimes it ruins the whole thing, by breaking it into pieces. Sometimes I have found it useful to analyse though and get stuck down a rabbit hole. You find treasure sometimes that you couldn't if you weren't so obsessed, so driven to find part truths that help the whole result. Like breaking down a technique of a swing, looking at joint angles and tensions.

**SARAH:** Hence the Ambiguity. It is inescapable.

*"If the work becomes an idol whereby the artist thinks that he is fulfilling himself as being, he is closing himself up in the universe of the serious; he is falling into the illusion which Hegel exposed when he described the race of "intellectual animals." P96*

*Academic breakdown of sport into its constituent parts. Using logic, cause, and effects where it is not always required.*

**Existential Phenomenology**  
*In her memoir **The Force of Circumstance (1963)**, Beauvoir looks back at **The Ethics of Ambiguity** and criticizes it for being too abstract. She does not repudiate the arguments of her text*



**DANNY:** So, was Beauvoir hypocritical? All you have told me about today is an analysis isn't it, all be it one of the human conditions and existential choices. Is it not contradictory of Miss De Beauvoir to propose her own set of assumptions and rational breakdowns of people and how they exist?

**SARAH:** Sure, it is. She herself was a human who existed in the world. Simone had no 'on the side-line' view of the world, she was a fully immersed as you and I sat here. In later writings namely *The Second Sex*, she brought her arguments forward in the lives of characters and in a way moved towards the artist-writer by leaving her works open for more interpretation. A more phenomenological approach.

**DANNY:** What? Phenom o.....what? I think I will read that after I've read Ethics.

**SARAH:** You will love them, I am sure. Phenomenology is a challenging work to say but easy to take in. You'll see why, it is real. Your life is real, yes? Sport happens in the world not in another world, this precise one.

**DANNY:** Definitely.

**SARAH:** Oh, my stop. That went quickly today. Lovely to talk with you Daniel.

**DANNY:** I feel like I owe you something, this has been so interesting and enjoyable.

**SARAH:** It has been. We were lost there for a while. In our small moment. There is no price to that.

Just be there for your wife, whilst you are both here. She doesn't need as much extra as you think. She just needs you to be with her. And you listen well.

**DANNY:** Thanks Sarah.

**SARAH:** Bye now. I'll look up your wife on the internet, good luck. (Walks away) Au revoir Daniel, "take part, come what may."

*but finds that it erred in trying to define morality independent of a social context. The Second Sex may be read as correcting this error—as reworking and materially situating the analyses of The Ethics of Ambiguity. Imaginary caricatures will be replaced by phenomenological descriptions of the situations of real women.*

*"But Once I got out into the street again, into my life, out of the system, beneath a real sky, the system was no longer any use to me, and I again wanted to live in the midst of living men. I think that, inversely, existentialism does not offer the consolations of an abstract evasion, on the contrary, its ethics is experienced in the truth of life." p172*

*"The result is not external to the good will which fulfils itself in aiming at it." p173*

*"If it came to be that each man did what he must, existence would be saved in each one without there being any need of dreaming of a paradise where all would be reconciled in death." p173*

### Act 3 Exit Commentary

This act was constructed to develop the ideas of existential ambiguity proposed by Simone De Beauvoir in her book *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. The central proposition of De Beauvoir's thinking in this book was that as an individual who realizes their existential freedom, post childhood, they adopt certain strategies to reduce the essential truth of ambiguity and subjectivity of existing. Such ambiguity perpetually creates uncertainty in individuals, and it is this that individuals strive to *rid of themselves*. This being so much an ingrained phenomenon that De Beauvoir suggested adults nostalgically crave the simplicity of childhood where all one had to do was wake up each day and simply *be a child happily irresponsible*. In response to this existential freedom and its consequent burden of responsibility, De Beauvoir proposed certain modes of existence that people adopt, and each is highlighted in this act through the conversation between the two characters: *sub man; serious man; nihilist; adventurer; passionate man; tyrant; artist/writer*.

In professional sporting circumstances, some of the associated ambiguities emerge through the dilemmas of common dualities. Examples may include

winning – losing

enjoyment – sadness

content – striving/dissatisfaction

successful self-narrative – unsuccessful self-narrative

champion – runner up

capable – incapable

naive – experienced

effective – ineffective

progression - regression

private individual – public property

popular - ignored

self-driven – externally motivated

free – trapped

source of inspiration/joy – source of embarrassment/disappointment

controllable factors – uncontrollable factors

excitement – anxiety

optimism – pessimism

present – future focused

In my experience of supporting professional athletes the tension that is created through such ambiguities is often the core of the psychological stress and eustress experienced. This constant *rollercoaster* (as I refer to in my poem in Dialogue 4) wears people and I often find myself identifying the ways in which individuals try to escape them by applying De Beauvoir's range of caricatures. This act is constructed to reveal those applications. *The Serious Man* caricature is of most relevance in my experience and is why it has been given extra attention. By understanding each of De Beauvoir's existential 'escape strategies' sports professionals can avoid the perils of their temptations and resist becoming stuck in roles that box them in. They can use the roles to assist with the ambiguities experienced but remain vigilant about their motives to do so and thus at times accept the many existential dualities that incessantly repeat through a sporting life. Such acceptance and understanding can reduce additional layers of frustration, stress and potential depressions faced by such continuous emotional overwhelm of competitive sporting ambiguities.



## ACT 4

**Danny meets Cyrielle in Grand Central Station, New York at the Tournament of Champions squash tournament. They begin a dialogue on the ideas of the Absurd and how they may be applied to the world Squash tour. Albert Camus is centre stage.**

Danny is selling his new book 'The Winning Parent' this week and each day works for three hours at the tournament merchandise stand. Cyrielle works on the stand each year to support the event, she is a big Squash fan, and this week is one of her highlights in her year. Her main occupation in life is a lecturer and she is well versed in the teachings of Albert Camus who hails from the country of her mothers' birth, Algeria. Cyrielle introduces topics

<p><b>DANNY:</b> Hello again.</p> <p><b>CYRIELLE:</b> Hello. You're Back again.</p> <p><b>DANNY:</b> I am. It's my ninth year on the bounce. The travelling circus is back!</p> <p><b>CYRIELLE:</b> It certainly is.</p> <p><b>DANNY:</b> It's Daniel (holding out a hand). All this time and I've never actually introduced myself.</p> <p><b>CYRIELLE:</b> Oh, don't worry, New York is like that. Its friendly but strangely distant at the same time.</p> <p><b>DANNY:</b> Hi, that's a nice name.</p> <p><b>CYRIELLE:</b> Thank you. My mother is from Algeria, she named me after one of her best friends who passed in the war there when they were children. I like it too.</p> <p><b>DANNY:</b> Yes, I've felt that about New York. I mean I am never on edge, apart from the subway at night a little, yet there is a 'distance' thing isn't there? Like everyone has something they need to be doing.</p> <p><b>CYRIELLE:</b> 'The city that never sleeps,' right?</p> <p><b>DANNY:</b> Of course. I never thought of it that way, is that what it means everyone in a rush?</p> <p><b>CYRIELLE:</b> Yes, kind of. Everyone is busy getting busy. The pace is like a vortex that sucks you in, it's just how it is.</p> <p><b>DANNY:</b> Maybe I am getting sucked in! On top of coaching this week I am selling my book here too.</p> <p><b>CYRIELLE:</b> Yes, I know, I am on the same stand. I've been reading it this morning. It's great.</p>	<p>Albert Camus An Absurd Reasoning – The Myth of Sisyphus p2 -6</p> <p><i>"The workman of today works every day in his life at the same tasks, and this fate is no less absurd. But it is tragic only at the rare moments when it becomes conscious."</i></p> <p><i>"While the question of human freedom in the metaphysical sense loses interest to the absurd man, he gains freedom in a very concrete sense: no longer bound by hope for a better future or eternity, without a need to pursue life's purpose or to create meaning, he enjoys a freedom with regard to common rules".</i></p> <p><i>"To embrace the absurd implies embracing all that the unreasonable world has to offer. Without</i></p>
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<p><b>DANNY:</b> Brilliant. I didn't know John had provided me an assistant.</p> <p><b>CYRIELLE:</b> Well, I am also selling tournament merchandise and VIP seats.</p> <p><b>DANNY:</b> VIP? Selling them? I thought....</p> <p><b>CYRIELLE:</b> Yes, I know. You can purchase your importance here! They are four times the price of a normal ticket, but you get a few drinks brought over to you and a few snacks. Around here having money to burn does make you important. This whole event is sponsored by Morgan Stanley bank. Finance is king around here.</p> <p><b>DANNY:</b> I notice that. I can't complain I suppose because they have just equalled the prize money for the female players with the male. It's mainly because of the 'me too' movement that has come in recently. After much bad press from the banking scandal, they really need good press not another attack. So, they really have had to match the money now.</p> <p><b>CYRIELLE:</b> Whys that good for you?</p> <p><b>DANNY:</b> Oh, my wife, she is why I am here really. She plays in the tournament.</p> <p><b>CYRIELLE:</b> Of course, yes, I read that in your book.</p> <p><b>DANNY:</b> She has just got to world number one in the rankings. It's an exciting time for us because all these tournaments are equalling prize money, just as her career is at a peak.</p> <p><b>CYRIELLE:</b> That's a bonus.</p> <p><b>DANNY:</b> Yes. It is strange really because all the girls are doing precisely the same job as before but because of some <i>cultural movement</i> that they had nothing to do with beyond their normal efforts, the prize money has doubled overnight. It makes me laugh how the Professional Squash Association has tried to wangle some credit for it but essentially, it's just the way the world has turned.</p> <p><b>CYRIELLE:</b> That's interesting you see it that way.</p> <p><b>DANNY:</b> Ha. I see a lot of things that way.</p> <p><b>CYRIELLE:</b> What way?</p> <p><b>DANNY:</b> You know. It's hard to explain. When you've been on the tour for a long time I kind of 'see through' things more. I notice the randomness, the repetition somehow, the passing of time. When you first come on tour it's like this huge 'set in stone' professional and historical thing that in a way feels like its solid and rooted. Like a government or institution. Lately I have seen through its moving parts and how fragile it really is. Like a travelling circus, making it up as it goes along. I don't know.</p>	<p><i>meaning in life, there is no scale of values: "What counts is not the best living but the most living."</i></p> <p>Camus himself explains, the Absurd is the result of the <i>"confrontation between human need and the unreasonable silence of the world."</i></p> <p>Even though absurdity is inescapable, Camus does not drift towards nihilism. But the realization of absurdity leads to the question:</p> <p>Why should someone continue to live? Suicide is an option that Camus firmly dismisses as the renunciation of human values and freedom. Rather, he proposes we accept that absurdity is a part of our lives and live with it.</p> <p>There is a significant difference between acceptance of absurdity in sport such as luck, chance, moments in time, scale of relative meaning, relative interpretations of success and failure momentum, fame etc and the dark cynicism of nihilism. Where people want to give up, complain, feel victimised and lose zest for purpose.</p>
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**CYRIELLE:** I have to say from the outside looking in, it doesn't seem like that. It appears very professional. I have been to this tournament now for ten years and it feels bedded into me. Everyone who comes enjoys it tremendously. There is a tremendous feeling for this event every year. I volunteer to do this, just so I can be around it and meet the players and people like you. Are you a little fed up with it because you've been doing it for so long?

**DANNY:** Maybe I am yes. I must sound miserable to you.

**CYRIELLE:** No, no, I do understand. I work in a university and there are times I feel the same thing there. I see all these undergraduates attending year after year, just like customers browsing in a big shopping centre. We try to sell them things, ideas and the more they resist the harder we push the sell. Tactics and strategies come tumbling down from those above, how to 'sell' better and how to retain numbers, attract more sales. Sometimes I feel like I am working at Walmart.

**DANNY:** That's interesting, I work at university too, but only very part time. I love my classes and it feels totally educational. I do hear mutterings from the more full-time lecturers on those lines though. Not from the managers or section leaders, they are contented more with those trickle-down steers you mention, they jump on board advocating away, I suppose they must really, they don't get paid extra to rebel.

**CYRIELLE:** No! They rebel in thought but when those dollars drop in, they aren't half a strong sedative.

**CYRIELLE:** You are right, when we do something too much for too long, we can start to get bored, over cynical, or hyper aware or something. What do you teach, I mean sell? Hahaha

**CYRIELLE:** I sell this! This exact thing we are doing now.

**DANNY:** Speech?

**CYRIELLE:** Philosophy. I teach philosophy and its history.

**DANNY:** Brilliant. That is so interesting. I have been stumbling over philosophy lately, I never really had the confidence to read philosophy, I don't know why, it seemed too big for me. I have been more into psychology.

**CYRIELLE:** Well, they are similar areas, and they mix all the time. Many of the great psychologists have based their theories and practice on certain philosophical ideas. Philosophy was originally about how to live a good life, how to find meaning and things so it was a practical thing.

**DANNY:** Yes, It's the practical I am in to. I want it to make a difference to how I feel and how I frame my life. Those great thinkers all through history must have something useful to advise after all.

While absurdism can be seen as a kind of response to existentialism, it can be debated exactly how substantively the two positions differ from each other. The existentialist, after all, doesn't deny the reality of death. But the absurdist reaffirms the way in which death ultimately nullifies our meaning-making activities, a conclusion the existentialists seem to resist through various notions of posterity or, in Sartre's case, participation in a grand humanist project.

**CYRIELLE:** What is interesting to me is how you explained the tournament and the tour before? You had ventured into an area of one of my favourite thinkers, Albert Camus.

**DANNY:** Okay. I have not come across him yet.

**CYRIELLE:** He was not what you might call a classic philosopher, he did not want to be known as such, yet he did write immensely powerful narratives in the form of plays and stories. He philosophised through his storylines and particularly through his characters and their circumstances. On commenting upon his works, he then made philosophical points which is what gathered him up into the identity realm of a philosopher.

**DANNY:** Interesting. What are his main ideas?

**CYRIELLE:** The main overall contribution he developed was that of the Absurd. Absurdism.

**DANNY:** The absurd, as in ‘that’s absurd.’ or ‘that doesn’t make sense, it doesn’t stack up’? That kind of thing.

**CYRIELLE:** Yes, that’s the ballpark. What Camus pointed to was more on the lines that life has no ultimate meaning to it. Specifically, the Universe has no pre-determined overall meaning set up for all humans to aspire to. To be absurd is to expect to find such an inherent meaning of life, in a world where none exists.

**DANNY:** See, philosophy it blows my mind. It wasn’t going to be a simple thing was it! Okay, carry on.

**CYRIELLE:** You already understand it. That’s what is funny.

**DANNY:** Funny? It sounds depressing, my stomach just sank.

**CYRIELLE:** Hahaha.... When you talked earlier, about ‘seeing through things’ that was reference to you sensing a lack of structured permanent meaning in your world. In a way, it is like you are waking up to the absurd nature of placing faith in a goal or career to provide you more than the simple process, the joy, and the practical payoffs of completing it. Your wife is at the pinnacle of the world rankings, and all is going well, together you have achieved the ultimate landmark in your sport, and you are now realising things move on and you still must work on your happiness every new day, each present moment. A sense of anti-climax realisation of this can creep in.

**DANNY:** I have had sparks of that yes. Everything feels like those old arcade games where after days and weeks of playing you complete it, and it says ‘GAME COMPLETED’ but then it just reboots and carries on. You understand this when it says ‘GAME OVER’ because you haven’t reached the end goal, you just start again. Yet when you’ve completed it, the computer does nothing for

you. It just reboots for another game. You are expected to play the same game again even though you've completed it.

**CYRIELLE:** How is that like the Squash tour?

**DANNY:** Well, everyone just carries on as normal and you are thinking, why is everything the same. Why are people going around in circles every year, all doing the same thing, getting through the tournaments, with the aim of winning them, only to have to do it all over again. *You never get to the end.* It is the same over and over. Even if you keep winning, it counts for nothing. You must start from the ground each time. I walked back in here yesterday and I have a sense of being on a strange merry go round. Is that absurdity?

**CYRIELLE:** When you say, '*the end,*' what do you mean exactly "you never get to the end?"

**DANNY:** I don't know, that's the thing.

**NARRATOR:** A customer approaches, tournament T shirt in hand ready to purchase.

**CYRIELLE:** Hello sir. Large, okay? .....thirty-five dollars please.

**NARRATOR:** The customer pays for the t shirt and picks up a copy of the Coach's book - "The Winning Parent."

**CYRIELLE:** This is the author Sir. He will sign it for you if you buy a copy.

**NARRATOR:** Coach nods, smiles, and signs the book, followed with a quick talk with the customer. He is not interested in the content of the book yet certainly impressed by having the author sign his copy. He also enjoyed a photograph with the author holding the book jointly, smiling.

**DANNY:** Getting to the point of it. The point of it all.

**CYRIELLE:** What?

**DANNY:** When I say, 'the end,' I mean the point. The reason for doing it.

**CYRIELLE:** The *meaning* of it?

**DANNY:** The *meaning* yes, the purpose of it. What is it all for? Why do it at all? Why continue?

**CYRIELLE:** They are some big existential questions.

**DANNY:** I know a bit about Sartre and Simone De Beauvoir. They were existential thinkers and they discussed meaning a lot too.

**CYRIELLE:** They certainly did. They were both initially friends of Camus but disagreed on many key ideas, particularly Sartre. They

fell out as friends eventually. Camus believed that despite ‘absolute’ meaning being absent in the world he totally endorsed ‘relative’ meaning. Relative meaning is to be extracted from one’s own projects and passions. He would say of your questions that they are the wrong questions to ask. Looking for a higher order to provide final absolute truths has been a quest for psychological comfort. He described it as ‘Le Mythe.’ The myth that there is something to be greater to be sacrificed for rather than the first-hand experiential meaning you get from doing it.

**DANNY:** He wasn’t being negative then?

**CYRIELLE:** Far from it. Camus loved life, he lived it fully despite knowing there was no higher purpose. That is embracing the absurdity. He was famous for saying ‘one should live the most life, not the longest.’

**DANNY:** That is helpful to me. I think I have sensed the absurd nature of things in my life, especially the more I have pondered, got older I suppose, been around the block more. My conclusions have left me a bit overwhelmed at times, a bit flat and sometimes a bit confused. My energy drops. What helps me is getting back INTO the details and the joy of the process and stuff.

**CYRIELLE:** Nihilism can be a common reaction to realising the absurd. That pointlessness feeling, leading to a temptation to dodge it by collapsing ALL meaning, in anything.

**DANNY:** I must admit that strikes a chord with me. There have been times I have felt disillusioned, dark, like the candle goes out, the future crushes in on itself. Pointlessness, inconsequential and I become deeply cynical about my situation. It’s not a great place. It rushes in so fast that it scares me. I work with a player who has these types of dark episodes particularly when they lose. He won’t talk, gets very nasty about others, and always says they are quitting the game for good. It was as if he forgets himself for a while. He tends to go out and drink himself stupid, usually getting into some trouble or hides himself away for days, radio silence. I don’t get to that stage, my episodes last twenty minutes at the longest.

**CYRIELLE:** What happens after?

**DANNY:** Well, that’s why I find this interesting. Having had this chat now with you I think I go more towards the Absurd. It’s a lighter version of the negativity that comes in. It is weird it’s like a humour comes over me, a kind of helplessness that admits to the randomness of it all, the lack of control. As a coach and player, you go into situations trying to control all the angles and possibilities, you can delude yourself you are like some God of fate. Sports science helps encourage this, data and analysis and the rest of it, you forget sport is sport.

**CYRIELLE:** Sport is sport, life is life?

Camus’s main question:  
Why not commit suicide?

*“There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy. All the rest — whether the world has three dimensions, whether the mind has nine or twelve categories — comes afterwards. These are games; one must first answer.”*

An Absurd Reasoning –  
The Myth of Sisyphus

Toward the end of the essay, Camus makes some compelling remarks about staying alive. He says that the absurd teaches us not to make the mistake of valuing certain kinds of lives and their experiences over other kinds of lives.

For the mistake is thinking that the quantity of experiences depends on the circumstances of our life when it depends solely on us. Here we must be over-simple. To two men living the same number of years, the world always provides the same sum of



**DANNY:** Ha, great song, Opus “life is life.” It’s quite amazing how many songs are becoming more profound the older I get.

**CYRIELLE:** True. Music is amazing for that, all good forms of art.

**DANNY:** It is as if I go into a squash match feeling totally in control. “Control the Controllables,” is a popular slogan, so most are encouraged to think of that. The game starts and suddenly if things are close you begin to wake up to the fact that the control is not as you anticipated. Strange things can happen, plans change, luck, decisions, form, opponents interfering with your plans, all sorts can happen. Then if I come out on top, I tend to be biased about how much it was always in control. It certainly seems that way when I watch sport, it always looks like a formula. Yet when I am close to it, in it even, I hover closer to absurdity I suppose because I am so invested in it. That’s why it always feels like sitting on a rollercoaster and not in some boat on a pancake lake. If the result slips away I think the shock of the reality that I was never in control having been so convinced of the model I had constructed in my head, I think that creates such a disturbance in me, Nihilism is my first reaction. Like a comfort in a way. Everything in the world is bad, I am bad, everything is utterly pointless so who cares anyway? Fuck it all.

**CYRIELLE:** A defence move.

**DANNY:** Yeah.

**CYRIELLE:** Defence from?

**DANNY:** Mm mm..... Sadness. Shame. Foolishness. A drop in my sense of superiority. I get to thinking I had the sport sussed, life sussed in a way. I am too intelligent for it; I know how to eliminate the losses through my systems and skills. Rather than feeling a natural disappointment and sadness, I prefer the Nihilism, instead of embracing the Absurdity as maybe I should.

**CYRIELLE:** Why would it be better for you not to and embrace what you believe is ‘absurdity’?

**DANNY:** I am not sure why, it’s just a feeling I have, I just know the nihilism isn’t good. I don’t think it’s a conscious choice, it just emerges. I think I get a grip of it; I mean although it’s a strong rejection and quite desolate for a while, deep down I know this is just sport, it isn’t life and death. I get my Mum ringing in my ears when everything seems pointless, that’s it I know I am being a baby, throwing a tantrum at the world. I know there is meaning to things but at that moment I want to dodge it, drag it all down.

To be fair to myself it happens far less than it used to. Laura’s coach, my friend now really, my mentor in a way, he has helped with that loads. He has been around for years and thinking about it, he is quite the Absurdist on the quiet. He wouldn’t know that! He just is.

**CYRIELLE:** Is he? What’s good about the Absurdity then?

experiences. It is up to us to be conscious of them.

There is nothing more than being aware of one’s life, whatever form it might take. For Camus, “one’s revolt, one’s freedom,” is this awareness, and it is the essence of living “to the maximum.” There is no life that is higher.

It is useful and important to distinguish between Nihilistic episodes and Absurdist ones.

Stories like this Buddha tale ‘may or may not be true’ have had powerful impacts on my experiences. As an ‘academic researcher’ I have a strange sense of guilt and inadequacy at not being able to clarify this tale. Perhaps this is a blockage in presentation of fictions as legitimate tools for the ‘phenomenological more’ of meaning and experience people use to navigate their worlds. Myths and stories no matter how fictionalised, adapted, interpreted etc do have impact on the psychologies of people.

‘BULLSHIT spotting’ is a popular sport for rationalists but maybe all is not bad with it? Like a soothing story helps a child with night-time

**DANNY:** Perhaps, Absurdity makes things less extreme, less final than the Nihilism. It helps me stay grounded and realistic, motivated but not as desperate. There remains hope with the absurd and humour too. I have this image in my head that the Squash court is like a big sitting Buddha just laughing at everyone who comes to play. Those Buddha figures are always laughing. I don't know if this is true or not, but I heard they are laughing at the people who approach with their self-perceived life problems. The Buddha can see the insignificance of the problem in the overall grand oneness of life, so they find it funny that the human before them is not. I do well to remember this image from time to time because it shrinks me. It reminds me of my general insignificance, and it lightens me up, which energises me. Logically I would have thought the acceptance of my unimportance would be at least annoying, yet it always settles me, I like it.

**CYRIELLE:** Camus most famously stated that there was only one serious philosophical question worth asking which was "Why should one judge that life is worth living or not?" He though the question of suicide was paramount.

**DANNY:** That's a bit strong. Flipping heck, we are getting deep now aren't we. It's only 10.30 am? Hahaha. Anyway, that's from Hamlet that sentiment isn't it, not Camus?

**CYRIELLE:** You mean 'To be or not to be'? It is on the face of it yes. He was getting to the point though.

**DANNY:** Not half!

**CYRIELLE:** Camus addresses the part of us that already believes that death might be preferable to life, and he says that once we have understood the absurdity of life and accepted it, we will see that more life is always better: "One just must be able to consent to this. There will never be any substitute for twenty years of life and experience." People feeling depressed and disheartened by life might feel that they are just marking time, getting through one day after another without much reason. Camus insists that there is a reason for getting through the days even when one does not feel joyous. He is certain that when we see the absurdity of the human condition, just living adds up to a rich experience that is, in its own way, joyful

**DANNY:** I really get that yes. In Squash, well probably all sports as well, unless you win the tournament you always finish with a loss. So, if you cannot cope with this it can really get you down. It is also the lost opportunity of a win that gets to you. Winning is way up here, losing seems right down there. That is Absurd right there. The reason I say this is because all sorts of things affect results, a bit of luck here and there, some randomly good form, an opponent who is off or on, a key moment like a referee decision or a new injury or something and that's enough to change the course of the match. I've seen it so many times. It's often Absurd. Yet often we don't embrace it and either get as high as a kite when we win or virtually depressed when we lose. I know that's life and I know all the rewards seem unevenly distributed, you know the media don't help with their narratives of

fears, an unverifiable fictional anecdote can equally be at least useful to some people.

Personally, I have studied Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) and it has been negatively criticised off many of my Academic colleagues for its lack of rigour. Yet I have found NLP highly effective at times for myself, players I coach and specifically my wife. At the core of NLP is the content the individual brings to the skeletal structure of a process. It is in the 'fleshing out' of the process where the therapeutic effects take place and allows the participant to explore existing meanings, beliefs, and interpretations of their existence. In this way, NLP is close to 'existential phenomenology.'

Metaphors and the investigation of one's own 'life stories' and lurking 'life questions' are two methods that really help participants break down and re structure experiences by often recognising the absurd in their self-made narratives.



heroes and losers, but I think we have lost our sense of acceptance of the Absurd.

**CYRIELLE:** Why might that be the case?

**DANNY:** I think we get too wrapped up in control and certainty. It links to much of these ideas of expertise and technology. A hyper professional, hyper rational approach. It is not cool anymore to acknowledge absurdity, it is like you are making an excuse. Rationality is great and thinking things through, trying to limit chance, and measuring improvements is good but there comes a point where you make everything into like a science project and it's not its sport, it can just be Absurd.

**NARRATOR:** Unbeknown to Coach a man had approached slowly from behind him, stood near his left shoulder. It was his mentor, DP.

**DP:** That's my line Daniel.

**DANNY:** Ha-ha. We were just talking about you. The secret Absurdist!

**DP:** A what? Hi, I am James.

**CYRIELLE:** Hello, Cyrielle.

**DP:** Sold any books yet?

**DANNY:** A few earlier yes. I've been talking too much instead probably.

**DP:** That's not surprising.

**DANNY:** We have been talking about the stuff we talk about a lot but a bit more philosophically. Do you know when you say everything is like a science project these days, what do you mean exactly.

**DP:** Oh, let me think... well I suppose I mean it's too much like maths or something. You know those equations you had to do at school that had symbols and shapes and all that, well sport has gone a bit too much like that really.

**NARRATOR:** Coach knew there was a long explanation coming wrapped up in some cynicism of the modern methods, Cyrielle was already charmed by DP's warm presence, soft glinting eyes and careless dress for someone of high reputation in the confined world of Squash.

**DP:** Take all these strength and conditioning trainers, these psychologists, nutrition people, analysis staff and the like, they seem to have as much importance now as the actual COACH and player. I mean I am not saying they aren't important and helpful, but they are just support people. The PLAYER and the COACH are the most important two and it's that relationship that counts. That is because

Camus ends the essay with a famous passage that combines all his strange pessimism and optimism.

*"I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain! One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile.... The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy."*

Squash is a complicated game and a quite simple game too. Trivial things end up becoming huge things, but those trivial things are hard to overcome. It's not a science really it is more an art and some days it's beautiful and some days its ugly. You can analyse things until the cows come home but you must remember that often there is no answer.

**DANNY:** Absurdity is that where there is no grand meaning to things in life so don't look for it. Instead, accept that, carry on, be enthusiastic and you know keep going for it as best as you can.

**DP:** Yes, it's that really.

**DANNY:** I've just remembered something. You are great at keeping players in their place, not too high when they win, and you help stop them from getting too low when they lose or feel hurt. Tell Cyrielle what you did with Nick when he won this event last year, at the restaurant after.

**DP:** No, she won't want to hear that.

**CYRIELLE:** Go on, I like to.

**DP:** Well, to be fair Nick won this tournament last year and it is quite a big deal really, it's a hard one to win and all the best players are here. So, he won, and we all arranged to go across the road there to the Italian place for a meal and celebration. Well Nick came in late, there was about twenty people turned up and when he walked in, he got this round of applause from the table we were on. All the other people in the restaurant had no idea. Nick sat down at the head of the table position and started his food and so on. Well as it went on, he started to get a bit clever. I noticed it with the waiters and a few of the things he was saying about people, being extra loud and a bit nasty to one person. That's not like Nick usually, he's a well brought up guy and quite caring really. Anyway, he made a bit of a comment to me, and I just told him to shut up basically!

Well, he came back at me, being overconfident and a bit clever, showing off to all his mates he had invited. So, I just said quite loudly 'Look Nick, I know you've done well today and won a game of Squash but don't forget that nobody in this restaurant apart from your cronies has ever heard of Squash, least of all seen it or played it. So, get down off that horse. Big deal you hit a ball against a wall for a job and you did that quite badly until I coached you at 20 years of age how to hold the racket properly, so just remember okay. You're no superhero.'

**CYRIELLE:** Oh my. That's cutting.

**DANNY:** Honestly, it was tense because all these other people on the table just naturally think Nick is some sort of Squash God. They would never have heard anything like that said to him so directly and bluntly.

**DP:** I did it with a smile on my face, and he knows what I am like. He can take it Nick, he knows me. But I wanted to make him realise, to calm down and stop getting carried away. It is just a game of Squash; it didn't make him a better person suddenly. In all seriousness, those things are vital between player and coach, in any occupation really. Did you say 'OBSURD'?

**CYRIELLE:** Absurd. Ab.....

**DP:** Absurd. Yes, well that's it isn't it. It was Absurd to be behaving like that when all he does is hit a blooming ball against a wall. He is not a war hero or nurse or anything? Why should he think himself superior suddenly because he won a match? It should be enjoyed yes because it's great to play sport and prevail, but it doesn't change who you are does it?

**DANNY:** It was the bit when you said nobody else in New York or this restaurant kind of sentiment, really struck a chord with the absurdity for me. We get so wrapped up in a project sometimes we mistake it for more than it is. We think there is a grander more generalised meaning to it than just our own sense of purpose and joy in it.

**DP:** It's just a sport Daniel, and a small one at that. We love it don't we, it's a fabulous little game. Most of my life since aged 16 has revolved around Squash in some form or other and I have played professionally, played for my country, been Head Coach of my country, coached world champions, the lot. Yet look at me, I am as normal as they come, I am nobody famous just known well in a small circle of people. I really like that. I mean I wouldn't say no to a bit more money for what I do but it's not like sport is all that important is it. Feeling balanced and having enjoyment is the key. You have a passion for it, you try your best and then accept what comes your way. It's a short life, we are all going to die soon anyway, so what's the big stress!

**DANNY:** I told you he was an unconscious Absurdist.

**CYRIELLE:** Camus called his ideas 'sorrowful but cheerful.' They are sad to think of in some ways but they also free you up and remind you live a bit whilst you can.

**DP:** There you go. That's why I always tell the players to have a few glasses of wine or beer now and again. Too much professionalism makes them so serious sometimes. It's harrowing to be around them. They get it all out of perspective and bottle up emotions. I mean it's important to be professional but there is a limit, my god. Enjoy yourself for God's sake!

**DANNY:** Laura will be playing later today; she will win her match easily as she's playing the wildcard girl. Yet I bet you she won't enjoy it until she has won.

**DP:** That's Laura for you. I bet she hasn't enjoyed one match from start to finish all her career. I mean look at this place, what an arena

*"Accepting the absurdity of everything around us is one step, a necessary experience: it should not become a dead end. It arouses a revolt that can become fruitful."*

"Three Interviews" in Lyrical and Critical Essays (1970)

*"In the midst of winter, I found there was, within me, an invincible summer. And that makes me happy. For it says that no matter how hard the world pushes against me, within me, there's something stronger – something better, pushing right back."*

Falsely yours, Poem. Camus.

Return to Tipasa (1952)

*"Thus, I draw from the absurd three consequences, which are my revolt, my freedom, and my passion. By the mere activity of*

to play squash, in front of all these people. Yet she will struggle to notice it.

**CYRIELLE:** Isn't that just focus though?

**DP:** Yes, some of it is, you must tune in to the match it's not easy, but you also notice the environment and the 'time' you are in. You can't be just a focussed robot, scared of losing. Otherwise, there is no joy. What's the point of that? You only play to win then and where does that leave you?

**DANNY:** Last year DP, when she played her quarter final and came off after the second game all stressed out in tears, even though she was winning.

**DP:** Case in point.

**CYRIELLE:** I watched that match last year, what happened?

**DANNY:** Well, she came off court after winning the second, just, and it was one game each. As I walked down to her, she was in tears with anger and disappointment all over her face. I had to decide what to say because I was quite stressed myself. You didn't much help either!!

**DP:** Hahaha, I didn't know what to say? I mean it was typical Laura, she just couldn't free herself. Yet in a way that makes her the player she is, so it is hard to know how to handle it.

**CYRIELLE:** What did you say to her? It must be strange being married in those situations too.

**DANNY:** I just remember having a weird flash of reality as I went down the steps. I paused for a moment looked around this whole Station, the lights, the train passengers everywhere mostly oblivious to the Squash, the fans at the front wall staring through it to get a glimpse of the rallies, the noise. I then realised what this all was. It was just a way to pass time for people. Sport is entertainment for us all, even the ones playing it. It is like the theatre; it is about expression. I walked to Laura slowly, relaxed, naturally. I had a smile on my face and looked at her and put my hands on her knees. I waited till she calmed a bit and just let her rant. I didn't try to fix it immediately. When she stopped, I just laughed a little, in empathy not at her, and told her to notice the place, the fans, the people, the lights. I asked her to go back out and 'show off.' Show off her amazing skills, her personality, her nice smile her aggression. I asked her to entertain the paying public and just focus on that. I told her to get back on court right now and warm up the ball that way and then just play.

**CYRIELLE:** wow that's so nice. Did you notice DP?

**DP:** No not at first. I was still stressed out, I think. I did notice in the first rally though. Her movement immediately sparked up, her

*consciousness, I transform into a rule of life what was an invitation to death, and I refuse suicide."*[21]  
The Myth of Sisyphus

**"Revolt"** - refusal of suicide and search for meaning despite the revelation of the Absurd

**"Freedom"** - lack of imprisonment by religious devotion or others' moral codes

**"Passion"** - wholehearted experiencing of life, since hope has been rejected, every moment must be lived fully

*\*Distinction between absurd (noun) that is related to silliness, nonsense, and humour with Absurdism as a philosophy.*

There is a degree of the absurd in the notion that simply being instructed advice is coaching. It remains vital for the pupil to participate in shared meaning generation leading to altered actions. It is in the doing, the experiencing of things where change occurs, not merely in the instruction part. In this way, it is absurd to believe a book is the complete answer to anything. Just in the same way a new racket won't make you a world champion. This point is bypassed in usual sales pitches and marketing strategy. Not merely for

reactions especially. Then she hit that volley drop, do you remember Danny? I said, 'she's back.'

**DANNY:** Yes. That was it, she won easily. I think in some ways that was all to do with Absurdity. Saying that, it didn't last long.

**DP:** No, she came out next match all nervous again!

**DANNY:** She did. Yet she sorted it out on her own in that match, she was much better, it was a different nervousness.

**DP:** It was, I'm just kidding. Anyway, I've got to go and coach over there now. See you shortly.

**CYRIELLE:** He gets it doesn't he?

**DANNY:** You know, his daughter is 31 years old now and she has been in a wheelchair for most of it. She has lived with Cerebral palsy all her life. He always tells me how much it has affected his views on things, especially the nature of things. He told me you just had to accept it, or it would have driven him crazy. His daughter inspires him a lot and I know many of his players have taken deep inspiration too. They never descend too far down when they consider her bravery.

**CYRIELLE:** At the core of Absurdism is that contrast. The honest acknowledgement of the confrontation between desire for significance, meaning and clarity on the one hand – and the silent, cold universe on the other. You're left with a choice to either give up or go for it and carry on. 'Get busy living or get busy dying'!

**DANNY:** Shawshank Redemption. It keeps popping up that film.

**CYRIELLE:** Refuse the suicide option 'giving up' don't get trapped in doctrines that trap you and hold you back, false beliefs and make sure to smell the roses as you go. I think that sums up what you described to me in that match before.

**DANNY:** You know what? I know all this stuff but whenever it is explained to me again it energises me so much. I feel ready to go. It makes you get over yourself because you remember all you have that's concrete is this moment and how you treat it. That's what injuries do for players.

**CYRIELLE:** What do you mean, Injuries?

**DANNY:** Players often come back just desperate to play and compete hard. They miss the rallies, the athleticism, the fight. The winning is secondary and all the drama surrounding it isn't there. Yet it only lasts so long, sometimes it sticks but players go from relishing playing again to getting over obsessed with it or bored. The best ones though, they keep that zest. They are like terminators. They have that look in their eye. Always dangerous, like an animal on the hunt.

products, but for the 'help service industry' too.

**CYRIELLE:** That's a poignant comparison. Squash players, wild animals, relishing the hunt. Nothing much more, nothing less.

**DANNY:** Yes, wild animals but with Instagram accounts!

**CYRIELLE:** (Laughter) That would be a caged animal, wouldn't it? Or at least trapped one. The golden cage of popularity and need of recognition. Those followers need feeding a lot you know.

**DANNY:** Now that's poignant. Some free, some caged or trapped, some tamed?

**CYRIELLE:** Now we are getting absurd in the popular sense of the word. I am imagining a tiger running about the court with a racket in its paw now! It is for another hour unpacking that.

**DANNY:** (laughter) Yes, playing against a wolf? Who would win that match? Absolutely, for another day.

Hello, can I help?

Yes, I am the author.

Well in a nutshell, it's a book that might go some way to help somebody be better as a Sports parent, whatever you make of that Sir?

No, not the typical sales pitch I agree!

#### **Act 4 Exit Commentary**

This act was constructed to highlight the absurd elements at play in life and specifically in sport and how this affects the sense of one's meaning making. Camus, in contrast to Sartre, brings forth the element of how the world acts on us. In contrast to Sartre, Camus left room for random occurrences with not everything being a fault of attitude. Camus reminds us that the world is absurd and follows no pre-ordained structure based on ultimate meaning. In sport this can be seen in elements of luck, chance, surprise, random injuries, freak results, and bizarre interferences from factors such as weather conditions, referee decisions, opponent resistance, crowd influences on name only four realms. Recognition of absurdity upon the nature of life events should not deter a positive 'rebellious' attitude to life or attempt to act on the world positively. Camus reminded us to create our own meaning through our engagement in projects and activities we find meaningful to us. This is particularly relevant to sport in that coaches and performers go after personally and culturally significant prizes as if it means everything to them, yet in absolute terms it is arbitrary.

Camus's ideas suggest that as admirable and personally significant sporting success is one should be careful not to deceive oneself of its over importance. This was not to encourage loss of appetite or at worst a nihilist approach to any personal sporting endeavour, it was to encourage one to go for it anyway with full enthusiasm whilst simultaneously staying aware that it can never complete your whole life's meaning for all one's existence. This is important to consider for coaches and performers who get overly obsessed with their sporting goals and lose themselves in it believing that once accomplished all will make sense for evermore. This can be the roots of disillusionment or depressive 'comedowns' after significant efforts and achievement's, such as the recent phenomena of 'post-Olympic depression' (Ranson *et al.*) The dialogue within this act explores a specific lived example of the scenario of winning a prestigious squash tournament and how easily one can get carried away with its over importance and consequently the over inflation of oneself. It is intended that the reader recognizes the value of Camus' ideas of the absurd not only in keeping one's life in balanced perspective but by also invigorating a freedom to 'go for it' for the joys and meaning it offers to you, the way you choose to set it up. This promotes more self-referenced authenticity and can help one live well by reducing the need of a type of mythic external approval. In simple terms, Camus' ideas here give a sense of how to 'keep it real' by staying true to oneself and the reasons you really play and coach.

## Act 5

### **Danny meets Herbert in Dubai at the World Series Squash Finals staged by the tallest building in the World, Burj Khalifa.**

The World Series finals are staged at the conclusion of each season of the World Squash Tour. This year it is held in Dubai. It is a celebratory event of the top eight ranked players in the world and has significant prize money and a coveted title available. There is a different atmosphere here than regular tour events; the matches are all played in the evenings, a shorter best of three games format (not five games), no ranking points, last event before the summer break. This year the winner of the event will earn the highest ever amount paid to a female Squash player at \$44,000. Coach enjoyed reading and writing by the hotel pool, amongst the ambience of other guests, fellow coaches, players, some of their family members and a resident DJ. On day three Coach meets Herbert from Germany, a guest of a German male player. They begin a dialogue on Being, specifically ideas of Martin Heidegger, including some phenomenological examples from Coach's experiences.

*"I have no philosophy at all,"* proclaimed Heidegger. But he is a philosopher nonetheless – because philosophy, for him, is not something one has, but something one does. The aim is not to arrive at a theoretical endpoint, rather it is the relentless and passionate devotion to a question. In a Heideggerian formula: questioning is the piety of thought. Providing any answer to the question of Being is less important than awakening us to it and using it to bring us face to face with the riddles of our existence. Heidegger wanted *"a critical process in which the traditional concepts, which at first must necessarily be employed, are deconstructed down to the sources from which they are drawn"* (The Basic Problems of Phenomenology, 1975, p.23).

"The widespread sterility of academic philosophy courses is.... caused by the attempt to instruct the students with the well-known broad brushstrokes, in possibly one semester, about everything in the world, or about even more than that. One is supposed to learn to swim, but only goes meandering on the riverbank, converses about the murmuring of the stream, and talks about the cities and towns the river passes. This guarantees that the spark never flashes over the individual student, kindling a light in him which can never be extinguished."

Martin Heidegger (The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic)

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**HERBERT:** Hi there. Gutten tag Daniel.

**DANNY:** Hello there.

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**HERBERT:** My name is Herbert; I am here with Simon.

**DANNY:** Hi, yes, I have seen you all together, there is a lot of you here from Germany this trip.

**HERBERT:** There is, sixteen of us. We have all come for the Finals and the sunshine. We are supporting Simon who grew up playing at our club in Ravensburg, in the South.

**DANNY:** Great. Do you play Squash yourself?

**HERBERT:** Ja. I do my best. It keeps me healthy. I like the social side I get from it. The professionals are so great though, I love watching them play.

**DANNY:** They are, aren't they?

**HERBERT:** Simon tells me you play much. He says you're rather good.

**DANNY:** I do yes. Well I am aging now so he is being kind, but yes, I can still play a good match occasionally. I love the game. Squash has given me so much in my life.

**HERBERT:** I also believe you are studying philosophy.

**DANNY:** I am indeed. In fact, I have been reading this morning, here look; "*Everytime I find the Meaning of Life, They Change It.*" By Daniel Klein.

**HERBERT:** Nice Ja.

**DANNY:** It is an introduction to different philosophies really, a few pages on various philosophers and their main ideas. It's remarkably interesting. I had not even heard of most of them, let alone their concepts.

**HERBERT:** Is Martin Heidegger in there?

**DANNY:** No way. I was reading about him last night, phenomenology, right?

**HERBERT:** Yes indeed.

**DANNY:** Do you read philosophy then? How do you know about Heidegger?

**HERBERT:** I do yes, I am a lecturer like yourself, outside of Munich, at university. I work in the philosophy department and, Heideggerian Phenomenology/Ontology is my area of deepest specialism. Do you want to discuss him with me? I am motivated to try and link Heidegger with Squash.

Das Man – 'the they'  
'*They change it*' – an early reference to the presence and influence of others

I have found Heidegger's work the most difficult to understand. The phrases which are German in origin are notoriously difficult to understand at the basic level of philosophy where I began.

**DANNY:** Brilliant yes. Can we do it tomorrow, here at the pool. I am meeting my wife for lunch in five minutes.

**HERBERT:** Of course, Ja, let's do that.

**DANNY:** I will be here from about 11.30 in the morning, we can get some sunshine before it gets too hot.

**HERBERT:** Excellent.

**DANNY:** It will give me chance to catch up on some of his ideas too. *Dasein*?

**HERBERT:** *Dasein* yes.

**DANNY:** 'Thrownness?' 'Being in the World?'

**HERBERT:** *Geworfenheit, In-der-Welt-sein.*

**DANNY:** 'And I liked the concept of 'The They,' that's.....erm 'Das Man?'

**HERBERT:** JA! You know more than you let on.

**DANNY:** Really? I only know it vaguely from last night's reading. It did really interest me though.

**HERBERT:** That's good, we will have a starting point. Just to discuss one of those terms could keep us busy for weeks, some professors' decades! The fact you are even interested in Heideggerian terminology is good because most people find it too complex and turn away. I don't often get to talk with sports coaches about *Dasein* and *Geworfenheit*.

I would like to use some of your experiences in my research so we can both get something useful for our projects too.

**DANNY:** That's a win-win, Great.

**HERBERT:** I am especially interested in '*Alltaglichkeit*.'

**DANNY:** What is that?

**HERBERT:** '*Everydayness*.' The '*lived-life*' you experience, the normalities, things you experience in your daily life, matters so subtle that you give little thought. Moods, casual talk, gossip, sliding fashions, familiar moments. The life inside the tour.

**DANNY:** Okay, that sounds interesting. I have been pondering these things myself. I have always sensed the 'more' of things but never been able to describe it. I feel there is a stripped back coldness to the way sport and life is analysed, summarised. There is a definite 'gap' when objectifying understanding of things, it has crept in evermore. Sports science, analysis, headline journalism in all its new forms; it

This is a pointer as to why Heidegger's brand of Ontological categorisation and existential phenomenology is rarely included in sports coaching philosophy and coach education.

**Geworfenheit – Thrownness**

Heidegger's notion of thrownness, for example, posits that we are thrown into dealing with a particular set of entities, into a particular life, and into a particular culture or tradition. By virtue of this, our sense making abilities are partially determined by prior experiences (Withy, 2014)

The 'everydayness' of life at squash tournaments is something ever present yet hard to put a finger on. More than culture, it is texture of the individual raw experience in the midst significant 'others' (opponents, fans, coaches, media etc).

Heidegger criticised the scientific approach for treating *Dasein* as objects and not as Ontological beings 'who' exist as 'existentialia' (70/71 Being and Time)

all seems reduced down to bare facts, twice removed from one's actual life, as we experience it - you know, how we go through it day after day, week in week out.

Take a match, not just a Squash match but any match in sport, each one has a 'life of its own.' There has never been one identical game of Squash ever played. People like to think so with their patterns and analysis but there are whole layers of texture missed out when you are not the one living it, you're just stuck in a classroom mindset, breaking everything down into too many bits. Imagine if nature worked like that? Well, it wouldn't, would it? That's the beauty of nature!

**HERBERT:** Oh fantastic. This is the stuff.

**DANNY:** Oh, I'd best go. Laura will be pissed off if I'm late again! I keep losing track of time over here, I don't know what's going on? See you tomorrow then Herbert. Nice to meet you. I will get some reading in!

**HERBERT:** Likewise. Hurry.... (laughter)

## NEXT DAY

**HERBERT:** Guten Morgen

**DANNY:** Hello Herbert. Coffee?

**HERBERT:** Ja great. You, Okay?

**DANNY:** I am yes, I slept straight through. Laura is ready for her match tonight, we had a good practice this morning at the venue, so all good. It's very well organised and I heard it's a sell-out. The venue is fantastic, right next to the Burj fountains. Certainly, got the juices flowing this morning when we were on court.

**HERBERT:** Super. I am really looking forward to the matches tonight. Let the games commence.

**DANNY:** Yes, it will be entertaining that's for sure. Now I must confess, I was trying to read some Heidegger last night, *Being and Time*. I got it on my Kindle. I have to say, I really struggled to read it. I am not sure if I am going to waste your time with this today.

**HERBERT:** Look, few can read *Being and Time* the first time, least of all understand it, don't worry about that. The idea with using Heidegger's writings is not to give you a Heidegger-exegetics. Rather, my idea is to simply illuminate *Being*, being-well and living life, in this case on the squash tour, and for this Heidegger will provide our light. I will take us through it.

**DANNY:** That's a relief, I was concerned I wouldn't know enough to understand. So then, what really is *Dasein*? I tried to explain it to

Heidegger claimed the Ontological question relating to underlying structures of reality is deeply fundamental, much more so than the Ontic questions which consider what is concretely and specifically there.

Time - another phenomenon. It seems to take on a different pace and structure at tournaments!

## CRITICISM of HEIDEGGER

Heidegger is notoriously difficult to take on board and was even described as an 'obscurantist' by British philosopher Bertrand Russell (1931 – 1970):  
"Highly eccentric in its terminology, his philosophy is extremely obscure. One cannot help

Laura this morning, she was mystified! I'm not confident I understand it at all. I haven't grasped the meaning yet.

**HERBERT:** Okay Ja, well, *Dasein* is 'being there.' Heidegger deliberately created an unfamiliar word for *Human Being* to provoke a fresh contemplation of it, he does this with much of his language. He was critical of the way philosophers had lost an original wonderment of life and replaced it with an overly rational view of Being alive. He wanted to awaken people back up to the state of being human, the Ontology we say. 'Being there' is a process, a perpetual activity we take part in and vastly different from the existence of things like rocks, trees, animals, that are 'there' but don't exist like *Dasein* does. He wants to continually refine and reinterpret what it means to exist as a person. It is never a set thing.

**DANNY:** That sounds so obvious yet complicated at the same time.

**HERBERT:** Isn't that exactly what life is like? What Sport is like too?

**DANNY:** It is yes. It feels simple one day and chaotic the next. A rollercoaster ride, an endless chess game.

**HERBERT:** When one philosophises, we are always trying to come to a clearer understanding of something that is vaguely familiar already to us. It was another philosopher Soren Kierkegaard, whom Heidegger resonated with, that said "*The more the wise person thinks about the simple, the more difficult it becomes for him.*" The fact that the something still preoccupies a thinker shows that it is not so easy.

**DANNY:** Isn't that just over analysis? A habit of looking for answers where there often isn't any?

**HERBERT:** Yes and no. To repeat myself; unlike a rock, a tree or even an intelligent animal, the world is understandable through time to *Dasein*. There are choices available for us and we can improve the choices through awareness, looking back and anticipating the future to come. This is where the complications arise.

**DANNY:** This is the 'normal life' right? The ups and downs, worries, and doubts.

**HERBERT:** It is yes. We are in the middle of life, 'In it,' aware of it all. It is slippery, stable, boring, worrying, exciting, dangerous, safe. No escape unless we get very drunk. (laughter)

**DANNY:** Or the 'zone' as they say? But that's rare, eh?

**HERBERT:** Ja, flow is an accessible state for sure yet for most of life *Dasein* experiences life out of flow. This is where time plays the part; *Being and Time*. Time is *Dasein*. Time is the task, Danny. Time is *Dasein*'s task.

*suspecting that language is here running riot."*

Roger Scruton (1944 - 2020) stated upon Heidegger: "*His major work **Being and Time** is formidably difficult—unless it is utter nonsense, in which case it is laughably easy.*"

Heidegger stood in the face of analytic philosophy and would be later deemed by Logical Positivist's such as A J Ayer as producing overarching unverifiable theories of existence.

OVER ANALYSIS -

I have encountered this type of philosophical 'clash' in my own views of sports coaching, sports performance, and sport psychology. I believe certain things cannot be measured or monitored and, in many ways, rationalism has attempted and failed to reduce sport to its component parts. When it does this it takes something vital away from sport and a person's experience of it.

'The Zone' has been much discussed in sport psychology terms, yet rarely achieved by design. Life is not experienced in some 'zone' and athletes are not exempt.

'Flow Theory' and its nine subdivisions (Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) has been applied to sports performance and often seen as the optimum state to

**DANNY:** Woah, reverse Herbert. My head is going to blow off already (laughter).

**HERBERT:** (Laughing). Yes, I've jumped ahead too fast there.

**DANNY:** Hang on, so *'Time is the task;'* I know that feeling, I've always felt it but never heard it put so simply, so profoundly. It is hard to explain. I almost feel relieved for some reason.

**HERBERT:** Good. Heidegger called these flashes of understanding *'clearings'* where we awake from our *'everydayness,'* our *'natural attitude.'* Moments where we can grasp an authentic sense of what being here is all about. We should stop pretending to be nothing but objective observers and get back in touch with the way we live through time, with time. The way our past, present and future mix up constantly and create the background atmosphere of our lives.

**DANNY:** Yes, take this morning or even right now. One minute I am just going with the flow, the mundane, keeping busy with small things, coaching at the courts, eating breakfast, sunbathing, chatting with you now, yet out of nowhere sat alone outside the court complex I am considering the match tonight and what it all means. The hopes, the consequences, where we have come from, what it will mean, consequences of the consequences and so on. My reality completely changes. I can almost enter a sort of *'midlife crisis'* inside a single minute!

**HERBERT:** Ja. What then?

**DANNY:** I just try and calm down I suppose, stop the thoughts layering on top of the last. To be fair to myself, I am quite good at nipping this in the bud. I react with a strategy. I use these surges now like they are prompts, like a dog pawing for attention. Something needs doing.

**HERBERT:** What kind of strategies do you mean?

**DANNY:** Well, this morning walking back from practice with Laura I could sense that the match tonight had come to the forefront of our feelings. I could feel it from Laura too, you get a sense of these things. Rather than avoid it or distract from it, which is what I used to do more of, I now usually address it. So, I asked her how are you feeling about the match later? She opens now because she trusts me, and I let her open it up more. I listen. I know she needs to address the feeling and not suppress it. It is really Laura's issue; it is not mine. I have plenty of my own concerns as regards the match and what it means to my life. I try to leave space for her to voice things out and only if she asks me, may I throw in a suggestion or viewpoint.

achieve, yet Dasein experiences life emergent and disrupting. How we perform when the 'flow' ceases to flow is at least as vital. It was exceedingly rare that performers I work with experience complete flow states.

"... we can know something vaguely without knowing it clearly. When we philosophize, we try to get a clear understanding of something that is already vaguely familiar. This is exactly what Heidegger is doing when he asks the question of the meaning of Being." Polt, R p36

Lichtung - Clearing

Hubert Dreyfus writes, "*the clearing in which some thing or idea can show itself, or be unconcealed things show up in the light of our understanding of being.*"

Dreyfus, H, p9

\*Many such ponderings and personal 'dialogues' are revealed in my autophenomonographic writing presented in Dialogue 4.

It relaxes her in a strange way. It's just something that has improved as we have gone through more experiences.

I also leave her alone for the day then, give her room. I go off playing golf or chatting to strange men about Heidegger!

**HERBERT:** So, your strategy is to listen more and ask questions?

**DANNY:** Yes. The balance is much better that way than throwing in loads of advice. Advice is cheap as they say. (Laughter) 'they!'

**HERBERT:** And you use this strategy for yourself too?

**DANNY:** Do I? I do. Yes, I suppose that is what I do. I have a Socratic dialogue with myself (laughter) That sounds better than going 'nuts' talking to myself, doesn't it?!

**HERBERT:** (laughter) Heidegger would think you wise for sensing that clearing within yourself and getting to the intuitions that can come from such space. You have a grasp of what works well for Laura at tournaments, and she has too. That takes practice and skill.

**DANNY:** Really? That's nice to think. Doing nothing can be the hardest thing to do on match days because I am on edge. I can be over eager. That's where the golf and philosophising has helped me and my PhD. I am distracted, with something I enjoy and makes me feel good about myself. Laura also knows I am enjoying myself and it helps her relax and focus on herself rather than worrying about me and my life too. We are much happier in general. She's just got to put up with hearing all my philosophical insights much more! (laughter)

**HERBERT:** Ja. That is the fate of all philosopher's spouses I would think.

**DANNY:** Yeah. They get the good and the bad of it. I never tell Laura what to think, I just prompt her 'to' think and choose her responses more confidently, to stand by her choices more. She says I am frustrating because I never her just tell her straight. Which isn't always true, I do give solutions and advice of course, it's just that I think it's vital for her and people in general, especially performers, to learn how to stand by the courage of their convictions.

**HERBERT:** Well interesting Danny, 'Mr H' also developed a term meaning *mineness*, *Jemeinigkeit*. It was more related to one's own death, but it can be expanded in terms of how nobody can live your own life but you. That can be a lonely and overwhelming thought but *authentic* ways of dealing with this include being *resolute*. Tied in with *mineness* is the proposal to have '*anticipatory resoluteness*.' An act where one chooses to be steadfast even in the face of impending death. *Dasein* knows that ultimately, it shall cease to be here at all and that this can happen at any moment. *Dasein* will cease to be *Dasein* when all possibilities are over for it, yet until then it must accept its mortality and move forwards resolutely.

Central to 'person centred' coaching theory is the use of questioning for extraction of knowledge from the performer as regards their situations and history. A key component of this approach is the relationship and 'background' practices such as tone, topic, timing, mood, consequences, environment etc are encompassed into the whole patchwork of a dialogue. Again, a dialogue must not be stripped of its magic by a reduction into a formulaic prescription for all. Communicative skill including rapport building, listening, empathy and intelligence are still all key players in each context that lead to the most appropriate and effective strategies.

### **Jemeinigkeit - Mineness**

*"Because my Being is mine, it is always an issue for me. She may acknowledge this task and accept her existence as her own to take over or she may exist inauthentically, avoiding owning up to the task of Being. Yet either*

**DANNY:** So, it's about the future and anticipating problems, so you can be better placed to react?

*way the task is hers as long as she lives"*  
Polt, R. p44

**HERBERT:** Ja, to face up to the responsibility of your own life. *Dasein* exists in the present yet carries its future possibilities, which includes death, in its present. It does the same with past events too, which exist here and now in *Dasein's* being. Time is therefore a task to hold and manage. Not in idle contemplation but in action.

*"This certainty, that 'I myself am in that I will die,' is the basic certainty of Dasein itself."*  
Heidegger Being & Time (300 -2)

**DANNY:** Okay. Can I tell you some thoughts I've had around this from a recent example?

**HERBERT:** Please Ja.

**DANNY:** I don't think it is idle contemplation because it led to strong action. Three weeks ago, Laura played in the World Championships Final and lost it from two games up.

**HERBERT:** I watched it yes. Amazing match. Sorry she lost.

**DANNY:** Yes, but it was strange and has had me thinking a lot about it since.

**HERBERT:** In what way?

**DANNY:** What you explained about time and being resolute. You see obviously becoming World Champion is such a significant event in one's life because it is so linked to time. When Laura won it in 2014 it meant that all the things before it changed in an instant. I remember exploding with emotion and running around the place. It was as if my past was all polished up in an instant and my future would never be the same again. I mean I wasn't even the one who won but being so close to her and so involved it felt like my own life's narrative changed there and then, to me inside me. All the good things about my childhood came back to me, past rejections lost their sting. I felt more complete as a husband, a coach, a son, a friend, a lecturer, a learner. All the loose ends seemed to meet and tie up into a nice whole. There was no anti-climax either, my future opened up, the start of something more.

*"Resoluteness (in the face of Death) is not a rigid stubbornness (355/307). An authentic person is free to change her mind – but she will do so because she lucidly grasps her Situation in relation to what she chooses to be, and not because of whim, cowardice, or social pressures."* Polt, R. p91

**HERBERT:** Go on.

**DANNY:** So, when Laura lost this time, I feel it didn't penetrate me the same as it could have, had she not been world champion before. It was the same for Laura too. It stung but it wasn't devastating. There was even space for some pride for reaching a third final and giving it everything.

*"If Dasein's conscience provided us with tidy, unambiguous rules, it would deny to existence nothing less than the very possibility of taking action."* (Heidegger 340/294)

**HERBERT:** No regrets?

**DANNY:** No there's always regrets and what if's that's just always there when you lose but since that match there has been a huge amount of positive energy from us. I would have thought we may

have felt flat, but it has been the opposite. We had a clear talk about it and decided to come and win this event, the World Series Finals.

**HERBERT:** Entschlossenheit! *Resoluteness?*

**DANNY:** Although had Laura not been world champion before I am not sure she or I would be so resolute. It would have felt painful to lose a third final. I think we would have been highlighting faults, interpreting past decisions as poor ones, feeling guilt. The loose ends will have still been frayed. This would in turn have changed the optimism for our future, put doubts there, clouded it. I have sensed it is all connected with time somehow. I think big moments do that. They bring up my past and future into my immediate processing of my life. So, in a way my past is always open to interpretation based on my present and future events. Like a film that seems to change when you find out the ending!

**HERBERT:** You are right. There are moments in life that do this, and they certainly snap us out of *everydayness* as we discussed before. They can wake you from a low-level boredom or automaticity of life by bringing into focus what is important and how fragile our being is. I would expect the prospect of being a world champion is certainly one of these moments. People make fun of the triviality of sport sometimes, at all levels, yet for those individual Dasein who are central to their own sporting episodes, only they know how significant it is to their sense of self hood and place in the world. Sport, even as a supporter, can be vital moments that can define Dasein to itself. We should not underestimate this.

**DANNY:** Could you quickly go over that again? *Everydayness?*

**HERBERT:** Ja. *Dasein* exists in a *lifeworld* not a world of objects that only consist of atoms and physical matter. *Dasein* dwells in a world that is already set up with one's history, culture, meanings, and uses of things. *Dasein* does not encounter a 'squash racket' as its constituent parts, what it is made of and its properties, or a squash court for that matter. Unless of course you are racket designer in which you will. What happens is that you pick up your racket, look at it briefly and just use it to play. This is what Heidegger called *ready-to-hand*. *Dasein* is absorbed in its dealings with the *ready-to-hand*. In a way *everydayness* is the usefulness of things as we go about our daily lives. *Dasein* cares what things produce or achieve for them. A squash player doesn't care for the string in the racket as much as the scientist who made it. The player just wants to know if it helps them play better if it helps with spin or power and they get on with it. They don't want to be over analysing the racket, they just use it in an *everyday* way.

**DANNY:** Yes, that's true. Sometimes the racket is just an extension of my arm, or it's a balancing aid as I move about. It isn't a separate racket in a way.

**HERBERT:** Yes. When we observe things as objects and analyse them, they are *present-at-hand* according to Heidegger. This becomes a theoretical and intellectual way of observing things. Then the object appears totally different to us. Have you ever done that

Action oriented response to impending situations is a quality of behaviour I have noticed amongst many coaches and their players. Nipping things 'in the bud' a pragmatism in interviews that is an 'owning up.' There is a steadfast care about them and their futures. Not so much a constant mood of defiance or brainwashed focus but more an ability to anticipate what is coming down the road and getting ready for it. The future is in play in a positive way, it inspires involvement in it.

"*Dasein is ontically closest to itself and ontologically farthest. What is most ordinary to Dasein is hardest to grasp.*" (37/16) Heidegger

"*What is familiar is what we are used to; and what we are used to is most difficult to 'know' – that is to see a problem; that is to see as strange, as distant as outside us.*"

F, Nietzsche, The Gay Science p301

"*Scientists do what fascinates them, and what fascinates them is not*



with a word you use every day? You try and spell it and keep looking at it over and over then suddenly, the word doesn't make sense, it changes to you?

**DANNY:** I do yes. I was talking about that last week. It's like the more you try to spell it the more it goes strange.

**HERBERT:** Well, that is taking something from the everyday, the 'ready to hand' into the 'present at hand.'

**DANNY:** So, the meaning of it changes? What it is?

**HERBERT:** Yes, and this is where Heidegger proposed that we misunderstand *Dasein's 'being in the world.'* We join in with the world of existing meanings and traditions, *Dasein* is not thrown into the world of objects only. *Dasein* exists in a web of pre-existing meanings of everything he knows. Objects aren't objects, they are *ready-to-hand* entities it learns to operate with. This is *everydayness*. The world is not experienced as if from the side-lines, or in the commentary box, through a magnifying glass.

**DANNY:** That is so obvious. This sounds like the 'more' or 'stickiness' of life that I have attempted to describe to my students back at home. Everything is loaded with personal, historical, cultural, economic meaning and it is always changing depending on the situation. They have a tendency in university and on Coaching courses to teach the intellectual 'detached' way, the *present-at-hand* side-line view. It feels void of something vital, especially for sports experience and people's lives. I notice it in sports punditry too. They comment on things with too much certainty, yet they are not living that person's life. The most vital part is just conveniently deleted from the analysis.

**HERBERT:** It is. Heidegger was vociferous against how Cartesian type subject – object rationality had dismissed the fundamental elements of *Being*. In fact, *Being* must be fundamentally considered as the grounds for all philosophical thought and not to be wiped out. It must be primarily considered in philosophy.

**DANNY:** You know there are sports performers recently who are describing their professional experiences as feeling like robots or 'pieces of meat.' Bradley Wiggins who won the Tour de France called the regime at British Cycling, the Death Star! From Star Wars, he said it was like the cyclists were stormtroopers ruled by Darth Vader! Do what you are told based on the data.

**HERBERT:** Ja, it's prevalent in Gymnastics and other sports also. Golf springs to mind. It is becoming increasingly scientific, calculated, a little less soul and personality on show from the players. As if they are following a set script.

**DANNY:** Coaching processes have moved things towards the '*present-at-hand*' from the '*ready to hand*' view of *Being-in-the-world*? A reliance on the intellectual reasoning of sport. This is the way of life in general these days, especially in the economically

*something you can discover with science. As human beings we find things interesting not because science tells us be."* Sobel, D. 1996 p90

Heidegger's approach is holistic

*"The lebenswelt (lifeworld), with all its significance, is what is fundamental for us. The Cartesian outlook suffers from an intellectualist myopia: it examines a specialised class of entities within the world, present-at-hand objects, but misses the world itself"* 122/89 Being and Time

*"We can begin to suspect that Descartes' concerns seem only proper if one has a narrow, impoverished view of the world – a view that unworlds the world, a view that tries to drain things of all meaning they have for us as engaged actors and reduce them to their calculable aspects."* Polt, R p59

*"For Heidegger, Husserl had forgotten the basic step in phenomenology. His turn inwards into idealism meant he was still prioritising the abstract*

advanced cultures, where there is much hunger for and profit in the guarantee of a simple solution to a linear problem.

**HERBERT:** That would seem the case yes. Do you think this happens in Squash?

**DANNY:** I do. I have noticed in general how players seem much less 'free in spirits,' as if sport primarily is a serious way of life. Less smiles. I do think some of the players have retained the 'play' elements more, the instinctive fight, the aliveness of a match. You know, I am not saying sports science is all negative, it can be used as a brilliant advantage, but I believe that when you forget the 'magic' of playing the game, the mystery of each player and their uniqueness, something vital evaporates. If too much is analysed and measured *present at hand* say, then the *ready to hand* instinctive way we each meet sporting moments loses something fundamental.

I must say, I like the way some of the young Egyptian players are coached, passion and demanding work but joy is in there, they seem still remember Squash is a game, a game to be played in the here and now. To be 'worked out' by themselves in a live situation, in an instant. You need instinct for this, and you need to be encouraged in those instincts. Which means there must be a certain 'letting go,' a trust that the 'experience' can be the coach, to a large degree. Too much coaching can cause 'learned helplessness' you know; you believe you can't work things out for yourself. The sport becomes too much of an abstract equation rather than a practical challenge.

**HERBERT:** So, you believe coaches are 'over coaching' and too theoretical? Heidegger warned this was to deny Being, a 'forgetfulness of Being' that strips life of the dynamic into an 'inward idealism of abstract contemplation.'

**DANNY:** EXACTLY THAT! That's what I have been trying to say about this stuff. I really believe coach education and analysis has made many coaches believe that to coach is to analyse and measure. I consider that an overly serious, controlling approach has crept in. I have noticed some of our England Coaches become 'stiff' in themselves, they seem 'dry,' overly serious, lacking spontaneity and energy. They become defensive when challenged, they quote references from selected research papers or popular science texts as back up to their interventions. Yet there is a failure to grasp the 'being' of a person as the start point of their practice. There is a cut off from the magical and life affirming part of the human experience itself. It is as if coaching is only about the abstract solution, the theory of. It's hard to pin it down, sorry Herbert.

**HERBERT:** That is why I wanted to talk with you Danny. You are a philosopher -coach and have sensed these things. You use philosophy FOR your coaching not just as a statement OF coaching. I have watched you and listened to the way you are with people. What you have managed with your wife is magical, you see her, you live it fully.

*contemplative mind rather than dynamic Being-in-the-world. From the start of Being and Time. He makes it clear that he wants no theoretical investigation, no mere list of definitions and proofs, but a concrete investigation, starting from whatever Dasein is doing at the moment."*

Bakewell, S p68

"Practical care and concern are more primordial than reflection. Usefulness comes before contemplation, the *ready-to-hand* before the *present-at-hand*. A table is not just a table: it is a family table, where 'the boys like to bust themselves,' or the table where that decision was made with a friend that time, or where that holiday was celebrated that time.'

Bakewell, S p64

My experiences of teaching 'Philosophy to Practice' modules on sports coaching NGB and University Masters courses is that Philosophy is more an intellectual categorisation method of

**DANNY:** Thanks Herbert. My confusions and not being to quite articulate my intuitions and senses of what is going on, was once a frustration but I accept it more now and just leave it fermenting. Every now and again someone gets the tidal download of it! Usually Laura, or DP bless them. They must think I am off my head.

**NARRATOR:** Herbert smiled back empathetically. He knew the feeling exactly being a philosopher himself. The two men had built some trust up very quickly and this gave the dialogue a level of depth both were finding stimulating and releasing.

**HERBERT:** Hey I understand Danny, us philosopher types live this way. You may have been always this way perhaps?

**DANNY:** I lived for four years on my own in my youth and I believe it helped me remember the feeling of just (pause) well, being-here I suppose. Alive. I was alone for extended periods; I thought a lot. I vividly recall having moments where a strange sense that there was something deeper to being here, existing. It was a bit freaky, but it intrigued me a lot.

**HERBERT:** Go on...

**DANNY:** Well, I figured out that I be comfortable just being here, to like being alive primarily. It's something you can sense it in nature and animals. I learned to 'hang out' with myself, especially when I wasn't busy. Going to sleep alone, waking up alone, days alone; I found a deep confidence through that. I could be with myself even when I was lonely or bored. It was like a sort of 'thinking skill' I developed using perspective and conversations with myself. Those feelings are still with me you know, surprisingly so.

Somewhere inside me, I think I vowed to push it and find out what was coming up in me. It must be why I have ended up in all this existential phenomenology stuff and chatting to professors about Being and philosophers!

**HERBERT:** That may very well be true Danny. Our lives are us. To 'Know Thyself' was inscribed in the walls at the ancient Temple of Delphi. Socrates was recorded as including it in his own dialogues to point the way towards wisdom.

**DANNY:** Can I ask, do you believe this to be relevant for people in our modern day still or are we off track here talking about philosophy from all those years ago? Will the young generation need this, or do they operate differently now?

**HERBERT:** Sure, they do. It is just as vital as it ever was. *Dasein* is timeless. You can use Neuroscience, Anthropology, Brain scans, Cognitive psychology whatever there is these days but there is much more to existence than data. You can get all the measurements and statistics you want on a person and still not come any nearer at all to what life is for an individual *Dasein*?

**DANNY:** I agree. There is a whole that must not be spoiled.

listing values and beliefs, the philosophy of their coaching. Philosophy in their coaching and philosophy for their coaching would be much more 'lived' and more rooted in a deeper truth about all coaching can be.

I have seen misplaced confidence in the intellectualisation of sports coaching philosophy and all the 'dogma' that ensues. The bland reduction and packaged slogans that in truth are faded signposts at best as to what the situated and immersed life is. Signifiers tend to become signs like this. Unfathomable and perpetually refined processes are turned into easily repeatable nouns, such as the value 'Honesty' or the belief 'Hard work pays off.'

"Resilience" is the latest catchphrase signposted across the coaching landscape.

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**HERBERT:** Heidegger proposed ‘*one must not lose sight of the forest, for obsessing on each tree.*’ He was not against intellectualism; he was an intellectualist himself. It was just that he wanted us to all remember that *dwelling in the world* comes before any knowing of the world does. He was criticising those that choose to ignore this and go straight for knowing, such as Descartes.

**DANNY:** Wow yes. This is what Laura’s coach tries to get through to me.

**HERBERT:** Who DP?

**DANNY:** Yes DP. He is a natural. His ‘feel’ for spotting movement rhythms and patterns and how that links with the flow of a swing. He senses the whole picture better than anyone I have been with. Always warning of over analysis!

**HERBERT:** Interesting.

**DANNY:** You know what? DP has never read a coaching book or been on any coaching qualifications in his life. He says his coaching all came from somewhere within. His record with players is second to none in the world and all of them have a great lifelong affection for him.

**HERBERT:** Has he used any of the modern analysis methods or science?

**DANNY:** He has yes, extensively but in a fresh way. He uses it as a tool when he needs it but only as a kind of crutch to help the player understand themselves. Swing analysis software for example but he was adamant the key is who is looking at the swing not the machine itself. Often, he will remind players not to get bogged down in it all. He reminds them of some of life’s absurdities and I would hear him repeating things like “*you are a person who plays squash, not an athlete who hits and fetches balls.*” You know, emphasising the **player** part over the athlete bit. His version of pointing to Dasein!

**HERBERT:** Maybe Ja Danny. The I can see why you resonate with the man.

**DANNY:** Yes. It’s just in all his small interactions and the way he remembers that life is complex for people, the ‘dwelling’ part you just mentioned. He has a special ‘way’ with people he coaches, and it is making more sense to me now. He has always talked of love and ‘coaching the person not just the player’ and I swear every year passes and I think I understand it fully, then a year later I understand him more.

**HERBERT:** You are revisiting and refining. This was Heidegger’s (p43) way of philosophising. He wanted to shine a torch on things only. He was not after finding some fundamental end point. This was his Hermeneutics, the circling and spiralling of interpretations. What is your new understanding?

I have found that much of the philosophy I have digested to be already familiar to me, though I may not have been able to pinpoint it before. This is particularly true of Heidegger’s proposals in Being & Time. It has helped me to draw out lessons from my experiences and in turn helped me understand

**DANNY:** Well, to be careful not to strip out personal meaning for people by breaking it down so much that I lose touch with their individual version of life. Humans are much more than components for a machine that can be broken down into parts, there is a wholeness to *Dasein* easily forgotten or unappreciated. I want to help people ‘release’ into their own *Dasein* nature, their being. It is important to remind them of their wholeness, their uniqueness too.

**HERBERT:** Ja. And now you are using the term *Dasein* fluidly!

**DANNY:** I am, I knew you’d pick up on that! I could hear myself saying it, thinking it was strange.

**HERBERT:** Good good, Ja. So how does that link in with you and Laura?

**DANNY:** I am reacting differently than usual. I have more an urge to leave things alone and not to force it with willpower alone. I can sense it is Laura’s life, all of it, her special story. It makes it richer, whole, her experience, part of her whole life journey and unique experience of it.

Things are not as FINAL as we may have made them before. Squash feels part of a bigger tapestry in both our lives. Perspective rises more quickly out of the background. It is what people call experience, yet it felt different.

After the final it felt natural to go again quickly, with energy and excitement. It wasn’t a big motivational push, we just felt ready to go, in a calm and composed way.

There is a saying “*when you fall off the horse, get back on quickly.*”

**HERBERT:** Ja, I have heard this. I understand. She got back on.

**DANNY:** No, my point is that she didn’t fall off in the first place, it was just wobbly ground, an uncomfortable bump. Strangely this all makes sense suddenly. The most vital thing is the ‘aliveness’ our ‘being’ not the Squash world, results and what it all means. You know there are times where we get so wrapped up in the sport, I can forget who I am?

**HERBERT:** Wow Danny. This is very interesting listening to you. When you know who you are, is it apparent? Do you notice?

**DANNY:** Yes, and it feels good. It feels healthy. In clearer perspective. As I say it was disappointing after the final and still thoughts of what might have been, but it didn’t get into our bones, our bellies like most results have over the years. For me, it feels like I have woken up, I am not as glued to the overall storyline of my life, things feel more temporary and richer in and of themselves. The good is still better than the bad but the gap between is not as cavernous.

myself and others in a more nourishing way. At times it feels like deep secrets are being revealed, like finding out how a magic trick works. It is exciting and certainly makes my life feel richer.

**Heidegger’s term  
Releasement**

(Gelassenheit) – at our deepest level *Dasein* allows the everyday to happen – our will does not ‘make’ it happen. Letting things unfold despite the mystery and uncertainty. A level of acceptance of what is.

Heidegger – *Country Path Conversations* (2010, Translation)

**HERBERT:** May I suggest an explanation or at least Heidegger's view on how you experienced this.

**DANNY:** Of course, please. This is fascinating to me.

**HERBERT:** Well, let me give this a go, it can be difficult to explain.

**DANNY:** You don't say!

**HERBERT:** Well, it is my profession, so I'll give it a go. Heidegger proposed that the way Dasein experiences time, is not the same as conceptual clock time. To Dasein the past is not the past nor the future the future and therefore the present is also not just this present moment.

**DANNY:** Okaaaay? Let's get another coffee first, this is another level for me.

**Break.....**

**NARRATOR:** This was energy consuming dialogue for coach. He had developed his ability to take part in such rich philosophical contemplation and although stimulating to him, it took full absorption into the dialogue. Also, Heidegger is renowned to be difficult to take on board due to his use of changing nouns into verbs, things into processes. 'Nothing, Nothings!' according to the Man from Messkirch.

**DANNY:** Okay. Time. What is it then?

(Both laughing)

**HERBERT:** For Heidegger, time is not just a thing that we observe pass by, not just a place where we must get things done and achieved along some timeline. Time or *temporality* is lived, and it is far more fluid. When we are more in touch or awake with our lived experiences, which Heidegger claimed to be *authentic*, we understand that our significance, our being, is situated in a 'now' that includes mixtures of our past and especially our future possibilities. In the manufactured concept of time the past has gone forever, and the future is never now, yet for Dasein the dimensions of our history, our heritage our personal past experiences always play out in the present now. Our futures are always in play also. What we might become, hopes, ambitions, fears. Yes, they may only be thought forms and not 'scientifically' measurable yet to Dasein they feel real. The present now is always an alive mixture of past, present and future. They all exist together in a background interplay; underneath and infiltrating the tasks Dasein is involved with.

**DANNY:** I feel what you're getting at Herbert, I have always known this somehow, yet I can't pin it down intellectually. There has been a lot said about 'being in the moment' in sport but I have always felt that is like a hiding place a too simplistic and unsustainable mode. I know it's nice to meditate and switch off and get immersed in what you're doing, you know a 'flow state' but unless you become a monk

### **Dasein's Temporality –**

A subjective progression through moments. Unlike an animal or rock which is a present at hand entity, *Dasein* is an existing entity – it's Being is an issue for it and knows it will no longer cease to exist.

*“For Heidegger, the primary phenomenon of time is the future that is revealed to me in my being-towards-death. Heidegger makes play of the link between the future (Zukunft) and to come towards (zukommen).”*

or something living away in a monastery or mountain somewhere you've no chance of staying 'present' all the time.

**HERBERT:** Life gets in the way Ja.

**DANNY:** That's just how it is and that's quite useful not always something to be avoided. I consciously use my past and future to help me, to energise sometimes and to make decisions. I like nostalgia energy and imagining future scenarios that excite me, that give me a bounce in my step. I would prefer to improve my abilities to use my past and future as an aid to my life rather than escape from it into some metaphysical nowhere moment. I think this is important for athletes and coaches to understand. There are rich sources of meaning and energy in the way we remember our lives, history and where we can go, what we can create.

**HERBERT:** Yes, so you are incorporating your past and future into your present in what Heidegger would say forms 'anticipatory resoluteness.'

**DANNY:** Can you help me with a specific example?

**HERBERT:** Well, tonight you are going to coach your wife, Ja?

**DANNY:** I am yes 7.30pm.

**HERBERT:** Well good, 7.30pm, we will be there. For practical purposes that is the time we use for organisation. Like dates, hours, minutes and so. This is the clock dimension. Yet we know time bends and feels relative.

**DANNY:** Yes, a whole tournament sometimes feels like a time warp but certainly matches have a time zone of their own.

**HERBERT:** Ja and you are experiencing spaces where you are summoning up the past and future into those moments creating a blend of meaning and experience.

**DANNY:** Yes, and lots of it just emerges from nowhere. Feelings invade me, jolts of future consequence, tremors of past tensions. Even if I am calm or more on the agitated side, there is always a heightened alertness going on. If you don't manage to get control of it can feel too overwhelming too fast. Then the panic kicks in and it can be all too much.

**HERBERT:** So, these situations emerge, and you find yourself in the middle of them, like you will do tonight. *Resoluteness* is where you will choose what to recall, to imagine and incorporate into your present turbulence. If you have anticipated this well, through reflecting on past experiences and future prediction, clarity will arise. Life, despite heading towards death, opens and simplifies.

**DANNY:** Calmness too?

*Insofar as Dasein anticipates, it comes towards itself. The human is not confined in the present, but always projects towards the future. The key to Heidegger's understanding of time is that it is neither simply reducible to the vulgar experience of time, nor does it originate in distinction from eternity. Time should be grasped in and of itself as the unity of the three dimensions – what Heidegger calls "ecstasies" – of future, past and present. This is what he calls "primordial" or "original" time, and he insists that it is finite. It comes to an end in death."*  
Critchley, S. 2009

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**HERBERT:** It can be calmness, or it could be aggression, zest perhaps? You make more authentic responses, appropriate to the situations. There is responsibility for you to choose to be resolute in that moment and authentic Dasein begins to accept this. A maturity arises, your own relationship to your past and your future fundamentally alters. You could say the temptation to listen to others too much, to blame circumstances, to feel a victim drop away. An independence arises within Dasein within the context of its past, present, and future playground.

**DANNY:** Do you think this is what has happened to me recently?

**HERBERT:** Possibly. This is something Dasein must always **revisit** and take responsibility for. Heidegger's ultimate account of resoluteness comes from the fact that Dasein knows it will die. Remember, we are Beings-towards-death. This is the anticipation part. Without being morbid or sad he said authentic people choose their own existence and define themselves by themselves within a context of the time and culture they live. Yes 'das man,' 'the they,' of course always play a role, we will always refer to others, the crowd to some level but this gets reduced down. One lives authentically in the face of death, and this opens freedoms within oneself that inauthentic, fallen, and scared individuals rarely experience. Inauthenticity involves a sort of auto pilot going from one task to the next along a manufactured timeline, one thing after another. Those in this mode of being fall into typical societal roles of their time, retrieve, and replay regrets and fabricate future fears.

**DANNY:** So, our relationship with time influences our realities?

**HERBERT:** Danny according to Heidegger *Dasein is time*. The way we relate to it fundamentally affects us. The more you face up to your temporal nature in all the things you do, like an athlete who knows they will retire one day, the more you embrace it and choose to be resolute and exist authentically as possible, with freedom, with energy and less of a helpless and victimised view. There is growth and alignment with life.

**DANNY:** Yes, I get it.

**HERBERT:** Let me read you this from *Being and Time*; "Our lives are a process of taking over who we have been in service of who we will be. We are what we were, and we will be what we receive and appropriate from what we were, and here the most crucial factor will be how we do so."

**DANNY:** So how we view and retrieve our past affects how we go on living?

**HERBERT:** Exactly. And the future must be met with those interpretations and awareness of our past.

Your example springs to mind Danny.

*"In the order of possible interpretation, Dasein's temporality has to come first." (479/426)  
Being & Time*



You have brought forward interpretations of your experience at the world championships to this moment now. You believe you are a successful team with your wife, you remember the whole narrative as one of great progress from where you began, with bumps along the way of course. Consequently, your future is full of possibilities. This tournament has opened up for you because your interpretation of your whole life, the big picture, is one of what?

**DANNY:** Ongoing improvement, enjoyment, growth, love, togetherness, learning. A type of living adventure, a bit like Indiana Jones in the movies in some ways.

**HERBERT:** Okay, so your future is an opening full of new opportunities, treasures to go after, to explore. The interplay of your future and your past is giving birth to your present.

**DANNY:** Yes, I understand. Is this not what everyone does?

**HERBERT:** Ja! Yet sometimes Dasein is inauthentic and sometimes authentic. Two different modes that we all experience to varying levels.

**DANNY:** Okay. So, therefore some live well cope and thrive, whilst some struggle more of the time.

**HERBERT:** Ja. If there is too much inauthenticity people can get stuck and bored in the *everydayness* of life. Remember *everydayness* is how we live in the main, yet the quality of it is affected by how much we can use our past and future authentically.

Authentic use of the past is where aspects of one's heritage and personal history is *retrieved* and *repeated* in celebration of existence. A pride, a confidence may arise. A positive memory energises and inspires. Whereas inauthentic relationship with past is forgetting. Nothing is remarkable to this person. The only thing retrieved is just enough to keep carrying on, maintaining the comfort of the current situation. Ticking over.

**DANNY:** These are the squash players I see who drift along, like they are stale. They have given up on themselves. Sometimes I have more optimism or pride in them than they do for themselves. They just lose a spark. DP calls it battle weary. I just think it is a low-level depression with the game. Their eyes lose the brightness for play.

**HERBERT:** Interesting observations. In authentic use of the present Heidegger proposed Dasein has *moments of vision*. Renewed awareness of one's situation arises. For example, this is not just a squash court or squash match, this is my opportunity to express my nature on a public stage. This is entertainment, a showcase not a place where I better not lose or else.

**DANNY:** I understand that yes. The best people I have worked with or observed seem to have that ability to see their situations better for them. They can manipulate the meaning of it accordingly.

*"In both authentic and inauthentic and inauthentic existence past, present and future are always at work together. (401/350) In inauthenticity, the past and the future are subordinated to the present whereas in authenticity, the present gains a fresh and deeper meaning from the past and especially, from the future."*

Being & Time

It is important to remember the UPS and DOWNS of authentic energy and

**HERBERT:** The opposite for those who fall into too much *everydayness* make the present, present, and lose sight of the big picture, or hides from their temporal nature and *being-towards-death*. The present just becomes about getting things done and over with. Getting by, getting through.

There is nothing wrong with phases of presence, being totally in the now, it can be joyous but as a long-term strategy Heidegger believed this was not aligned with Dasein's nature and thus inauthentic.

**DANNY:** That is why lots of the 'mindfulness' exercises that have re-emerged as popular lately, isn't sustainable. On the surface of things, it can be temporary relief, yet it does not sort out the underlying issue of time and the fact Dasein is time.

**HERBERT:** I agree.

**DANNY:** The future?

**HERBERT:** Authentic relations to future are ones of *anticipation* as opposed to *waiting* for it to come. Exciting possibilities arise whilst being totally accepting of the fact it will all end one day. This awareness helps spark anticipation, 'no time to lose' so to speak. On the other hand, *waiting* for the future, for things to come my way, for the results of my labour to pay off is again towards the inauthentic. You fail to go and meet your future; a naïve optimism lurks rather than a pragmatic one. It reduces energy and you stay stuck in your seat whilst the future unfolds without you taking part in it as fully as you could.

**DANNY:** This sounds like it's the underpinnings of motivational sports psychology?

**HERBERT:** Well in some ways it is, and the modern way has been to offer advice and solutions to life, yet Heidegger was merely revealing Being and ways of being which includes both authentic and inauthentic modes. He therefore preferred the phenomenology, the access to a person's personal lived experience. No prescriptive 'one size fits all' map. No holy destination

**DANNY:** Not much to sell then, as a solution package?

**HERBERT:** No, not at all. Remember, he even denied he was a philosopher at all. Yet, on one memorable occasion at a lecture he gave in 1961, Heidegger was asked by students for one big piece of advice regarding how to live.

**DANNY:** What did he say?

**HERBERT:** In a rare 'nutshell esque' comment he advised them to spend more time visiting graveyards!

**DANNY:** What?

inauthentic drifting along; BOTH are forever in play. There is no way out and no possible perfect state. Consequently, this work is no SELF HELP guide, it is an observation (at best) of Dasein's existence, its Being. 'Wellbeing' as an idea of a permanent achievable state is an ideology that creeps in and damages sports professionals who exist in a turbulent and precarious lifeworld of results and ensuing consequences. There are times and phases all will not feel well at all. An acceptance of this, in some ways takes off an unnecessary expectation which inadvertently denies Dasein of its very Being. A *being* that naturally includes the lot.

*"Authentic anticipation of our being-towards-death individualizes Dasein towards its own most, nonrelational, and insuperable possibility. Becoming free for one's own existence in anticipation liberates one from one's lostness in chance possibilities urging themselves upon us."*

*Heidegger; Lecture - 1961*

**HERBERT:** Go to Graveyards and read the tombstones. Get the feeling. The acceptance of the final nothingness can ‘jolt’ one into appreciation of all the glory of being here, being something and not nothing. The nothing that Death reveals to us is stark and truthful.

**DANNY:** Perspective. Players who get injured or ill for prolonged periods come back so enthused to just play, joyous to compete again, innovative ideas and a freedom about them. It’s more than the freshness, its perspective.

**HERBERT:** Yes, and there no greater perspective than the end of something, the ‘no-more’ the ‘no-thing.’ It would still be highly personal however, but this was as specific as Heidegger got when it came to what we now call ‘life advice.’

**DANNY:** Well Herbert thanks a lot. I feel alive!

**HERBERT:** There is one last thing I believe is particularly relevant to sport.

**DANNY:** Yes?

**HERBERT:** It is about *Heritage and Thrownness*.

**DANNY:** Go on?

**HERBERT:** Well, everyone is a product of their *heritage*; we are ‘*thrown out*’ of it into our worlds. This *heritage* forms a historicity that Dasein carries. Our ancestors, grandparents, parents, fellow cultural citizens, people we never meet, all contribute to our shared *heritage* and personal *historicity*. For good or bad we know people helped put us where we are on all levels of existence from the evolutionary, biological, social, cultural, psychological, technological, environmental, practical. This is powerful because in an inherent way Dasein owes a *debt* to this heritage, to people.

**DANNY:** I do remember a quote by Althea Gibson, up at the entrance of Disney Land of all places; “*Nothing great was ever accomplished alone.*”  
I hadn’t appreciated it beyond the obvious.

**HERBERT:** Elite sportspeople have significant opportunities to repay this debt, on a scale bigger than most. How many times do you see whole nations if not families of competitors gaining personal pride and joy from their sports heroes? Also, a feeling of connected celebration?

**DANNY:** I think that flips the other way too when family and coaches hurt because you lose. It’s a pressure. We are very aware how we affect the feelings of our families at home. Its right, you want to pay them back. Sometimes you think it’s all about yourself, but it is not. It is deeply emotional. Both ways.

Heidegger’s concept of our thrownness (Gerworfen); to philosophise from the ‘*times we are in,*’ prompted certain thoughts and observations I believe to be relevant to the current professional sporting landscape which include: the need for certainty and solutions, the business of ‘selling’ certainty and solutions, the demise of ‘agnosticism’ and a sudden rise in the awareness of mental health/ ‘wellbeing’ issues in professional sport.

“*Historicity is the way Dasein stretches along between birth and death (425/373). A more concrete working out of Dasein’s temporality.*”

I have felt the weight of the constant ongoing ‘biography’ of my life. I am not simply biology or instinct (which my dog seems to be!), my relationship with my life’s biography always remains in play. It is open for re-edits and in many ways my future is my chance to enhance my own biography as I would prefer it. This

**HERBERT:** *Ja. Dasein's heritage* serves up a roadmap of how to live and what is good, what should be repeated. This is where role models from ones past become important to us. Role models provide an authentic inspiration of what is good in one's culture. They offer direction rather than a set template to copy, that would be inauthentic and impossible. This is vital for Dasein because they can pay back their debt by becoming role models themselves for future generations. Thus, connection is made through the generations which can be powerful and connecting for Dasein.

**DANNY:** For me that would bring a balance to being. It is nice to feel part of something greater than your own immediate self-satisfaction. Both are important I feel. The feeling of contribution to others certainly drives me and Laura on. I even feel I owe it to my unborn children, to be a role model. Contribute by example in the hope they will be guided to be able to face life resolutely I suppose.

**HERBERT:** Ja.

**DANNY:** Was it' Marcus Aurelius who said something like 'what we do in this life echoes in eternity?' Meaning, if you represent the values of your time and place on earth, heritage, through good example and others go on to repeat it in their own style, then consequently that has ripple effects for a long time. You build a legacy, a type of destiny for others to reach for and go beyond. You live on in some respects, bending the physics of time.

**HERBERT:** Remember Danny, *Dasein* is time? *Dasein* is a being towards death. *Dasein* can get absorbed in its everydayness, overly concerned by *Das Man, the they*. *Dasein* can operate authentically and inauthentically at any time of its existence. *Dasein* exists in an ongoing interaction between its past, present, and future which is in constant flux and re-editing. *Dasein* is thrown into existence out of a *heritage* that limits yet provides it possibilities. If *Dasein* can choose to be resolute by anticipating its eventual 'no-thingness,' *Dasein* can be an inspiration for itself and others along its historicity, its journey between birth and death. *Dasein* can have impact beyond its existence even after all its possibilities are no more.

**DANNY:** *Dasein* is *Dasein*!

**HERBERT:** It is. Being there, in all its situated existential and projecting nature. *Dasein* is a *caring* thing. It is constantly concerned with itself, in projects and living.

**DANNY:** Coaches and players are *Dasein* first and last. Mixed in with an existence all their own, and 'in play' in all their experiences. People have lives to live, unlike machinery. Decisions, fears, hopes,

informs the emotional background of my life which permeates and colours my waking existence.

*"Heidegger specifies that the possibilities that we project must be drawn from the past as heritage (435/383). I cannot invent a life project I have dreamed up completely on my own. My source for projects is the heritage that I share with others in my community, the wealth of possible self-interpretations my culture has made over millennia. Thus, the past is a storehouse of opportunities to exist authentically: 'everything good' is a heritage.....it brings forth meaning that makes the past the present. Thus, strange as it sounds, possibilities are the things that properly concern historians (446/394)."*  
Polt, R. p101

*"Because Dasein is historical in its own existence, possibilities of access and modes of interpretation of beings are themselves diverse, varying in different historical circumstances."*  
Heidegger, Basic Problems of Phenomenology, p22

#### **Sorge – Care**

*"Dasein is such that its Being-in-the-world has always dispersed itself or even split itself up into definite ways of Being-in."*  
*"The multiplicity of Care is indicated by the following examples: having to do with something, producing something, attending to*

predictions, guilt, desires, moods. Wins, losses, fulfilled and unfulfilled dreams, legacy, notoriety, earnings, titles. It goes on.

**HERBERT:** Ja. Heidegger simply wanted to bring that back to the forefront. The stuff of life we live in, what we care about.

**DANNY:** This has been fascinating thank you Herbert.

**HERBERT:** Not too much Danny, not overwhelming? I was worried with it being the tournament and everything?

**DANNY:** For me, all I can say right now is that I feel great. Thank you.

**HERBERT:** It has surprised me how sociable and open you are. I was telling the guy's last night.

**DANNY:** Well, we get that a lot. I am naturally more open than Laura, but she is nice and warm believe it or not?

**HERBERT:** The 'Ice Queen' is warm?

**DANNY:** That's comes from them, though right? A nickname, the other people's view of her.

**HERBERT:** Das Man; They!

**DANNY:** "They" yes. The commentators, the competitors, the media, referees the Squash bubble! The gossip grapevine!

**HERBERT:** Is that something you are wary of? Have you separated from that as a kind of tactic?

**DANNY:** Oh yes, it is. We have our friends at home and people 'on tour' are just acquaintances for us. We want an aura, a bit of mystery around us, otherwise they get into you. You can go soft and complacent because we are all friends and comfortable. It becomes more a social club than competitive sport. I've seen loads of players lose their 'edge' because they get so bogged down and lose themselves in what everybody else thinks of them.

**HERBERT:** You know, Heidegger warned of this, The Dictatorship of Others. He talked of the 'temptation of contentment' being invited and involved with Das Man. He warned one can

*something, and looking after it, making use of something, giving something up and letting it go, undertaking, accomplishing, evincing, interrogating, considering, discussing, determining. . ."*

Heidegger, 1962, p 56

The Squash commentating fraternity gave Laura the Nickname "ICE QUEEN." based on her frosty and strong on court presence. A nod to her lack of friendliness on court and her fierce independence.

Heidegger tells us that in idle conversation, one understands things "only approximately and superficially": "one does not so much understand those entities about which one converses, but rather one listens only to what is said in the conversation as such. Or, as he puts it elsewhere, this idle conversation "releases one from the task of true understanding" Wrathall, M (1999)

"In its inconspicuousness and unascertainable, the real dictatorship of *The They* is unfolded. We take pleasure and enjoy ourselves as **they** take pleasure; we read, see, and judge about literature and art as **they** see and judge; we find shocking what **they** find shocking. The 'they,' which all are, prescribes the kind of being of

'alienate' themselves from themselves, like you just said Danny. Fallenness – too much of a binding with the they world.

**DANNY:** And you've left this till last to tell me? (laughter). This is vital for professional sport because each sport has its own version of the 'they' set up. It's powerful and to retain your independence and not get too sucked in is awfully hard. Striking out on your own, keeping your own mind whilst not annoying everyone or being persecuted is tough. In a way it's one of the big reasons I travel with Laura. We can keep ourselves away from a lot of it.

**HERBERT:** Like what particularly?

**DANNY:** The other players, coaches, some media, fans and the background gossip, the false friendliness, the need to be popular and liked. It can be lonely on tour so it's natural to want to be liked and popular amongst the 'big girls.' Like at school you know, on the playground. What to say, what to wear, how to act, what is acceptable, who is fashionable and on. In Squash its more how to play, how to behave on court, how to train, what to eat, how to fit in, what professional is, what etiquette is, what to say or not to say in interviews.

**HERBERT:** I understand Ja. Heidegger suggested in Dasein's 'everydayness' we talked about before we can dissolve into the Others, and it is hard to stop it because it is subtle and there lies its power. It is everywhere, reminding you what you must follow to be considered normal.

**DANNY:** Totally. I mean who doesn't like to be popular and in the 'in crowd'? After winning and suddenly being accepted, glorified it is usual to soften up. Staying there at the top is tough. I know from our experience that we lost our 'edge' many times, particularly after winning the world championships. I think that feeling of general acceptance and popularity makes you weaker in some ways. It sucks you in, you can lose your truth. You're there to crush your opponent's not to be accepted.

**HERBERT:** That authenticity again perhaps?

**DANNY:** I think so. Truth. What is this genuinely about for us? Truth. You must be almost paranoid without the craziness parts. Suspicious without accusation. Smart, streetwise. Wary. Awake. We are always going to be affected by others at some level, in positive ways and de energising ways. It's just lowering the percentages of this 'falling' into the others too much. It is a skill to recognise when the time is right to pull back, to be yourself. Like good artists do, before they sell out and are owned by their public.

**HERBERT:** Wow. Not just hitting a squash ball then Danny? (Laughter).

**DANNY:** No, it's so much more. You cannot be scared to be negatively judged. Sometimes you're simply going to annoy people, not everyone will like you and sometimes you will cross the line and

everydayness." Collins, J p65

Heidegger's declares that

"The falling prey of Dasein to **the they** and the 'world' taken care of; we call a 'flight' from itself."

"**The they** prescribe what can and may be ventured, it keeps watch over everything exceptional. Every kind of supremacy gets silently suppressed. Overnight everything original gets glossed over as something well-known. Everything gained by a struggle becomes just something to be manipulated. Every mystery loses its force. This averageness reveals an essential tendency of Dasein: the 'levelling down' of all possibilities of being."

In *Polt, R. p65*

This was deeply detailed in the Netflix Documentary Save the Last Dance (2020) Michael Jordan was equally loved and criticised by teammates, competitors supporters and the media for his authentic desires to dominate, demand action and unsettle. He is an example of a sportsman who managed to maintain his authentic self for better or worse for a high percentage of his career. Interestingly, Jordan's authenticity and

be out of order. You must accept that part of you and not worry about the incoming judgements. Even myself as a coach, I must stand by my players no matter what. If that means I lose the popularity vote, then fine. If that means people think I am eccentric, annoying, worthy or whatever then so be it.

**HERBERT:** So, you need, we say ‘eine dicke Haut?’, ‘a thick skin?’

**DANNY:** Well, I used to think that, but it isn’t that. You can have a normal skin, you just ‘become confident in your own skin.’ You stand by your choices and care less for opinions of people. I practice it. I practice remembering what I stand for, what my own opinions of myself are. I only really care about the opinions of those I deeply trust. Not so much social media, that can really suck you in. That happened when I released my book, I got bogged down trying to please everyone. You end up being distinctly average that way. My writing suffered; it lost its punch.

**HERBERT:** Ja, my students go that way when they write to please me and the ‘academic way’ they learn. I invite them to test me, to argue. The better ones do that without getting too ridiculous.

**DANNY:** I really think there is a place for philosophy in sport Herbert. I find the process of philosophising exciting; it promotes confidence in your own ideas, it has an element of fun to it, the mysteriousness. That’s what I am getting from all our chat here. It has excited me. Heidegger’s ideas are amazing, and I will certainly be using them for more guidance but more than that they stimulate energy in me. Of course, there is a place for science and rational logic in sport but if we lose the excitement, the questions, the artistry, the personal expression then what’s the point?

**HERBERT:** I feel that from you strongly Danny. Remember Danny, Heidegger’s *phenomenological ontology is hermeneutical*. Interpretations, illuminations, re – interpretations, a spiralling pattern. You should never arrive for as soon as you lose your will to interpret, to reconsider you discontinue to philosophise. Instead of those energising ‘aha’s’ and head scratching questions, you will end up with sterile assumptions which turn into dull truisms. *Dasien* is interpretation, it is its very nature of itself and of things out there, so one may as well do it with sophistication.

**DANNY:** Yes, I am learning this. Going around in circles, refining our approach, keeping things fresh but without being reckless. I am learning how to see things through with refinement, it is not as easy as jumping ship from this idea to another one. This kind of life takes some thinking, patience and it can be tough. Yet accepting there is no end point, knowing it is a constant circular process really gives me heart. It encourages my spirit to press on and I think this rubs off on people.

**HERBERT:** Heart Danny. Love and care. You’ve helped me very much; it’s been great to meet you.

representation of it, is the backbone of this compelling documentary and includes the ‘they’ and their opinions throughout.

In my time I have been known as ‘deep’ by the they of the professional Squash community. Many find the questions and ponderings too much. Whereas I have found too much of their gossip and ‘tour chit chat’ all too much like a television soap opera. It bores me, I find it doesn’t help to be involved in all that tour chatter.

I have never felt too deep but for others philosophising the way I do and looking for the underlying structures of things is too much for them.

*“What makes Heidegger’s hermeneutics ontological is that interpretation belongs to Dasein’s being. That is, Dasein’s being is characterized by understanding, and hence Dasein is always already engaged in interpretation, not only of the world but also of itself.”* Bowler, M. p12

I have felt that is has been important to ‘separate myself’ from too much conventional thought and retain what some consider an ‘eccentricity.’ It is not a rudeness or a lack of desire to socialise, it is more a conscious desire to retain a healthy vitality of mind, a curiosity that awakens and

<p><b>DANNY:</b> As I say, it has been my pleasure. You have brought me some deeply complex and controversial ideas in a way that I can begin to understand them a little. ‘The meaning of your communication is the response you get’ right?</p> <p><b>HERBERT:</b> I haven’t heard that, but Ja, I like it.</p> <p><b>DANNY:</b> Well, there you go, one for you (laughter).</p> <p><b>NARRATOR:</b> Warm smiles and a high five were exchanged between the two men. There had been something energetic between them, like all great conversations generate. One of life’s simple pleasures.</p>	<p>maintains the child in me. That includes a sense of both <b>mischief</b> and <b>innocence, cynicism, and hopefulness.</b></p>
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### Act 5 Exit Commentary

This act was constructed to reveal the complex and unfamiliar notions of Martin Heidegger’s ideas from his book *Being and Time* as applied to sport. Heidegger’s Emic based ontology of ‘being in the world’ and ‘Dasein’ is central to this whole project and despite much commentary on Heidegger throughout the thesis it was important to illustrate his thinking by application to lived sporting experience, in this case the researchers experience of coaching his wife at the world series finals. Due to the many ideas that are interlinked in *Being and Time* this act took on the style of a more educational dialogue and was why Herbert was introduced as a lecturer specialising in Heidegger. This is the longest act, the densest and was left to last so as not to overwhelm the reader too early. It is also split into two parts to encourage a break in the pace at which the information is delivered.

The main idea of Heidegger's that I wanted to reinforce in this act was that primarily we are *beings in the world, thrown* into existence without our choosing and immersed in an *everydayness* that we are so familiar with we experience the error of *forgetfulness of our being*. In sporting terms, it is a reminder that underneath the role identity of coach, player, or athlete we are all primarily beings, just ‘being here’ in the circumstances and predicaments that are in many ways a part of us. We do not exist sitting on the side-lines of life as if detached from our immersion in our lives and all that means. We are not only individuals but connected to others (*Das Man*) and we exist as socially dependent beings who care about what *they* consider us be. This has always been a prevalent issue for those who are engaged in public life aswell as their immediate circle of influence yet with the addition of social media *das man* has extended beyond the local more so than ever before. This is not a distant influence but a direct part of *Dasein’s* being, consequently it is foundational to lived experience. Sports performers have an obligation to relate to their social media platforms and skill must be developed in how to relate with it as *Das Man* just as Heidegger originally proposed.



The other vital point is that we are *temporal beings* (the time element of *Being and Time*) meaning that we exist with our past, present and future always *in-play* in our existentiality. These themes are so fundamental to our lived experience they are easily forgotten when considering how we live. This act illustrates this and there are many examples included to show how the past and the future cannot be negated from sporting experience and moreover how it can be accommodated to enhance one's life (*anticipatory resoluteness, historicity,*) in the pursuit of a more authentic, less *fallen*, mode of existence. All the themes included within this act are aimed at revealing ways in which we can appreciate the deep complexities of *being* yet at the same time reveal common elements that can help individuals consider themselves not so strange. Heidegger helps us understand the foundational aspects of our existence more than the other four thinkers in Dialogue 1 and in this way provides some understanding and relief as to why existence is difficult in the first place. By using Heidegger's ideas with sporting performers, I have enabled them to at least understand why their various forms of suffering is not unusual amongst all the joys they experience from their careers too.

### **Dialogue Summary**

This dialogue has revealed many aspects of existential phenomenology as related to professional sporting life. By incorporating the ideas of five distinct thinkers of similar philosophy I have revealed aspects of the lived life that can be applied to sports coaching and performance psychology to help individuals understand and cope with an array of emerging subjective experiences. Each thinker has a style that may be suited to certain characters for predicaments they find themselves in and in this way the dialogue is comprehensive from an existential point of view. Using creative nonfiction writing in the style of Socratic dialogue allowed for storytelling and analysis combined. Valuable insights into my lived experiences as a coach, supported by philosophical construction of argument and supporting literature has allowed for multi layered communication of ideas. This way it appeals and holds the attention of academic readers and/or those who enjoy storytelling without extra academic layers. Overall, this Dialogue is useful and impactful for coaches and performers who want to understand how they might live well through a sporting life.

## DIALOGUE 2

### ‘Diary Revelations – James Willstrop & Laura Massaro’

Incorporating *Existential Phenomenology* to study aspects of lived experiences of 2 world champion performers through historical diary entries and subsequent conversational discussions.

#### Reader Entrance

This Dialogue is an extension of Dialogue 1 by applying some of the selected existential concepts presented in Dialogue 1 to two world class level sports performers' (Laura Massaro, James Willstrop) lived experience. The reader is presented with excerpts from performer Diaries that have been selected by the researcher to illuminate existential themes as proposed by the five thinkers presented in Dialogue 1. By reading the raw data excerpts of each participant and the consequent interpretations and synthesis of reflections, the reader is presented with applied understanding in and around sports performance settings. Both participants are immersed deeply in a sporting life conveying their typical existential issues around competition and career striving by their phenomenological revelations. Each participant provides their own review of the analysis undertaken and adds a further layer of interpretation of their lived experience revelations. This allows the reader to understand how existential phenomenology may be applied in conversation or as a method of analysis to help performers and their coaches/therapists/ psychologists to initiate investigations into some of the deeper complexities of a lived sporting life as a performer.

“In communicating ‘texture’ and ‘structure’ an existential-phenomenological approach does not claim to characterise ‘absolute essences,’ but rather indicates possible themes that help our understanding move together in that vital *space between commonality and diversity....this is where we live.*” Todres (2011, p.55)

#### Dialogue Aims:

##### To highlight -

1. *The connection of ‘existential elements’ in phenomenological investigation and its relevance to the central ontological question of this study; How might one live well through a sporting life?*
2. *Differences between the ‘phenomenological attitude’ captured in emergent diaries and standard qualitative methods e.g. semi- structured interviews, observational interpretation.*
3. *The significance of the difference between **description** (‘as it is’) and **interpretation** (theorisation) of phenomenological data.*

### **Process:**

- Use of diary entries to identify aspects of living well through a sporting life
- Progression of the philosophical themes identified in Dialogue 1 from Jean Paul Sartre, Friedrich Nietzsche, Simone De Beauvoir, Albert Camus, and Martin Heidegger. Identify instances of existential phenomenology within the diary entries.
- Conversational clarification with each participant to extract further meaning of phenomena as experienced by the participant

### **Continuing philosophical themes introduced in Dialogue 1:**

**Jean Paul Sartre** – Responsibility; Authenticity; Bad faith; Freedom for Others

**Friedrich Nietzsche** – Acceptance of Fate (Amor Fati); Slave Morality; Ubermensch - three metamorphoses of Spirit (Sheep - Lion- Child)

**Simone De Beauvoir** – Modes of coping with Existential Ambiguity (Serious Man), Freedom for Others

**Albert Camus** – Absurdity, Meaning in the ‘struggle’ (Sisyphus), Paradox of the Absurd

**Martin Heidegger** – Dasein (Being-in-the-world), Everydayness (Ready to hand / Present at hand), Anticipatory Resoluteness, ‘They’ (Das Man), Being-Towards-Death, Care Structure (Facticity, Fallenness, Existentiality)

### **Introduction**

“It is best to think of the basic method of phenomenology as the taking up of certain attitude and practicing a certain attentive awareness to the things of the world as we live them rather than how we conceptualize or theorize them.” Van Manen (2000, p.400)

Keeping with Husserl’s notion of the ‘phenomenological attitude,’ as contrast to application of a rigid technique of phenomenological research e.g., Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, 2003), it is important to pay attention to and assemble descriptions of direct lived experiences of research participants from interactions and conversations. Yet, using approaches such as semi-structured interviews can engender problems. Here, researcher preconceptions, including the theoretical, can filter through at an earlier stage and to a greater extent than in approaches more conducive to participants’ own constructions of experience, such participant diaries and

conversational clarification. Van Manen (2017, p.775) explains that the consequent reduction of data be treated in the following way:

“One needs to reflect on one’s own pre-understandings, frameworks, and biases regarding the (psychological, political, and ideological) motivation and the nature of the question, in search for genuine openness in one’s conversational relation with the phenomenon. In the reduction one needs to overcome one’s subjective or private feelings, preferences, inclinations, or expectations that may seduce or tempt one to come to premature, wishful, or one-sided understandings of an experience and that would prevent one from coming to terms with a phenomenon as it is lived through.”

Dahlberg *et al.* (2008, p.98) recommends that the researcher adopts an ‘*open discovering way of being*’ and develops a ‘*capacity to be surprised and sensitive to the unpredicted and unexpected.*’ In their version of openness, ‘**vulnerable engagement**’ and ‘**disinterested attentiveness**’ are simultaneously present. As they see it, ‘*Openness is the mark of a true willingness to listen, see, and understand. It involves respect and a certain humility toward the phenomenon, as well as sensitivity and flexibility.*’ Consequently, I invited the participants to consider the ideas proposed by the philosophers that I had identified as relevant to their predicaments and experiences. This third part of the process was for clarification and relevance of the proposed theme. It was also an opportunity for the participant to re visit the original diary entry and consider it from an existential, ontological, or phenomenological stance. This giving a sense of the usefulness of such interpretations for each participant.

### **Participant Diaries**

“I wished to keep open a complimentary tension between academic and more simple forms of writing. This involved the enactment of a rhythmical gesture in which I, as researcher and writer, moved between moments of closeness and distance in my engagement with the phenomenon of self-insight.” Todres (2011, p.58)

‘*Distance*’ as Todres signifies is where academic summations are further distilled into generalised themes. Such themes which are ‘distant but relevant’ can then be utilised to generate discussion and awareness across broader contexts and across individual case studies. This is different to the *closeness* of individual depth of experience which contains obvious ambiguities and a multiplicity of emotional, personal, and present complexities impracticable to reveal in distant thematic deductions. Diaries offer a portal into the latter, particularly amongst entries written with

no warning of post analysis. The diaries included in this study provide data in their purest form, free from prompts, encouragement, or potential critique. They reveal a specific phenomenology of experience from two individuals spilled out on paper near and close to the occurrence of the events at hand.

Using diary methodologies, you can get a longer and much more regular insight into lived experiences, plus you also change the researcher-participant power dynamic. Interviews and focus groups can sometimes be a bit of an interrogation, with the researcher asking questions, and participants given the role of answering. With diaries, participants can have more autonomy to share what they want, as well as where and when (Meth, 2003).

### **Methodological rationale**

“The potential to use diaries as a vehicle for research informants to observe situations which researchers cannot access has been explicitly drawn out within the context of ethnographic research.” (Elliott, 1997, p.4 after Zimmerman and Wieder, 1977)

The choice to use data from historical ‘real time’ private diary accounts was in line with the aims of existential phenomenology, to get as close to the lived experience as possible, including the emotional truth at the time of the events. Bell defines solicited diaries as ‘an account produced specifically at the researcher's request, by an informant or informants’ (Bell 1998, p.72). Solicited diaries are written with awareness that the writing process is for external needs. Smith (1994) who contrasted real time diary writing with post solicited accounts of pregnancy experience noted that

“In their later narratives, women were inclined to gloss over difficulties originally presented during their ‘real-time pregnancy’ accounts, and that (with hindsight) they emphasized personal growth and continuity of self apparently lacking (from an observer's perspective) in their earlier accounts.”

Intent on revealing inconsistencies between the narratives over time, rather than on the ‘current’ personal spirit of each diarist's account, Smith observed that individuals may modify their presentations retrospectively to produce ‘self-enhancing personal accounts.’ This is not to completely dismiss the benefits of post reflection, but one must distinguish between the nature of in time recordings that are privately expressed and post event summaries that are written with the awareness that someone else, at the very least the researcher who requested them to write, will be consuming and judging them.

“In understanding how diary accounts have been used in research, it is crucial to acknowledge any shifting approaches to private and public construction of accounts within research projects. Furthermore, diaries need to be acknowledged as constructed by both the writer and, through research and analysis, by the soliciting researcher.” (Bell 1998, p.75)

The benefits of including a reader response to the diary analysis were evident in this research. Solicited diaries will have been negotiated between participant and researcher and consequently an outcome or area of application will have been agreed, yet with private diaries there has been no interference or negotiation between either party. This has benefits in terms of purity of the said phenomena but can be too biased by the subjective pickings and interpretations of the researcher. My interpretations and constructions of meaning in relation to existential phenomenology of the five thinkers deserved to be checked and enhanced (member checking) by the participants for authenticity and ethical fairness. Private diaries are intended for private purposes, so ethical concerns must be addressed and by creating the reader response in step 3 of the process a dual purpose is well achieved. This may be a useful template for further research when utilising private diaries.

### **Presentation Structure**

1. Diary Entry
2. Philosophical Theme
3. Participant Response

### **Participant - Laura Massaro**

On Diaries:

*“The main thing I found with writing a diary was that I had a much more objective feel to them. Whereas when I am reflecting from distance you can’t help but be already optimistic about how to move on. Afterwards there’s always a kind of reflective bias. Whereas a when you write it before an event or immediately after there is almost an unknown objectivity.”*

*“So even though I didn’t always feel like writing my diary straight away, I had to do it, so I didn’t just write down a highlight reel. I got more of the truthful details of ‘how it exactly felt’ at the time it happened. This way when I re read them weeks later I got the proper emotional impact of the information, not just the information. It’s that emotional part that takes me right back to the moments and really fires me up to get to work.”*

Me: More detail then?

*“Just more honesty of what actually happened and how I felt. Especially from my perspective. The diaries written after the matches are obviously more emotionally related. If you’ve lost or won, it affects the diary entries but at least that’s authentic. When I write before the event it feels a lot more neutral but just as important and useful when you look back. This is because that’s exactly what you feel, the unknown element. What’s next?”*

*“It’s more real the closer to the event you can write. You capture the mood of the information more genuinely and that’s why diaries are private because it’s what you most genuinely want to say. It might be overreacting or wrong but it’s your truth AT THAT TIME.”*

### Entries, Themes, Response

<p>Entry 22/6/2012</p>	<p><i>“Had a breakthrough with Danny yesterday. I realised (which I have known for a while) that I care about what people think of me. What I do, what I wear and what I say. What I didn’t realise is that this affects how I play, feel, and improve amongst other things. It’s my main reason for wanting to achieve a high ranking and win titles. Because of this I am never fully relaxed and then more likely to follow the script of what is supposed to happen. The one tournament where I forgot the script was Monaco when I’d spent time believing ‘the secret.’ Anyway, after the chat yesterday I have become more aware of how I am and also aware that I don’t have to be this way. I have started reading Eckhart Tolle – A new earth and I will see how it goes. Awareness is the 1<sup>st</sup> thing and it is helping me so far.”</i></p>
<p>Philosophical Theme</p>	<p><b>Martin Heidegger</b> - “Das Man” (‘they’)</p> <p>For <i>Dasein</i> it is a fact of life that we will always care and include what others think of us. In <i>Being and Time</i> Heidegger says, “I am always familiar with a range of social expectations and interpretations that mark me as belonging to a culture.”</p> <p>Importantly he distinguishes between this constant fact ‘they’ and the term ‘they-self.’ He says, “when I exist as ‘they-self’ as I do, most of the time – I simply accept these expectations and interpretations, and let my world be structured by them. But it is also possible for me to exist as an <b>authentic</b> Self. In this case, I work with my culture in order to work out for myself who I am.”</p> <p>For Heidegger, this ability to be authentic was part choice but part within the limits of culture and ones ‘thrownness’ into a situation and also one’s ‘facticity’ about themselves. Both <i>authentic</i> and <i>inauthentic</i> living are simply ways of existing and it is impossible to go 100 percent either way because of the dynamic between <i>Dasein</i>’s individuality and thrownness into a social culture. This tension between authenticity and inauthenticity is in play when Laura alludes to caring too much about ‘what people think of me.’</p> <p>Due to many potential reasons in sport, not least the judgements coming from clearly defined results and achievements and failures, it is easy to waver over to the inauthentic mode of existing of the they-self dynamic.</p> <p>Laura’s realisation of this and a consequent release from the inauthenticity of her ‘they-self’ compliance, helped her towards a more self-directed authenticity and a balance of tension. Rather than the overly simplistic advice of ‘don’t listen to anybody else’ or ‘don’t care what they think about you’ this revealed a more</p>

	<p>ontological approach to this common existential phenomenon. Acceptance of the reality that at some level we will always care how we are judged and received by others, but we equally have a responsibility to consider our own care and set boundaries accordingly.</p>
Participant Response	<p><i>Yes, for me of course I play for and love the adulation. Like a big massive 'pat on the back.' But the problems lie when you focus on that part as the aim because when you don't produce results you feel an extra level of disappointment and that builds as pressure. It started as a positive support thing but sort of turns into a standard pressure of expectation. Then the silence is loud. The lack of praise is like a negative thing. Also, when the negatives come along more people have an opinion to give and that's just what happens. You want to be liked and thought of as a success not just by people in your team and family but in your club, your country, across your sport even. So, you just have to use it as a positive as best you can but don't focus too much on it. At the end of the day I played for me more than anyone and that helps knowing that.</i></p> <p><b><i>Did you experience more authenticity?</i></b></p> <p><i>I realised I would always care and at some level I would be letting people down if I didn't win and cheering them up if I did. Awareness of that in a way helped me deal with it, I accepted it as part of my Squash rather than try to stop it from happening. That alone made it less dramatic and scary and maybe because I didn't care as much as I got older than I started to set my own expectations and felt a bit more freedom.</i></p> <p><i>It's funny reading that entry back because it reminds me how weak my mind could be when I was younger. I used to get so bogged down with the drama. The Heidegger thing and reading all the books and doing my psychology work must have helped me care less and focus. I think some of my realisation was knowing I had a choice and taking it. I accepted the choice to be the true me even though I may not be liked for being that way. I could handle it more because I chose that. It was my choice. It made me feel less 'picked on' by people, I almost understood why they wouldn't like me (Laughter). I got the Nickname the Ice Queen and I played up to it so maybe that was the best way for me.</i></p>

Entry 10/12/2012 Cayman Islands World Champs	<p><i>"Danny and I chatted about his role while at events. We had a great chat on the flight about getting some role clarification as I was feeling nervous about him travelling with me and the expectation that brought. Not to mention the extra cost and his time. We had agreed that he would help me set a plan for my matches, be there to hit with if I needed and watch my matches. That was all I wanted from him. In return he wanted me to say 'Thank you' when he gave his time, try my best in matches and then let him have a holiday around our commitments! It gave us an agreement we could both stick to and I felt calmer because of it. Now I was back feeling ok we practised the things I needed from a technical point of view. Using the shoulder, getting head speed, low follow through and more positive and attacking play. Then together we would have a holiday with no pressure. Feels like more of a win-win."</i></p> <p><i>"In a roundabout way Danny asked me on the flight if he thought I could become world champion. It made me emotional at first then annoyed he had asked but it</i></p>
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<p>Philosophical Theme</p>	<p><i>needed asking. It was the elephant in the room. His exact words were ‘out of all the players coming here, who do you think believes they are good enough to win the world championships?’ I had to think of myself and that’s what got to me. It brought it out in the open and it forced me to ask myself the question. I had just presumed I thought I could win but unless you really ask yourself, you’re just hoping. I was much more comfortable after that; it was like waking up in a good mood. I knew it would be more pressure on myself, but it was good pressure because it was from me and I wanted it.”</i></p> <p><b>Jean Paul Sartre</b> – <i>Responsibility; ‘Bad faith’</i></p> <p>Why do I do what I do? What are the roles we are playing and who has chosen these roles?</p> <p>These two questions are at the centre of Sartre’s proposed existential state of ‘bad faith.’ Using the example of a ‘waiter’ who he observed assuming the role as if some automaton (‘his movements a little too precise’), Sartre describes ‘inauthentic’ living, whereby freedom of conscious choice wanes away. Through actions of ‘<i>bad faith</i>’ individuals attempt to relieve the pressure of responsibility to commit to one’s freedom by taking on projects and roles that constrict them into a state of believing they have no freedom. In other words, they use their freedom to choose projects that deny their freedom and this deception is temporality comforting as it can relieve the ‘anguish’ or ‘nausea’ that freedom presses upon us. Sartre said in his 1946 lecture “<i>Existentialism is Humanism</i>”:</p> <p><i>“That is what I mean when I say that man is <b>condemned to be free</b>. Condemned, because he did not create himself, yet is nevertheless at liberty, and from the moment that he is thrown into this world he is responsible for everything he does.”</i></p> <p>This relates directly to Laura’s comments on ‘role clarification.’ It would be natural to assume roles of coach-player or husband-wife dynamic, indeed any relationship with the automaton approach of Sartre’s ‘waiter.’ The conversation reduced this and re-clarified identification of commitment to and appreciation for aspects of both roles and responsibilities to each other. This took away a lot of the guesswork and idle assumptions that fertilise ‘<i>bad faith</i>’ and an inauthentic drift through a sporting life, with all its distinct, unique qualities yet repeated, patterned loops too. This had the psychological effect of freshening up each experience as well as ‘calming’ Laura, which phenomenologically speaking can change the whole lived experience of tournament.</p> <p>Sartre added that ‘<i>Human reality is what it is and is what it is not.</i>’ The potential self of ‘what I am not yet’ although not tangible or evidential is ‘in play’ for human consciousness, particularly those in competitive sport who strive towards future targets. Wondering, goal setting and predicting future outcomes relies heavily on a fertile imagination and awareness of a future that only exists as fantasy. Yet in a lived sense, for goal driven sports performers the ‘potential self’ is very much ‘there’ and present, on the mind vividly as if part of themselves now. Laura indicates that being able to accept and include this aspect of existence (potential self) rather than deny it (stay in the present) and overt it: <i>“I had just presumed I thought I could win but unless you really ask yourself, you’re just hoping. I was much more comfortable after that; it was like waking up in a good mood.”</i></p>
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	<p>Phenomenologically speaking, one's own experience of the potential self is manifested temporarily and uniquely, as is the phenomenon of 'good mood.' Consequently, to experience full authenticity, one must continually choose and take part in one's decisions based upon personal phenomenological experience. This bears much responsibility, but the prize may be an escape of the dulling effects and building regrets associated with 'bad faith.' Laura's entry here certainly points towards this. Rather than thinking solely of the immediate positive effects of making renewed and well considered decisions, it is in the long run where one benefits the most. A career or life lived closer to <i>authenticity</i> is not only well practiced in useful decision making, courage, self-awareness, and probable reward there is inevitable reduction of a sense of waste, misunderstanding, regret, and blame.</p>
<p>Participant Response</p>	<p><i>Yes, this makes very good sense to me. Looking back, it gives my brain more order rather than letting certain brain process get scattered.</i></p> <p><i>By discussing the roles, I felt like I was organizing a pile of books, so I can find and use the right book for the right time I needed it.</i></p> <p><i>I suddenly got into a no-lose situation because I was going to be able to do some things well even if others didn't. So, my future became broader, more ways to have a successful trip, less about just the win. I have a wider life and more to it than just Squash. By having more ways, I could succeed, the future was easier to get on with in a way.</i></p> <p><i>The conversation also gave me the chance to recognise the beauty of the trip. The place the venue, how lucky I am to go to the Cayman Islands. And also, provide Danny a trip to the Cayman Islands as a by-product of my squash. Monaco was a bit like this too. It wakes me up a bit to the other aspects of my life and how I value it. Yes, all these things calmed me. The chat woke me up in a way and I started to enjoy each tournament more. The events didn't all roll into one as much, I think I enjoyed them a lot more as special occasions.</i></p> <p><i>On that 'bad faith' part I can remember times I felt a bit numb, like passive about things, a passenger on a train being taken along. Then you are looking more to the results to change your state of mind. Losses hit you harder which then carries forward into the next event and so on. Wins become a bit desperate, like the only thing that can make you content and happy. All that wears you down. You feel like you've done the work and somehow you should just be repaid by someone for it. I suppose that's the 'bad faith' thing' like I've done my bit where is my prize. Squash isn't like that though, I learned you must still earn things and keep working it out because it's always changing, and I was always changing. You can't just sit back and expect, you've got to be braver than that and make decisions in the moment. It's so annoying because you keep thinking I've got this solved now, the equation of winning but that's just 'switching off' again and you cannot do that, you will get sussed out.</i></p> <p><i>When I look back, good result or bad result, on the whole it was fun despite it being painful at times. I am very proud of how I enjoyed more of it than just the results but still managed to attack my career strongly to win things and achieve goals. I believe you have to find people who you can enjoy it with and who can remind you to make choices for yourself along the way. Such a simple thing of appreciating each other's jobs gives everyone a chance to get a small win even if it doesn't go great on the court. In the long run, this creates an atmosphere of freshness and new ideas because you are more awake and not as stuck in the mud. That is the 'authentic' bit, being awake and fresh to make decisions about</i></p>

	<i>things when a decision is drastic or needed. Stopping the plod, I used to see in lots of the other players. Like they were just stuck on a 'merry go round.'</i>
Entry 25/5/2013 Hull British Open Final Reflection	<p><i>"For some reason, between games I didn't get excited this time. I was calm. I knew it would be hard and I expected her to comeback at me! I made a great start in the 4<sup>th</sup>. I started to see her 'tell' reveal itself. Over analytical, replaying her swing and I knew she was thinking too much. She also hit a few errors which was so rare, and you knew you were getting to her when that happened! I stayed focussed on the plan and went 7 or 8-3 up. I just thought to myself, DO NOT MESS THIS UP! It was a British Open final and it was so hard to stay calm and not think about what it all meant. It went 4-8 then 9-4. She then won 2 rallies and it was 6-9... starting to get edgy now! I got a lucky let after a tough rally and she re-served from the left and as soon as she hit the serve, I thought, that's going out... OMG THAT'S GOING OUT!! I smiled. I thought "I cannot believe she's just handed me a championship ball. Nobody serves out ever, never mind Nicol." Then very quickly my smile disappeared; "Don't be an idiot, it's not done. Concentrate! Good serve, get up the court."</i></p> <p><i>"I lost the next rally. Pathetic really, weak! I went soft. It was so poor it made me re-group. I remembered to say to myself 'Dig in and get back to the plan!' I started the next rally well and then out of nowhere the ball went into the tin from Nicol! I couldn't believe it! I jumped up and down and went to the front wall a bit dazy. We shook hands and then tears came when I bent down, couldn't get up! I thought 'Why am I crying?' It was the best feeling I've had on a squash court."</i></p>
Philosophical Theme	<p><b>Albert Camus</b> – <i>'paradox of the absurd'</i></p> <p>Central to Camus' beliefs is that it is absurd to try to know, understand, or explain the world, for he sees the attempt to gain rational knowledge as futile. Here Camus pits himself against science and philosophy, dismissing the claims of all forms of rational analysis: <i>"That universal reason, practical or ethical, that determinism, those categories that explain everything are enough to make a decent man laugh."</i></p> <p>Laura's diary entry is full of paradox's with moments of absurdity revealed:</p> <p><i>"For some reason, between games I didn't get excited this time. I was calm."</i></p> <p><i>"I stayed focussed on the plan and went 7 or 8-3 up. I just thought to myself, DO NOT MESS THIS UP!"</i></p> <p><i>"OMG THAT'S GOING OUT!! I smiled. I thought "I cannot believe she's just handed me a championship ball. Nobody serves out ever, never mind Nicol."</i></p> <p><i>"I lost the next rally. Pathetic really, weak! I went soft. It was so poor it made me re-group."</i></p> <p><i>"...out of nowhere the ball went into the tin from Nicol! I couldn't believe it!"</i></p> <p><i>"Why am I crying?' It was the best feeling I've had on a squash court."</i></p>

	<p><i>The assumption that everything can be neatly and rationally explained in life is a 'grand mistake' argued Camus. In professional sport there is an intense infusion of logical analysis, rational reasoning and technological monitoring interventions that can cause forgetfulness of absurd aspects. Elements of chance, luck, chaos, timing, social and individual phenomenological complexity, context (event status, competitors, timing, environment) and conditions (weather, time of day, surfaces etc). Each sport has its own potential absurdities and in Squash the difference between a narrative of success and one of failure is affected directly by the immediacy and multiplicity of an opponent's responses. Post-performance cause and effect calculations are created yet Laura's entries reveal that certain moments as they happened simply 'made her smile.' Being unusually calm between games whilst so close to a childhood dream, her opponent serving out which she only did once in her whole career, Laura going soft mentally only to help her refocus, a weak error from her opponent on championship ball, crying on the floor with the best feeling she had felt on a court, these all examples of the paradox of the absurd.</i></p> <p><i>Camus proposed a 'leap of faith' to embrace the absurdities of life and to keep in mind that nobody has yet agreed on one all defining meaning or explanation (philosophical or scientific) of life and existence. Including the proposition that there exists no 'absolute meaning' in the world we must create our own 'relative meaning' in the things we do. This will prevent potential nihilism or negation of the joy of living this one life we get. This way Camus believed we can 'naturally align with our projects' and it is in this that sports performers might benefit. A modern motto from Camus might read 'keep calm and carry on.' To believe you can rationalise your way out of sporting ambiguity is a trap. A misconception that can dehumanise the experience and create unnecessary guilt, shame, disillusionment, and fake grandiosity.</i></p> <p><i>Camus warned against going 'full absurd,' warning this would be the same psychological blindness as extreme rationality. Laura reflects 'I stayed focussed on the plan and went 7 or 8-3 up.' Here is obvious rational planning and is clearly a vital piece of the experience of performing and winning. If one can embrace such duality Camus proposed one is 'freed to realize his situation clearly,' to 'struggle willingly' and to reach a state of 'contented acceptance.' (Le Mythe De Sisiphe).</i></p>
Participant Reaction	<p><i>There is an element of having to accept that not everything is down to you. Yet, I had to train as if it was though because I had to believe it was worth it and was going to make me win. If I thought everything was just 'absurd' especially early on in my career I may have stayed too relaxed in those small things I needed to do, those extra sacrifices that I believed made the difference. Things like my diet which was always hard to stick to or my solo practice, my warmups and cool downs, my analysis of players, keeping my diary etcetera.</i></p> <p><i>When I started coaching with DP though he did help me lighten up and see that not everything was just down to me all the time. Like when he took the mickey out of me for talking about which Almonds were better for recovery. He was like Laura "a bloody almond isn't gonna make you win or lose a squash match, come off it." He was also good at giving opponents credit for their part in a match or pointing out bits of luck either way. He was good after hard defeats sometimes because he would help me see how hard I had tried but still unfortunately lost and not to get too obsessed about it, to look for the good things I had in life.</i></p> <p><i>Sometimes he'd say, "you'll probably get her back next time, it will just be your</i></p>

	<p><i>turn.” It helped me that, it stopped me from panicking too much but kept me motivated to get to work again.</i></p> <p><i>Yes, it’s finding that balance. Sometimes you get so stuck to Squash and what it means you can’t see the wider picture that it’s just a sport that millions of people don’t even know what it is. It’s just a game and something that means a lot to me but not everyone in the world. Even though that’s obvious you forget when you’re the one in it. you don’t like to think of it as Absurd because of your ego and that but at the end of the day it is and I can see that more now I have stopped playing. Absurd though doesn’t mean it’s pointless, Squash has meant everything to me and Danny. It’s been an amazing scaffolding for our lives, and I love it.</i></p>
<p>Entry 12/4/2016</p> <p>Preparation for British Open</p>	<p><i>“When did winning the event become the only way to be happy? Of course, I want to win the event but out of 56 players if only one can be happy at the end then that doesn’t seem right. Enjoy the journey! I must find a way to stop being too serious but still keep my dedication and love for it. Peter has helped me with this – my perfectionism can make me stressed; my work ethic is what’s good. I can work hard, and things might not go great, but I can be happy with myself. I will win and lose but I can be proud of myself and my attitude. Danny said I don’t deserve a place in squash heaven just because I have worked hard like people who go to church and pray. I still need a bit of luck and things to go my way. Part of that is relaxing a bit more and not getting so desperate and judgemental”</i></p> <p><i>“God knows how many ‘chats’ we’ve had over the years. You’d think I’d have figured things out now, at least. Or at least figured out how to deal with myself emotionally and gain some sort of mental control. It honestly feels like someone erases my memory after each event and I must figure it all out again. The feelings I have during training, after training, with my weight, with my expectation with my worry that it will be worth it. Then during the events. The nerves, whether I think I can win, whether I worry I’ll lose. Am I giving my opponent enough respect? Am I tired? Was I this tired last time I did this session? Do they think they can beat me? Have I had enough sleep? Have I eaten enough? Do I feel good? Do I feel focussed? There is more to life than squash? Or is there? I am an absolute nutter! And people think I am mentally strong. They have NO IDEA! Either that, or everyone else is a bigger nutter than me! If that’s the case, god help them!”</i></p>
<p>Philosophical Theme</p>	<p><b>Simone De Beauvoir – the Serious trap!</b></p> <p>Simone de Beauvoir proposed that man craves the naivety of childhood where ‘<i>He feels himself happily irresponsible.</i>’ She proposed a range of tactics in the form of separate caricatures or ‘modes of being’ whereby individuals attempt to eliminate the ambiguities and responsibilities of their existence. Taking a ‘serious’ attitude to projects brings temporary relief through single minded focus on a project or way of life. She says,</p> <p><i>“It is in a state of fear that the serious man feels this dependence upon the object; and the first of virtues, in his eyes, is prudence. He escapes the anguish of freedom only to fall into a state of preoccupation, of worry. He will always be saying that he is disappointed, for his wish to have the world harden into a thing is belied by the very movement of life. The future will contest his present successes.”</i></p>



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Laura writes *'when did winning the event become the only way to be happy?'* and adds *"I have to find a way to stop being too serious but still keep my dedication and love for it."* This is a hint at the constrictions of overly dedicated and narrow approach in which Laura aims to control all outcomes and absurdities of sport whereby 57 others also compete to win. De Beauvoir states:

*"The serious man wills himself to be a god; but he is not one and knows it. There then blazes forth the absurdity of a life which has sought outside of itself the justifications which it alone could give itself."*

Laura reveals the questions that come up in her mind repeatedly. They reveal the ambiguities of sport and the impossibility of controlling all potential outcomes. Yet they reveal a desire to abolish such ambiguity which in Laura's words reveal her *'as an absolute nutter.'* Perhaps admitting this and noticing the trap of the 'serious mode' is one way of coping with the inevitable ambiguities of a sporting life.

De Beauvoir proposes alternative modes (as introduced in Dialogue 1) and all are potential traps. Self-awareness and acceptance of existential ambiguity and complexity allow a person to mature with life and drop the desire to return to an innocence unachievable once past childhood. Laura's admissions to herself helped the 'relaxation' she was looking to feel and reduce the 'desperation' which constricted her.

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<p>Participant Response</p>	<p><i>I think I realised that there was more than one way to win. I remember thinking I don't think any less of the players that don't win and in fact respected their efforts to keep on tour while most of them never won anything. I realised I was lucky and that the journey was just as important as the destination and if I didn't win then I learned from it for next time. Winning started to become something I enjoyed more and more as my career went on. As opposed to the relief of 'not losing' earlier in my career.</i></p> <p><i>When I went to world number one, I remember freezing with the pressure of it all. It was weird. I was playing the best Squash of my life and suddenly I felt stiff and scared to lose. It was like I was playing with a weights vest on. It was nice to be announced onto court as the number one player in the world but as soon as I stated in the rallies, I became so self-critical. I think that was taking the position too seriously. It was like starting a new job or something like that. I built it up as some perfect position where you had to be perfect and I felt judged every rally – 'oh the number one player in the world just missed, that sport isn't particularly good is it if she is the number 1.' It just got worse as I got more serious about it. I tend to be a perfectionist at the best of times, and it just took it to a whole new level.</i></p> <p><i>It was only when Danny let me have a good cry about it did it all come out at the worlds in 2015. He said; "you've not handled it very well have you, its shocked you, hasn't it?" It was like he understood, and all this emotion came out. The next day I played one of my favourite matches of my career, I was so free it was crazy. I was shocked at my level and sent out a big statement to the other players. I never looked back. I think that was the seriousness going away because we laughed about it and made it a big joke. I celebrated the position rather than be straightjacketed by it.</i></p> <p><i>This one is probably the most powerful philosophy for me. I learned how to stick to things but not get stuck to them and I think this is what she means with her 'serious man' philosophy.</i></p>
<p>Entry 12/4/2018</p> <p>"They"</p>	<p><i>"Something that Danny read to me recently that made complete sense was from a German philosopher called Martin Heidegger. Heidegger came up with a phrase, 'Das Man;' translated as 'the they,' which basically means the 'others.' On tour, that is everyone who makes up 'the squash scene': other players, coaches, organisers, reporters, referees etc What can happen is that all these people ("the they"), influence you so much, that you are dragged innocently towards a state of 'averageness.' It is subtle and a normal thing and everyone to some degree is dragged in. Fashion, hairstyles, things like the sudden emergence of tattoos, technology trends, opinions and so on. An example on tour is the sudden trend of 'hugging each other' after match point instead of the handshake. It's become like a rule you must follow. Not one person started it or wrote the code it just becomes the way things are done. It reminds me of school, the 'in girls' and how they used to decide what was cool or not."</i></p> <p><i>"Heidegger said it is easy to fall into and hard to escape. It starts by knowing everyone else's business, the gossip and idle chit chat going around, the 'in jokes.' This is tempting because it gives you the feeling of comfort, acceptance, and a bit of power over those not joining in. I have been bothered about what people have thought of me over the years and I suppose it's something you can't escape because I want people to know me and my achievements and think well of me, but I suppose that means there will always be negatives too when I play bad or don't</i></p>

	<p><i>do what people expect and let them down. In a way though knowing that helps me. It's like a fact of life and it's not just me who feels that, we all go through it because we are human beings."</i></p>
<p>Philosophical Theme</p>	<p><b>Martin Heidegger</b> – ‘Das Man’ (‘The They’), Being-In-the-world (ontology)</p> <p>Heidegger proposed that the problem with ascribing and succumbing to ‘<i>das man</i>’ was that you are overcome with ‘<i>contentment</i>’ which in turn ‘<i>washes away one’s restlessness to act.</i>’ In other words, you get comfy and complacent. We become ‘<i>alienated</i>’ from ourselves, a term he borrowed from Friedrich Nietzsche.</p> <p>This entry is poignant because by understanding Heidegger’s Ontological proposition of ‘the they,’ Laura was able to make sense of a key aspect of her sporting life which she had already been fully immersed. Often Heidegger’s Ontology (Being- In-the-World) illuminates’ things that are in such plain sight that they cannot be noticed. Like Nietzsche he favoured the pre-Socratic thinkers to those Metaphysicians who had in his view “<i>retained a more originary relationship with the world.</i>” Polt (1999:2) summarises:</p> <p><i>“Heidegger reminded us before theory ever comes along, the world is opened up to us by “life.” Our obsession with theoretical propositions, then, dangerously alienates us from the human condition; it dismisses the richness of pre-scientific experience, which originally makes the world meaningful. He reiterates there must be a way of understanding life before we ever theorized it.”</i></p> <p>In this entry, Laura can illuminate her experiences and make sense of a thing that plays such an influential part in her career yet has been difficult to ‘grab.’ Just being able to unpack the phenomenon of ‘the they’ using her own feelings of experience leads her to conclude “<i>In a way knowing that helps me. It’s like a fact of life and it’s not just me who feels that, we all go through it because we are human beings.</i>” There is emotional relief and practical wisdom in this. For Laura, it helped her with the ambiguities of wanting popularity and recognition whilst wanting to avoid negative criticism, gossip and letting people down. These things are so intertwined into the complexities of existence and in Laura’s case amongst the world of professional squash, that they can become existentially overwhelming. By Laura learning Heidegger’s philosophy, it gave her a platform to make sense of something she was already immersed in without offering solutions or specific guidance. Primarily, there is nothing to be solved, attention can be enough.</p> <p>On this Heidegger remarked; “<i>Formal Indication is using concepts to indicate what is already familiar to us from our own experience. ‘Formally indicative’ concepts do not capture the essence of a thing and explain it with perfect theoretical clarity; they allude to a phenomenon in our lives and encourage us to live in such a way that we pay closer attention to it.</i>”</p> <p>As Laura grew in experience and knowledge in many areas of her self-understanding, her life and philosophical concepts she found a way to live well and move forwards with more psychological flexibility towards the incoming predicaments she experienced.</p>
<p>Participant Response</p>	<p><i>It was the same with the enneagram work with Peter. We never treated my personality space as ‘actually me’ it just helped me notice patterns about myself. Once I started to understand my personality habits better and understood the other spaces too, it took away lots of the stress. It even became funny and I could laugh</i></p>



*at myself more and catch myself before having a meltdown. I understood why other players behaved like they did, so it was not personal. They still annoyed me when they did certain things, but it was much less. Alison Waters' chin lift and not showing me any respect was one of those things, I know why she had that tendency and therefore it didn't get to me the same. It was more her weakness if anything.*

*I think 'psychological flexibility' is a clever way of saying mentally tough. It's like you have all these tools you've picked up and can use at contrasting times. I do so much reading on psychology and have tried all kinds of psychologists too and it just kept building my options. I didn't always use the right tool maybe and sometimes it wasn't about my mentality it could be my physical stuff or squash shots, but they all link I suppose. It's about understanding myself better, what makes me tick and what I need. That gets good because you can stop spiralling happening or anticipate a problem and get ready for it 'prevention is better than cure,' right?*

*So, I understand Heidegger why you don't want to be 'alienated' from yourself. It was true for me that when I got bogged down worrying about others or trying to fit in, even on social media, it took too much brain space up. For me, that's when I lost myself and even Danny would get frustrated with me for it. It was so much better when I had that brain space where I felt like I could think for myself, it was so subtle but affected my enjoyment so much which in the end affected my squash and my life.*

<p>Entry 12/5/2018</p>	<p><i>"In times I have had nothing to prove especially after a big win, it feels nice to be popular, a relief from the focus of me against them. Nothing to prove for the time being and everyone is sending me compliments and praise. Even Alison text me to say well done – ha. The downside - I lose my 'edge.' I get overly friendly and know too much gossip suddenly and I had been seduced by 'fitting in' and not keeping my distance, my drive to prove myself with action. Why do I crave that so much? Is it easier to be part of the pack? It's hard to be the outsider all the time, it was like that at school. I like it most of the time in my own way, I know I am stronger when I keep my distance and do it 'my way' not 'their way.' At the end of the day the other girls are my rivals and I have to want to beat them more than I want them to like me. I suppose if they like me fine, if not I have this one career chance to do it my way and get what I want. If I must take a bit of slagging off or gossip for that then no problem. I want to win."</i></p>
<p>Philosophical Theme</p>	<p>Friedrich Nietzsche – <i>Herd Morality, Ubermensch</i> Simone De Beauvoir – <i>Freedom for Others</i></p> <p>Nietzsche proposed we become 'alienated' to our true selves and rather than recover our true deep desires we stay contented by following the 'herd.' We want power but become morally scared to take it and consequently take up what he terms a 'herd morality' whereby we dance to the tune of niceties, traditions, good behaviour, accepted assumptions of our culture and leaders. This leading to an averageness of mediocrity amongst men:</p> <p><i>"a smaller, almost ridiculous type, a herd animal, something eager to please, sickly, and mediocre." (Beyond Good and Evil)</i></p>

	<p>Laura records <i>'it feels nice to be popular.... nothing to prove..... compliments ...seduced by 'fitting in' and not keeping my distance.'</i> This is a variation of concern for the <i>herd</i> of the Squash world tour and all its seductions. When Laura had experienced success and proven her point, she was open for the seductions of compliments, acceptance and friendliness Laura lost her 'edge.' Her 'edge' was the grab for power over the herd and it provided the energy and clarification to resist the mediocrity associated with simply <i>'fitting in.'</i> This is a paradoxical state for sports performers whereby one needs their rivals to push against and seize power yet equally want their acceptance and need them to push back. This is a particular existential ambiguity that sports performers share with teenagers who want to fly the nest of home, rebel, and race to independence with the unconscious aim of gaining their parents' pride and love.</p> <p>Simone De Beauvoir criticised Nietzsche's 'overman' saying <i>'his fault is believing that one can do something for oneself without others and even against them.'</i> She adds <i>'nothing exists outside of his stubborn project.....and he remains at a distance from others; he is never fulfilled. 70</i></p> <p>Selfishness ('for self') is at the core of Nietzsche's philosophy and fits well with the concept of competitive individual sport where a trip to the top of the dominance hierarchy is what is inherent. De Beauvoir's observations that one can never feel existentially free until one wills 'the freedom of others' (for others) is relevant. Without opponents to beat then how can one win? There needs to be movement between the duality of <i>'for self'</i> and <i>'for others'</i> to align with one's true existential freedom. Appreciation and for all the people in your history and your present that make such a situation even occur in the first place. In sport you need rivalries, you want the possibility of being beaten by others, you need to applaud those who raise the standards. You must be prepared to lose to win. This is the ambiguity that drives sport. The feeling of lack as compared to others can be helpful in the correct dose. Nothing can be achieved by oneself, for oneself even though one must 'take part' energetically in one's life and commit to make meaning of it.</p>
Participant Response	<p><b><i>On Ubermensch –</i></b></p> <p><i>Not only have I felt this in myself, I have seen it in the best players who I competed against. I can name ten champions who kept their independence. I also noticed lots of admirable players get too sucked into the tour 'soap opera' which almost became a social life for them. It was as if popularity was what mattered most to them.</i></p> <p><i>I This was what DP (coach) meant by creating an 'aura' by being strong and independent. You want to remain a mystery and do what you need to do, without being rude and too serious about it. I had my own friends at home. I did not need to follow the pack on tour just to 'fit in' or to be popular with them all.</i></p> <p><i>It helped a lot having a team around me. It was great having you about (husband) because you are single minded when you want to be and although you're naturally more friendly, you don't pander to anyone. That made it easier. Plus, some of the friends we met like Bobbi and Morgan in Hong Kong, that made it easier to enjoy trips and hang about with other people.</i></p> <p><i>Maybe being a woman there are different pressures when it comes to tour life and the 'in crowd.' The guys didn't seem so bothered about each other they could be a bit more up front about issues and speak their mind to each other whereas the</i></p>

	<p><i>girls would go away and fester on it in little groups. I was certainly at my best when I stayed true to myself, my natural personality, and my own desires. This was why 'they' nicknamed me the ICE QUEEN; cold, frosty, strong. I grew to like that nickname because I used it to fire me up in matches.</i></p> <p><b>On 'for others'</b></p> <p><i>There is a saying called 'frenemy' which means your enemies are also your friends because they drive you to be better and adapt. Looking back, Nicol David pushed me to be the player I am. I did not appreciate it at the time though, I just wished she would go away because she was that dominant. I get it that you need opponents and others winning and playing to drive the sport on but in the moment, I didn't think this. I just wanted to win for me. I would have taken it all. It is easy to be philosophical about it now and appreciate my fair share of success, but I did not think this when I was competing. I don't think that makes me a bad person or too selfish, I think it was a good thing when I had more of that Nietzsche approach.</i></p> <p><i>Since retiring I have had so many people say things along the lines of 'oh you're really nice, I didn't realise you were like this.' It has shocked me to be honest because those close to me know I am just Laura, in many ways just a normal person who really likes people. I now understand more how important it was for me to be able to be strong enough to separate myself 'at work' especially from my competitors. It gave me so much power and saved me from worrying about what they thought about me.</i></p>
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<p>Entry 7/4/2018</p> <p>Brisbane, Commonwealth Games</p>	<p><i>"I need to accept myself more fully, and all my faults and strengths but still push on. This is my last Games and I know myself more these days. I know I have things to keep working on, but I am what I am too. I have a personality that makes me a particular way, but Peter has helped me to grow with it rather than change it. A lot has been made of my strong mentality if only they knew the half of it. I have learned how to keep my own fire burning though and only listen to those I totally trust. Put personality over popularity and remember I am here to WIN for me. I am here for a medal but it's about pride and progress now. It is bonus time for me and 'I am playing with the house's money' as Danny said yesterday."</i></p>
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<p>Philosophical Theme</p>	<p><b>Jean Paul Sartre - Facticity -Transcendence duality</b></p> <p><i>"We are what we are whilst we are what we are not yet. We are beings of fulfilment and lack" Sartre, Being and Nothingness</i></p> <p>Laura alludes to the classic existential duality of Facticity and Transcendence which was central to Sartre's ontology and existential phenomenology. Like Heidegger's concept of 'thrownness' where we arrive at the world into a particular setting of time and place, Sartre also added the facts we have about us such as our biology, genetics, culture etc which do limit our existence. For example, in sport few people have the physical capacities to be heavyweight world champion regardless of their ambition and potential efforts. Transcendence represents man's ability to surpass the immediate situation by imagination, effort, and specific action in one's future. So, we experience a</p>
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	<p>tension between who we are and who we can become. This can cause a feeling of constant 'lack' which can vary in affect from feelings of overwhelm through to useful motivation.</p> <p>Laura writes about this duality throughout her entry at the Commonwealth Games. Given her facticity at the time with it being her 'last Games' her understanding of herself had increased and a useful level of self-acceptance through self-awareness had been established. She says, "I know I have things to keep working on, but I am what I am too." There is still healthy motivation to transcend and win, whilst there is reduced desperation of doing so. Using words such as 'grow,' 'personality,' 'pride,' 'progress' alongside 'WIN' signifies a balance between the two poles of facticity and transcendence. There is both that sense of lack and that desire to improve her situation without the overwhelming loss of perspective and weight of responsibility that had previously pervaded her career.</p> <p>The pressure of the Facticity – Transcendence duality is relentless; we only truly escape it in death. Laura embraced this pressing ambiguity and rarely looked for escape routes such as injuries, low goals, avoidance, self-deception, excuses, false praise and so on. Sartre stated part of one's 'authenticity' is shouldering the responsibility of our transcendence within the limits of our facticity, hence his central existential point 'existence precedes essence.' Laura assumes this stance too 'I have to accept myself more fully, and all my faults and strengths but still push on.'</p>
Participant Response	<p><i>Yes, this says it itself really.</i></p> <p><i>As an athlete setting goals is what I did. They changed all the time, but they were ones that always stretched me. I would write them down then put them away in a drawer. I knew they were there, but I didn't need to overthink them.</i></p> <p><i>I think after winning the World championships I fell flat for a while and accepted what I had as enough, like I had completed a computer game. Lawrence my other psychologist told me years later that I had relaxed too much because I thought I had arrived. I wanted a rest or just thought I would just improve naturally now. I forgot that all your opponents are getting better and making their way to potential themselves and goals. Lawrence helped me set new higher targets, the main one being becoming the world number 1 player. That takes serious dedication because you must be the best over an entire year not just one tournament.</i></p> <p><i>I don't regret having that lull because I feel it was just a natural reaction. Looking at it with Sartre's philosophy makes sense because I had spent so much focus on my 'potential.' Even my lottery funding was called 'world class potential performer.'</i></p> <p><i>I had read a lot of spiritual books that said that it's important to live in the moment a bit more and notice what you have rather than what you don't have. This really helped calm me down and re charge me. I think I needed that year or two so I could push again to my higher potential because I had been doing Squash since I was 10!</i></p> <p><i>As I got older, I definitely felt at my capacities and almost maxed out all my potential. I think I felt this feeling creeping up on me from about 33 years old and I suppose being surrounded by youngsters who were making big leaps in</i></p>

	<p><i>their game I could see that my days were running out. I had no more tricks to develop even though I tried my hardest to bring ideas in right to the very last match.</i></p> <p><i>My two main mottos were 'leave no stone unturned' and 'you get out of life what you put in.' I was very driven by this and I think I turned over every stone I could find. This is such a satisfying feeling because I don't feel I could have done anything more or been better overall. After retiring it is difficult to find that same level of striving for something and I pressured myself a bit too much to find something. I love my coaching, but it is different because it is about the player reaching their potential not about me fulfilling mine. So, I am trying to still set challenges and coach as best as I can do and get better, but I can't live through the players I help. It is their journey, not mine.</i></p> <p><i>I am due to become a mother soon and already I feel a different purpose opening and my new journey as a mum. It feels like I have a project again, but I really want to remember that my child will have their own journey to live, like I have done. I don't want to be clingy, so I still want to find other projects for me to do. (sorry I went off tangent there).</i></p>
<p>Entry 5/7/17</p> <p>Dubai</p> <p>World Series Finals</p>	<p><i>"I was absolutely loving this event. It felt special. The players felt special by how we were treated. The Opera house venue was special, and I was in the final playing well. I had that balance between ferocity and relaxation. I was enjoying my own company and mixing with a few of the TV crew and Vanessa who was here commentating. It is because Dubai has that holiday feel for me, and Danny is always relaxed aswell but there is something about this event where I find my mental 'sweet spot.' There's a lot of money up for grabs and I want it, it's a bit like when I used to bet money with Dad when I was in juniors. Like when he promised me a new music system if I won the German Open. It always motivated me, and this felt like that, nothing to lose but everything to gain. It was always fun with Dad when we did that stuff."</i></p>
<p>Final -</p> <p>Champion -</p>	<p><i>"I always know when I am going to play well when I feel like doing a little dance in my warmup. It's excitement rather than nerves. If anyone would have seen me, they would have been well shocked because nobody sees that side of me normally. I was being silly, dancing and bouncing about just before a big final. I was surprised myself!"</i></p> <p><i>"I felt relaxed in the final and I played great. That match could be up there as one of my best performances. It was clinical from me and I moved and felt the most fluid I ever have on court. I could feel I had an aura about me even playing Sherbini who was the world number one. I just felt dominant and it now it feels so satisfying to know that all my training and practice came together, and I have still got it in me to be the best. Yeah."</i></p>
<p>Philosophical Theme</p>	<p><b>Friedrich Nietzsche</b> – 3 Metamorphosis of Spirit: Camel – Lion - Child</p> <p>In Thus Spoke Zarathustra Nietzsche's proposed that as part of the journey to reach the authentic heights of the 'Overman /Ubermensch'" Nietzsche proposed three stages or metamorphoses of ones spirt: Camel – Lion – Child. Nietzsche suggested continuous engagement with the 3 states of spirit, paying attention to the cyclical nature of metamorphosis. All three states are appropriate for</p>



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certain contexts, yet one should be always aiming to create one's own values if it is freedom one wants, and that is the Child state.

Laura's entry here hints at transition:

*"The creation of freedom for oneself and a sacred "No" even to duty—for that, my brothers, the lion is needed." proposed Nietzsche.*

The Lion archetype is typical of Laura throughout her diary entries. The Lion typifies independence and a rejection of the 'thou shalt' from the herd. As Laura's career evolved, she was able to roar 'no' to much of the 'should's' imposed by internal and external judgements and in her own words stopped *"shoulding all over herself."* My own direct observation was that she stood up to better players more often, frightened players with her presence, established a reputation of strength, beat back pain in training sessions, controlled skills that previously controlled her and formulated a team of honest and highly capable individuals around her which she led. She made her coaches raise their game because she demanded it. She began to express her authentic opinions to the media concerning emergent issues such as equal pay for women. She had more arguments with rivals and stood her ground on her opinions whereas previously she would have rather stood down and taken the moral high ground (Slave Morality) whilst appearing the innocent victim.

This was Laura developing from the hard-working professional yet dutiful 'Camel' archetype into a stronger independent 'Lioness' figure. This brought an added tension to things and far more battles to fight yet it toughened her, and she made her way to the top of the world rankings. She won many encounters with this spirit alone as it spread into her reputation and skillset. This did bring the problem of 'over seriousness' (discussed in entry \*) and was hard to sustain through a run of seasons.

When Laura arrive to play at certain events such as the 'World Series Finals' where there exists a different type of competition, she exhibited a transition into the 'Child' archetype state:

*"The child is innocence and forgetfulness, a new beginning, a game, a self-propelling wheel, a first motion, a sacred Yes."*

The child is curious and filled with wonder. The child is not weighed down by rules and values, the child discovers for themselves their own meaning in things.

In this entry Laura compares fond memories from childhood with her father. She also describes *"dancing and bouncing about,"* being *"silly"* and having feelings of being on *"holiday."* Laura found aspects of her *child* state in this week, she was easy to be around, easy company, spontaneous and was what I noticed as being *"light"* in herself. There was a freedom in her and it showed in her play and mood all week long. It is not something easily replicated, and it came and went. Contextually, it was the last tournament of the season; we were staying for a holiday immediately afterwards and the sun shined all week long. The hotel was 5\* luxury, she was physically as well prepared as she could be, no injuries or niggles and felt more of a superstar given the lavish nature of the event. All such factors encouraged elements the *child* to emerge that week and it was tangible, especially in her play. Underpinned by the reputation and arduous work of the 'lion,' Laura found an independence of spirit and a

	freshness of approach that set her free to some of her best performances of her life.
Participant Response	<p><i>I was more accepting and forgiving of myself at this goes along with a more 'what will be will be' attitude. I still wanted to win and prepared in a way to make myself proud, but I felt less serious. I enjoyed spending time with other athletes and Nick and knew deep down my career was ending. It made things take a different perspective and enjoying the little things and experiences other people don't get became something to enjoy rather than ignore as I had done in the past.</i></p> <p><i>I don't know if I changed into the child or not, I could understand the lion part that's really who I am as a competitor, more individual and reactive, to shut people up and prove them wrong. Dubai did relax me though and looking back something was different about me. Like I went wandering about on my own, taking it all in and feeling lighter. I remember enjoying practice hits and trying things out. Nobody pissed me off all week and I also remember buying all the squash TV crew treats and bringing them coffees. I felt like it was a celebration week I suppose but on court I wanted to win just as much and fought like crazy. It was a different energy.</i></p> <p><i>I think everyone was more chilled to be honest but that could be just me thinking that because I was more friendly myself. I gave off a different vibe and that's why. I just didn't feel like I needed the barriers up as much at those events. I don't think you can just replicate it at every tournament though because I would have lost something as much as I'd have gained something. I needed that aggression sometimes to keep me motivated to train. If we could all get it right all the time, we would never need a psychologist I bet.</i></p>

## Participant - James Willstrop

On diaries:

*“For me, I think my diaries are artistic and an expression of my life as it is at the time. My private confusions and feelings. I have always written it helps me process. It may come from my love of Literature, in particular Oscar Wilde and his writing. I know I am a busy reflector and writing stops me from going mad. It is a way to ramble without pressing on somebody else’s time. Vanessa (wife) will listen to me as much as anyone but even for her I would be too much.”*

*“I don’t use them as such to look back on, although they were useful for my documentary, I just keep them in case I ever want to. They may be useful if I go into coaching. More than anything they are just a pleasant way to download and release tensions that build up. Something to do on flights and in hotel rooms. We have a lot of spare time as Squash players hanging around waiting for matches so at the very least my writing is a good way to fulfil that time.”*

### Entries, Themes, Response

Entry 12/10/ 2011	<i>“I have noticed people always search for a definite cause for things. The fact that the other player might simply be better on the day doesn’t seem to suffice.”</i>
Entry 21/3/2015	<i>“Why am I so bloody driven to compete and try my guts out to win squash matches and push- push- push. It’s a fascinating question. I have been like this if I can remember. Incessant questioning. What is driving me to go through these hard sessions? Why does it matter that I win a squash match, chasing a ball around, getting it back onto the front wall over and over? The more I think about it I am not sure it does.”</i>
Entry 5/7/2017	<i>“I just want to get the best out myself and to be on that stage and I just wanted to play this game more than any other reason really. That’s inspirational to people, to see that effort and commitment.”</i>
Entry 5/7/2017	<i>“I play squash, it’s not the be all and end all is it? But having said that I still to this day lose myself in it.”</i>
Entry 5/7/2017	<i>“How do I end up in this mental anguish, this bubble of torment? What would life be like if we didn’t all doubt about very trivial little things? I cope with it ... ..somehow? The way I am made means that I think about everything. I am deeply sensitive, and it’s not helped me all the time. But I think about everything, I consider everything. That’s just my make up I suppose.”</i>
Philosophical Theme	<p><b>Albert Camus</b> – <i>Absurdity, Sisyphus - Struggle</i></p> <p><i>“There is no sun without shadow, and it is essential to know the night.” Albert Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus</i></p> <p>James’ entry here highlights an awareness of the absurdity of his relationship to professional Squash and he finds it <i>“fascinating.”</i> As a deep thinker he has felt the lack of ultimate meaning in what he does when he plays squash and has therefore, glimpsed the Absurd. From there the question arises <i>“why do it at all?”</i></p>



	<p>This a smaller scaled experience than Camus’ pivotal view that <i>“There is only one really serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide.”</i></p> <p>Rejecting ‘absolute meaning’ in life Camus wrote to suggest we must continue to create ‘relative meaning’ in our daily tasks no matter how Absurd they truly are in the grand scheme of life. In <i>The Myth of Sisyphus – An Absurd Reasoning</i> (1942) Camus points out Sisyphus, a man condemned to the eternal task of pushing a boulder up a hill and letting it roll back down to the bottom, is purely focused on the meaning of his goal, not on its obtainment, and has a complete understanding that his goal holds no value. Camus writes:</p> <p><i>“The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man’s heart.”</i></p> <p><i>“At the very end of his long effort measured by skyless space and time without depth, the purpose is achieved. Then Sisyphus watches the stone rush down in a few moments toward that lower world whence he will have to push it up again toward the summit. He goes back down to the plain.</i></p> <p><i>I see that man going back down with a heavy yet measured step toward the torment of which he will never know the end. That hour like a breathing-space which returns as surely as his suffering, that is the hour of consciousness. At each of those moments when he leaves the heights and gradually sinks towards the lairs of the gods, he is superior to his fate. He is stronger than the rock.”</i></p> <p>Sisyphus can make meaning of what seems ceaseless and pointless toil. James in his own way has come to this conclusion in himself <i>“I want to get the best out of myself maybe that’s inspirational....to this day I lose myself in it.”</i></p> <p>For James, this is a reoccurring process and engagement with activity of preparing for and competing at his Sport. By engaging with the question of <i>“why do I do it at all”</i> he forces himself to generate useful answers that create meaning for him. His puzzlement of the absurd assists James to continue to drive himself from within. Camus suggests we imagine Sisyphus happy in his own meaning, for his own reasons. Each time James re-enters his arena with vigour and eagerness to play and compete well, that is the reason he <i>‘does it at all.’</i></p> <p>In sport, to realise and embrace the absurd may at least offer temporary relief from the grand narratives of cause and effect and logically based generalisations about one’s successes and failures along the way. Do we ever know exactly why things turn out the way they do? As James writes, <i>“The fact that the other player might simply be better on the day doesn’t seem to suffice.”</i> On occasion, a cessation of analysis could help performers. An ability to let things go can be aided with the initial philosophy of the absurdity of competitive sport by redirecting performers within for their own meaning as to <i>why</i>, of all the things they could do in their lives, they do this?</p>
Participant response	<p><i>Yeah, I like this a lot, it dispels the theory of coaching doesn’t it. I am noticing this more now I am coaching young players. I’m telling them to remember its sport at the end of the day, anything goes especially in a squash match.</i></p> <p><i>I have seen it with my physiotherapist Alison. She is top of her game in her field and the amount of times she would admit to ‘not quite knowing’ what was wrong with my leg or back. I just wanted a quick diagnosis and fix, but it rarely works like that with the body. And she knew my body inside out after working with me since a young age. I wanted the answer and procedure to follow, but Alison</i></p>

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*would never give me anything certain if she didn't know. She always was straight and wasn't scared to tell me if she didn't have an obvious fix. So, in a way she understood that an injury or niggle is often complex, and I suppose 'absurd' to think otherwise.*

*Sometimes I think why I am still doing this, playing top level squash travelling the world and I think 'well what else would I do?' That's not as bad as it sounds in terms of my life options and other things I could do. I have all sorts to do in life, but I suppose I must still love playing. When I was young it was all big dreams and reach world number one and be world champion, it was easy that way. Now it's all more about wondering if I could be a bit better here and there with my game, can I make little steps forward and sustain my level. The small things matter to me more, I appreciate Squash in my life more. That's the meaning part.*

*Having a child is constant, I have two. It's hard, endless care and doing things for them, its tiring but then good bit comes, then a bad bit and on and on. You get moments where you realise it's an unbelievable achievement to get through a day. Then it starts over again. This is like the Sisyphus story and it reminded me of my Squash career too. So, I resonate with the boulder thing but noticing the good parts of that.*

*The biggest strength I have is my repetition of habits. Especially practice. I would always repeat the same practices endlessly and although at times I may have been a bit obsessive about it which verged on too much at times, overall, I was able to stay stimulated and fascinated in the tiny things of a practice. Hitting balls up and down the wall to myself was my boulder. You've seen me Danny, I get in this place and I just work. It may look boring or tedious to others on the outside, but I find great comfort in it and it pays off. I believe I will always hit balls, long after I've stopped competing on tour.*

*I also think my father Malcolm had elements of what Camus had to say. He veered away from the grand outcome of the big goals but kept his day to day coaching sessions so simple. He wanted good manners, smiling, enjoyment, effort, commitment, and to share. He was famous for pairing beginner players with top professionals for a proper practice session. In a way that was Absurd by the normal way of things in sport, but he saw great value in it. It humbled but thinking about it now, it made me focus on the task not myself and that I had a tournament coming up. Dad could see the beauty in the rallies when most could only focus on the score. Also, he'd talk about strange things sometimes during matches and warmups, trivia, theatre shows, some little player he was excited about. Again, I think he was helping me kind of 'keep it real' by not buying in to all the hype of the tour and that. He knew he certainly didn't need to add to it all at least.*

<p>Entry 6/4/2018</p> <p>Brisbane Commonwealth games</p> <p>4 hours before 1<sup>st</sup> round match</p> <p>28 January 2010 New York</p>	<p><i>“Just getting ready for my first match of the Commonwealth games tonight and this is a big event for us. There’s about a hundred washing machines and a five ice baths downstairs below my room. Here I am in the warmup phase, getting ready for my match tonight – it never gets any easier to be honest, I don’t know why it doesn’t, it just doesn’t?”</i></p> <p><i>“After a match or after the tournament or when I’m not at a tournament I can get this perspective of Squash, it does not matter, they’re just games. I am living well, I’ve got a lot of good things in my life, I tell myself these things and it’s all good. It’s not going to change anything. I come off and I lose, it’s not the worst thing that can happen. It’s not that bad, it’s not world war three. BUT then....no four hours before, right now, I am still getting that hideous feeling in my belly of like this is the end of the world. Where has the wise perspective gone? I’ve got a big match and I am going to have to push myself and go through pain and I don’t know whether I will play well, and he is a talented player.... what if I don’t feel good today? I had this and that happen yesterday, my hip is aching, I don’t know if my body is going to hold up? It’s pressure and I just bloody hate it. You’d think I’d be over it by now but no..... I guess not.”</i></p> <p><i>“As usual I run things over in my head all night long. I wonder what it will be like not to live in this world of extremes: misery and joy; action and exhaustion; sleep and insomnia. Nobody will ever understand what I go through because it is intensely me. It is a constant feeling that I only escape on Christmas Day or holidays. It is so normal for me now it doesn’t seem unusual. It’s the price I pay for caring so much and I am lucky to have something that drives me.”</i></p>
<p>Philosophical Theme</p>	<p><b>Martin Heidegger</b> – Dasein, ‘Ready to Hand’ - ‘Present at Hand’</p> <p>These entries are examples that brings to light the contrast between ‘lived experience’ and the ‘theoretical view,’ within James. It highlights an important distinction between two modes of existence that are equally important if their distinction is understood and embraced.</p> <p>Heidegger used the term <i>Dasein</i> which means ‘being there’ to summarize his view on the basic Ontology of humans. <i>Dasien</i> are “Beings in the World,” “thrown in” to the world and ‘stuck’ with it and its own being which it must deal with. All Dasein are ‘situated in a concerned life, out in the openness of the world, not just inside a skull.” (2002:57) He added: “Dasein is absorbed in its dealings with the ‘ready to hand’ aspects of its life. It awaits results of its dealings, its producing activities, its achieving.” (2002:107)</p> <p>Heidegger said that the “theoretical attitude” ignores this fundamental ontology and separates the world up into ‘present at hand’ objects we can study as if we are detached observers of a life, sat on the side-lines making rational and calculated sense of the world. He says “A theoretical thinker is dedicated to comprehending how present-at-hand entities present themselves; yet the basic experience of Dasein is not a theoretical experience: it is not just looking and taking notes. It must be an experience that is relevant to me as an individual the full, concrete and historically factual self that is accessible to itself in its historically concrete experience of itself.” (<i>Being and Time</i> 414/363)</p> <p>James’ entry here reveals his confusions between two selves that experience his Squash vastly different. When he is distant from the situatedness of an impending squash match which he fully cares about, it is easy to slip into the</p>

	<p><i>'present at hand' view and feel reasonably at ease with it. Yet when he is immersed in the anticipation, in the original ontological state of 'ready to hand,' he cannot summon his detached wisdom that he gleaned from distance. It is as if he has fooled himself or at least forgotten that the experiences of immersion are not the interpretations of objective contemplation: "It's not that bad, it's not world war three. BUT then....no four hours before, right now, I am still getting that hideous feeling in my belly of like this is the end of the world."</i></p> <p>This is not necessarily a problem for James, more of a dilemma he cannot fathom. Yet it illustrates that even experienced individuals can forget the differences between the theoretical and the lived life. Coaches, academic theorists, and support staff in sport may do well to remember this distinction more often, as it is easy to slip into one side or the other and lose what it is to be Dasein, to exist at all.</p>
Participant Response	<p><i>I found this difficult to understand properly but what came to mind was the recent passing of my Dad, Malcolm.</i></p> <p><i>After Malcolm died recently the grief was brutal for weeks. All that mattered was that I was wife my wife and two children and we were close and safe. I was thinking about my Squash and It was just inconceivable that I would ever play again. There is NO WAY I can play without him being around for me to call him or have him watch me; I'll never ever get THAT feeling again so it's pointless. In my head that was it. Vanessa told me not to make any decisions or overthink it but in my mind my Squash was finished.</i></p> <p><i>Five weeks later I entered a tournament and as soon as I got in my warmup, I got the buzz – it felt right, squash was still there. I heard my Dad's voice like usual and I went on court and loved it. It was very emotional in a way because I thought the competition side of things had gone forever. Yet once I got immersed into the routines, the game, the rallies, the contest it was all still there as normal, and it has stayed that way.</i></p> <p><i>I suppose that's what Heidegger was getting at, like my quotes.</i></p> <p><i>The other day I was arguing like crazy over a stupid bloody train ticket and it stressed me out .....WHY? Five weeks ago, all I was thinking was 'big picture,' life is too short to argue, enjoy the small things. I caught myself doing it aswell but still harped on to the sales attendant like a petulant child!</i></p> <p><i>I suppose you can't really break away from it can you?</i></p> <p><i>I'm not overly keen on goal setting, for these reasons. It's all very well doing goals and I meet plenty of players who have BUT you must actually DO IT. You must live it not just theorise on it. You must get immersed and come through the hard matches when they are happening, in real time. That's the hard part and some players just don't seem to be able to get through it. Not for lack of ambition, effort, or training or desire, they just can't seem to get through them enough times that it would take to reach the goals they write down. So, I think in that way GOAL SETTING is a bit of a myth. I might be contradicting myself here because I have targets in mind but not specific stages or goals because I think I am more of a realist in a way. Perhaps if you remember the difference that's the important bit.</i></p>

<p>Entry 15/1/12</p>	<p><i>“I say the winning doesn’t matter ha-ha-ha it does! The amount of time people have put into me brings me to tears. It has been so selfless. All those hours, all those tears all those chats and disappointments. It is incredible to say we have done it together. I have been looked after so well. I am the number one player in the world, and it means so much to me to share it. It’s full circle and it’s all been worth it.”</i></p>
<p>World Number 1 reflection</p>	
<p>Entry 12/10/2018</p>	<p><i>“I love winning, but it has become secondary now which to some may sound ridiculous because I go through a lot of training pain. But NOW more than anything I love playing the game, I love being on the stage, I love feeling the warmth of an audience, I love the buzz and excitement. Looking back as a child I think that is what got me in the first place. I wasn’t watching Jansher Khan as a kid thinking I want to win what he has won, I wanted to play his shots. I love the way Rodney Martin plays those backhand volley nicks. I have come full circle.”</i></p>
	<p><i>“In the middle bit of my career the winning took over and the sulks were horrendous. Completely stupid. I feel I have wasted a lot of time sulking, arguing, fighting and now I make sure I don’t. I must remind myself mind you! Now it is more about now the quality I produce, the playing part, the brilliant rallies I have played, the places I have played, the good matches, those great occasions. This I what I will remember, these are the memories that I really remember.”</i></p>
<p>Entry 21/11/2018 Qatar Classic</p>	<p><i>“The best times as I am aging come from the moments. My match with Karim today was one of those. People will remember this and my triple fake shot. The commentators got excited, and it makes me proud because I have touched people. I have kids coming up to me asking about the triple fake shot and it’s so heart-warming, it’s so lovely to connect that way.”</i></p>
<p>Entry 16/1/2019 New York, Tournament of champions</p>	<p><i>“Won first round 3 nil played solid. I shot off with Logan (4-year-old son) to a court across the road so he could play. He didn’t care about my win, he just wanted to go on a court and play. People were surprised to see me there so soon after coming off court doing warm down exercises, but I thought it was obvious thing to do. There was only that court available all day and to see him so happy is what’s important now, I guess. I know myself more now, I know warming down is important but the joy of seeing Logan so immersed in his own fun and completely disinterested in my progress through a squash tournament is refreshing and as energetic as any recovery shake.”</i></p>
<p>Philosopher Theme</p>	<p><b>Friedrich Nietzsche – Metamorphosis of Spirit - Lion to Child</b></p> <p><i>“But tell me, my brethren, what the child can do, which even the lion could not do? Why hath the preying lion still to become a child? <b>Innocence is the child, and forgetfulness, a new beginning, a game, a self-rolling wheel, a first movement, a holy Yea.</b>”</i></p> <p>Whereas the lion manages to slay the dragon of thou-shalt, in his world, the child, can create a new world, fresh territory. From these new observations, this new curiosity, it can create new purpose and rationale for its existence. James, even more so than Laura (above), appears to have made a general transition to a state based much more on expression, play, entertainment, and connection to the audience. These entries are his most recent and contrast clearly with previous tones of fighting enemies and sulking if he did not win. A winning-only mentality of the <i>lion</i> that must ‘kill or be killed’ in the jungle</p>



	<p>of professional sport is clearly abundant and necessary, particularly when striving to climb a dominance hierarchy. The sustainability of this state comes into question. As one is hunted down by old and new rivals, experiences battle weariness or loses energies of youthful vigour and novelty, a development of spirit is required if one is to live well. James reveals such development amongst many of his entries from 2018 contrasting with earlier years although he doesn't indicate why.</p> <p><i>“The child, according to Nietzsche, has an almost miraculous ability to forget and move forward. The loss of shame, compassion and child-like spirit will be the step that leads to freedom, by doing that it wins its own world, with no burdens or no's, he can create his own values, and not to be left with superfluous pleasures that hinder a full enjoyment of the existence.”</i> John Kaag, (2018:102)</p> <p>James remembers his childhood; <i>“Looking back as a child I think that is what got me in the first place.....”</i> and also gleans meaning from his own child <i>“the joy of seeing Logan so immersed in his own fun... is refreshing and as energetic as any recovery shake.”</i> He also comprehends his influence on children who watch him; <i>“I have kids coming up to me asking about the triple fake shot and it's so heart-warming.”</i></p> <p>Professional Squash is deeply combative and to win requires mixtures of assertion, enjoyment, dominance, creativity, discipline, plotting and desire. Elements of both the Lion and the Child spirit are required in each single match let alone phases of career. It may be that experiencing their differences and allowing oneself to practice flexibility in one's own values is what can be learned from the Child spirit the most. Lions tend to seek things for their own dominance by repetition of strength, whereas the Child can open to things in an exteroceptive sense, beyond their own selves. An ability to <i>‘transcend and include values’</i> (A term used by Integral Philosopher and Transpersonal Psychologist Ken Wilber 2001), may be the suggestion that performers can be encouraged to practice through in their lives. This may be something encouraged by significant others or even gleaned more naturally by having your own children. It will remain strictly phenomenological to individual circumstances and rather than a conscious move of philosophy, may be more a gradual emergence (<i>metamorphosis</i>), such as which appears to have happened in James's career.</p>
Participant Response	<p><i>This resonates with me the most. I talk about this all the time lately and I have never put my finger on it this way before. I have certainly embraced my inner child as my career has developed. When all said and done, you're just playing, like kids do. It is that spirit that got me into trying out with the acting classes and getting on stage now in the theatres. We all need to play and express ourselves. I see great parallels now between being on the stage doing a play with fellow professionals and me being alone playing Squash in grand central station to a big crowd. Part of what we do as performers is entertain and, in my Squash, it has often been forgotten in the early to mid-section of my career. I like the 'lion' idea because it is true that you have to kind of be a fighter and strike out on your own when you are coming up. You're taking on all these other top players and they are coming hard at you, so you must be tough and thick skinned.</i></p>

	<p><i>I used to be more selfish with my time and I wouldn't say 'prima donna,' but it could lean that way, especially around tournaments. At the time, I chose to be that way. Dad said I had like a 'Clint Eastwood' persona about me, which I still do but not as intense. I was never rude to people I just make more time for people now; I speak more and find people interesting. I think having my own children have influenced that a bit, I see how they play how there is a bit of magic there. I have re captured some of that so the 'Lion to the Child' is quite accurate for me and I can see that in my diary entries too.</i></p>
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<p>Entry 13/2/2011 –  reflection upon Mother and her example - living with Cancer towards her passing.</p>	<p><i>"It's 10 years to the day Mum died, she is on my mind. The isolation is crushing and it's not fair to expect anyone to understand or feel the same way at the same time, about the same person, however much they try to sympathise. That period, those last days were full of grief and sorrow, yet every time I stepped out of the hospital, I was surprised to see the world still turning as usual. Exposure to the realities of illness and death. Time seemed to stand still for a while, and I couldn't imagine returning to my normal life of squash and petty problems."</i></p> <p><i>"How do we achieve happiness, and what gives us fulfilment? I think about Mum and wish she was here to offer advice. I think I know what she'd say. During her entire illness she somehow managed to retain great positivity, facing each day on its merit. Playing her last ever match she showed us all awe-inspiring bravery. Wearing my 'World Class Performance' baseball cap she was the embodiment of beauty, courage, and inspiration. She battled her heart out, running for every ball with all her might and, as the games became close, everyone shouted her name, willing her to do the unthinkable and win. She lost; it didn't matter. No message could be clearer than what she gave me. It was her lasting gift."</i></p> <p><i>"The courage she found, not only that day but every single day of her battle with cancer, is a constant source of inspiration. The future can't be depended upon and it certainly isn't worth worrying about. You must live. It is time for me to take a leaf out of Mum's book."</i></p> <p><i>"Squash is a big part of what I do and who I am, but it isn't the be all and end all. I can't allow it to become all-consuming as it sometimes has done in the past. If I can stop overly worrying about illnesses and injuries, catching colds, agonising over defeats, worrying about the future with Vanessa, and instead concentrate on what can be controlled or what feels best now, then I will be following Mum's example. Let's face it, Mum's battles in the end were tougher than any of mine. When I think back on her in hospital and fighting on court through chemotherapy, although there is sadness, I feel an overwhelming sense of inspiration and encouragement."</i></p>
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<p>Philosophical Theme</p>	<p><b>Martin Heidegger</b> – <i>Being towards Death, Anticipatory Resoluteness</i></p> <p>The last part of Heidegger's 'care structure' for Dasein after facticity and fallenness is one's existentiality and in particular the awareness of our mortality. He states, "this certainty, that 'I am in that I will die,' is the basic</p>
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*certainty of Dasein itself. (Being and Time p256). We know our nonexistence is a possibility and this hangs over Dasein in everything we do. We are ontologically speaking “Beings towards Death.” So, what to do?*

Heidegger stated an authentic response to death was what he termed *Vorlaufen (running forwards)*, meaning ‘facing up’ to existence in the face of Death.

James’ entries reveal clear elements of this and his Mother’s attitude and actions as she faced bravely up to her own mortality. Heidegger claimed Dasein wakes up to their ‘*situation*’ explicitly and gains a clear understanding of what is profoundly important to him and what he needs to do in the world. This is what fuels ‘resoluteness’ and the act of actively being ‘anticipatory resolute’ becomes a vital way for Dasein’s authenticity.

*“Resoluteness (in the face of Death) is not a rigid stubbornness (355/307). An authentic person is free to change her mind – but she will do so because she lucidly grasps her **Situation** in relation to what she chooses to be, and not because of whim, everydayness, cowardice, or social pressures.” Polt, R. p91*

James reveals how he often ‘wakes up’ to his own situation by remembering his mother’s examples of resoluteness. It continues to impact him deeply particularly when he brings her to mind or compares his situation to hers. Heidegger summarised;

*“My own most possibility is my issue. I must accept this; I am to make something of my life regardless of limitations. First, the life one builds must be based on one’s facticity, ones thrownness, on who one already is. Secondly, one’s life will exclude an infinity of other lives that I could have led. Thirdly, my life is susceptible at any moment. When we choose considering these facts, we are prone to the authentic, clear-sighted stances. This way life is not morbid, but soberly joyful.” Lecture, Freiburg University, 1957.*

*James grasps a requirement to wake up and move forwards with greater clarity; “If I can stop overly worrying about illnesses and injuries, catching colds, agonising over defeats, worrying about the future with Vanessa, and instead concentrate on what can be controlled or what feels best now, then I will be following Mum’s example.”* It can be seen throughout James’ diaries that such resoluteness comes and goes dependent upon his situations. It is not a stuck state to aspire to but a proposition to include as one authentically lives life. James admits to falling from this ideal as he goes through periods of ‘sulking,’ ‘burnout’ and self-indulgence yet evidently, he has his mother’s example calling out to him, reminding him of another way to exist; her “last gift.”

In a far less significant way than actual death, professional sports performers know that their own careers will one day die out. They will cease to compete at the level required to win at the professional standard. It has been suggested that performers die two deaths, with their career being one of them. Taking forward the principles of ‘anticipatory resoluteness’ may therefore assist with this in a more positive way. Knowing retirement is due and reminding oneself of it, ‘facing it’ may force a response towards the authentic choice. Career



	<p>breaks, interruptions or illness and injuries may not only serve as refreshment points to reset from overwhelm but may act as existential prompts towards our career mortality as well as our actual mortality. If performers can contemplate this and consider steadfast responses to this fact, within the limits of their situations, then they might develop perspectives that help them live well not only in the remainder of their careers but beyond too.</p>
Participant Response	<p><i>Mum continues to affect me deeply. In ways I will never work out, nor want to really.</i></p> <p><i>She is a constant inspiration to me and those words that I wrote formed the last pages of my mid-career autobiography. She went through a lot and will always remember her courage. I hope I have honoured her.</i></p> <p><i>I am not sure about facing up to death and it being a positive thing, it's terribly difficult to think about. If anything, reading this reminds me that retiring is absolutely nothing like death.</i></p> <p><i>I do think life events affect you as a person and I guess you must assimilate them along the way as best as you can. That's all I have tried to do and keep trying to do. It can be hard sometimes.</i></p>
Entry 12/10/2014 Hip Injury	<p><i>"I am finished. The doctor said I will never play again. Leave me alone."</i></p>
Entry 6/7/2015	<p><i>" I would not choose to go through that week again where the doctor told me I was finished but I look back and I am quite glad because it took me to the depths that week and I woke up in a strange way. I realise how much I love playing. I do love performing. I prefer to play rather than to win. It's a nice perspective to have."</i></p>
Entry 15/4/2010 British Open Final reflection	<p><i>"I replay the mis-hits and the forehand drop error in the in the fifth game countless times over the course of the night, but the frequency of these flashbacks is outnumbered by piercing thoughts of the match ball stroke decision. To have effectively won the match destroys me for days and months afterwards. I can cope with the mis hits they are my opponents doing – I can't cope with the stroke decision from the referee who 100% got it wrong."</i></p>
Entry 5 / 3/ 2012 Qatar – after semi-final loss	<p><i>"Being a squash player, you must lose, and you must lose a lot and feel that disappointment. I know it's part of my job. Going in front of an audience, big event and losing its going to happen, however good you are? It reminds me of actors who go to auditions, knockbacks, knockbacks then bam an audition. Eventually maybe a role. Its setback after setback and if you keep going it helps. It still stings but I have got better at dissipating it quicker and using it to go forwards. Then sometimes everything clicks. The time, the opponent, the moment, luck, the body, the occasion and after all the disappointments and many occasions it doesn't work out, suddenly out of nowhere it just does! Crazy."</i></p>

<p>Entry 9/4/2018 Before Commonwealth games final</p> <p>Post-Match</p> <p>Gold Medal Winner</p>	<p><i>“I saw Alison today and she suggested ankle surgery which she has never mentioned before. I am ecstatic. At least something might make it better now finally. Middle of the road won’t cut it; I have been working my while life to achieve the heights. Now I can push on if it goes well. I am already cringing at the extent of my self-pity yesterday. Where has my perspective gone? Am I that hooked on my life as a squash player? It’s the price I pay for caring so much and I am incredibly lucky to have something that drives me? What else would I do honestly?”</i></p> <p><i>“I can’t want it this much, and work so hard for it only to suffer setback after setback. I can’t do it. It is the end. I want the easy life now, none of the extremes, none of the excess.”</i></p> <p><i>“Whatever happens here I will run through a brick wall. It’s a final, it’s the finish line. I will die here today for this. I am in decent shape I can go to the bottom of the well and find something extra. I know mentally I can do that, I did it when I beat Greg to become world 1.”</i></p> <p><i>“Nobody is more surprised than me how this week has gone. There was no expectation. It all gathered momentum and it came together. The final was a dream effort, my ball control was singing, and I had him pinned, it just clicked. It’s a strange feeling, I am just elated. It was the stuff you dream of, one of the most brilliant performances in my career where everything works and clicks. It just happened.”</i></p>
<p>Philosophical Theme</p>	<p><b>Friedrich Nietzsche – Will to Power / Amor Fati</b></p> <p><b>Will to Power:</b> <i>“Superficially, the idea of the Will to Power suggests the victory of the strongest. But fundamentally, it is a psychological principle of human behaviour that every being seeks to extend its sphere of action and influence: to consolidate itself.” Gane, (2013:85)</i></p> <p><b>Amor Fati (to love one’s fate):</b> <i>“I want to learn more and more to see as beautiful what is necessary in things; then I shall be one of those who makes things beautiful. Amor fati: let that be my love henceforth! I do not want to wage war against what is ugly. And overall, and overall: someday I wish to be only a Yes-sayer”. Nietzsche The Gay Science (1882:276)</i></p> <p>Above are entries that show contrasting philosophy akin to Nietzsche’s earlier writings regarding <i>Will to Power</i> with his later proclamations of <i>Amor Fati</i>. There is a clear distinction between a Will-driven philosophy of taking control of one’s life and making things happen for oneself due to ingrained psychological needs of influence, from a celebrated form of fatalism in the form of loving one’s own complex, painful yet beautiful fate.</p> <p>We don’t – in Nietzsche’s eyes – need to be consistent, we need to have the ideas to hand ‘that can save our wounds.’ Nietzsche isn’t therefore asking us to choose between glorious fatalism on the one hand or a vigorous willing on the other. He is allowing us to have recourse to either intellectual move depending on the occasion. He wishes our mental toolkit to have more than one set of ideas: to have, as it were, both a hammer and a saw. This is evident across</p>

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the diary entries selected above. James' inability to accept his fate after the loss at the British Open opposed by the reflective acceptance of his hip injury and how it was part of his overall tapestry of success.

Sport, like life can be so volatile so quickly and repeatedly that certain occasions in particular need the applied wisdom and pragmatism of a 'will - driven' philosophy; yet the next day other situations demand that we know how to accept, embrace, and stop fighting the inevitable. Across James' entries he reveals the determined self-directed athlete pursuing victories and excellence with absolute commitment to even "*run through a brick wall...die....and go to the bottom of the well*" to get a Gold Medal. This was the form of power that Nietzsche devotes much attention to in what he calls "*self-overcoming*." Here the will to power is harnessed and directed toward self-mastery and self- transformation, guided by the principle that "*your real self lies not deep within you but high above you*."

This entry in particular reveals James' existential dilemmas brought about by his quest for 'self-overcoming':

*"Middle of the road won't cut it; I have been working my whole life to achieve the heights. Now I can push on if it goes well. I am already cringing at the extent of my self-pity yesterday. Where has my perspective gone? Am I that hooked on my life as a squash player? It's the price I pay for caring so much and I am incredibly lucky to have something that drives me? What else would I do honestly?"*

So, while the *will to power* is neither good nor bad, Nietzsche praises those expressions of it he views as creative, beautiful, and life-affirming, and he criticizes expressions of the will to power that he sees as ugly or born of weakness. James manifesting this in his contempt of his self-pity and inappropriate perspective.

*Amor Fati* may not be as easy 'in the moment' but useful in retrospect as a meaning making mechanism, if not just to quell lingering torment. James illustrates this and indicates the existential benefits as life continues to come at him:

*"I would not choose to go through that week again where the doctor told me I was finished but I look back and I am quite glad because it took me to the depths that week and I woke up in a strange way. I realise how much I love playing. I do love performing. It's a nice perspective to have."*

Despite the 'onwards and upwards' pragmatism within the concept of *Amor fati*, evidenced continually throughout James' diaries, perhaps it is too far a philosophical leap 'to love one's fate unconditionally.' Those straining to improve their situations by the day on highly competitive hierarchies will at times be floored with outcomes that are too much to accept, particularly in the short-term. However, the usefulness of the concept may lie in the 'loosening' of one's sense of overall control, allowing room to move towards the acceptance states of 'what will be, will be' or 'it is what it is.' In an environment where high pressure and expectation is felt by individual athletes from both internal and external sources then a back-and-forth movement between the will-driven approach and the more fatalistic themes may help performers live well. This is evident in James' entries and his back and forth shifting of outlook, prompted by his own existential questioning, may be a reason he has

	<p>stayed the course all the way to World Number one ranking and beyond, a Squash Ubermensch.</p>
<p><i>Participant Response</i></p>	<p><i>I would say that my career was almost two distinct halves. Pre and post hip surgery.</i></p> <p><i>The injury was the complete turning point and these quotes have reminded me again. I think the injury and being told I would never play again forced me into loosening my sense of control. I am still professional in all the necessary respects, but I am nowhere near as self-centred or obsessive with it than preinjury. In these terms after the operation, I was more ‘amor fati’ too far! It was too accepting and ‘what will be will be’ attitude. A few difficult results and I soon realised I had to sharpen up my approach. Like I mentioned earlier, when I get back into the midst of competition, something kicks in within me, like a stubbornness. It’s a great feeling.</i></p> <p><i>I think at the commonwealth games was my most balanced. I went in well trained and looking to really take in the experience, but I knew I wanted to push hard in the matches. My expectations were balanced, and I just took it day by day. I never expected to win the Gold Medal but deep inside I knew I was more than capable of it.</i></p> <p><i>The ‘will to power’ philosophy is a part of competitive sport because at the end of it all you want to win. We all want things to go our way, even small things. In the first half of my career it went overboard though. I am not saying that that was a bad thing and it may be part of my overall ‘fate’ or ‘journey’ as is said also by Nietzsche. Ideally, I would have been less extreme and taken a bit more of both halves in each half!</i></p> <p><i>Nowadays I have to consider why I keep playing and I really think I have the balance and that’s why it’s still enjoyable. That ambiguity we spoke of I seem to have grasped it better. When I coach the young professionals or speak with certain ‘experts’ on sport they are rarely there. Winning is over fetishized by the media as if it is the ONLY thing worth trying for. There is so much more to it than that and Amor Fati although not always desirable or totally true is something that might help people make sense of things and keep them sane through the difficulties.</i></p> <p><i>I agree with the thing you said Danny about understanding life backwards but having to live it forwards. That’s the way it is, you’ve got to live your career to work it out.</i></p> <p><i>(Soren Kierkegaard – “It is quite true what philosophy says that life must be understood backward. But then one forgets the other principle, that it must be lived forward.” (Either/Or, Fear and Trembling 1843)</i></p> <p><b>Researcher Reflexive note on Amor Fati:</b> <i>Laura won her world championship final on a similar stroke decision. At 10-9 up she was rightly awarded the match, no complaints from anyone. I often consider how we would have moved on had she been awarded a let ball replay and then lost. I physically shudder at the thought and wonder at how difficult our levels of ‘amor fati’ would have been in that scenario.</i></p>

## Dialogue Conclusion

This dialogue required trust between me and the 2 participants. To be privileged to access the private thoughts of two exceptional sporting individuals was a pressing responsibility. James is a deep reflector and private character so for him to permit access to his personal phenomenology in the form of his diaries was a privilege and a strong boost for the method I wanted to employ, that of using unsolicited diary data. My spouse Laura and I already have deep trust, so it was less delicate although it still required sensitivity. When applying interpretation to another person's experiences one is going against the grain of usual therapeutic coaching practice where one extracts meaning from the client as opposed to filling it in for them (Rogers, 1951; Whitmore, 2002). This added to the responsibility as I proceeded to explain **their** experiences through the lens of selected ideas from existential phenomenology and the five thinkers introduced in Dialogue 1. No matter how sensitively a researcher interprets the private recordings of their participants, there remains intrusion. An example was my handling of James' thoughts concerning the death and influence of his mother and I had to ensure that it was relevant and pertinent to highlight this section of his diary entries.

As mentioned in the short method section of this dialogue, there is much involvement in the selection element of the data when it comes to using private diaries. As this was an extension to Dialogue 1, I was scanning the diaries for data that could bring to life the themes identified and introduced previously. The aim of this dialogue was to blend the existential ideas introduced in Dialogue 1 through a coaching perspective, with phenomenological moments of experience from a sports performance perspective, to reveal existential examples of the things that sporting performers live through. In addition to bolstering the introduction of existential phenomenology to sporting lives, this dialogue was also a representation of the value of writing and investigating private 'in time' diaries as a method of phenomenological analysis. Consequently, enhancing the main aim of this thesis to illustrate an emic ontological insight into individual experience adding to the contributions of the other dialogues, particularly in Dialogue 4 by way of autophenomenography.

The *philosophical theme* sections of each entry allowed for links and applications of the existential predicaments each of the five thinkers proposed. This complimented the applications presented in Dialogue 1 to a coaching life and is why it follows immediately. It was not important at this point for Laura or James to have a grasp of the underpinning ideas for them to formulate a response to my analysis yet for the reader of the whole project it enhances the overall understanding of the aims of study, by getting to grips with the ideas of each thinker before reading Dialogue 2. The reader is

better placed to understand the *philosophical theme* sections having been taken through each thinker's concepts and subsequently be able to extract more meaning from the interpretations and *participant response* sections that follow.

The *participant response* sections were the most compelling part of the process due to the excitement and confirmation of understanding Laura and James provided. Each responded thoroughly to the applications of each diary extract presented to them. James was enthusiastic to the point that he requested Dialogue 1 to read and subsequently produced the idea of a two-person play based on the acts written (James takes part in amateur dramatics). James's thought that between us we had encapsulated many of the things he had not felt able to describe but intuitively understood, declaring "*I love the way you have used proper philosophy and gone straight to the horse's mouth with the old philosophers because at the end of the day we are just all people making our way through stuff whether we play squash for a living or run a business or something.*" This simple observation gives gravity to this dialogue because it reveals the impact on James. Indeed, he reported to me in that period that he felt rejuvenated by engaging with this work and had begun his own investigations into Simone De Beauvoir and Friedrich Nietzsche admitting "*reading this has helped me reinterpret some of the crap I have in my head about my past and certain situations that I went through. You can make a big deal out of things that aren't that important at all in the final picture.*"

Laura was more pragmatic in her overall response. As someone who enjoys things to be either 'correct' or 'wrong' so she can accept or reject the idea and proceed accordingly, philosophy could have been much too blurry for her to regard as useful. Laura concluded "*I like things to be clear cut and why I naturally gravitate towards science and more clean-cut explanations than you, but I can see how this can be a bit stupid. The philosophy opens it up without making it too confusing. I can tell how you have helped me over the years with some of these ideas.*" Philosophical application was clearly more in James' style of personality than Laura's but in their own way it can be seen how useful they found the process by way of their deep engagement in their *participant response* sections.

In summary, this dialogue has revealed that existential phenomenology and some of the philosophical ideas of Jean Paul Sartre, Friedrich Nietzsche, Simone De Beauvoir, Albert Camus, and Martin Heidegger are relevant and applicable to two performers who live professional sporting lives. Both performers are former World ranked number 1 squash players and each reveal complex, ambiguous, confusing, and often absurd nature of their sporting existence as they quest for higher levels of potential. They reveal themselves to be vulnerable, strong, resourceful, anxious, disillusioned,

desperate, content, joyous and much more. These elements are in flux and are most often influenced by the outcomes of their competitive results although not exclusively. They each try to remind themselves that primarily they are 'beings in the world' trying their best each day, yet both reveal how they forget this when caught up in their respective 'everydayness' of living the life of a competitive squash player. Consequently, when introduced to concepts of 'being' both could immediately appreciate them and understand how being immersed in a sporting life exasperates and condenses many of the existential pitfalls 'Dasein' can suffer. Equally, each could further understand the existential structure a sporting life can provide and if approached with certain ways of philosophical consideration, can be lived well with increased personal meaning, towards one's own sincere authenticity.

These conclusions point to my recommendation that being able to incorporate existential understanding is of value to sporting professionals who want to understand themselves more. The use of diaries may be a useful entry point for some performers who feel normally overwhelmed when asked to reflect on or reveal deeper aspects of their lived experiences particularly for those who are not inclined to consider philosophy in the first instance. Post analysis of their entries can be a useful method to incorporate existential philosophy into their individual phenomenology, thus becoming an excellent mechanism by which to access and consider an emic ontological position.

## DIALOGUE 3

### **‘David Pearson – phenomenological anecdotes’**

**Using phenomenological anecdotes for revelations of a man who has coached multiple world champion performers over a 35 -year period.**

#### **Reader Entrance**

Here the reader is presented with phenomenological experiences of five key coaching incidents of a man (David Pearson) who has coached for 35 years. The aim is by reading each anecdote and understanding the philosophies and examples of the participant, personal insights are appreciated relating to personal coaching experiences and coaching processes. The method of ‘phenomenological anecdote’ construction (Van Manen) is brought to action to illustrate how this may be used as a mechanism for presenting phenomenological data in anecdotal form and how that can bring forth a certain type of understanding and meaning associated with this narrative technique. The reader is presented with reactions from practicing professional sports coaches who are currently studying at master's degree level in sports coaching, to check the type of impact the anecdotes had on them. Existential themes are not directly addressed as in Dialogues 1 and 2 yet the reader may notice such themes as they interpret the anecdotes themselves, such as responsibility; bad faith; ambiguity; potential; humour; authenticity etc.

Data captured by interview are rarely vivid evocations of the underlying themes of the phenomenon, instead they are a mixture of facts, tales, explanations, conversational dialogue, and repetition. They meander in different directions often veering away from the intended investigation and although this is fertile it can overwhelm and distract from the impact of intended insights. Consequently, the reader can be left with high information and low levels of meaningful impact in terms of the phenomenon. If not precise, we may find out much about how one man lived through various situations in his coaching life on a descriptive level but be left with no ‘feeling understanding’ of the man or his inner experiences of coaching squash players in his life. The latter is what can evoke learning in the reader, not necessarily in an empirical cognitive way but in a more connected understanding that pulls them near to the phenomenon in themselves, through calling out their own memories from their own lived experiences. Therefore, the anecdote is constructed, trimmed, and strengthened through careful pruning for as much as it takes so that it resonates beyond information and description.



## Phenomenological Anecdotes – rationale

“Phenomenological understanding is distinctly existential, emotive, active, relational, embodies, situational, temporal, technical, theoretic, and non-theoretic. A powerful phenomenological text thrives on a certain irrevocable tension between what is unique and what is shared, between what is immanent and transcendent meaning, and between reflective and the pre-reflective spheres of the lifeworld. Without this tension, the research text tends to turn flat, shallow, boring – because it loses the power to break through the taken for granted dimensions of everyday life.” Van Manen (2014, p.68)

“The method may seem as if it launches on an endless progression, but even here there are methodical ways of knowing when a desirable stopping point is reached; again, the stopping point is not a final statement of an experience, but a way of structuring words or situations so that some living, some action, or some intellectual task may be carried out. There is no stopping point to a statement, because experiencing can always unfold to more and be further structured in several different ways.” Gendlin (1973, p.305)

A well-crafted and impactful anecdote is the *‘gift that keeps on giving’* so to speak. They have a beginning and clear end point methodologically (fashioned best with a concluding element of *‘punctum’* (Van Manen)) but phenomenologically they can grow, deviate, and unfold into ever unfolding constructions of meaning. They are high in entropy despite their structure. Consequently, their impact varies amongst those willing to involve themselves with them. That *‘involvement’* can be light and fleeting, or it can be deep and questioning, either way the impact between *‘it’* and the reader is mysterious and always open to change. In this way, it represents life as lived in its richer complexities, often surprise, sometimes shock. Sporting experiences work like this. You take part in something, you *‘show up’* get involved and commit to something and then the outcome is revealed. Outcomes can vary from predictable, to surprising, to absurd and sometimes unconceivable. Somewhere in these anecdotes are all those elements, thus representing more of the truth of the lived experience of sport than just one of the aspects alone.

The anecdotes work individually and as a collective. Interpretations will be dependent on how many of the anecdotes are taken in by the reader, in a certain order and of course how often. Included are subtle contradictions and consistencies that help maintain humanistic elements of coaching sport and living through a sporting life. The phenomenological method aims to illuminate life as we live it, of which there is no neat and tidy empirical version for all. Todres points out *“as*

*researchers this repositions our task as one that is an ongoing 'conversation' that seeks to share 'good words' and phrases that are evocative and 'carry understanding' further.*" The anecdotes are a way of prompting this both in individuals and within a community, such as a team. They allow room for additions and have enough structure for subtractions whilst giving clear prompts. In this way, a dialogue of collective communication can stir without the over protection of formal rules and some elements of the confined and reductive procedures of logic such as cause and effect assumptions, analytical bias and losing site of the 'whole.' Such phenomena can lead to aspects related to guilt, denial of multiplicity, blame, false hopes, and eventual disillusionment, shame. These are the 'bad words' that block understanding, the opposite of Todres' suggestion above.

### **Participant – David Pearson (DP)**

My original intentions were to reveal coaching essences of David Pearson (DP), a coach of over 35 years of experience who has had world renowned success and an enormous impact on my own life. I proposed a 'case study' in my transfer document yet as I evaluated the data from our first extensive 'qualitative' interview, I realised I had failed to capture the man as intended. I had recorded strong personal and opinionated discussion on what coaching is, is not and ought to be. Despite best intentions and some carefully prepared questions, on reflection it reminded me more of a podcast-type interview, evermore popular through 2020 and COVID restricted living. The interview was full of pertinent information about DP and his rationale for how he continues to coach but nevertheless it remained descriptive, generalised, and polluted by my interpretations and leading questions (as hard as I tried not to). We could have compiled the key points and reproduced them in a convenient visual model or listed them with example on a PowerPoint presentation, something we could have packaged and sold for reproduction. Although this would have had significant use, in obvious retrospect it jarred against my sincerity of capturing and presenting the meanings of some of DP 'lived coaching experiences' by way of phenomenology. I had failed to use phenomenology in the way I intended – to capture 'lived experience descriptions' whilst revealing and exhibiting a practical demonstration of how to do so.

Heidegger warned that phenomenology "*never makes things easier, but only more difficult*" (Heidegger, 200, p.12). Therefore, at first, despite best intentions, I fell into a trap of merely inviting opinions and broad generality from the interviewee (DP). In using phenomenology my intentions were to help reveal 'being' in a more substantial, vocative, and less prescriptive manner. Despite these intentions I missed the mark and surprised myself by how far! It did prove difficult. Phenomenological writing invites involvement from the participants and encourages, or at least leaves room, for, readers to go within and extract meaning from their own experiences and interpret

accordingly. Consequently, to provide something that provokes, not tells, in that way taps into different faculties of their understanding, led to the inclusion of anecdotal phenomenology rather than qualitative explanation through case study. One central aim through all dialogues of this PhD is to bridge the gap between the more empirical and structured cognitive categories of interpretation and the less formalised noncognitive capacities of understanding associated with ontology. This supporting the overall aim of revealing mechanisms that bridge the gap and allow for new insights as to how one might live well through a sporting life.

### **“Once upon a time....” - phenomenologist or storyteller?**

“A lovers kiss may brighten our day and lighten the appearance of things around us. A disturbing email may cloud our perception, a hostile comment may clog our mind, an encouraging look may help us feel confident and resolute. **Phenomenology** aims to bring such experiential realities to language. A good phenomenological text can make us ‘see’ or ‘grasp’ something in a manner that enriches our understanding of everyday life experience.”  
Van Manen (2014, p.241)

“Could it be that we communicate in stories (and everyone else understands them) because what everyone is doing in the world is fundamentally a story? Could that mean that the world of experience is, in truth, indistinguishable from a story – that it cannot be expressed more accurately than a story? You might argue, contrarily, that the scientific view of the world is more accurate....yet even that is nested inside a story: one that goes something like “unbiased pursuit of truth will make the world a better place.” Peterson (2019, p.307)

DP is at heart a phenomenologist. A well-kept secret, a secret he hasn’t even revealed to himself! In our preliminary interview without direct invitation DP recounted seven separate stories (in some form or another) all of which I had heard before. He uses stories to communicate something ‘more’ (Todres, 2013) than the standard neat and tidy formulated response, which I always sense he is uncomfortable providing. He tells anecdotes when answering questions, which I knew well by being with him so much travelling around the globe. He could make me realise things by taking me into those anecdotes. Usually, I would want to unpack it and ask for the derivative summary, the ‘point’ of it. At best I would get a single word that represented a notion such as “*it’s love*” or “*power*” or “*personality Danny, personality.*” Often, I would receive an instruction from him; “*don’t try and analyse it Danny, it’s just life. It was happening when the Romans ruled the world and it happens now the same. It’s just how life is.*” It is not my nature, and he knew that but teased me none the less.

I developed a nickname for him, ‘Columbo’ in homage to the charming and befuddled TV detective who repeated stories and anecdotes to his suspects, always ‘off piste’ from the typical rigmarole of neat and disciplined investigative procedures of standard agents. I have never been able to pin it down why this TV character illuminated my mind over the years when thinking about DP but after this research I may have stumbled across the reason. They are fellow phenomenologists! Minds that grasp the vitality of experience and the often disregarded or unnoticed details that reveal the ‘more’ of momentary lived situation, a match, or a crime scene. A strategy that also sucks people in and as Van Manen (2014, p.251) suggests brings people “*nearer*” to the experience thus increasing vulnerability through the emergent vividness. This evoking a “*presence of an experience*” that for coaches and detectives alike could encourage their respondents to reveal emotions that can help them both get to a deeper truth. We may be getting into ‘charm’ territory also, at least charisma and rapport qualities.

In repeating his lived memories and indeed reconstructions of those memories (as indicated in recent Neuroscience research discussed by Lisa Feldham Barrett (2017) in her book *How Emotions are Made - The Theory of Constructed Emotion*), DP refuses the one-dimensional nature of the traditional question and answer format. As interviewer this made me notice a rigidity in my questioning despite my opposite intentions. The rigidity was in respect of how ‘leading’ my enquiries were in assuming patterned and logical responses existed at all. DP is highly wary, if not sceptical, of the unequivocal logical path when it comes to sport. I had felt this tone of rejection often, he had a way of making me doubt myself when I was conveying the latest coaching theory I was enthusing over. In this more formalised back and forth interview (intensified by having to conduct it over video link) it remained obvious that DP doesn’t buy neat assumptions and formulaic reasoning, even if part of him can see the logic. He includes the complexity and the multiplicity of context, the ‘situation it was’ and especially the personalities involved when his thoughts are directed to coaching squash. It is more about awareness than analysis and there is a freedom in this. It is different than I am used to being someone with one foot in an academic life, yet regardless of the temporary annoyance at his disruptions, it is refreshing and useful to me. He helps my awareness of situations more fully of their unique nature, their absurdities and this reduces my analytical sprint to a conclusion that at best only serves to make me feel temporarily ‘right.’

### **Tell me those stories again, will you?**

Knowing DP is a practiced storyteller I considered it the ideal portal into revealing and communicating essences of his coaching life. To recall them directly and have me probe into the

possible ‘meaning’ of them latterly was my strategy. Through using Van Manen’s (2014) direction on ‘anecdotal writing’ constructed from “lived experience descriptions (LED’s)” I chose to compose five phenomenological anecdotes that would remain true to the words of DP and evoke a ‘feeling understanding’ from the reader by bringing near pathic understanding and shared meaning :

“What makes anecdotes so effective is that they seem to tell something noteworthy or important about life, about the promises and practices, frustrations and failures, events and accidents, disappointments, and successes of our everyday living.....stories or anecdotes are so powerful, so effective, and so consequential in that they explain things that resist straightforward explanation or conceptualization.” Van Manen (2014, p.250)

I requested DP to think of different stories that he believed conveyed meaning about coaching and in particular his coaching. I explained my process and the ideas I had as regards ‘*phenomenological anecdotes*’ and he was mildly enthused by the concept, if not baffled to some degree:

**DP:** “*Yes, sounds good Danny. So, I just tell you stories then?*”

**ME:** “*Yes.*”

**DP:** “*Like the ones I’ve told you before?*”

**ME:** “*Yes.*”

**DP:** “*Can they be the ones I’ve told you?*”

**ME:** “*Yes, they can.*”

**DP:** “*Okay good. That’s a relief, cus I think I’ve told them you all at some stage or another. I’ll get thinking. Are you sure though? Is that enough for your PhD thingy or whatever it is?*”

**ME:** “*Yes. I will work on them after you’ve told them and come up with what’s called a “phenomenological anecdote.”* (I knew that would tease him.)

**DP:** “*Oh, don’t start with the big words Danny. OK. You know what you are doing, I suppose, not like your coaching.*”

**ME:** “*Oh, thanks for the vote of confidence.*”

**DP:** “*(Laughter)*”

Subsequently, we agreed on five examples and I reminded him all he had to do was repeat them to me and afterwards I would ask a few questions.

I structured consequent dialogue between us keeping in mind that I would need certain elements to contribute to the final “Anecdote Structure,” as advised by Van Manen (2014, p.252)

1. An anecdote is a very short and simple story
2. An anecdote usually describes a single incident
3. An anecdote begins close to the central moment of the experience
4. An anecdote includes important concrete details
5. An anecdote often contains several quotes (what was said, done, and so on).
6. An anecdote closes quickly after the climax or when the incident has passed
7. An anecdote often has an effective or “punchy” last line: it creates punctum.

Throughout our discussions I was acutely aware of staying with the story and the experience from DP’s perspective. I refrained from assumptions or interpretations as best as I could and kept an elevated level of naivety asking for re clarification or a retelling to extract more concrete detail. It was important I left space and silence for DP to relax and respond with minimal contamination through suggestion or summary. When he drifted into generalised commentary about the situation of modern life and in particular the state of England Squash coaching, it was important to direct him back to the story at hand. It is unusual for somebody to just repeat a story when you know ‘academic research’ is taking place, a phenomenon that could be investigated distinctly.

### **Probing the phenomena – the felt sense**

The two of us have a strong established rapport and have shared many hours of dialogue over the years, so there was trust between us. It remained vital that I avoided presumptions and personal interpretations from knowing characters involved and previously hearing the stories in their various forms. Clarification of themes through the probing phase was necessary, particularly to ensure that the construction of the anecdotes was both authentic in content and related back to my central question ‘*how might one live well through a sporting life?*’

Below are four examples of the ‘probing’ elements where I checked for clarification of ‘meaning’ not validity of the actual story. This was a fine balance as I aimed to encourage embellishment of the underpinning essences of what the stories pointed to yet not provoke a definitive ‘answer’ to what they are supposed to mean. The anecdotes invite the listener to draft their own meaning by meeting the text at least halfway. They must work for their reactions and in this, value will be earned in a separate way than by being told. Even so, the original phenomenon is to be communicated strongly, and this is where the skill and artistic elements of this process comes into play.

## Examples of probing (Appendix 2)

### 1: (Interview 1 p.252)

**ME:** Why is it an effective story for coaching?

**DP:** Well, it's a delightful story to tell because one, one thing about it, it's funny. Because Laura, Laura's reaction to it, was what I thought it would be with the 'pie face' and everything, you know Laura's face when she doesn't like what she's hearing really or she's a bit worried, or she's a bit troubled. 'Oh oh,' you know that look she gives. So, the story itself is funny. Cause you remember the way she looked and the way she reacted and what have you and then, so it has a sense of humour behind it, there's always that. She finds it funny herself now.

**Theme (s): Sense of Humour, Care, Laughing at yourself**

### 2: (Interview 1 p.257)

**ME:** When that happens, what does that feel like? Is that why you coach or what? What does that feel like to you?

**DP:** Like I said before, everything you do it. Everything you, the work you've been putting, and you get in the fruit, the fruition. The benefit of all the early coaching you put in. And what have you so that makes you feel everything you've done over the years have been worthwhile? And you get that feeling within yourself, whatever. However, that feeling feels. Let that person blossom.

So, it's like every person you coach, it's like a different flower? So, everyone's not going to popup a sunflower, you may have one popup a Rose you have one popup as a sunflower. You might have one who pops up as a Bogan Vilia or something. **'cause it's a different personality.** So, all these personalities are in the mix.

**ME:** So, what you what you've been working on over that time is the personality rather than all the heavy techniques, and then that that personality will grow whatever type of personality they have.

**DP:** You got to have that **ability to get into the head, to help them as people.** 'cause you know anyone who's played to a high level or something knows really what to do with their techniques to a level. The key is how do you get into the person's head to get them to feel better?

**ME:** So, Laura's story is changing her grip, is a delightful story or it's funny because **LAURA IS IN THE STORY, that particular story,** because it's actually about Laura's personality.

**DP:** YES! so that's why Laura, who's retired from the game, two years ago, will always remember that story? Even when she's 70 years of age, she, she will remember that story and that's

what's ironic. You remember that story more than she'll remember winning particular tournaments and details and things. **It will be with her and help her in** a strange way.

**Themes – long term development, rewards, different personalities, helping them as people through life, individual personality,**

### **3: (Interview 2 p.266)**

**ME:** So, to summarize to finish. For you, is who you are as a person, more important as your information and ideas?

**DP:** Absolutely. All those people Laura, Nick, Matthew, Peter, Nicol, Cassie Jackman, Jenny Duncalf, it was **how they were as people that made them world class** squash players. All right, you got to work at your game and all that, but the, **THE main thing was how they were as individuals.** And as a coach, the same. Absolutely same again.

**Themes – individual people, personal qualities**

### **4: (Interview 2 p.266)**

**ME:** Is it that straightforward for you?

**DP:** Well it's a really **difficult to do if you haven't got the ability to express your personality and leadership in the right place, at the right time. Pick your moments and go for it. If you can** then leadership through the personality makes it easy.

**ME:** Yeah.

**DP:** So, the **personality is absolutely, vitally important.** You know, and if you look at some world class coaches before we stop. If you look at somebody like Rodney Martin from the past. He's got a strong personality, whether you agree with him or not. A strong personality you've met him. Paul Carter- He's got a strong personality about motivation. You couldn't have a better person at a team event than Paul Carter, he's in his element there?

You know, **blandness gets you nowhere.**

**Themes - Master /pupil hierarchy, Relationship skill vital through understanding personalities  
Strength of character for leadership, Blandness is ineffective**

Van Manen (2014) suggests “*After collecting such story-like material, interpret what the significant theme(s) are that seem to emerge from the narrative as you read it against the backdrop of your research question – “the lived experience phenomenon” of your study*”(p254). Being aware



not to over interpretate, I extracted four or five key themes (meanings) from each story. As shown above we had clarified much of the meaning from DP's perspective, but I also used reflection and re reading of the interview transcripts to help refine the chosen themes.

**Themes extracted Post Interview in relation to my central research question; 'how might one live well through a sporting life?'**

**Anecdote 1** - faith, trust, personality, vision, honesty, care, love, use of humour, sense of humour

**Anecdote 2** - personality, rational reductionism, pressure from above, self-assurance, knowing yourself, self-belief, sticking with strategy

**Anecdote 3** - trust, personality, gut decision making, leadership, honesty

**Anecdote 4** - self-confidence, gut decision making, trust, leadership, understanding personality

**Anecdote 5** - honesty, sense of humour, relationship strength, personality

**Construction - honing the narrative**

“What we are doing phenomenologically is fictionalizing a factual, empirical, or an already fictional account in order to arrive at a more plausible description of possible human experience.” Van Manen (2014, p.256)

DP embellishes and re edits his stories each time he repeats them. There has been denial by the characters involved in his retelling of events and this usually involves humour and DP telling them to “*be quiet*” so to “*let me tell it exactly as it was!*” Of course, everyone is aware of some embellishment, fictional additions, and no doubt particular bits of memory loss, but this rarely detracts from the overall impact. He will take time to explain details and by using varying tones of voice, pauses, some touch, gesticulations, and facial expressions to restore as much of experience as possible. They always contain humour and delivered with enthusiasm. There is more going on than the facts presented and that is why there is room for imaginative embellishment because the point of these stories is multifaceted. They pull the listeners in; they bring the experience near to them emotionally and thus evoke meaning interpretations based on personal recall.

In practical terms it was straightforward to write the first draft of the anecdote, a word for word transcription of the ‘telling’ by DP. From there it became a process of careful and deliberate honing whilst paying attention to the following guidelines as suggested by Van Manen (2014, p.256)

- Remain constantly oriented to the lived experience of the phenomenon.
- Edit the factual content but do not change the phenomenological content.
- Enhance the eidetic or phenomenological theme by strengthening it.
- Aim for the text to acquire strongly embedded meaning.
- When a text is written in the present tense, it can make an anecdote more vocative.
- Use of personal pronouns tends to pull the reader in.
- Extraneous material should be omitted.
- Search for words that are “just right” in exchange for awkward words.
- Avoid generalizing statements.
- Avoid theoretical terminology.
- Do not rewrite or edit more than absolutely necessary.
- Maintain the textual features of an anecdote as described above.

These guidelines were just that, they were not restrictive or absolute to me. They are in some cases contradictory and vague yet remained useful as concise prompts. They provided flexible boundaries rather than definitive rules as I chipped away at each anecdote. I have learned that when writing phenomenologically one is not attempting to formulate an argument or encourage the development of an underpinning theory. The anecdotes are not proof of any way one SHOULD live, coach, or perform. They are condensed and unique examples of experience that include themes of interest. From this as Agamben (1993, p.10) puts it “*the example lets the singular be seen.*” In a sense these anecdotes aim to help the listener hear in a pre-reflexive manner and as Merleau-Ponty (1962) claimed “*to grasp attentively the living sense of the experience before we have lifted it up into cognitive, conceptual, or theoretical determination or clarity.*”

With these things in mind, I relaxed and allowed myself space to leave the anecdotes and revisit them over a process of 6-8 weeks.

I was surprised by how often I trimmed away parts of the anecdotes as I re visited them. In Anecdote four I stripped out a paragraph in its entirety and it left the rest of the text to breathe and ‘say more.’ In some ways, it was disheartening to keep finding faults retrospectively. Yet I could feel the process was strengthening the phenomenology as I left them alone and reread them. Heidegger was not wrong about this; it was difficult to clip and change things that I had previously been convinced sounded ‘exactly right.’ I did this task alone as I did not want interference so at times I

felt as though as I was arguing with myself and did not know what worked best. On other occasions it was clearly obvious what needed to be deleted or re worded, leaving me baffled as to how I could have been so inaccurate and clumsy in the first place.

I sent the anecdotes to DP asking him to read them through. Mindful of Van Manen's guidance to ensure 'the essence of the story remained' I asked DP if they did. Not understanding my aims of producing powerful and phenomenological style anecdotes, free of prescriptive descriptions and theorizing, he replied apathetically with a single thumb's up emoji!! Only once did he offer an improvement. In anecdote two he told me to change the word "*incompetent*" to "*unhelpful*" in this sentence "*I was considered **incompetent/unhelpful** on the premise of not producing all the paperwork type data that came in about then and was relieved of my job after 16 years of mainly success.*" Something about the word "*incompetent*" was too strong for him. Even after re clarifying the fact that he was 'sacked' unfairly according to tribunal law, the connotation and resonance of that word still felt uncomfortable, "it's too harsh" he said. That's what words can do, and it made me extra attentive to ALL words in the anecdotes and how one word can flavour the 'vibe' and evoke tensions and emotions in people. After this, I changed other key words and some considered, the same.

Each anecdote ends with a **punctum**, something that "punches" through the flow and catches the listener off guard. Appreciate most art from the artist Banksy and you will understand what punctum is. It is a contrast, a snapshot summary that catches you off guard and this makes you think. At the end of **Anecdote 4**, I added "*That was her last ever match for England, Vicki retired from the game soon after*". Had I included this previously or omitted it from the anecdote it would have lessened the 'punctum' created by leaving it till the last line. It gives context of time and timeline to the anecdote which all in one line can alter the way you think about the whole episode. That is the 'punctum' impact, which startles and causes a new engagement in the form of a rethink and reinterpretation of what had been previously taken in by the listener. At the end of **Anecdote 2** I changed it from "*I never changed my philosophy*" to "*I never changed*". Again, this creates a different 'sting' and in my view brings closer the man, not an abstract thing called a philosophy. It represents something deeper and wider within the man. It is stronger and has less flexibility, he owns the statement more.

"*No bullshit*" is the last line of **Anecdote 3**. This was a way of including DP's repeated use of the profanity during our interview. It points at the pragmatic necessity of 'winning' top level sporting encounters and ties in with the need to extract truth from oneself. He pushed Nick to 'clear the air' with himself by creating such tension and raw emotion that he either produced a performance

or did not. Although the story discusses ‘trust’ that was just a rouse used by a coach who wanted his performer to ‘step up’ and rid himself of excuses. DP prodded Nick’s weak point which was that he was considered unreliable by his ‘father type figure.’ This cut to the direct truth of the matter and gave Nick nowhere to go but to perform and win. Within that he learned what it was to represent England at the level of consistency required and he also learned what it was not. Hence in quite simple terms, “No bullshit” says so much in provocative simplicity. A phenomenon of profanity and swearing well known to have unique effects.

The last line of **Anecdote 1** was changed from “*That’s what a grip change can do*” to “*Love and trust can take you a long way*” to “*Love and trust took us both a long way*” and finally to “*That level of trust took us both a long way*” . I felt it important to reduce the over celebratory, perhaps smugness of the first comment although it had punctum. On reviewing the interview with DP his main point was about the relationship between himself and Laura not necessarily his coaching information. I added the words ‘*trust*’ and ‘*love*’ to the next proposal which at first seemed to fit well. As it settled and I came back to the anecdote I realised that both words together were too vague as they stole the limelight off the other. The anecdote at its heart is really one about trust. Trust of oneself and trust of the other. As I knew personally that DP and Laura’s relationship did turn out to involve love and deep care, at that stage it was far more weighted to trust. On this occasion I felt that I had interfered with the phenomenology of the story by imprinting my own emotions onto it. I removed the word ‘*love*’ and got more specific with the word ‘*trust*’ by referring to the ‘*level*’ of it. This indicates a vertical element to trust and that levels of it exist. I believe this was a subtle, yet important part of the ‘*punctum*’ created as it signifies maintained effort, bravery, and a bond between the two of them.

## Anecdote 1

### Laura Massaro – ‘A Change of Grip’

**This is a first-person account of recollections from David Pearson, following an interview with Danny Massaro**

I looked at her and I said, “*well your grip is not good enough.*” Considering Laura was ranked number two in world, it was a shock to her. She, like, looked at me and there was this silence for about 15 seconds, and she just kept looking at me. I had wanted to say this for quite a long time but had to pick my moments you know. I knew it was a bombshell and now that she had asked me outright, I thought now is the time to hit her with it.

She looked at me with that funny ‘*pie face*’ she does when she is wobbly, which was so funny, and she sort of squinted ‘*what do you mean my grip is wrong?*’

*“Well, I didn’t say it was wrong. I just meant it’s not good enough Laura. You’re not pushing Nicol David at the top, you’re not really getting anywhere near her on a consistent basis, and really unless you change your grip, you’re never going to get anywhere nearer.”*

Well her face. I thought, oh gosh, here we go. I’ve said the wrong thing, she’s going to have a right meltdown here now on the court.

*“What do you mean?”* she goes to me, all subdued.

*“Well you know only by probably a centimetre around a little bit. If you’re able to do that, that would enable you to take the ball further out in front. Your racquet face would be more open. And then you’ll get a bit more movements on the strings.”*

Silence.

I walked around the court a bit and let it settle. She was staring at the floor.

*“So, it’s up to you ....., OR you can either keep your grip as it is and you know, stay number two or three in the world for a little while before you retire.”* I let that sink in for a minute whilst she started chewing on the top of her racket or something, a bit like a dummy I thought.

I started to panic a bit I must admit. What have I said now I thought? There was more Silence.

*“I suppose Laura the question really is, just thinking about it, is..... have you got the courage to, you know, change grip, and then access all these things I’m talking about?”*

Her head came up and she looked at me dead in the eye, **“OK, then I’ll change it.”**

I knew she would because she trusted me, she always did what I suggested when it came to the Squash part. She really believed in what I said to her. It was only tiny change, but I know from experience it feels much bigger especially the grip because it affects so much else. We drew new lines on the racket to fit her new position, a bit like you might do with a beginner. I could sense she was perturbed, scared she wouldn't be able to adapt and play properly. She cried driving home that day, which was 2 hours away. It was delicate.

Later that week, my phone rings. I see Laura's name, so I pick up.

*"Hello DP, it's Laura have you got a minute."*

*"Hi, yes, what Laura?"* I was in a supermarket, by the bakery of all places.

*"Can you turn on your video please I want to show you something?"*

*"I'll try yes. Okay what is it Laura?"*

*"Is this right DP, am I gripping it right?"*

*"Turn it around a bit more, like this on the backhand Laura,"* I had my VAPE pen out showing her, stood by the bakery!

*"Oh okay.....got it DP. Thanks a lot. See you next Friday!"*

And.....that was that.

She was practicing, practicing, practicing and she took it all on board. She worked on it as Laura always did with things and it was as simple as that. She didn't have many problems at all, and she just focused on that grip, changed it, made it feel hers. Our relationship was the key part in that.

Wrapping up the story, a few months later I was landing in Canada whilst Laura was playing the final of the British Open against Nicol David. My phone was switched off, I put it on in customs which you shouldn't do but I did and immediately the phone goes 'Bing.' The message said *'Eureka – I won.'*

She got her own back because that made me instantly tearful, I was a bit overcome. It was not just the advantages of the technique you see; the grip change strengthened her mind and our bond for all the things to come. That was the kickstart of Laura becoming the number one lady player in the World and World Champion.

That level of trust took us both a long way.

## Anecdote 2

### David Pearson – ‘I can’t write myself down on paper’

**This is a first-person account of recollections from David Pearson, following an interview with Danny Massaro**

It was an unusual request, but I had felt it coming from him.

*“Come on DP, you’re great, you’ve must start writing all these lessons down. We need to get the others doing it the same way. We could have the whole team delivering the same quality, we’d be bloody unbeatable in a few years.”*

*“Yes, but Peter” I said, “I..... I don’t know how to. It’s hard for me to explain, it doesn’t work that way. My lessons are, well I can’t describe them really. They’re individual.”*

*“Course you can, don’t worry DP” he said. “Just write it down, I have some standard forms its easy, we use them on the level 3. We will duplicate them hand them out to the coaches on the courses, ‘DP’s golden threads’ or ‘England’s success strategy’ something like that. We can even produce a book for the coaching awards and stuff. I will sort all that part out; you just document the lessons.”*

Peter was the Performance Director and I was the National Head Coach. Both of us were what you might call ‘out there’ a bit, we got along well, we laughed about things; overall I felt his support.

*“You don’t understand me” I said. “How on earth can I write my own personality down on paper? The lessons I give are never the same. They are all like different paintings, from the same brush.”*

I couldn’t get through to him.

*“I know that DP of course but there are structures you have, themes and practices you use. The information you give, let’s get it all down and spread the word.”*

He was like a dog with a bone. I had seen it coming in all aspects of the organisation, the paperwork and measuring everything. Reports to write. I remember it all very clearly. It is not my style at all. I always coached ‘off the cuff,’ organised in a non-serious way, caring.

*“Peter, I can do it, but it won’t make an iota of difference. I am the lesson, me, and the pupil together. I can’t write that on a piece of paper. My lessons are about people, the personality bit, who they are. My lessons have a feeling from moment to moment. It’s how we get along, the mood on the day and all that. I can’t even explain it myself.”*

He didn't like it, his face glazed over. In fairness, I don't think he understood, his job wasn't 'hands on' anymore.

*"I form relationships Peter, they're complicated. I use my weird sense of humour which makes it all work somehow and the person then wants to do it for me because of that."*

Eventually, he stopped asking but left me feeling as if I was being uncooperative. I heard whisperings that I was lazy. If you watch my lessons, I am none of those things.

Two years later and neither of us worked at England Squash anymore. Peter went to another sport; I was considered unhelpful on the premise of not producing all the paperwork type data that came in about then and was relieved of my job after 16 years of success.

Two years after that I coached Nick Matthew and Laura Massaro to become individual world champions, the same year. It was highly emotional as I had felt quite let down and disoriented by my removal. Bizarrely, later that year my ex employers awarded me a trophy that said "England Squash Elite Coach of the Year" on the front of it.

I never changed.



### Anecdote 3

#### Nick Matthew – ‘trust’

**This is a first-person account of recollections from David Pearson, following an interview with Danny Massaro**

I was coaching the England team in Vienna and a situation popped up like they do on trips away. Our number 4 player James Willstrop had strained his calf muscle slightly, so I told our reserve player Nick Matthew, *“you're playing the semi-final tomorrow, get ready for it.”*

Next morning, I was troubled about my decision. It was with me through the night's sleep, on my mind. So, I remember finding Nick and telling him, *“Sorry Nick, we're not going to play you now. We going to stick with James.”*

His face dropped immediately, he went white and Nick is pale at the best of times. He asked, *“why, why are you doing that to me?”*

I said *“Honestly Nick it's because we can't trust you yet. I can't trust you will perform tomorrow, compared to James. You can either play brilliantly or still play like you know, unreliably.”*

I hurt him, he was not happy, his eyes watered up, he turned away from me.

You see I was Nick's personal coach and he trusted in me very much by that point. I was a bit like a father figure to him, so to hear the words *“I can't trust you”* really disturbed him. It was like when my dad said something hard to me when I misbehaved as a child. You're just upset. Still I felt it was the right decision and it was a chance to say something important to Nick, something hard for me to just say in an everyday situation. I went with my gut instinct and hoped it didn't backfire.

Nick did not play the next day and sat behind the courts watching, supporting his team but still sore. James won his match, the team won, and we set up a final against France. James' calf muscle was now too stiff and so emerged a big chance for Nick help us. I went and found him; *“Nick, you're playing in the Final tomorrow, 100 percent. We need you to play, we need a performance from you, it is as simple as that.”*

You could see him rise; he immediately had a look in his eye. It was his chance to prove to me I could trust him, to show me I was wrong about him.

*“Okay, I will be ready”* he growled in a deep and steady tone.

Well Nick went on court in the final and absolutely hammered his opponent three games to love. He walked off court all pumped up with his white England kit on, and a look on him that said 'up yours' kind of thing. He was happy, proud of himself. I liked it; I had hoped he would bring that response out of himself. I was impressed and excited for his future. I choose my praise carefully with players, I leave it for occasions when it is fully deserved so it really means something to them. I walked over to him whilst he was cooling down and said quite bluntly, "*Well, the thing is now Nick. If you can repeat those type of performances for your Country, you'll be picked all the time. Very well played. You've got guts.*"

For the rest of his career, he never had those difficulties. Every time he played for England he played brilliantly. His personality made him one of the all-time great Squash players.

No bullshit.

#### Anecdote 4

#### Vicky Botwright – ‘play me!’

**This is a first-person account of recollections from David Pearson, following an interview with Danny Massaro**

It was the European Team Championships, representing England and I had just announced the team to play the women’s final. I was on my own having a relaxing beer in the bar and Vicky Botwright came and sat down next to me.

*‘Oh, hello Vicky, would you like a drink?’*

*‘No, I’m fine thank you,’ she says. ‘Can I just say something to you though?’*

I thought oh here goes, get ready for the attack.

*‘Yes of course you can Vicky?’ I said, bracing myself a little.*

*‘You’ve made the wrong decision to not pick me for the final. You need to play ME!’*

*I was startled; ‘Okay fair point but why Vicky?’ I said, ‘Why are we going to play you? We know you can be a reliable player, but you haven’t been lately. You admitted yourself you have had a massive loss of form in the last six months. To be fair to us, why would we play you tomorrow?’*

Straight away she looked me right in the eyes,

*“I am the person that can beat Vanessa Atkinson. I will beat her and certainly more than the person you’ve picked instead of me. I will win for you.”*

She really pushed me, and I started thinking about it. I thought, you know what, she’s got a point here. There’s something about the way she was speaking, her personality was coming out strongly, which I had not felt off Vicky for some time. She was demanding the responsibility after such a recent dismal run of form. It sparked me up.

It took less than 5 minutes to change my mind; *‘Right, you’re playing Vicky.’*

The other coaches questioned me, and they brought up Vicky’s recent form statistics as a worry but for me it was not about statistics, it’s about personalities of people. It was by no means time to be bland and overly sanitised; it was an instinctive read of the moment based on my take on Vicky’s attitude and knowing her as I did. She had been a stubborn player over the years, and that

can be the vital ingredient in close intense pressure matches. Her attitude to come and ‘front me out’ so confidently, told me a lot.

Vicky won her match convincingly. I was proud for her. She came off court and gave me a warm sweaty hug; ‘*thanks for believing in me*’ she said. It did a lot for her that, as a person. Yes, it was my decision to put her in, but it was Vicky who decided.

That was her last ever match for England, Vicki retired from the game soon after.

## Anecdote 5

### Peter Nicol – ‘crap drop shots’

**This is a first-person account of recollections from David Pearson, following an interview with Danny Massaro**

Coaching Peter Nicol was fun for me, he demanded honesty and would give it back too. We knew each other inside out and to this day we love each other. I met Peter when he was 15 years of age and to this day, I cannot explain how I knew in my bones that he would become a very top player. I have had moments in my life where I had feelings and it was like ‘whoa’ I kind of just know something will happen with this person. I haven’t always been accurate but many times I have.

One afternoon coaching Peter, my nephew Michael was sat behind the court watching. Michael was a very keen squash player; he was over for a lesson himself. He was in awe of Peter who by then was the world number one player. He’s watching us intently and I shout:

*‘THAT IS CRAP PETER. Can't you play a better drop shot than that? Really, my God, you can't play a drop shot and you are number one in the world. That is crap!’*

Now I knew it would be like ‘water off a duck’s back’ for him but I knew that it would annoy him a bit. That would probe him to go and practice so that next lesson he could challenge me back, just to prove a point. He was stubborn. I kept on prodding:

*‘Come On, at least hit one good one!’*

A few minutes later the session ended with a bit of a smile between us, we shook hands as always and I had a glint in my eye. I walked off court to sit down and Peter wandered off for a stretch down.

Michael comes straight over from his seat and whispers; ‘*How can you speak to the world champion like that DP? He's the world number one. It was like you were coaching me or something.*’

*‘Michael’* I said, *‘It doesn't matter whether he is world number one or world ranked 300, his drop shot was crap! It was bad and it's not about being world number one, it's about what the drop shot quality was not about him as a person or his ranking. He's not a King or anything like that.’*

*‘I know but still, it's Peter Nicol,’* he said, still flustered.

In my day, growing up, the coach was always in control. I don't mean control in a controlling way, they just never let a player get ahead of their station. Apart from anything, the coach was in charge.

*'Michael' I said, 'Peter is an extraordinarily strong personality; I have to step up to that. It does him no service to have me lie to him. His drop shots were crap today.'*

*'Now come on, let's get you on court and sort you out.'*

You should have seen the look on his little face!

## Meaning Generators - do they work?

“Children are highly motivated to hear stories – sometimes even the same one every night before bed. That is an indication of the depth and multiple meanings in stories. You might think the story is simple, but a child, listening intently, is processing the multiple levels of meaning represented in any decent tale – meanings of which you are very unlikely to be aware.” Jordan Peterson (2021, p.213)

I presented the anecdotes to people who live through a sporting life: coaches, academics, and performers. This was not an analytical process; it was simply a request for feedback on how the anecdotes affected them after reading. I want to place examples of that feedback here in the main body of the study because I believe it is valuable AS IT IS. The reader (you) of this feedback can and will infer your own meaning from the responses laid out. I have highlighted seeds of meaning expressed by each participant using **bold** type and offered a brief personal interpretation for each section.

## Participant Response (DP)

Van Manen (2014, p.255) suggests that after producing the completed anecdote one must ask the source “*Does this anecdote show what an aspect of your experience is / was like?*” This was not to be confused with “*factual or empirical validity*” but what he calls “*iconic validity*.”

My question to DP was:

*“Do the anecdotes individually and/or collectively convey the essences of your experience as you lived through them?”*

Followed by:

*“In other words, are they representative of the feelings you had going through them?”*

True to form, minimal when writing, DP replied:

*“Yes Danny, they are all great. **They gave me goosebumps.** Well done, it’s not as easy as it looks. They are all special moments to me; you can forget sometimes. Love DP.”*

It was poignant. The minimalism was to be expected and although my instant response was that I wanted ‘more’ I appreciated the depth of his response. For him to have a tangible physiological reaction provided the confirmation I had retained the phenomenological aspects of his experience in the anecdotes. It was particularly reinforcing because he had also alluded to the phenomenon of

“moments.” Buytendijk (1971) described phenomenology as the “*science of examples*” and extended this to the concept of “*singularity*”. Remembering that events are momentary and singular highlights the uniqueness of each experience and moves us from the tendencies of over generalisation to the specific, thus ironically drawing people closer to their own experiences and consequent meaning. DP’s “*goosebump*” reaction and recollecting “*special*” times of his life, suggested that the anecdotes for him had stirred something positive in him. I was tempted to tease him with a reply, “*Thanks DP, but did they have enough ‘iconic validity’ for you?*” I refrained, preferring to say “*Thanks DP, you’ve said it all there. Love Danny.*”

### **Reaction from Dave Grecic (Academic Supervisor and Golf coach)**

#### **Feedback -**

*Yes, Danny, I enjoyed the stories and they did resonate with me and my own memories of decisions, players personalities and the relationships that are built or destroyed over time.*

*In my academic role I also looked at the theory underpinning the stories – decision making, coaching philosophy, the coaching triad and so on. All fascinating stuff, I really enjoyed them.*

#### **Anecdote 1:**

*My reflections were based on **my own golf coach** Kendal Mcwade who got me to see the game completely differently – a **leap of faith** really like Laura’s, but I totally **believed in ‘him’** so bought into his concept and worked hard to utilise it in my game. This is replicated repeatedly with the elite golf coaches I know and their tour players. I’ve watched so many ‘lessons’ where similar conversations to Laura’s are taking place – change grip, angle of wrist at top of backswing etc. **If the trust stays then there is often long-term success** – Leadbetter and Faldo, Foley, and Justin Rose, etc. **As soon as the trust goes** – players jump onto the **next shiny coach** and their careers yoyo.*

#### **Anecdote 2:**

*I think about being mentored as a rugby coach by **Brian Ashton** compared with what the **RFU** wanted as part of their **accreditation** course. Brian was all about player centred learning, getting to **know them**, build a **bond**, find out what works for them, let them lead the process etc. Coaching being a values-based act, a **personal humanistic** act, that will **change day to day, moment to moment** depending on the **shared needs and wants** of the players. Plan the first 5 minutes, see how the players react, what they need and adapt accordingly. Have **strong principles and values***



*that guide the choices available. This is still how I coach today. In comparison however I have completed RFU and FA courses where I have **had to plan, write, deliver, record, and reflect on every aspect, minute by minute to show competency. Not quality, only competency!***

### **Anecdote 3:**

At a personal level I thought about coaching the Regional Basketball U16 final. We won by 2 points – last shot of the game but I didn't interchange one player – Daniel Lyons, in the entire game. Daniel was a lovely child, keen, helpful, hardworking **BUT I just didn't trust him** in such a tight game. With 2 mins to go the other boys on the bench asked did I know that Daniel hadn't played. At that point I didn't. I was just **too caught up in coaching to WIN**. I tried to see a situation where I could **THROW HIM ON** for 30 sec or so, but it was too tight a game. At the end we won, the boys, staff, parents, Head Teacher etc all celebrated but Daniel just walked off. At school, the next week he wouldn't speak to me, and his parents asked for him to move classes. This act was **like a light bulb. Why was I coaching?** What were my values, my philosophy? **I changed 180 degrees overnight!!!!**

On an **academic level** I was fascinated on how David made the 'gut' decision to drop and play the players – the tacit knowledge he had about them and players like them over many years. **More questions** - What was going through his brain, what unseen cues had he picked up on too? Are these examples of expert decisions by an expert coach OR are these deemed this from reflection and how he has made meaning from his actions and experiences?

### **Responses from UK (United Kingdom) Level 4 Sports Coaching students**

I presented the anecdotes to 7 students who were studying on a Level 4 Elite Coaching Practice MSc at the University of Central Lancashire. All coached professionally and were currently employed as Elite level coaches in their respective sports. We focussed in on anecdote 2 'I can't write myself down on paper', it generated a 45-minute dialogue between us which revealed a multiplicity of interpretation, impact and meaning.

#### **Student 1 –**

*“Yeah I had a look at the piece and I quite like the respect DP or David, as in terms of he had his own certain values and ways and beliefs and they didn't want to compromise on them and he **couldn't really articulate why** that was the case. My overriding feeling **was respect for David** and he wasn't going to compromise any of that and he felt he'd **be a fraud** if you wrote things down that's in his head and his emotions really, **I engaged in that** as a coach.”*

*“He wasn't even bothered about the success he was bothered about **his beliefs, his morals, and his values.** I thought that was really an **endearing quality, an honourable thing,** quite liked it, and that sort of endearing feeling that you got by reading it.”*

**ME:** Did that lead to anything else in you like any did that spring you off into other realms of thought and consideration?

*“It made me relate it to my own practice, but that's exactly why when I read, see, or listen, I always reflect it to me in practice. Whether that's right or wrong? And even when you're talking there, I'm thinking of **scenarios where basing myself in that position,** and sometimes it side-tracks me and I don't quite actually listen and concentrate enough because I'm thinking of how it relates to me. I don't know if that's a weakness or strength, **but that's the way I am.**”*

*“I've been coaching rugby it for 15 years and I played so I know the game, but I try things outside the box. I'm new as a head coach of Salford, it's a big job. Pitching at various levels from some players are getting the stuff that I'm talking about. Some players aren't, but you know what? I'm not bothered. What **I'm bothered about is being true** and making sure the ones who are engaged in it are growing and developing and the ones who aren't. That's **just the way it is.** They **might, not like me.** What can I do? **I'm just being me.** That's what the anecdote made me remember and confidence I suppose Danny.”*

**Student 2: -**

*“I agreed with (Student 1) on a lot of it, but I also felt that there was a little bit of **a fixed mindset,** he wasn't willing to compromise or see the other side. The guy who was insisting he write it all down, understood he was a good coach, but there were other reasons for it, and I think if you're going to go into an environment as an employee and say no, I'm not willing to compromise **it's limiting.**”*

*“Yeah, like I think it's quite understandable that he was asked to leave, or he was removed from the role. That's **not how organisations work,** and if you're not willing to grow with the times, and I think now increasingly than ever we write more down than we ever have done and documented things, and that's **kind of the way things are going** so I don't know. I didn't quite see the positives, I just thought **he sounded a bit arrogant.**”*

**ME:** *Yeah, great and do you think, well, what you might call arrogance or fixed mindset or whatever, can be a useful characteristic, or is it always a negative one?*

*“No, it's negative. I mean, I could say it's positive because you know he stuck to his guns and that. He knows what works, yeah, but there's other ways where he's missed out. He said he's got two athletes to the World Championships or whatever but possibly if he was **more growth mindset**, it would be three, four, five, like you are proving you're a great coach, but if you're so **stuck in your ways**, you're **not willing to change its bad**. I think if it was somebody asking him to do something ridiculous, I'd get it, but I don't think it's ridiculous to ask him to write down his plans, or because ultimately if you're in an organization is going to help underpin, like the development of the program underneath you, it's going to help a lot of **people, not just you.**”*

**Student 3: -**

*“I read all five of them. I thought it's an easy read if you give me a seven-page Journal to read during that time I would have really struggled. **Give me seven of those any day**, I just found it so much easier to read. And much easier to **spark my own thoughts off** rather than, you know, with the Journal layout is quite a hard read and often feel like you concentrate so hard and what they're saying. There's not much brainpower left to think about your own context was brilliant.”*

*“I think also they are quite a clever way to get it to the player easily as well. So, I was like, yeah, I really like the format for that. It has given me an idea to do it more because of the **instant impact I felt** even just sat here.”*

*“I bet he's an interesting **character**. One of you want to dinner party, alongside a few other controversial characters.”*

*“The way he deals with Nick Matthew in that anecdote I think is absolutely fascinating. I get the point of him being arrogant and quite fixed, but he clearly **knows his athletes inside out back to front and upside down** and I think that's the point he's trying to make. You see it in Coach development courses or when people go to observe other coaches, you could give them the session plan or you could put it on paper, but there's **more to it than the paper** so he could write whatever he wants on paper. People could copy it, but it's never going to be the same because they don't have that **coach-athlete link**. You can watch session, you can have the session plan sent to you, but you it's not your session so you can never get that.”*

*“I think you can really **sense the irony** with the award at the end. You know you can see that what kind of character is, but it's quite right. He developed these amazing athletes, yet the organization didn't value him because of his paperwork, but then he developed his incredible athlete because of the **talent he has in terms of his relationships** and then obviously gets the award. It really shows the **contradictions that go on.**”*

**Student 4: -**

*“I was interested, to hear Olivia’s (Student 2) perception of the anecdote because I never even gave that one ounce of a thought, and I think that's the younger generation and like an educated person from the younger generation. But **I personally** didn't take that.”*

*“I read it and I thought gosh I can **remember being in a similar situation** whereby I didn't write it down because I thought that's how I got here. I ‘blagged’ it a little bit and I didn't really know what I was doing. I just happened to turn up at the Olympics a couple of times, but I didn't really know what I was doing. **I just did it.** And it's only really, I suppose, in later years, like coming on, doing a little bit of tutoring, and then coming on this course, that when you're hearing things, thinking, oh, **I do know more than what I gave myself credit for.** So, I think it's that's what I took from it. There is **more to knowledge** than writing it down formally.”*

*“I also took it from an educational point of view that he was under confident. Huge under confidence when it comes to **some modern ways of analysis and technology.** He didn't have, you know, he couldn't understand what he was doing, **he just did it.** It was **a feel** and I just think in life and especially in coaching everyone had has **different strengths.** We have a national coach that's very much like that and a **phenomenal coach, but she couldn't lecture.** She certainly couldn't come on this course and she couldn't, you know, I will get a phone call going “help’ I meant to be on Skype and my camera is not working,” you know, and but she's a phenomenal coach. So, I think everybody has **different areas that they're comfortable with.** I certainly have and it's **good to know that I think.**”*

**Student 5: -**

*“I really **empathised with DP** in the anecdote. I've I felt like that for a long time everybody wants everything from a coach, they want them to be better at things that **aren't necessarily natural to them.** At the same time, you put yourself in the middle of the English Institute of Sport and suddenly they think you know nothing, and they are the expert of the analysis, and the physiotherapist and the psychologist. But, in your own way, on a day-to-day basis, you*

are that person that's expected to pick up all those roles in a different way, that's what coaching is, **a whole, not separate bits**. You can't really write all that down."

"I was only having a **conversation this week** about, you know the people who get the top medals and suddenly they now want to be the CEO, but in fact to be the CEO of British gymnastics compared to being Olympic coach of a medallist is just light years away and I think in olden days it was very much the person who was the best coach ran the club or they ran the business or they ran. You know the regional academies and things like that. And I think you know sports just gone to such a level now that everybody must know what they're good at and **stop spreading yourself too thinly**. Coaches need to **coach how they like to coach**; administrators need to administrate you know, and so on."

**ME:** "Stay in their lane" perhaps?

"Still develop and all that and learn but yes that's it. The **anecdote has reminded me** of that, it's important to remember the **obvious things, what you do well**. I do a **better job that way** and I **feel way better too** which as head coach is good for everyone, they get the **better version of me more of the time**."

#### **Student 6: -**

"When I read that is almost **like reading about myself** sometimes like I don't really like writing down lessons and stuff like that so it really hit home that way but it was interesting because it kind of almost felt towards the end he was pushed out of his job just for how he is and not look at actually well what he done to then get to where he was in the first place, you know."

"I can set a drill for 15 different people and each 15 different persons will get something different out of that drill. So, it is irrelevant on the drill 'cause you must **coach the person** and then see the individual movement and everything else like that. So, Peter should have asked the question for him to write it down, but in another way relating to certain people or certain style of play. Like a **player example not a formula**. Then he might have been able to do that, but for him to just write it down without context, it's all mostly I would say it's impossible feat for someone who is a **personality-based coach**."

"Yeah, it was ironic that he gets the trophy again, but then that was like the best thing about that tale. 'cause it just shows that no matter if you stick to what you believe and **what you believe is working, that's fine**. But if you stick to what you believe in, sometimes that's **not always going to have that happy ending**, so you know you must find that medium of where you're at as a coach."

*“And what **stage of their life** that coaches in at that time as well, you know because if you’re thinking “well I’m retiring a couple of years.” it’s different than beginning your career. You know, you’re gonna do everything you can to try and like be national team head coach aren’t you? You know like it’s **one of those things you know, in a coaching life.**”*

**Student 7: -**

*“Anecdotes like this might be a clever way to pass on coaching information and be a good method to **allow conversations to develop** with my players. I liked the first one about the change of Grip. It was not just about that obviously, but it did still remind me of how important small fundamental things can be. I mean it was a big reason she won the British Open.”*

*“We need to make sure we can pass it on to the younger coaches coming through 'cause otherwise it **could be like lost craft** you know like how to mill flour or something like that. We want to modernise, but you can show young coaches and players how to do things better **just by the way you are** and by them coming to watch you do things and copying. It’s like **how you are is just as crucial** as what you say or write down, its **more crucial** I think.”*

**ME:** *Have you experienced that personally?*

*“I have yes. I learn that way, it **sticks**. **People rub off on me** and then I get **through to them** if it’s a player or I listen to them more if they are coaching me. It’s a bit **like street credibility** with each other. Anyone can chat this and that but you gotta **buy into a person** and **keep that respect** between you. **I loved the stories, they are proper.**”*

**Student Response Summary**

I did not desire to dilute the responses here or interpret them, I wanted to leave immediate resonance. Each of the seven individual coaches/students provided a representation of how the anecdote in question triggered various forms of personal interpretation. Consequently, the anecdotes stirred up meaning in them as related to their own experiences. This was noticed by me as an emotional engagement too, as if they had been stirred up in an alternative way to direct information which I often dispense. The anecdotes played out as invitations to take part in the learning and an extraction process occurred from each of the participants. I sense the anecdotes represented a more enticing gateway for each student to reveal their own self-confidence, vulnerabilities and tacit know how. Their own experiences emerging as potential anecdotes, in themselves valuable to an academic process that can feel more distant and difficult than it should. Rather than a potential overwhelm of ‘things to learn’ learning emerged from relaxed realisations emanating out of lived experiences. The

mood was light throughout the group, and it spread. As the presenter I certainly felt rapport and trust amongst us, a levelling of status as we all shared our own stories and fell to the great denominator of one's own existential truths.

### **Dialogue Summary**

Phenomenological anecdotes can offer a valuable addition to the way we can understand a life lived in sport. They can 'get through' and speak to ranging levels of maturity and self-awareness. Rich in texture and layered with skill, one can paddle and splash in the surface shallows or dive deep down into the depths of them, both with profound potential to help. There is a time and a place for both approaches in sports coaching and performance situations, the simple and the complex. Although the collection presented here are all based upon one coach's experiences and his own style, revealed in his voice, there is much can be gleaned about sports coaching and performance in general terms. Simple and profound tales that may simply remind us of our own stories which themselves may come back to life. These anecdotes and our own are easily accessible, packaged nuggets of information that we can pay attention to and listen to repeatedly. They can be therapeutic at best, interesting at the minimum. We can repeat them enthusiastically, with humour and with our own additions and style creeping in. To produce them also takes patient skill and personal reflection and I suggest them to be excellent mechanisms for coaches and players alike to make sense and celebrate aspects of their sporting experiences.

## DIALOGUE 4

### ‘Autophenomenography – Danny Massaro’

#### Reader Entrance

This dialogue presents raw descriptions of my (Daniel Massaro) immersion in complex and highly personal coaching experiences at competition on the world professional squash tour. I utilised the methodology of “autophenomenography” to convey emic ontological experience; *a fly in the room* not merely on the wall! Most of my data presented was recorded whilst coaching my spouse (Laura Massaro) at professional tournaments with some coming post career to contrast the experiences. The reader is presented with constructed poetry and instant reflections that were honed to capture the essence of my emotions and states of being at the time of experience. By *showing and not telling* the reader I aimed to reveal and convey some experiences I lived through and communicate the complexity and ambiguities I felt regularly. By inviting the reader *in with me* the aim is to stir up deeper understandings, more a *felt sense* arising from their own similar experiences. From this *embodied understanding* (Todres) combined with their intellectual reasoning of the data presented, they can gain different insights into aspects of their own experiences, insights that might lead them to a more useful way of living through their own sporting careers. Autophenomenography is brought to life in a way that shows the reader its usefulness as a methodology that gives precedence to the emic ontological pillar of this study.

#### Auto-phen-om-en-o-graphic what?

Maree Gruppetta (2004), it would seem, is the author who first refers to the term ‘autophenomenography’ in a conference paper, where she argues that “*if an auto-ethnographic researcher analyses her/his own experiences of a phenomenon rather than of a ‘cultural place’ (as would be the case in an autoethnographic study), then the appropriate term would be ‘autophenomenography’.*” Autophenomenography, is in the autobiographical realm, where the phenomenological researcher is both researcher and participant in a study of their own involvement with certain phenomenon or phenomena. This differs from the auto/ethnographic genres of reporting particular social groups who share a common culture. Even though phenomenological in nature with data gleaned from immersive range, researchers nevertheless remain on the side-lines, observing subjectively, detached.



As Gruppetta (2004) notes, phenomenological researchers (in the social sciences) have been criticised by some because, unlike auto/ethnographers, they rarely actually participate in the processes under study, relying instead upon second-hand accounts. This would not necessarily yield the research ineffective, second-hand interpretations can be illuminating in their own way, yet *autophenomenography* does provide a means of addressing such criticism (Gruppetta 2004, Allen-Collinson 2009). This dichotomy is truly relevant to me because I feel that when coaching, I am heavily involved in the competitions, almost stuck in them, yet at the same time I am a mere observer of the action unfolding before me. I have never hit one of Laura's shots for her! *Autophenomenography* bridges this paradox better than any other form of methodology I had previously used. It provides me a means of capturing 'rich and precise' (Allen-Collinson, 2009) feelings and textures of coaching, particularly at competition sites. More importantly it became a friendly mechanism to me, allowing for relief and release of 'my lived biased truth,' my *Dasein* reality, those private and continual contemplations.

Stewart (2005) states in relation to the process of writing qualitative research, "***there exists a powerful tension between what can be known and told and what remains obscure or unspeakable but is nonetheless 'real'.***" As phenomenology readily acknowledges, some experiences are indeed without – or beyond – language. Nevertheless, I have discovered in the process of attempting my own *autophenomenographic* writing I feel to have expressed my lived experiences more richly than previous attempts. In common with auto ethnography too, there is the scope for a wide spectrum of representational styles, ranging from modified realist tales (cf. Sparkes, 2002) to more evocative genres such as poetic representations and performative, audience-interactive forms such as dialogues and Socratic questioning (see, e.g., Hopper *et al.*, 2008, Todres, 2008).

### **Background Magic**

"Not until we begin to talk from our own dark recesses can we fully appreciate the risk for others...to open up to us." Rockhill (1987 p.13, cited in Church, 1995, p.67)

This statement points to the fundamental inclination for centring myself within my wider research. Along with my experiences as an academic educator, sporting coach and curious researcher, I retain the conviction that my encounters as a developing competitive Squash player and learner of various sports in my youth, provided and continue to provide me the most fertile background on which to seed my evolving coaching life. There is something vital in what I have lived through which orients me, a level of familiarity that helps me across a multitude of social and sometimes cultural

contexts. Such experiences which lurk in the background jump to the foreground on so many occasions, nudging me in a certain direction. They settle me down; they provide grounding and sometimes a wisdom which informs me how to proceed. It is not so much intuition or a ‘gut feeling’ but more an automatic mode of being that is there, it is embodied. I slip into these modes naturally; the environment pulls it out of me, and it is not something I need to ‘switch on.’ The same which happens when I walk in the woods, walk with my dog, or absorb music. There is no doubt a neurobiological explanation for it, that can be traced as far back as the evolutionary biologists can consider but for me as I operate, in the world, in my life situations, I experience empathy and familiarity for the situation, and this helps. A warmth emanates from understanding my own specific experiences, my struggles, and naiveties. My past experiences are alive in that present moment, situating me more firmly, in a less volatile mood. There is less detachment from the person I am coaching because there is more attachment with myself. This is what keeps the warmth of feeling between us, even though I can still be panicking, predicting, and planning at heightened levels.

As much as I relish digesting words and considering what they may represent as I make meaning from them and as illuminating as listening and conversing with others continues to be, they take silver and bronze medals when it comes to overall value. My own Being-in-the-world and ready-to-hand immersion in my life’s experiences, takes Gold. In *Background Practices – Essays on the Understanding of Being* (2017, p.8) Hubert Dreyfus articulates

**“Background practices** make the world intelligible to us. Such an understanding is contained in our knowing-how-to-cope in various domains rather than a set of beliefs that such and such is the case. Thus, we embody an understanding of being that no one has in mind. It becomes a familiar feeling, less a logical breakdown.”

This embodied ‘*knowing how to cope across domains*’ that is not only difficult to articulate but not often considered as a thing to articulate in the first place, was another part of the emic understanding I wanted to research at the outset. Heidegger (1966) warned “*the greatest danger of the approaching tide of technological revolution in the atomic age could so bewitch, dazzle, and beguile man that calculative thinking may someday come to be accepted and practiced as the only way of thinking.*” A feeling I have always had is that in sport as in life we must *leave room for the magic* and be careful not to over intellectualise everything to the point of fact. Music, Christmas time, poetry, walks amongst nature, friendships, God, childhood, Animals, and playing/learning sport have all benefitted from some analysis and conscious thinking yet I have learned it to be vital for my *life’s zest* to press

the *calculating* pause button and leave *breathing space* for background practices to do their magic. Sometimes it is nice to sit back, just notice and be taken care of.

### **Naturally, I am Biased!**

Edmund Husserl (1901) originally proposed that phenomenology must '*bracket out*' personal bias, assumptions, and existing beliefs, '*epoche*' he termed it. Such a *suspension of judgement* was dismissed by former disciple Martin Heidegger and criticised by Jean Paul Sartre, both firmly proposing that humans are '*beings in the world*' and therefore '*bracketing out*' the self, would be not only impossible but unnecessarily reductionistic. In the data presented in this dialogue; my poetry, my considered ramblings, and my instant reflections, I am most aware of my situatedness and bias in the moment of production. I cannot conceive of highlighting then filtering and removing all my momentary biases and interpretations, not to mention my more rooted background ones. I believe going down that road can indeed cause levels of paralysis, paranoia in some cases. The theoretical tendency to aim for and arrive at some clean unbiased conceptual end point, ready to be packaged up and bartered as some neat '*how to*' for all, denies this kind of inherent human bias. It reduces *Dasein* and its propensities to wriggle, survive and exist to gain some advantage over its situation. The '*messy*' stuff of pure truth is left out, presuming there exists a *truth* at all! Worse, it cannot understand *mess* so aims at eliminating it with a clean blast, a rational torpedo that one could apply to mechanics or engineering. This is my life however; this is professional sport and it is always messy!

Stranda and Rinehimerb (2018, p.37) make the point

“In autophenomenography biases are understood to be part and parcel of the lived experience. Biases and personal perspectives emerged as tensions before, during, or after the experiences in our researcher journals. We used these tensions to learn how our internalised beliefs and perceptions impacted and informed the meanings that we constructed throughout our study.”

Thus, admitting my blatant *constructivist* and not so blatant *ontological* underpinning to my autophenomenographic data is more vital than denying it. Consequent reflections can then incorporate elements of natural bias, and how this enriches the whole experience as opposed to forced elimination of it as something damaging or in some way irrelevant. This is not to merely go '*full natural-attitude*' as Husserl was sceptical of but instead to allow my *relative realism* to shine through the data. Consequently, without preference or rank, the phenomenology can stand alone '*as it is*'

without being interfered with or side by side with my continual attempts at rational interpretation and logical reduction of my experiences.

Another crucial point from methodological perspective is that ‘*the phenomenological researcher is required to promote an ‘air of equality’ rather than an air of superiority due to age, position, power or prior knowledge, and the participant is the real authority.*’ (Thomas & Pollio, 2002, p.24) Grupetta (2014) poses the question; “*how can the researcher be ‘equal’ if they are not willing to share the participant’s position by becoming a participant themselves?*” She also repeats the assertion made by Thomas and Pollio (2002, p.4) that “*participants must be co-researchers, not subjects*” in successful phenomenological studies. Putting myself at centre in this Dialogue goes a step further than *Dialogue 1* where although situated throughout, I appeared in a ‘factional’ guise which allowed for a palatable narrative that could fit snugly with previous philosophical standpoints. Here, with my own phenomenography, the data is free, much closer to the things themselves and unconcerned with explanations for the reader. The reader is requested to work hard for their own meaning and certainly must get involved.

#### **Almost but not quite : CRITICAL REALISM**

North, J. (2013 & 2017) has applied the philosophical framework of *Critical Realism*, originally brought to bear through Roy Baskhar’s ideas on the natural and social science fields (Baskhar,1975). Critical Realism suggests (amongst other elements) that there is an ontological depth to reality which includes “underlying materials and emergent causal structures that are not easily identified through events and our experiences of them.” It adds that the epistemological lens we decide to consider things through is inextricably influencing what we come to understand. North J (2013) explains;

“existing coaching practices makes Ontological assumptions about coaching on epistemological foundations. For example, it is common for coaching researchers using Psychology as a parent discipline to root their work in a scientism epistemology and quantitative methodology. This presents a view of, or approach to understanding, coaching which has been variously described atomistic, mechanistic systematic, controllable, and predictable (e.g., Jones & Wallace, 2005).”

From a *critical realist* perspective, it is virtually impossible to pinpoint the empirical causal factor of outcomes or experiences in social and natural worlds, particularly where humans are involved. Thus, the term ‘*openness*’ (Baskhar, 1975) is proposed in a salute to open systems constantly

interacting causing vast multiplicity. For me, the Critical Realist view leans towards Heidegger's 'being in the world' and lingers close to the non-dual almost transcendental aspects of his Ontological phenomenology. North, J (2013) concludes Critical Realism may act as an '*orienting structure*' by which to consider the sports coaching phenomenon

"In conceiving coaching practice as the inter-relationship between objects (e.g., physical spaces, artefacts, coaching stakeholders), structures (e.g., norms and rules of coaching groups and particular sports), and mechanisms (e.g., the physical and cognitive resources and strategies of coaching stakeholders) in open multi-layered social systems, with routine and non-routine elements, a critical realist approach moves beyond existing psychological-sociological, quantitative-qualitative, agency-structure, coach-athlete, simple-complex, and stable-dynamic dichotomies."

#### **REFLEXIVE NOTE:**

I was pointed towards Critical Realism by two academic colleagues, particularly the work of North and Baskhar, whilst responding to a request to explain my research to them. I did not feel well listened to (they did not have the time to relax) but nevertheless they were quick to help and offer something they had heard of in this ballpark of '*how one might live/coach well through a sporting life?*' Many of us in Academia have a habit of scanning our brains for vaguely relevant research when temporally unnerved by revelations of probable 'gaps' in our expert subject knowledge. It reminds me of the game children play where they race to put their hand on top of the other's hand as quickly as possible to always have the top hand, but at least that is in the spirit of fun not insecurity or impatience to listen enough.

For me, my colleagues missed the point of my intended message. Although *Critical Realism* aims to converge the raw and deeper '*lived experience*' with the more '*operational and empirical*' mechanisms of understanding, it still falls into the trap of devolving into a 'reductionist procedure', offering layers of specific tactics (North 2017; Chapter 6 - Critical Realist Informed Sport Coaching Ontology for Interdisciplinary Thinking and Research: **Introducing the ERE Model**) on how we can get to a common truth as regards experience in the sports coaching realm. For me, this was much like the behaviour of a snake who obliviously eats its own tail. For the same reason I have deliberately veered away from the confines of '*Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis*' (Smith, Jarman & Osborne 1999; Reid, Flowers & Larkin 2005.) I sense that the moment one aims to condense things into some form of guidelines, a one size fits all 'Acronym' or overconfident 'how to' mechanism, the ontological bubble bursts in your heavy hands.

Reductionism creeps back into the place where ironically it was professed to be left alone and while it may be either useful or ineffective, IT IS WHAT IT IS! This in my view, requires to be realised and admitted.

Whilst we could sink into the lower absurdities of semiotics on this path, signs, and signifiers and all, ‘what does language even mean?’ and so on, we must resist that too. We ought to allow ourselves more opportunities to be perplexed, wondrous, even anxious because these are the conditions, we swim in. My autophenomenographic writing is enough by itself on the plate, it requires little to no garnish. It is the meal. It benefits it to be served alone; it needs its space. It requires no second-hand or underhand deduction apart from where the reader can meet it. **The point of it is to point! Not to tell.** It shines as an example of how things can be useful if left alone: - something *Critical Realism* partly indicates but ultimately fails to do. Leaving things as they are from time to time, just noticing, may be the most difficult existential skill to trust and therefore do. We might live well, if we can value a sporting life as it is, not as hypothesized or condensed into another convenient acronym.

#### “Show don’t tell.”

“To facilitate embodied understanding is to make understanding ‘habitable’ for others in a lively way. The path of embodied enquiry in qualitative research thus seeks to show and evoke the presence of a lived experience through words. It does not arrive at a summative ‘essence’ but offers ‘good words’ that describe and show, but do not KILL the sense of aliveness that they refer to.” Todres (2008, p.6)

How do we retain the richness and texture of individual experiences when formulating a level of description that applies generally and typically? As a researcher I feel the fear of the overly abstract, accusations of the ‘wishy washy’ kind, the over vague and self-indulgence, even narcissism. Philosophy appears this way in general to some people I have noticed, eager to ask “.....yes but what does it DO and how can I use it?” It is a fair question in a practical world. Pragmatism courses through my life and especially my coaching approaches and so it continues to be an ongoing leap of faith to allow the raw. Nevertheless, I am noticing value in resisting the rush to action and conclusion, there is wisdom to be had in the ‘clearings’ and producing autophenomenographic data (writing/considered raw ramblings) has aided me in this.

Aristotle claimed, *'no universal is substantial – only particulars are substantial.'* It is the *'substantial'* of my experiences that my autophenomenographic *'spills'* of language have revealed to me. A unique perspective, a deeper sense of the confusions I always have, and a remix of the philosophical assumptions I thought were authentically my own. Elements of the *'absurd'* (Camus), *'bad faith'* (Sartre), *'ambiguity'* (De Beauvoir) and *'will to power'* (Nietzsche) reveal themselves to me, they muddle me and confuse which helps mainly. I have realised that much of what I lecture about on sports coaching philosophy modules have been futile *'gap-filling'* exercises, built to satisfy external constructs of what a *coaching philosophy* is. I can certainly notice this in my previous attempts to discuss and write my philosophy down. When *'DP'* (Dialogue 3) used to tell me, *'I don't really have a coaching philosophy Danny, I just coach,'* I could never understand him nor the bewilderment on his face when I attempted to explain away his naivety! The memory tightens me up; the man has coached well for 40 years without a formulated *coaching philosophy* and there I would be attempting to constrict him. *'I enjoy telling stories though, there is something in that, just come and watch if you want to know more. It is not a science project after all is it?'* he would usually add.

## **Researcher Autophenomenography**

### **Poem 1 – The seat**

This is a poem I wrote to express my experience sat in the coaching *'seat'* at the World Open Championships March 2019. It was slightly unusual as I knew beforehand that I was going to sketch down a poem after the match, so I was a little more *'meta'* than usual. Despite this, I was still very much engrossed, and the match sucked me in as always.

#### **“The seat”**

Trapped in being

The child within

Past weighing in

Future heavy

Ease this need

Want this so much

Confused now

Clarity will arrive

Stop the jealousy  
Use the fear  
Open my heart  
Hang on tight

Energy fluctuates  
Spirit fragile  
I am  
I am not

Significant man  
Irrelevant sponge  
Today is the day  
Will I come again?

Ambiguity consuming  
Philosophy jumps  
Being unfolding  
Being me  
Sit

What I felt more than anything else here was to try and capture the mood that occasion, THAT contest. Naturally, there are familiar aspects in play emerging from hundreds of ‘sittings’ coaching my wife through competition. Some aspects are common to every match, some to certain tournaments, some to certain places, some against certain players and some to the stages of the tournament, especially first rounds, semi-finals, and finals. Yet there is freshness there too, new specific elements on each occasion. I regularly consider the now paraphrased aphorism attributed to pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus “*No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and he's not the same man.*” Heraclitus believed the *flux* of life, the *becoming*, the *flows* of life are the Universe’s underlying principles. This was proposed in contrast to the philosophy of another pre-Socratic thinker Parmenides, who believed in the static nature of things, of elements. For me, I empathise with both points of view. I sense the static and direct repetition of experience of things and situations whilst simultaneously aware of the unique ‘nowness’ of this experience, knowing the moment will never come back exactly like this. Both perspectives are comforting and unsettling. It all adds to the urgency and maybe why you hear a lot about ‘*carpe diem*’ in professional sport.



The coaching seat brings on a heightened sensitivity, slightly nauseating from all the details coming in. This is good because I interpret it as being awake, on hand and ready to use my instincts. When I read this poem back, even right now as I write this, I am feeling the strangeness again. I have some of the same bodily sensations, the tingling feet especially. I feel proud of myself for repeatedly showing up. Heidegger called this *'Berfindlichkeit'* – a form of understanding when we read the text of a human situation – we relate ourselves to its mood – and can thus understand it with our HEARTS as well as intellect. Heidegger advocated for poetry as a way of accessing a deeper truth of experience where both author and reader could relate better together;

“Poems retain their pre-reflective qualities of experiential structures – concrete, embodied, mooded, sensed, interrelated and full of imagination gathered from other times and places. In poetry, one’s relatedness to existence is revealed in that it asks the listener to move towards the speaker or the text and to find the body of the occasion, its taste, and mood on his or her own.” *Heidegger in Todres* (2009, p12)

Expressing my experiences through poetic attempts has revealed new interpretations of myself and those moments I lived. I notice my ambiguity and desperation in a way I had not previously. I feel more sympathy for myself yet notice my own role in creating the drama. There may be different meanings for the reader to attach with particularly when contrasted with my lectures or more formal packaging of the experience. There are enough signposts available for direction and interpretation. The reader can intellectualise my communication if they so wish or they can allow it to just sink in. In the true hermeneutic tradition, there is room for both me (writer) and reader to admit and allow personally biased interpretive contributions to the meaning of the text. How would it be human to be any other way? Interpretive bias is not so much a ‘shady tactical tendency’ we need to heap cynicism on but a vital dance between ourselves and the world we are thrown into.

**"The untenability of one interpretation of the world, upon which a tremendous amount of energy has been lavished, awakens the suspicion that all interpretations of the world are false."** Friedrich Nietzsche, Will to Power

Here Nietzsche points towards something fundamental concerning the human condition and the need to avoid ‘giving up’ on all things just because previous beliefs, values have under reconsideration, collapsed. When highlighting and encouraging such revision of taken for granted value systems, we must be careful to leave enough potential meaning in the world so that people can

work with it and not fall into some vast meaningless gap, ripe to be sucked up by the readymade comforts of Nihilistic or Totalitarian blankets. “God is dead” may have been the most provocative nihilistic statement in all philosophy, yet Nietzsche still called for personal meaning-making efforts from individuals. No uncomplicated way out unless you are a Nazi type perhaps! Descriptions of phenomena that refrain from the over vague and veer wisely from the temptations of doctrine, retain something flexible and special in this sense, they tantalize and invite you in. It is vital that people ‘take part’ in their lives and poetic presentations encouragement that. My poetic stanzas offer me hope, some despair, a place to empty and feel meaning.

## **Poem 2 – Riding High**

In this poem ‘Riding High,’ the ground beneath me is most solid and the structure of my beliefs stiffen. I say ‘stiffen’ as opposed to strengthen for a reason. What comes to mind is the sudden rigidity of self-assurance here, solid ground. I have cracked the code; I am the man. It is a specific example of my intellect and emotions working together to provide me with the pleasure and security of certainty. I have power, albeit relative power. Power over others, over fate itself. In this moment there feels no awareness of the temporary nature of my confidence. I have arrived. Who needs empathy when you have power? What use are doubts and reflection when you just know? When you have that dopamine and serotonin topped up, there is no need for the adrenaline shots. It feels great to ride this high and that is in some ways the prize for riding the rollercoaster so often. The ‘high’ is boosted by the awareness it is not a ‘low.’ There is relief seasoning the joy. One glance across at the losers in this situation and it is enough to remind me relief is there all right. It is hard for me to be truthfully empathetic for others even though I can logically understand and remember the feelings of having the ground shake beneath your world. That comes later after sobering up.

### **“Riding High”**

What’s the big deal? Why so stressed  
Everybody else, easy to see your mistakes  
If you only knew my secrets, you could be in the place  
I am in NOW, clarity with peace

Possibilities sprouting, revelations  
WOW - obvious suddenly  
Those ‘neurodrugs’ do work  
I read that recently (keep it a secret)

Yet they make me want to tell all, my new religion  
Taller, springy feet, it adds to the high  
So, is this high any good for me, running for as long as we all run?  
Go with it, let the head swell but only in HUMILITY  
Ego is bad they say, doesn't seem so this time around

Everybody was right, every word  
All the hero stories shine forth, connected  
To me, I could be a hero maker  
A prophet once told me, now I'll profess!

Let's all be friends; you need a person like me  
I understand your lot, you lot  
Come and ride this horse, but you will have to share  
I like it up here

This will last. At last!  
The promised land exists after all  
Freedom  
Or the monkey trap

\*Monkey Trap -



### **The Instability of Uncertainty – an Overwhelm**

I noticed the tendency within myself to need certainty, something to cling to. What I interpret from my poetic data is the desire for some structure underneath me, something stable to ground me and rely upon. It may be a coaching idea, a theory, a philosophy, praise or confirmation from others, a belief, even a trusted superstition can become strangely stable. Winning reinforces the stability, I feel it in my feet, within the skin that surrounds me, comfortable and homely. Yet, an unexpected loss and the ground shakes. One loss too many, one that particularly laughs in the face of the secure stability naively manufactured in my mind and a disorienting vacuum opens all around. So quickly too. From one tournament to the next I have felt this swing and it starts to get under your skin.

## **Shanghai Reflection - 2017**

Here was a reflection I wrote the morning after a disappointing loss in Shanghai. It is unpleasant to read, and I feel embarrassed by my nihilistic if not dramatic piece of self-pity that could take over my mood on certain occasions. Meaning draining from me as the structure of what we believed in, fell to pieces in one 35-minute match.

*This is no fun anymore; it feels barren and bleak.*

*I'm much heavier this morning. Much more dead weight.*

*A long way from home in this awful plastic hotel. That stale smell.*

*There is a wider space between us, a little more even than last night when the adrenalin and shock came up with all the fixes.*

*Panic is trying to break through now and it is having some success. Where has the colour gone, where is the bright future?*

*Deep breath. It is that rejection thing again, thrown away. Empty belly, a cave of space, maybe that's the lack of guts. Wallow in it, no! fight it.*

*Pity me, for once somebody rescue me. Stop being a Baby. Speaking of babies, where are they by now?*

*"How did you sleep? She asks*

*"Alright..."*

*"Shall I open the curtains?"*

*"Yeah, whatever...."*

*Hurtful. Nasty. Notice my pain, I always notice yours. It isn't always about you.*

*Come on feel as bad as I do. We need an argument now, let's really dig this out. All the festering bits, all the bullshit, the bits that really scare us. Come on, I need that adrenaline, I ain't getting going otherwise.*

*Users.*

Leaving raw, live emotions on the page, alone, unexplained, unjustified, and reasoned out stirs up doubt in my sense of self as researcher. But what of my emotions if these are meant to be buried – at what cost? The Academic part of my being shrills at the data above. Not only am I suspicious about my bias and requirement to be impartial observer (even of myself) I have forever suspected emotions are not supposed to count as much as intelligence in theoretical analysis (with no evidential basis for this belief). So, as a researcher I am usually suspicious of them, yet I am beginning to relax.

The emotions revealed in my reflection are intelligent. They are intelligent beyond conception. Psychologist and neuroscientist Lisa Feldman Barrett (2017) presented compelling evidence for the '*theory of constructed emotion*' which runs counter to a two-thousand-year-old assumption that emotions are essential properties simply waiting around to be triggered off. She explains "*emotions are experienced without conscious effort but that does not mean you are a passive recipient, emotions are very real creations of social reality, made possible by human brains*" (p281). I have developed a feeling for this. As I experienced more and began to read more philosophy, I felt more involved with the 'set up' and interpretation of my situations. I refrain from any connotations with 'emotional control' apart from the superficial parts where consequences felt minimal. Easy to pick paradigms of meaning with 'no skin in the game' I started to realise.

Barrett (2019, p.287) explained her concept of *Affective Realism*:

"Your personal experience is actively constructed by your embodied actions. You tweak the world and the world tweaks you back. You are in a very real sense, an architect of your environment as well as your experience.... What we experience as 'certainty' is an illusion the brain manufactures to help us make it through each day. Giving up on that certainty now and then is a good idea."

I have felt that I am an actor changing the script to suit where I want to go with the character. Manipulative even. I am suspicious of my emotions because I cannot separate them from my cunning. In my data above and throughout this dialogue I can feel the manipulation underneath. I am far from completely overcome or out of control, I know I am at some level within me concocting a state. It is not shock or absolute pain but a construction of some sort. So as 'raw' and unbiased as *autophenomenography* can be presented or any data for that matter, the unequivocal truth can never be objectified. Consequently, I do not feel it is relevant to aim at. What is relevant is to access the

intersubjective, phenomenological experience the person can admit to. This is the land where ‘reality’ is formed and therefore the only place worth travelling to and searching.

### **Hong Kong Reflection 2018**

This collection of data was written throughout the day of the quarter final match. I wrote to encompass how it felt to me at the time as the day unfolded. There are some explanations and reflexive notes, but this is as close as I could reveal the “*prereflective meaning of living in the now*” (Van Manen, 2014, p.34). It is revealing only to the point that it should invite more questions from the reader and consequently encourage a different and useful type of reflection upon experiences associated with sports coaching. I flit between first and third person for no conscious reason.

- **Four hours before play**

Drip.....drip....., drip.....drip...drip, drip, drip, drip  
STOP .....drip, STOP.

Here we go, the determined and persistent intrusion, invasion has started.

Do you know that sense you get when you have an exam approaching or a driving test? It is a personal thing but to me it is a tension springing up from inside. It infiltrates my fingers, my breath, my forehead. I experience as jolts within me, a kind of alertness prodding me, as if my usual daily manner is insufficient for what is coming. Fight or flight perhaps but it feels much less dramatic than that, itchier, nagging. A dog who wants its attention, a child who is bored. The pest that pesters on.

I have learned how to hold it back a bit, decrease its effects but the natural will of this thing to flood my senses is important. It is tidal, always eager to move, happening anyway. Engineers temper such surges of the waters of our seas and oceans but the pure will and intent they embody would be futile to tackle. The sea never gives up its intentions.

This is how it feels for me coaching my wife at competitions.

The before it, the just before it, the it and the after it. Each match a Shakespearian experience all in itself.

Surging and receding movements of tensions, thoughts, energies confuse me then ‘bam’ immediate clarity, then confusion again. ‘Drunk’ sensations but without the freedom of carelessness and spontaneity (which really makes THE substantial difference and why I especially enjoy a drink at tournaments.)

I care too much, and I know this, yet I dread not caring enough.

I relate with certainty like a windsurfer relates to wind. I need a force of it to propel me somewhere, otherwise embarrassment looms, stuck. A let down. Fragile. My collapsing values. Who wants to feel stuck? Who values the man who cannot help anymore?

**Post Reflexion** - it is the ambiguity of it all that I recognise, even appreciating in retrospect. The paradoxes, the triggers of various mood states. The sense of confusion, the second guessing, the bewilderment, doubts, and emotional crutches I would learn to use. Just the quality of the *'stuff'* missing from the clean and calculated 'coaching models' that those back in blighty, back from the front line had either never felt in their bones or forgotten the smell of. Van Manen (2016, p68) puts it *"Phenomenology tries to be sensitive to the moments of thoughtfulness as well as moments of taken-for-grantedness, moments of insight, and even moments that we may experience our world in terms of mystery, confusion, disorientation, strangeness, or incongruity."*

- **30 minutes before play sat in Hong Kong Park, next to the Squash Centre, staring at the largest outdoor birdcage I have ever seen.**

Ah well, it's just a game, just do your best that's all you can do. But win.

Winning is so much better. It is a long way to come to lose something that doesn't matter anyway.

What will it be like if we do lose? I mean It's bound to happen eventually.

All nature has its eventual dark side. An avalanche, an earthquake, a drought, a harsh change of temperature, floods, viruses there's always the threat. So, whatever happens is just nature doing its thing. I hope it's not tonight though.

The 'big picture' is just a way to excuse myself. Be here Danny, do not opt out now just to feel steady. WE MUST WIN – it is important this, and it is about survival.

Losers think big picture, they aren't serious enough about winning. Those people lack care. Not me, I care. I care too much; I don't care enough. What is care? Oh, here goes.... down my own Socratic rabbit hole. Well at least it's a distraction.

But is it helping?

Leave it alone. Stop thinking. Just Eat. Watch the birds.

**Post Reflection** – writing this data at the time brought me into close relationship with my philosophising and inner monologue more than I had previously experienced. So, it was with a ‘meta’ third eye that became integral in the writing. I notice that here as I reflect on ‘reflecting/philosophising’ with myself and the role it plays in my lived experience, not least a way to pass the time of day. I am always trying to grip some form of control when apprehensive and the consolations of philosophy are very evident in this piece. There is always a pendulum going on between the ‘big picture’ and the ‘narrow focus’ required in these moments. It almost became entertaining this shifting. I was just doing my best to get into a useful state I conclude, and I never found an exact formula that worked. In truth, it was complete hit and miss in terms of success but at least I turned up every time and never once failed to ‘take part’ as best as I could manage.

- **2 hours after the match - LOST.**

A dazed unfolding again. Here it comes.

A different kind of self-consciousness is at play, do not pity me, there is nothing wrong with me.

I feel a bit like a blot on the scene. Nobody wants the loser hanging around; I mean how I can add to this scene.

I have the dishonest feeling I used to feel when I saw my parents just after I had stolen sweets from our own shop. The false face, the body revealing truth. Eye contact tough.

I do not belong here right now; I belong down a hole and there I will go.

A deep Rabbit Hole of analysis should do it.

These short lines did not come to me in such a packaged order as is laid out. The feelings and thoughts that I experience after an unexpected loss are flavoured by elements within the broad categories I list. I could have picked various descriptors for the states so this is no definitive nor prescriptive process such as those laid out in “grief processing” models which may be similar but by no means substantial enough. This is not an exact linear timeline of the experience, but the words have to be laid out somehow in a way that is useful to help stimulate personal insights whilst reducing the prescriptive power of my authorship.

**Confusion.**



Make sense of it. Everyone will want to know answers. I want answers.

I need something to know.

How? Work it out because this battle goes on, and it will go on until it ends.

Be practical, start the plan. Oh, what is the point, it's gone. It didn't work tonight did it.

Let it go – bring it back.

### **Shallow Guilt.**

Is it ME? It probably is

Should of, Could of....

That indigestion in my upper tract, like a grey stone blocking the flow

You have always been a let-down at some level Danny.

### **Stupid Faith.**

Those pathetic superstitions, clinging to things you don't honestly believe in.

I did my 50 press ups. Still lost!

Stepped on no cracks walking to the court.

Rituals galore.

Did I forget one?

Call yourself a coach?

### **Blind Reason.**

I had this all worked out before play commenced. Not just this match, the whole sport.

Forever the theorist you fool.

No rhyme – no reason. You fell for it again Danny boy!

Call yourself a coach?

### **Blame for Self-Relief.**

Detach – take the pill, it helps instantly

I didn't play - "I can't play for you"

I am just a coach

They take all the glory and feelings now it is time to take the blame. That's how these things work you know.

Detach. That's better.

### **Experience is a 'con.'**

Does experience even count anymore?

How can one get rid of experience?

It is tricking me, a false sense of security, a con. All this experience of experience is weighing down on us, give me back the innocence of youth.

It was never as heavy as this before.

### **Calming Considerations – deposit the account**

Hold on, hold on tight Danny. Do not leave a sinking ship.

There is no sinking, remember that. This is the best boat to be on, just a bad day at sea.

It hurts though, the sickness, from the inside out. Today, there is no land ahoy. Just got to stay on board and wait for all to settle.

It is the failure I think, the fall from grace. I pride my whole existence on fixing people, achieving improvements, selling my theories. I am a self-made man I tell myself, yet I know how utterly dependent I have been on others.

I have carved an identity and reputation that suits me and suits my human social marketplace. Oh my, this result threatens to let people see inside. Behind the curtains. The wizard from the Land of Oz flashes in my mind. My defensive curtain has been pulled aside, so simply. The fragility is embarrassing.

Am I a fraud really?

Can you be a fraud if you mean well?

Breathe... you mean well.

You mean well.

I am doing my best.

### **Humble Fire.**

I am centred again. That was quick. Usually takes longer.

There is flow through the Chakras again, belly to head. I can tell because this feels like optimism.

WE can't win em all, but we can win some.

A good punch to be fair, a jab, no knockout.

Awake

Plotting

Stirrings in the belly

You haven't seen the last of us. Bitch.

Have your day, you will need it.

You do not know what you have just done. Thank you.

Still jawline, clear eyes, stable stare.

WHOLE.

PROTECTED

JUDGE DISMISSED

### **Powerful Pride**

Deep pride

I am Power

I am the storm

**Let's go back and win.**

### **Post Reflexion of Data**

I can vividly feel the gears of change reading this back. Those phases of recovery from the panic and temporary shock of an unexpected or disappointing loss. Each match has its own story and context. This match was awfully close, and Laura had a match point to win. The turbulence was always hard to digest yet I read this back and can notice the pragmatism in action. I tend to be like

this. I shift from despair and some hopelessness to ‘fixing the entire problem’ within hours. I know it is how I process the worry of my ineptitude after losses. For some, sometimes, it is my biggest help to them, for others, sometimes, it annoys them terribly. I still do this. I do not worry about it; I have just tempered it. I like that I do this. It's who I am. It is consistent. It is how I function.

### **World Open Championship - Chicago 2018**

I had arrived in Chicago with high hopes for Laura to go far in the event. I was also coaching three other players in the men's draw and one young girl playing in her first world championships. They were all doing well, and I was receiving comforting praise wherever I walked around the venue.

It feels energising to be in such demand. There is a future opening again. The next phase of significance perhaps.

My confidence has returned, my friendliness pouring out, looking for eyes.

I am appreciating the little things and noticing the effort everyone is putting in. I am wearing the double lenses of excitement and possibility, its tainting my whole perceptions of myself, the sport and life in general.

I am in a good place here. Its effortless and although tired I feel the buzz of spring.

Love

After two victories Laura unexpectedly lost her match in the 3<sup>rd</sup> round. She lost 3 games to zero and the way it happened brought Laura to the realisation she was ready to retire from professional Squash at the end of this season. Five tournaments left then!

### **SPIRALLING – a better way to go around in circles**

I sense that feeling of going around the roundabout again. Am I going nowhere by doing this? Am I supposed to be getting somewhere else?

I do not feel encased in the circle and although it is familiar to me, the pattern, it doesn't feel like a trap. I have an image of a spiral in the background, and I am revolving slowly upwards. Is this what experience is?

The same old same old but with a higher view.

I have always felt acceptance as unhelpful, weak. I have wanted to push it back and deny it. I have reacted against the weakness, the losses, the shame. Action, action, do something about it. Create turbulence, start a fire, accuse, and recycle the bad energy into good energy. I know energy is energy but sometimes it feels like it has a personality.

Acceptance is giving up. Acceptance softens instincts that I need to stay the course, to be of any use to my wife in our whole reasoning for flying around the world hitting balls against a wall with the same people, in the same places.

So why accept now? Something is different about it.

Acceptance is emerging from deeper inside and it feels useful for the first time. It feels appropriate and I still feel useful.

There is no surrender in me. I am evolved, I am spiralling. I am spiralling up. Those ‘Spiral Dynamics’ I used to teach are awash in my being. I have taught them over and over, up, and down, both ways up but now I am making the leap across.

Second tier apparently, an integration. To think I once knew it all. This is quite beautiful, this is my prize for walking this path so far, my path.

It feels close to the end of the tracks, but I could turn around and live it all again. It has been amazing to witness and absorb. It has changed me; it is changing me. LOVE. Love is easier to access even amongst the nerves on the rollercoaster.

What a sense of relief. There is no need to exit because there is nothing to go from.

Just spirals.

So, I sit here, in Chicago Laura just lost a few hours ago when she expected to win. I don’t feel weak for still loving her wholly. I don’t feel useless anymore for not doing more to help. I am happy to hold my head up in front of everyone, even the temporary embarrassment the ‘daze’ has departed. I accept it. I accept all of it. I am overwhelmed with tears and I experience a ‘happy cry’ for the first time in years. Spiralling up, dropping the weight.

**Post Reflection:** After I wrote this out on the Pier, surrounded by a Lake so big I still cannot convince myself it is not a sea, I walked back to my hotel in the freezing temperature. I note that the music I played in my headphones sounded extra meaningful and delightful. I had it on ‘shuffle’ selection and every vocal, the rhythms, and each instrument had extra grab. Perfection. It is phenomenon I usually experienced after a big win. These were powerful moments when the perspective hit home. I felt like I was meaningful, and I still mattered to people. I felt genuine and a drop-off of that lurking ‘imposter syndrome’ that occasionally flooded my being. I had rearranged predictions of my future here,

despite Laura's impending retirement. This must have been a deeper fear building within me somewhere and out on that lake shore, that tension left me, and I walked back to shore and my future life with a new purpose and far less weight on my shoulders.

### **January 2020 - Coaching at a tournament post wife's career, New York.**

This is the first tournament I have been to since my wife retired. I will be coaching two other professional players here. Laura is here with me in New York, she has other players she is coaching.

This feels much more akin to a holiday experience, a celebration. No feelings of self-assessment or impending deadline. I was trepid about walking back into the environment, visualising being in the way or appearing clingy, as I have often criticised others for their inability to 'move on' once retired. It has always been important to me to have a sense of moving on, transcendence, independence, autonomy. I fear my own judgement as much as what the others can think, and this is my ultimate competitor. As I approached the venue, everything felt normal, excited, and appreciative for a life like this. Appreciation is something that has emerged a little more from within me this past six months. It is a relief from the pressure. I drafted this poem with words and feelings that came to mind after one match where I was coaching a player, obviously not my wife.

#### **Poem 3**

##### **"A Different Seat"**

Different time, different me

A warm seat, padded

Feet grounded

Heart appropriate

There is more to take in

More comes in, scenery

Less of the detail,

Biases faded

Unusual presence

This comfortableness

Too light perhaps

Where are my friendly negatives?

Bark with no bite  
Or is this wisdom  
Who knows?  
It's coming back

Trampoline heart  
Maybe appropriated now,  
Details, details matter  
Win please, that would be nice

This is not the same River  
Rapids without rocks  
Thrilled despite seat belt  
Bonus time

### **Post Reflection - Circle**

As I try to consider the change in my state of being since leaving the professional tour, I have had the recurring sense of a circle. A white thin oscillating circle, shining brightly. When this image comes to mind it relaxes me instantly. Maybe its dopamine, satisfaction a craving settled. There is definite sense of relief within me. WE did it, I did not fuck it up. I am less the overbearing crazy philosopher, more a wise inventor. I enjoy my eccentric ways; I am proud of my mistakes. (but that might be the Oxytocin releasing now even as I read this back, hence my confidence to write 'fuck'). I have a lot of empathy for me and for Laura, what we achieved together and especially how we did it. Now it is over, and we know the ending, the whole is easier to digest. As time has passed by the experiences seem to have compressed into a single 'Disney-esque' tale. A simple narrative, easy to package and convenient for repetition. 99 percent of sports autobiographies I have read are like this, not to mention the popular sports science books that hit the market nowadays (Bounce, Mindset, Blink, Champions, Winners etc. etc.). It will be important for my coaching, my ongoing teaching, and my humility that I remember the difference between the 'tale' and the momentary experience. Although, admittedly, a happy story does have its place, I really want to remember the difference, or I fear losing my empathy in those tempting waters of both fictional and rational idealism.

## Dialogue Conclusion

This dialogue was most impactful to me and the process of writing my data has continued to help me richly. Philosopher Hannah Arendt claimed, “*storytelling reveals meaning without the error of defining it.*” I feel that *autophenomenography* requests the writer to go a step or two further by encouraging extraction of personal storytelling at a level of detail that leaves minimal room for over generalisation. At first, it took a brave leap to get to the point where I trusted that there was any value at all in my writings, unconvinced that such data could be either useful or even qualify as PhD level academic knowledge. I accused myself of self-indulgence, irrelevance, sceptic about my simplistic and inconclusive language: - “*I am no poet, no writer, I am an educator, I need to provide summaries, show intelligence, my abilities of deduction.*” As time elapsed and I continued to write, I began to feel companionship with the process, as if it were a friend ‘*in it*’ with me. I began to value it, it meant something more than what I feared it lacked. This settled me into a space of self-revelation and the belief to assume neat definitions waned; what would I do with them anyway? How could they help anyone else really? This transition was the vital benefit of my phenomenology, my ethnography and consequently my PARTICIPTION in my research. Allowing others to participate in their own experiences, to encourage it and skilfully hold a space for them to do so, is something I will always aim to include as I progress.

To remember, reflect or predict lived experience are modes quite different to *being* amid it. This is obvious to say, yet easy to bypass in action. Heidegger considered this a fundamental “*sleight of hand*” move that even the most notable philosophers of his time played when considering Being and the ‘*in-the-world*’ immersion of Dasein. It is an easy trick to fall for. One enables oneself with mysterious powers of prediction, somehow believing we can control outcomes and have things unfold, to desired specifications. When exposed by one’s own deviance, repeatedly, there can be suffering beyond disappointment into unnecessary delusion, consequent despondency and even elements of depression. Ripe for picking, others convince that certain methods will bring about specific ends; products, services, practices, mantras, philosophies, techniques, theories (especially peer reviewed ones!). If taken without context and consideration to one’s own situations, there creeps up a fundamentalism I can now notice as something akin to SOLUTIONISM! This becomes the undercurrent of the transaction culture. It lurks in plain sight, and I have noticed this amongst lazy educators/coaches or the overly capitalist ones. Rather than illuminating the chance factor, the luck involved, the trial-and-error workings out, the responsible efforts required, the competitiveness of the piece of the pie you are after and the low probabilities of some (let alone sustained) success in sport, market forces drive solutions. Some of the time, for some people, in some context, by some chance, by some effort and by some luck a solution will slot into the gap, it will fit.

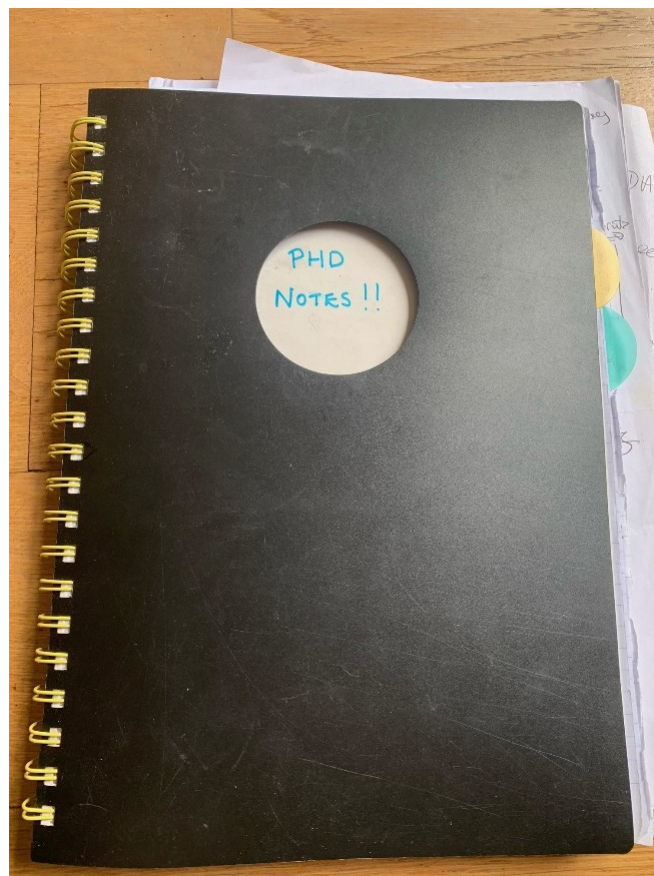


This is where the practice of phenomenology in my experience, autophenomenography can keep one alive and aware to an absurd solutionist narrative that is commonly pedalled in sports coaching academia and the consequent marketplace. Solution focus is not the inherent problem, the stripping out and forgetfulness of *being* is. Before blinding people with prescriptive external inputs, having practices that promote coaches and performers to go back into their own phenomenology, to notice it, to value it, can help them become confident in finding their own way through life's complexities. It cultivates self-awareness, and an ability to make their own choices more of the time and crucially act on them. Action beats intention in the practical world of competitive sport and this is something that all the existentialist thinkers would agree as vital in living a life more towards the authentic and meaningful. For reasons unknown *Dasein* seems to require struggle to thrive and if deprived of the privilege may lose their sharpness, their zest to grow. A sporting life will always service this need. Consequently, people might live well through sport if they can resist too much of *the sell* and stand through aspects of their own instances of hell.

## DISCUSSION

“In being mindful of **validity, trustworthiness, and faithfulness to the phenomena...** nothing can replace the personal digestion of the research experience in producing a description that is both valid and aesthetically communicative. No technique can do this. The reader must **participate in engaging with the entire text** to ensure the possibility of an aesthetically rich understanding.” Todres (2011, p.13)

I was driving home from a graduation ceremony with my wife, who had just received honorary fellowship to the University of Central Lancashire for services to sport, when first contemplations of commencing this research began. Inspired by an elderly man who was awarded his PhD in Philosophy of Care, something sparked within. I explained my intrigue to my wife, she was mildly encouraging. Two weeks later, Christmas day, she had wrapped up a simple A4 ring bound notepad of which she had written ‘PHD Notes’ on the front. It meant a lot. I sensed I had something to contribute as regards to ‘care’ and the gift confirmed that my wife, whom I had supported for 15 years in and amongst a life of professional sport, thought so too.



The notepad came alive on Boxing day.

I wrote:

*“I want to help people manage their lives in a more consistent healthy way. Their internal feelings and thoughts and their external behaviours which includes relationships.”*

*“I want to enjoy a journey into research and deeper understanding of psychology and mental wellbeing.”*

*“I want to prove to myself I can complete a PhD and all it entails.”*

*“I want a challenge that is out of my comfort zone.”*

*“I want to write a book based upon my research.”*

*“I want to continue to inspire those I love as I go after my life’s passions.”*

*“I want to help my future family by having greater understanding of life and financial security whilst keeping my time and INDEPENDENCE.”*

In retrospect these ‘wants’ appear basic and slightly embarrassing in their simplicity but at every stage of the process they have helped me deeply. They remain the simple drivers that I frequently returned to when I became stuck too close to the content. Something of their innocence is wise, like the way simple pop song lyrics can affect me. They grounded me into my research enquiries by reminding me that as much as I want to ‘*make an original contribution to knowledge*’ I equally want to do it for me, those I love and my future family. As Heidegger brought to light, we are ontological ‘beings-in-the-world,’ thrown into existence, stuck within our predicaments, here amongst the mess and not outside of our lives on some type of ‘side-line’ dimension. My previous experiences of research were shrouded with warnings to avoid interpretive bias, with insinuations that neat objectivity or at least a detachment from the research data is winning academic practice. I was conscious of this from the outset and it took me time to move towards the basic ideas of the phenomenological method initially and then the far more applied practice of existential phenomenology (Van Manen). As I realised, I am the research, and could not be separated from it, the direction of where I wanted to go with concepts of ‘*living well through a sporting life*’ altered. I zoned in around my own experiences and what I was familiar living through.

Now, the extractions of experience and the wisdom expressed during the research process must be drawn upon to discuss the main research inquiry, ‘*how might one live well through a sporting life?*’ Also, how might the methodologies applied in this study assist in such a way that help coaches, performers and academic teachers understand possibilities of enquiry that assist with the potential to ‘*live well*’ amongst the emergent landscapes of professional sport.

## What use is philosophy then?

In their seminal book “*What is Philosophy?*” (1991) Deleuze and Guattari define philosophy as “*an activity that consists in forming, inventing and fabricating concepts.*” As I delved deeper into thoughts of the five philosophers I identified as existential phenomenologists (Sartre, Heidegger, De Beauvoir, Nietzsche, Camus) I had an original feeling that these thinkers were beyond the realms of ‘*fabrication*’ and in some ways were more hard wired in facts and foundationalist understanding of the human condition. I had heard snippets of philosophy, through aphorisms you get to hear in the sporting world, for example Nietzsche’s bastardised line (and well merchandised!) “*What doesn’t kill you, makes you stronger.*” To learn that philosophers were merely ‘concept-creators’ left me feeling vulnerable as I began this strict academic quest. “*I can’t simply make this stuff up,*” I thought. I would need evidence, facts, hard data, pinpoint truth. I need science, or at least a scientific nest to embed my research upon. On reflection, this naivety sprang from a slight ‘inferiority complex’ and perhaps ‘guilt’ of poor application to my undergraduate sports science degree some 26 years ago. How things remain in play? Heidegger did say ‘*Dasein is always in the process of rebuilding its past, in its future*’ and this was clear with me and remains so.

What helped me relax into philosophy was how Deleuze and Guattari distinguished the functions of Art (aesthetics), Science (empirical facts) and Philosophy (concepts) and how they are three creative processes that are supported by each other as opposed to combatting each other. For a fuller picture of experience science requires a concept in the first place and in this way, the two ‘modes’ are equally important in their own way. I realised philosophy is an artistic process and that art requires philosophical concepts. Similarly, science can be found in art and vice versa. This understanding changed the game for me, it relaxed me. I dropped off my doubts and self-suspensions and fears of future interrogation. I could understand what Integral philosopher Ken Wilber claimed about all systems of understanding, that they are ‘*true and partial*’ and almost impossible to be so intelligent as to be completely wrong!

Consequently, taking a lead from Deleuze my aims shifted from revealing a ‘*how to?*’ into a ‘*how might?*’ quest. This would be enough, even for a PhD. This revelation underpins the whole study and it has affected my personal life, my coaching work and the type and depth of psychological support I give to clients who live lives in sport. This is the usefulness of philosophy. It helps us admit that we are in the business of ‘*concept-creation,*’ humans invent and guess and fill-in. We are fabricating our own versions of reality through perceptual constructs and manufactured categorisations. Most of the philosophical concepts are so deeply entrenched in culture and historical understanding of the world we fail to notice the *concept* part. For example, in professional sport we may utilise science to quantify times, joint angles, calories, speeds, forces etc. and we may use art to

express rhythms, beauty, moments of emotion, complexities of grace and movement but easily forget to question what is it to win, or where does a performance begin and end, or is coaching a form of cheating? The latter questions seem at first inconvenient in their stupidity, but they can lead to discussions that can wake people up to the fact in the first-place humans created the concepts that we now all play in.

So What? Such questions remind us that elements of the world are not as *set in stone* as we believe. Throughout the research all characters question the way norms and accepted practices have been *set up* either in their own minds or by the micro cultures they exist in (Professional Squash, High Performance Coaching, Marriage, British Sport). Such contemplations of primary assumptions easily made in ‘*everydayness*’ and ‘*ready to hand*’ flow of the way we mostly exist, can disrupt us. The pause may be confusing, disorienting, even ‘*nauseous*’ as Sartre suggested brought on by an awakened sense of existential responsibility (and why De Beauvoir suggested a yearning in many to return to the ‘*nowness*’ and ‘*naivety of childhood*’ and quotes Descartes that “*man’s unhappiness is due to his having been first born a child.*”) Yet if we are to curtail the overwhelm of freedom, ambiguity and involved responsibility, some realisations created by philosophical disruption energise us to *join in* much more with the way we live and make meaning from our existence as we go along. It is important that we *take part* in our life and what it could mean to us.

Such involvement can prevent the search for a futile perfection brought on by ideologies of our time. Laura revealed this in her reflections on her own relationship with concepts of *delayed gratification* and *professionalism* which on occasion became like a Christian sacrifice to the ‘*Gods of sport*’ who would certainly repay her down the road. This verged on what Nietzsche had to say about either side of the *Slave/Master Morality* duality (see Dialogue 1), where control was the target. Both try to deny life’s ambiguity by following a system of belief instead of admitting it was just a tactic to achieve ever-present desire to have things go our way (*Will Power*). Laura questioned her own belief system as regards ‘*professionalism trap*’ and noticed some paradox:

*“I wonder if my professionalism is a good thing sometimes. I have trusted every little thing in my training, my preparation my team of people **but not myself**. I get a feeling that I deserve things to go for me because of all my sacrifice and attention to details that the others don’t do. Everyone says I am special for this, a role model so it becomes addictive and a pressure to be the ‘perfect pro.’ I know it helps in the long run but I kind of lose my trust in ME.... and when I lose it gets to me because it feels more unfair and I feel angry at myself for losing to someone who isn’t doing the work. Especially if they are overweight or not as fit. I suppose I think I am morally better than them when it comes to following what professionals are supposed to do.”*

*“The benefit is that I do get a massive satisfaction that ‘I have left no stone unturned’ in my career and I don’t have regrets. I did get better though at loosening my perfectionism. DP and Danny have helped me a lot with it by giving credit to my opponents more and helping me be less judgemental on myself. Peter (psychologist) also helped me with my perfectionism and ‘my rules for me, my rules for you.’ He made it more ‘My rules for me your rules for you!’ It stopped me feeling I deserved to be paid back just because I was so professional. It is a relief. I am softer in a good way.”*

My recollections of Laura’s tendencies to obey the doctrines of the day are mainly positive. She gleaned structure and meaning to her daily existence through abiding by principles laid out in emergent ideologies related to ‘winning,’ ‘success,’ ‘goal getting,’ ‘elite practice’ and so forth. Gurus communicated through research papers, autobiographies, documentaries, popular science books, seminars, podcasts, TED talks and interviews, all well-intentioned in their own way. At their crudest however the messaging can morph easily into fundamentalist type propaganda that promise a level of certainty that does not exist. In the same way a priest confidently professes one will ‘*go to heaven if one is a good little girl*’ there must be questions considered.

Philosophy can reduce tendencies to oversimplify lived experience into concrete concepts born from overly rational analysis of cause and effect. I have made this mistake often, and consider it driven by the urgency to find believable justifications and strong solutions to the ongoing competition. Even if assessments and conclusions turned out to be eventually wrong, at least I felt useful and that either eliminated pain and worry or provided inspiration and energy to get back to work. Sometimes, anything (within limits) will help because it gives impetus and direction towards potential improvement. Sartre’s explanation of the tension we experience between the duality of our Facticity (what we are) and our Transcendence (potential self) presses heavy on those living a life in competitive sport. Sartre suggested that this tension can be fertile ground for ‘*bad faith*’ whereby the “*duality of the deceiver and the deceived does not exist.*” If all else fails at least act the part! I suggest this is particularly poignant in that I recognise the rush away from the feeling of confusion and ‘*I don’t know what the hell is going on or what’s just happened.*’ This is too dreadful when one is supposed to be fulfilling all the potential everyone has told you, you have! It is no surprise we are susceptible to the available modes of interpretation, particularly if they sound rational. Acknowledging the mystery and insecurity of whether one will ever march down on one’s higher potential can feel too much to bear. Any semblance of explanation will suffice in those moments, and the media, family, ‘*Das Man*’ and oneself all want more than “*I don’t really know what happened.*”

Agnosticism does not appear to be automatically conducive for progress. Personally, I am a fixer, particularly after unfavourable outcomes. I rush to solutions. Failure does something to my version of 'fight or flight' DP would advise me "*leave it for a few days Danny, let it settle and see. Let the player digest it too. It could be anything as far as we know.*" The advice helped yet it remained a struggle for me to resist formulating fast explanations of failure and rationales for immediate improvements. I am aware I am doing it nowadays and I have been able to notice the 'Absurd' much more. Professor of Philosophy Bryan Magee writes in his book *Ultimate Questions* (2016, p.30) that

"The plain fact is that often all the explanations on offer are wrong, and we are in a position of not knowing, not being able to explain the phenomenon in question until a new idea or discovery comes along."

Magee advises:

"And meanwhile we must learn to live with our ignorance.... active agnosticism is required, agnosticism as a positive principle of procedure, an openness to the fact that we do not know, followed by intellectually honest enquiry in full receptivity of mind."

Producing the Socratic style writing for Dialogue 1 in this study, affected me over the eighteen months I researched and wrote them. At times they do simply serve as dialogues to convey information but at their best they provoke, declassify, and make ridicule of accepted certainty of so called 'knowledge.' Socrates' two most popularised themes link to self-awareness; to '*know thyself*' and '*self-scepticism*.' According to Plato's Socrates in *The Apology*, Socrates claimed:

*"I seem, then, in just this little thing to be wiser than this man at any rate, that what I do not know I do not think I know either."* (*Apology*, 21d)

This, I have reflected, is easy to say but much more difficult to commit to. Yet at least I know my tendencies and rather than being paranoid or panicking too quickly, I have slowed to a more open-ended approach of providing improvements as opposed to absolute and cleverly convincing certainties. In De Beauvoir terminology, I am less the '*serious man*' more the '*passionate man*.' It feels so.

There is nothing wrong about the intentions of pragmatic urgency and quest for solutions but there is with *final solutions*. Trying to make an uncertain phenomenon into a certain one is at best to deny the complexities and difference in life, at worst tyrannical. Socratic style Dialogue and Existential Phenomenology invite and give permission to relax assumptions and think a little more freely, even artistically, whilst not excluding the empirical in it. Questioning assumptions, the roles

we adopt, why we do what we do, who are we doing it for, what is winning, who decides your worth? These questions can loosen tension, even if only temporarily. This study has taken courage to remain less traditional than usual, but I have learned that the methods of philosophy utilised can be equally as reassuring and motivating as the outcomes arrived at. It is in the discussions and the meaning making processes of phenomenological enquiry where a person can breakthrough and find security in themselves and the direction of their lives. I have learned throughout all the Dialogues that **Philosophy's strength is that you can take a leap of faith into a place that with all best intentions may only conclude in loose fabrications with invented truths.** For me, truth be known, that's precisely how sporting lives evolve, my own especially.

### **Existing Literature Existential Philosophy and Sport**

Slusher's 1967 publication, *Man, Sport, and Existence*, appears to be the first book to consider existential philosophy on sport. Since then, books on the topic have been sparse with most offerings appearing in article format within the *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* and *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy*. The two main texts written since have been *Existential Psychology and Sport – Theory and Applications* (2004) by Mark Nesti and *Talent Development, Existential Philosophy and Sport* (2017) by Kenneth Aggerholm. Aggerholm presents existential philosophy as a range of ideas, subjects, and perspectives, rather than 'a single school of thought with an agreed project or unified account of human existence' and admits 'it is a branch of philosophy with inherent tensions and contrasting understandings' (p.5). By going to the source of the human condition of existence and considering the philosophy of sport Aggerholm states (2015 p.16),

"I have tried to illustrate how existential philosophy can contribute to nurture an eye for both existential dangers and values in sport. It can contribute to reveal objectification of human subjectivity in sport and provide an alternative to approaches governed by, for example, instrumental or dogmatic values. It can also help to understand and avoid other existential dangers, for example when athletes neglect their situated freedom to focus exclusively on transcendence or facticity."

The aim of this project was to illustrate how existential phenomenology can be used to provide an emic ontological viewpoint and understanding of sporting life to add to and bridge with the vast pillars of etic epistemology provided in sports analysis, sports science, and sports coaching science theory. Both Nesti and Aggerholm consider much value in the applications of existential



phenomenology to sport as a beneficial inclusion to the overall corpus of sports coaching and performance research. Nesti writes (2004, p.22)

“Existential-phenomenological psychology is not about a return to the purely subjective introspectionism of the nineteenth century but represents more of a **middle ground** between purely objective and purely subjective approaches. It is an effort to go beyond the whole notion of the subjective/objective continuum, by emphasizing that our pre-reflective perception in one sense bursts through this artificial split because what we experience directly is the phenomenon itself.”

With reference to Heidegger’s ‘being in the world’ Nesti adds

“The inseparable- ability of the subjective and the objective and therefore talk of objective, subjective or mixed subjective/objective perception is unreal and unfaithful to how human beings *live in the world*. Existential psychology differs markedly from other approaches in sport psychology because of the methods it employs and its interest in questions surrounding our existence, this being critical in the lives of performers.”

Nesti’s remarks are supportive of the fundamental aims of this project, by highlighting the element of finding some middle ground between the emic and etic viewpoints by incorporating existential considerations. Aggerholm (2017, p.3) states at the outset of his book was written to illustrate ‘the many ambiguous and yet meaningful phenomena that are easily overlooked if sport is only seen through the lenses of modern sport science.’ He later adds (p.5) that ‘without providing models or clear recommendations, descriptions will point to meaningful and sustainable ways of working with existential dimensions of sports development and especially stimulate reflections on the practice of coaches and leaders.’ This was the intention of the methods employed in this study, *to show* not merely *tell* and in doing so invite the reader into the work to construct their own meaning from it from a heavily interpretivist position. An example of this is the reactions of coaches/coaching students to the five phenomenological anecdotes presented in Dialogue 3 using Van Manen’s (2014) methodology.

Martínková & Parry (2011) concluded in their paper Introduction to The Phenomenological Study of Sport despite offering ‘extraordinarily little in the way of practical advice and illustration for scholars who wish to explore phenomenology in relation to sport’ that due to the many varieties of it

“We insist that, if a researcher wishes to use the name 'phenomenology' for his or her research, he or she should explain just what it is (about the method or the concepts, or the outcomes) that informs or results from the research and that authors must have a proper

theoretical account of their own, as part of their research methodology, if they wish to claim to be applying phenomenology.”

Dialogues 3 and 4 are the two that rely mostly on phenomenological aspects, and both adhere to the recommendation above by applying Van Manen’s phenomenological anecdote method and Allen Collinson’s method of autophenomenography. Dialogues 1 and 2 have more existential theoretical aims but are still well ‘accounted for’ in the research methodology. In their investigations into the ‘lived experience’ of sports coaches Cronin & Armour (2015) also used Van Manen's (1990, p. 18) methodology to construct narratives that revealed *everydayness* (Heidegger), to tell ‘the most captivating stories, exactly those which help us to understand better what is most common, most taken-for-granted, and what concerns us most ordinarily and directly being a coach?’ This study is a strong illustration of how the methodology can lead to the revelations and communication of existential phenomenology of sports coaching experience by construction of narrative storytelling, like Dialogue 1 in this regard.

Kerry and Armour (2000) warned that most of the ‘phenomenological’ work in sport studies did not live up to its name, for several reasons:

1. *the name was simply misapplied, or used as a synonym for any kind of qualitative research;*
2. *no reference was made to the philosophical basis of the work, although this is essential;*
3. *where reference was made, it was usually imported using second-hand sources;*
4. *sometimes only a methodology was outlined (not the philosophical position underlying it);*
5. *an ‘alien’ philosophical terminology was used.*

I can empathize with each point. As the outset of this project and as it developed, I became increasingly aware of the vast collection of existential and phenomenological categories/terminology that can cause significant confusions and irregularities in this field of study. Martínková & Parry (2011) illustrate this comprehensively. Despite this, I am content that this study has provided strong and appropriate philosophical positioning throughout, direct from source and explained and presented in a way as not to appear ‘alien.’ This study, whilst adhering to methodological rigor, was intended to become a practical and useful document that sports coaches and performers can read and use to enhance their lives and I know this has been achieved (discussion below).

## Philosophical Applications

Here I will discuss examples of the applications of some of the main existential ideas presented in this study as sourced from the five thinkers presented in Dialogue 1.

Nesti (2011) remarks “The work with a sports performer is always oriented towards helping them to maximise their sport performances in some way. It also involves working with the whole person and beyond their sport identity. He suggests

“The requirement to focus on reality is something which separates existential applications from other approaches within the sports coaching discipline. In very simple terms, ‘reality’ refers to what we might call our true lives; something we experience without the need to reflect upon, theorize about, or view as a project apart from ourselves. This difficult, obscure, and important existential idea can easily be ignored or forgotten. ....we are no longer attending to ‘reality’ the lived life of the person before us, but instead have abandoned reality to enter the domain of speculation, hypothesis testing and theorizing.”  
(p.112)

This links closely to Heidegger's accusations of *forgetfulness of being*. Authenticity involves remembering our *thrownness* into the world, the nature of our *ready to hand everydayness* and how we are bound up in our circumstances whilst knowing we are *beings towards death*. Nesti (2011) believes ‘The implications for sport psychology from Heidegger's ideas about authenticity could open the door to the study of several other important but largely ignored topics in sport psychology such as spirituality in sport.’ Aggerholm (2015) is equally optimistic as regards the uses of existential applications to sporting lives; ‘On the more positive side, existential philosophy can be a constructive lens through which many engaging aspects of meaning and value can come to notice. Sport is a domain filled with attracting yet sometime ambiguous existential phenomena and people engage in sport for many explicated reasons.’

Sloterdijk (2013, p39) draws heavily on Nietzsche’s understanding of *heightening (will to power) and* he argues that

“Humans are inescapably subject to vertical tensions, in all periods and all cultural areas’ Sport is, of course, no exception and, in this cultural area, he clarifies the vertical tension to consist of the two poles of excellence versus mediocrity. These are the decisive vectors of the human condition for athletes, the first of which attracts and the latter repulses.”

This tension created by the ambiguity of fighting up hierarchies, avoiding failures, chasing dominance is at the core of each participant's lived experiences presented in this project. In a positive

sense we are each chasing meaning (through power via sporting success) and clearly relate high almost spiritual points of satisfaction and connection with ourselves and others. In a negative sense we each experience personal crisis points, evaporation of meaning and sense of loss that can seem arbitrary when looking from a distance but very embodied when living through it. Sections of Dialogue 2 with Laura and James especially and my own expressions through the poetry and reflections Dialogue 4 (e.g., Riding High V 'Lost -a dazed unfolding)' convey the 'vectors of the human condition' which performers and coaches by very nature of competition slide up and down upon.

Anderson and Clarke (2002) warned 'sports coaches, sport psychologists and performers themselves fail to consider that broader life issues of a non-clinical nature often interfere with sports performance as much as more specific task related issues, such as personal relationships, future concerns, finances, fluctuating motivations, aging and self-understanding.' By applying Heidegger's notion of Dasein to sport Martínková & Parry (2016) conclude

"For the athlete who has just lost another game or has become injured, further questions may arise that reach beyond the area of sport. For example: How does sport contribute to my life? What is the meaning of my life? What is a meaningful existence? What is it to be human?"

This may seem overly dramatic but if one takes in Sartre's notion of *bad faith* or Heidegger's concept 'fallenness' it is understood how absolutely wrapped up and identified in the 'role' of sports performer or coach (see Act1 Dialogue1) one can become. Culbertson (2005) analysed *bad faith* in elite sports within swimming, athletics, and weightlifting arguing that

"Each can be seen as an arena that promotes bad faith, as athletes tacitly accept the constituent factors of improvement, enhancement, quantification, and endless pursuit of records. This can make athletes neglect the physical limits to the capacities of human beings (facticity) as they strive for limitless progress (transcendence)."

Aggerholm (2015) reflected on the existential necessity and automaton suggestions of Sartre's *bad faith* in relation to the example of Andre Agassi who like Laura and James in this study won all there was to win in Tennis.

"His engagement was determined by necessity; he never chose to play, and he neglected finding his own meaning in his practice. Without judging if this is right or wrong it can

point to the existential importance of choosing one's own engagement in sport if the sportive endeavours are to be meaningful for the athlete."

Agassi (2009) who explains his hatred for tennis due to was due to his overly forceful and ambitious father was according to Aggerholm acting in *bad faith* but is keen to point out this is merely an 'outside' interpretation and that sometimes what is *bad faith* is a fulfilment of necessary role playing that the social situation requires. Both Ryall (2008) and Aggerholm (2013, 2015) have argued that this kind of role playing can be an important and constructive part of being in a team for athletes in team sports or within coaching units. Aggerholm adds 'athletes are always, in an existential understanding, free to relate to a particular kind of activity in a variety of ways, the experience and meaning of a sporting practice ultimately depends on the existential attitude of the athlete.'

Such *existential attitudes* of the athlete are revealed in Dialogue 2's diary analysis of James and Laura. Staying with this theme of *bad faith* Laura wrote

*"I suppose that's the 'bad faith' thing' like I've done my bit where is my prize. Squash isn't like that though, I learned you have to still earn things and keep working it out because it's always changing, and I was always changing. You can't just sit back and expect, you've got to be braver than that and make decisions in the moment. It's so annoying because you keep thinking I've got this solved now, the equation of winning but that's just 'switching off' again and you cannot do that, you will get sussed out."*

Laura clearly reveals that her existential attitude towards life is blended directly with her behaviours and experience of her profession. James also reveals here how his existential attitude fluctuates throughout his diaries driven by his approach to any given circumstance. Yet, there is a clear theme that his overall approach has mellowed through the years, ironically the same as an older Andre Agassi

*"In the middle bit of my career the winning took over and the sulks were horrendous. Completely stupid. I feel I have wasted a lot of time sulking, arguing, fighting and now I make sure, I don't. I must remind myself mind you! Now it is more about the quality I produce, the playing part, the brilliant rallies I have played, the places I have played, the good matches, those great occasions. This I what I will remember, these are the memories that I really remember."*

## Has it worked?

Hughes (2022) considered the application of philosophy to sports coaching in a refreshingly titled paper ‘Philosophy for coaching rather than philosophy of coaching: conceptual clarifications.’ Although incorporating the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein as opposed to existentialist philosophy, Hughes makes a critical point

“Rather than being blinded by the word ‘philosophy’ or hamstrung by the phrases ‘coaching philosophy’ or ‘philosophy of coaching’ actually doing philosophy for the study of coaching may well illuminate some overlooked opportunities to legitimize and strengthen coaching research but also, draw attention to some deep confusions.”

This project is deeply philosophical. I have focused on ‘doing philosophy’ in a venture to get inside the emic lens of a sporting life. The work has responded to the inspiration of Jones *et al.* (2004) which opened the Introduction section

“Coaches’ stories are complex, messy, fragmented and endlessly fascinating, and they demonstrate a need to understand the interconnections between coaches' lives and their professional practice. We argue that coaches’ emerged life stories cast doubt on the wisdom of viewing coaching as a systematic, depersonalised set of standardised models and procedures; a trend which currently characterises many coach education programmes.” (p.6)

It has been a challenging process to try and address the concerns of Jones *et al.* those ‘interconnections between life and practice.’ It can be understood why relatively little research has been attempted previously in the extraordinarily complex yet rewarding field of existential phenomenology and sporting life. Many of the applications made were difficult and as alluded to later in this discussion, I experienced low moments of confidence when constructing much of the narratives, personal reflections, applications of philosophy and anecdotes. Nesti (2004, p.114) makes a relevant point as regards the challenge of using existential phenomenology in both practice and research

“I found that the challenge to remain with the reality of the athlete’s lived world was not related to my lack of understanding about the importance of this. Instead, I was able to reflect that the more important issue for me was that I found it very hard to completely withdraw from the natural science attitude, which had been the main approach I had been exposed to throughout my education and training in sport psychology and research methods.”

These research methods are not easy to apply for those who find it difficult to engage in spontaneous, direct, and authentic dialogue and consequently may be too difficult for the inexperienced researcher or practitioner that has been embedded in a certain frame of reference as regards their delivery and outlook. Naturally, some will feel more secure with etic categories on which to hold onto whilst structuring their practices and philosophies of delivery. This concern encouraged Carless & Douglas (2011) to suggest ‘that through a storied approach we might be able to shed light on those things which go unseen or are most difficult for a coach to articulate because in often practice the coach is focusing how best to meet the aims of the coaching session, not questioning why they do what they are doing or how aspects from outside the session intervene.’ This is something I have observed as a lecturer of ‘Sports Coaching Philosophy,’ where students are preoccupied with the ‘what’ aspects of their session planning/delivery and articulation of their top 10 coaching beliefs and values when constructing and articulating their ‘coaching philosophy’. Consideration of the deeper elements of ‘why’ especially as connected to their unique existence and wider life is an afterthought if pondered at all. Carless and Douglass (2011) propose

“We have suggested storytelling offers some potential. Through creating accounts which elucidate **what** we do **and why** we do it, a coach may begin to understand more fully some of the personal, political, cultural, and value-laden influences that shape his or her coaching practice.”

The methods within this study have revealed potential avenues for a different mode of delivery and I have used them effectively in recent teaching sessions with coaching students.

Angen (2000) suggested that ‘researchers need to ask if research is helpful to the target population seek out alternative explanations than those the researcher constructs ask if we've really learned something from our work.’ This suggestion was not least for the ethical basis of subjecting participants to the research process and their sacrifice in giving up their data and their time by doing so. The member checking process (see method) revealed that the participants did themselves benefit from taking part in the research and so did many of my personal clients. Ravizza and Fazio (2002) and others, claimed that a most principal factor in the success of work as a sport psychologist/mental coach, is not the ability to design a psychological skills intervention, but is based upon your capacity to relate to the other person. Using the examples within this study with clients has helped open dialogue in areas of psychology that previously were unreachable between us which has assisted the development of our relationship in aspects of trust, humour, emotional expression, and truth.

## Applications

Over the course of two semesters, I presented the four dialogues to practicing Elite Coaches who study on our UKCC combined Level 4 sports coaching degree at the University of Central Lancashire. I invited each learner to construct at least two of three creations from the options of Socratic Dialogue, Phenomenological Anecdote or Autophenomenography as illustrated by the work in this project. The work had already been well received in the classroom, creating excellent discussion and reflections around the *everydayness* and existentiality of the coaches. I presented the Sartre dialogue (act 1) to begin as to investigate the question of *why of all the things we could do in our lives, we still choose to be a coach?* The consequent classroom philosophising had a natural lean into the other ideas presented of each thinker as myself and the learners exposed our coaching lives and experiences at different depths of detail compared to the usual way I deliver coaching philosophy, by way of information led constructs to be fleshed out. I explained this emic approach and that they would need to work more for their understanding of coaching philosophy and explained how it would link to their assessment of the module. The work produced for the assessment by way of anecdote, poetry, autophenomenological reflection or non-fictional dialogue was a rich enhancement of the other descriptive elements of their work. The approaches complemented each other and encouraged more confidence in the topic area as the coaches comprehended that they were ‘doing philosophy’ each time they coached whether they believed themselves philosophers or not! Highlighting this *inside out* emic approach remains the way I deliver all sports coaching philosophy teaching after 12 years of delivering it from a more limited etic led structure of general propositions and specific pillars of construction such as values and beliefs.

In the case of a competitor who had been quite illogically regarding herself as a failure at aged only 21 years old I applied the ideas of Nietzsche’s three metamorphosis of Spirit from his book *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883). She was asked to read Act 2, so we had a start point by which to enter the applications of the concept of spiritual growth and stage development of the camel, lion, and child literary caricatures that Nietzsche develops. Her application of the idea in relation to her own experience was that she had become a *Camel* to the ‘thou shalt’ of her success in becoming two times world junior champion. She explained how her own family, her father specifically, regarded anything but repetition of such a standard in the senior game as a failure of potential and consequentially a letting down of the family standards and reputation as winners! It made matters intensify that her junior rival (whom she beat twice in the world junior final) had surpassed her and was having immediate success in the senior game. She understood this as feeling that the sport now weighed heavily on her back and the consequent demands of training, nutrition, travel, professional behaviour etc. had added to the burden. She had become the *lion*, arguing constantly with coaches and



her father and in her own mind the sport itself. She responded that she thought her father and main coach as the dragons who needed to be shut down, yet this caused her internal conflict because of the love and bond she felt for each of them. From my etic outside view, I understood her reactions as a natural rebellion of a spirited youthful personality, a personality that ironically comprises her strengths as a competitor in match play. We wanted spirit but not the type of detrimental spirit that had taken over her recently. By introducing the ideas of how she could return or grow into the stereotype of the *child* we had a breakthrough. In simple terms, she re directed her energy towards the ‘play’ element of her life and allowed herself to permit an enthusiasm for the game again despite the obvious demands of ‘thou shalt’ that would always exist when battling away for hierarchical dominance. This brought back elements of spontaneity in her play and training which were not reckless or irrelevant but channelled through a more carefree commitment to play the game how she did as a junior player. She tapped back into memories of her junior success in a positive way and pulled out ‘the good stuff’ rather than feeling it as a weight of burden.

A positive and effective use of the autophenomenographic writing was with a parent of a professional performer. The parent travelled the world with her 19-year-old daughter and having been a professional athlete herself, acted as onsite coach too. I resonated with their intensity, the ambiguity of their relationship and although distinct from my husband-wife coaching experience, I could understand the tensions that were leading to some dysfunction. The poems *Riding High* and *The Seat* really impacted the mother and got through to her in a way she explained as “*I think I have loved her too much. I want to protect her from some of the things I felt, and I just want to know I was there no matter what.*” The mother’s realisation and admittance were an opening to talk about her own history and existentiality and how it influences her relationship with her daughter, particularly at tournament settings. I brought in Heidegger’s point that ‘*Dasein acts in the interests of building its past by what it aims for in its future*’ which we applied easily in our conversation once our rapport settled. Knowing she was not alone nor misguided in her existentiality was a relief to her. She experienced a breakthrough in empathy for herself which relaxed her which consequently altered the mode of her subsequent support for her daughter. The pivoting point of responsibility shifted further across to her daughter, yet she was still there for her. The intensity of their relationship remained, a strong bond, inspirational without the prospective burden of inappropriate disappointment. The autophenomenography stimulated her confidence to open up to me because I had opened myself up vividly in my writing and offered it to her as an example. In this case we got to elements of lived experience that we would not have accessed had the trust not been established by sharing my poems and reflections. Her emic experiences were given validity and in releasing them, she understood a different way she might be.

During the recent pandemic (2020) sports performers were forced into the unfamiliar experience of isolation whilst at tournaments. Due to safety protocol's players had to remain inside 'athlete bubbles' as they travelled around the world, without company, long amounts of time to think and ponder. To help with this disorientating period, I applied ideas of all the thinkers presented in Dialogue 1. I sent each Act to the performers and arranged an online video call to reflect on them and apply one of the ideas to their experience. I worked through nine players and discussed each act with them in separate meetings that lasted between 45 and 90 minutes (about 1 and a half hours). It was a form of study as much as having a therapeutic aim too. The most significant was Act 4 and the introduction to Camus' ideas. The *absurd* nature of how the world had changed so rapidly during the pandemic resonated and thus helped. Some acceptance was necessary particularly in the case of rising frustrations, aloneness, and continuing uncertainty. The *Myth of Sisyphus* enabled Camus to propose the idea that despite absurd events and a crisis of meaning one should certainly NOT commit suicide, philosophical or otherwise. It is a time to *rebel* and create one's own meaning even in the most dire or repetitive of situations. '*One must imagine Sisyphus happy*' exclaimed Camus and this really struck a chord with most of the players. Practically, they began to create new options in their hotel rooms and in some cases set about new online projects and completed ongoing qualifications that they now had the time to focus on. In turn, this helped their mood and those of loved ones who had rightly felt concerned about such strange circumstances. Even if the relief was temporary, it stopped a slide towards the temptations of nihilistic thinking which as De' Beauvoir claimed is tempting and provides relief but ultimately life denying and therefore dangerous.

An approach to coaching and participating in sport, based on existential phenomenology, will be particularly useful at moments of transition, change or perceived crisis in a sporting life. (Lavalley *et al.*, 2005; Nesti, 2002). I also argue that this approach can be effective in the *everydayness* of individuals' circumstances including personal life, professional performance settings including competing, and throughout the phases of a career journey. I support Aggerholm (2015) who suggests "Much more could, and should, be said about this layer of meaning (existential phenomenology) that provides a source for excitement and sustains the involvement of sportspeople around the world. We might inspire scholars within the philosophy of sport to grant existential philosophy the attention of which it is worthy."

## Further Discussions

- **Heidegger's Ontology - Engaged and Immersed**

Sarah Bakewell author of *At the Existentialist Café*, summarised:

‘For Heidegger, the philosopher’s second biggest mistake (**after forgetfulness of Being**) has been to talk about everything as though it was present at hand. But that is to separate things from the everyday ‘concernful’ way in which we encounter them most of the time. It turns them into objects of contemplation by an unconcerned subject who has nothing to do all day but gaze at stuff. And then we ask why philosophers seem cut off from everyday life.’

‘By making this error, philosophers allow the whole structure of worldly Being to fall apart, and then have immense difficulty in getting it back to resemble anything like the daily existence we recognise. Instead, In Heidegger’s *Being in the world*, everything comes already linked’ (2017, p.64)

This study developed into a representation of Ontology, Phenomenology and Existentialism based heavily on my first-hand experiences, specifically Dialogues 1 and 4. *Being* is something that we are engaged in. When you remove the languages, when you remove the intuition, when you look at *being* in a phenomenological way, this is what you find: **Being is something that we are engaged in**. Instead of investigating ‘*what is a human Being?*’ a more existential phenomenological approach is to enquire “*what is it like to exist as a human being?*” One investigates experience of being a *Being*, in an alternative way to the more generalised theoretical view of human beings that is inherently more detached from individual existence. Consequently, positioning myself at the centre of the research gave me the opportunity to utilise my own lived experience and those of three other participants (David Pearson, Laura Massaro, James Willstrop) using existential phenomenology as it was intended by way of personal reflections, historical diaries, anecdotes, poetry, fictional dialogue, and personal discussion. As one prominent coach who read my transfer report proclaimed, “*I understand what you’ve done now. You have been the ultimate anthropologist; you’ve turned your coaching years into a PhD.*” It felt to me complementary, which gave me a necessary shot of confidence against my gnawing sense of narcissism and free-floating trepidation working with phenomenology and the methods chosen to represent my research.

What has come through during this research is a sense of how deeply immersed I was with my unfolding experience when coaching my wife on the world tour. Nothing passed me by. In retrospect I was on *high alert* all the time. Laura and James revealed this phenomenon too throughout their diary's. Regardless of the interpretations, the situation, the ensuing 'drama,' there is a constant sense of deep involvement with matters at hand. Their self-awareness and ability to articulate and express detail and nuance pervades the pages of their thinking. There is no hesitancy to look inside themselves and try to empty out and articulate feelings, joys, frustrations, hopes, confusions, hurt and personal truths. They ask questions of themselves, of life too and without knowing it are philosophical, James particularly so:

*"I know I am a busy reflector and writing stops me from going mad.... I have been like this as long as I can remember. Incessant questioning. What is driving me to go through these hard sessions? Why does it matter that I win a squash match, chasing a ball around, getting it back onto the front wall over and over? The more I think about it I am not sure it does."*

For both it seems that part of their sustained gumption and to experience moments of sporting success amongst all the complexity and moments of despair, is their attribute to think through and consider their terrain. Their ponderings although unpleasant at times felt as frustrations, doubts and confusions have overall proved worthy. When they write there is an under tone, they know what they have signed up for committing to a life of professional Squash. This acceptance is foundational. DP also emanates this through his interviews and consequent storytelling that form the basis of the anecdotes. The stories vary and the personnel changes yet there is an ever-present acceptance of the nature of the immersion, the lived context of the 'person' who is there. This context is not just the external situation such as the occasion or time of day but the internal character, the engagement the person has with their own version of reality – how that person experiences themselves. DP notices and assumes 'the person' in the situation and how they might be feeling at the time, what it may be like to be them, in their shoes. This not only comes across through the anecdotes but when I am with him. It feels nice to be noticed that way, not as some blank template to be put through a process as if on a factory output line. I sensed this as the root cause of DP's aversion to 'lesson planning':

*"I am the lesson, me, and the pupil together. I can't write that on a piece of paper. My lessons are about people, the personality bit, who they are. My lessons have a feeling from moment to moment. It's how we get along, the mood on the day and all that. I can't even explain it myself."*

(Anecdote 2: *'I can't write myself down on paper'*)

None of Heidegger's accusations of '*forgetfulness of being*' here, despite his inability to comprehend it formally and therefore articulate it to others neatly. This is one of the problems of honouring our ontological foundations; it is not something we can put onto a PowerPoint presentation and even if we could, not particularly shiny and new!

- **Spot the difference: 'wellbeing' / 'being well'**

This was not a study the emergent and evolving concepts of 'wellbeing' (Breslin et al, 2017; Hill, 2021) or 'athlete mental health' (Reardon et al, 2019; Golding et al, 2020) in professional sporting lives. There has been evident rising publicity given to the topic of *wellbeing* and *mental health* in professional sport, notably from global sporting icons Simone Biles - Gymnastics, Naomi Osaka - Tennis, Matthew Wolfe - Golf, Adam Peaty - Swimming, Tyson Fury - Boxing. Many of the individual accounts reported have been linked together to form a consensus that professional sports performers share general problems. Conditions explained within their [published] narratives have included feelings of being dehumanised (Kyrigos) bullying (Varnish, Keatings, Simmonds), personality loss (Bartoletta, Emms), depression (Wilkinson, Richardson-Walsh, Fury), anxiety (Kirkland), abandonment (Shangwu), chronic fatigue/burnout (Bisk), addiction (Gascoigne, Fallon), OCD (Wilkinson, Gerrard, and Pickering), training addiction (Jamieson)<sup>1</sup>. On review of such narratives, after bypassing the categorisation, each individual case is unique and most personal. Each individual reflection reveals an individual who experiences private existential complexity, living a bittersweet existence, not merely concepts and symptoms shared by the many. This is my own experience of working with performers too. Whether peering in from the outside or reflecting from the inside, specific investigation is required for each case. Otherwise, generic assumptions replace

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<sup>1</sup> **Professional sports performers: narratives/conditions/sports**

Nick Kyrigos - Tennis  
Jessica Varnish - Cyclist  
Dan Keatings – Men's Artistic gymnastics  
Lizzie Simmonds - Swimming  
Tianna Bartoletta – Athletics (long jumper)  
Gail Emms - Badminton  
Jonny Wilkinson – Rugby Union  
Kate Richardson-Walsh - Hockey  
Tyson Fury - Boxing  
Chris Kirkland - Football  
Zhang Shangwu - Gymnast  
Amanda Bisk – Athletics (pole vaulter)  
Paul Gascoigne - Football  
Kieran Fallon - Jockey  
Steven Gerrard - Football  
Pickering – Athletics (sprinter)  
Steve Jamieson – Swimmer

the complexity and ambiguity of each individualised unfolding, followed by the formations of unnecessary and simplified epidemics, particularly ones orbiting around emergent concepts of *wellbeing*.

The concept of *athlete wellbeing* in sport has gathered momentum. Deleuze (1991) suggested that concepts are more a '*process of creation rather than acts of discovery*'. Rather than believing that something has original essential properties or an inherent truthful stable identity that can be *discovered*, Deleuze suggested that we resist that urge and instead keep noticing differences. He said '*not to focus on identity of a concept but differences as no criteria can ever make concepts sufficiently stable.*' Without going deep down this ontological 'rabbit hole' what Deleuze points to is that there has been an essentialist urge in philosophy and science to pinpoint elemental truth and eliminate difference. The more we categorise and make essential properties of things the less room we leave for difference. Phenomenology on the other hand is something that aims at difference of individual experience by eliminating categorical assumptions and '*get back to the things themselves.*' (Husserl). In Dialogue 4 I was aware of how unique and often unstructured my ramblings were. In some way they are vague yet at the same time rich with information. I ponder is it important that the reader can understand me or is it more vital that my 'autophenomenography' is a method that encourages freedom to express my original ontological difference.

At first when writing my thoughts, I was worried they lacked a formality but as I reflected on my data, I could appreciate it much more.

**Example: (Dialogue 4):**

**LOST.** A dazed unfolding.

A different kind of self-consciousness is at play, don't pity me, there's nothing wrong with me.

I feel a bit like a blot on the scene. Nobody wants the loser hanging around; I mean how I can add to this scene.

I have the dishonest feeling I used to feel when I saw my parents just after I had stolen sweets from our own shop. The false face, the body revealing truth. Eye contact tough.

I do not belong here right now; I belong down a hole and there I will go.

A deep Rabbit Hole of analysis should do it.

**REFLEXION** – These short lines (below) did not come to me in such a packaged order as is laid out. The feelings and thoughts that I experience after an unexpected loss are flavoured by elements within the broad categories I list. I could have picked various descriptors for the states so this is no definitive nor prescriptive process such as those laid out in “grief processing” models which may be similar but by no means substantial enough. This is not an exact linear timeline of the experience, but the words must be laid out somehow in a way that is useful to help stimulate personal insights whilst reducing the prescriptive power of my authorship.

The *mechanistic* way of thinking is something Neuroscientist Lisa Barrett (2021) has expressed caution about in psychology.

“Psychological phenomena arise out of complexity, not from simple, mechanistic cause and effect. Many people who practise, use and report on the science of psychology assume that thoughts feelings and behaviours and other psychological outcomes are the result of one or two strong factors or causes. This is called a ‘mechanistic mindset.’”

Barrett continues:

“If we treat the brain and body like simple and mechanistic systems, targeting one or two variables and leaving the rest unmeasured, then the impact of that fuller web of weak factors masquerades as a failure to replicate. The absence of replication may, in fact be the presence of meaningful variation.”

The more a psychological phenomenon is discussed, investigated, and categorised the more it tends to narrow into a stuck concept that has set properties. Suddenly there is a top 10 list of characteristics associated with the phenomenon and beyond that probable subcategories. This propensity for pattern recognition can be useful for diagnostic purposes and consequent interventions yet at the same time it can be highly limiting through oversimplification of psychological phenomena. Barrett alludes to the need for the media to simplify phenomena:

“Even when scientists carefully design experiments with complexity in mind, their results when reported in the popular press, are often explained in mechanistic terms. News stories are simpler and more digestible when they have headlines such as “brain circuit x causes fear” or “Gene Y causes depression.”

This is recognisable in the current sporting media, most recently seen during the delayed 2020 Olympic games where narratives of ‘athlete wellbeing’ and ‘gold medal success’ dominated interviews and interpretations of events. It appears that as soon as an agenda has been identified as currently important for whatever reason, all derivative narratives must be fitted to a symptomatic trail. Questions squeeze the parameters

*“What do you put down to your momentous success?”*

*“Do you think mental wellbeing is important?”*

*“Have you ever had burnout?”*

*“Why are we successful in this event but not that one?”*

*“Who is responsible for this failure?”*

*“Why are the Chinese so good?”*

*“What went wrong with person X today? Will they ever recover from that?”*

*“How hard should athletes be pushed?”*

*“Do you think they want it enough / do they want it too much?”*

*“Are we too focussed on winning now and not about athlete wellbeing?”*

From an existentialist point of view, such questions have no answers but can have use in stimulating a phenomenological investigation of the case in hand. Yet these questions are asked in a way that there is a general definitive truth and that is where Barrett suggests we need to be more sophisticated. She even suggests; “The lab experiment may need a major overhaul in order to observe and account for complexity.” It is a step too far for sports journalists to reconsider their approach, yet there is insight here for **HOW** the questions that coaches, and performers might ask of themselves. Questions lead us places and it is wise to be careful with them. We do not want to box ourselves in too often, in that tempting rush towards a reprieve from the deeper complexities of a lived life.

- **“Don’t opt-out even when it is too hard”**

This research has opened an understanding of the original ontological state of being and the consequent existentialist matters people cannot escape until death comes. Along the way we all experience our ‘being here’ in phenomenological experience states that even still neuroscientists, evolutionary biologists and philosophers still refer to as ‘the hard problem’ of consciousness and phenomena (Chalmers, 2006). Author of *Becoming You* (2021) and Neuroscientist Professor Anil Seth commented:



“It’s more that I think there’s hubris in assuming that everything will submit to a mechanistic programme of explanation. I think it is intellectual honesty to acknowledge that the existence of conscious experience as a phenomenon in a universe for which we generally have physicalist accounts seems weird.” (p.6)

Unperturbed by this admission and acceptance that mechanistic answers fall short of a full knowing, Seth adds, *‘I want to figure out the ways in which we can undermine this seeming weird.’* This is admirable in that it prevents the nihilistic take of ‘well what’s the point then’ and Seth finds a challenge in what could be the absurd attempt to understand qualia of conscious experience. This is refreshing, something Sisyphus would certainly be proud of, as meaning can still be made and crafted in situations where complete relief is unobtainable. Giving up out of frustration is not the option that helps even in the face of insurmountable challenge. In *The Ambiguity of Ethics*, De Beauvoir warned of the temptations of the nihilist position and even pointed out an element of truth in it in terms of ultimate meaning, yet she blows open the illusion of certainty the nihilist seeks to find comfort in:

“The **nihilist** attitude manifests a certain truth. In this attitude one experiences the ambiguity of the human condition. But the mistake is that it defines man not as the positive existence of a lack, but as a lack at the heart of existence, whereas the truth is that existence is not a lack as such. And if freedom is experienced in this case in the form of rejection, it is not genuinely fulfilled. The nihilist is right in thinking that the world possesses no justification and that he himself is nothing. But he forgets that it is up to him to justify the world and to make himself exist validly. Instead of integrating death into life, he sees in it the only truth of the life which appears to him as a disguised death. However, there is life, and the nihilist knows that he is alive. That’s where his failure lies. He rejects existence without managing to eliminate it. He denies any meaning to his transcendence, and yet he transcends himself.” (p.13)

I have empathy with this nihilist position in times when sport will not line up with my desires and *‘play ball.’* There are occasions where the urge to want everything to collapse into a meaningless quest can last for hours in me each time, I do not get my own way, or my Nietzschean *Will to Power* desires. Across all the dialogues is confusion and ambiguity. My autoethnographic writing especially reveals complexity and emotional confusion where the temptation is sink into a comfortable certainty of despair found in the elimination of ambiguity. It is not easy this ambiguity stuff, especially when one forgets the absurd nature of sport.

The more I reflected on the approach of DP I noticed a tendency in him to notice and point out elements of Absurdity. With one comment he could shake me or a player out of the emotional state we were stuck in. It was the instant wriggling of perception that helped, not necessarily the content of the point made but more the option of an alternative view. I experienced his company as settling and reassuring throughout the hours and weeks we shared, I still do. This all came through to me clearly when producing the Camus Dialogue in Dialogue 1 and then interviewing him for the phenomenological anecdotes created in Dialogue 3. Appreciating elements of the Absurd seemed to emanate easily for David and this was felt as exceptionally low levels of tension in him at competition sites where one would expect it the most. He often pinpointed it back towards his experience of playing the talented players of his generation (Jahangir Khan, Jansher Khan) and remembering that as individual people they were not rounded individuals or necessarily happy. He also had his own daughter at the front of his mind who after 10 weeks of being born was committed to a wheelchair to this day. This is not to assume he exists in a constant state of peace brought about by the absurd perspective, but he clearly taps into it when he needs to. This is the main undertone throughout all the anecdotes, where there is clearly a freedom shown across five potentially stressful incidents. His perspective to act closely to what Sartre encouraged as ‘*towards the authentic*,’ by being untypical of the expected and normalised ‘role’ of coach (*or bad faith*), DP is refreshing to be with.

Coming from a more natural absurdist perspective (not a formal academic understanding) DP responds to people and their situations from a calm intuition and empathetic yet straightforward understanding in each case. He helps those around him **keep their feet on the ground**, and this along with his expertise of Squash may be his biggest contribution to those he coaches.

- **The method may release the magic**

Dahlberg *et al.* (2008, p.98) recommends that the qualitative researcher adopts an ‘*open discovering way of being*’ and develops a ‘*capacity to be surprised and sensitive to the unpredicted and unexpected*’. In their version of openness, ‘**vulnerable engagement**’ and ‘**disinterested attentiveness**’ are simultaneously present. As they see it,

“Openness is the mark of a true willingness to listen, see, and understand. It involves respect and a certain humility toward the phenomenon, as well as sensitivity and flexibility.”

Throughout this research process and especially at the outset, ‘**vulnerable engagement**’ is what I have felt so strongly. I could not put my finger on exactly what I wanted to express about the lived immersion of my life in sport, but something was pulling me in. I had a sense that something

magical, something untouchable was always going on in every moment, always there in the background. I can remember living alone aged 16 and pondering the sense back then. I sensed it completely vital to life yet kept itself protected from analytical explanation and consequent reduction. It intrigued me endlessly and I strangely found comfort in the mystery, perhaps it was exciting and why my life has developed along the paradigms of psychology and coaching. On reflection, it may have been the key stone to this whole PhD. The core seed of mystery that set me off on this quest into existence and being well. I presented this in the ‘opening scene’ of Dialogue 1 to show the reader my enthusiastic yet incomprehensive mind. This is a trait that both James and Laura reveal in their diaries. All three of us are known well for our own applications of enthusiasm, a word easily aligned with motivation. It is *more* than that!

It was a relief as well as inspirational to read Qualitative Research Professor and Clinical Psychologist Les Todres’ book “Embodied Enquiry – phenomenological touchstones for research, psychotherapy, and Spirituality (2011).” He nailed what I had sensed vital but unexplainable

“The path of embodied phenomenological enquiry in Qualitative research seeks to show and evoke the presence of a lived experience through words. It does not arrive at a summative ‘essence’ but offers instead ‘good words’ that describe and show, but do not kill, the sense of aliveness that they refer to. That ‘**more**’ of experience we can’t ordinarily grasp.” (p.6)

**WOW** – the last line here blew my mind wide open. My introduction to phenomenology and its wider methods of enquiry into a more *embodied understanding*, so that readers could grasp this ‘*more*’ of experience, amongst a lived existential life, started there. Up to that point I had been playing with the more formalised process of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith, 1999) but there was something about the sequencing and empirical reductionism that felt akin to what I was aiming to get away from in my study. I also kept hearing half-hearted suggestions such as ‘*oh just get some IPA done on it, you’ll be right with that.*’ An immediate put off.

Understanding this difference in how to extract the *generalised* and the *substantial* has been highly developmental to my work as a coach and councillor. I have learned how to use and incorporate the methods of storytelling, Socratic dialogue, poetry, autophenomenography, phenomenological based anecdotes and diary reflections to open the ‘*more*’ of my clients’ situations and crucially how I have understood them. This can be seen in the reactions recorded within this study from all participants, all of whom gained deeper insight through their involvement with the methodology adopted. No doubt influenced by his clinical therapy expertise, Todres encourages:

‘In drawing close to experience, words are instructional rather than merely ‘descriptive;’ they invite us to further experiencing of the ‘more’ exceeding them and in languaging the ‘more’ further, this re-situates the ‘more;’ and the ‘more’ itself becomes more intricate.’

The mechanisms to unload one’s existential woes may help towards a life lived well. A coach or performer may not need the subsequent solutions, just the mechanism of release may be of benefit. A way to reveal the complexity, the mystery and even magic of life. In this way, social media could be useful for some with all its various and emergent forms of expression e.g., Tik Tok seems to allow for a humorous release, Instagram allows for expression of personality outside of the usual sporting media.

As a focus of this study is to investigate ‘how one might *live well through a sporting life*,’ there is a strong connection to methods used that allow participants to reveal depths of life experiences without overbearing interference from the questioner. ‘*Person-centred coaching*’ developed and practiced by Carl Rodgers from 1961<sup>2</sup>. Central to the method is the rapport formed by shared understanding through engaged listening and non-reductionist conversations. Rodgers’ crucial point was that ‘*It’s not for us to guide the client; it’s for the client to guide us, and for us to walk with them in their subjective reality.*’ This humanistic attitude infiltrates all the Dialogues presented and I kept it at the forefront of my writing throughout. I took the considered approach of *joining in* with the data but aware not to tell it what to do or what to mean. I was mindful of the reader being involved and making effort to join in. I aimed to leave space for the reader whilst creating something enticing enough for them to care to. This was not straightforward because I am including elements of difficult philosophy and subtle ontological states of being. I felt the pressure to show that I ‘know my stuff’ without churning out a standard philosophy text. I found this constantly difficult but by working in dense flashes of inspiration I am pleased with what came out.

In terms of the existentialist thinking dripping through this study, the methods used have been positive for revealing much of their befuddling concepts in a way that is accessible. I have utilised all five scripts within Dialogue 1 by sending them to clients, coaches, and masters level coaching students. They have continually been well received. They have proved to be useful portals for further conversations born out of their own experiences of the concepts introduced. This sidesteps the need to theoretically clarify the precise understanding of each philosophy which so often acts as a fearful obstacle to people when introducing philosophy, particularly somebody like Heidegger. The Sartre dialogue has been well received by coaches whereas for professional players both Camus and

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<sup>2</sup> Rodgers has close links with the existential phenomenology psychologists Ludwig Binswanger and Medard Boss who themselves were students of the original phenomenologist philosophers Martin Heidegger and Edmund Husserl.

Nietzsche have been adopted most easily. The Heidegger and De Beauvoir dialogues are more complicated and longer. They are my personal favourites but require more substantial understanding and consequently daunting or over burdening to some reading their philosophy for the first time. There is further review of the methods within the dialogues themselves.

- **In Flux – change, contradictions, and development**

I am a different person to when I began this study. I am at the same person too.

I wish that I could turn back the clock and go back with what I now know and perfect it. No, I would not change a thing, its organic nature is not a weakness, it is the strength of it.

I read my work and feel impressed, almost shocked at some of the style and infusion of philosophy included. I re read it once more and it completely lets me down. What is that?

I have nothing more to reveal or create, just repetition now. Later that week walking the dog or talking with a client and ‘BAM,’ connections appear like apparitions in front of me, so clearly, I am nowhere near empty.

These contradictions of state (and suchlike) if taken too seriously can become stifling. I still get them, but they do not confuse me like they once did. I recognise the same loops and ambiguities in those I work with, but the difference is that they can panic themselves. This is where therapy through conversation can help. Creating this project has been therapeutic for me. Apart from the document produced which is useful in a formal and practical way, the process has softened my original agendas. I look back to my transfer report and I can see I had more of a point to prove. I was fighting against something rather than sitting in open discovery. I was using philosophy to back myself up, to cover up insecurities, maybe just to get somewhere. I can see the same patterns in others now. I notice how they cling to new concepts and certainties in the same way DP could see it in me. I am softer because of this research journey and it is impacting my relationships tremendously well. There is a patience that once was lacking. I have lost the urge to be superman. I feel more like Batman’s butler Alfred. The steady observer who trusts people to go out and live their adventures for themselves, danger, or peace.

Such ‘letting go’ took me time and I am aware I have transitioned into a new phase of my life. I am older for one. I am not travelling on the world tour anymore, so I am far less immersed. My confidence has grown, particularly academically which has tempered my over enthusiasm for the Academic versus Applied rivalry I tended to fuel. I feel I have thrown a long clinging monkey

off my back in that regard. These things have helped me relax which in turn has developed my ability to connect more deeply with a broader range of character. Rapport comes surprisingly easy and with that, trust is not far behind. My coaching conversations are far more profound when they need to be yet in the next moment light and fleeting. I am better company and easier to be around, something which is felt even through a computer screen in recent times. I have gained surprising amounts of connection and impact with clients some of whom I am yet to meet in person or seen for some time. We are in the realms of understanding each other rather than being mere information swappers. My autophenomenographic dialogue accelerated this process for me, as I think by turning inward, I appreciated the torment I had lived through at times. Those ‘in the moment’ feelings that take over when you are desperate to win, to avoid loss and all it means to you at that very time in your life. The madness that takes over. There is no way out of it, you can only ride it as best as you can.

In addition to the better dynamic between myself and those I coach I hesitate to underestimate the profound wisdom of the philosophers I have studied and presented in Dialogue 1. Their ideas now form the core of all my interactions, and I am convinced existential phenomenological thinking has significant value for living well through a life in sport. So many of the applied ideas fit snugly with the landscape of professional sport; *Absurdity, Ambiguity, Identity, Bad Faith, Meaning, Will to Power, Potential, Responsibility and Choice*. The Ontological concepts of *Being*, particularly Heidegger’s *Dasein* and his of ideas of *thrownness, being in the world, ‘the they,’ being towards death and anticipatory resoluteness*, have all formed the basis of meaningful reflective dialogue between us. These ideas can easily overwhelm but as I improved my understanding, I was more able to deliver them gently and mingle them into conversations by use of example or anecdote. If they seemed to connect and even find humour in the new revelational possibilities of their predicaments, which people usually do with existential thinking due to its obvious yet concealed nature,<sup>3</sup> I would send them my narratives for a more specific understanding. In turn, we generated many ideas between us that could help them with their next period of competition. One example was born out of Nietzsche’s call to utilise both the Lion and Child stereotype by way of wearing certain coloured kits for certain occasions. The kit was only a reminder of the deeper philosophy understood and it proved effective in terms of what the player wanted to develop.

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<sup>3</sup> Much comedy is based on bringing forth existential and Ontological habits of humans. In the ‘revealing’ we laugh at ourselves, perhaps our conscious inabilities to override such fundamental states of our existence. Ricky Gervais is a clear example who incorporates this in his stand up shows such as ‘humanity’ and more recently in his TV production of *After Life* which utilises existential thinking throughout and contrasts the sadness and joys of existence rarely produced for TV. The show has been powerful at helping people with grief and depression as well as making people laugh and feel an uplift.

In the 'participant response' section of Dialogue 2 both James and Laura confirmed that elements identified as examples of existential philosophy were relevant and useful. Laura had already identified how '*Das Man*' understanding had aided her in relaxing about social media comments and opinions of other players on the tour. She claimed it helped "*free her*" to remain more authentic which in turn gave her a shot of deeper confidence and self-esteem to do things her way. James questioned some of the suggestions and found others to be close to exact and immediately helpful. James is clearly of a philosophical mind and as he transfers into a coaching life, he has been stimulated to consider existentialist ideas further particularly those of Simone De Beauvoir and Martin Heidegger. James is no fool, he is as close to an authentic professional sportsperson as I have met, so for him to affirm that matters of Ontology and Existential Phenomenology struck a chord with him and helped him make sense of things he has gone through, was poignant and rewarding.

## CONCLUSION

“The fool generalizes the particular; the nerd particularizes the general; some do both; and the wise does neither.” Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *The Bed of Procrustes*

Are we any wiser?

We are.

By addressing the main question of this study “*How might one live well through a sporting life?*” I have shown that there is a wise option available without falling for the illusion of certainty that pervades the more commercial ‘*How to?*’ I strongly recommend the use of **philosophy FOR** living a sporting life not merely **philosophy OF** a sporting life. Being frustrated by over generalisations and too much micro analysis of sporting experience, particularly from academic modelling, performance analysis methodologies and sports media, I have revealed and demonstrated that there is a way that incorporates *lived experience* initially before we begin to conveniently categorise and break it down into rationalised patterns. The philosophical ideas of *Existential Phenomenology* and the research methods I have used throughout the main body of the four Dialogues have shown an alternative way of how to incorporate philosophy into a sporting existence as it emerges. I have shown that both coaches and performers can apply the concepts of *Ontology (Being)*, *Existentialism* and *Phenomenology* within their lives to help them create meaning, develop new paradigms of perspective, and make sense of the chaos and often absurd unfolding that a competitive sporting life becomes. I call on coach educators, sports psychologists, and sports performers to consider my conclusions and incorporate elements of the wisdom within their own lives and practices.

In his book *The Phenomenology of Perception*, philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945:241) suggests that it is a philosopher’s duty not to simplify things into categories. Instead, he encourages philosophers to ‘*rigorously to put into words what is not ordinarily put into words, what is sometimes considered inexpressible.*’ This research has successfully adhered to Merleau-Ponty’s request and that of Edmund Husserl who originally stated we must ‘*get back to the thing's themselves*’ by use of phenomenology.

This project aimed to reveal:



1. *Differences between the 'phenomenological attitude' in data collection and standard qualitative methods e.g., semi- structured interviews, observational interpretation.*
2. *Suitable methods of inquiry that stay closest to the non-interpretive, non-reductionist and rich textured meanings of experience of individuals e.g., Diary descriptions, open interviews, autophenomenography, narrative dialogue*
3. *The difference and significance between **description (as it is)** and **interpretation (theorised)** of phenomenological data.*
4. *The connection of the 'existential element' in phenomenological investigation and its relevance to the central ontological question of this study; How might one live well through a sporting life?*
5. *The use of Socratic dialogues as a method of representing data that aid protection from invasive interpretations and consequent over reductionism.*
6. *The potential benefits for a life lived sense in sport when considered from the substantial, rich, and non-reductionist perspective.*
7. *Conclusions and wisdom gleaned from aims 1-6.*

All aims have been met. I will now elaborate upon '**Aim 7**' as well as more of '*the potential benefits*' (**Aim 6**).

### **1. Embrace Complexity**

Experienced in real time territory, **sport is a pre-separated multiplicity of unfolding becoming**. I call on coaches and performers to embrace this more often. There is always something exciting on the way with sport. There is also temporary failure knocking at the door too. Boredom, fatigue, confusion, sudden meaninglessness, existential nausea, self-doubt, jealousy, anger, regret, shame and so on. Yet amongst all that is hope, potential, confirmation, ecstasy, arrival, peace, love, and pride. Luck plays a big part, as does effort. Elements of a sporting life can be controlled, many times they cannot. There will never exist a single model or cardboard cut-out tool that will negate the existential complexity of a sporting life. That is the case for an individual existence, so to presume repetition across time and amongst people is flawed.

Clinical Psychologist Les Todres explains here how he has realised and embraced complexity to assist his own understanding of himself and his work with others:

“I experience myself as more competent to deal with life’s complexity which I now realise life is like. I somehow feel initiated into a secret of seasons; that I and the world can be many things, and I have moved closer to giving up ready-made answers or simple solutions that are attempted in all situations. I find myself sometimes responding in less ready-made ways and I sometimes feel more reconciled to such open-endedness. Now that I am engaging a bit more with the unknown, life itself seems to have the capacity to be my ‘therapy.’

So, the broad thrust of therapeutic insight has been to initiate me further into my complexity. And such a process has given me some confidence and permission to retain bits of the old and embrace bits of the new. This gives me a feeling of flexibility and freedom that is not too scary.” Todres, (2013, p.54)

On occasion things appear to be simple, times when we seem to flow through life’s predicaments. Indeed, ‘flow theory’<sup>1</sup> has been popularised in the optimal psychology movement and given considerable credibility in sport (Nesic et al (2014), Swann (2016), Wiggins & Freedman (2000)). Yet to assume the possibility of escaping into a constant state of flow, simplistic thinking, ‘resilience mind,’ ‘growth mindset’ or whatever other permanent ideology is not to be human. Complexity is the truth and not just in some theoretical notion of it, in a highly immersed experiential happening. Rather than try to eliminate this from our thinking and therefore our expectations of existence and what we go through, we might do well to embrace complexity more readily. Be careful before rushing to conclusions and what you ascertain about yourself, your history, and your future. Hold back on value judgements of opponents or ‘*the they*’ before you neatly summarise, categorise, diagnose, or accuse them. How sure can you really be given all the complexity of the world and how it unfolds? How does that make you feel? Empowered? Worried? Excited? Relieved? Well - start unpacking from there.

## **2. *Dasein* – stay in motion with the world and your own version of it**

My overall realisation the existential thinkers got through to me is that people are not machines. People are living processes that care about their pasts that have been and their futures yet to come and this makes existence tricky to say the least. It sounds simple and obvious to understand

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<sup>1</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. (1990) Popular within the positive psychology movement, ‘flow states’ are proposed to optimal mental experiences and closely connected to underpinning understanding of ‘THE Zone’ in sports performance

this but is why it is easy to bypass. To escape the confusion (at best) or the anguish (most probable) people tend towards wrapping themselves in stuck identities, often parodying those who we consider valuable. People play the accepted roles and expectations of the of the current *social hegemony*<sup>2</sup> as if support actors in a play. If people are not brave or awake enough, they sleepwalk into requesting a safe pre planned template of how to live. We conform and then we expect something back for our conformity. What happens when we go too mechanistic this way? Well, we become stale by denying new possibilities that could excite, send us off into new ventures that keep us buoyant, refreshed more often. In sport, the energy must flow well.

This can be attempted in small ways; it does not have to be huge career changing moves or deep self-identity shifts. It is possible to adapt patterns of thought, habits of identity and past narratives about ourselves. We can change style, listen to current and innovative ideas, investigate our philosophical outlook on concepts of winning or competition. We can create our **own meaning** as we go along in life and **take part in our own becoming** akin to the motion of the world. Instead of relying on automaticity of accepted habit or ‘the way things are’ try something new, include difference in your life. Nobody has seen it all or tried everything, there is always more to experience. We can question the assumption “what does it mean to be me?”

Deleuze said philosophy is best when aimed at “*How might one live?*” not “*How should one live.*” The latter is a call to action, the former a transcendent vision of perfection. Both *Nietzsche* and *Deleuze* especially, talk a lot about the process of living by affirming life, rather than negating life. They both reject conformity and encourage people to experiment, they suggest you work for your meaning. The world owes you nothing at all, you must stay in motion and grab pieces of meaning where you can. Celebrate difference and change as you go along.

In 1981, Psychology researcher Clare Graves, a former student Abraham Maslow<sup>3</sup>, interviewed over a thousand of his students and asked them what they perceived as a healthy adult.

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<sup>2</sup> Antonio Gramsci (1971) “The Manufacture of Consent’ - one of the most important functions of a controlling state is “*to raise the great mass of the population to a particular cultural and moral level, a level (or type) which corresponds to the needs of the productive forces for development, and hence to the interests of the ruling class*” *In sport the ruling classes can be anything from Fans, Governing Bodies, Universities, Governments, Sponsors, Commercial Stakeholders.*

<sup>3</sup> Abraham Maslow was one of the first psychologists to investigate psychologically healthy adults, believed that Self Actualisation represented the highest level of need and provided the ‘healthy persons’ prime motivation. Clare Graves attempted to verify Maslow’s work.

It resulted in a 'stages' theory he announced as "The Emergent, Cyclical, Double Helix Model of the Adult Human Biopsychosocial Systems." Graves said:

"My research indicates that man is learning that values and ways of living which were good for him at one period in his development are no longer good because of the changed condition of his existence. He is recognizing that the old values are no longer appropriate, but he has not yet understood the new. The error which most people make when they think about human values is that they assume the nature of man is fixed and there is a single set of human values by which he should live. My data indicate that man's nature is and open, constantly evolving system, a system which proceeds by quantum jumps from one steady state system to the next through a hierarchy of ordered systems."<sup>4</sup>

I have utilised the work of Clare Graves (which he developed as *Spiral Dynamics*), for fifteen years but up until this point I had not completely understood the fundamental simplicity that underpinned it. That of *motion and phases*. Do not think of yourself as a set object nor behave like one. Keep evolving, keep oscillating, spiral up. Life is a process of becoming and with or without us consciously involved it will happen whether we want it to or not. Even within the sporting career phase of a person's life, there will be smaller distinct phases lived through. Peaks and troughs, struggle, and flow, junior to senior, rising and falling, inexperienced and experienced, different coaches, changes in finance, eras of opponent, personal vitality/health, relationship status and so forth. Living through them, phases are hard to distinguish as they blend at the edges, but a wise coach can notice them and help performers realise them too. Then there can be an appropriate reaction for the occasion being experienced. It could be to relax, let go, wait, recharge, diversify or to work harder, push more, develop assertion, add more expertise, grind. One might live well if you can simply keep going **with intentions to develop amongst the phases of your life**. In sport, that may be as grand as going full throttle at a barrier breaking lifetime goal, a commitment to break away and rest for enough time required to recover zest, or as small an action as to put your kit on and give it

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<sup>4</sup> Graves stated "I am proposing is that the psychology of the mature human being is an unfolding, emergent, oscillating, spiralling process marked by progressive subordination of older, lower-order behaviour systems to newer, higher-order systems as man's existential problems change. These systems alternate between focus upon the external world, and attempts to change it, and focus upon the inner world, and attempts to come to peace with it, with the means to each end changing in each alternatively prognostic system. Thus, man tends, normally, to change his psychology as the conditions of his existence change. Each successive state, or level of existence, is a state through which people pass on the way to other states of equilibrium. When a person is centralized in one state of existence, he has a total psychology which is particular to that state. His feelings, motivations, ethics and values, biochemistry, degree of neurological activation, learning systems, belief systems, conception of mental health, ideas as to what mental illness is and how it should be treated, preferences for and conceptions of management, education, economic and political theory and practice, etc., are all appropriate to that state."

another go and try something new that could help. All equally fundamental, all in the spirit of positive *motion*.

### **3. Use Phenomenology to connect and validate wonder**

Phenomenology gives credit to a person's experience. It listens. It acknowledges and verifies a person's version of events. Just this, is highly significant. Phenomenology is not a mechanical process it is more of a mode of thinking, an inquisitive and interested mind. Whichever form of phenomenology you apply to your thinking, the key skills are questioning and listening. You extract and you listen. You listen. You allow. You listen some more. Van Manen (2014, p.36) summarised

“Doing phenomenology is becoming infected with a certain pathos that creates an openness to the world and open attentiveness. The meaningfulness of the talk consists not only of the things talked about, but also in the sphere of togetherness where you share time together. Even the silences speak.”

The quality of rapport could be said to be the oil that lubricates communication. Any process that encourages the phenomena of listening is going to be useful for rapport and consequent trust. Holding a space for people to open and release their confusions, their fears, their hopes, their ideas is of paramount advantage. By practising the phenomenological mind of enquiry with my clients, I have increased my effectiveness in helping them live well. After all my information stacking and piles of advice ready to go, it seems that listening intently, being inquisitive and interested in the person talking to me is now my main strength. The solutions and determinate conclusions can wait their turn. As the popular coaching aphorism goes “*nobody really cares what you have to say, until they know you care.*”

I have equally found that giving due diligence to the persons experience and digging into their details brings each conversation much more alive between us. There begins a fascination with the matter in hand which helps hold attention and create new possibilities of how to respond. Heidegger said, “*Phenomenological thinking compels us into the basic disposition of wonder, which transports us into beginnings of genuine thinking.*” The experience is given primary attention, not some theoretical retrofit of it, that comes in suitable time. There is nothing wrong with the theories and ideas of the generalised consensus of matters, but they can be damaging if they bulldoze over the entry into the investigation process. Everything begins to negate to the mean average and with

that the original sparkle of being and experience takes a hit, both for the experiencer and the coach. Van Manen adds;

“What makes phenomenology so fascinating is that any ordinary experience tends to become quite extraordinary when we lift it up from our daily existence and hold it with our phenomenological gaze. It grasps attentively the living sense of the experience before we have lifted it up into cognitive, conceptual, or theoretical determination or clarity.” (2014, p.39)

I call on those who develop sports coaching courses to incorporate phenomenological enquiry into their curriculum. I know of no current National Governing Body award that does and would be surprised if it has been placed on the curriculums of university led Degrees or even master's programmes. Importantly, it will most appropriately be delivered as an investigative way of mind and a practical skill not washed over as only a novel theoretical idea. The best-case scenario would be helping coaches to learn a mode of thinking and operating that can *bring alive the ordinary*.

#### **4. Existential thinking - *shake up and wake up***

The ideas of the five philosophers presented in Dialogue one is illuminating, powerful, and pragmatic. Producing the dialogue was a joy. Their ideas have changed the perception of my life, my usefulness, my life's meaning and what is important to me. I operate differently and I treat myself kindlier. A personal example of this was how by reading Sartre's ideas of '*freedom from*' and '*freedom for*' helped me to change a particular background question I had floating about in my head. For a long time, I had carried a self-suspicion that I was lazy by not having a proper 'nine to five' job. My question was "*Am I really just being lazy by not taking those opportunities to work a full contract like I should do really?*" In other words, I have my *freedom from* which at some level I am guilty over. Only when I considered my *freedom for* did I shift focus and drop the weight of responsibility I had felt as low-level shame. Instead, I ask, "*How will I inspire those I love as I go after what I am passionate about in my life?*" This is what I do with my freedom. My freedom to choose. I cannot articulate here how profoundly this has affected my state of mind and all the consequent energy and directions I take.

I propose that taking on board existential ideas can train the brain to respond with flexibility to the terrain of one's sporting life. It can help with a type of maturing of thought that prevents feelings of being stuck or trapped which in my experience and those of clients can quickly lead to panic. In an uncomplicated way the ideas can help one pit stop for a while at a new philosophical

conclusion that can help pragmatically, if only for a while. There can be something therapeutic in understanding you are not alone with your experiences in the world. To know nobody has really cracked the problem of existence and what it all means or how to live correctly can take pressure off. The Absurdity claims of Albert Camus are particularly illuminating in this aspect. We are not rigid beings; we cannot formulate rigid minds, therefore. There is no doubt Mr Nietzsche, Mr Camus, Mrs De Beauvoir, Mr Sartre and especially Mr Heidegger will help those minds be anything but rigid. They will flex.

##### **5. Beware the Serious Trap – *Stick to things, do not get stuck.***

One of the most poignant moments of my research was brought to light when I read Simone De Beauvoir's description of her caricature *The Serious Man*:

“The serious man wills himself to be a god; but he is not one and knows it. He wishes to rid himself of his subjectivity, but it constantly risks being unmasked. He will always be saying that he is disappointed, for his wish to have the world harden into a thing is belied by the very movement of life. He will be a prey to ill humour and bitterness. His very successes have a taste of ashes, for the serious is one of those ways of trying to realize the impossible synthesis of the in-itself and the for-itself.”

I could recognise this character's propensity for the over serious within myself at times but certainly in performers and coaches who get stuck in themselves. I notice it as an incessant will to force square pegs into round holes. Impatience reigns, a hard battle against life and what it inevitably has in store for us. Where theory fights with reality, where penalties are missed by the finest football players in the land. There are *negative serious types* who carry a generalised cynicism and over scepticism about their own predicaments and those of the wider world. There are also *positive serious types* who are hell bent on some fundamental mechanism that will forever solve all complexity, such as those recently stuck too far in the 'mindfulness' trend, or 'positive affirmation' world. It is much easier to be either a hard cynic or blind optimist than to deal with complexity. I have seen this with sporting parents, coaches, performers, and academics<sup>5</sup>. There is inability to maintain a sense of humour especially about oneself, only a sarcasm perhaps or a judgemental prod at someone else's ignorant stupidity.

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<sup>5</sup> One academic Doctor told me not to begin my PhD at all costs. He said there was nothing I could prove and therefore would get fed up and just be wasting my time. He had his PhD certificate in his bottom drawer as if cast away in shame.

I, Laura, and James all have a propensity for the serious, but the research revealed that at our best we lightened up. There was still determination but more of a relaxed alignment with the truthful multifaceted nature of sporting situations. DP is the one who has least tendency to tighten up. He is the one most frequently helping to lighten the mood and bring balance to most occasions. De Beauvoir added that clinging to any of her various caricatures was an understandable but futile attempt to bypass life's ambiguities and that only in helping others may we experience a fuller connection to life. This is particularly poignant for athletes who are self-centred creatures. They are fundamentally aiming to climb over others in their quests up the respective hierarchies and it may be hard for them to move towards the more collective outlook. Nietzsche would say "*go for it*" and become what you must and inspire through your own fullest becoming. Yet even Nietzsche advised to do it in the spirit of the child, banishing the "*thou shalt*" and acting with spontaneity and new curiosity with a freedom and move on to the next thing.

It has been said that professional sport performers die two deaths due to their inability to sustain standards of excellence required. I propose that if they can be helped to reduce elements of tendencies to form an 'Overly-Serious' relationship with their occupation, yet maintain a meaningful bond with it, they might exit their sporting lives well and continue to develop beyond. I see it as incumbent upon those who support performers and who are close to them can aid this progression by becoming less serious themselves. They can illuminate through their own being how one might live through tempering the propensity to forge a narrow intensity of an almost addictive nature to something that can never be totally controlled, a sporting life. Those I have witnessed do well over prolonged periods are less about the body of knowledge they have piled up or dropping the big 'secret' but more a way of relating. It is in the interactions where I have felt my own most influence upon myself and others, when we have stumbled on realisations. The way you are, is often the way you influence most. Without digressing too far from one's natural character Coaches, performers, teammates, support staff, parents might do well to remember to resist the trap of the overly self-serious position.

In the transfer report for this research, I questioned '*Am I using a Sledgehammer just to crack open a peanut (p.9)*? Existential phenomenology is after all rooted in deep relativistic grounds that are highly individualist. Consequently, it follows that complexity will become the dominant lens by which the world of things appears. There is a risk in over complication at the cost of simplicity. Straightforward solutions do exist, they work. Rational simplicity continues to benefit sports performers and within this study there are examples from DP, myself, Laura, and James where simple



calculations and repeated practices helped. At times, sport is rational and logical analysis works. I have adopted many models of sports performance, winning, personality, leadership, psychology, and analysis and considering their partiality, they have benefitted me and those I work with exponentially well. The best templates I follow never claimed to be substantial and require me to go back into my own life and apply them. The problem occurs when the template masquerades or is received or 'sold' as THE solution. There must be relativistic individualised application, and this remains where the complexity begins.

Putting Ontology before Epistemology may be an overly complicated way to consider life. "Too deep," I often hear. This is fair criticism. I can make myself feel nauseous at times when I go down into the depths of Ontology. I can get stuck in the weeds down there when all I needed was to follow a trusted piece of universal advice. A weakness of this study may be that it provides no simple template for many who require that at times of their life. Sports coaches and performers have enough complexity dealing with the terrain of evolving competition and the sociocultural aspects of their existence, without then needing to question the roots of their own individual ontology or existential phenomenology.

There are other vital aspects to consider for living well. Advances in Bioenergetic (Mondall, 2017; Wells et al 2009) understanding of cellular energy release associated with metabolic states brought about by nutrition strategies and workload intensities, most certainly has a foundational effect on lived experience. If you doubt this, try living in a permanent hangover state! This field of bioenergetic research also considers neurochemistry and in particular the key role of neurotransmitter release (oxytocin, dopamine, serotonin) and their consequent effects of too little or especially in the case of serotonin, too much. I would encourage investigations in the expanding field of *NeuroPhilosophy* (Balaban et al 2016) where Philosophy diverges with Neuroscience and Biology. This interdisciplinary approach uses a neuroscientific basis of investigation to philosophical concepts of phenomena and uses philosophy to consider the appropriateness of investigative methods and their effectiveness. With advances in brain scanning technologies, it will be useful keep a philosophical mind involved to not lose our way completely down the scientific order of life.

Simply expressed, there is no precise 'how to' live well through a sporting life, only an ongoing participation with it. Therefore, philosophical investigations are well suited and through these I generated the better question 'how might one live well through a sporting life?' I have presented how existential phenomenology can particularly help and exemplified methods that can help reveal the *more of our ontological experience of being here* not merely the rationalised, the

generalised, or the theorised. By making affirmative suggestions based on the research undertaken, I believe the conclusions drawn are specifically beneficial to those willing to take part in deeper thought. In a time of increasing individuality, media scrutiny, instant fame, fast tracked success, technological dissection and less community dependence comes more of an existential overwhelm. There can be deep loneliness amongst all the attention. Meaning can evaporate through a disconnection from the original magic of competition and play. Yet some thrive. A sporting life lived permanently well may be hard to come by, but it is possible to stay afloat, and to be buoyant. This takes skilful engagement not only with the sport itself but with one's own historical, current, and future involvement with perceptions of *my unique existence*.

I leave the last words with Martin Heidegger

“It is entirely correct and completely in order to say, “You cannot do anything with philosophy.” The only mistake is to believe that with this, the judgement concerning philosophy is at an end. For a little epilogue arises in the form of a counter-question: even if we cannot do anything with it, **may not philosophy in the end do something with us, provided we engage ourselves with it.**”

Engage. Be and Become.

Well?

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1

DP Coach article to support brief Biography

Pictured with Laura Massaro and Daniel Massaro (Researcher)



12

## PEARSON – A CHAMPION COACH

David Pearson admitted to emotions he had never experienced before as he sat in the Kuala Lumpur hotel after Laura Massaro became world champion. "All of a sudden it hit me – I got a bit tearful," he said.

Pearson had done something unique. A few years ago he coached Peter Nicol, more recently Nick Matthew and now Laura Massaro – all world champions. No one had ever coached both men's and women's world champions before.

Many people might not have noticed the difference Pearson made. It was by "tiny, tiny" changes, according to Massaro, and observing details which at the highest level are crucial.

"It might only make two or three shots a match better," she said. "But it matters." Notably two points were the difference between Massaro and Nour El Sherbini in the world final.

Making "tiny" changes can actually be a big thing, so big, in fact, that some players can no longer make them once their game is grooved.

Pearson suggested to Massaro that she move her grip slightly anti-clockwise. It fitted with the aim of striking the ball slightly further in front of her, and sharpened the effects of her drop and drive on the forehand side.

Attempting it when you are already world no.2 could be disruptive. Pearson was so aware of this that he left it fully eight months before broaching the subject. When he finally did, he looked her in the eye for 10 seconds before speaking. Trust and confidence were everything.

"It's not like 'I'm a coach and I'm trying to help you,'" he said. "It has to be that this person really believes in you. If they go through trauma in life, they trust you are there. You're a friend more than a squash coach. That's the key."

Massaro described how it felt. "David gives me a lot of mental stuff subtly," she said. "That's alongside his main strength, which is massive technical knowledge."

"If things are not going well, he's really good at making sure you don't dwell on it – and he never lets you get too high if you are winning."

"He's had Peter Nicol and Nick Matthew. Me winning is just another in the list of achievements. So you just carry on."



12

THE SQUASH PLAYER

David Pearson, Laura Massaro's coach, explaining that improvement is made in small steps

Last year another improvement came when Danny began touring with Laura more often. "After 10 years it's important that I feel comfortable on tour," she explained. "I was getting unsure what I wanted to do."

"Now he is there with me, it's like we are at home and that takes a lot of pressure off me. My life-squash balance is one of the huge reasons I am where I am."

That is within 800 points of becoming world no.1, the closest anyone has been to David for seven years. To climb closer, a successful defence of the British Open title in Hull may be needed.

Massaro will also bid for David's Commonwealth title in Glasgow in July and August. Managing increased media expectations will be important in Glasgow, she reckons, but once into the athletes' village, that pressure will disappear.

Hull will present different, and perhaps more difficult, challenges. "I see myself as defending champion, but at the same time I am number two and Nicol will be favourite," Massaro said wisely. "I will still take all the pressure off myself I can in terms of expectations."

"I know I want to do it and will fight for every point, but at the same time I am not expected to win, so that will help."

It is a sensible attitude and Pearson understands how she came to adopt it. "Now she thinks 'I am quite good,'" he says. "That's where she's got to now. She believes that she could win things now."

Appendix 2

Dialogue 3

DP - Interview Data, content and theme extraction

NOTE: Key selected themes highlighted in **bold** throughout

DP and Danny Massaro Transcript 1

<p><b>Transcript Date: 12/1/21</b></p> <p><b>ME:</b> OK DP so um yeah just what what's it like to change somebody's grip?</p> <p><b>DP:</b> Well, I think. <b>I think Laura Massaro's a good example</b> and I think with the changing of a grip it doesn't matter whether you're nearly a top player in the world or you're a beginner. You know the grip's extremely important. Well, whatever level you are and I always remember Laura, <b>I think it was on a cold November day I think, in Harrogate Squash club cause the weather was absolutely freezing</b> and always remembered it having this session and I think Laura at the time was probably <b>two or three in the world.</b></p> <p>And at the end of the session I always remember her standing in the middle of the 'T' <b>looking very pleased with herself.</b> And she turned around to me and I think I was in the forehand back corner and she said, well, you know, DP <b>isn't there anything else we need to work on</b> and she looked at me and I think she was expecting me to go – 'Well, no, not really. You just have to improve on the things you do already.'</p> <p>I remember thinking, which I had wanted to do for quite a long time but had to pick my moments you know. And I looked at her and I said, "<i>well your grip is not good enough.</i>" You know, consider she was two or three in the world at the time. <b>She, like, looked at me. And there was this silence for about 15 seconds and she just kept looking at me and I said, well, you grip is not good enough. That's why you're not pushing Nicol David at the top,</b> you know, the top player in the world. You're <b>not really getting anywhere near,</b> and really, I said, "<i>unless you change your grip, you're never going to get anywhere nearer</i>" and well <b>her face.</b> You know that face that Laura has just sort of. She looked at me, you know, and it was that sulky face. <b>And I thought, oh gosh, here we go. I've said the wrong thing, she's going to have a right meltdown here.</b></p> <p>She says, "<i>What do you mean?</i>" And I sort of went through it without going into the technical details. I said, "<i>you know you need to change your grip by probably a centimetre around a little bit.</i>" I said, and "<i>if you're able to do that, that would enable you to take the ball further out in front. Your racquet face would be more open. And then you'll</i></p>	<p><b>Emergent Themes</b></p> <p><b>LIVED EXPERIENCE DESCRIPTION (LED)</b></p> <p><b>Laura in the story</b></p> <p><b>Context</b></p> <p><b>High level proficiency</b></p> <p><b>High Ego</b></p> <p><b>Asking for help</b></p> <p><b>Surprise</b></p> <p><b>Picking the right moment</b></p> <p><b>Suspense</b></p> <p><b>Truth</b></p> <p><b>Shock Emotion</b></p> <p><b>Quotes in first person</b></p>
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<p><i>get a bit more movements on the strings I said, so it's up to you, OR you, you can either keep your grip as it is and you know stay number two in the world or three in the world forever for a little while, or have you got the courage to, you know, Change grip and then access all these things I'm talking about."</i></p>	<p><b>Trust Ultimatum</b></p>
<p>So then there was about another 15 seconds of silence in the face was still like Thunder. And then Laura did what she always does with me anyway, she said, <b>"OK, then I'll change it."</b></p>	<p><b>Confidence in technical knowledge</b></p>
<p>So, I said, right, we'll go through it now and explain it in a bit more detail. We spent about another 20 minutes explaining what we're looking for and then I remember the session finishing and I could see she was a little bit perturbed. If you like, you know, <b>'I'm not going to be able to do this. I'm not going to be able to do it,'</b> but the one thing that she', Laura always had, <b>she always believed what I said to her.</b></p>	<p><b>Action</b></p> <p><b>Doubts</b></p> <p><b>Belief in each other</b></p>
<p>Yeah so. You know, I remember at the time. Which she told me later 'cause I didn't see it because she was in the car on the way home back to Chorley.</p>	
<p>Yeah um, <b>she burst into tears.</b> I think when she was driving by herself, I don't think you were with us that day. Danny where you were there that day?</p>	<p><b>Upset – tears</b></p>
<p><b>ME:</b> No.</p>	<p><b>Context</b></p>
<p><b>DP:</b> I don't think you were, apparently, she was crying in the car and you know thinking <b>'I can't do this, I don't know if I can do this'</b> (high pitch)</p>	
<p>And then probably before the next session, which was about a week away. I think, um, <b>she was practicing, practicing, practicing</b> and really then she took it all on board. She tried to do it as Laura could try and do it and it was Simple really, she didn't have much up and downs and in in terms of a game going backwards or anything and <b>she really focused on that grip.</b></p>	<p><b>Practice Action</b></p> <p><b>Work</b></p>
<p>At the end of the day cutting Long story short, she, the final, errrrr, the awakening moment was - I remember I was going to America to do some coaching and I couldn't be there for the final of the British Open. I saw the semi-final. I remember getting on the plane. I remember arriving in America and because I had my phone switched off, you couldn't obviously get anything. I remember putting it on in customs. I think, which you shouldn't do. Or was it going to Canada? Or is it America? I think it might be in Canada actually. And see David and remember the phone going Bing. You know when you switch it on there was this Bing noise and it was a message from you. A cryptic message which is like you! (laughter) A Cryptic message going. What did it say, it went?' Eureka' or something. <b>Anyway, it would basically, end of day she beat Nicol in the final, which had never done before. I was very emotional</b></p>	<p><b>Success</b></p> <p><b>Context – left her, apart</b></p> <p><b>History making</b></p>

<p><b>Danny, it just hit me.</b> That was the <b>beginning of Laura being you know real contender for world number one for probably, Ohh maybe five years, Six years.</b> I think you know where she was one for a while or at 2 or whatever, but she was. Uh, you know, as you say, became world champion and that's what grip change can do!</p> <p><b>End of the Main Anecdote -</b></p> <p>-----</p> <p><b>Phenomenology of experience questions</b></p> <p><b>ME:</b> yes, what? How did it, how does it feel to go through that as a coach?</p> <p><b>DP:</b> I think the first thing is to.... <b>was having the courage just to tell her your grip needs changing.</b> It's easy. For me it was easy, cause I've done it lots of times before. It was as much as <b>'your grip needs changing, are you going to do it or you're not going to do it?'</b></p> <p>The more apprehensive thing was going to be <b>her reaction mood to it all.</b> In terms of delivering information, I didn't have a problem with that, if that makes sense.</p> <p><b>ME:</b> Yeah? So, is it just a confidence there when you're thinking about that as a coach?</p> <p><b>DP:</b> Well <b>I always knew as a coach through experience and what have you, if you don't change your grip, you're never going to be what you're going to be.</b> To change your grip so I had no doubts as a coach. That's why it happened. <b>You believe in your conviction and then what happens is aswell, because you've gained Laura's confidence over time.... I knew she would do it so.....</b> So, what I mean by that is, with some people you can do it straight away. Other people you've got to get their confidence for a year before you come in with that sort of a heavy hand. So, it's horses for courses and <b>you've got to get to know the personality.</b></p> <p><b>ME:</b> Yes.</p> <p><b>DP:</b> And when, when can you deliver it? In an ideal world. I'd love to deliver that when I first gave her first lesson, but I felt Laura couldn't take that, <b>so I had to wait.</b> Maybe a year or so from what I can remember now. And before I deliver that information.</p> <p><b>ME:</b> So how well does that feel like? Is that a sense, you get in your body?</p>	<p><b>Simple summary</b></p> <p><b>PUNCTUM – World number 1 by changing something so small</b></p> <p><b>Courage</b></p> <p><b>Mood reaction</b></p> <p><b>Confidence in information</b></p> <p><b>Belief in information</b></p> <p><b>No doubts – conviction</b></p> <p><b>Know the individual personality</b></p> <p><b>Patience – timing</b></p> <p><b>Bodily sense A feeling within</b></p>
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<p><b>DP:</b> Yeah, a sense you get in your body. You're not doing it through coaching I think, <b>it's a sense you get within yourself. This is the right moment to do it.</b> So, with Laura..... that moment in Harrogate Squash Club was the ideal day to do it. <b>And I just knew that was the time.</b></p>	<p><b>Knowing</b></p>
<p>And what that does it brings them, <b>brings the athlete back to a level again. 'cause when they two in the world of three in the world, they think they're quite good and that ego comes in. And then when you deliver the hammer blow yeah, how are you going to react to that?</b></p>	<p><b>Reality check</b> <b>Ego drop</b></p>
<p><b>ME:</b> Yeah, that makes sense. So, it's also why, why you obviously confidence you know, and you know the moment to do it. Why are you aware it's a 'Hammer Blow' to them? because that's quite a strong term.</p>	<p><b>Timing</b></p>
<p><b>DP:</b> Say that again, Danny,</p>	
<p><b>ME:</b> Like you know, like the hammer blow, yeah, so there's obviously more going on because it's obviously a strong term that it's in in one way is just a grip change?</p>	<p><b>Realisation</b></p>
<p><b>DP:</b> Well, I think <b>it's the realisation</b></p>	
<p>I don't know. It's like. Laura you are number two in the world, you probably think you're really good. I'm going to deliver some information now which will take you to One in the world. OK, and um.... Are you going to be able to take information and want to do it? If that makes sense.</p>	<p><b>There is change required to get to higher</b> <b>Responsibility on the player</b></p>
<p>So... it's a hammer blow. You either take the information, do it which could get you to one in the world, or you don't bother with it and you will stay at three and four in the world, which is a lot of people would have done.</p>	
<p><b>ME:</b> Does that feel like there's more going on there in that moment than just the grip changes then?</p>	<p><b>Grip – metaphor for the overall mentality to become the best</b></p>
<p><b>DP:</b> Oh yeah, the grip, the saying is not flippant comment, but it's a comment you just throw out, there's a lot deeper than that in it. It was changing your grip. Will they be able to? You'll be able to access different things on court, so you become mentally tougher as well. So, you say that at the time, <b>so when Laura changed a grip, little did she know that that would make her mentally tougher. As time went on.</b></p>	<p><b>Breeds confidence</b></p>
<p>And more confident and believing in herself because Laura was never the most confident. She was always worried about what she was doing, so it had many, many knock-on effects rather than just changing grips.</p>	<p><b>Higher themes and benefits</b></p>
<p>So, with that grip change when she improved with it and everything else, and then the other players start to get wary of because she knows they know she's improved.</p>	<p><b>Personally, and in competitors</b></p>

<p><b>ME:</b> Yes, how did it? What did you think or feel as a coach when she went OK? Then let's do it.</p>	
<p><b>DP:</b> Well, it makes <b>you feel that they trust what you say to them</b> and they want to do it. So, it makes you feel, <b>Confident within yourself</b>, really. Yeah, because there was no, there was no.... what's the word? Rejection of it. So, it's basically OK, I'll change my grip within 20 minutes, and I'll do it. Which is you know, for world class players, quite a bombshell. You know, so it makes you, it makes you <b>feel trusted, appreciated</b>. But then again, for me, Danny was more like <b>I'd always deliver information like that</b>. It was like please either you want to do it, or you don't want to do it. <b>I was never frightened of anything like that</b>.</p>	<p><b>Trust</b> <b>Self confidence</b></p> <p><b>Appreciation</b> <b>Not scared to say or do it (both)</b></p>
<p><b>ME:</b> Yeah, when the confirmation comes through OK then are you then experiencing different levels of. 'Let's really do this' or 'I'm all in'. Did you get a sense of? OK, then let's do it all the way. Do some players say it just for saying it, but you know they're not going to do it? I mean what? What kind of sense did you get from Laura?</p>	<p><b>Belief in Laura</b> <b>Know the personality</b></p>
<p><b>DP:</b> So even before I said change your grip to her, <b>I knew she would do it</b>.</p>	
<p><b>ME:</b> It's still nice to have a pupil be the pupil is it?</p>	
<p><b>DP:</b> Yeah. So, what you get with other pupils is like they know everything! Say you had someone like a young player for England who would say yeah I'll go and try and change but never <b>would really go all the way and I knew that</b>, so you knew that and that's why that player is still number 50 in the world.</p>	<p><b>Teacher pupil status</b></p>
<p><b>ME:</b> Why is it an effective story for coaching?</p>	
<p><b>DP:</b> Well it's a good story to tell because one, one thing about it, <b>it's funny</b>. Because Laura, <b>Laura's reaction to it</b>, was what I thought it would be with the 'pie face' and everything, you know Laura's face when she doesn't like what she's hearing really or she's a bit worried, or she's a bit troubled. 'Uh oh,' you know that look she gives. So, the story itself is funny. Cause you remember the way she looked and the way she reacted and what have you and then, so it has a sense of humour behind it, there's always that. She finds it funny herself now.</p>	<p><b>Humour</b> <b>Laughing at oneself</b></p>
<p><b>ME:</b> Yeah.</p>	
<p><b>DP:</b> Well, on that day, for instance, it's the Columbo effect. Right? So, she wasn't expecting that at all. It's like Colombo, the TV detective 1st and <b>who he's catching never expects it when he delivers the blow</b>. That was a bit like that. It was a bit like I'm going to deliver the blow today. You <b>know you have no idea what's coming today</b>. What's going</p>	<p><b>Awareness of mischief</b> <b>Set up</b></p>

<p>to hit you, yeah, so it's so the good things about stories is <b>1.</b> there's a sense of humour <b>2.</b> It's the Columbo effect and then <b>3.</b> You hope there's an end result, like the person ends up in jail (laughter)!!</p>	<p><b>In order to create a reaction</b></p>
<p><b>ME:</b> So, is there anything about this that is mischievous or humorous you?</p>	<p><b>Humour</b></p>
<p><b>DP:</b> I mean it's that's why I always like telling stories, right? Even when I tell the story, I'm laughing because I love one thing about me, <b>I love bringing Egos down.</b> Not that Laura had an ego and that. But I love doing like with Nick Matthew or Peter Nicol. They've got big egos. You just bring him straight back down to reality. cause at the end of the day it's a game to squash. You are <b>not a better person than anybody</b> else. You know. You know <b>you're just a squash player. It's a black ball against the wall. Whether you're a big club, squash player or you will champion, there's no difference in the way you should behave and what have you. Don't get above yourself.</b> So, what I used to look doing was bringing, Top players down, yes, if that makes sense.</p>	<p><b>Lower the ego</b></p>
<p><b>ME:</b> Yeah, and so that is that part of the fun of coaching for you? When you're in a situation in that moment, does it feel the walk home from that session you know, what did you do next? Like I've set a ball in motion? Or are you secretly, you know, have you gone home and thought guess what I did today?</p>	<p><b>Absurdity</b></p>
<p><b>DP:</b> I knew there's a ball set in motion, so I was <b>waiting for the reaction.</b> Not the reaction at that moment. Two days later, for instance. So, I, you know, I love to go shopping at Marks and Spencer's, yeah? And I'll be walking around the aisle. Phone goes two days later and it's Laura on the phone. Yeah, she's she. I'm in the middle of the Isle of Marks and she's got FaceTime or one of those things with it. And she's asking, is this right? DP was at 4:00 in the afternoon. I'm on the phone we have got shoppers passing me and she's saying to me, 'Is this what I'm looking for', so I knew that's the consequence of delivering that information. I was showing her with my vape pen thing. <b>So even after two days she was onto it.</b> If that makes sense.</p>	<p><b>Keep feet on the ground</b></p>
<p><b>ME:</b> Yeah, so that's something.</p>	<p><b>Challenge perceived ego</b></p>
<p><b>DP:</b> Look Danny, what happens is it's all about making this statement. And then the <b>personality is going to react to that statement.</b> It's not about or as <b>simple as having a coaching conference</b> and I think that people should hold the racket this way and then you learn as a coach, <b>it's all about personality. Personality within itself is what makes the difference and you can't put your finger on personality.</b></p>	<p><b>Create a reaction</b></p>
<p><b>ME:</b> Yeah, so without paraphrasing you, just prompt you to, Um, you were up to something that day!</p>	<p><b>I need your help</b></p>
<p><b>DP:</b> Yeah, <b>I'm always up to something.</b></p>	<p><b>Pupil/coach order re clarified</b></p>
	<p><b>Get a reaction through a statement</b></p>
	<p><b>Prod their personality</b></p>

<p><b>ME:</b> maybe there was a mischief there, that you were up to something which is hard to put into words, but you were you were it was ready to move on and have some energy to it. And in some way and it just happened to be you picked the grip because it was a it was actually relevant thing but yeah, it's not just change the grip here.....what I'm getting from the story is that there's, there's a lot more going on than just what appears.</p> <p><b>DP:</b> There's a lot more in it, you can't write it down, yeah, but you can actually <b>you can just tell it in a story ....it comes through the vibe of your body, the vibe of your soul.</b> It's got all these things going on OK and you can't describe it. For instance, I know this is slightly another story, <b>I don't know if you want it, but you know the first time I saw Peter Nicol when he was 15, I knew. Why did I know? I knew that he was going to be a world class course player at 15 when he wasn't quite as good. It wasn't the best junior in the world or anything, but I knew it was going to be world class. Whether that was world number one or world top 10, whatever I knew. In my being that that kid would be a great player, how do I know that I can't explain?</b></p> <p>You can see things he volleyed the ball and he was quite a good mover and what have you, but you knew through the personality.</p> <p><b>ME:</b> So, do you think the body, your body might have sensed it, and intelligence. You say it's not a rational calculation. Do you think there's something going on?</p> <p><b>DP: There's something going on within you as a person that you can't write it down on a piece of paper. It's the feeling.</b></p> <p><b>ME:</b> We can't pin it, but if you were to, you know, think of an area where you get that feeling, or at a certain tension, or a lightness or a temperature. Where does it tend to be in your in yourself? For you.</p> <p><b>DP:</b> I think through the mind. Is that through your, you know whatever the brain does? I don't understand it.</p> <p><b>ME:</b> Do You get butterflies? Do you get lightness? Did you get tingly feet? The feel on the skin?</p> <p><b>DP:</b> You do certain things when somebody <i>gets</i> something, you get a lightness, giddiness when you can see improvement. You know it's like Jenny, Jenny Duncalf (stepdaughter). She got to world #2. You know when she, from the age 11, I always knew she would be professional squash player. Yeah you know everyone say she should take her A levels first and you know do this all this edge educational stuff. I knew she was never going to do that so once you got to 18 after taking her A levels, she was never going to go to University was she? She turned straight</p>	<p><b>This story is communicating MORE than the grip part.</b></p> <p><b>Uses stories for that</b></p> <p><b>This story highlights the importance of a sixth sense</b> <b>This story highlights the importance of a sixth sense intuition</b></p> <p><b>Beyond rationality</b></p> <p><b>Feelings</b></p>
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<p>away to be a professional squash player. And, and that's those, are the types of things you know. So other moments when you, you know when you're coaching that you'll be just pottering around and doing your daily coaching, you know your way. <b>Other moments that occur where you, where you get feelings and it's like whoa. Like either way, whether you know like wow like you see it, you might send someone doing a movement or an improvement and quickly just know.</b></p> <p><b>ME:</b> Yeah, yeah, I remember. They're simply going to go there type thing?</p> <p><b>DP:</b> I remember Alistair Walker, who's world class player for two and a half years. He would you know he tried hard, he was about 40 in the world and I remember one Monday morning him coming for his session. We did what we've been trying to do over the last two and a half years, then all of a sudden, I remember after that session walking off the court and saying he's got it! A bit like 'My Fair Lady' that she's got it to speak English and the hitting it's actually worked it he's got it after 2 1/2 years and he went from 40 in the world in the world to 11 in the world in about 10 months.</p> <p>Yeah, so that was one of <b>those feelings</b> same with Paul Johnson. The next World #4 player. Yeah, you know, you knew when you always got it, it's going to happen. You know Simon park, another one.</p> <p><b>ME:</b> Is it fair to say you just crack on until that feeling lets you know is that you got back on? Do you trust that more than anything that feeling?</p> <p><b>DP:</b> Yeah, you just get that feeling you don't let up. You keep cracking on. Until it works. Sense overall.</p> <p><b>ME:</b> Yeah, I can remember sat with you watching Laura. You'd just be quiet then all of a sudden, you'd say "Danny, Danny!" I'd be been bogged down in the match, you know she's 8 1 up, she needs another point.... you'd say "Danny, Danny, she's got it. She's, manipulating the wrist and transferring the weight there". And I would be literally saying to you – "DP What are you on about?"</p> <p><b>DP:</b> Yes</p> <p><b>ME:</b> But you've gone to another place, like in a way where I always felt that you went a little bit more serious, quieter, more concentrated rather than maybe a bit bored and it was almost like you'd said " Oh now we're talking, yeah?" Is that what it's like? It wasn't like I asked you for it and we measured it and we found it through data, it was like it just came to you. Is that the way that you know, where you monitor how your coaching is developing and going with a player.</p> <p><b>DP:</b> It doesn't happen that often, but you watch certain matches where you just sit there, and you just think. <b>Wow. It's like all of a sudden,</b></p>	<p><b>A knowing</b></p> <p><b>It can be random</b></p> <p><b>A sudden emergence through work over a period of time</b></p> <p><b>Trust your feelings and senses</b></p>
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<p><b>they become a bit of an extra.....</b> What's the word and extra-terrestrial being right? It's like you're on another planet. So, when you sit there watching that, you can, you <b>can feel it and see it a mile off.</b> <i>Well, I can.</i></p> <p><b>ME:</b> Difference?</p> <p><b>DP:</b> The difference? You know, today they're playing on a planet on a level of, of..... they've never played like before or they've got that. What's the modern sporting term? They use zone, or you know these clever words. People use today, you know. And every now and then people will go into that zone.</p> <p><b>ME:</b> Is there something about that though that you know is permanent and they're not going to go back.</p> <p><b>DP:</b> Yeah, you can only get those zones maybe twice a year.</p> <p><b>ME:</b> yeah, I get that about a high level high performance, I just mean sometimes where you've been plugging away with Laura on something for ages and then all of a sudden something you'd worked on for a long -long time without being too direct and really strict about it. It emerged in a game, yeah? Then you were almost like nicely surprised. Like a flower, just grow and get grown yeah, and it wasn't done through it. It was done through cultivating the. It was done through cultivating around it and then all it was popped up there like. Is that you know, rather than like hammering it in really strictly, it was like you could do your thing and then just be patient and then all the sudden it happened. Then you'd see it.</p> <p><b>DP:</b> It's like you know when you plant flowers, or you plant seeds you booked seeds in and then when that one day pops up <b>with all the beauty of what that flower is. And that's what happens with athletes are squash players. You put the groundwork in. And then what will happen if you get it right? That flower will blossom at some time.</b> Little blossom if it's a sunflower, it will blossom into, you know, <b>like a sunflower can be,</b> and that's what you're trying to work. You're trying to get out of players that blossoming of, of, of, the coaching you are doing. If that makes sense.</p> <p><b>ME:</b> Do you remember those moments more than the?</p> <p><b>DP: I remember the stories.</b> If you ask me now, 'When did Laura win the US Open?' I would have to guess. Was it 2000 two 1017 out? I mean, I might guess right? But I would be guessing. I wouldn't know for sure. So even with other people, I think Nick Matthew when did he win his first British Open? Haven't got a clue. But I can remember if I tell you a story about him, he will always remember, and hours remember it.</p>	<p><b>Sudden emergence of notable difference</b></p> <p><b>Change</b></p> <p><b>A flowering</b></p> <p><b>Through groundwork</b></p> <p><b>Different types of flowers</b></p>
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<p><b>Stories are erm, the, erm.... The way life's always been people remember stories.</b></p> <p><b>ME:</b> We're going to finish now, you know, but just as you've obviously gone down that story and revealed it again and talked about the story and how does it make you feel?</p> <p><b>DP:</b> I like telling the story, so it makes me feel excited, makes me laugh, it makes a love telling the stories. That's what it will always be. If you you've been around me long enough Danny, we, we go back.... I'm telling stories all the time. About Simon Power in Malaysia. Yeah you, you know don't have to explain to you about Peter Nicol about, you know it's always stories, isn't it? And it makes you feel excited. Totally makes me feel excited. Yeah, telling story. Telling a story, how you, <b>you know I you know I love reading. I love stories and most people you know who want to listen to stories the Viking Warriors. Go back in 680 or whatever loved to listen to the stories in the evening when they have their mead or whatever they had. It was always storytelling, yeah. And that is such a massive thing.</b></p> <p><b>ME:</b> When that happens, what does that feel like? Is that why you coach or what? What does that feel like to you?</p> <p><b>DP:</b> Like I said before, everything you do it. Everything you, the work you've been putting, and you get in the fruit, the fruition. The benefit of all the early coaching you put in. And what have you so that makes you feel everything you've done over the years have been worthwhile? And you get that feeling within yourself, whatever. However, that feeling feels. Let that person blossom.</p> <p>So, it's like every person you coach, it's like a different flower? So, everyone's not going to popup a sunflower, you may have one popup a Rose you have one popup as a sunflower. You might have one who pops up as a Bogan Vilia or something. <b>'because it's a different personality.</b> So, all these personalities are in the mix.</p> <p><b>ME:</b> So, what you what you've been working on over that time is the personality rather than all the heavy techniques, and then that that personality will grow whatever type of personality they have.</p> <p><b>DP:</b> You got to have that <b>ability to get into the head, to help them as people.</b> cause you know anyone who's played to a high level or something knows really what to do with their techniques to a level. The key is how do you get into the person's head to get them to feel better?</p> <p><b>ME:</b> So, Laura's story is changing her grip, is a good story or it's funny because LAURA IS IN THE STORY, that particular story, because it's actually about Laura's personality.</p>	<p><b>Blossom differently at different rates</b></p> <p><b>Personality</b></p> <p><b>Satisfaction feelings</b></p> <p><b>This is the main game – creating stories you will always remember more than even winning sometimes</b></p> <p><b>The grip story is practical but mainly metaphorical FOR LAURA and listeners</b></p> <p><b>Stories are memorable and</b></p>
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<p><b>DP:</b> YES! so that's why Laura, who's retired from the game, maybe how long ago two years ago, so now will always remember that story? Even when she's 70 years of age, she, she will remember that story and that's what's ironic. You remember that story more than she'll remember winning particular tournaments and details and things. It will be with her and help her in a strange way.</p>	<p><b>therefore powerful</b></p>
<p><b>ME:</b> Are you ever aware a story is unfolding as you're in it, or does it only become a story after it like that for me becomes a story after it?</p>	<p><b>History</b></p>
<p><b>DP:</b> Yeah, because I can remember everything I was in and then the story will come out,</p>	
<p><b>ME:</b> Yeah... So, as you were actually in the that day with Laura, you weren't thinking this will be a lifelong story, but it's just blossoms like that, but then it becomes one.</p>	
<p><b>DP:</b> It becomes one yeah</p>	
<p><b>ME:</b> Then in a way does that serve even though it might not be completely factually, accurately true. Whatever that is, does that then serve as an ongoing thing that you can still use in the coaching?</p>	
<p><b>DP:</b> Yeah, so it has a life of its own. Every now and then on a Tuesday afternoon at 2:00 o'clock, is a session and we might work into something totally different. Then I have to bring that story in and pop it into conversation. And she'll roll her eyes and go "here we go again"! It's is that sense of humour again.</p>	<p><b>Stories are timeless</b></p>
<p><b>ME:</b> yeah, yeah and I've seen you do that like a lot with stories you bring it back when they think they've got past it and bring it back in.</p>	
<p><b>DP:</b> I think one of the biggest things in stories. Generally, to bring the ego down, because athletes, World Class athletes, to be a world class athlete, so it's not criticism, you have to have an ego. You know, in any of them, even Shabana, who you know was always very casual and looked really carefree. He had a big ego, and you have to bring it back down, so you might pick something from their childhood? almost a duty of care if you can.</p>	<p><b>Stories break up rationality and open up humour</b></p>
<p>I always remember my nephew one day was watching Peter Nicol do drop shot practice and he was world number one and half of them were going in the tin and I said 'that is pathetic Nicol' I said 'you can't even play drop shot and you will number one.' What the heck is going on? Look at that you call that drop you got and always remember it went off for a shower afterwards. And Michael my nephew is saying to me DPI can't believe you spoke to the world number one like that I said Michael. He might be world number one BUT his drop shot was crap. Like a club player, if it's crap, it's crap. Yes, I'm not frightened of telling him.</p>	<p><b>Bring down ego with stories</b></p>
	<p><b>They can relax people</b></p>

<p><b>ME:</b> Yeah, but underneath is that a duty of care? Is that like?</p> <p><b>DP:</b> I'm trying to help the guy feel normal and treated normal. Yeah, I'm not trying to necessarily bring him down. When I did that with Peter it was done with this sense of humour. I'll be picking at him in his tummy. And maybe thinking deeply you do my head in you do more and then I put another dig in and it is all about sense of humour. So that story about Peter Nicol was about sense of humour, yes.</p> <p><b>ME:</b> (laughter) Like when you told Laura, that's another story, when she won the Chicago Open and you asked her about what she was having for pudding. You knew she was paranoid about her bum?</p> <p><b>DP:</b> (Laughter) Well that's it because she was getting high and I knew that, correct yeah, bit high for everybody. I knew that would really BUG her. And it did. It becomes a story, so there's another story that I could tell about Laura. (laughter). We laughed about it in the taxi home because she wasn't happy with me (laughter)...you've got to laugh.</p> <p><b>STOP</b></p>	<p><b>Truth can be revealed less harshly</b></p> <p><b>Mischief</b></p> <p><b>Lower the required ego to an effective level</b></p> <p><b>Rank – humour</b></p> <p><b>LAUGHTER</b></p>
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**DP Transcript 2**

DP and Danny Massaro Transcript 2

INTERVIEW 02/03/21	Emergent themes
<p><b>ME:</b> Again, thanks for this appreciate it. So OK, there was a time you were national coach and, by my recollection of this, just a prompt here, there was a performance director person and it was a time when things were coming in and wanting more evidence of writing down of what you actually did with players. You have proved you were doing really well in your job, National coach, everybody liked it. Can you start writing down things about what you do? So how do you explain that? What kind of happened in that type of story?</p> <p><b>DP:</b> I think with. It was the beginning of I was noticing just before even what you've just mentioned. Things would, sort of getting a bit weird about documenting things and what have you and, and which didn't appear sort of appeal to my myself anyway, but Peter Hurst (Performance Director) himself I always remember, one day just said, because he was quite an eccentric guy, he just said;  <i>"DP what you need to do now, and you need to every lesson you give, I would like you to document it. What you did - every routine, everything like a statistic so we can pass what you do on in a lesson to the other coaches to try and help them if you like. We can come up with a title for it @DP's golden threads or something."</i>            I remember looking and saying,  <i>"Well Peter" I said, "but it's not about. what routine you do in lesson. It's about your personality. Is your personality that you get across? That is what people gravitate towards. So, no matter how much you document a lesson, you are never going to replicate it with somebody else, because it's down to my individual personality that gets into the person's head."</i>            And that was the gist of what I said to him and he didn't get it:  <i>"No, it's got to be documented, it's got to be documented as well,"</i> said Peter, you know.            And I remember saying <i>"the reason why you know, I've coached maybe world champions and what have you isn't about what routines you do. It's about how you get your point across. Individually individualistically wise."</i>            And he just, he, he didn't understand. He did not understand it at all. <b>It was about that personality that shone through.</b> And which I found quite bizarre and in many ways that was the beginning of..... everything changing really. So, he was like  <i>"Oh well, OK, I mean,"</i> (conciliatory tone)</p> <p>He was a little bit like that and then it started to just seep into all other areas of the job, not just coaching, every other area as well. And in many ways when you look at today, you know how it is today? that</p>	<p><b>Documenting processes</b></p> <p><b>Resistance</b></p> <p><b>Measure and document</b></p> <p><b>Personality</b></p> <p><b>Individual relationship</b></p> <p><b>Getting through to them</b></p> <p><b>The personality</b></p> <p><b>Individual connections</b></p> <p><b>Transfer of knowledge</b></p> <p><b>Rational documentation for replication</b></p>

<p>was the beginning of all this transpired into today, <b>coaches not coaching</b> pupils? It's a matter of we do routines, we get together as a group and we <b>don't really get into you as a person</b>, until they misbehave or something. So, you know, and that's why you look at the world class performance now of England squash players, it's, you know, it's relatively average, maybe apart from Sarah Jane Perry. It's, it's very average. The standard of play. can't say much more than that.</p> <p><b>ME:</b> What was the reaction of Peter when you maybe put your side forward there and he said he can't?</p> <p><b>DP:</b> Well he didn't, I'm not going to say didn't like it, but he just didn't understand it. I said, "<i>Well Peter, I can do it, but it's not going to make an iota of difference.</i>" And so, he kept pushing. He kept pushing it. He never got angry with me or anything like that or.... because you know we got, <b>we got on very well actually</b>. But it was just left after a while. It was just left when it came to the coaching and never followed through what was where.</p> <p><b>ME:</b> Did that wisdom come from that that natural reluctance to say, 'yeah, OK, I'll write everything down?'</p> <p><b>DP:</b> What from me to do that?</p> <p><b>ME:</b> Yes, most people would just write it down and go 'OK,' but why didn't you do it?</p> <p><b>DP:</b> It wasn't part of my philosophy how you coach squash. So, I, you <b>know I had a very direct way of knowing what I would like to do</b>, and I wasn't going to move from my, my philosophy, how the game should be? So, I didn't, I wasn't being stubborn, but I just thought this is too far for me.</p> <p><b>ME:</b> Is there an example that you can give where you think your personality? You know has been in the lesson with someone. In it, in the lesson.</p> <p><b>DP:</b> Well, I think it's in every lesson I've give given. Yeah, not just one, but you know you can't make a uh, maybe an outside thing. I mean, it was literally, I think, every, every lesson I've given is about the personality being in there with you there all the time. Then every lesson you give this that personality part and then bit by bit, you know, it, it, it either works or it doesn't work.</p> <p><b>ME:</b> <b>So, you can't take yourself out of the information.</b> Are you talking about the way you say things?</p> <p><b>DP:</b> It's the way you say things, it's the <b>sense of humour</b>, It's <b>the way you deliver your words</b>. It's the <b>way you deliver</b> your information about the routine. It's the <b>way you deliver</b> what you trying to do, so</p>	<p><b>The personality</b></p> <p><b>Pressure to conform to expectations</b></p> <p><b>I do not believe in it</b></p> <p><b>You cannot document personality</b></p> <p><b>Strong belief in underpinning philosophy and rationale</b></p> <p><b>I know myself and why I coach</b></p> <p><b>Personality connection</b></p> <p><b>The mode as much as the method</b> <b>Humour / style</b></p>
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<p>what you eventually get is <b>you hope the athlete really wants to do it for you.</b></p>	<p><b>Relationship through coaching so they want to do it for you</b></p>
<p><b>ME:</b> Is there a story where you can remember going on call with a player on a squad for example, and you were fully aware that who you were? “DP” let’s say ‘the character’, so it was the personality, almost coaching, not the information because it was your reputation. For example, Laura would, because of all your past success, the first time she ever went on court with you would just think I will do what you say cause it’s you? If all the same stuff was on a Lesson plan with someone else coaching it, it wouldn’t necessarily work.</p>	<p><b>Reputation / legacy</b></p>
<p><b>DP:</b> Joey Barrington is a good example.</p>	<p><b>STORY</b></p>
<p><b>ME:</b> OK, what happened with Joey?</p>	<p><b>Courage</b></p>
<p><b>DP:</b> Well when he first came to the first ever squad, he came to, he always felt, well he had a bit of a chip on his shoulder, he felt as though he’d been neglected in the past etc. So, he came with a very negative, you know cynical vibe. And he’s very edgy. I went on court with and he was like, really tense and things. I remember saying to him</p>	<p><b>Awareness of personality and context</b></p>
<p><i>“Joey, what’s your problem?” I went; “You know what’s your problem? You’re, we’ve, invited you on the squad, everyone loves you being here don’t think you’re an, an underling, you know or you’re not good enough or you’ve got, you don’t want to mix with these people.” I said, “You’re a member of the squad like everyone else, so you have to learn to become part of a team rather than being just an individual all the time.”</i></p>	<p><b>Personality</b></p>
<p>If you know Joey, that’s what he can be like. You got to be a team member and I know it’s not about a squash coaching lesson, but basically me explaining that to him. Put him totally at ease. <b>Now that’s part of personality.</b> Whereas today, I don’t think that’s the type of thing they do. You know? You watch a lot of the young players today, like Richie Fallows and maybe George Parker, they can be a little bit troublesome at the moment. Well, in my time that wouldn’t have happened because it <b>would have been dealt with when they were twelve through the personality, through the personality and getting them through to come get him to understand.</b> You can’t behave like that.</p>	<p><b>Forms relationships prevents escalation of problems</b></p>
<p><b>ME:</b> What aspects of your personality? When you’ve coached, like do you think are special or unique to you.</p>	<p><b>Sense of Humour</b></p>
<p><b>DP:</b> Say that again, Danny?</p>	
<p><b>ME:</b> Which parts of your squash personality your coaching personality do you think are unique to you that are special to you?</p>	



<p><b>DP:</b> Well, I think I'm straight right with a <b>sense of humour</b>. I tend to whether it's big headed or not, I tend to believe in what I'm teaching through that personality and make people feel comfortable on court and that that you <b>care</b> about everything they do. OK, so you could, <b>you become a bit like a 'carer' in lots of ways</b>. And I think they may have bad results, but you still care about them.</p>	<p><b>Belief in the information</b></p> <p><b>Care</b></p>
<p><b>ME:</b> Yeah, how would you express your care in a lesson, for example? Is it the way you walk on, shut the door, where you are...?</p>	
<p><b>DP:</b> It's in the way you are, you might start off doing a forehand drive for instance. What you will always do, you'll be trying to work on something to get them better, but you will, you will try and deal with the positives first. You know 'that forehand looks good, you're getting your edge through blah blah blah blah so they feel you know and then you go But maybe your racket head at the top of the swing needs to just do this for instance and then they start thinking, OK, let's try that. He's been telling me a lot of good things. Now. Let's try just something a little bit different. And I think it's that type of thing. <b>It's a very caring nature.</b></p>	<p><b>Caring nature</b></p> <p><b>Positive criticism</b></p>
<p><b>ME:</b> Does that come across in your eye contact, your tone of language?</p>	<p><b>Voice tone</b></p>
<p><b>DP:</b> You use your tone of language, so you don't talk with a low monotone, you know like this all day? You know you got the ups and downs of voice – <i>'That's good, maybe better next time'</i> so you're raising your voice up and down all the time. <b>I think the other thing with me, one of the things that always worked for me, was when I gave real praise.</b> Like for instance, you might go that an unbelievable shot, or you know you come off court and you watch the match and you go to them <i>'That's the best I've seen you play this year'</i> or something like that. I will only use those phrases <b>maybe once or twice a year</b>, so when the player heard that, they would, their whole-body language would raise, so you didn't give praises all the time. I mean, you encourage them and that, but real praise when you did it, <b>made them feel a million dollars. OK.</b> So that is a motivational thing.</p>	<p><b>Sporadic Praise</b></p> <p><b>Knockout sparse praise</b></p>
<p><b>ME:</b> You must have a memory of that. Doing that with a player. Maybe PJ or someone or Laura or.</p>	
<p><b>DP:</b> I'd be like that with most players.</p>	
<p><b>ME:</b> Yes, is there one that just pops to mind again, where you remember them puffing up. Playing for England or something?</p>	
<p><b>DP:</b> I'm just thinking I've got to think now a little bit and you</p>	
<p><b>ME:</b> take your time.</p>	
	<p><b>TRUST</b></p>

<p><b>DP:</b> I remember Nick Matthew. One match in Vienna, where James Willstrop had pulled his calf muscle and I said to Nick the night before, “<i>you're playing tomorrow</i>”, because he was a reserve in those days, you're going to play tomorrow. You know, so I always remember going the next morning and that night I was a bit troubled about it all, I remember going to him and saying, “<i>You know we're not going to play you now. We going to stick with James.</i>”</p> <p>He said “<i>why, why are you doing that?</i>”</p> <p>I said “<i>because we can't trust you. You can either play brilliantly or still play like you know .....</i>,” So he was not in a happy way. Anyway, so he didn't play the next day. I went up to him and said right, you're playing today. Against, I think it might have been Australia, No France! And I said, ‘well, today you're playing Nick’ and you could see him, feel <b>empowered</b> if you like and then when he went on court, I think he played Renan Lavigne and absolutely hammered him. He hammered him three love and he came off court. I said, “<b><i>well, the thing is now Nick. If you can repeat those type of performances, you'll be picked all the time.</i></b>” And what was quite interesting for the rest of his career. he never had those ups and downs, so every time he played for England he played brilliantly. <b>Never had a bad match after that day.</b> You know, <b>so that within himself empowered him to become a very consistent player individually and playing for England.</b></p>	<p><b>Honesty</b></p> <p><b>Empowerment</b></p> <p><b>Empowerment gives long lasting impact</b></p>
<p><b>ME:</b> Is there a backdrop to that? Like so were you two particularly close?</p> <p><b>DP:</b> I was his coach, his personal coach. Yeah, and I think what happened when I didn't.....when I had to tell him the next morning that actually we've changed our mind and I used the words ‘we can't trust you’ <b>that hurt him.</b> Then the next day, when he did play, that within itself was the beginning of his most successful period in his career. So, what happened, me as a <b>father figure</b> to him was quite <b>disturbing for him to hear me deliver the information ‘we can't trust you.’</b> Is it like your dad saying something to you if you behave badly or something? You know when you're a kid or something like that? I mean you; you're really just upset. Well, it'll upset most people.</p>	<p><b>Honesty</b></p> <p><b>Father figure</b></p>
<p>The other in fact, one that comes to my mind again, it's a similar type of thing. Vicky Botwright, European Championships she came up to me in the night of the semi-finals before the final after she was dropped for the final. She came and sat down next to me in the bar when I was just having a beer and <b>she said to me you made the wrong decision.</b> She actually said; “<i>you need to play me!</i>” She hadn't been playing well and I said, “<i>why? Why do that? Why are we going to play your Vicky? You've not, you know you can be a good player, but you haven't been lately. You had a massive loss form in the last six months. Why would we play you?</i>”</p> <p>She says, “<i>I am the person that can beat,</i>” I think it was Vanessa Atkinson,</p>	<p><b>Honesty</b></p> <p><b>Courage</b></p> <p><b>Personality</b></p> <p><b>Gut Instinct</b></p>

<p><i>"I am the person that can definitely beat that player more than the person you've picked."</i></p> <p>She really pushed kept pushing and I went to and I started thinking about it. And I thought, you know what, she's got a point. There's <b>something about the way she was speaking, so this is the personality of it.</b> If you were looking at stats because she's been playing so crap, most coaches would have just gone 'Oh, you're not picked you forms no good. These are the results you haven't been good,' but it was a <b>gut instinct.</b> So, <b>I changed my mind,</b> played her in the final, which didn't go very well down very well with certain players, played and she won three love, I'm sure it's Vanessa Atkinson. Yeah, so she made, she made the right decision. Not me. if that makes sense?</p> <p>And Danny, <b>she hugged me after that match it mattered a great deal. It wasn't too long after that Vicky retired from the game, it was like her last big hurrah or something.</b></p> <p><b>ME:</b> Yeah, those two stories to me. Sound like there was some element of courage.</p> <p><b>DP:</b> Well, you've got, you've got decisions to make when you actually have to make decisions. You have to go with your gut instinct and Peter Hirst was very good at that. He was used to say to me, 'what was your first gut instinct' and I got it. <b>So that gut instinct call is a massive thing.</b> And then you're going to <b>have the courage</b> when it could be perceived as controversial, <b>if it goes wrong or you got a problem</b></p> <p><b>ME:</b> In a way there, for the gut instinct, when he requested, write your lessons down was no, he couldn't argue with you, could he!?</p> <p><b>DP:</b> No! Yeah, it's so the gut instinct things very, very important. You know, but I think a good way of what you might say the way things are in this day and age.....<b>Sanitized.</b> It's there's <b>no room for the gut instinct, the personality, the, the eccentricity,</b> the whatever you want. You know other words that you can use. There's no room for that anymore and that's why we have it. That's why everything is just <b>so sanitized.</b> You know, so if you go back in out again, you go back. To my time. Everybody knew who coached who, so I was definitely Nick Matthew's coach. I was Jenny's coach. I was Peter Nicol's coach. I was Cassie Jackman's coach. Paul Carter was Allison Walters Coach. Paul Carter was Peter Barker's coach, Tanya Bailey's coach and all the coaches within the program had a player. Everyone knew who their coach was. If you said to, to all the coaches now - Who do you coach? <b>Put a name against your name? They cannot put their name to a player. It's all just Facilitating.</b> And that's got to change, if we want to get back and beat the Egyptians, we've got to stop all that rubbish. And that has to change if we got any chance of doing that. You know, but it'll be interesting to see if it does.</p>	<p><b>Courage to DECIDE either way.</b></p> <p><b>Personality</b></p> <p><b>Gut instinct</b></p> <p><b>Stand by decisions</b></p> <p><b>Personality</b></p> <p><b>Eccentricity</b></p> <p><b>Leadership – stand by a player</b></p> <p><b>Responsibility</b></p> <p><b>Individual Personalities key component</b></p>
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<p><b>ME:</b> So, to summarize to finish. For you, is who you are as a person, more important as your information and ideas?</p>	
<p><b>DP:</b> Absolutely. All those people Laura, Nick, Matthew, Peter, Nicol, Cassie Jackman, Jenny Duncalf, it was how they were as people that made them world class squash players. All right, you got to work at your game and all that, but the, <b>THE main thing was how they were as individuals.</b> And as a coach, the same. Absolutely same again.</p>	<p><b>Anecdote</b></p>
<p><b>Another good story</b> - Michael, you know my nephew. I always remember coaching Peter Nicol on court and he's playing forehand drops. He was never known for a fantastic short game and I was feeding him, and I was going <i>"THAT IS CRAP PETE. Can't you play a better drop shot than that?"</i> And I was like, <i>"really, my God, you can't play a drop shot and you are number one in the world. That is crap!"</i> And it was not character assassination, but it was like my God, harsh you know. I remember walking up the stairs at Harrogate Squash club afterwards, whilst Peter went off into the shower, and Michael going to me, <i>"How can you speak to the world champion like that DP? He's in the world number one. It was like you were coaching me or something."</i></p>	<p><b>See past status</b></p> <p><b>Be honest</b></p> <p><b>Leadership</b></p> <p><b>Be in control</b></p>
<p>And I went to him, <i>"It doesn't matter whether was world number one or world ranked 300. His drop shot was crap! It was bad and it's not about being world number one, it's about what the drop shot quality was not about him as a person or his ranking."</i></p>	<p><b>Hierarchy in Relationship</b></p> <p><b>Master /pupil</b></p>
<p>So, you don't differentiate just because someone's world number one. You don't 'kowitz' to them and that's the biggest thing. Back in my day, the coach was always in control. I don't mean control in a horrible way. You never let a player run you. So, for instance, if Laura came for a lesson. Where did she have to come for a lesson? To Harrogate, Harrogate. How often did I chip over to Chorley? Once in a blue moon, so the coach is the leader of the pack and the player. I don't mean his second, but what you find today is the players leading too much. And the coach is the second person. So, if you look in American sport, the coach at the coach is far more revered than the player. And that's the way it should always be. I don't mean me particular; I mean all coaching, every coach. That's how it should be, and they have to start getting back to that.</p>	<p><b>Relationship skill vital through understanding personalities</b></p> <p><b>Strength of character for leadership</b></p>
<p><b>ME:</b> Is it that straightforward for you?</p>	
<p><b>DP:</b> Well it's a really <b>difficult to do if you haven't got the ability to express your personality and leadership in the right place, at the right time. Pick your moments and go for it. If you can</b> then leadership through the personality makes it easy.</p>	<p><b>Blandness is ineffective</b></p>
<p><b>ME:</b> Yeah.</p>	
<p><b>DP:</b> So, the <b>personality is absolutely, vitally important.</b> You know, and if you look at some world class coaches before we stop. If you look</p>	

at somebody like Rodney Martin from the past. He's got a strong personality, whether you agree with him or not. A strong personality you've met him. Paul Carter- He's got a strong personality about motivation. You couldn't have a better person at a team event than Paul Carter, he's in his element there?

You know, **blandness gets you nowhere.**

### Appendix 3

#### Ethical Application and Ethical Approval forms



## UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL LANCASHIRE

### Ethics Committee Application Form

PLEASE NOTE THAT ONLY ELECTRONIC SUBMISSION IS ACCEPTED

This application form is to be used to seek approval from one of the three University Ethics Committees (BAHSS; PSYSOC & STEMH). Where this document refers to ‘Ethics Committee’ this denotes BAHSS; PSYSOC & STEMH. These Ethics Committees deal with all staff and postgraduate research student project. Taught (undergraduate and MSc dissertation projects) will normally be dealt with via School process / committee.

If you are unsure whether your activity requires ethical approval please complete a [UCLan Ethics Checklist](#). If the proposed activity involves animals, you should not use this form. Please contact the Ethics and Integrity Unit within Research Services – [EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk) – for further details. Please refer to the [notes for guidance](#) on completion of the form.

If this application relates to a project/phase which has previously been approved by one of the UCLan Ethics Committees, please supply the corresponding reference number(s) from your decision letter(s). ONLY REQUIRED FOR PHASED PROJECT SUBMISSIONS		
<b>Previous Ethics Approval Ref No</b>		
<b>1.1 Project Type:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Staff Research <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial Project	<input type="checkbox"/> Masters by Research <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MPhil Research <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PhD Research <input type="checkbox"/> Professional Doctorate	<input type="checkbox"/> Taught Masters <input type="checkbox"/> Undergrad Research <input type="checkbox"/> Internship
<b>1.2 Principal Investigator:</b>		
Name	School	Email
Clive Palmer	Sport and Wellbeing (Social Science areas only)	<a href="mailto:CAPalmer@uclan.ac.uk">CAPalmer@uclan.ac.uk</a>
<b>1.3 Other Researchers / Student:</b>		
Name	School	Email
Daniel Massaro	Sport and Wellbeing (Social Science areas only)	<a href="mailto:Dmassaro1@uclan.ac.uk">Dmassaro1@uclan.ac.uk</a>
	Choose an item.	

	Choose an item.	
<b>1.4 Project Title:</b>		
To Live Well – An Ontology of Being through a Sporting Life		
<b>1.5 Proposed Start Date:</b>		
01/04/2018		
<b>1.6 Proposed End Date:</b>		
01/09/2020		
<b>1.7 Is this project in receipt of any external funding</b> (including donations of samples, equipment etc)?		
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No		
If Yes, please provide details of sources of the funding and what part it plays in the current proposal.		
<b>1.8 Project Description</b> (in layman's terms) including the aim(s) and justification of the project (max 300 words)		
<p>This study will investigate ontological experiences of <i>being</i> from individuals who live a sporting life and ask what it is to "live well" through such a life. Common (but not exclusive) references to such individuals include 'professional athlete/player/performer' or 'coach/trainer'. Improved and sustained performance will/can be their main occupation in life, encompassing a means of income, realisation of ambitions as well as the creation and fulfilment of present and future personal meaning. Utilising branches of existential and phenomenological philosophy (Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Sartre, Camus, Husserl, Heidegger, De Beauvoir, Merleau-Ponty, Frankl) aspects of the '<i>lived experience</i>' of <i>being</i> will be extracted and presented through dialogues and phenomenological inquiry. Although much of the philosophy underpinning the research will come from Centuries past, particular emphasis will be upon the modern landscape of sport and its particular links to capitalism. The researcher will include an auto ethnographical account to analyse his experiences of touring around the globe for the past 15 years coaching his wife on the world professional Squash tour. A journey that included her reaching World Number 1 ranking and becoming World Champion. The researcher will reflect on other professional relationships with other players and coaches on the Tour, including a 4-year relationship with a 3 times world champion male player and his coach (who also coaches the researcher's wife).</p>		
<b>1.9 Methodology</b> Please be specific		
T		
The methodologies are interview and narrative analysis. I will be utilising Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis in one of the dialogues, auto narrative in another dialogue and case study conversation with interview in another.		
<b>1.10 Has the quality of the project been assessed?</b> (select all that apply)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Independent external review <input type="checkbox"/> Internal review (e.g. involving colleagues, academic supervisor, School process)		

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Research Programme Approval gained on <a href="#">Click here to enter a date.</a> <i>(Please note that RPA is a prerequisite for Research Degree Student, including Prof Doc, projects to be able to submit for ethics)</i> <input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/> Other
If other please give details
<b>1.11 Please provide details as to the storage and protection of your physical /electronic data for the next 5 years – as per UCLan requirements – or whichever archive period is appropriate</b>
<b>1.12 How is it intended the results of the project will be reported and disseminated?</b> (select all that apply)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Peer reviewed journal – hard copy or online <input type="checkbox"/> Internal report <input type="checkbox"/> Conference presentation <input type="checkbox"/> Other publication <input type="checkbox"/> Written feedback to research participants <input type="checkbox"/> Presentation to participants or relevant community groups <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Dissertation/Thesis <input type="checkbox"/> Other
If other, please give details
<b>1.13 Will the activity involve any external organisation for which separate and specific approval is required</b> (e.g. NHS; school; any criminal justice agencies including the Police, Crown Prosecution Service, Prison Service or Probation Service)?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <b>IF YES, BEFORE PROCEEDING WITH THIS FORM, click <a href="#">here</a> to CHECK WHEN, HOW AND WHAT IS REQUIRED</b>
If Yes, please provide details of the external organisation and attached letter of approval
<b>1.14 The nature of this project is most appropriately described as research involving:-</b> (more than one may apply)
<input type="checkbox"/> Behavioural observation <input type="checkbox"/> Questionnaire(s) – <i>please provide a copy of the questionnaire / survey</i> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Interview(s) – <i>please provide a list of questions to be asked, or if semi-structured the topics</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Qualitative methodologies (e.g. focus groups) - <i>please provide the questions/topics to be covered</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Psychological experiments <input type="checkbox"/> Epidemiological studies <input type="checkbox"/> Data linkage studies <input type="checkbox"/> Psychiatric or clinical psychology studies <input type="checkbox"/> Human physiological investigation(s) <input type="checkbox"/> Biomechanical device(s)



<input type="checkbox"/> Human tissue(s) <sup>1</sup> <input type="checkbox"/> Human genetic analysis <input type="checkbox"/> A clinical trial of drug(s) or device(s) <input type="checkbox"/> Lab-based experiment – <i>please provide relevant COHSS / RA forms</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Archaeological excavation/fieldwork <input type="checkbox"/> Re-analysis of archaeological finds/ancient artefacts <input type="checkbox"/> Human remains analysis <input type="checkbox"/> Lone working or travel to unfamiliar places (e.g. interviews in participants homes) - <i>please provide relevant risk assessment form</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify in the box below)
If 'Other' please provide details
<b>1.15 Human Participants, Data or Material – the project will involve: -</b>
Please select the appropriate box(es)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Participants [proceed to next question 1.16] <input type="checkbox"/> Data [proceed to question 1.29] <input type="checkbox"/> Tissues / Fluids / DNA Samples [proceed to question 1.30] <input type="checkbox"/> Remains [proceed to question 1.32]
<b>1.16 Will the participants be from any of the following groups:</b> (tick as many as applicable)
<input type="checkbox"/> Students or staff of this University <sup>2</sup> <input type="checkbox"/> Children/legal minors (anyone under the age of 18 years) <input type="checkbox"/> Patients or clients of professionals <input type="checkbox"/> Those with learning disability <input type="checkbox"/> Those who are unconscious, severely ill, or have a terminal illness <input type="checkbox"/> Those in emergency situations <input type="checkbox"/> Those with mental illness (particularly if detained under the Mental Health Act) <input type="checkbox"/> Those without mental capacity <input type="checkbox"/> Those with dementia <input type="checkbox"/> Prisoners <input type="checkbox"/> Young Offenders <input type="checkbox"/> Adults who are unable to consent for themselves <input type="checkbox"/> Any other person whose capacity to consent may be compromised <input type="checkbox"/> A member of an organisation where another individual may also need to give consent <input type="checkbox"/> Those who could be considered to have a particularly dependent relationship with the investigator, e.g. those in care homes <input type="checkbox"/> Other vulnerable groups (please list in box below)
If 'Other' please provide details
<b>1.16a Justify their inclusion</b>

<sup>1</sup> Please email [EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk) if any project involves HT

<sup>2</sup> Where staff or students of the university are being used please explain how this is not convenience sampling

<i>Ethical approval covers <b>all participants</b>, but particular attention must be given to those in a vulnerable category. Therefore, you need to fully justify their inclusion and give details of extra steps taken to assure their protection.</i>
<b>1.16b Is a <a href="#">DBS – Disclosure and Barring Service (formerly CRB – Criminal Records Bureau)</a> check required?</b>
<i>Certain activities and/or groups of individuals require DBS (formerly CRB) clearance. If unclear, please seek advice.</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If Yes, please advise status of DBS clearance (e.g. gained; in process; etc)
<b>1.16c All staff should be aware of <a href="#">UCLan’s Policy and Procedures on Safeguarding and Prevent</a>. Please confirm that, where relevant to your project, the appropriate training has been undertaken (please give date).</b>
<i>Please refer to UCLan’s Safeguarding Children, Young people and Vulnerable Adults Policy and Prevent guidance.</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
If Yes, please give details and dates of relevant training session – external or internal
<b>1.17 Please indicate exactly how participants in the study will be (i) identified, (ii) approached and (iii) recruited?</b>
If an advertisement and/or information sheet is being used, please attached
Participants have been identified due to their profession (professional sports performers and professional sports coaches)
<b>1.18 Will consent be sought from the participants and how will this be obtained?</b>
If a written consent form is being used, please attach
Consent Form to be administered
<b>1.19 How long will the participants have to decide whether to take part in the research?</b>
1 month
<b>1.20 What arrangements have been made for participants who might not adequately understand verbal explanations or written information, or who have special communication needs?</b>
<i>Gives details of what arrangements have been made (e.g. translation, use of interpreters, etc).</i>
<b>1.21 Payment or incentives: Do you propose to pay or reward participants?</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If Yes, please provided details
<b>1.22 Will deception of the participant be necessary during the project?</b>

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If Yes, please provide justification
<b>1.23 Does your project involve the potential imbalance of power/authority/status, particularly those which might compromise a participant giving informed consent?</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If Yes, please detail including how this will mitigated <i>Describe the relationship and the steps to be taken by the investigator to ensure that participation is purely voluntary and not influenced by the relationship in any way.</i>
<b>1.24 Does the project involve <u>any</u> possible distress, discomfort or harm (or offense) to participants or researchers?</b> (including physical, social, emotional, psychological and/or aims to shock / offend – e.g. Art)
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If Yes, please explain <i>Describe the potential for distress, discomfort, harm or offense and what measures are in place to protect the participants and/or researcher(s). Please consider all possible causes of distress carefully, including likely reaction to the subject matter, debriefing or participant upset.</i>
<b>1.25 Does the activity involve any information pertaining to illegal activities or materials or the disclosure thereof?</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If Yes, please detail <i>Describe involvement and explain what risk management procedures will be put in place.</i>
<b>1.26 What mechanism is there for participants to withdraw from the project, at what interval(s) and how is this communicated to the participants?</b>
The participants can withdraw at any stage. They will understand that data captured before such time may be still used in the final thesis presentation.
<b>1.27 What are the potential benefits of the research?</b>
The research aims to illuminate the “realities” of the lived experience for those who live a life in professional sport. This can benefit areas of wellbeing, coach education, athlete welfare and health. Tools including phenomenological investigation, Socratic dialogue/questioning and self-authoring is grounded in some of the great philosophical thinkers and underpins much of person-centred therapy and coaching itself. Highlighting the usefulness and practicality of these rich methods may go on to help many professional performers in a time when there are increasing reports and incidences of poor mental wellbeing.
<b>1.28 Debriefing, Support and/or Feedback to participants</b>
<i>Describe any debriefing, support or feedback that participants will received following the project and when.</i>

Participants will be given full disclosure of their transcripts upon request at any stage. Only 4 participants are to be questioned and all will be available		
<b>1.29 Will the project involve access to confidential information about people without their consent?</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No		
If yes, please explain and justify <i>State what information will be sought, from which organisations and the requirement for this information.</i>		
<b>1.30 Confidentiality/Anonymity - Will the project involve:</b>		
	Yes	No
a. non-anonymisation of participants (i.e. researchers may or will know the identity of participants and be able to return responses)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
b. participants having the consented option of being identified in any publication arising from the research?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
c. the use of <a href="#">personal data</a> (i.e. anything that may identify them – e.g. institutional role – see DP checklist for further guidance)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<i>If yes to any please attach completed <a href="#">Data Protection (DP) checklist</a></i>		
<b>1.31 Does the project involve human tissue?</b> <sup>3</sup> See <a href="#">Human Tissue Act (HTA) Supplementary list of Materials</a> to check what is classified as human tissue.		
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No		
If no, please skip to question 1.32 If yes, please provide full details and answer questions 1.31a-c		
<b>1.31a Who is sourcing the human tissue?</b> (e.g. a tissue bank governed by its own HTA licence)		
<b>1.31b Will the human tissue be stored at UCLan?</b> (please note restrictions on storage)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		
If yes, please state how long and in what form - cellular or acellular (DNA extracted) <i>Please note – if human tissue is only kept for the purpose of DNA extraction rendering it acellular the HTA storage regulations may not apply. If holding for DNA extraction, please state the length of time the tissue would be stored pre-extraction.</i>		
<b>1.31c Is the human tissue being used for an activity listed as a ‘scheduled purpose’ under Schedule 1 Parts 1 and 2 of the Human Tissue Act 2004?</b> (click <a href="#">here</a> to see list of HTA ‘scheduled purpose’ activities)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		
<b>1.32 Does the project involve excavation and study of human remains?</b>		

<sup>3</sup> Until such time as the University gains its own HTA Research Licence, human tissue that is for a ‘scheduled purpose’ and not sourced from a BioBank or part of an NREC approved project can only be stored for a maximum of 5 days.



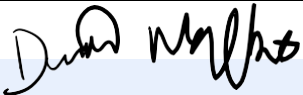
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
<b>If yes, please give details</b> <i>Discuss the provisions for examination of the remains and the management of any community/public concerns, legal requirement etc.</i>

**DECLARATION**

This declaration needs to be signed by the Principal Investigator (PI), and the student where it relates to a student project (for research student projects PI is Director of Studies and for Taught or Undergrad project the PI is the Supervisor). Electronic submission of the form is required to [EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk). Where available insert electronic signature(s) – alternatively, provide an email in lieu from appropriate party.

<b>Declaration of the:</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Principal Investigator
<b>OR</b>
Director of Studies/Supervisor and Student Investigator (please check as appropriate)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The information in this form is accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief, and I take full responsibility for it.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I have read and understand the <a href="#">University Ethical Principles for Teaching, Research, Knowledge Transfer, Consultancy and Related Activities</a>.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I have read and understand the University’s policy and procedures on <a href="#">Safeguarding and Prevent</a>.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I undertake to abide by the ethical principles underlying the Declaration of Helsinki and the <a href="#">University Code of Conduct for Research</a>, together with the codes of practice laid down by any relevant professional or learned society.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If the project is approved, I undertake to adhere to the project plan, the terms of the full application of which the Ethics Committee* has given a favourable opinion and any conditions of the Ethics Committee in giving its favourable opinion.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I undertake to seek an ethical opinion from the Ethics Committee before implementing substantial amendments to the project or to the terms of the full application of which the Ethics Committee has given a favourable opinion.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I understand that I am responsible for monitoring the research at all times.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If there are any serious and/or adverse events, I understand that I am responsible for immediately stopping the research and alerting the Ethics Committee within 24 hours of the occurrence, via <a href="mailto:EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk">EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk</a>.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I am aware of my responsibility to be up to date and comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data.</li> </ul>

\* Ethics Committee refers to either BAHSS, PSYSOC or STEMH

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I understand that research records/data may be subject to inspection for audit purposes if required in the future.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I understand that personal data about me as a researcher in this application will be held by the University and that this will be managed according to the principles established in the Data Protection Act.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I understand that the information contained in this application, any supporting documentation and all correspondence with the Ethics Committee relating to the application, will be subject to the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act. The information may be disclosed in response to requests made under the Act except where statutory exemptions apply.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I understand that all conditions apply to any co-applicants and researchers involved in the project, and that it is my responsibility to ensure that they abide by them.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>For Principal Investigator:</b> I understand my responsibilities to work within a set of ethical and other guidelines as set out by the University Policies and/or professional standards.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>For Supervisor/Director of Studies:</b> I understand my responsibilities as Supervisor/Director of Studies and will ensure that the student investigator abides by the University's Policies on Research Ethics at all times.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>For the Student Investigator:</b> I understand my responsibilities to work within a set of ethical and other guidelines as agreed in advance with my Supervisor/Director of Studies and understand that I must comply with the University's regulations and any other applicable code of ethics at all times.</li> </ul>	
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Signature of Principal Investigator:</b> or <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Supervisor or Director of Studies</b>	
	 
<b>Print Name:</b>	<b>Clive Palmer</b>
<b>Date:</b>	<b>01/05/2018</b>
<b>Signature of Student Investigator:</b>	
	
<b>Print Name:</b>	<b>Daniel Massaro</b>
<b>Date:</b>	<b>2/4/2017</b> <small>Click here to enter a date.</small>

Commented [DM1]:

Commented [DM2R1]:

22 May 2018

Clive Palmer/Daniel Massaro  
School of Sport and Wellbeing  
University of Central Lancashire

Dear Clive and Daniel

Re: BAHSS Ethics Committee Application Unique  
Reference Number: BAHSS 565

The BAHSS ethics committee has granted approval of your proposal application 'To Live Well – An Ontology of Being through a Sporting Life'. Approval is granted up to the end of project date.

It is your responsibility to ensure that

- the project is carried out in line with the information provided in the forms you have submitted
- you regularly re-consider the ethical issues that may be raised in generating and analysing your data
- any proposed amendments/changes to the project are raised with, and approved, by Committee
- you notify [office@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:office@uclan.ac.uk) if the end date changes or the project does not start
- serious adverse events that occur from the project are reported to Committee
- a closure report is submitted to complete the ethics governance procedures (Existing paperwork can be used for this purposes e.g. funder's end of grant report; abstract for student award or NRES final report. If none of these are available use [e-Ethics Closure Report Proforma](#)).

Yours sincerely



Richard Peterson  
Deputy Vice-Chair  
**BAHSS Ethics Committee**

\* for research degree students this will be the final lapse date

*NB - Ethical approval is contingent on any health and safety checklists having been completed, and necessary approvals gained.*