

REFLECTIONS ON MY TIME WITH THE AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF SPORT COACH DEVELOPMENT TEAM



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Background

My Manager, Bill Davoren, and I spent some quality time together last week reviewing, revising and updating my ELMO Professional Development Plan. Whilst working through the stated goals and objectives, attention soon turned towards the work I've been doing on monitoring and evaluation and the impact it is having across the team. This led to a great discussion about the importance of our work (HP coaching) and the various ways we (the HP Coach Development Team) have been pursuing it. Although I can't remember everything we discussed at our [yarning session](#), I do remember feeling quite proud of what we've achieved and having a profound sense of purpose. This was especially true when Bill and I were discussing the different projects I've been involved with and the positive influence they seem to be having. After an hour or so and somewhere toward the end of our session, Bill asked if I would consider sharing some of my thoughts about my role and highlight the work I've been doing. The following attempts to achieve this goal and uses an appreciative practitioner researcher perceptible to summarise my time with the AIS Coach Development Team.

I got the job!

I thought it was appropriate and even necessary to frame the discussion by providing a few words on how I came to be a part of this fabulous team. This, however, proved to be much more challenging than anticipated and I found it difficult to express [in words] just how excited I was when I received the official letter telling me that my application was successful and that I will soon be a member of the newly formed AIS Coach Development Team.



I'm not entirely sure, but think it may have been around mid-July 2021 when I received the "letter of offer" and still feel incredibly lucky and extremely grateful to be a part of this amazing and inspiring team.



Paul Perkins is an associate Professor at the University of Canberra and a member of the Australian Institute of Sport High Performance Coach Development Team. He is a dedicated, passionate and experienced coach, educator and researcher with an extensive background in the Australian sport sector and a passion for helping others and seeing people succeed. Paul is skilled at, and highly experienced in developing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating multi-layered sport-based development initiatives and has a thorough understanding of deductive, inductive and abductive reasoning and how these different processes can be used to draw conclusions, make predictions, and/or construct explanations. Whilst Paul's research has been multi-disciplinary and positioned within the broader societal context, he is currently exploring the benefits of more social and collaborative approaches to coach learning and is interested in contributing to long-term positive outcomes through the use of Australian First Nations methodologies.



Moving back to Ngunnawal county

My wife and I were lucky enough to be working and living on [Larrakia country](#) when I applied for the role but had already made plans to return to Canberra to be closer to our mob/ family and loved ones. I remember having mixed emotions at the time and feeling apprehensive about relocating without my wife (we thought it would be best if I went first so I could settle into the new role while she completed her work contract and concentrated on the move). However, it should be noted that I also felt incredibly excited to be moving back to Ngunnawal county and was really looking forward to working at the AIS again.

The early days

Despite being away from my wife for the first couple of months, my time on the Canberra campus proved to be highly effective. For example, I completed all of the onboarding tasks, developed new relationships with team members, colleagues and other key stakeholders, re-aquainted myself with familiar faces, established a new work routine and carried out the majority of the scoping activity for the Summit program. Nevertheless, I did seek permission to return to Larrakia country when the Covid-19 pandemic hit Canberra and was very happy to be reunited with my beautiful wife (Sharan) and adorable puppy (Missy) after spending two-weeks at [Howard-Springs quarantine facility](#).

Watching the team grow and develop

Since joining the team in 2021, I have witnessed its growth and development and watched in awe as it slowly but continuously evolved into an extremely important and highly productive workforce. A workforce that, in my opinion, communicates openly, has a diverse range of skills, experience and expertise, provides genuine care and support for its members, believes in the concept of excellence, operates with mutual trust and respect, and is underpinned by a set of shared values and beliefs.

Roles and responsibilities

As a member of the coach development team, I have been primarily focused on building the capacity and capability of the HP workforce by providing coaches with authentic and meaningful professional development opportunities. However, my role involves performing a broad range of tasks, including:

- > Cultivating productive and collaborative relationships.
- > Identifying current knowledge gaps and implementing practical solutions.
- > Providing technical direction and operational support.
- > Translating theory to practice.
- > Providing evidence-based recommendations for projects and assisting with broader operational needs.
- > Knowledge production and management.
- > Using deductive, inductive and abductive reasoning to draw conclusions, make predictions and construct explanations.
- > Acting as a sounding board for new ideas and work practices.



Personal beliefs

My work has been underpinned by the following philosophical assumptions and personal beliefs:

- > An epistemological constructivist understanding that knowledge is socially co-constructed and generated from various perspectives.
- > An ontological point-of-view that people offer different versions of a reality that when analysed create a detailed understanding of an experience.
- > A personal belief that human beings are fundamentally social and learning is at the very core of our existence.
- > A thorough understanding of how our identities change as we learn.
- > A strong belief that social structures encourage meaningful interactions and create authentic learning opportunities.

Approaches

Below, is a brief overview of the ways in which I have gone about my work and the different approaches I have used to achieve my goals.

- > **Participatory Action Research:** Working collaborative with coaches and other key stakeholders to design and implement authentic learning and development projects in ways that enable holistic identification and resolution of real-world problems through repeated cycles of observation, reflection, planning, action and evaluation conducted in collaboration with the people for whom the solutions are being sought.
- > **Asset Based Community Development:** Acknowledging and leveraging existing skills, knowledge and experiences to make improvements.
- > **First Nation Methodology:** Using techniques and methods drawn from the tradition and knowledges of Australian Indigenous Peoples, including:
 - Applying Indigenous ways of knowing and being.
 - Recognising Australia's colonial past and the negative impact it has had on First Nations People.
 - Resisting colonial narratives and using interpersonal information-gathering techniques to create contextually relevant bodies of knowledge.
 - Utilising **Indigenous** research methods to generate new actionable knowledge and know-how (e.g., storytelling, yarning, introspective self-analysis, information-sharing circles, physical artifacts and ceremony).

Outputs

During my time with the team I've had the honour and privilege of assisting with the achievement of several key outcomes, including:

- > The design, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of the AIS Coach Summit Program.
- > Creating numerous resources to support the above initiative and other coach learning and development programs.
- > Playing a leading role in the design and implementation of the AIS Coach Mentorship Pilot Project.
- > Developing important artifacts (e.g., the AIS Coach Summit Evaluation Report, the AIS Mentorship Information Guide, the AIS Coach Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Writing Guide, and the AIS Coach Learning Guide).
- > Establishing links with the University of Canberra Research Institute for Sport and Exercise.
- > Generating considerable reputational, learning and social capital for the team.

Next steps and future goals

It is currently a very exciting time to be involved in HP coach development and I believe (both professional and academically) that the work we are doing is extremely important. The following is therefore provided with a profound sense of respect and deep admiration for what has already been achieved by the team and summarises what I would like to achieve over the next twelve months.

- > Continue to support the development of coaches who are working at the highest level of the Australian sport system.
- > Establish an inquiry-focused participatory HP coaching culture where members believe that their contributions matter and feel a sense of connection with each another.
- > Support the development of adaptable leaders and skilful custodians by enhancing the ability of HP coaches to consider different perspectives and ways of thinking through engagement in meaningful discussions and the examination of real-world experiences.
- > Continue to explore the benefits of more social and collaborative approaches to coach learning and development.
- > Assist with the creation of initiatives that acknowledge the idiosyncratic nature of learning and understand that effective coach development tends to occur through opportunistic and serendipitous methods as opposed to participation in structured programs.
- > Conduct a formal study with some the Summit coaches and have the findings reported in an International peer-reviewed journal.
- > Be cancer free.