

# Working with coaches and their teams in youth and collegiate sport in the USA: A Commentary

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## Introduction

Sport psychology literature contains many accounts of mental training consultants working with teams from youth sport to the highest levels of amateur and professional sports. Recently, Simon Jenkins interviewed Andy Gillham about his career as a full-time coaching consultant at the youth and collegiate levels. We found the article quite illuminating, and we enjoyed being privy to the ins and outs of this unique and innovative career. This commentary will focus on information contained in Jenkins' interview, emphasizing Gillham's professional journey, his implementation of evidence-based coaching, and the importance of resiliency.

## Gillham's journey

The article focuses on the life and career of Dr Andy Gillham, the owner of Ludus Consulting, which he formed in 2013. The reader learns that Gillham never intended to become a full-time coaching consultant for sport teams. Rather, his profession likely emerged as a result of luck, chance, hard work, and the possession of a distinct skill set. Gillham entered his PhD following a Bachelor of Science degree in fitness with a coaching concentration and a master's degree in human performance. He felt fortunate to have been accepted into a PhD given that he had little background in the social sciences. It is likely that his supervisor saw some interpersonal and professional skills in Gillham that would make him a competent graduate student and an effective consultant. Related to his PhD dissertation at the University of Idaho, Gillham worked on the creation of a coaching success questionnaire, a task that helped him complete his PhD requirements as well as assisting his initial ventures as a coaching consultant.

Over the course of his personal journey, Gillham acquired a variety of coaching and applied sport psychology knowledge that provided him with expertise that informed his coaching consultation business. With regard to his acquisition of coaching knowledge, Gillham engaged primarily in formal learning (i.e. large-scale curriculum-based education) and to a lesser extent informal

learning (i.e. intentional or incidental learning opportunities).<sup>1,2</sup> With respect to the latter, Gillham acquired some valuable knowledge through his athletic experiences in football and as an assistant coach. These forms of informal learning experiences are also typically used by sport coaches who are learning their trade.<sup>3,4</sup> What sets Gillham apart from developing coaches is his extensive experience within formalized learning structures, such as his undergraduate and master's degrees, his strength and conditioning coaching certification through the National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA), and notably his PhD at the University of Idaho during which he became a certified sport psychology consultant through the Association for Applied Sport Psychology (AASP). Gillham's formal and informal learning background and experiences help explain his career progression and how he is able to implement evidence-based strategies in his consultation work.

## Evidence-based coaching: Moving from theory to practice

Theory to practice is an important and unique element of sport psychology. Our journals are replete with coaching articles that have taken complex and multidimensional theories and translated them into practical interventions that helped athletes and teams achieve both personal satisfaction and enhanced athletic performance. For example, Mallett<sup>5</sup> integrated self-determination theory/research<sup>6,7</sup> into his coaching practices to create an autonomy-supportive motivational climate in preparing his athletes for the 2004 Olympics. Finding success in his approach, Mallett concluded that "the utility of adopting an approach to coaching on sound research in preference to

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