Timeout for Irish International Basketball: Consequences to Coaches and Players

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Student Declaration

“I, Cathy Grant, declare that the Masters thesis entitled An examination of the sources of development for Irish, senior, basketball coaches and players; and the identification of the consequences to development when the International programs are removed is no more than 60,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, references and footnotes.

This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.”

Signed

__________________________

Cathy Grant
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Abstract

Title: Timeout for Irish, International Basketball: Consequences to Coaches and Players

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While research has investigated the development of coaches and athletes in top-level sport limited research exists that has examined the consequences to coach and athlete development when sources of development are removed. The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of players and coaches after finding out that the Irish senior international basketball programs had been discontinued. Eight senior international members (two coaches, six players) participated in the study. This study relied upon grounded description methods, including semi-structured interviews, to gather and analyse data.

While findings supported previous work which indicates that the main sources of development for the coaches included: experience, other coaches and reflection. The sources of development for the players included: exposure to top-level coaches, top level players and competition. This study has identified that the basketball structure played an important role in coach and athlete development through the provision of development opportunities associated with the international programs.

Most notably, it was found that the removal of the senior international programs negatively impacted on the development and participation of younger players and reduced the popularity of the sport. However, the long-term consequences of the removal of the senior international programs warrants further research.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION
1.1 INTRODUCTION
International level basketball is a highly competitive arena in which participants continuously try to enhance their performance in a bid to be successful. Research indicated that individual development at this level is influenced by the context, resources and interactions with others (Baker, Horton, Roberston-Wilson, Wall, 2003, Côté, 1999, Pedersen, 2005). The purpose of this chapter is to outline the rationale for this study, based on the previous research, and outline gaps in the literature. First, a brief overview of the literature is provided in relation to coaching research and athlete research. Second, the contextual background for Irish basketball is discussed which identifies the current situation pertaining to international basketball.

The majority of current literature surrounding sport development has focused on pathways to top level sport. However, what happens to coaches and players when sources of development are eliminated? There is limited research identifying the consequences of such actions to development. When Basketball Ireland removed the senior international programs, it provided the opportunity to record such a phenomenon. The international teams provided a multitude of development opportunities for both coaches and players such as: experience, learning from other coaches, reflecting on performance, and working with top level players. Consequently, the removal of the teams has reduced these opportunities. But before the consequences are examined, the sources of development need to be identified. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine the sources of development for basketball coaches and players and the consequences to their development when sources are removed.

1.2 COACH DEVELOPMENT
Coaching research originally focused on the bio-scientific, however, it has evolved to encompass coaching behaviours (Bloom, Crumpton, and Anderson, 1999; Côté and Sedgwick, 2003; Cushion and Jones, 2001; Gould, Guinan, Greenlead, and Chung, 2002), practices (Baker, Côté and Abernethy, 2003; Bloom, Durand-Bush, and Salmela, 1997), reflections (Knowles, Tylerm Gilbourne and Eubank, 2006; Nelson and Cushion, 2006) and social interactions (Nixon, 1993; Poczwardowski, Barrot, and Henschen, 2002; Zeigler, 1980).
While one of the aims of this study is to focus on the consequences of the discontinuation of the Irish senior basketball programme on coach development, it aims to provide a description of the sources of development that lead to top level coaching in Irish basketball. Research advocates that the coaching process is individual to each context, and should be researched as such (Cross, 1995; Shempp, 1998; Tinning, 1982).

1.3 ATHLETE DEVELOPMENT

While coaching research is still within the nascent stage of sports research, athlete research is a well-established discipline. Therefore, a large amount of research pertaining to athlete development exists, specifically, examining the stages of development for athletes and the comparison of elite athletes and amateurs. According to the literature athlete development is influenced by numerous factors namely: genetics (Galton, 1876), opportunities to play (Côté, 1999), the coach (Gould, Guinan, Greenleaf, Medbery and Peterson, 1999; Jowett and Cockerill, 2003), social support (Côté, 1999), and psychological characteristics (MacNamara, Button, and Collins, 2010). Additionally research has highlighted the importance of deliberate practice in athlete development (Ericsson, Anders, Krampe, Tesh-Römer, and Clemens, 1993). Deliberate practice, stages of athlete development and influential factors for athlete development are all discussed in detail in the literature review. While previous work has provided substantial information on the sources of development necessary for athletes to reach top level performance, little research has been devoted to the development opportunities of athletes once they reach top level in their chosen sport nor the influence of competition on development. Moreover, there appears to be limited research illustrating the consequences of the removal of these sources to athlete development.

1.4 THE HISTORY OF BASKETBALL IN IRELAND

In December 1891 in Springfield, Massachusetts, the game of basketball was invented by a physical education teacher James Naismith. Since then the game has evolved into a fast paced, professional sport. Sergeant Major Doogan (1920) introduced basketball into the Irish army as an auxiliary gymnasium exercise for boxers in training (Basketball Ireland, 2007b). By 1925, two strong championships existed in the Curragh (Basketball Ireland, 2007b). Basketball grew in popularity and in March 1945, the Amateur Basketball Association of Ireland (ABAI) was founded and the first club was formed in University College Dublin (Basketball Ireland, 2007b). The first Intervarsity
Competition was held in 1946 and in 1947 the Dublin County Board was established and Irish Basketball was affiliated with FIBA\textsuperscript{1} (Basketball Ireland, 2007b). Ireland sent its first and only basketball team to represent Ireland during the 1948 Olympics which were held in a post war Britain at a time when there were no qualification systems for teams participating (Basketball Ireland, 2007b). The first men’s and women’s domestic National Leagues were introduced in 1971/1972 and 1979/80 respectively (Basketball Ireland, 2007b).

The “modern era” of men’s National League began when St. Vincent’s, Killarney introduced the first American professional players in 1979/80 (Basketball Ireland, 2007b). In 1980, the name of the association changed from the original ABAI to the Irish Basketball Association (IBA) (Basketball Ireland, 2007b). In August 2001, for the first time in history of Irish Basketball, the senior men qualified to the semi-final round of the 2003 European Championships (Basketball Ireland, 2007b). In 2003, the IBA was restructured and re-branded as Basketball Ireland (BI) aimed at improving and developing basketball (Basketball Ireland, 2007b). Basketball is now the third largest participation sport with currently over 180,000 people actively playing (Basketball Ireland, 2007b). Almost 300 clubs cater for basketball players around the country, with approximately 1,200 teams participating at a variety of levels (Basketball Ireland, 2007b). Superleague is the highest level of participation with nine men’s teams and seven women’s teams competing. (Basketball Ireland, 2007b).

\textbf{1.5 CURRENT SITUATION}

Ireland holds a long standing tradition of basketball in the country stretching over eighty five years (since 1925). Unfortunately, the country is currently in the midst of a recession, thus everyone from governments, businesses, schools and clubs are making large scale cut-backs. Basketball Ireland has felt the pinch and only received €650,050 in 2009 (Irish Sports Council, 2009) which was divided amongst administration, schools, clubs, national and international teams. Additionally, at the beginning of the domestic season in September 2009 it was announced that the Superleague was reducing the number of professional players from two to one in the men’s league and the elimination of professional players from the women’s league. The next decision

\textsuperscript{1}FIBA: Fédération Internationale de Basketball is a worldwide basketball association that governs all aspects of the game for its members
made by Basketball Ireland included a reduction in organisation staff and the removal of
the senior international programs until the organisation was in a better financial
position.

1.6 THE DOMESTIC LEAGUE AND INTERNATIONAL TEAMS
The Superleague season begins with pre-season training at the end of August. During
the season two competitions take place: the National League and the National Cup. The
National League runs from September and concludes with the league finals taking place
March (approximately six months). The National Cup takes place between November
and January.

The international season began in June; the youth teams (U16, 18 and 20) competed in
July and the senior international teams competed between August and September
(depending on performance outcomes). In 2007, eight National teams existed that
competed at the European Championships: U16, U18, U20 and Senior Level, both men
and women. In 2008, the under 18 and 20 teams were withdrawn from European
competition and 2010 saw the disbandment of the senior international teams for the
foreseeable future. Prior to the withdrawal of senior teams the men’s team was ranked
as twelfth in division B and the senior women’s team was ranked as third in division B.

1.7 BASKETBALL IRELAND
Basketball Ireland is the National Governing Body for Basketball in Ireland. Basketball
Ireland has responsibility for the promotion, development, administration and co-
ordination of all basketball activities throughout the thirty-two counties. The goals of
Basketball Ireland include: to make basketball the number one indoor team sport in
Ireland; to maintain and increase participation levels among adults and children, and to
develop basketball across all levels from participation to high performance (Basketball
Ireland, 2007a). In addition, Basketball Ireland aims to create high quality
competitions; and to provide a high performance program that will ultimately led to the
National teams becoming a competitive force at European level (Basketball Ireland,
2007a). In 2010 Basketball Ireland consisted of 10 full-time staff members; the rest of
the organisation was comprised of voluntary members. The organisation is funded by
the government, the Irish Sports Council (ISC), business sponsorships and fundraising.
1.8 COACHING EDUCATION PROVIDED BY BASKETBALL IRELAND

Basketball Ireland is working in conjunction with the National Coaching Committee’s (NCC) to improve coaching development opportunities. The NCC is responsible for providing coaching courses, clinics and conferences throughout the year. The coaching structure of Basketball Ireland has been redeveloped over the last few years with Basketball Ireland working in partnership with Coaching Ireland², developing coaching syllabuses from introductory level up to international level. To date, only two coaching levels exist for Irish basketball coaches.

Basketball Ireland also started a programme called ‘coaches in training’ to prepare coaches for international level competition at underage level. These coaches must first fulfil one year in this program before being considered for the under 16 international campaigns. No coaching academy yet exists for coaches wishing to work above this level for Irish team programs.

1.9 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The information outlined above illustrates the sources of development associated with the senior international teams, provides an overview of previous research in coach and player development and highlights gaps in the literature. The Irish basketball context has provided the opportunity to record the impact of the removal of international teams on both coach and player development. The opportunity to examine this phenomenon will expand on previous research and attempt to bridge gaps in the literature by providing new knowledge in coaching and athlete development from an Irish perspective. Therefore, the purpose of the project is:

(i) To identify the consequences, perceived by coaches and players after the removal of the senior international programs.

(ii) A subsequent aim is to explore the sources of development for senior international coaches and players in Irish basketball.

² Coaching Ireland is the primary coaching organisation in Ireland responsible for the development of coaches. It works in conjunction with 60 national governing bodies to produce coaching education for coaches of all levels.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW
2.1 INTRODUCTION
The identification and comprehension of factors that lead to enhanced performance are the main antecedents for all sports research. The common element that runs through research (for example, coaching science, sport psychology, sociology, physiology and biomechanics) is a need to understand what influences improved performance and why. Such work has provided valuable information into the development of coaches, athletes and the sport itself. Furthermore, research has identified that in order for a sport to progress; three components need to be developed and evaluated: (i) the coach, (ii) the athlete and (iii) a sport structure (De Bosscher, De Knop, and van Bottenburg, 2009; De Bosscher, De Knop, Van Bottenburg and Shibli, 2006; Duffy, Lyons, Moran, Warrington, and MacManus, 2001). Not only does each component play a role in the development of a sport but each component impacts directly or indirectly on the other components. Therefore, it is important to discuss each component and how it can be maximised to improve performance. The following literature review will outline the multiple factors that impact on the development of coaches, athletes and structures in sport.

In keeping with the aim of this study, that is, an examination of the perceived impact of the removal of international teams on both coaches and athletes, the sources that promote learning and development must first be identified. The first section therefore, discusses sources of learning and development for coaches. Next, the literature review will examine the factors impacting on the development of athletes including the impact of the coach on athlete development. Finally, the value of elite sports structures will be outlined and examples of how such structures have benefited sport through the development of coaches, athletes and resources (e.g. sport sciences, facilities, sports medicine).

2.2 COACH DEVELOPMENT: AN OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH
Previously coaching was seen as an extension of traditions such as: psychology, pedagogy, mentoring and training. Originally, coaching research reflected educational research as much of the research was conducted on teachers (Laughlin and Laughlin, 1994). These teachers played a dual role as physical education teachers and coaches, lending support to the notion that coaching was an extension of teaching (Kahan, 1999). Based on this assumption most of the coaching research moved in line with the physical
education research during the 20th century (Kahan, 1999). Coaching followed education research when education became a science; “dedicated to control rather than making sense of the forms and processes of schooling and teaching” (Doyle, 1992, p.489). At this time psychology “became the foundational discipline for educational thought and research” (Doyle, 1992, p.489) as it did in coaching research. Adopting a scientific approach meant that coaching research moved towards a training approach instead of the original view that coaching was related to teaching (Cassidy, Jones and Potrac, 2004).

Sport psychology also featured strongly in the development of coaching research. Through the examination of coaching behaviours researchers attempted to identify common characteristics, for example leadership style, of coaches that would lead to successful coaches (Chelladurai, 2007; Chelladurai and Saleh, 1980; Czaikowski, 2010; Potrac, Jones and Cushion, 2007). However, the findings of these studies suggested that not all successful coaches possess the same characteristics and what worked well for one coach may not transfer successfully across contexts.

Recent research has begun to acknowledge the complexities associated with coaching (Jones, 2000; Potrac, Brewer, Jones, Armour and Hoff, 2000; Potrac and Jones, 1999). In addition, cognitive processes and qualitative methods have increased within coaching research (Gilbert and Trudel, 1999). Research examining cognitive processes has examined the thought processes behind coaching behaviours and actions. This transition reflected educational research which moved from behavioural research to examine cognitive and constructivist orientations (Cassidy et al., 2004) in which coaching researchers have acknowledged the complexity and uniqueness of the coaching process and advocated a holistic and individualised approach to examine it (Jones, 2000; Potrac et al., 2000; Potrac and Jones, 1999).

Coaching research has enhanced knowledge relating to the coaching process and has highlighted numerous factors that influence coach development (Cushion, Armour and Jones, 2003; Gould, Krane, Giannini and Hodge 1990; Lemyre, Trudel and Durand-Bush, 2007). Results from these studies proposed that the development of a coach is a complex process, which requires individuals to source methods of development through ad-hoc learning pathways (Knowles, Gilbourne, Borrie and Nevill, 2001). Although,
these ad-hoc pathways vary from coach to coach, similar sources of learning have been identified. These are: experience, learning from others, formal coach education, coaching knowledge.

2.2.1 EXPERIENCE

Learning through experience has been identified as one of the most essential sources of coach development (Cushion et al., 2003, Gould et al., 1990, Lemyre et al., 2007). According to researchers, coaches have advocated that previous playing experience and possessing leadership experiences in the sport they are now coaching were necessary for their development (Carter and Bloom, 2009; Erickson, Coté and Fraser-Thomas, 2007). Erickson, Bruner, MacDonald and Côté (2006) reported similar findings in their study examining top level coaches. Two types of experience were outlined in the literature (Carter and Bloom; 2009; Cushion, 2007; Cushion et al., 2003; Erickson et al., 2007) as sources of knowledge that aid in coach development: previous playing experience and previous coaching experience.

Previous playing experience allows for the acquisition of coaching methods through participation, experience and observation (Cushion et al., 2003). These methods reflect the culture context which, in turn, are internalised and embodied (Cushion et al., 2003). That is, even though coaches’ past experiences differ in terms of amount and quality they form a screen through which all future experiences will be shaped (Schempp and Graber, 1992). However, it must be noted that this form of knowledge can be limited in terms of coaching behaviours and actions acquired which may not result in an effective or positive coaching practice (Cushion et al., 2003). Playing at a high level is suggested as a necessary requirement to coach at top level sport as the coach’s playing experience provides the coach with knowledge to equip the athletes with skills and behaviours necessary to excel at that level (Cushion, 2007; Cushion et al., 2003; Erickson et al., 2007). Findings indicated that the coaches drew on their previous playing experience to develop their coaching knowledge, philosophy and beliefs (Carter and Bloom, 2009; Cushion, 2007; Cushion et al., 2003, Erickson et al., 2007).

Recently, however, it has been suggested that playing experience is not necessarily a requisite for top level coaches. For example, Carter and Bloom (2009) found that several coaches who have surpassed their athletic achievement have been successful at
top level. Their study found, for the university coaches involved in the project, the beginning of their careers were difficult as they lacked previous athletic experience, however, hard work and perseverance allowed them to overcome these gaps to become top level coaches. Therefore, it is suggested that previous playing experience is a favourable source for top level coaches but not necessarily requirement. These findings further strengthen the belief that coaching is an ad hoc, complex and individual process that draws on a multitude of knowledge sources including experience and other coaches (Carter and Bloom, 2009; Cushion, 2007; Cushion et al., 2003; Erickson et al., 2007).

Experience as a coach has also been highlighted as an important source of coaching knowledge (Cushion, 2007; Cushion and Jones, 2001; Gilbert and Trudel, 1999; Nelson and Cushion, 2006; Wright, Trudel and Culver, 2007). Findings suggested that coaches’ practical experiences, through observation and/or discussion with other coaches or mentors, were perceived to be more important than their coach certification program in their progression toward becoming top level coaches (Wright et al., 2007). Salmela (1995) examined ‘expert’ team sport coaches in an effort to identify their experiences of the transition they encountered moving from athletes to expert coaches. In this case, expertise was determined by the number of years a coach had spent coaching, a minimum of ten years was deemed necessary for a coach to reach expert level (Coté, Salmela and Russell, 1995b). It was found that the coaches participated in several sports as young athletes and, early in their career, many of them had the opportunity to learn from other coaches through observation and mentoring. As the coaches progressed, their own experience and the sharing of knowledge were noted as important learning opportunities (Salmela, 1995). Carter and Bloom (2009) also reported that learning was an open process in which they gained knowledge from experience through trainings, others, and competition.

Reflection has also been proposed by the literature as another important learning source for coaches. Reflection is defined as the “active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief supposed to form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions which it tends” (Dewey, 1933, p. 9). The process of reflection in and on experience has been described as central to experience-based learning theories (Erickson, Bruner, MacDonald and Coté, 2008). According to Knowles, Tyler, Gilbourne and Eubank (2006) reflection refers to the coach’s conscious
examination of experiences in an attempt to develop new understanding and expand their knowledge. Reflection has been proposed as a learning aid for coaches to explore their decisions and experiences thereby increasing their understanding and management of themselves and their practice (Anderson, Knowles and Gilbourne, 2004). “Encouraging practitioners to reflect upon practice is thought to create the opportunity for the exploration of good practice, the identification of areas for improvement and the formulation of ideas for change” (Knowles et al., 2001, p.187).

Reflection is thought to create a link between the application of professional knowledge and practice into conscious sport specific knowledge (Gilbert and Trudel, 2001; Knowles et al., 2001). Gilbert and Trudel (2001) proposed that: coaching issues, role frames, issue setting, strategy generation, experimentation, and evaluation provide the coach with opportunities to reflect and engage in the experiential learning process. Examples of coaching issues that trigger reflection include: athlete behaviour, athlete performance, coach profile, parental influence, and team organisation, the coach's role frame and/or approach to coaching (Gilbert and Trudel, 2001).

Knowles et al. (2001) examined the development of reflective practice within a higher education based coach education program. Coaches participated in 120 hours of placement that included journal writing, reflective workshops and the completion of a post-placement written exercise. The study revealed that the development of reflective skills does not occur naturally nor does it run parallel to increasing coaching experience (Knowles et al., 2001). However, the benefits of learning reflective skills in a coach education program were found to positively influence training practices after the program was finished (Knowles et al., 2001). Furthermore, Gilbert and Trudel (2005) conducted a study investigating the conditions that influence coach reflection. Findings supported both the interaction of four conditions (peer access, stages of learning, issue characteristics, and environment) and strategies employed acted as influential factors of the reflection process (Gilbert and Trudel, 2005).

2.2.2 LEARNING FROM OTHERS

3 Role frames filter the construction of problems are constructed, and how they are addressed (Gilbert and Trudel, 2001). Issue setting refers to the identification of an issue, and determine why it is an issue (Gilbert and Trudel, 2001).
Observation of other coaches acts as another important source of knowledge for coaches (Cushion, 2007; Cushion, 2001; Gilbert and Trudel, 2001; Gould et al., 1990). Research has illustrated that coaching principles and opinions of coaching to be shaped by social and observational opportunities (Cushion et al., 2003). This suggests that observation is not an isolated process rather it is impacted by the coach’s interaction with others. In terms of development, coaches often serve an informal apprenticeship of prolonged observation, which familiarises them with the task of coaching (Cushion and Jones, 2001). This apprenticeship, or mentoring, has received considerable attention in coaching circles and findings have suggested, that mentoring can act as a viable framework, for the development of coaching knowledge (Cushion et al., 2003).

Previous research (Bloom, Durand-Bush, Schinke and Salmela, 1998; Cushion, 2001; Gilbert and Trudel, 2001) indicated that informal mentoring is already an established practice in the coaching community. Bloom et al., (1998) examined the various training methods available to coaches and found that the majority of coaches participated in a mentoring system, largely informal, in which they themselves became mentors in their later years. Consequently, research has proposed that mentoring plays an important role in coach development (Bloom et al., 1998; Cushion, 2007; Gilbert and Trudel, 2001).

Currently, mentoring for coaches is an informal and unstructured process (Cushion, 2001, Cushion et al., 2003). Problems associated with this unstructured form of learning have been identified and include: the possible reproduction of; existing culture, coaching practices, and power relations (Cushion and Jones, 2001) which may not necessarily lead to effective coaching. For example, promoting a culture of winning at all costs (Cushion and Jones, 2001) or if a coach is exposed to an authoritarian approach to coaching then this coaching method is more than likely to be passed onto the neophyte coach. Thus, mentoring in its current state also has disadvantages as it serves to replicate current practices, philosophies and coaching behaviours (Cushion, 2001, Cushion et al., 2003). With that in mind, if mentoring is to be considered a critical source in the development of coaches, it has been proposed that mentors need to have established the appropriate position in the coaching hierarchy (Cushion and Jones, 2006). That is, mentors must not only possess the necessary knowledge for coaching but they must also possess the necessary social, cultural, and symbolic experience.
encompassing technical, tactical and interaction skills that allow for the neophyte coach to develop his/her own coaching principles and practices (Cushion et al., 2003).

2.2.3 FORMAL COACH EDUCATION

In an attempt to foster the development of coaches, education programs have been established as a potential method of acquiring the technical, tactical and psychological skills necessary to be an effective coach. Coach education programs in various universities and institutions have been established for decades across Europe, America (the American Sport Education Program), Canada (the Coaching Association of Canada’s National Coach Certification Program) and Australia (the Australian Coach Accreditation Scheme). These formal coach education programs have been, up to now, the only method recognised, that leads to certification. A coaching certificate is usually obtained through the successful completion of a formal coach education program/course. Erickson et al. (2008) identified three benefits of coaching education programs for coach development: (a) increased perceived coaching efficacy (b) better facilitation of social development and growth of athletes and (c) decreased rate of coach burnout through the use of stress management and coping strategies. In addition, the authors found that the coaches got the chance to interact with others allowing for the establishment of coaching networks.

However, there are several questions surrounding programs including the validation and effectiveness of these programs. One criticism of these programs is that the courses tend to occur irregularly, usually several months and often years apart (Knowles et al., 2001; Nelson et al., 2006). The courses have been described as nothing more than an information booth: “there are governing bodies that certify coaches based on the successful completion of our program but we don’t certify competency of coaches,” (Cohen, 1992: P.25). Furthermore, previous studies have shown that formalised learning environments are not the preferred method of learning for coaches (Demers, Woodburn and Savard, 2006; Werthner and Trudel, 2006). Day-to-day learning through experience, observation and interaction with other coaches have been identified as the desired methods for learning (Gilbert, Côté and Mallet, 2006). This finding is understandable given the ratio of time spent in a formalised learning environment is small compared to the number of hours a coach spends in the sporting environment and interaction with athletes, other coaches and sporting officials (Demers et al., 2006;
Gilbert et al., 2006). Further, it has been found that these courses failed to develop what Jones (2000) deems as the necessary, intellectual and practical components that are important to making meaningful decisions and problem solving. Instead theory and practice are taught independently presenting high level tasks as a routine resulting in a deskilled practitioner in terms of cognitive and human interaction (Jones, 2000; Potrac et al., 2000). This approach is problematic as coaches are ill-equipped with the necessary skills to deal with the many challenges and tasks associated with the complex process of coaching practice (Cushion et al., 2003).

Coaching courses have also been found to be limited in their attempts to teach coaches to adapt or apply value judgements (Cushion et al., 2003). Other complaints against formal education include: lack of interaction between the coaches and the inability to transcribe effectively the complexity of coaching into a brief course on coaching science (Demers et al., 2006). Where large scale coach development systems are employed their goal is to encompass a broad spectrum of sports. Therefore, sport specificity is lost and tactical skills may not be relevant. There is minimum follow-up and few opportunities to facilitate the integration of new knowledge into coaching practice (Cushion et al., 2003). Consequently, it is proposed that coaching education programs are limited in their ability to induce considerable development opportunities for coaches.

2.2.4 COACHING KNOWLEDGE

Work has also examined the way in which coaches learn in an attempt to identify the knowledge necessary to reach the highest level possible and the learning characteristics used by coaches to reach that level. The structure of knowledge includes various schemes under which knowledge can be organised (Côté and Gilbert, 2009). Côté and Gilbert (2009) proposed that the organisation of knowledge is divided into two broad domains: declarative and procedural knowledge. Declarative knowledge is defined as “routine knowledge that may include readily available information about concepts and elements relating to particular subjects” (Côté and Gilbert, 2009, p.309). Procedural knowledge is defined as “details steps or activities required to perform a task” (Côté and Gilbert, 2009, p.309). Abraham, Collins and Martindale (2006) examined the declarative and procedural knowledge of coaches to highlight the simplistic nature of previous coaching models. Here it was proposed that the transferable schematic across a “multiple of situations and contexts through reference to relevant knowledge and
The findings suggested that schematic ⁴ was more effective at identifying the knowledge/decision-making concepts and the resulting behaviour requirements of all coaches. Similarly, Cassidy (2009) suggested that when examining the coaches’ declarative and procedural knowledge subject matter content, pedagogical content and curriculum content should be included. Alternatively, Nash and Collins (2006) classified knowledge in terms of tacit and explicit knowledge as it reflects the ill-defined problems and decision making inherent in coaching. These studies showed a correlation in the relationship between coaching and the use of knowledge and pedagogy which is reflected in course content.

It is now acknowledged (Cushion and Jones, 2001; De Bosscher, De Knop and Van Bottenburg, 2008; Jones and Turner, 2006; Potrac et al., 2000) that the coaching process involves more than the ability to teach sport specific skills, it includes the ability to create and maintain relationships with others, and the ability to learn from one’s own practice. Previous work (Abraham et al., 2006; Cassidy, 2009; Nash and Collins, 2006) encompasses the knowledge structure and professional knowledge associated with coaching expertise; however, these studies do not emphasise the important interpersonal and reflective dimensions of expert coaches. Several authors (e.g. Baker et al., 2003; Côté and Salmela, 1995; Schinke et al., 1995; Bloom et al., 1999; Jones et al., 2003; Côté and Sedgwick, 2003) use the term “expert” when examining top level coaches however one clear coherent definition does not exist for expertise. Some researchers determined expert coaches based on the number of years they have been coaching (Côté and Salmela, 1996; Côté and Salmela, 1995; Salmela, 1995; Salmela, Draper and Desjardins, 1994). Others, such as Abraham et al. (2006), proposed that expert knowledge for coaches included declarative knowledge in sport sciences, sport-specific knowledge, and pedagogical knowledge in conjunction with procedural knowledge. According to Collinson (1996) expert knowledge falls within a more general ‘professional’ category and this knowledge is utilised in coach education programs and clinics (Abraham et al., 2006). Many researchers have thus based their definition of expertise on this ‘professional’ knowledge (Côté and Gilbert, 2009). However,

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⁴ A schema is a diagram of explanation for a concept or system
professional knowledge fails to account for the interactional processes that occur in the coaching environment.

As mentioned above, a coach’s effectiveness is also based on the coach’s interactions with others (e.g. athletes, assistant coaches, parents). Research has acknowledged that coaching is a complex, mutual and influential process based on social structures (Côté and Gilbert, 2009). Consequently, when considering coaching knowledge, research needs to include interpersonal knowledge as this is necessary for coaches to communicate effectively with their athletes. Additionally, there is research to support the inclusion of intrapersonal knowledge based on the assumption that a coach must have knowledge on how to understand the self, the ability for introspection and reflection learn from experiences (Côté and Gilbert, 2009). For example, Gilbert and Trudel (2005; 2004; 2001) examined the way in which coaches transferred their experience into knowledge and skills. The authors found that intrapersonal knowledge was an important element of coaching and as such should be included in the definition of coaching expertise. Similarly, Côté and Gilbert (2009) suggested that the critical role of intrapersonal knowledge is evident in how expertise in teaching is defined.

2.2.5 SUMMARY OF RESEARCH ON COACH DEVELOPMENT

After reviewing the literature, it is apparent that the coaching process is a complex process in which there is no standard method of learning. According to the research several factors impact on the development of a coach: (i) previous experience (Cushion et al., 2003; Gould et al., 1990, Lemyre et al., 2007), (ii) learning from others (Baker, 2003, Bloom et al., 1998; Cushion, 2007; Cushion, 2001; Gilbert and Trudel, 2001; Gould et al., 1990), (iii) reflection (Knowles et al., 2001) (v) formal coach education (Cushion et al., 2003; Gilbert et al., 2006; Gilbert and Trudel, 1999), and coaching knowledge (Cushion et al., 2003; Cushion, 2007). However, some argue that these methods of development do not reflect the effectiveness or abilities of the coach (Bell, 1997; Gilbert and Trudel, 2001). For example, experience does not necessarily lead to effectiveness therefore other methods for evaluating coach effectiveness are necessary. A coach must have an extensive knowledge base that covers the elements of professional, interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge in order to be effective in coaching (Abraham et al., 2006). Although coaching research has aided in the identification of these sources of knowledge (Cushion et al., 2003) and factors that
influence the development of coaches (Cushion et al., 2003; Gould et al., 1990; Lemyre et al., 2007), future research needs to consider the unique and complex nature of the coaching process (Jones, 2000; Potrac et al., 2000; Potrac and Jones, 1999).

2.3 ATHLETE DEVELOPMENT: AN OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH
The majority of athlete development research to date is based on work in sport psychology (Bruner, Erickson, McFadden and Coté, 2009) in which theoretical models for of athlete expertise have been developed. For instance, Bloom (1985) identified three main stages in the development of an elite performer; the initiation stage, the development stage and the mastery stage. Expanding on the work of Bloom, Côte (1999) developed a sport participation model outlining three stages; sampling, specialising and investment years. Sampling refers to the athlete’s participation in a variety of sports at a young age. The next stage, ‘specialising’, shows an increase in commitment and training to one particular sport. Finally, ‘investment’ shows the largest increase in commitment and training for the refinement of skills and increase in performance for success in competition (Bloom, 1985). In addition, Côté (1999) suggested the addition of a fourth stage relating to the maintenance and perfection of skills. Durand-Bush (2000) also proposed a ‘maintenance’ stage which was characterised as the increased quality of training, and the need for more support to deal with the additional stress of elite competitive sport. In this stage, Ericsson et al. (1993) outlined deliberate practice as an important source for talent development. Deliberate practice is discussed in greater detail later in this section.

For top-level athletes, development is an intense process of physical and mental preparation (Abbott and Collins, 2004). However, before athletes can enter top level development programs they must be identified as possible future champions (Abbott and Collins, 2004; Augestad, Bergsgard and Hansen, 2006; Hong, Wu and Xiong, 2005). Previous athlete development models have been useful in their identification of talent based on skill and physical development (Bruner, et al., 2009). However, these models fail to emphasise the development of psychological behaviours at an early stage in order to optimize development (Bruner, et al., 2009). Thus, alternative research on athlete development is based on the career transition literature (Bruner et al., 2009).
Work on career transitions found that the successful transition between stages of development is facilitated, and indeed characterised, by the development of an athlete, and the use several psychological behaviours (Abbott and Collins, 2004; Stambulova, Stephan and Japhag, 2007). Abbott and Collins (2004) suggested that coping strategies are developed by athletes to overcome any difficulties when moving across stages. It is thought that without the development of these psycho-behavioural strategies athletes will not be able to effectively deal with the transition and not achieve their potential (Abbott and Collins, 2004). This work was initiated by Schlossberg, and more recently, Bruner et al. (2009). Schlossberg (1981) proposed a conceptual framework that identified three factors contributing to the adaptation of an individual to a transition: the individual characteristics (e.g., age, past experience with a similar transition), pre-transition and post-transition environments characteristics (e.g., social support of friends and family, institutional support) and perception of the particular transition (e.g., gradual or sudden event, degree of stress, positive or negative affect) (Bruner et al., 2009). While this work has contributed to the understanding of athlete transitions, career transition models are too general and do not account for cultural differences across contexts (Stambulova et al., 2007).

Accordingly, research has begun to focus on the social influences that contribute to athlete development and transitions between stages. Adopting Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model of human development (1979), Wylleman (2004) outlined three levels of influence on athlete development: macro-level (e.g. size of country, population): meso-level (e.g. athletic infrastructure, public support for athletes) and micro-level (e.g. the psychosocial position of the athlete) (Stambulova et al., 2007). The results from this study have been useful in identifying differences in reactions of athletes to society based on the cultural context (Stambulova et al., 2007). For example, Stambulova et al. (2007) found that Swedish athletes who received greater attention from the public had longer careers in sport and were satisfied with their professional careers than their French counterparts. The authors highlighted the impact of society on the satisfaction and persistence of athletes which highlights the importance of support for athletes. Similar results emerged from the work of Bruner, Munroe-Chandler and Spink (2008) which demonstrated that social issues influenced the level of difficulty experienced by athletes in the transition stages towards elite sport.
Although athlete development models have been important in the identification of stages of development for athletes, they fail to recognise the training and competition elements of athlete development. Balyi (2010) proposed that athlete development occurs through six-steps for athletes to reach top level; the ‘fundamental stage’, ‘learn to train’, ‘train to train’, ‘train to compete’, ‘train to win’ and ‘retirement. In this model Bayli (2010) acknowledged the importance of competition in athlete development and suggests that competition is the ideal time to evaluate the development of an athlete as well as the effectiveness of a particular training regime (Bayli, 2010). It gives athletes the chance to analyse their own performance, identify weakness in their performance and areas that need to be worked on (Bayli, 2010).

2.3.1 COMPETITION
It has been suggested that competition allows for: the production of a hierarchy based on performance of athletes/teams; maintaining a permanent state of scarcity, meaning that only one athlete/team can, at a given time, be on top; ensuring recurring possibilities of exceeding previous performances and of occupying the top position of the hierarchy; and encourage motivations to win (Pedersen, 2005). Competition in sport is also suggested to determine the ‘best’ athlete, which sets the bar for other athletes dictating the level an athlete must achieve to become the best (Munroe-Chandler, Hall and Weinberg, 2004; Pedersen, 2005). Competition motivates athletes toward improving their performance; it fosters self-development and discipline (Munroe-Chandler et al., 2004; Pedersen, 2005; Weinburg, Burton, Yukelson and Weigand, 1993). The information relating to team sports and competition is limited and previous research to date has only looked at either the use of competition as a source of evaluation for athletes or the psychological characteristics necessary for successful performance (Abbott and Collins, 2004). It has yet to determine the influence of competition on individual athlete development as it has been proposed in this study that the opportunity to play against other teams acts as an important source of development for top-level players.

2.3.2 TYPES OF DEVELOPMENT FOR PRACTICE
High levels of training or practice are required to reach top level in any sport (Ericsson, Krampe and Tesch-Römer, 1993). The most prominent theories relating to practice are the ten year rule and the theory of deliberate practice which are discussed below. The
ten year rule and the theory of deliberate practice were developed in order to explain the difference between expert and non-expert individuals. Here, expertise is defined as “the result of the successful interactions among biological, psychological, and sociological constraints” (Baker et al., 2003 p. 1).

Simon and Chase (1973) developed the 10-year rule based on their study of chess players. The results of these studies indicated that experts had a greater ability to organize information and that inter-individual variation in performance could be explained by quantity and quality of training (Simon and Chase, 1973). Here, a 10-year commitment to high levels of training is the minimum requirement to reach expert level (Simon and Chase, 1973). This “rule” has been supported within the sport contexts, for example, swimming (Kalinowski, 1985), distance running, (Wallingford, 1975) and tennis (Monsaas, 1985). However, although the ten year rule can act as guideline of expertise, research suggests that it is not a good indicator of skill acquisition (Ericsson et al., 1993).

Based on the work of Simon and Chase, Ericsson et al., (1993) developed the theory of deliberate practice suggesting that it was not simply training of any type, but engagement in “deliberate practice” that was necessary for the attainment of expertise (Baker et al., 2003). According to Ericsson et al., (1993), deliberate practice refers to non-intrinsic motivating activities which require high levels of effort and attention. Through conditions involving high effort and concentration experts develop specific skills that are necessary in their field (Ericsson et al., 1993). Central to the theory of deliberate practice is the monotonic benefits assumption (Ericsson et al., 1993) in which a monotonic relationship exists between the number of hours of deliberate practice performed and the performance level achieved (Ericsson et al., 1993). Ericsson and Lehmann (1996) concluded that level of performance was determined by the amount of time spent performing a “well defined task with an appropriate difficulty level for the particular individual, informative feedback, and opportunities for repetition and corrections of errors” (pp. 20-21). Here it has been suggested that a combination of ten thousand hours of deliberate practice is necessary to reach the top level (Baker et al., 2003a; Erickson and Lehmann, 1996; Ericsson et al., 1993).
Several studies have provided support for the theory of deliberate practice within the sporting context (Helsen et al., 2000; Helsen et al., 2004; Hodge and Deakin, 1998; Hodges and Starkes, 1996). Helsen et al. (2004; 2000) uncovered a positive, linear relationship between practice time, and skill level, for soccer players, athletes and ice skaters. Starkes, Deakin, Allard, Hodges and Hayes (1996) reported a positive relationship between practice time and concentration and performance level. Similar results were found in studies examining karate (Hodges and Deakin, 1998), wrestling (Hodges and Starkes, 1996), soccer (Helsen et al., 2000; Helsen et al., 2004), middle distance running (Young and Salmela, 2002), and field hockey (Helsen, Starkes and Hodges, 1998). While deliberate practice may enhance skill development, expertise is likely to arise as a result of an interaction between several related factors, for example, environmental factors, social interaction, and experience. What can be surmised from this work is that the type of practice engaged by an athlete influences their development.

### 2.3.3 SOCIAL AND CULTURAL FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE DEVELOPMENT

It has now been acknowledged that factors such as the situational context, cultural and social elements of human interaction play an integral role in athlete development (Baker et al., 2003b; Côté, 1999; Pedersen, 2005). Social support and interactions with others have been shown to positively or negatively impact on an athlete’s performance and development (Baker et al., 2003). Support from coaches, family and friends play an important part in an athlete’s continued commitment to training and the sport (Coté, 1999). It has been found that athletes rely on this support system to provide support, motivation, understanding, and confidence (Coté, 1999).

In addition to support from social networks, cultural elements also play a significant role in the development of a sport, and subsequently on the development of an athlete. The capability of a sport to develop depends largely on the importance a country or society places on a particular sport (Baker et al., 2003b). For instance, the historical identity of certain sports may impact on the amount of funding a sport will receive. GAA, Ireland’s unique and historical sports has established 2,600 GAA clubs across the globe with structure and programs in place for development of athletes from seven years of age to senior level (GAA, 2011). The opportunity for children to play at an early age, impacts largely on their development, and also, impacts on the development of the sports. Looking abroad, cultural factors can be used to attribute to a country’s success.
relating to a particular sport. Canada, for instance, ice-hockey is part of the Canadian identity (Robidoux, 2002). The countries sporting history and climate has laid a strong foundation for the development of its athletes and adequately explains why Canada is such a successful country in ice-hockey. Similarly, the same can be said for Austria for alpine skiing (Coakley, 2001) and Nordic countries for cross-country skiing (Baker et al., 2003b).

2.3.4 THE COACH-ATHLETE RELATIONSHIP AND ATHLETE DEVELOPMENT

Research (Denison and Jones, 2007; Gould et al., 1999; Jowett and Cockerill, 2002; Kenow and Williams, 1999; Poczwardowski et al., 2002) on the coach-athlete relationship has identified the sources that positively and negatively influence the working environment between the coach and the athlete. The coach-athlete relationship is defined here as “the situation in which coaches’ and athletes’ emotions, thoughts, and behaviors are mutually and causally inter-connected” (Jowett and Ntoumanis, 2004, p. 245). The discussion below outlines the role of the coach in athlete development and the constructs that are believed to influence a ‘healthy’ and ‘unhealthy’ relationship. The impact of the coach on athlete development varies depending on the level of sport and the perceived function of the coach (Denison and Jones, 2007). Individual sports allow for one to one interaction between the athlete and the coach (Denison and Jones, 2007) but a team coach must have the necessary skills to marry the skills and personalities of all the athletes in order to get the team to work as a cohesive unit (Olympiou, Jowett, and Duda, 2008).

The coach plays an integral part in the physical, psychological and social development of athletes, therefore it is necessary to understand what the role of the coach is in relation to the athlete’s development and what actions, and behaviours the coach perceives as necessary to fulfil this role (Kalinowski, 1985; Monsaas, 1985; Woodman, 1993). A coach can influence performance (Woodman, 1993), and personal development (Kalinowski, 1985; Monsaas, 1985).

Researchers have described the coach-athlete relationship as reciprocal, trusting (Woodman, 1993) and genuine (Bloom and Durand-Bush, 1997). Additionally, this relationship is proposed to aid personal development (Kalinowski, 1985; Monsaas, 1985) and go beyond the simple tasks of teaching and instructing skills, techniques and
tactics (Jowett and Cockerill, 2003). Similarly, Poczwardowski et al. (2002) discovered that underlying the athlete-coach relationship was respect, belief in, knowledge of, and contribution to the other’s goals, needs, and wants.

Research in sport psychology which examined the nature of the coach–athlete relationship (Jowett and Cockerill, 2002; Jowett and Cockerill, 2003; Jowett and Meek, 2000) revealed that feelings of being cared for, liked, and valued, and mutual trust had an positive effect on coaches’ and athletes’ intrapersonal (e.g., creativity, determination) and interpersonal (e.g., compatibility, relationship maintenance) factors (Jowett and Meek, 2000). Work has also shown that shared knowledge and understanding of common goals allows coaches and players to work cohesively towards attaining each other’s needs, goals, and solving problems (Poczwardowski et al., 2002; Jowett and Meek, 2000; Jowett, 2001).

2.3.5 THE IMPACT OF COACH BEHAVIOURS ON ATHLETE DEVELOPMENT

The influence of coaching behaviours on athlete performance has been one of the most prominent areas of coaching research (Black and Weiss, 1992; Chelladurai and Saleh, 1980, Kenow and Williams, 1999; Shields, Gardner, Bredemeier and Bostro, 1997). Several researchers have attempted to examine the impact of the coach athlete relationship on athletic performance through measurement scales. For example, Chelladurai and Saleh (1980) utilised the LSS (Leadership Scale for Sport) to examine coach leadership in sport and the impact of coaching styles on athletes’ performance. Several other studies have also focused on how coaching behaviours affect athletes’ performance through questionnaires and observation (Potrac et al., 2007; Wandzilak, Ansorge and Potter, 1988). Results from these studies lend support the notion that athletes’ performance outcomes are influenced by the coach.

Additionally, the development of athletes to become confident and self-reliant members of their sport and wider society (Smoll and Smith, 2002) has been identified as being influenced by the coach. For instance, the CBAS (Coaching Behaviour Assessment System) has been used to examine a coach’s influence on the psychological development of children through sport (Smoll and Smith, 2002), and to examine the association between coaches’ behaviours and athlete satisfaction (Chelladurai, 2007). These studies have shown that coach knowledge and behaviours directly influence the
psychological development of athletes (confidence, satisfaction) and their perceived competence (Côté and Gilbert, 2009). The findings outlined above provide strong support for the influence of the coach on athlete development.

2.3.6 SUMMARY OF RESEARCH ON ATHLETE DEVELOPMENT
According to the literature mentioned above, successful athletes need to possess the physical and psychological characteristics as well as commit to an intense and time demanding training regime. It is no longer believed that success lies in the genes of an athlete, rather it includes a combination of both genetics and the training environment (including all social and situational contexts). The coach contributes significantly in the progression of the athlete in numerous ways. Not only is the coach involved in the planning of training sessions and physical fitness of the athlete but it has been shown that the coach can impact the athlete’s psychological development (Bloom et al., 1998; Bloom and Durand-Bush, 1997; Gould et al., 1989; Jowett and Meek, 2000). The sport structure provided for an athlete plays an active role in development through the provision of resources, such as, facilities, coaches, and competition which is discussed in the section below.

2.4 SPORT STRUCTURE
Sport, by its very nature, is competitive. On a narrow scale the competition exists between athletes while on a broader scale competition exists between countries. Here sport can be a strong symbol of national pride. As such, governments have increased funding into the development of world class athletes (; Bernard and Busse, 2004; Bernard and Busse, 2000; Green and Houlihan, 2005; Green and Oakley, 2001; Hong et al., 2005). A nation’s sporting structure and policies play significant roles in the development of a sport, impacting significantly on the development of coaches and athletes. The structures in place for sports provide funding, facilities and programs for developing coaches and athletes as well as providing specialised knowledge in the areas of medicine and sport science.

There is an international trend towards an increased focus on the organisation and arrangement of elite sport (Augestad et al., 2006; De Bosscher et al., 2008). Research has found that countries have attempted to imitate the most successful models and adapt and develop the original model to suit their own needs (Green and Oakley, 2001). Green
and Oakley (2001) found that many countries based the development of their elite systems on the former Eastern Bloc countries ‘managed approach.’ Australia, and to a lesser extent Canada, have both adopted polices of elite squad development which are very close to the Soviet model (Houlihan, 1997, p.6 as cited in Green and Oakley, 2001). There are also similarities between the former Eastern Bloc and Western countries which support the idea of a uniform model of elite sport development (Green and Oakley, 2001). Similarities included: effective communication between different sporting agencies; and common sporting and political boundaries were common entities within the uniform model (Green and Oakley, 2001). Additionally, the establishment of an effective identification system, which monitored talented, elite athletes and the provision of a high performance culture (Green and Oakley, 2001) were other similarities identified between the Eastern Bloc and Western models. Other common findings included: well structured, competitive programmes, on-going international exposure and priority access for elite athletes to facilities (Green and Oakley, 2001). To achieve success it also emerged that both Soviet and Western models concentrated resources on a small number of sports to achieve success as world level (Green and Oakley, 2001) and provided comprehensive planning for each sport’s needs, infrastructure and people (Green and Oakley, 2001). Despite the move towards the uniform model, Green and Oakley (2001) attest that diversity still exists based on the governmental influence and public policy. For example, the USA had minimal government intervention in developing elite systems while France saw sport as a public service.

Several researchers have attempted to identify successful developmental programs for elite athletes (Abraham and Collins, 1998; Augestad et al., 2006; De Bosscher et al., 2010; De Bosscher et al., 2009; De Boscher et al., 2008; De Bosscher et al., 2006; Green and Oakley, 2001). Green and Houlihan (2005) categorised these elements into three areas: contextual, for example, the availability of funding/wealth, processual, for example, a system for identifying talent, determining the basis on which particular sport will be allocated support, and specific, for example, bespoke training facilities.

2.4.1 SPORTING POLICIES
As mentioned previously, successful international performance outcomes has become an important focus of governments in certain countries (De Bosscher et al., 2008; De
Bosscher et al., 2006; Hong et al., 2005; Maguire, 2008). Underpinned by the assumption that investing strategically in sports leads to greater success in performance outcomes, governments have increased funding which has led to subsequent institutionalisation of sports (De Bosscher et al., 2009). According to De Bosscher et al. (2009) success can be achieved on three levels: macro, meso and micro, with macro variables determining more than 50% of success. Macro-level variables include: the social and cultural context in which people live: population, political system, cultural system, geographic and climatic variation, economic welfare and degree of urbanisation (De Bosscher et al., 2009). Meso-level factors include: sports policies and politics (De Bosscher et al., 2009). Micro-level factors refer to the individual athletes and their close environment (parents, friends, coaches). At this level only some factors can be controlled (training techniques or tactics) and some cannot (genetics) (De Bosscher et al., 2009). Factors suggested to contribute to success at the macro-level are found in a multitude of studies primarily based on the Olympic games (Bernard and Busse, 2000; Johnson and Ali, 2004). Factors at the meso-level can also contribute to success and are impacted on some level by sports policies (De Bosscher et al., 2009).

De Bosscher et al. (2009) identified nine pillars which they considered to be the forces behind successful development programs for elite athletes. These included: financial support, organisation and structure of sport policies, foundation and participation, talent identification and development system, athletic and post career support, training facilities, coach provision and coach development, (Inter) national competition and scientific research (De Bosscher et al., 2009). Conclusions from the study indicated that investment in some pillars may not increase a country’s chance of success. Instead, they need to find the most appropriate combination of all pillars to meet their specific circumstances (De Bosscher et al., 2009). De Bosscher et al (2009) also found that the countries who invested the most in sport development saw the biggest return in terms of successful performances (e.g. Italy, UK, Netherlands). Interestingly, coaching provision was also highlighted as an important factor among these successful countries. This was evidenced in the increase in with and post career support and training facilities over the past number of years. Therefore, the authors proposed that the main pillars: pillar one (sport and elite sports expenditures), pillar five (athletic and post career support), pillar six (elite sports facilities), and pillar seven (coach provision and coach development) act as the key factors for an effective sports policy (De Bosscher et al., 2009). However, the
authors noted that the findings may not be the same in countries where the government does not directly influence policies and investment, for example the United States (De Bosscher et al., 2009).

In Ireland, dedication and support from family and friends and committed and highly knowledgeable coaching staff contributed to enhancing athletic performance (Duffy et al., 2001). Factors believed to inhibit athlete development included: lack of funding, facilities, sports science and medical support, specialised high level coaching, structure and organisation, training and competition and lifestyle (Duffy et al., 2001).

2.4.2 SUMMARY OF SPORT STRUCTURES AND POLICIES
With policies, structures and sport development becoming more prominent in governmental decisions, research in the area has developed. Here, findings indicate that successful coaches need access to development and educational sources provided in the sport structure. Athlete development was found to be influenced by a wide range of factors including; the coach, sports policies, and structures established by the national governing body. The degree to which these components influence coach and athlete development varies according to the context and therefore, it is suggested that these components reflect and are developed based on the individual (i.e. national) context.

2.5 SUMMARY OF LITERATURE REVIEW
The purpose of this chapter was to discuss previous literature relating to both coach and athlete development. It is clear that coach development is a complex and dynamic process that is influenced by numerous factors and differs across contexts. Additionally, it is evident that athlete development is also influenced by a multitude of components determined by the underlying context. However, none of the information above provides evidence of the impact of the removal of development sources on coach development. Nor does the literature outline this influence on athlete development. This finding provides the foundation for this study which attempts to address gaps in the literature pertaining to the removal of development sources for both coaches and athletes.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY
3.1 INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

The purpose of this chapter is to present the methods used for the collection, interpretation, and analysis of data that would aid in establishing grounded description. Given that the research question is to explore people’s perceptions relating to the discontinuation of the Irish, senior basketball teams, it was determined that qualitative methods were appropriate for the project. Qualitative methods employ research methods designed to describe and interpret the experiences of research participants within an individual context (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). As such a phenomenon has not been explored, this study drew upon a variation of Grounded Theory methods, specifically, Grounded Description.

3.2 METHODOLOGY: GROUNDED THEORY AND GROUNDED DESCRIPTION

Grounded theory was founded by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and was developed as an inductive, theory-discovery methodology, in which the researcher develops a theoretical account of the general features of a topic, while simultaneously grounding the account in empirical observations or data (Black, 2009). Since its establishment, grounded theory has diverged and adopted different assumptions associated with several paradigms; namely positivist, interpretivist, and constructivist (Black, 2009). Although Glaser and Strauss were the ‘founders’ of grounded theory, they had differing opinions regarding its expansion, and thus, began to develop their own work relating to grounded theory. Subsequently, Glaser (1992) emphasised the development of theoretical categories that served as variables and his work contained strong positivist leanings. Strauss coupled with Corbin developed grounded theory to reflect interpretive views, which can be seen in Strauss and Corbin (1990). Strauss and Corbin (1990) proposed clear distinctions between theory and description as they proposed that these are a person’s use of words to invoke mental images of objects, events and experiences. Taking this a step further, Charmaz (2006) developed a more constructivist approach to the method, which was underpinned by the assumption that no true ‘objective reality’ exists.

Grounded theory is a methodology that seeks to construct theory about issues of importance in peoples’ lives (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) which occurs through an inductive process of data collection where the
researcher has no preconceived ideas to prove or disprove (Glaser and Holton, 2004). Instead important issues according to the participants emerge from their experiences. The data is then analysed by constant comparison, initially data with data, then comparisons of concepts and data and finally concepts are compared with concepts. This constant comparison of analysis to the field grounds the researcher’s final theorizing in the participants’ experiences (Glaser and Holton, 2004). This conceptualisation of data through the coding process acts as the foundation for theory development (Glaser and Holton, 2004).

Grounded theory distinguishes itself from other research methods because the researcher is seen as the primary method for data collection, which in turn is used to inform and shape further data collection (Denzin, 2007). The findings that emerge from grounded theory hold general implications that can be used in other areas through constant comparative method of modifying theory (Glaser and Holton, 2004).

3.2.1 GROUNDED DESCRIPTION
According to the founders of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), many researchers fail to actually conceptualise the findings into substantive theory. Instead, researchers tend to identify a number of themes and discuss these themes without actually integrating them into a theory (Glaser and Holton, 2004). This has become known as grounded description. Grounded description provides a theoretical explanation of a phenomenon through a series of well-integrated concepts about a theoretical scheme (Meetoo, 2007). Grounded description provides insight into a phenomenon and expands previous knowledge but does not rely on generating a theory.

This study has chosen to draw upon grounded description for several reasons. Firstly, the number of participant coaches is not suffice to base a theory on the findings. Secondly, the information provided by the participants provides an account of the context of Irish international basketball which is unique. New knowledge also emerged highlighting the importance of international competition on athlete development, however; the degree of influence of international competition was not investigated. Thus, the combination of number of participants and a single method of data collection
(interviews) does not provide a strong enough foundation for the development of substantitive theory.

3.3 METHODS
3.3.1 PARTICIPANT SELECTION
The selection of participants was based on multiple criteria: first, top level coaches were purposely selected. According to previous studies the coaches had to have had a minimum of ten years coaching experience to be considered top level coaches (Côté et al., 1995a). Second, each coach must have developed at least one international and national level to ensure that the coaches were at top level standard (Côté et al., 1995b). And, finally the expert coaches had to be recognised by the national governing body (Basketball Ireland) as among the best in the country. Four senior international coaches were approached for the study. Two of these coaches participated in the study.

Players were also selected for interviewing based on a number of criteria. The players had to be Irish born, so that the players would have an understanding of the Irish basketball culture, and had to have played senior international basketball for the previous two years. Eight players were approached for the study of which one declined and another withdrew later in the study. Six players (three male, three female) were interviewed. The age range of the male players was from 23 to 30 years of age and the age range of the female players was from 22 to 33 years of age, an average of 26.5 years. Members of Basketball Ireland were approached to gain information on their role in coach and player development however the members declined to be interviewed.

This study received Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (EHSREC) approval from the University of Limerick prior to initiation of the study.

3.3.2 INITIAL CONTACT
The participants were contacted by word of mouth, which was then followed up with a phone call. The participants were each given an information sheet outlining the purpose of the study and the interview procedure. They were also provided with a signed consent sheet which was signed before the interview took place. Participants were made aware that pseudonyms would be used to increase confidentiality. However, coaches were informed that due to the small number of senior international coaches,
confidentiality cannot truly be achieved. Coach 1 and Coach 2 were the pseudonyms assigned. The names David, Jack, Evan, Ciara, Bríd and Lorraine were also assigned to the players in an effort to provide confidentiality. Any other names referred to by the participants were also given pseudonyms based on position, for example ‘head coach’, ‘senior player’. Participants were contacted two days prior to interviews to confirm date, time and venue.

The participants were informed that the interviews would be recorded and transcribed, and the written and audio records would be kept locked away in a cabinet which only the researcher had access to. A copy of their transcript was given to each participant for approval. This allowed the participants the chance to verify what was discussed in the interview and withdraw any information they felt might be revealing or damaging to their reputation (Charmaz, 2006, Williams and Morrow, 2009). The participants were also notified that the audio records would be destroyed after seven years in accordance with ethical procedures outlined by the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION
A pilot study was carried out in order to determine whether the interview guide (see Appendices E and F) was appropriate. One Superleague coach and two Superleague players participated in the pilot. Alterations to the guide were made and administered to participants.

3.4.1 THE INTERVIEW
Semi-structured interviews were used to elicit information from the coaches (Côté et al., 1995a), and senior basketball players. These interviews were used to elicit the participants’ interpretation of an experience (Charmaz, 2006; Côté et al., 1995a). A semi-structured interview allows the interviewer to prepare questions in advance, but is free to modify their order based upon her perception of what seems most appropriate in the context of the ‘conversation’ (Robson, 1993). That is, the interviewer can change the wording of questions, provide explanations, omit particular questions which seem inappropriate with a particular interviewee or include additional ones (Robson, 1993). The use of a semi-structured interview format allowed for a wide range of topics to be discussed. The topics were determined in advance but the sequence and wording of the
questions were altered by the interviewer during the course of the interview. This interview technique is concerned with the viewpoints of the participant and as such the interview was allowed to flow in a way that the participant’s perspective emerged and not based on the interviewer’s perspective (Marshall and Rossman, 2006). The main points of discussion included:

1. Background information on the coach/player.
2. Experiences on the senior international teams.
3. Main sources of development over their career.
4. Participant feelings/opinions relating to the removal of the senior international programs.
5. Participant perceptions of the consequences of the decision to eliminate the senior international programs.

The interview schedule was designed to identify the issues perceived as the most important to the participants and to focus on these issues in detail. This technique ensured that the concepts elicited by the participants were understood through the meanings they attributed to them. Validation and credibility checks were an on-going process, that consisted of continually questioning the interpretation of the participants; confirmation of participant’s interpretation and communication during the interview. During each interview, probes were used to ensure that participants discussed every issue they perceived as important regarding the development of basketball at international level. “A probe is a device to get the interviewee to expand on a response when you intuit that he or she has more to give” (Robson, 1993, p.234). At the end of the interviews the participants were asked if they wished to clarify any terms they have used, reiterate information or add any information they feel would be important to the purpose of the study. The interviews were transcribed verbatim immediately after the interview was completed.

The venue of the interview was chosen by the participants. The same basic format was employed for each interview, however, additional questions were added and probes used based on the responses of the participant. Each interview began with general information about the purpose of the study. The participants had to read participant information sheets and sign consent forms before the interviews began. The participants
were given the opportunity to ask questions about study and all participants were made
aware that they could refuse to answer questions they did not feel comfortable
answering, and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any
consequence. Next, questions focused on the background and demographic information.
Finally, the knowledge elicitation took place. None of the interviews were rushed, and
participants had time to clarify and reformulate their thinking. Participants were asked
to clarify what they meant by certain terms in order to get a full understanding of their
perceptions of the basketball world. Each interview lasted between 1 and 1.5 hours.

3.5 ANALYSIS
Transcripts were analysed according to grounded theory methods. The main methods
used included coding the data into themes and written memos.

3.5.1 CODING
Data analysis began with a substantive examination of the transcripts through open
coding. Coding refers to “the naming of segments of data with a label that
simultaneously categorises, summarizes and accounts for each piece of data” (Hotton,
2007, p.265). By transcribing the interviews as soon as possible after they happened,
codes emerged from the data which in turn was used in further interviews to increase
the information relating to that code. Once the interviews were transcribed verbatim, the
transcripts were imported into the qualitative software Nvivo. Two types of coding were
employed in the analysis process: initial and focused.

Initial coding refers to the close examination of fragments of the data for analytic
import, for example line by line analysis (Charmaz, 2006). Initial coding allowed for the
identification of interesting areas that needed to be explored in greater detail in
subsequent data collection (for example, coach background, development opportunities,
travelling abroad). In the beginning 135 categories emerged allowing the researcher to
make comparisons, and clarify the relationships between categories. For example, in the
beginning stages of analysis coach data was examined separately to player data. The
coaches’ interviews were then compared against players’ interviews to verify findings
and identify important themes to be addressed. Grounded theory allowed for these
alterations to be made to the research method (in this case interviews) as the data
collection continued in order to identify more meaningful information (Burck, 2005).
Areas such as development, and playing standard were discussed in greater detail based on information that emerged from the initial interviews.

Focused coding then examined the initial codes against extensive data (Charmaz, 2006). This type of analysis leads to a comparison of similar and different concepts which were grouped accordingly, and labelled, for example, formal coach education, stages of development. Higher order themes were identified through the examination of recurring themes and relationships between themes, for example ‘travelling abroad’ was a recurring theme amongst players and ‘development opportunities’. By comparing the data to data more refined codes emerged which highlighted important themes and verified existing themes. During the coding process, an inter-rater agreement was carried out in which an experienced social researcher was approached to conduct a separate analysis on the interview transcripts. She coded the interviews separately, and then these codes were cross checked with the researcher’s codes. During the reduction phase, both researchers went through the codes and eliminated irrelevant codes, and condensed the relevant codes into larger meaning units and eventually into themes (Charmaz, 2006).

3.5.2 MEMOS
Memos play an important role in the identification of codes throughout the analysis process. Memos provide theoretical notes about data and provide connections between data (Glaser and Holton, 2004). Memos allowed for the identification and development of categories. In addition, memos allowed for connections to be made between categories. Since this study takes a grounded description stance the information contained within memos was used to illustrate categories and not for theory generation. For example, connections were made between player and coach transcripts regarding coach standard.

3.5.3 LIMITATIONS OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH
Researchers have critiqued qualitative measures because of the difficulty to verify the ‘truth’ from these studies (Brustad, 2009; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Porter, 2007). Furthermore, critics argue that because situations, behaviours and action will differ across contexts, the methodology employed in one study may not be relevant in another (Brustad, 2009; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Porter, 2007).
3.6 SUMMARY

This chapter discussed the methods of collection, interpretation and analysis of data employed for the study. Justification for the use of grounded description and limitations of this approach were provided. Next an overview of the methods for data collection, analysis and presentation were outlined. Interviews were employed to illicit information which were then transcribed and analysed using NVivo software. In order to increase the trustworthiness of the study member checking and inter-coder reliability measures were utilised. The findings and interpretation of the data are presented in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 4: THE FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
4.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings of this project, specifically, the consequences (perceived by players and coaches) of the withdrawal of international teams from competition. The chapter is organised in the following way, firstly, in an effort to provide more context to the quotations used throughout this chapter, a brief description of the coaches, players and the context (of basketball in Ireland) is provided. Following this, coach development opportunities will be examined. Next, the players’ development opportunities are examined. Finally, with the elimination of the senior international programs, the perceived consequences to coach and player development are outlined.

4.1.1 SETTING THE SCENE: A DESCRIPTION OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Coach 1 and Coach 2 began coaching at a young age within their local basketball clubs. The coaches had over twenty years coaching experience each, ranging from underage level, schools basketball, senior club and international. The coaches had a minimum of two years coaching experience with the international teams.

Six players from the senior international teams participated in this study: three males (David, Jack and Evan) and three females (Bríd, Ciara, and Lorraine). Consistent with work by Cote (1999), the players began their sporting careers by sampling several sports, “[I] played soccer, rugby and GAA growing up” (David). “[I] was playing soccer..., I played a little bit of camogie and field hockey” (Ciara). Players specialised in basketball around the age of 17. The players commented that they were under constant development but, they believed that the greatest learning tool for them at senior level was experience:

“I became a lot better basketball player playing with or against those guys than I would have if they weren’t on the team so the same, I’m sure the same can be said for all the lads on the team as well so that right there is showing that they have improved Irish players in basketball just by being on the team” (Jack).

3 Pseudonyms were used for all participants in the study.
“Like coming from playing with the Irish team into [American college team] was a huge advantage for me... having that level to play against, that European level, every summer I’d always be sharper than the girls starting off and I’ve had a super career at [University] and I think a lot of that has to do with playing every summer and playing at that level every summer” (Ciara).

4.1.2 SETTING THE SCENE: COACHING AS A PROFESSION IN IRELAND

To date, basketball coaching in Ireland holds an amateur status. As such, many of the coaching positions in the country are filled on a voluntary or a part-time basis. High performance basketball, like many other sports in Ireland, is in its infancy (Bertz and Purdy, 2011) suggesting that the structures and organisations necessary for development of high performance programs are not fully established. Due to the lack of high performance structures within the sport it makes it difficult for basketball to progress to having full-time professional staff and athletes.

Both coaches interviewed worked on a voluntary basis with the international squads. Given this, the coaches felt like they had to be more strategic than their opponents with less resources (i.e. staff, budgets).

“A lot of the European countries ...assume that we are professionals ... whereas ... last year [we didn’t] even get a penny for it so like I look at the guys I’m coaching against and I’m trying to out-scout and he’s on 40, maybe 40, 50 grand a year plus” (Coach 1).

While both coaches did not receive payment for their work with the international squads, Coach 2 is a full-time paid coach (one of the few in basketball in Ireland). However, in contrast to full-time basketball coaches in other countries, to maintain a full-time salary, Coach 2 had worked with several different schools and teams.

“... Obviously in Ireland you wouldn’t make enough money with one project so I went to see if there was a way to maintain it full time from basketball. That’s when I picked up a couple of different schools, got approached by different schools and coached them so, I suppose I have a full teaching week, almost not a the full forty hours but enough hours to keep you going” (Coach 2).
Although Coach 2 had to work several positions to achieve professional status, his situation allowed him to gain exposure and experience as a coach impacting on his commitment and development. In contrast to Coach 2, Coach 1 works 40 hours a week in sales position and coaches in the evenings and at weekends.

From the perspectives of the athletes, the inability to be employed to coach one team was a limiting factor for coach development. Lorraine commented that the lack of professional coaches in Ireland limited the development of the players. "Your head coaches on a side job, they have their main job, they have to concentrate on it" (Lorraine).

Five of the participants interviewed played basketball in the US, under the leadership of full-time coaches. The players commented: "it’s their full time job... so they’re just obsessed with basketball over there...it’s very professional...facilities they use are fantastic, it’s all weights, your conditioning, what you eat" (Lorraine). The players also suggested that because the coaches are paid full-time they take the job very seriously: “like it’s the college coach’s job to win games...” (Bríd). It was suggested by the players that coaches who are not full time cannot give the players or the game of basketball the attention necessary to develop full and effective programs.

4.1.3 SETTING THE SCENE: PLAYING IN IRELAND

In addition to lacking exposure in Ireland, basketball also lacks funding. The inability to play basketball professionally was raised as an issue as the coach is also contending with players having other interests, commitments and responsibilities. Furthermore, the players received no financial assistance while on the international teams. Therefore, the players who worked used up their holidays for trainings and games to meet the time commitment:

“most of the players would have to keep their holidays for the games, so some players missed trainings here and there, bits and pieces but they all did their best...I genuinely believe they did their best to get there” (Coach 2).

In addition, four of the participants were students and, as such, had to balance their academic work with training. For instance, Ciara’s dissertation was due at the same time
she would be competing in the European Championship. She made it a priority to have her work done before the tournament so she could focus on playing basketball and delivering for her team:

“Like, like last year... I was doing my dissertation. I was in the library, ok I’d go training in the afternoon but I was going to get that dissertation done by August and even when my tutors were like, ‘I don’t think you are going to be able to do it’, ‘I was like watch me, it’ll be done, trust me’, So I wanted to go to Europeans with no distractions...like a couple of years I had to extend work back and stuff but if I’m committed to the Europeans, I’m committed and then I’ll catch up later. So... for me, it was just having no other distractions that my full focus was on the Irish team and playing for Ireland” (Ciara).

4.1.4 SETTING THE SCENE: COMPETITION WITH OTHER SPORTS

The Irish Sports Council (2011) has identified 16 focus sports\(^6\) to support, of which basketball is not identified. Consequently, basketball is struggling to recruit and maintain participants. This was raised as an issue by the interviewees; “I just feel like [GAA sports, rugby and soccer] are our national sports... so everybody loves them like..., there’s national pride because behind them whereas ... basketball is an American sport or ...it’s what the Yankees play” (Bríd).

In addition to not being a focus sport, another reason reported by the players for other sports taking priority over basketball is their professional nature: “See the problem with the rugby and the soccer, they are professional sports so that’s a huge disadvantage for us” (Ciara). With soccer and rugby being professional the players commented that they can use this public image to get into schools and increase participation:

“It’s propaganda, no, it is, I think that they are getting into the schools, they’re marketing, you know they are throwing out the sport well, their advertising and stuff like that, and that’s a big thing especially with the kids because the kids, they want to see their stars and stuff like that” (Evan).

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\(^6\)Focus sports in Ireland include: badminton, boxing, canoeing, cricket, cycling, golf, golf ladies, hockey, horse sport, rowing, sailing, clay pigeon shooting, swimming, tennis, triathlon, Paralympics.
In summary, due to the amateur status of basketball in Ireland, it is suggested that the context itself is a limiting factor for the development of both basketball coaches and players as they must contend with external responsibilities and commitments. Furthermore, the popularity of the sport, and lack of funding also act as a constraining factor for coach and player development.

4.2 COACH DEVELOPMENT IN IRISH BASKETBALL

This section outlines the development of the two senior international coaches who participated in this project. Their development will be discussed in light of their previous coaching experiences, selection as international coaches, initiative in self-development, coaching standards, the importance of other coaches in coach development and coaching courses/qualifications.

4.2.1 EXPERIENCE

4.2.1.1 PLAYING EXPERIENCE

In line with previous research in this domain (Carter and Bloom, 2009; Cushion, 2007; Cushion et al., 2003; Erickson et al., 2007), both coaches held previous playing experience in the sport they are now coaching. Coach 2’s story is interesting as he was better at soccer than basketball but he decided to coach basketball because the atmosphere was more positive: “I think the coaching and the basketball was more positive, I don’t know I just caught the bug from basketball and someone told me I was good at the coaching and kept going” (Coach 2). For these two coaches, playing experience at a high level was not requisite for them to achieve the top level standard in Ireland. There is considerable debate in the literature (Carter and Bloom, 2009; Cushion, 2007; Cushion et al., 2003; Erickson et al., 2007a) over the necessity of previous playing experience as a requirement for coaches to reach top level status. On the one hand, Coach 1’s experience is reflected in the literature (Cushion et al., 2007; Cushion et al., 2003; Erickson et al., 2007) which supports the notion that playing at a high level is a prerequisite for top level coaches. Coach 1’s playing experience included playing Superleague basketball and representing Ireland at senior international level. As a result, Coach 1 believed that he possessed the people skills and previous playing experience necessary to deal with top level players.
“One of the huge advantages [for] me as a coach ...I mean I mightn’t be the most technical coach...but I know when it comes to games...and man management my coaching or my playing experience would be huge” (Coach 1).

According to this literature, and to Coach 1, playing experience, particularly at higher levels allows the coach to connect with the players, identify the possible obstacles (physical and mental) a player might face, and equip them with the necessary skills to overcome these obstacles (Carter and Bloom, 2009; Cushion, 2007; Cushion et al., 2003; Erickson et al., 2007). Conversely, Coach 2’s coaching achievements surpassed his successes as a player, but he is recognised as one of the top basketball coaches in the country by his peers. Coach 2’s experience strengthens research findings relating to the existence of an ad hoc pathway for coaching development, and that there is no linear progression, towards becoming a top level coach (Carter and Bloom, 2009). Rather than relying upon previous playing experience at the top level, Coach 1 commented on how he learned to work with the top players; “The likes of ...[Coach 2]...I would look at those as being the top coaches ...you would try and gain knowledge from“ (Coach 1).

This is consistent with recent research, which has illustrated that coaches who work at a higher level than the level they played at acquire the necessary skills for top-level sport through a variety of different methods (Carter and Bloom, 2009). Thus, although previous playing experience at a high level provides useful knowledge for top level coaches, this should not be seen as a prerequisite to reach top level coaching as other experiences and sources of knowledge may be used to overcome this.

4.2.1.2 EXPERIENCE AS A COACH

“A coach needs to know what he’s on about, he has to have experience working with senior players and must to be able to communicate with his players on and off the court, there needs to be a good vibe with the players” (Lorraine).

Both players and coaches recognised appropriate coaching experience as necessary for success at international coaching level. However, the players reported a lack of international experience as the main weakness of Irish coaches. Interestingly, the international coaches did not raise inexperience as an issue on their part. All of the players agreed that although the international coaches in Ireland were very knowledgeable in their field these coaches did not possess the experience (game and
tactical experience) necessary for international competition when compared to their European counterparts. Four out of six of the players believed the international coaches from the senior campaigns in previous years (dates withheld) lacked experience coaching at such a high level.

Despite comments from the athletes that suggest that the coaches were lacking international exposure, throughout their careers both coaches travelled abroad to gain experience and knowledge in basketball. The coaches felt it was necessary to travel abroad in order to increase their coaching knowledge and, in their words, “reach a higher standard” which they could not do in Ireland. Additionally, the coaches’ believed that their experiences abroad have shaped and influenced the style of play they use today. For example, Coach 1 travels every year to the United States for coaching camps. Whilst there he takes the opportunity to participate in some training sessions, imparting his knowledge to others and observing other coaches at work. “I mean I go over ... maybe twice a year and when I get to [University in the US] I sit in on a few sessions and I do a few bits” (Coach 1). This example reinforces research on coach development which stated that other coaches play an important role in coach development (Abraham and Collins, 1998; Carter and Bloom, 2009; Côté et al., 1993; Côté et al., 2007; Gilbert, 2009). Consequently, Coach 1 believes that the style of play that he promotes with his teams in Ireland reflects the American system rather than the European system. On the other hand, Coach 2 spent a year in the UK coaching professionally, as well as travelling to other countries for clinics and courses. While in the UK he developed the technical side to his game which allowed him to bring what he learned back to Ireland; “I’d say the year I went to [UK] really helped me [technically] ” (Coach 2).

4.2.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF OTHER COACHES IN DEVELOPMENT
In this study, the coaches commented that other coaches in the form of mentors and peers played an invaluable developmental role. The learning occurred through the transfer of knowledge between coaches, and through observations and conversations amongst each other. The coaches commented that informal mentoring was one of their first learning experiences. The mentoring system, although unstructured and informal, was deemed important to both coaches early in their careers. It allowed for the
acquisition of information from more experienced coaches, and the development of philosophies based on their experiences.

“It was run by [mentor] ... and [mentor] ... the two of them had a fantastic vision and then what they used to ... the players who were kind of 15, 16 coaching the young kids with them in the schools, in the summer” (Coach 1).

“So it’s really with [Mentor] I started on the coaching ladder you know learned a good bit off him he was a very good coach... taught me a lot, about the way I was teaching stuff” (Coach 2).

Previous research (Bloom et al., 1998; Gilbert and Trudel, 1999; Nelson et al., 2006) has suggested that informal mentoring is a common occurrence in the coaching community, and one of the main sources of learning for coaches (Bloom et al., 1998; Gilbert and Trudel, 1999; Nelson et al., 2006) . Additionally, it was suggested that mentoring acts as a viable framework for the development of coaching knowledge (Cushion et al., 2003). Here, Coach 2 commented that his experience as assistant coach gave him the opportunity to observe, question and learn from a more established coach: “it’s really with [mentor] I started on the coaching ladder, you know learned a good bit off him he was a very good coach”. Coach 1 also learned his trade under the guidance of experienced coaches within his club:

“[School] was kind of an academy, it was kind of the closet thing...to an American setup. It was run by [head coach]...and [other coach]...the two of them had a fantastic vision and then what they used to do is...get all of the younger... players who were kind of 15, 16 coaching the young kids with them in the schools, in the summer” (Coach 1).

As suggested by the research (Bloom et al., 1998; Gilbert and Trudel, 1999; Nelson et al., 2006), the use of other coaches, in the form of peers and experienced others, played an important role in the development of these two basketball coaches. This interaction occurred at clinics⁷ and camps that the coaches attended as often as possible. Coach 2 admitted that he often used coaching techniques and tactics he had seen other coaches

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⁷ Clinics refer to the coaching workshops, usually one day events in which top level coaches, national and international, give their opinions on coaching practice.
use. Both coaches believed that it is a common practice to “borrow” information from others, and adapt it to their own training sessions. However, both coaches admitted that although they were willing to share their knowledge with other coaches they did not share their ‘new knowledge’. By this they meant that they were willing to give information about tactics or techniques they have used up to now, but withhold information they think will benefit themselves in the future. Similar findings reported in the literature (Lyle, 1999; Treadwell, 1986) indicated that the coaching environment can also be a secretive and restricted area with regards to gaining knowledge about practices, techniques and tactics. Treadwell (1986) and Lyle (1999) suggested that those involved in coaching have avoided investigation to protect their knowledge.

“That’s the thing with coaching, you rob a little from one coach, and this from another coach; then you form your own sort of philosophy ....You know coaches are curious creatures they kind of hold on to ... most new things that they have they will give you a little bit of the old stuff but they have already moved onto the new stuff but that’s the nature of the beast because the whole thing is the better the players you have the better the team will be” (Coach 2).

In addition to sourcing information from other coaches, the coaches were also interested in feedback about their own practice. For example, Coach 1 invited others to challenge his coaching practice and wished to continually learn from others. His willingness to recruit coaches who might previously have been his rivals onto his coaching team suggests that the team is his first priority. He felt that by surrounding himself by other top-level coaches he would learn from them and the whole team would benefit:

“I surrounded myself, when I took the job I surrounded myself with people who I felt would have an input...if I thought that that person did the job better than me, I’d go and ask them why, how do you do that and why do you do that and why do you think that works” (Coach 1).

Similar characteristics have been shown in top level coaches in the literature (Vallée and Bloom, 2005). Vallée and Bloom (2005) found that coaches who were committed to continuous learning were successful.
Although the two coaches interviewed did pride themselves as Ireland’s top-level coaches, they admitted that they were constantly developing: “[a former director of Basketball Ireland] rang me to take over the senior women after the [foreign coach] so it’s been a progression” (Coach 1). This is consistent with the literature which suggests that continually learning from experiences has been suggested as a hallmark of top level coaches (Knowles et al., 2001). In this way, Coach 1 believed that adding sport science (fitness component) to his coaching repertoire would see great results. Thus, he often brought in a professional fitness trainer to work with his teams and uses this experience for his own learning. Coach 2 likes “to think I’m on constant development”. To do this he questions everything he does and adapts his training sessions to cater to the needs of the team/competition. His continued self-evaluation provides support that reflection can be used as a valuable method of learning. Self-reflection is viewed as an effective strategy that aids coaches to explore their decisions and experiences thereby increasing their understanding and management of themselves and their practice (Anderson et al., 2004). Additionally, self-evaluation was a key characteristic of successful coaches found in the work of Vallée and Bloom (2005).

Players also commented that, in their experience, the better coaches will always look for new methods of learning. For instance, Evan’s experienced coaches wished to develop themselves through constant reflection on experience. Similar to Evan’s experience, studies have found that top level coaches actively seek new information (Werthner and Trudel, 2006): “you know with coaching I think it’s, you have to be learning the whole time, you know it’s not like, the game is changing each year and everything’s adapting and the good coaches generally do this” (Evan).

4.2.3 COACHING QUALIFICATIONS/STANDARDS
With the two coaches focused on constant improvement and development, it is worth noting that the coaching qualifications that they had obtained in Ireland held little value to them. Although both coaches received coaching certification from the national governing body, according to the coaches, these courses had little impact on their development. Firstly, Coach 1 revealed that he was assimilated to a level 1 coaching qualification without participating in the course. This led him to question the relevance of coaching courses, especially if a coach can be given a grade without actually completing the course. “When they decided to do it in Basketball Ireland ... they
decided we better get the coaches on the ladder so I was given a level 1 straight away which was kind of top level” (Coach 1). Furthermore, as a result of the ‘young’ system of coaching qualifications, the coaches commented that there is currently no coherent structure for Irish basketball coaches to follow. Due to this inadequacy, coach development for Irish coaches is limited “because there isn’t enough being done with coaching development” (Coach 2) and there is confusion regarding the formal development path: “I don’t think there is a proper ladder” (Coach 1).

Recently, Basketball Ireland has begun to structure a coaching pathway, however, as commented above, the structure in place is limited. In conjunction with Coaching Ireland, the national governing body has begun to develop two levels of coaching qualifications. Although these courses show the beginning of a structure, the organisation provides “only two levels” (Coach 1) for coaches, but nowhere to progress once these courses are completed. Furthermore, in this study the coaches commented that the current levels of qualifications were below the level at which these international coaches were currently working. Therefore, the consequence of the limited education pathway has led the coaches to source knowledge outside of Ireland. In this instance, one coach is finishing a coaching qualification in Spain and the other coach hopes to do the same course next year. Their enthusiasm to learn and develop as coaches means that they are willing to pay (approx. €1500) for a course in another country: “You know [top Spanish basketball coach] like is one of the best European coaches, maybe one of the best coaches in the world runs a coaching qualification which I’m doing at the moment” (Coach 2).

Not only is the coach education system not able to provide coaching qualifications above these levels, the international coaches were also critical of the coaching courses that were offered. Both coaches believed that the content of these courses failed to address the practical element of coaching sufficiently, limiting the capacity for coaches to learn efficiently. This issue echoes the on-going debate in the literature questioning the value of coaching courses in the development of coaches (Cushion et al., 2003; Gilbert, 2009; Gilbert and Trudel, 1999; Jones et al., 2003; Jones and Turner, 2006). According to the coaches, the courses were delivered poorly. This, they believed, was

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8 Coaching Ireland is the main sporting body for coaching in Ireland across all sports in all counties
the result of the poor communication between the national governing body and the coaching community. For instance, Coach 1 mentioned that he was never approached for feedback or opinions into what content is needed for coaching courses.

“I think a Coaches Association\(^9\) formed [the course content] ... we get no input into it, I mean I was the senior [international] coach and I’ve never been asked to go to one of those meetings so ... you wonder what they are talking about and what they are actually trying to do” (Coach 1).

Furthermore, the coaches believed that the course content presented was based on a perceived ‘gold standard’ for coaching practice. That is to say, the coaching courses fail to reflect the coaching environment and are delivered based on the tutor’s own experience and beliefs. Furthermore, the literature proposed that this ‘gold standard’ approach reflects the success of one context and may not translate successfully across contexts (Abraham and Collins, 1998; Cushion et al., 2003):

“With the courses and again I’d be very critical of Basketball Ireland and what they have done and what they haven’t done more so really with a lot of the younger coaches... most of the stuff, most of the lectures and most of the clinics that I’ve attended, it’s really the opinion of, most of the time it’s if you respect the guy” (Coach 1).

Another criticism raised by the coaches pertained to coach evaluation and certification for the existing coaching levels. The coaches commented that those who have qualified for the level one and two courses believe that they have the ability to coach at these levels based on a qualification alone. According to Coach 2 “the reality is that they need experience as well as knowledge to obtain such a level”. Coach 2 also raised the point that there was no way of evaluating or monitoring coaches once they have completed these courses, everyone is perceived as having the same qualification and thus the same abilities.

\(^9\) The Coaches Association is an organisation established by Basketball Ireland to protect the rights and increase the standard of Irish basketball coaches.
“You know it is a bit frustrating because it’s hard to know what a level one coach, a level two coach and a level three coach is, and there was supposed to be a level four ... there are about 30 or 40 level three coaches in the country I wouldn’t think they are all on the same level. There’s nowhere else to go once you’re a level four, there is nothing to separate you from the other coaches once you’re a level three” (Coach 2).

This sentiment was echoed by the players who called for a clear and definite structure to be established for coach development in which coaches can be assessed and monitored in order to improve the standard:

“I definitely, that’s a big thing that should happen, the coach should be monitored and assessed, you know, each year and the kids, you know even if you went in and you’d seen the training session from the start of the year and the end of the year, there should be a difference in the kids” (Evan).

Additionally, it was argued that coaching practices are not challenged or evaluated. Consequently, it was suggested by both coaches and players that coaches who did not develop themselves also failed to develop their players:

“And then you need a monitor someone to go watch their sessions, well I know it’s a lot of time now but I mean, when that door closes in the gym you don’t know what is the hell goes on behind closed doors and like, and then you have the parental problem and you have the winning mentality with young kids and there’s such a quagmire there of stuff” (Coach 1).

“Coaching underage needs to be a lot better...you look at other countries around the Europe that are smaller than Ireland and their developed a lot better in basketball and that’s just simply because they have a structure involved and the coaches are told by a certain age, like in a business what targets they need to meet, so like what levels of basketball they need to meet as far as drill... You should be able to do a left hand lay-up before your twelve...the coach should be monitored and assessed... each year and the kids... even if you went in and you [saw] the training session from the start of the year and the end of the year, there should be a difference ... [Currently] coaches want to get
winning instead of developing their skills and making them into basketball players where they can push on and compete at higher levels” (Evan).

Again it was proposed that the poor coaching standard is a reflection of the coaching structure in place. This poor standard of coaching was suggested to be related to a lack of awareness, on the part of the coaches, to the use of appropriate skills, drills, and tactics based on age and level of abilities. The current education system for coaches does not highlight what coaches should be emphasising for the age group, participation level or individuals they are working with:

“I don’t think the emphasis that we put on you know what kids should be learning you know whether kids should be winning or not at under 14 or under 13 or whatever, I don’t think there is enough emphasis in that in clubs or in schools or whatever, they just give people jobs for the sake of it because that’s another problem over with” (Coach 1).

The progression of coaches from one level to the next was also raised as an issue. Coach 2 advocated that a pathway to move from one level to the next was necessary for a coach or player to develop. By this, Coach 2 meant that there should be guidelines to establish current levels of coaching abilities and a means of progressing beyond this level: “... when you get to a certain level in basketball, anything whether you’re a player or a coach, there needs to be another level that you can go and try to evolve to you know” (Coach 2). This comment is reflected in the literature (Demers et al., 2006; Jones and Turner, 2006). In addition, Coach 1 discussed the way in which coaches progress in Irish basketball. He argued that just because an underage coach had success with one team based on one or two players, the coach is termed a ‘great’ coach. But based on his experiences and observations, this does not serve as an effective evaluation system. According to Coach 1, the coach’s weaknesses are magnified when this coach is given an international team to work with without proper experience and training:

“I think the big problem again is that, there’s certain coaches that come in and they have a little bit of success maybe underage or whatever and automatically they are considered great coaches...and how do we monitor them? And how do we know that they are getting better? How do we know that they want to get better?... if you go and watch and under 19 cup and you see an under19 coach and he wins the U19 cup
because he’s got the best player or the best two players and now all of a sudden he’s projected as .... a great coach... I watch some of the sessions and I’ll be honest with you, I don’t know what’s going on …” (Coach 1).

Although the importance of these educational courses provided were not seen as a major contributing factor in coach development by the interviewed coaches, they still felt that the coaching courses provided the groundwork for coaching at certain levels (especially during the initial stages): “they provide basic information for coaches especially starting off” (Coach 1). Whilst the coaches recognised that qualifications acted as a source of development, they suggested that qualifications were not the most important sources of development. Here it was indicated that experience (practice) surpasses theory:

“You definitely need some qualification... you know their level of technical ability is very high which are learnt so I think it’s a mixture of both. You need the experience but you not going to get any better experience than being in a team and a team situation and you’re not going to get any valuable experience unless you’re playing at higher levels you know” (Coach 2).

Given the criticisms the players had regarding the coach education system in Ireland, it is not surprising that the players interviewed were of a similar opinion to the coaches that international coach education programs held far more merit than Irish ones. For example, several of the players commented on the impact of one foreign coach (who had a degree in coaching from a university outside of Ireland (degrees in Ireland for coaching do not exist) on their training. He was seen as highly professional and knowledgeable: “he’d all the tactics were fantastic, fundamentally he was the best coach, probably I’ve had” (Lorraine).

Their contact with him, although brief, allowed them to compare his coaching practice to other coaches. The players were aware that he had a degree in coaching and believed that this was apparent in his coaching practice. In addition, it was found that the players’ awareness of the coach’s knowledge directly impacted on the players’ mentality about the coach (i.e. they respected his coaching practice based on his knowledge and qualifications):
“I’ve never had a coach - I think we ran like one suicide in the year and a half we had [foreign coach] like every drill, all the drills were game like and like the most intense drills you would ever do. He’d never have us do anything meaningless ... But he also did a lot of really unusual drills like you’d never just shoot freethrows, so he gave me a lot of cool ideas for drills myself and ... just like we had to run our offenses in an exact way like if we were cutting out to the wing we had to put our foot inside the key and he’d stop the whole play and say like if I don’t do that then the timing is off. He just had a lot of weird ways of showing us how to get open, like he’d a degree in coaching you could like definitely tell” (Bríd).

While the players were happy with the coach’s knowledge and skills, cultural and personality differences led to a poor coach athlete relationship; “[foreign coach] is kind of a tough coach... he was a little bit meaner... if you were like two minutes late he went crazy, so he made a lot of enemies that way” (Bríd). This finding highlights the important nature of the coach-athlete relationship, in particular, acknowledgment of social interaction as an important element of coaching. For the players the coach was respected based on his skills and coaching knowledge, however, without the ability to connect with the players his influence was limited; “It’s kind of like the team united against [foreign coach] ” (Bríd). Similar reports in the literature have also proposed that the coach-athlete relationship plays an important role in the coaching process (Czajkowski, 2010; Jowett and Chauny, 2004; Jowett and Cockerill, 2003; Poczwardowski et al., 2002).

4.2.6 SELECTION OF INTERNATIONAL COACHES

In light of the above information, the selection of coaches becomes a topic for examination. Here, the coaches and players were critical of how coaches were selected for the international teams, suggesting that the positions were filled because there was a vacancy; rather than selecting the person with the ‘best’ qualifications, experience or knowledge. Interestingly, the coaches were unaware of the reasons for their appointment as senior international coaches. Coach 1 stated that he was just “asked to do it”. Coach 2 also commented that he was unaware as to what criteria were used for the selection of international coaches:
“What do people judge it on? Do they judge it on what you have won national league? Do they judge it on what you’ve done internationally? Or do they judge it on your qualifications? You’re coaching qualification and the coaching qualification I’d say is being ignored” (Coach 2).

Five of the players commented that they believed the coaching positions were filled based on the convenience of the coach. That is, the players commented that coach selection seems to be a matter of whoever’s willing to take the job more so than who is qualified. “Yeah, it’s absolutely anyone can stand up and have a go, it seems like, It’s almost like persuading people to coach a team” (Jack).

Similar to the players’ comments, the coaches interviewed proposed that because coaching in Ireland is a second profession to most (as discussed earlier) the top coaches generally were not in the position to take on the international coaching job. Thus, the position is open to less experienced coaches. Both players and coaches expressed concern about the current practice of selecting coaches to the international team, suggesting that because it is a voluntary position, it would suit someone with little responsibility outside of basketball.

“Well the first criteria is that you know you’re not going to get paid, ok, and you know the Dutch coach is getting paid, the Montenegrin coach is getting paid, Lithuanian coach is getting paid so therefore that’s going to rule out some people because they can’t afford to coach because they are working and that’s their job and they might not be the best coaches that are around. The coaching team tends to suit somebody who needs to boost their CV or their a bit younger and they have loads of time and they don’t have a family and stuff so there’s lots of sacrifices there you know” (Coach 2).

While the coaches and players have provided a criticism regarding the selection of coaches to the international teams, a former10 Basketball Ireland representative has commented that the coach selection process is being re-structured. Coaches who wish to coach at under 16 international level must now participate for at least one year in the academies run by Basketball Ireland. The basketball academies are run by Basketball

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10At the time the interview took place the Basketball Ireland representative was still an employee but has since left the organisation.
Ireland for girls and boys under sixteen years of age. In conjunction with the players development, ‘promising’ young coaches are given the opportunity to coach and work with more experienced coaches:

“You have to come through the academy system, right now so if you want to coach for Ireland U16 you have to be in the academy for a year. You have to demonstrate your coaching skills within the academy, you are given a program of work to do so all the coaches coming here this week had twenty hours preparation work to do to come here, they had to come here and present it...If you’re in the academy you can apply to be an under 16 coach….there’s an open advertisement on the website then for anybody else who wants to be involved beyond under 16...for the senior teams it’s an open advertisement, anybody can apply” (Alan).

However, coaching at an academy in Ireland does not expose these coaches to international competition and it could be argued that it does not equip them with the necessary knowledge and experience to prepare the players for competition.

Another key point is that the coaches decided to coach at international level because they felt it was the next step in their development. As mentioned earlier in this section, the coaches themselves determined that they were ready to coach at this level once they were approached by the national governing body. The coaches did not have to work as an assistant coach prior to taking the position of head coach, their reputations and experience as coaches were seen as acceptable for the international teams. This is another example of the lack of a formal pathway for coaches to follow to reach top level status; instead this position is acquired through experience and opportunity: ...it’s been a progression and a lot of it is, like none of it is really planned, it’s just opportunities” (Coach 1).

4.2.7 SUMMARY OF COACH DEVELOPMENT
To summarise this section, the general consensus amongst the players and coaches who participated in this project was that the coaching standard in Ireland was poor. The poor standard described by the players relates to their experiences with both international coaches and underage coaches. Reasons attributed to this substandard level of coaching include: coach experience and coaching qualifications. Coaching qualifications in its
current form also received poor reviews by both coaches and players as these certifications do not assess competencies of the coach. However, they do acknowledge the importance of coach education which can serve as a standardised monitoring and evaluation tool for the improvement of coaching standards.

Based on this information it was revealed that coaches must actively seek their own sources of knowledge. The main source of development reported by the coaches was the opportunity to work with, question and observe other coaches/mentors. In addition, experience was identified by both players and coaches as another important source of knowledge for the coaches. Through competition the coaches learned from working with, or against other coaches and observing and reflecting on experiences. However, another major finding of this study revealed that many of the senior international coaches lacked the necessary experience to coach at European level. Based on the evidence provided by coaches and players, it is evident that there is a need for structure to be brought into the coaching domain for neophyte through to the top level of coaches.

4.3 PLAYER DEVELOPMENT IN IRISH BASKETBALL

The sources of player development will be examined in relation to: development opportunities in Ireland, standard of players, exposure to top level players, and the impact of the coach on player development.

4.3.1 DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN IRELAND

The players suggested that development opportunities inside Ireland were lacking, but opportunities outside of Ireland allowed them to reach top level performance. Interestingly, all of the players interviewed followed a similar pathway for their underage development. That is, while the players had access to basketball through a club or school team and competitions, they believed that their development mainly occurred through the international programs (all of the players participated in the international underage pathway, which runs from under16 to under20). As such, all of the players found that the decision to play at senior level was a natural progression. The majority of players expressed the selection for the international team was their goal and acted as their motivation to remain committed to basketball:
“I would think it’s the ultimate goal you know, it’s the highest you can play, the highest standard you can play in this country, in most countries, it’s the highest you can play, obviously, it’s a huge honour you are playing with the best players in the whole country and obviously in Ireland” (Jack).

The international programs were seen by the players as the only effective source of development available to them in Ireland. However, once the players finished secondary school, opportunities to develop outside of the international season in Ireland were limited. Thus, five out of six players interviewed played college basketball in the United States for one (one player) to four years (four players). Of those four players one is returning to continue her fourth year of eligibility\(^{11}\) whilst doing a Masters degree, two finished in the US and went on to play professionally in Europe, and the remaining player returned to Ireland to play in the Irish Superleague. The five players who went to the US mentioned that it was during this time that they developed their game the most. This was put down to the professional structure of American basketball, with access to valuable resources such as: facilities, physiotherapists, fitness trainers and coaches.

“I mean I went to college in the States, like learned a lot over there, there was a very good post coach... I think he kind of developed my game really, just shooting and moves and stuff like that. Suppose I got a bit better than what I was going over, then brought that home” (Ciara).

The opportunity to play abroad has played a large role in making resources for development more available to athletes the world over (Lowell and Findlay, 2001; Maguire, 2008; Thibault, 2009). The opportunity for these players to move abroad, and continue to play and develop allowed these players to continue their journey towards becoming top level players. It provided them access to top level coaches, facilities, other players, and competition. Although the move was not permanent for these players it was seen as the pinnacle of developmental opportunities in their careers. Furthermore, the player’s move abroad initially led to depletion in the standard of Irish players in Ireland, but since the players continued to play for the international teams, it increased the overall standard of the senior teams.

\(^{11}\)According to NCAA rules, players can only play basketball for a maximum of four years while attending college in the US.
One exception, Evan, felt that he had the ability to develop his own game within Ireland through “hard work”, opportunities to play with and against better players, and the opportunities to learn from coaches during the international season. It must be noted that although Evan did not play college basketball in the US, he did spend some time in US camps. Evan believed that he was learning continually through experience and competition, and that by working hard he would reach his potential in a few years’ time:

“Well I’m improving every year, my season last year compared to this year was a lot better…I can always shoot the ball better that’s a big thing, my decision making can always get better” (Evan).

Thus, it is proposed that player development is a continual process. Two of the players believed that they had reached their potential as basketball players. The players were aged 31 and 27 respectively. According to the rest of the players they had yet to reach their potential and that would come with age (a common belief within the basketball community is that basketball players are said to reach their peak around the age of 27). “No, apparently [players] won’t be fully at their, fully at the top of their game, this is what I’ve been told and I hope this is the way, maybe, maybe 26, 27” (Evan). However, the players were realistic in their views, and indicated that unless they were exposed to opportunities to learn and develop they would never reach their potential. As such, Bríd decided to stay in the United States as she felt it would provide her with better opportunities to reach her potential.

“No, that’s one of the reasons why I want to go back to the States too because…I have been working for so many years…to get to this point where I could be like a starter and do all this” (Bríd).

The senior team was portrayed as a largely amateur setting, with time constraints, limited resources, and somewhat invasive personal commitments. These constraints limited the developmental opportunities for the players. What follows is a description of those limiting factors (Note: time constraints refer to the restricted time the players had with the international team). The domestic league in Ireland began with preseason in
September, and finished at the end of March. The international season in Ireland began at the end June and finished at the end of August/start of September.

“It’s generally [the competitive season] just August really. My first year, it was an eight week programme. And I guess with budget restraints it’s gotten shorter and shorter so it was only three and a half weeks last year” (David).

Time constraints meant that the teams had approximately two months of training together including competition. Moreover, training sessions happened every second week because of work commitments and other responsibilities of the team members.

“I’d have to try make at least, say if it’s a weekend session, late Friday, Saturday and Sunday, I’d have to try and make the Saturday or part of the Saturday and the Sunday, you know, the best I can” (Lorraine).

As such, the players knew they had to prepare themselves before these training sessions in terms of fitness and basketball skills. The players also accepted that personal development was a lower priority than team cohesiveness. “They don’t have time to make you run because they need to work on plays and stuff” (Bríd).

“So at least two months before our training camp would start, I would make sure I would be getting ready for that so when the actual training camp does come along you just have to focus on learning new plays and getting sharp with your shot and your ball handling and that kind of thing” (Jack).

However, the players also revealed that once the campaign was over the team dispersed until/if they got selected for the following year. There were no training sessions in between that time, no contact with the coaches or the organisation, and ultimately no continuity from one year to the next. The player’s commented that the absence of any contact with the coach is another limiting factor for player development, as the players were unaware of what the coach is expecting for the next season, what weaknesses need attention, and ultimately if they are training hard enough. The poor continuity and lack of coordination between international campaigns is evidenced by this player’s description of the international season:
“You know it doesn’t continue on to the regular season, you do those, play those four games then it’s a blank sheet the next year again so it’s pure luck if the team plays the same way again or you’re playing the same role, there’s no continuity there” (David).

Financial constraints also impacted on time constraints, meaning that the team could not afford to begin preparation earlier. Furthermore, the budget also had consequences on access to sport science and sports medicine, which one could argue could limit the teams’ ability to reach its full potential. According to the players, the budget for their international team was approximately €50,000 for each of the teams to cover accommodation, playing gear, travel and equipment. Three of the players compared this budget to what they heard the Dutch were getting per team. Netherlands was a team in the same division as Ireland, but had a budget of one million euro. The tight budget meant minimum team staff was available for team development. Senior teams therefore consisted of the players, the head coach, an assistant coach, and a manager. The players had access to a physiotherapist “but only at the games” (Lorraine). Again, the players provided examples of the Dutch team to illustrate the benefit of a larger budget. The Dutch budget meant they could afford a large staff; coaches, physiotherapists, psychologists, masseurs to work with the players:

“All say Holland, have like a million euro budget for their senior women’s team so they’d have all that, you’d see their bench, they’d have the coaches, all the players and then five other people at the end, who would be physiotherapist, masseuse, psychologist everything” (Lorraine).

As mentioned previously (See section 4.2) basketball is not a professional occupation in Ireland, and therefore, external responsibilities impacted on the players’ commitment to training and competition. In addition to the work/study and socialising sacrifices these players had to make, the players felt that they were working against the odds as their competitors were getting paid for playing, had access to a large support team (i.e. physiotherapist’s, doctors, fitness specialists) and did not have to work outside of training. “Like we’re competing against professional teams but we’re totally amateur like which is tough” (Lorraine). Some of the players recalled players from other countries standing in disbelief when they were told the Irish players didn’t get paid.
Ciara recalled that one player of the German team laughed when she said she was playing for free: “the German girl thought I was joking when I said we didn’t get paid”.

Another key factor identified as influential to player development was termed ‘limited resources.’ Limited resources impacted on development especially during the early stages of the players’ development. Practise is a well-documented source for the development of top level athletes (Baker et al., 2003; Stotlar and Wonders, 2006). Given this, it is logical to assume that access to facilities plays an important role in development. Outside the training hours allocated to the Superleague team training sessions, players found it hard to gain access to courts and gyms in order to practice:

“you know with all these insurance issues ... and you have to beg people to let you in the gym or you have to like break in yourself or do whatever you have to just to be able to shoot around and to practice playing basketball” (Jack).

This sentiment is also shared by the coaches. They believed that access to basketball facilities for top level players is more difficult in comparison to the easy access individuals have to GAA pitches or rugby clubs. The limited use of facilities was also a topic broached by Coach 1 when talking about player development. He suggested that the main problem associated with acquiring facilities lie in the expense:

“We need to get back to using facilities like the GAA and ... we need to get back to using facilities and helping clubs and teams secure facilities... The problem is insurance, and a lot of time good will” (Coach 1).

He also indicated that the basketball community needs to give players the opportunity to play basketball whenever they can and if they can’t get the players into the gyms and playing basketball these “kids” will find other sports more attractive. Ultimately, he is suggesting that if the facilities are there then people will be enticed to play, and develop.

“I think we need to give kids somewhere to go...and basketball being the core of it... like right now the FAI\(^\text{12}\) is ... it’s sexy” (Coach 1). In keeping with the coaches’

\(^{12}\text{FAI- Football Association of Ireland.}\)
comments, some of the players complained about the difficulty accessing a court for practice:

“The standard of facilities, I think is, is, pretty abysmal. I remember when I was growing up all I wanted to do was shoot around and practice on my own or practice with a few of the lads or whatever and you know with all these insurance issues comes in and you have to beg people to let you in the gym” (Jack).

According to the coaches and players the interest in basketball is fairly high, but there are not enough basketball facilities in this country to support the interests of the general public, clubs and top level players. Facilities are an important source of development in that they provide the opportunity for practice. Thus, limited access to facilities limits the development opportunities of players: “like there are a lot of people playing basketball and it’s an up and coming sport in schools, so the interest is there but just the facilities, the coaching really isn’t” (Lorraine).

The opinion of those interviewed regarding interest in the sport are interesting given a report on the participation rates of school children in Ireland (Fahey, Delaney and Gannon, 2005). The report revealed that basketball is one of the highest played sports in physical education (PE) in secondary school until the Junior Certificate year. Further, basketball was the third largest extracurricular sport played at the same age for both males and females. In contrast, several of the players interviewed in this study commented that the opportunities to play basketball were limited growing up: “there was no club when I was young” (Lorraine). “[We] didn’t have a school team, we were a GAA school” (David) and “I started playing basketball when I was seven with guys [because] there [weren’t] any girls teams” (Bríd). These players advocated that in order to improve the quality of player standard in Ireland such resources must be made available to the younger players.

4.3.2 STANDARD OF PLAYERS
The standard of players in Ireland is seen as a reflection of the development opportunities in the country for players. Despite the lack of professionalism in Ireland, the standard of female players was described as fairly high: “I think like the playing standard is like really good….there are some really fantastic players in Ireland” (Bríd).
Bríd’s opinion of the standard of Irish players must be viewed with caution, as she has been in the US for almost five years (played basketball for four), and the only opportunity she had to witness this standard was while playing on the senior international teams. Her opinion is therefore based on working with top level players and not an overall view of the Irish talent pool. The interviewee’s believe that the impact of the coach and opportunity to play abroad have resulted in a higher standard of female players. That is, many of the players reflected on their early playing experience and the impact a quality coach made on their development: “[Coach] worked us hard he really pushed us and demanded the best out of the team” (Ciara). Moreover these players had the opportunity to play in the US during their college years. Brid and Ciara both admitted that it was the professional culture in the US that made them decide to play there: “to get from high school to college to pros that drive is there and everything is done more professional and that’s the big advantage that they have” (Ciara). The players believed that it was during this time that they had developed themselves as players the most. Playing in the US was seen as a greater opportunity for these players to develop: “like in the States you’re going out at it hard, six days a week, like you can’t help but improve [because] like you have to put so much time into it so I think you would regress if you came back” (Bríd). In America the players are subject to training ‘six days’ (Bríd) a week with games and possibly ‘two sessions per day’ (Lorraine), which is approximately 20-24 hours per week. “The American system is much more professional ... you go six days a week” (Bríd). In Ireland players attend “two to three sessions per week with games on the weekend”, approximately 6-8 hours per week, a difference of fourteen hours of training per week. Furthermore, individual sessions with American coaches would last about an hour a day with the player, and in Ireland a coach would spend possibly 15-20 minutes per week.

“I went to college in the States, like learned a lot over there, there was a very good post coach...he kind of developed my game really, just shooting and moves and stuff like that...then brought that home” (Lorraine).

According to the research in athlete development, on average, it takes 10,000 hours of deliberate practice in order to reach an elite level (Ericsson et al., 1993). In America, players are given the opportunity to reach a high level, however, players in Ireland do not have the access to similar sessions, meaning that it would take longer for these
players to reach the top level. The players also suggested that because basketball was a means to an end (career route) in the US, the competition for places was high and therefore they were pushed a lot harder:

“I mean I value a scholarship a lot but not as much as some of my team mates who maybe wouldn’t have gone to college without it so like they are fighting every day because they’re like ‘I wouldn’t be here if it wasn’t for basketball’ so they gave a lot more of themselves” (Bríd).

In addition to the players, Coach 1 also commented that the standard of Irish female basketball players was very high. He indicated that the opportunity for these players to play in the US has contributed to a high standard amongst the female players. Additionally, he suggested that if going to the US is not an option for players they should look to European countries for these opportunities:

“We are very lucky we’ve had some many players who have gone to America and played over there. What I would like to see happen more is younger players going to Europe...there is a pile of money out there in England at the moment you know where they have developed the sport and I suppose there’s actually some colleges in England trying to get all younger kids over and work with them and there’s huge opportunities...I mean if I had every kid whose eligible to play senior women’s right now out there on the grass and we said ‘right let’s pick’, we’d have major problems picking the team...I mean I think the girls are ready I think they are good enough ... but I think for a very small amount of money in this country, we can compete” (Coach 1).

Conversely to the women, the Irish male players have been described as a lower standard of player. The male players admitted that the men’s team does not share the same competitive playing level as the women’s team. Thus, they rely on the use of ‘Plastic Paddys’ to be competitive. ‘Plastic Paddys’ are US players who hold Irish passports. The male players suggested that without the ‘Plastic Paddys’, they would ‘be destroyed’ in games. “But if they get a legitimate six or seven Irish Americans players, you’d need it really to beat England” (David).
The players believed that the main difference in standards between the men and the women is due to the opportunity for players to secure scholarships to play in the US. The male players found it hard to secure scholarships or places in the US due to the high competition for places, added to this is the lack of contacts clubs and players have with American colleges. They predominantly end up playing in lower leagues in colleges in the US. Furthermore, it was believed that the Irish male players did not possess the athleticism, height or speed necessary to compete at the US level. These are particular drawbacks when you account for the typical US style of play “run and gun”.

In 2009, the Irish Senior Men’s team consisted of six Irish born players and six ‘Irish American’ players. Although two of the three male players interviewed had played basketball in college in the States, the players felt that the development pathway established in Ireland did not prepare players adequately for bridging the gap between America and Ireland, or even Europe and Ireland: “there is no Irish player playing in the NBA or any major league really” (David). “The highest level they have ever played at is in the Superleague, then they go and they play against Sweden and Georgia who have NBA players on their teams” (Jack).

As a consequence of not being able to play on the international team, the players interviewed believed that their only option was to remain in Ireland and participate in the Irish Superleague. However, the Superleague was seen as a substandard league. “The standard of the Superleague is kind of, just everything is just not, it’s just not a good product anymore the Superleague” (David). Up until the 2009 season the Superleague allowed each men’s team two paid professionals and a bosman, and the women’s team were allowed one paid professional. Since then only the mens’ teams are allowed one professional. The players felt that this has negatively affected their development, as they believed two professionals meant better players to train with and play against which exposed them to a higher standard of basketball. “I think the standard of the league has dropped massively since they’ve reduced it to, for a small one they have reduced…have one American” (Jack). The female players also believed that the standard of the Irish Superleague was not high and with the withdrawal of one paid professional, the coach must take a player from the bench. This typically means the player is younger, less experienced and having a level lower of ability. “It’s not as
consistent like some players in the Superleague are great and sometimes there is a little bit of a drop off…but that’s probably just because the ages are so different” (Bríd).

4.3.3 EXPOSURE TO TOP LEVEL PLAYERS

The players commented that the opportunity to work with, and play against, players of similar or greater abilities acted as an important source of development. While the time on the international teams was brief, it gave the players a taste of a more professional outfit. This professionalism was shown in the way the players trained together, socialized together, and played together. For example, Evan described the team as more of a unit compared to a club setting. The international teams trained several hours over a weekend, during competition the international teams travelled together, slept in the same complex, ate breakfast together, had a meeting, and a walk through\textsuperscript{13} giving the sense of a unified team. “With club you’d be there an hour before with the Irish team especially before the game, we’re eating together, we’re having breakfast together, we’re meeting an hour before, we have a walk through” (Evan).

Not only did the Irish teams have the opportunity to practice in a more cohesive manner, the international team gave players the chance to play with Irish Americans, and it also allowed for the players to mix with other players that they would normally play against in the domestic league. “You’d have Irish Americans and stuff, you’re playing with Irish players that you would never normally have the chance to play with otherwise” (Jack). The opportunity to play with, and against, better players increased their own performances, which was a huge benefit associated with being on the international squads. Here, the experience of older players being passed onto younger players helped develop the team. “I felt a lot sharper and playing with other guys brings you up another level” (Evan). In addition, the exposure of other top level players (i.e. competitors) was described as an important factor in player development.

“And it makes the Irish guys on the team a lot better. I became a lot better basketball player playing with or against those guys than I would have if they weren’t on the team so the same, I’m sure the same can be said for all the lads on the team as well so that

\textsuperscript{13}A walk through refers to the practice of tactics at a slow pace to refresh the minds of the players without taxing their energy levels before a match.
right there is showing that they have improved Irish players in basketball just by being on the team” (Jack).

For many of these players the Irish Superleague is the highest level of basketball players can achieve. However, as mentioned earlier, the players felt that the Irish domestic league was not at a high enough standard for them to progress as players. Therefore, the international season gave these players the opportunity to reach a higher standard of play; to learn from better, more highly skilled players. The professional players also increased the competition for the Irish players, by making them work harder in order to gain minutes on the court. Without the professionals, the interviewees believed that the Superleague was a weaker, less attractive competition, in which younger players are brought onto the panel, but are too young and inexperienced to make an impact on the team.

“So I actually think the more Americans you have on the team the better it is for the Irish players, I understand that people who wouldn’t really have made the team would get the chance to play but to be honest like the tenth, eleventh, twelfth, guards, Superleague players, these days would never be on the team a few years ago and they are not impact players and the guys ... are just there to make up the numbers in practice. So in my opinion, they never should have gone away from two Americans, no way” (David).

However, it must be noted that although similar benefits for development opportunities were acknowledged within the Superleague, the degree to which these professional players impacted on development differed. For the Irish players the opportunity to practice with, and play against, an entire squad of international level players was more effective. Nevertheless, the use of professionals in the domestic league was a lower but alternative source of development. The players commented that without the opportunity to compete at high levels, or train with strong players and top level coaches, their incentive to continue training and strive for high standards will be affected.

The benefits of working with ‘better’ individuals are documented in social research. Results demonstrated that students who compared themselves to classmates who they perceived were performing well in the classroom subsequently improved their own
academic performance (Blanton, Buunk, Gibbons and Kuyper, 1999). This is based on the assumption that individuals compare themselves, and their abilities, with others in society, a process known as social comparison. Depending on the comparison level, and the evaluation of this comparison, the individual then reacts to the threats accordingly. In the case of the female basketball players, the players perceived that their opponents in the European Championship possessed similar/better abilities to their team and adjusted their performance in order to address this threat. Thus, a team with a €50,000 budget and a preparation period of 6-8 weeks were able to contend/beat teams with similar/greater abilities (for example, Netherlands). Additionally, the senior players on both teams were able to compare their abilities to that of their team-mates and work towards becoming better players.

Social comparison works in two main ways: upward comparison, and downward comparison. The type of comparison depends largely on the motives of the individual (Sheldon, 2003). In relation to sports, self-evaluation plays an important role in the commitment and effort of an athlete (Sheldon, 2003). According to the research, highly skilled athletes depend largely on social comparisons in an attempt to evaluate their own achievements and development (Sheldon, 2003). It has been proposed that individuals engaged in social comparison with others who are perceived as having greater skills, which act as a motive for self-improvement (Blanton et al., 1999; Buunk, Cohen-Schotanus, and Van Nel, 2005; Gibbons, Lane, Gerrard, Reisbergan, Lautrup, Pexa, and Blanton, 2002). For example, Gibbons et al. (2002) found that students who scored well in a test wished to compare their results to those who scored higher in an attempt to improve. If this is applied to sport then it is suggested that the opportunity to train with and play against players with greater abilities acts as a source of player development.

4.3.4 THE IMPACT OF THE COACH ON PLAYER DEVELOPMENT

The impact of the coach on commitment to teams, motivation and development became a prominent topic amongst the players. The impact of the coach on athlete development has received widespread attention in the literature (Black and Weiss, 1992; Kenow and Williams, 1999; Paterson, 1999; Poczwardowski et al., 2006). Given the importance of coach impact, it was necessary to discuss the players’ experiences with coaches who impacted on their development. For instance, Bríd stated that her main reason for joining the senior team was not based on the goal to represent her country, but instead
the opportunity to work with the coach. This again strengthens findings surrounding the impact of a coach on a player’s development (Côté and Sedgwick, 2003; Woodman, 1993). The fact that Bríd got to work with the foreign top level coach motivated her to play with the team, which exposed her to a higher level of coaching, training and ultimately competition, all of which are necessary for development; “I wanted to be under [the coach’s] wing so that really drew me to it” (Bríd).

All six players commented that a good coach-athlete relationship was necessary for both team and individual development. Here the players believed that professionalism was one of the main requirements outlined by the players for an effective coach. Based on their experiences, the players defined a professional coach as someone who is organised, has a direction for the team and a plan to achieve that direction, possesses great knowledge in basketball, communicates with and motivates players and is honest.

“I think a professional coach is someone who is well organised, who has a theory on how he wants the game to be played and someone who can get his players going and playing together” (Evan).

Similar to the research, (Erickson et al., 2007; Gilbert, 2009; Jones et al., 2003) the players perceived that a top-level coach needed to possess the necessary tactical, technical and skill-related knowledge for coaching and to implement this knowledge effectively into the training environment. Furthermore, players felt that it is the coaches’ job to design training sessions to suit the needs of the players. Jack illustrated the importance of a professional coach in terms of the coach’s interaction with the players. The coach he described was approachable to the players and possessed the necessary skills to motivate them: “[Coach] is what I would call a players’ coach, he got on really well with the players, he knows how to motivate guys, he’s very professional approach and he gets on really well with everyone and everyone gets on really well with him” (Jack). Evan also describes his experience with [the same coach], he found the coach to be upfront and honest which allowed him to trust the coach and build a good relationship.

“We practised and he told me a little on what I needed to work on. And then we played, the first game we played against Sweden and I didn’t play which I was disappointed
about [because] they told me I’d be playing but after that I went to training on the Monday, and you know it was kind of preseason for me, I thought you know I wouldn’t be playing so just [head coach] said go in and bust a gut for the whole week and I did that and I got rewarded for it. That was a big thing because before I felt like the teams were picked and you know in fairness the coaches said that if you put in the effort at training you’ll get your rewards so I felt that was a great thing” (Evan).

Jack highlighted the importance of coaching knowledge in player development, based on his experience with a previous international coach. Although the coach did not possess much previous playing experience, he had a great understanding of the game. Regardless of playing experience the coach provided the team with highly informative and rewarding sessions, by using his knowledge to devise intense and effective practice sessions. As previously mentioned, recent research indicated that previous playing experience is not a necessary requirement of top level coaches (Carter and Bloom, 2009):

“[High performance coach] ...was a type of coach, is kind of you know, the kind whose read all the basketball books and all that, not necessarily was a great player and that so but he, he brought massive intensity to his practices and stuff, and they were really hard, and they were very rewarding” (Jack).

This study found that top level coaches were an important source of learning for these players. The players had the opportunity to work with and learn from the senior international coaches which exposed them to new knowledge, tactics, skills and intensity far greater than the Superleague. According to Ciara, her experience with the senior coach advanced the technical aspect of her game and she suggests that if it was another coach she may have missed out on this information.

“I think you learn something from every coach...I think as a player it’s important that you learn something from them...with [senior coach] for instance I never realised how technical he was until I started with the Irish team ... I only obviously played against him and I was like pleasantly surprised at how technical he was and how he really tries to break things down in the game and there is not that many Irish coaches who would do that” (Ciara).
Coaches who possessed large amounts of technical, tactical, and sport specific knowledge were respected by all of the players. The players felt that the international seasons which saw their greatest improvement, was largely due to the sessions prepared by the coaches, and their ability to work with the coaches to achieve goals.

“When [head coach] took over, two years ago, you had a guy who was have a very accomplished basketball player himself whose dad was a huge coach in college basketball and [coach] himself was an excellent coach. [Coach] is what I would call a players’ coach, he got on really well with the players, he knows how to motivate guys, he’s very professional approach and he gets on really well with everyone and everyone gets on really well with him, so, really he had a huge impact on my development as a player” (Jack).

Previous research has also illustrated the importance of the coaches’ knowledge and experience in the development of an athlete, through the provision of technical, tactical, physical conditioning, and psychosocial learning opportunities (Gould et al., 1999, Trninic et al., 2009). The literature has strongly demonstrated the influence of a coach on player performance and development (Jowett and Cockerill, 2003, Jowett and Chaundy, 2004, Wright et al., 2007). Evan’s experience with the international coaches also impacted positively on his self-confidence as a player: “It developed my game a lot, and actually [head coach] and [assistant coach] helped me out an awful lot you know, confidence wise and helped me out in, those two in particular helped me” (Evan). While the senior international coaches were perceived as confidence builders for the players, the open communication with the coach acted as a motivating factor: “I thought you know I wouldn’t be playing so just [head coach] said go in and bust a gut for the whole week and I did that and I got rewarded for it” (Evan). The impact of the coach on athlete confidence has also been widely recorded in the literature (Côté and Sedgwick, 2003, Smoll and Smith, 2002). Côté et al. (2002) found that effective feedback led to increased self-efficacy of athletes. Behaviours such as honesty and good communication between the coach and the players were identified as important for a good relationship.

The coaches also expressed opinions relating to the impact of the coach in the development of players. They suggested that the current coaches in Ireland failed to
develop players to a high enough standard. Coach 1 believed that the coaches at school and club level are unaware of what areas of basketball should be emphasised for continued participation and development. Furthermore he suggested that coaching positions were filled just to take care of an age group.

“*I don’t think the emphasis that we put on you know what kids should be learning you know whether kids should be winning or not at under 14 or under 13 or whatever, I don’t think there is enough emphasis in that in clubs or in schools or whatever, they just give people jobs for the sake of it because that’s another problem over with*” (Coach 1).

Coach 2 also commented that the club systems were not progressive but regressive. Here he believed that the clubs do not look to develop their coaching model or player model because it is too much effort and instead look at ways to bring down other club models so that they do not have to keep up.

“*I don’t think a lot of the clubs are progressive enough because this is what I’m talking about coaching development, you’ve got to have a model for it within coaching if you don’t have that you don’t have anything now I use that word very lightly but, jealousy’s in the club system, then again instead of people saying let’s get up to that level, they just want to bring everyone back to their level, because maybe they’re volunteers and they just want to do X amount*” (Coach 2).

Equally, Coach 2 expressed his opinion relating to the poor technical ability of Irish players. Although he acknowledged a good working attitude among the players - for example: he believed the Irish to be resilient and hardworking athletes - he also pointed out that a strong work ethic is not enough for players to compete at international level. Coach 2 believed that Irish players lacked the technical ability he has observed in other countries which is the responsibility of the coach for not preparing the players correctly, supporting findings illustrating the impact of a coach on player development (Trninić, Papić,&Trninić, 2009). Coach 2 acknowledged the impact he and other coaches have on players, and he took responsibility for failing to completely develop all aspects of a player.
“We tend to be relying on what the kids do and effort and not skill, now we have some good players don’t get me wrong but you know some of the stuff I see them using on an offence, I don’t think we have prepared them for an international team” (Coach 2).

4.3.5 SUMMARY OF PLAYER DEVELOPMENT IN IRELAND

As previously mentioned, the development opportunities were similar for all players up until eighteen years of age. The players interviewed believed that the coach played a major role in athlete development in which top-level coaches need to be professional, honest, trustworthy, have good communication skills, in addition to possessing the necessary technical, tactical and sport specific knowledge for coaching. New knowledge emerged which suggests that other top level players are an important source of development for senior international players through the medium of international programs and competition. However, in Ireland an unstructured and broken development pathway for players exists. Since the dissolution of the senior teams, international competition, now only exists at under16 level. Since international competition was highlighted as an important source of development for senior players, the implications of the dissolution of the international programs is discussed below.

4.4 THE PERCEIVED CONSEQUENCES TO COACH, PLAYER AND SPORT DEVELOPMENT

In February 2010, Basketball Ireland announced the withdrawal of the senior international teams (both men and women) due to financial issues. In an interview with RTÉ14 Paul Meaney, chairperson of Basketball Ireland, was quoted: “this is a financial rather than philosophical decision...We have had to cut back in every possible way or we face the scenario of Basketball Ireland collapsing...This time last year we had 27 staff. Now we have 11” (RTÉ, 2010).

The coaches and players interviewed in this study described the short term consequences to basketball in Ireland in relation to their own (player and coach) development. These will have consequences on the sport.

14RTÉ; Radio Telefís na hÉireann is a public broadcaster that provides television, radio and internet services to the general public.
Before the perceived consequences to coach and player development are discussed, it is of interest to discuss the emotions behind their responses. The coaches and players expressed feelings of, disgust, anger, abandonment and disloyalty from the Basketball Ireland organisation after years of their service, commitment and sacrifices representing their country. “I think it’s a disgrace...Bottom line is I made myself available and I busted my arse like for two years, for nothing” (Coach 1). Certainly, the decision to remove the international teams has had a negative reaction by the players and coaches. The players, in particular, felt like Basketball Ireland had let them.

“I know that sounds kind of harsh but I think a lot of players feel hard done by, like in a sense I’ve said for six summers in a row I’ve played, I’ve gone back and played scholarship basketball so I’ve gone six years without a break nearly to play and to get to that level and I just wanted to do it like” (Ciara).

Moreover, the players believed that not providing representation from your country reflected poorly on the nation, especially, since basketball has been a long standing sporting tradition in Ireland, (approximately 85 years), and has been a member of International Federation of Basketball (FIBA) for the past 63 years. “Yeah and like if you don’t have a senior team, I mean, it’s just terrible, it’s like the flag sure, you have to have the senior team, so I think it was terrible” (Bríd).

Similar feelings were reported in employment research relating to the involuntary redundancy of employees. Even though the players were not employed by Basketball Ireland, their loyalty, work ethic and commitment to the sport took up a large proportion of their daily lives. The players also felt a sense of powerlessness in the decision made by Basketball Ireland and offered possible solutions to come up with the money to enter the teams into the European competition, but Basketball Ireland declined.

“I think they just made the decision without consulting everyone who could be consulted like. They just kind of told us they didn’t give us the option, if they told us a couple of months ago look we’re in financial trouble, the Irish team is dodgy, might need to raise their own money, fair enough we’d do fundraising or something but just to cut it like that” (Lorraine).
A key finding from this study was that it became apparent that the international season was the most important part of the year, in terms of coach and player development at senior level. The rest of this chapter discusses the impact on development as a result of the elimination of these sources.

4.4.1 IMPACT ON THE PLAYERS

After the blow of losing professional players in the Superleague (the 2009 season), prior to the withdrawal of the international teams from competition, the players felt that this latest decision was just another hindrance to their development. Outlined previously, players advocated that the opportunity to work with better players led to an improvement in their performance. Other top level players provided motivation to improve, and allowed for the transfer of knowledge from veteran players to the younger members of the team. Furthermore, the international season meant that the senior players also played against other top level players, which allowed them to observe and learn. It also provided match experience to the players which were seen as an important learning opportunity. The removal of the international teams now means that the senior players no longer have these opportunities to develop their game.

The decision to remove international teams from competition has resulted in a decrease in motivation and commitment by all players to develop themselves further as basketball players. It seems that players no longer strive to reach a higher level of basketball. As stated “I don’t need to push myself to reach that high a level; I know what I need to do for Superleague level” (Lorraine). Five out of six of the players interviewed said they were now playing a different sport to fill the gap which was previously filled by international basketball. Even the coaches see this change in focus to be a negative thing for basketball.

“I think they will all pick up other sports over the summer and I think that’s a grave loss for basketball you know and I know the GAA don’t have international football and that’s probably the one thing that basketball had, that if you were a basketball player you could move up the ladder ... play Superleague go onto to play international” (Coach 2).
The commitment of the players has decreased since the decision to withdraw the senior teams was announced. For example, Ciara, who felt that she was left stranded by Basketball Ireland’s decision, now feels that she can get no more from the sport. This sentiment was echoed by the other players.

“So for basketball wise I think I’m trying to find a job and I think like I said I play football to keep fit because I know I will want to play basketball and become very jaded. Like as you can tell from the whole interview I’m a little disgusted with Basketball Ireland, just need to take a step back and a deep breath” (Ciara).

Sport enjoyment, involvement alternatives, personal investments, social constraints, and involvement opportunities have been suggested by the literature as factors that influence sports commitment (Scanlan et al., 2003, Scanlan et al., 2009). Previously, basketball held a greater attractiveness for the players, largely based on the opportunity to represent their country and play at a higher level. Without this opportunity, the alternatives (for example, GAA, soccer, and rugby) are now more appealing. This is evidenced in the decision of five of the players to take up other sports during the season and off season. Instead of preparing for the next season of basketball these players have been drawn to other sports, partly because they wish to remain competitive and partly due to the fact that they felt they were let down by Basketball Ireland and were re-prioritising sport in their lives. “Players don’t need basketball, like I can play football and I enjoy football. [Another player]’s retired and gone playing back, gone playing camogie” (Ciara). What remains to be seen is whether these factors cause these players to lose interest completely in basketball and drop-out.

It also became apparent that for many of the senior team players they would never represent their country in basketball again. For them the 2010-2011 European Championships’ would have been their last. In particular, the older players on the women’s team thought they had one more chance of qualifying and they were highly motivated to achieve what they failed to achieve in their last campaign:

“I think it’s terrible that they pulled like we were doing so well and we were really, really improving and also because like some of the players were at that age where if it
takes the team three years to come back like they are going to retire, like (Centre\textsuperscript{15}) and (Guard\textsuperscript{16}) and like (Point Guard\textsuperscript{17}) probably will and (Forward\textsuperscript{18}), like so they are forcing people into retirement” (Bríd).

Coach 1 believed that Basketball Ireland took a drastic decision “pulling the plug” on the senior teams. He felt that training camps during these times would have been a more positive alternative as players could be prepared for Ireland’s return to competition.

“You know, actually at the start of the summer I asked them for like five grand, I said ‘look lads, if you could push five grand more, I can get training camp in Spain, ... the training camp in [America]’, you know we could have done one or two of those things and that would have made it so much easier and it probably would have gotten us over the hump” (Coach 1).

Coach 1 also argued that because the decision made by Basketball Ireland was so “shallow small minded” the country has lost out on a generation of players who could have taken Irish basketball beyond the level they were so close to achieving. “You’re going to lose a generation of players ... it’s just, it’s just frightening really, you know where the sport is going to go you know”. The results of this project, therefore, suggest that elimination of the international programs could impact greatly on individual player development. Not only do players find themselves in the position where they have no training sessions, but they are no longer being exposed to the high levels of competition from which to learn and gain experience. Furthermore, they do not have access to a top level coach to instruct and teach them, or highly trained and motivated team-mates to learn from.

\textsuperscript{15}Centre: the name of the position given to the player that plays underneath the basket in basketball. This is usually the tallest player on the team

\textsuperscript{16}Guard: the name of the position given to the player that plays on the wing. This player is usually a shooter or attacks off the dribble

\textsuperscript{17}Point Guard: the name of the position given to the player that takes the ball up the court. This is usually the player that is most skilled at handling the ball.

\textsuperscript{18}Forward: Similar to the centre player the forward plays underneath the basket but is usually the shorter of the two.
4.4.2 IMPACT ON THE COACHES

With the coaches not having to commit to international teams, they have found they have more time for other things. Coach 1 admitted that he has taken a break from basketball and worked on his “golf swing”! The concern is if the attractiveness of coaching is reduced, and other activities hold a greater attraction, there is a possibility that basketball clubs in Ireland will lose quality coaches.

One of the main criticisms put forward by the players earlier in this section relates to the poor coaching standard and limited experience of international coaches. From this, there is an assumption that the withdrawal of the international teams reduces the chance of Irish coaches to gain important international experience. Thus, the main weakness of the international coaches outlined by the players (i.e. lack of international experience), will not be addressed unless the coaches look to coach abroad with international teams. However, according to two of the international coaches, they do not have the capacity to coach abroad based on family and work commitments. Although Coach 2 discussed his lack of interest to move abroad to coach at this moment in time, he does not dismiss the notion entirely.

“Well I had my opportunity you know which was a year away from my family to do what I loved doing and it would have to be a serious opportunity to consider doing that again at the moment I’m not seeking them but that doesn’t mean I won’t in the future” (Coach 2).

Coach 1 also suggested that once he is in a position to move abroad he might take the opportunity to coach in another country.

“I mean my kids, [eldest child is abroad] and [younger child] is kind of looking to go that road, if that happens in a year or two, financially I can do that, I’d like to take a year out and go and do a kind of, you know work in a school or work in a College in a European Club team.”

While the opportunity to work abroad will impact positively on their development, it could negatively impact the talent pool. Certainly their expertise and knowledge will be a loss to the players and other coaches.
4.4.3 IMPACT ON THE BASKETBALL COMMUNITY
Emerging from the study was the notion that the removal of the senior international team would impact on the wider basketball community. The development of the younger players and participation levels in basketball were voiced as major concerns by all those interviewed.

“I think there should be something there to keep them interested, like I know [young player] was interested in going for the senior squad this year, I’m just going from my, well it’s disbanded so she’s gone to Hawaii, you see this is the problem, they are going to start losing players” (Ciara).

Another concern raised by the participants interviewed was, that if and when the younger players get the opportunity to play for their country, they will be ill-prepared for such a major step. “Are they just going to grab… young players and the highest level they have ever played at is in the Superleague?” (Jack). Previously, coaches gradually introduced the younger players through practice with senior players, playing in international ‘friendlies’ and competition, and then integrated into the team. If and when the international team returns to competition the consensus is that the senior players will have retired from basketball leaving a massive gap for the younger players to fill.

“As well, you know that was important, you know like say, but I think that’s a big thing for me now, you know, where the [senior player] and [another senior player] have been successful where does it leave your age group 20, the 18-24,25 year olds because nothings done then you know” (Coach 1).

Moreover, promising young talent will look abroad to compete where resources, coaches and opportunities to develop are greater than in Ireland. If highly skilled individuals migrate to other countries, these individuals are taking with them the knowledge and skills they possess (talent pool), causing a decrease in these areas at home. The same can be assumed for top level coaches. If these individuals leave the country, they reduce the number of top level players and coaches in Ireland. For the

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19 Friendlies: matches played between two teams that don't result in ranking, points or titles.
players the international season was an important opportunity to provide income for basketball. Home games for the European Championship series meant that supporters from Ireland and outside Ireland would pay to watch the international teams play. However, the removal of senior teams from competition means that the general public will have no national exposure to top-level basketball: “it’s out of the public eye what is it six months, yeah it might actually effect the younger kids” (David).

“It was probably like five or six years ago now there was a huge game on in UL, I think the senior team was playing against Estonia or something and like they had both sides of the bleachers out and I’d never even seen that before and I know that all those little kids were probably saying like ‘Oh I really want to be on that team’ and even like they don’t have an under 20 team anymore or the under 18 doesn’t even play in Europe” (Bríd).

Research has shown that media and marketing boosts the profile of a sport which then has an impact on the development of a sport through increased participation and supporters (Sotiriadou et al., 2008). A survey in Australia revealed that the Commonwealth games “motivated Australians to take up a new activity” (as cited in Sotiriadou et al., 2008). On the flip-side, when international competitions/events are removed from the spotlight, as is the case in Irish basketball, it is suggested by the participants that this will lead to a decrease in media and marketing opportunities for the sport. In turn, this will indirectly affect the participation of children and adults and a decrease in support for basketball in general.

“Yeah, yeah, and like next or come August/September, September now, there used to be some many people at our games international games, kids, parents bringing their kids up, come over and they would be like well done, sign this, sign that and they don’t have this anymore” (Lorraine).

In addition, the media coverage generated by these games no longer exists, preventing a connection to be made between the team players and the public audience. According to Sotiriadou et al, (2008) an important consequence of the nurturing process is its impact on the general public. Top level athletes increase the potential for sports’ publicity and media attention and increased awareness then boosts the profile of the sport and impacts
positively on participation and support (Sotiriadou et al., 2008). These games also acted as a showcase of basketball players as role models especially for younger players. Research has found that sport athletes act as role models, and their success has been shown to increase feelings of self-enhancement and inspiration to athletes and the general public (Lockwood and Kunda, 1997). Now that the children do not have players to look up to or aspire to become, it is believed that their attention will turn elsewhere to other sports where role models are readily available on T.V.

“You know, if you can’t long along, play under 16 play international as well, well I can run, I can run for Ireland. I can play camogie for my county, play at Croke Park in front of 12-13,000 people” (Coach 2).

“Now that young players won’t have that opportunity they may have the opportunity to go see Ireland play in the football and go see intercounty Gaelic matches and all that, but if the arena isn’t there for these guys to go see the matches then the motivation won’t be there, so I think that will definitely have a knock on effect” (David).

4.4.4 SUMMARY OF THE PERCEIVED CONSEQUENCES TO PLAYER AND COACH DEVELOPMENT

The removal of the senior international programs has had a direct impact on the players. According to the interviewees, the absence of the team has had a negative effect on motivation to train, lessened commitment to the sport and, increased player attention to other sports. Since these factors were highlighted as the main sources of development for top level players, it is reasonable to assume that their ability to progress is limited by the removal of international competition. The removal of international programs also influences the development of coaches’ as it limits the coaches’ opportunities to learn from competition, and interact with other coaches. Furthermore, the decision to remove the international team was also speculated to impact on the basketball community. Without the teams young players do not have a pathway to guide their development, which is available to them in other sports. Thus, the appeal of basketball has been reduced to the next generation. Additionally, this decision has impacted on the support, popularity and participation of basketball, through reduced publicity, availability to the public, and role models. These findings indicate that the removal of the international
team goes beyond affecting those directly involved in the team, but also potentially impacts the entire sport.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION
5.1 Introduction
The purpose of this study was to identify the consequences to coach and player development when the international basketball programs were removed. The first part of this chapter provides a summary of the findings. The relevance of these findings to the research is also discussed and limitations of the study are outlined. Finally, recommendations for future research are discussed.

5.2 Coach development in Irish basketball: A summary
Drawing upon grounded description, findings indicated that the coaching context in Ireland was perceived to be a constraining factor for the participant coaches’ development. Coaching was primarily a voluntary position meaning that the coaches had other responsibilities outside of coaching, thereby limiting their ability to learn and develop their coaching practice.

In keeping with the literature (Cassidy, 2009, Cushion, 2001, Cushion et al., 2003, Jones et al., 2003), the main sources of development of Irish basketball coaches included: mentors, observation, other coaches, experience and reflection. Coaching courses and qualifications received both positive and negative references. For instance, all participants agreed that coaching qualifications should play some role in the coach development - through the delivery of content knowledge, and assessment of coaching abilities and establishment of standards. However, the participant coaches suggested that the current courses failed to reflect the coaching environment; assess the abilities of coaches prior to qualification; or monitor development. Many of the arguments put forward by these participants reflected previous research (Cushion et al., 2003, Jones, 2000), strengthening claims that coaching qualifications are, in their current form, a poor source for coach development. The coaches' discontentment with the Irish coaching qualifications led them to seek knowledge and qualifications abroad, illustrating that coaching structure does not provide the sources of knowledge necessary for top-level coaches.

Another common thread running through this study and previous literature relates to the importance of other coaches/mentors in coach development (Abraham and Collins, 1998, Carter and Bloom, 2009, Côté et al., 1993, Côté et al., 2007, Gilbert, 2009). The coaches reported that other coaches aided in their development through several means:
conversations, observations and opportunities to work with others. To date, this form of learning is largely unstructured and informal. Similar to the literature, it is suggested here that if other coaches can be utilised in a more structured manner where coaches with a large knowledge base and strong coaching principles are drawn upon in the progression of coaches, it would enable them to be monitored in a far more effective manner (Abraham and Collins, 1998, Carter and Bloom, 2009, Côté et al., 1993, Côté et al., 2007, Gilbert, 2009).

Experience at top-level international competition was also found to be an excellent source of development. International competition allowed for the observation, study and interaction with other coaches, and reflection of performance. According to the interviewees, experience was one of the main weaknesses of the Irish coaches and with the removal of the international teams this source of development is eliminated. This revelation also strengthens the belief that international experience is importance in developing top-level coaches (Cushion, 2007; Erickson et al., 2007; Gilbert and Trudel, 2005; Jones et al., 2003; Mielke, 2007).

5.3 Player Development in Irish Basketball: A summary

The players reported that the context limited their development as other commitments affected their ability to train and prepare for international basketball. Consistent with research, the players progressed through the stages of development (Côté, 1999). Similar to the coaches’ experiences abroad, the players found the opportunity to play in the US was one of the most important sources of development. Those who trained in the US advocated that it was during this time that they developed the most as players because of the professional attitude, programs and coaching they received there. Thus, the limited structure for players to progress to top-level basketball in Ireland caused the players to source opportunities abroad.

The main sources of development for senior international players included: exposure to top-level coaches, exposure to top-level players and international competition. The study provided several examples of the importance of the coach in player development (Black and Weiss, 1992; Kenow and Williams, 1999; Paterson, 1999; Poczwardowski et al., 2002). The relationship between coach and player was found to be an important factor in the motivations and work ethic of the players. Additionally, playing with and
against players with similar or greater abilities provided development opportunities as players could learn through observation, experience, communication and training. Therefore, this study suggests that the main source of development for players at top level comes from experience in high quality competition, training and learning from others (coach and competitors/team-mates).

Since the international teams have been eliminated it is therefore, concluded that the senior players do not have access to the sources of development necessary to continue progressing to the next stage of their individual development (at least not in Ireland). The consequences of this are beginning to unfold, beginning with the short-term effects on those directly involved, but it was also proposed that there will be more widespread long-term effects on the basketball community as a whole.

The most immediate effects of the removal of the senior international programs impacted the coaches and players who were directly involved in the programs. Players’ commitment to basketball has greatly reduced; instead their efforts are transferred to other sports. With players putting their effort and attention into other sports, there is a reduced number who are able to work with and compete against other top-level players, factors which were outlined previously as important sources of development. The impact of the removal of international teams, however, goes beyond those directly involved and it was proposed that this decision will also impact on future basketball players, and basketball’s popularity. Two possible outcomes for young players were outlined: emigration (to play basketball), or drop out. Either outcome will lead to the depletion of the talent pool for basketball highlighting the necessity of a structure in the development of players. Moreover, it was found that the removal of the international programs will impact on the general basketball community, reduce popularity, general participation and support for the sport which may in the long term influence the quality and number of players wishing to reach top level in the future.

5.4 Closing thoughts
Although this project has provided a grounded description of the consequences to coach and player development when the international basketball programs were removed, there remains a limited understanding. As the findings are based on the perceptions of eight participants, the project can act as a foundation for future work. A multi-method
approach could be used in future studies in order to strengthen findings, for example, observation, surveys, group interviews, and statistical analysis to measure the impact of competition on performance. Additionally, the length of the study does not allow for the emergence of measurable consequences outside the impact on the senior international players and coaches. That is, this study does not record the impact of the removal of the senior international programs on the wider basketball community. This study also focused on the perceptions of some of the most highly regarded, nationally based basketball coaches and players, but it did not take into account the opinions of the national governing body. Further, given that this study examined the basketball context within Ireland and hence, it is possible what is experienced by these participants and the findings of this study may not transfer to another sport, or context.

The researcher is an active member of the basketball community and thus may have imparted certain bias over the course of the thesis. Since a grounded description approach was adopted for the purpose of the study it must be acknowledged that the researcher was the primary source for the collection and interpretation of data. However, measures such as participant checking and cross checking have limited the impact of the researcher’s assumptions.

In summary, the findings of this study provide information about the sources of development that are available to Irish basketball coaches and players. Since there is limited evidence relating to the consequences to coach development after the removal development sources, this study brings to light the possible implications such a situation would impact on coach and player development. The extent of these consequences to development warrants further research.
Bibliography
Bibliography


APPENDICES
Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet for Coaches
International Coach Information Sheet

Title: Timeout for Irish, International Basketball: Consequences for coaches and players

Thank you for showing an interest in this project. Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate we thank you. If you decide not to participate there will be no disadvantage to you of any kind and we thank you for considering our request.

What is aim of the project?

The purpose of this study is to examine the sources of development provided available to players and coaches at international level in Ireland. In addition, the players and coaches opinions and subsequent actions in relation to development will be recorded.

In-depth interviews will be conducted to gather information from International coaches. The data collected will be examined in order to determine where coaches get their previous coaching experiences and what the coaches feel they must do to develop as coaches. Furthermore, attitudes towards the structure of international basketball in Ireland will be discussed and the coaches ideas on how to improve the system will be recorded.

Another objective of this study is to gather the reactions of the coaches to the decision made by Basketball Ireland I to withdraw senior international teams from competition. This provides an opportunity to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the present
international structure in basketball and provide recommendations towards improving this structure based on the knowledge and experiences of coaches.

Finally results from this project will help identify the main sources of development for international coaches which can help in the restructuring of the basketball system with the aim of producing effective and expert coaches within Irish Basketball. This study will also highlight the resources available for coaches in Ireland to develop to their potential and determine whether this development is aided by the NGB or is self-sought.

**What type of participants are being sought?**

We are looking for International coaches, the men’s international coaches and the women’s international coaches.

**What will the participants be asked to do?**

Should you agree to take part in this project, you will be asked to participate in formal interviews (lasting between 1 & 2 hours).

**Can participants change their mind and withdraw from the project?**

You may withdraw from participation in the project at any time and without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.

**What data or information will be collected and what use will be made of it?**

This project involved a questioning technique where the precise nature of the questions to be asked have not been determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the interview develops. This involves the researcher asking questions about a particular topic.

In the event that the line of questioning does not develop in such a way that you feel hesitant or uncomfortable yo are reminded of your right to declining to answer any particular question(s) and also that you may withdraw from the project at any stage.
without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind. Results of this project may be published but any data included will preserve anonymity.

As a consequence of the limited number of International coaches worldwide, ensuring anonymity is impossible. However, the data collected will be securely stored in such a way that only the researcher (Cathy Grant) and supervisors (Dr. Laura Purdy and Dr. Sunnhild Bertz) will be able to gain access to it. At the end of the project the collected data will be retained in secure storage for seven to ten years, as required by the University of Limerick’s research policy, after which it will be destroyed.

You are most welcome to request a copy of the results of the project.

**What if participants have questions?**

If you have questions about our project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact:

Cathy Grant (Research Student)                      Laura Purdy
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087-9349715                                         0612022819
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_This study has been approved by the ethics committee of the Physical Education & Sport Sciences Department. If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:_

_The Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee,_
Room E1003,
_University of Limerick,_
Limerick.
_Tel: (061) 234101_  _Email: ehsresearchethics@ul.ie_
Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet for Players
Title: Timeout for Irish, International Basketball: Consequences for coaches and players.

Thank you for showing an interest in this project. Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate we thank you. If you decide not to participate there will be no disadvantage to you of any kind and we thank you for considering our request.

What is aim of the project?

The purpose of this study is to examine the sources of development provided available to players and coaches at international level in Ireland. In addition, the players and coaches opinions and subsequent actions in relation to development will be recorded.

In-depth interviews will be conducted to gather information from previous International players. The data collected will be examined in order to determine the sources of development of players and what the players feel they must do to develop themselves as athletes. The study aims to determine whether Basketball Ireland plays an active role in the development of international players at senior level. Furthermore, attitudes towards the structure of international basketball in Ireland will be discussed and the players recommendations on how to improve the system will be recorded.

Another objective of this study is to record the reactions of the players to the decision made by Basketball Ireland to withdraw senior international teams from competition.
This provides an opportunity to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the present international structure in basketball and provide recommendations towards improving this structure based on the knowledge and experiences of players.

Finally results from this project will help identify the main sources of development for international players which can help in the restructuring of the basketball system with the aim of producing talented and expert players within Irish Basketball. This study will also highlight the resources available for players in Ireland to develop to their potential and determine whether this development is aided by the NGB or is self-sought.

**What type of participants are being sought?**

We are looking for International players, both male and female who were previous members of international squads for the 2009 season.

**What will the participants be asked to do?**

Should you agree to take part in this project, you will be asked to participate in formal (lasting between 1 & 2 hours).

**Can participants change their mind and withdraw from the project?**

You may withdraw from participation in the project at any time and without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.

**What data or information will be collected and what use will be made of it?**

This project involved a questioning technique where the precise nature of the questions to be asked have not been determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the interview develops. This involves the researcher asking questions about a particular topic.

In the event that the line of questioning does not develop in such a way that you feel hesitant or uncomfortable yo are reminded of your right to declining to answer any
particular question(s) and also that you may withdraw from the project at any stage without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind. Results of this project may be published but any data included will preserve anonymity.

The data collected will be securely stored in such a way that only the researcher (Cathy Grant) and supervisors (Dr. Laura Purdy and Dr. Sunnhild Bertz) will be able to gain access to it. At the end of the project the collected data will be retained in secure storage for seven to ten years, as required by the University of Limerick’s research policy, after which it will be destroyed.

You are most welcome to request a copy of the results of the project.

**What if participants have questions?**

If you have questions about our project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact:

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*This study has been approved by the ethics committee of the Physical Education & Sport Sciences Department. If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:*

*The Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee,  
Room E1003,  
University of Limerick,  
Limerick.  
Tel: (061) 234101  
Email: ehsresearchethics@ul.ie*
Appendix C: Written Consent Form for Coaches
Written Informed Consent Form

January 2010

**Title:** Timeout for Irish, International Basketball: Consequences for coaches and players.

Please ensure that you have completed all the steps below:

- I have read and understood the participant information sheet.
- I understand what the project is about, and what the results will be used for.
- I am fully aware of all of the procedures involving myself, and of any risks and benefits associated with the study.
- I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving any reason.
- I am aware that results may be published but that individual names will not be used.

Signed:

Date:
Appendix D: Written consent form for players
Written Informed Consent Form

January 2010

Title: Timeout for Irish, International Basketball: Consequences for coaches and players.

Please ensure that you have completed all the steps below:

- I have read and understood the participant information sheet.
- I understand what the project is about, and what the results will be used for.
- I am fully aware of all of the procedures involving myself, and of any risks and benefits associated with the study.
- I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving any reason.
- I am aware that results may be published but that individual names will not be used.

Signed:

Date:
Appendix E: Interview Guide – Coaches
Coach interview

Aim: The aim of this interview is to establish the coaching pathway that is available to Irish coaches based on the experience of top-level coaches. The questions will relate to your sporting background and entrance into coaching. Additionally, this study aims to record your understanding of the coaching standard in Ireland. Next, we will discuss the player pathway and standard of Irish basketball players. Lastly, this study will record your opinions relating to the current situation for top level coaches and players in Ireland.

Take your time to answer the questions. If you do not understand the question just ask me to repeat it. The interview will last approximately. You may refuse to answer any question if you wish to and you can withdraw from the interview at any time. Is there anything you wish to ask before we start?

Introduction Questions

Just to get things started can you tell me a bit about your sporting background, for example your experience in the sport or participation in other sports…

- What impacted your decision to coach?
- When did you start coaching? What levels did you coach?
- Tell me about your coaching experience
  1. success
  2. highlights

- Coaching Education- What are your qualifications? Have you completed any courses run by Basketball Ireland? Have you done other courses? Do you attend coaching clinics?
- With Regards to courses you have done; do you feel the course was delivered as designed?
- Do you feel that courses adequately cover the necessary content for the coaching environment?
- What has influenced your coaching?: (Other coaches, previous experience, reflection on performance; immediate, short term, end of season)
- How would you develop yourself as a coach? (Do you look outside Ireland for you information?)
- How useful has this approach been?
- Can you identify areas in your development that you think are most influential/important to your work?

**The International Scene**

Next I would like to talk about your experience with the international squads. Firstly, how would you prepare yourself for the international season?

- How would you compare international competition to the regular national league?
- Do you feel that coaching at SuperLeague level is sufficient for your own development?
- What other factors can enhance your opportunities to develop?
- What do you think of international teams not competing this year?
- How do you think this will affect Irish Basketball?
- What do you think is needed for Irish basketball to survive and become successful in competition?
- In your opinion what structures are necessary?
- Do you think the standard of Irish players is as good as, or better than that of other European countries? If not, why not?
- What do you think Basketball Ireland should be doing in order to develop players to reach this level?
- What do you think Basketball Ireland should be doing in order to develop while they are not participating in an international team?
- Do you think there should be a developmental panel for international teams if they are not competing?
- What do you think should be done during this period?
- Do you think there is a negative atmosphere associated with Basketball Ireland? How do you think this has come about? Have you any suggestions on how Basketball Ireland can re-establish a good working relationship with the coaches?
Basketball is the 3rd largest participation sport and highest participation sport for women in Ireland, so why do you think basketball is not a focus sport in Ireland?

**Basketball and other sports**

Lastly I would like to get your opinion relating to Basketball Ireland and other sports.

- In terms of what you have noticed and worked with (i.e. Basketball Ireland & clubs), what is needed in Irish basketball?
- Can you suggest structures/systems that work in Ireland (GAA, rugby)
- What do you need in terms of long term development in basketball?
- What is the Basketball Ireland offering in terms of development?

**Probes**

1. What effect did that have?
2. Could you expand a bit upon that for me please?
3. How did you feel about that?
4. Do you feel it is up to yourself to develop your abilities?
5. What value did you get from taking the course?
6. What did you take from it?

I think that is all the questions I have for you today, is there anything you wish to add to the conversation or put on the record relating to coach or player development in Ireland?

Thank you for your time
Appendix F: Interview Guide-Players
**Player Interview**

**Aim:** The aim of this interview is to establish the player development pathway available for Irish players based on the experiences of top level Irish players. The questions will relate to your sporting background and pathway from underage basketball to senior international level. Additionally, this study aims to record your understanding of the player standard in Ireland. Next, we will discuss the coach pathway and standard of Irish basketball coaches. Lastly, this study will record your opinions relating to the current situation for top level coaches and players in Ireland. Take your time to answer the questions. If you do not understand the question just ask me to repeat it. The interview will last approximately. You may refuse to answer any question if you wish to and you can withdraw from the interview at any time. Is there anything you wish to ask before we start?

**Background**

Just to get things started can you tell me a bit about your sporting background, for example your experience in the sport or participation in other sports…

- How long had you been a member of the international squad?
- What impacted on your decision to play at international level?
- What were the financial costs/time commitment demands associated with playing at international level?
- What advantages and disadvantages of playing at this level?

**The International Scene**

- How did you prepare for the international season?
- What do you think impacted on your development (e.g. coach/experience)?
- What expectations had you of the coach/training/competition?
- Did you feel you improved/developed as a player when you trained with International teams? If not, why not? If yes, why? In what way did you develop?
- What did you learn from the coach?
- How does your coach aid in your development at the end of the season?
• What differences are evident in these training sessions compared to the regular season that aided in your development?
• How does the approach to training, competition etc. adopted by the coach differ from that of your club coach?
• How would you compare international competition to the regular national league?
• Have you reached your potential as a player?
• What has aided in your development? Is there anything else that you feel would help with your development?
• How do you feel about not competing at international level this year?
• Do you think there should be a developmental panel for international teams if they are not competing?
• How do you think this will affect Irish Basketball?
• What do you think is needed for International basketball to survive and become successful in competition?
• In your opinion what structures are necessary?
• Do you think the standard of Irish coaches is as good as, or better than that of other European countries? If not, why not?
• What do you think Basketball Ireland should be doing in order to develop coaches to reach this level?
• What do you think Basketball Ireland should be doing in order to develop players while they are not participating in an international team?
• Do you think Basketball Ireland is seen in a negative light? Do you think this situation could have been avoided? Would you be willing to return to an international team if there was one next year?

**Basketball and other Sports**

Lastly I would like to get your opinion relating to Basketball Ireland and other sports

• In terms of what you have noticed and worked with (i.e Basketball Ireland & clubs), what is needed in Irish basketball?
• Can you suggest structures/systems that work in Ireland (GAA, rugby)
• What do you need in terms of long term development in basketball?
• What is the Basketball Ireland now offering in terms of development?
Probes

1. What effect did that have?
2. Could you expand a bit upon that for me please?
3. How did you feel about that?
4. Do you feel it is up to yourself to develop your abilities?
5. What value did you get from taking the course?
6. What did you take from it?

I think that is all the questions I have for you today, is there anything you wish to add to the conversation or put on the record relating to coach or player development in Ireland?

Thank you for your time