

S2 E19: Looking back at the season so far

Ricky Snodgrass 0:00

Hello, and welcome to this episode of the coaching podcast from British canoeing.

Ben Woodruff 0:07

Hello, good morning. Good afternoon, and welcome to the British Canoeing coaching podcast from wherever you may be listening to. My name is Ben Woodruff. I'm an eLearning and digital developer at British canoeing. And today, we've got something different for you on the podcast, something really special, we're going to have a recap of the season so far. And in that recap, we're going to be looking at some of the incredible discussions that have been had, we're going to be looking at the amazing learning opportunities that have been adding and reflecting on and prompting reflection on some of the amazing conversations that have taken place on the coaching podcast over the last nine months. Left in this year's British Canoeing coaching podcast season, we have another two instalments, or the coach interviews, another two instalments of discipline, specific coaching, and another two instalments of the coaching philosophy chats with Lee Pooley. So we felt it was a really good place to stop, take a breather, have a reflection, and think about everything that's been said, and prepare ourselves for everything that's yet to come on this season's British Canoeing coaching podcast. Firstly, I'm going to take you all the way back to Episode Four of this season, we're going to hear Lee talk Darren joy, about knowing what to coach and test pieces. It's a really good discussion. And it'd be really beneficial for you to listen back to

Lee Pooley 1:30

What would be nice to explore now is rather than looking back, and you know, please still refer to looking back. But what I'd be really keen to explore is, you know, what on earth gets you to a point to know what you are actually going to coach. So what approaches considerations or processes if you don't have to use those particular words, and it might feel quite, almost granulator way of doing it. But how on earth do you decide what to focus on? What do you just how do you decide what you are going to coach? I guess?

Darren Joy 2:12

Great question. That's a great question. I've given it some thought. And I think I have free kind of coaching, I don't know approaches or focuses that, you know, really depend on what's in front of me when I'm actually getting to that conclusion. So with my providership roles, you know, it's very much contact, content focused coaching, so there is a product, there's a syllabus, this is what they get, and actually, you know, that drops very much into kind of scripts and patterns that I've seen before and it just becomes not really coaching to me not actually becomes just delivery, you know, that that's, that's what it is. And I find from that kind of content focused coaching, or delivery, you know, I can I can deliver all day and then my clients from that really just take away what it is they want from that delivery from that, from that subject from that, that syllabus. I think really now, when I think about true coaching, I think it's now kind of solution based stuff that's where I'm kind of going at the moment where I really get to know people so I think the first thing would be you know, original client comes to me I've got to get as much information out of as possible. You know, I can't just suddenly go magic up here is the answer from you know, two minutes on it on a telephone call with them you know, that's just not possible. You know, some of the some of the biggest things I do is someone rings up and says I want to be in To do this you know that I want to go paddler a great free whitewater river well the first thing is having that kind of profiling conversation with them you know, that's one of the biggest things but you know, I really struggle just with the phone call I need to see it that's where I get my triggers from I need to I need to see stuff so very much You know, there's still not much talk talking in the car park it's literally get changes get on the water you know I'm you know, I'm very technical observers or coach so I need to see people I need to see people on there so very much a test piece so you know, example would be let's get on the river and you know, I won't even coach properly for the first 30 minutes which I think for some people probably are nerves in that you know, you know, I've paid for this coach to come along and I'm getting nothing from them but I really need to kind of tune into them and I just paddle with them. That's one of the things when I first get my direction so once I paddle with them for a bit, tried a few things out you know, we would call it a test piece in to kind of go or try this try that I've kind of kind of settled into it then I start getting my picture you know that's where I that's my process really, you know, that's where I started getting my first triggers of what I'm going to coach is finding out kind of bit more about who you know that's it's about them Lee okay.

Lee Pooley 4:50

That's really yeah, there's a couple of areas we're going to dig into a little bit more but you know, Weiss, you were talking there, you know, you talked about you know, gathering information, get enough Picture, it just reminds me of a book by Malcolm Gladwell about he talks, he talks about thin and thick slicing, about making quite judgmental thing, judgmental decisions very early on with very little evidence, and the importance of actually thick slicing. So that just sort of resonated with me there, if possible, if possible for the listeners, could dig into a bit on test pieces. So, you know, you coach education, lots of different on lots of different crafts in lots of different environments. And sorry, and lots of different environments. And how do you how do you decide the test piece? What is the test piece? And what are you looking for?

Darren Joy 5:45

I mean, that's a great question. So, you know, very environmental specific, I think, is the first thing really, you know, even on flat water, so, a test piece or a test piece for me would be to find a kind of a level, you know, where are they at? So I could turn around to me and say, you know, what, okay, I've been paddling great for years, you know, well, I've been skiing for 25 years, well, it just means I've been 25 times, I'm still not very good. So, you know, the test piece for me when I go skiing, is, when I first put the skis on, and I kind of shuffled towards the left and still feel like it's still my first day skiing. So a test piece for me would be kind of like finding, you know, their, their kind of their comfort points. And that's a big thing. For me, it's finding a comfort point, because, you know, when they're comfortable, they they're not stretched, you know, I'm not going to see kind of breaking points, I'm not going to see weaknesses, you know, if people are comfortable, you know, and, you know, as an example of a test piece, for me, I've used it recently would be that, you know, we can get onto a river, I could paddle down, you know, like the river Dart in the southwest for probably for half an hour. And that's the majority of the river done, you know, so and I've not seen much, you know, I've seen them do moves that they already do, because they know the river inside out. So a test piece for me would be, you know, trying to gather as much information about, you know, their entire performance. Now, if they're just going to perform and do what they normally can do, I can't get any more information from that. So it's going to be a challenging test piece. So something I've done more recently is, you know, I'm sure the listeners have come across this before, but just getting someone to paddle back up a rapid. So

it's so simple like that can give me huge amounts of information, and then I would follow them back up that rapid as well. So I can actually then almost mimic and go, well, why did they make that choice? Is that what I would have done? You know, is there a better way of doing this from, from behind as well, I can see stroke patterns, fitness levels, changes speeds, everything from confidence, you know, attack angles, you know, all the technical stuff, you can see all the tactical things coming up and actually looking at the water, are they are they just given it from the ad and just flapping their arms? You know, you can see the psychological stuff coming out, you can see, you know, you can't make it up there. You know, if they're starting to get fatigued, you know, have they got determination to keep themselves going. You know, this, there's so much I can see from those little test pieces, as opposed to just, let's get on and go for a paddle. That's where I think about the moment Lee.

Lee Pooley 8:12

Yeah, no, I think you know, that's just, I think that's really, really helpful. And I imagine there's people listening in go and thought of that or, okay, so you know, a bit of background because lots of people talk about test pieces, don't they, but actually, what you've done is given some great examples of, you know, paddle up the river, and then all of a sudden, just by that exercise of paddling up the river, you're gaining a phenomenal amount of information.

Ben Woodruff 8:40

Next, I'm going to take you back to episode nine, where said, talk to Greg Hitchin about his step up to the podium program and the challenges that he faced around that.

Sid Sinfield 8:50

And then I suppose I'm making an assumption here that one of the next biggest steps would have been when you joined the team at Lee Valley, and were then coaching during the day, as opposed to around the day. What I mean by that is, often with the talent, we're having to fit in around school, college and things like that. Whereas once you're on the program, you're coaching, during a, you know, on a more of an eight kind of five slot. So was that was that a change as well, when you when you came on to the to the program?

Greg Hitchin 9:22

Yeah, it was. Yeah, Yeah, I would agree. Yeah, I guess previously to coming down to the valley. I was the ence coach, based in in home Pierpont, and I've done that for more or less a full cycle, I think, before starting as what the time was the podium potential lead coach to come down to Lee valley. And yeah, certainly that one thing that really appealed to me was the How to have the opportunity to work with athletes on a full time basis. We with without as many restrictions in that, in that sense, you know, you've got pretty much unprecedented access, you've got absolutely probably the best facility in the world to offer. Right out of and that was it. Yeah, that's a big, big change. But one that I was certainly ready for and, and again, would create an as created more opportunities in terms of a coach to learn. Learning how to coach in that environment was definitely a change

Sid Sinfield 10:20

What was the different challenges of being in in that in that environment then then when you were working in the talent space, so what's the what's the difference as far as the talent coach, for instance, was listening to this, what they were thinking about the change? What is the other key difference, you think, for being involved in the full time, daytime current type of coach?

Greg Hitchin 10:44

Yeah, probably just a lot more bespoke to the individual. You're not trying to work with high numbers of athletes that you're trying to, you know, get through a volume of people to see in a day and cram your sessions in, and you're able to tailor specific sessions, to the athletes, to one or two athletes individual needs, rather than trying to incorporate, you know, four or 567 athletes into one session where you can't really necessarily work on one specific thing. Whereas here, we have the volume of sessions available to us that I can go on, you know, Thursday morning, we want to go and work on this with that athlete. And I can go and do that. And have less things less blockers in the way of being able to go about it is very much yeah, a lot more bespoke in terms of working to a part of this philosophy, and making it about them, rather than making the athlete have to adapt and adjust to what's going on.

Ben Woodruff 11:46

So now, we're going to head back to Pete, talking about sea kayaking with Eila Wilkinson, we're going to hear them discuss things along the lines of does she plan or does she do things off the cuff? And about saying no to people when the environment might not allow the fact of paddling that day? It's really interesting. Give it a listen.

Pete Catterall 12:05

Did you does that go with your mind-set? So some people that I speak to like if they can't work to a plan? They really struggle. So how do you do? How do you manage that? Because some people really like a plan other people can work just off the cuff and deal with what's in front of them. Is that something that's that you've learned to do? Or is that just like a natural thing for you to be able to do that?

Eila Wilkinson 12:28

That's a good question. I think it's possibly been there. But I think as I, as I've developed, it's become more and more adaptable. As you go through the coaching system, we're taught to create a session plan, mechanic session plan. And I've learned right from beginning that you might have a really detailed session plan. Fantastic. But you create that session plan last month, well a month, we don't know what the weather's going to be doing, what conditions we've got, or where we can actually go how your students are feeling or what's happening. So then you've got to change it because we'll follow that session plan to a degree, but just adapt it and change it and enhance it work. What have you I think, I think I've developed through the changes that's happened with the sea and with everything? I think that's development as a coach individual, isn't it?

Pete Catterall 13:16

Yeah, I think it's also an it's vital, isn't it? To be able to, to realize when you need to change plans, I think you could definitely get into a lot of trouble if you didn't have that real open mind-set of I need to change something to get the best out of the day. But it might equally be for, you know, safety reason, it might be

conditions of change. Maybe someone in your group isn't performing how they thought they would or you thought they would, and you need to make that change. I think having that real creative, sort of way of working and spontaneous way of working is really, really important, I think. But it's hard.

Eila Wilkinson 13:56

Having that, having that ability and having that competence to say no as well. A lot of times people come expecting to do something, and the conditions won't allow it. But they want to do it. And it's having that point of Okay, we can go have a look, you know that you're not going to be doing it. But we need to go and have a look because otherwise they just think we're getting the short end of the short straw. Yeah, having that ability to say, No, we do not stay.

Pete Catterall 14:25

Yeah. And that's, I think that's where you earn your money sometimes isn't it as a coach, as a leader with you know, whichever one you want to talk about, it's that it's really easy to get Oh, yeah, we'll do it because that keeps everybody happy. But it's not going to keep everybody happy in the end. It countless times I would have driven on priority to go to a bay to go and do something and then gone. Actually, we're not doing that we go somewhere else. And yeah, yeah, a friend of mine. I don't know if you know, Jules Fincher, he's based up in Scotland. He always talks about your plan a and then you have another Plan. But that's also called Plan A. And then you have another plan, which is also Plan A, because they're all the best thing. You can't do the first the plan as you go to another place is the next best job. He doesn't call it Plan B, because he sees that as, Oh, it's not as good as what we wanted to do. Whereas actually what you're doing is the right thing. I was like, I get where he's talking about that. And I think it's really interesting mind-set. Again, if we can't do Plan A, we're going to do a different plan A, because that just changes the way we think about things. So I like it was his AAA plan, he called it, I really like that. And do you...

Ben Woodruff 15:38

But it's also good coaches know what you said about going to the bay and then finding out you can't go paddling there for that reason. But just that whole experience, that's a good coaching tool in its own right as well. Looking at that,

maybe going taking 10 minutes out, go to the walk on the cliffs to have a look, see why we're not going to be using that environment state. So it's all part of coaching and adapting what we've got as well.

Pete Catterall 16:00

Yeah, absolutely. I can think of a few times where or what, you know, maybe a classic trip around the stacks. And I've got a group looking very disappointed at why we're not doing it. And we've been up to South stacking. And they've been really pleased we haven't been doing so. But it's easy to we could just say no and go somewhere else. And they don't get that learning experience, I think. Yeah. So it's a good call that and do you think so obviously, you trained as a coach, but also trained as a leader? And do you see those as you're doing one? Or you're doing the other? Or do you see it as like a huge one and then the other end and back to back to coaching and back to leadership? Or do you see it more as a kind of a blended approach to how you work?

Eila Wilkinson 16:43

That's the age old debate isn't it as a coach or leaders leader coach, in my mind-set, I do believe a leader has to be a good coach. And they were taught through the whole process that you're given top tips. But I do think you need to be a coach. And as a coach, you also need to be a leader. I do believe they go they go hand in hand.

Ben Woodruff 17:04

And we've been lucky enough to have other guests come on the podcast throughout the year, especially when we had Darren come on to talk about mental wellbeing. We're now going to listen to me charts him about anxiety around COVID and the return to paddle sport. And why as a provider, you need to be aware of mental wellbeing.

Yeah, so I'm just completely agree with you, Darrin. Just a quick one. So my previous question was about do you feel that as a coach is pressure to deal with mental health and these pieces? So the coach may be anxious themselves about returning anxious about the COVID protocols to follow it, keeping their

participants safe and making sure that they've got an enjoyable return to the water returned to play? How can a coach manage their own anxieties and mental health during this transition? Because not only their own that they're looking after? It's the participants as well?

Darren Clarkson 18:01

Yeah, for sure. I mean, that's a really interesting, very interesting question. And it's one that as coaches, providers guides, whatever name we're going to use, we sort of run on autopilot a lot when we will in sessions, because we decided know that this is how it works. But now that's not the case. And I think for a lot of providers, it's time to sit back again, pause, work out, not just what participants require from the session, but what we require from the session. You know, just because there's a guideline that says, if you're outdoor space, and you're over two meters, you don't need to wear a mask and add this on the other. If you feel comfortable about wearing one, why won't, you know do what feels right for you, but not at the expense of other people feeling uncomfortable? I think it's time that as providers, we sit and we pause and above and just think about what I can say what our participants want out of the session. What do we want out of the session? How will this affect us? What learning outcomes will we have? How will we develop after the session, perhaps get a friend to check in with your afternoon your section. So you know the day before the session before your friend you say I'm doing this session, maybe I'm a little uneasy. These are the points that I'm uneasy about the new session, check back in with your friend or maybe another coach, maybe another provider and then maybe have a debrief about it if you work in India independently if you work in with all cultures and providers check in with yourself with each other. Maybe put it in your log book if you if you're working with log book about how this feels, how each section differs. You know

Ben Woodruff 19:53

yeah 100% I think good coaching practices to reflect on sessions and add in in how you feel is definitely a good Step forward, rather than just thinking how the session went, how, how did you feel delivering the session that it feel good. And moving forward in that return to the water after COVID is something that's really important for coaches to consider. Because I mean, nine times out of 10, you have the best session in the world, you've absolutely loved it. It's been brilliant.

But the other one, it feels like the loneliest job in the world when it's you and the participants. So moving onwards, for coaches and providers who don't have much experience with considering mental wellbeing. How is the best way to educate yourself on the topic? And why would you educate yourself on the topic?

Darren Clarkson 20:38

I love that mental wellbeing so much better than issues?

Ben Woodruff 20:41

Yes. 100%

Darren Clarkson 20:44

Yeah, mental wellbeing a little bit. Let's take it out of the arena of paddle sport for a second. Yep. And the first question, so that it means why should I have experience of mental health and wellbeing? Not as providers? Why should I? Well, actually, it's quite simple. Usually, everyone should be aware of their own, needs and wants their own mental health check-up, almost a wellbeing check that everyone should be aware of that, we know that if we spend every meal of every day in junk food, we're going to feel like rubbish. We know that. We know that if we sit in front of the television, drinking Coke and drinking beer, we're going to feel rubbish. We know that. Yeah. So I think as coaches and guides, we can bring that in, what do we already know, about what makes us what makes us tick, and we see this, this is like, pre COVID stuff, but it is quite relevant. We see it a lot with the younger participants, and especially school groups, and young, younger members of clubs, where they go on a paddling trip for the day, maybe they're excited and giggling. And all they've done the night before, maybe it's a Canoe Club, we can do air, an early start, and all they've done is eat and Hairdo sweets, or the sweets obviously available. Love the sugary sweets, the bad a lot of energy drinks, the knocking back Lucozade tablets, like they're going out of fashion. You know, they're listening to loud music. And they're going to go on a sugar high, a lot within an hour, maybe they all crash bang the door, they get grumpy, they get tired, we see that quite a lot. We can use that example I've just given into a longer session post COVID how people interact when they're when they're hungry. Because they're not going to be necessarily used to put in

dietary requirements in place because they're now going out for the first time to participate in their activities. Again, they've sort of maybe need reminding of eating the tech food and hot drinks, stopping for snacks as providers, maybe we forgotten because maybe we're a little bit athletics. And we forget that people do need to stop snacks introductions. And some people, maybe they're going to start feeling alone and lonely. You know, we need to sort of bring all that back in. So as individuals, we need to be understanding of sort of mental wellbeing checks personally. How can we do that? How can we be sort of aware of our mental health and wet mental wellbeing? We can do it quite simply by the days that we walk around. You know, I didn't feel so good today on a simple level. Go back through and look at what affected our days. Did we have any triggers that made us feel anxious? Did we personally have triggers that made us feel stressed? Did we have things that made us feel loved and cared for? Well, my personal bugbears is when I in the days when you could share transport to livers because obviously that's a thing at the moment due to restrictions. Or you get in somebody else's car and you're going into a show and they've got loud drum and bass music. With a God knows how many beats per minute you get out of that car Personally, I get out of that car already anxious, perhaps be in a way and I'm already anxious when I get out of that car simulator game changing car parks, car stereos or music because music plays a massive factor in the way that our environments are set. So as providers again, how can we look at the environment in which we are leading our sessions and how this work does. But also, it's worth everyone. And I'm not just saying to provide a purchase here, you know, and guides, and everybody on sessions to look at like, courses, there's a lot of resources online. You know, there's that mind and calm resources. If you're feeling like you do need a lot of support with the mental health issues, and your mental wellbeing, please consult the NHS and a doctor. That's really important, there are places that you can get help. If you need help, there are places where you can gain the skills and the lives to help others. This, this is not the conversation to have about how that works. Because it's going to be individual for everyone. But I urge people to please, please, if you feel the need, contact your doctor contact the NHS. If you just want more knowledge. You can get a base knowledge online, you can buy books, or you can go on training classes. And this is really important to everyone.

Ben Woodruff 26:10

Yeah, I couldn't agree more Darren. One place I massively recommend is the Open University. They have some amazing free courses online, looking at

understanding anxiety, panic attacks, depression, PTSD, the whole spectrum of, of people's mental wellbeing. And it's a really good place to start and try and delve deeper into it. And it's quite a taboo subject sometimes. And it's one of those things where we need to become more comfortable as not just providers, leaders guys as a nation in opening up and talking about mental wellbeing and how important it is.

It's been really good to listen back to these clips and remembers of the journey we've taken for our season two of the British canoeing coaching podcast. Now there's plenty more to come. Like I say there's two more instalments of each of the miniseries, plus some extra bonus episodes in there as well with some more guests. We hope you're enjoying it so far. Have a good week everyone and watch out for more episodes of the British canoeing coaching podcast.