University of Southern Queensland

VOLUNTEER RUGBY COACHES IN REGIONAL QUEENSLAND: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF LIVED EXPERIENCE ON THEIR COACHING PHILOSOPHIES, PRACTICES AND DEVELOPMENT

A Thesis submitted by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to explore the complex role of volunteer rugby union coaches working in regional Queensland communities. Organised sport is an important contributor to regional communities with the volunteer coach having a vital role in contributing to the overall connectedness and health of these areas.

The research focused on five volunteer rugby union coaches with significant experience of living and coaching in regional Queensland and analysed how their lived experience informs their coaching philosophy, practice, and professional development. This associated exploration of their values, contexts, needs, and motivations offered valuable insights into how their role can be further supported and strengthened to improve outcomes for their regional communities, their sport's governing bodies, coach educators, and the coaches themselves.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was the methodological approach employed for this study. Its idiographic focus enabled the identification and subsequent analysis of the complexity of the coaching roles adopted by the participants. The interpretative analysis revealed five overarching superordinate themes: the formative development of personal qualities conducive to coaching, the significance of sport, the uniqueness of rugby, effective coaching pedagogy, and the challenges and rewards of coaching regional rugby.

This research proposes a number of recommendations for consideration by rugby's governing bodies including increased user-friendly or user-specified educational opportunities for volunteers; more locally-based regional development personnel with a particular focus on school contexts; and greater education and awareness regarding volunteer coaches' well-being. Underpinning these recommendations is an emphasis on the importance of seeking out and listening to the perspectives of volunteer coaches in regional areas.

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THESIS CERTIFICATION

This Thesis is entirely the work of David Robinson except where otherwise acknowledged. The work is original and has not previously been submitted for any other award, except where acknowledged.

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GLOSSARY

AFL	Australian (Rules) Football League.
AIC	Associated Independent Colleges, consisting of eight private/catholic schools in Brisbane and Ipswich.
ARU	Australian Rugby Union.
Capricornia	School sport region covering Central Queensland.
CSS	Combined Secondary Schools, made up of all players who attend all non-GPS/AIC schools in Queensland.
First /A Grade	A club's best team. Ability levels generally correspond so teams of less ability will compete, for example in second (B), third (C), fourth (D) grades etc.
GPS	Greater Public Schools, consisting of nine wealthy private schools in south-east Queensland.
Level 3	Until 2019, the Australian Rugby Union's invite-only Level 3 coaching accreditation was offered to coaches who were coaching or had aspirations to coach at the elite level (state-level schools/juniors, Premier Grade, [Senior Men], provincial and national teams).
NRL	National Rugby League.
Peninsula	School sport region covering Far North Queensland.
Reds	Queensland Rugby Union's professional team which competes in the Super Rugby competition against other Australian and New Zealand provincial teams.
QCRU	Queensland Country Rugby Union.
QRU	Queensland Rugby Union annual Super Rugby tournament.
The Cape	Isolated rural communities in Cape York Peninsula.
Wallabies	The informal name for the men's Australian Rugby Union team.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Participation in organised sport is valued for its capacity to provide people of all ages with physical, mental, and social health benefits and valuable life skills which will assist them throughout their lives (Hajkowicz et al., 2013; Hansen et al., 2003; Larson, 2000). Organised sport is an important contributor to regional communities, providing members with significant opportunities to interact with each other and to improve their overall health (Atherley, 2006; Mugford, 2001; Tonts, 2005; Tonts & Atherley, 2010). Committed and skilled sports coaches play a vital role in creating, maintaining, and maximising opportunities for participants living in these communities to involve themselves in organised sporting activities.

Establishing and retaining a pool of well-qualified and capable coaches in regional areas is a constant challenge for sports organisations (Mugford, 2001). The multi-faceted nature of the coaching role has been highlighted in research which recognises the coaching process as dynamic, complex and chaotic in nature (Cushion, 2007; Potrac & Jones, 2009a). Coaching is a negotiated, contentious activity involving competing demands and expectations from various stakeholders with varying degrees of motivation and power which can create an emotionally-charged and stressful environment (Cushion & Jones, 2006; Nelson et al., 2013; Purdy et al., 2008; Purdy et al., 2009; Purdy & Jones, 2011). This environment, along with the potential impact a coach can have on players' physical and emotional well-being (Anshel, 2012; Chelladurai, 1984; Murphy, 2005; Williams & Krane, 2015), has led to researchers examining not just the 'what' and 'how' of coaching but also investigating the needs, motivations and priorities of coaches (Cassidy et al., 2016; Danish et al., 2004; Griffiths & Armour, 2014).

Facilitating the development of these coaches' skills and capacities can enhance their self-efficacy and skills and potentially allow them the opportunity to coach at higher levels. This professional development is also beneficial to their communities and to their respective sports' governing bodies. This development process can be enhanced by understanding the

biographical, social, and cultural contexts of coaches and how this impacts their coaching practices. In addition, a coach's philosophical, ideological, and political perspectives also inform their role and warrant greater attention, particularly for those working in regional areas. Currently, there has been only limited research conducted that explores the lived experiences of regional sports coaches in the existing literature (Shaw & Allen, 2009; Hotham et al., 2021).

Educational theorists such as Peter Jarvis (2006), Carl Rogers (1961) and Paulo Freire (1993) have argued that identity and values development are informed by an individual's experiences and their effect on how they learn. In an instructional role, these experiences also inform the way they teach (Kolb & Kolb, 2010). Coaches' past experiences exert a significant influence on their coaching philosophy and methods (Light et al., 2014; Robinson, 2014) as well as what they choose to prioritise and learn about (Werthner & Trudel, 2009). These experiences are therefore vital in shaping a coach's identity and how they enact this role.

Organised sports participation is a social and cultural institution in Australia. According to the Australian Sports Commission's 2015-2016 AusPlay data, 3.2 million children (69%) participated in some form of organised sport or physical activity outside of school hours. On average, 70% of Australians between the ages of 15 and 44 participate in sport-related activities. Central to the provision of organised sport are volunteer coaches (Bouchet & Lehe, 2010; Crawford et al., 2009) who are engaged in a social, relational and pedagogical interaction within a cultural context (Cassidy et al., 2016). The concepts underpinning the coaching process such as power, agency, ideology and gender and the scale of sport's socio-cultural agency in Australia are explored in this study.

1.1 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

I have been a Level 2 rugby union coach for over twenty years, during which time I have coached Under 6's through to elite schoolboys and adults, including a period of employment as a semi-professional coach in regional Canada. The motivation for this study stems from my own extensive history of sports coaching (rugby union, rugby league, athletics and soccer) in Queensland's regional areas while working as a Physical Education (PE) teacher in schools. As is generally the case for many coaches, my coaching of school teams and athletes

almost always occurs in my own time before and after school, during lunch breaks and on weekends. As a voluntary coach of community teams, the demand on my free time is further increased. Despite Physical Education (PE) teaching experience and qualifications, the idiosyncratic nature of coaching in regional areas has presented me with significant challenges which are familiar to many volunteer coaches working in regional areas.

This study will examine and explicate the influence of lived experiences on five regional Queensland volunteer rugby union (henceforth to be referred to as "rugby") coaches and their respective philosophies, practices and development in order to elicit a deeper understanding of their "life-worlds" (Jarvis, 2006, p. 22). While specifically focusing on these coaches' lived experiences, including their respective social, cultural and historical contexts, in addition to their coaching role (which is underpinned by philosophical, ideological and political perspectives), broad insights concerning the complexities of coaching in regional areas will also be identified.

Regional Queensland was chosen as the focus for this study for a few reasons. Firstly, as a Queensland resident, it was easier for the researcher to access Queensland-based coaches for face-to-face interviews. Second, Queensland is one of the two states in Australia in which rugby is a major footballing code (although this position has become increasingly tenuous in recent years, according to sport participation data) (Australian Senate, 2017; Australian Sports Commission, 2018; Colgan, 2017). Finally, in Australia, Queensland is second only to Western Australia in terms of geographical size and remoteness from major centres and this provides significant challenges to its regionally-based sport coaches. While regional coaches from smaller states may not have quite the same distances with which to contend, it is likely they face similar challenges to the participants in this study and comparisons may be drawn from these Queensland regional coaches' experiences.

It is anticipated that the research will provide greater understanding of the experiences of volunteer rugby union coaches in a regional environment, including the benefits and impediments that influence their approach and what meaning they give to each aspect of their experiences. The focus on five rugby union coaches from regional areas will allow for a richness and depth of exploration and description by considering the multiple realities of the research participants which can differ across time and place. A greater understanding of these coaches' influences, values, contexts, needs and motivations will benefit their communities, the sport's governing body, coach educators, and the coaches themselves by providing a more

targeted, empathetic perspective to their development as coaching practitioners. This study will also provide recommendations to assist voluntary regional coaches and the sector more broadly.

1.2 RESEARCH FOCUS

The methodology chosen for this study, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), does not require a specific research question to be formulated, which avoids the researcher imposing their understanding on the phenomenon under investigation. This study is therefore underpinned by the following overarching guiding inquiry question: *How have the lived experiences of volunteer rugby coaches in regional Queensland informed their coaching philosophies, practices and overall development*?

This question encompasses several areas pertinent to this study including: each participant coach's respective coaching journey; the challenging/rewarding aspects of being a volunteer rugby coach in a regional community; the personal and professional demands of a voluntary coaching role; and successful strategies or approaches used by regional voluntary coaches.

1.3 METHODOLOGY

This study utilised Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore the lived experiences of five volunteer rugby coaches based in different areas of regional Queensland. A series of individual semi-structured interviews with each participant was the primary means of generating data. Each interview was transcribed verbatim and member-checked by the respective participant for accuracy, clarification and final approval. These transcripts were subject to sustained scrutiny and reflection throughout the data collection and data analysis process. These interviews were then developed into a narrative for each participant to assist in identifying subordinate and superordinate themes, related to the IPA approach, within the interview data.

1. DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMINOLOGY

Regional Queensland

The Queensland Government Statistician's Office (2017) defines regional Queensland as those areas of the state outside of South-East Queensland – an area which stretches from the New South Wales border north-west to Toowoomba, and north to Noosa (see Figure 1).

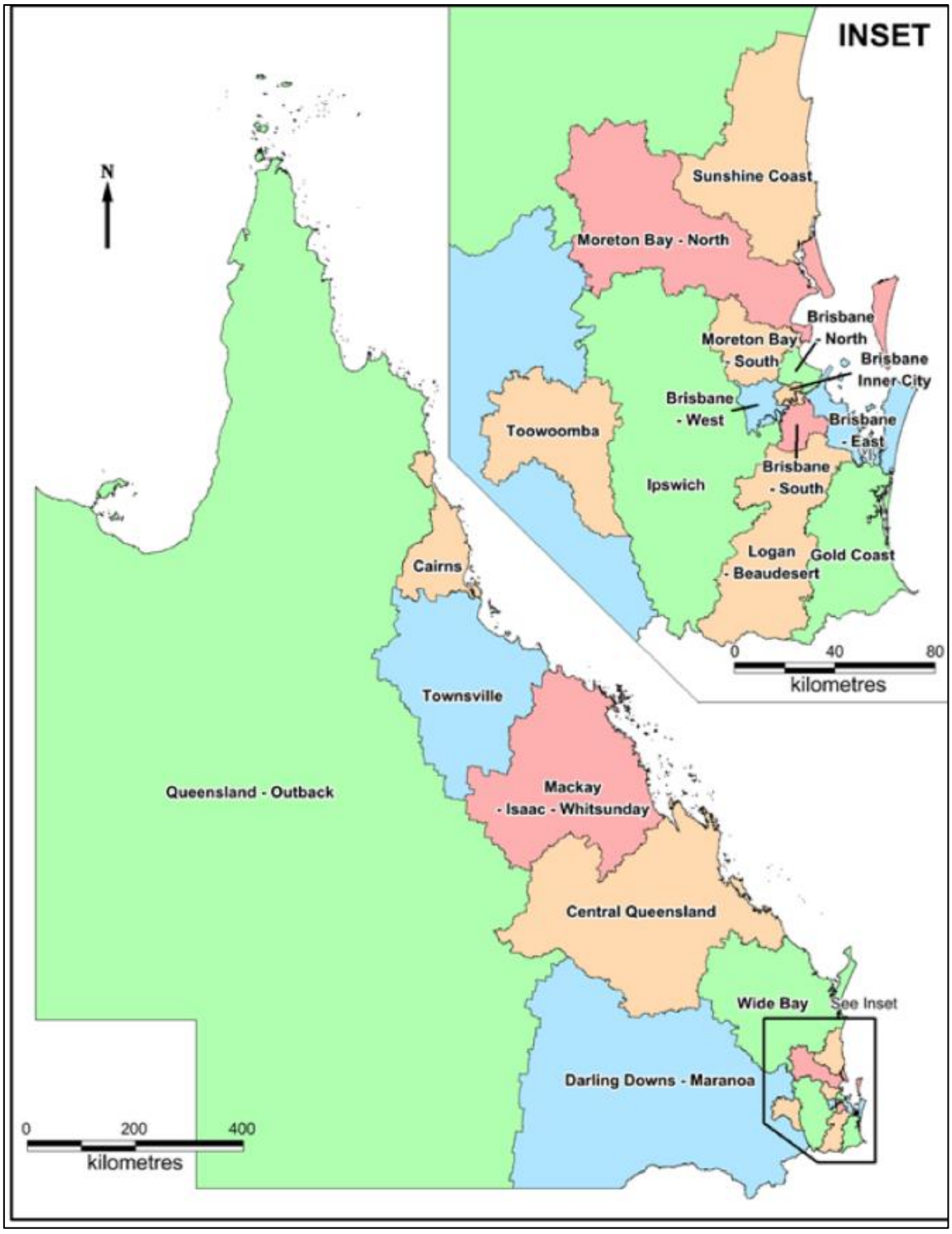
According to the Regional Australia Institute (2017) definition, "regional" Australia encompasses all towns, cities and areas that lie beyond the five major capital cities (Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth) regardless of their population size, geographical or socio-economic features (e.g. coastal, inland, agricultural, industrial, mining). The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2018a) categorises estimated Australian population levels into five zones - major cities, inner regional, outer regional, remote and very remote. Their research indicates that approximately:

- 17.7% of people live in inner regional areas;
- 8% of people live in outer regional areas; and
- less than 2% of people live in remote or very remote areas.

This national data breakdown is similar to regional Queensland, according to the Queensland Government Statistician's Office (2017).

Figure 1: Maps of regional and south-east Queensland

(Queensland Government Statistician's Office, 2017)



Remoteness is calculated using the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia which is based on the road distances one must travel to access services (ABS, 2018a). While a variety of locales are identified when applying the term "regional", for the purposes of this study, the

major distinguishing feature will be a community's distance from the headquarters of the relevant sport's governing body, which for the participating coaches in this study is Brisbane.

Brisbane is the capital city of Queensland and the major population base for the state. Utilising the Regional Australia Institute (2017) definition allowed for a wider range of locations from which to draw participants and subsequently a greater range of perspectives from a group that can be, in maintaining consistency with the chosen methodology, perceived as being homogenous.

Volunteers

A volunteer is someone who willingly donates unpaid help in the form of time, services or skills, through an organisation or group. The reimbursement of expenses in full or part (e.g., token payments for fuel) or small gifts (e.g., sports club T-shirts or caps) still qualify the recipient as a volunteer (ABS, 2018b). Formal volunteering involves people providing unpaid assistance within the context of an organisation, group or club (Ajrouch & Tesch-Roemer, 2017). Informal volunteering is providing unpaid help as an individual to other people (not relatives), such as mowing an elderly neighbour's yard. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics' 2019 General Social Survey of over 5000 households across Australia (ABS, 2021), approximately 25% of Queenslanders had undertaken unpaid voluntary work through an organisation in the previous twelve months. Across Australia, the same survey found that sport and physical recreation organisations were most likely to garner volunteers (39.1%), followed by religious organisations (23.3%) and education and training (21.8%). Regarding gender, the survey results found that while women were more likely to volunteer than men in 'parenting, children and youth' and 'health and welfare' organisations (30.5 %), men were more likely to volunteer in the areas of sport and physical recreation (47.5%).

Coaching and Types of Coaches

Coaching is the instructing, teaching and training a person or group of people to develop skills to improve their performance in achieving an identified goal. In a sporting context, the coach will seek to achieve these ends with an athlete or team. Within this broad definition, there are a variety of subgroups, the most important of which were identified by Duffy and colleagues (2011) who distinguished between participation-oriented coaches and performance-oriented

coaches. While participation-oriented coaches work with people who are participating for recreational purposes, performance-oriented coaches focus on competitive sport.

Recreational sport generally concentrates on the social interaction aspect of sport participation in which players will be more focused on fun, fitness and improving their own skill competencies. Competitive sport is focused on athlete/team performance as it relates to winning sporting contests against opponents with a similar goal. While recreational sport can be competitive, players in competitive sport are often required to commit more time to training (Bean et al., 2021; Lyle & Cushion, 2017). Coaches of both these categories of activity are often volunteers. For example, a community Australian Football League (AFL) club will play matches against other teams in a competitive league but players and coaches are not paid professionals. Volunteer coaches donate their time and efforts for no monetary reward (Volunteering Australia, 2021). However, professional and semi-professional coaches receive financial compensation for their time and expertise.

1.5 ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY

This thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the study and an overview of the importance of sport and sports practitioners, particularly the role of coaches, in Australian regional communities. With sport occupying such a central position in Australian life, better understanding the needs, challenges and lifeworlds of those who are integral to providing opportunities for participants to engage in community-level sport may have significant benefits for many Australians. The chapter also provides an overall statement of purpose and the central research foci guiding this study. This is followed by a brief overview of the methodological approach and a summary of the key terms used in the study.

Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature encompassing the place of sport in regional communities; volunteerism and coaches in regional communities; rugby's place in the sporting fabric of regional Queensland and the complex role of coaches.

Chapter 3 provides an explanation of the methodology chosen for the study and the theoretical framework underpinning it. This chapter seeks to position the study within the

interpretive paradigm and provides the rationale for the choice of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as the most appropriate approach for this research.

Chapter 4 provides the results of the interview data and presents the superordinate themes with their underpinning subordinate themes that emerged from the participants' collective lived experiences. This chapter seeks to predominantly present the participants' interpretations and understandings of their experiences.

Chapter 5 will discuss the findings of the study, provide a critical analysis of the participants' interpretations of their lived experiences and the significance of these relative to existing theory and literature.

Chapter 6 presents conclusions that seek to explicitly connect the research findings with the overarching guiding inquiry question. In addition, this chapter will suggest methodological considerations (including limitations), implications of the study's findings and propose recommendations for consideration.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

There are several areas of knowledge relevant to this study including: the place of sport in regional communities; volunteerism and coaching in regional communities; the complex role of the coach; the interaction between coaches' 'professional' and personal lives; issues for regional coaches in sports and type; and the nature and outcome of coach development in sports, specifically rugby. This review will position the research in the context of relevant literature and will highlight gaps that warrant further investigation into the influence of lived experience on regional volunteer rugby coaches' philosophies, practices and learning.

2.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF SPORT TO REGIONAL COMMUNITIES

Internationally, rural and regional communities in many countries experience health inequities and disparities with higher mortality rates, shorter life expectancy, higher rates of obesity and chronic diseases (Abildso et al., 2021; Barreto, 2017; Marcen et al., 2022; Walia & Leipert, 2012). Living in rural areas has also been associated with higher rates of poverty, fewer community resources, less access to health services and transportation services, and greater geographic dispersion (Umstattd Meyer et al., 2016; WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2010; Wilson et al., 2020). Researchers have highlighted the importance of physical activity and sport in improving regional and rural community members' health outcomes and overall quality of life (Devine et al., 2012; Farag et al., 2010; Marcen et al., 2022).

Australia's regional communities, in comparison to metropolitan areas, also reflect several issues being experienced in the international context. They are characterised by residents earning generally lower incomes; reduced access to services and infrastructure involving health, education and transport; decreasing employment opportunities due to changes to industry; extensive distances; a significant proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; and older populations and isolation (Clearinghouse for Sport, 2021a).

Organised sport has been promoted as an institution that may mitigate many of the issues that are often endemic to regional communities. Participation in organised sport in Australia plays a vital role in community engagement and identity, (Mugford, 2001; Sheppard et al.,

2019; Tonts & Atherley, 2010; Tonts, 2005) and in doing so contributes to regional areas socially, financially and culturally (Hoye & Nicholson, 2012) and the overall health of community members (Eime & Harvey, 2018; Eime et al., 2015). The physical health benefits associated with participation in sport and physical activity are well documented (Miller et al., 2016; Reiner et al., 2013; Warburton et al., 2006). In general, increasing the frequency, intensity and duration of physical activity lowers the risk of developing cardiovascular disease and colon, breast, lung, prostate, and endometrial cancers (Lacombe et al., 2019; Tian & Meng, 2019). Physical activity can also benefit those who have developed major musculoskeletal conditions such as osteoporosis and osteoarthritis (Reis & Gibbs, 2012). In terms of health risk factors relevant to developing cardiovascular disease, people living in Australia's regional areas were more likely to be overweight or obese, smoke tobacco, consume more alcohol and sugar and have higher blood pressure than those living in major cities (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2021). This is especially relevant to rural and regional areas where cardiovascular mortality and morbidity rates are higher than in major cities due to other factors such as lower incomes, lower levels of education, less stable avenues of employment and difficulties accessing health professionals, services and facilities conducive to undertaking preventative actions such as physical activity and sport (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2021; National Rural Health Alliance, 2015).

Those who incorporate regular physical activity into their daily lives during childhood and adolescence will often maintain these through to adulthood. Children's active participation in physical activities should therefore also be encouraged on the grounds of its long-term benefits (Baptista & Janz, 2012; Paul et al., 2020). Sporting clubs have a significant role to play in achieving this. As Eime and colleagues (2015) observe, community-based sport participation provides a considerable contribution to overall health, thereby enhancing leisure-time physical activity for both children and adults. As well, research has found that participating in regular sport and physical activity promotes psychological health and wellbeing (Clough et al., 2016; Gerber et al., 2014; Murphy et al., 2020; Saxena et al., 2009).

While cognisant of the possibilities that community sporting clubs (both regional and metropolitan) can provide, they can also inadvertently exclude and marginalise people due to age, ethnicity, gender and income (Collins & Kay, 2003; Kennedy & Kennedy, 2015a; Tonts, 2005). Local sporting clubs, through adopting more inclusive strategies, can provide greater opportunities for community members to interact, with the added benefit of building their

own membership depth (Edwards, 2014; Frost et al., 2013; Kennedy & Kennedy, 2015b). For example, Frost and colleagues (2013) found that by expanding their traditionally male-dominated focus to become more socially inclusive of women and families, regional Victorian AFL clubs "thickened" social networks across a wider range of community members with a resultant growth in community participation (p. 32). The development of such connections between individuals and the creation of social networks, known as social capital, has far reaching benefits including "the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (Putnam, 2000, p. 19). Putnam's research (1995, 2000) into social capital and a decline in participation in various political and social activities, or civic disengagement, has explicitly referenced community recreational activities as a significant setting for social capital to develop (Jarvie, 2003).

Putnam (2000) elaborates further by identifying three types of social capital: bonding, bridging and linking. Bonding social capital refers to bonds between people in similar situations such as family members, close friends and neighbours. These similarities, although helpful in bringing people together, may also act to exclude others who do not share these similarities. Bridging social capital refers to looser connections with, for example, colleagues and acquaintances. While such ties may broaden one's scope of social contacts, the strength of these connections tends to be weaker (Spaaj, 2009). Putnam (2000) contends bonding social capital is inward looking and reinforces exclusive identities and promotes homogeneity. As such, it is seen as an important source of social support with members working together to help others to "get by". Bridging social capital is considered to be outward looking, promoting links between diverse individuals and allowed people to "get ahead" by providing access to resources and networks that might be otherwise unavailable (Claridge, 2018, p. 1). Linking social capital joins people from heterogenous groups together by including dissimilar people from varied social situations both inside and outside the community, thus enabling members access to an even greater range of resources and opportunities (Woolcock & Narayan, 2001).

Whereas Putnam sees social engagement as a way of strengthening civic engagement, Bourdieu (1986) views the contexts and relationships through which a person might build social capital as being more self-serving, allowing them to gain greater cultural and even economic capital as well as promoting and reproducing social inequalities (Gemar, 2020). In the community sport setting, Maxwell and colleagues (2013) recognise that practices leading

to the inclusion of one social group may lead to the exclusion of another. Similarly, Bailey (2008) suggests that social inclusivity in all areas of Australian sport may not succeed if the factors which perpetuate feelings of exclusion remain, such as lack of trust in the providers of sports activities. However, national and international studies (Fehsenfeld, 2015; Hoye & Nicholson, 2012; Janssens & Verweel, 2014; Jeffress & Brown, 2017; Tomiyama, 2016; Zhou & Kaplanidou, 2018) indicate that participation in sporting clubs and events is strongly linked with traits associated with high social capital such as developing wider social networks and engaging in pro-social activities (Biernat et al., 2020).

Sports clubs can provide a focal point for regional towns and their surrounding areas and are often considered a constant amidst the changes associated with turbulent times (Townsend et al., 2002). These include catastrophic environmental events including drought, bushfires, and floods, which are particularly devastating to rural, regional and remote areas of Australia and through to the recent COVID-19 pandemic (Rutherford, 2020). Organised sport can offer an effective way to engage people who are disadvantaged or isolated within their communities to develop their social connections (Skinner et al., 2008). This is also considered to be particularly relevant to rural, regional and remote communities of Australia (Frost et al., 2013; Onyx & Leonard, 2010) where social health problems are becoming more prevalent as populations decrease and employment opportunities in traditional industries like agriculture and mining decline (Bice, 2013; Peters et al., 2019).

Sport can offer financial benefits to communities through the creation of infrastructure and hosting of significant events, such as the Sydney Olympics in 2000. While staffed primarily by a volunteer workforce and not necessarily run for profit, such events often generate substantial financial benefits for the local community (particularly smaller ones) via increased demand for accommodation, localised transport, food and drink services and other flow-on opportunities (Fraser Coast Regional Council, 2021; Gibson & Stewart, 2009). For example, Hervey Bay, a coastal community in Queensland with an approximate population of 53 000 people (ABS, 2016), has hosted the Queensland Junior State Cup Touch carnival for the past several years. It involves between 6000-8000 people visiting the district for the three-day event held during the winter school vacation. Estimates of visitor expenditure in the Fraser Coast region over the course of the competition are approximately $AUD2 million and the event is underpinned by hundreds of volunteers operating and maintaining facilities and fields, refereeing, coaching and managing teams (Fraser Coast Regional Council, 2021).

While sport is important to regional communities, these communities are also important to a sport's governing body both operationally and symbolically. According to Queensland's State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning department (2022), Queensland is the most decentralised of Australia's mainland states with almost half the population (49%) living in its capital city, Brisbane. Nearly all State Sporting Organisations (SSOs) such as the Queensland Rugby Union, Queensland Rugby League, Football Queensland, AFL Queensland, Queensland Cricket and Netball Queensland are headquartered in Brisbane. Residents of regional Queensland are estimated to account for almost one-third (29%) of the total state population (Queensland Government Statistician's Office, 2017) and, a significant proportion are potential sporting consumers/contributors (as players, spectators, viewers, club members, merchandise buyers and volunteers). Queensland's total land area is approximately 1.8 million square kilometres, with 98% of this classified as outside of south-east Queensland (Bureau of Meteorology, 2018). Such vast distances can present difficulties in maintaining strong relationships between a sport's administrators, game development staff and regionally-based stakeholders (Robinson, 2017). As such, the extent and type of sporting facilities found in regional communities and the number of regionally-based participants engaged in sporting events may act as a barometer of a sport's overall health including the strength of the link with their governing body (Robinson, 2002).

Sport in regional and rural Australia also possesses a symbolic value which contributes to both regional communities and sports' governing bodies by combining two integral motifs in the traditional Australian national image, 'the Bush' and sport. The sentimental allure of the young sportsperson from the Bush learning their skills without the facilities/equipment available to players in metropolitan areas, adapting their limited resources to further hone their playing style, travelling long distances to compete and then coming to the city to succeed at the highest levels (while maintaining their manners, humility and love of their home town) has been powerful and enduring. As Muller (2016) contends, this type of backstory feeds into the "underdog story trope that pervades Australian culture (and) goes hand in hand with our belief that everyone deserves a fair go" (Muller, 2016, p. 1).

The appeal of this "rural-nationalist narrative" (Hutchins, 2002, p. 34) is perhaps best exemplified in arguably Australia's most revered sportsman, Sir Donald Bradman, who famously honed his formidable batting skills as a child in the country town of Bowral hitting

a golf ball against a corrugated water tank with a cricket stump. Visitors to the Bradman Museum in Bowral can view the film taken of Bradman as an adult engaging in this feat. Bradman "represented the mythical values of an Australia anchored in the bush, one that treasured the practical and the resourceful, was self-taught, took quiet pride in achievement and never, ever cashed in" (Hutchins, 2002, p. 39). Contemporary media coverage still treats sport played in "the bush" and the athletes it produces with reverence. These commonly involve recounting incidents reflecting the romantic simplicity and innocence of sport in country areas (FitzSimons, 2015, 2018; Piesse, 2011; Scanlon, 2021;), describing the difficulties associated with training and competing in such environments (Abram, 2021; Ikin, 2018; Meares, 2003), extolling the attributes of players who have come from regional areas (Lutton & Tuckerman, 2011) and praising elite sportspeople from rural and regional communities for providing aspirational models for young regional players (Lane, 2010; McClellan, 2015; Scherer, 2019).

Two of Australia's professional football leagues, the National Rugby League (NRL) and Australian Football League (AFL) have recognised the importance of maintaining regional connections to their respective codes. While the AFL organises its clubs to play some pre-season matches in regional communities, the NRL has frequently scheduled premiership matches in regional centres in Queensland and New South Wales throughout the last several seasons. ARL Commission chairman Peter V'landys explained the rationale behind this strategy:

> One of the Commission's major objectives in the next three years is to reinvigorate Country Rugby League. Accordingly, there is no better way than to take the game's stars to country heartland and inspire participation at all levels. (NRL Media, 2020)

In 2021, as NRL premiership games were re-located due to COVID restrictions, previous forays into regional areas were seen have been a sound investment as Mackay in northern Queensland hosted two semi-finals in front of capacity crowds and provided significant positive economic impact to the community (Loftus, 2021).

The recently initiated Queensland Rugby Union 'Reds to Regions' campaign also seeks to connect with regional stakeholders to further promote the game. In this initiative, Queensland Rugby contracted players billeted in regional areas to visit local clubs and schools. This has resulted from the recognition that Queensland's only professional rugby

franchise, the Reds, is based in Brisbane and needed to be seen as representing the rest of the state as well (Tucker, 2021).

2.3 VOLUNTEERISM AND COACHES IN REGIONAL COMMUNITIES

Sport is a major source of social capital in regional communities (Australian Sports Commission, 2018; Mugford, 2001) and volunteering is a vital aspect in its creation and maintenance at the community level (Onyx, 2016). According to Sport Australia's 2021 AusPlay report, almost three million Australians volunteer in the sports sector annually. Without volunteers, the viability of many community sporting clubs would be compromised, and opportunities for many Australians to participate and succeed in sport would be limited (Sport Australia, 2021). The input of volunteers in sport has been estimated to contribute billions of dollars of unpaid work to Australian communities annually (Clearinghouse for Sport, 2021b), thereby supporting Zakus and colleagues' (2009) assertion that "Australian sport at any level cannot function without volunteers" (p. 989).

Men are more frequently involved in sports volunteerism (Sport Australia, 2021). The roles that volunteers fill in community sports clubs are wide-ranging, including but not limited to coaching, timekeeping, umpiring, scoring, running the canteen, marking the fields, cleaning facilities, and serving on the club committee (Crawford et al., 2009). In regional communities, volunteers may also frequently provide land, labour and resources in the construction and maintenance of sporting facilities as well as fundraising (Tonts, 2005). Research has indicated that fathers often volunteer for the formalised and public roles of coach and assistant coach while mothers perform the less visible, but still critical volunteer roles such as fundraising (Trussell, 2016). Research undertaken by Balish and colleagues (2018) analysing the link between volunteering in sporting associations and community size across 19 countries found that participants from smaller communities (between 2001 and 20 000 residents) were more likely to volunteer, relative to participants from larger communities (greater than 500 000 residents). Reflecting a similar trend in Australia, Sport Australia chief executive Rob Dalton stated: "Volunteering is more common outside of the major cities where population density is lower. This perhaps reflects the strong role sport clubs play in rural and regional social and community life" (Kennedy, 2021, p. 1).

In community sports clubs, the most common non-playing role is coaching (Sport Australia, 2021). In these settings, coaches are almost universally volunteers and are often the most visible representatives of their sporting organisation's quality and effectiveness (Cuskelly et al., 2006; Harman & Doherty, 2014). According to Bailey and colleagues (2013), children will more likely remain involved in a sport if coaches' behaviours and practices align with the needs of the young participants, including having fun with peers, learning new skills, and feeling competent. This is significant as poor coaching has been identified as a major reason given by players for leaving a sport (Football Queensland, n.d.). In regional communities, potential participants often deal with stressors such as long travel times, less facilities and financial issues pertaining to transport and competition costs (Clearinghouse for Sport, 2021a). The Australian Football League (AFL) Victoria's review of country football (2011) found that skilled coaches were a crucial element in regional players choosing to participate in that sport. Outside of training and playing duties, coaches may also provide socially beneficial opportunities for their communities and clubs through utilising relationships within their coaching networks to organise tours, host visiting teams and coordinate carnivals. Considering their contribution to their clubs and communities, Bouchet and Lehe's (2010) contention that volunteer coaches are the "lifeblood" of sport organisations is appropriate. It has also been asserted that a lack of qualified and skilled coaches can threaten the ongoing operation of a sport in regional communities (Mugford, 2001).

According to the most recent AusPlay data, there has been a decrease in the number of sport volunteers in Australia (Sport Australia, 2021b). In their 2009 report, *The Future of Sport in Australia*, Crawford and colleagues warned that the cost to sport volunteers (physically, financially, time-wise), including coaches, may outweigh the benefits of their participation as they seek to balance work and family commitments and increasing regulatory demands. These demands have increased as clubs look to operate post-COVID19 with concerns about the additional layers of administration and organisation imposed on coaches potentially discouraging volunteers from taking on vital roles (Elliott et al., 2021). This situation may also contribute to a decline in the volunteering rates overall in Australia (AIHW, 2021b) which have also been exacerbated by issues identified by researchers for sporting associations including parental expectations, the increasing bureaucratic demands of sports clubs, risk management, fund-raising pressures, personal issues involving work/family commitments, and fears of litigation and abuse (Cuskelly, et al., 2004; Riot, et al., 2008; Rundle-Thiele & Auld, 2009). In addition to these, Louw (2020) identified scheduling inflexibility, poor

communication, a perceived lack of appreciation and lack of alignment between the values of the volunteer with those of the club as contributing to volunteers ceasing involvement.

As regional youth leave their communities to pursue employment and education opportunities in larger cities, there is a danger of "volunteer burnout" for the same small group of regional people who over-commit themselves to other voluntary tasks such as the Rural Fire Brigade, the Country Women's Association (CWA) and various sporting and recreational activities (Holmes et al., 2019; Tonts, 2005). Problems associated with a lack of jobs, declining infrastructure and services as well as an ageing population have also impacted the number of volunteers available to help with coaching, administration and operation of sports clubs in country areas (Holmes et al., 2019; Mugford, 2001; Skinner et al., 2008; Townsend et al., 2002).

2.4 RUGBY IN REGIONAL QUEENSLAND

Rugby is strongly associated with the English Public School system from which it gradually grew during the first half of the 1800s. It was one of a group of sports viewed as vehicles for building "healthy, vigorous, heterosexual men who could bring their skills, their talents, their healthy bodies and morally pure minds to the service of the nation and the empire" (Polley, 2011, p. 17). Rugby, according to former Australian rugby captain, Mark Loane (2008) was seen as strongly correlated with what was described as "muscular Christianity", a paradigm which saw physicality as an avenue to grow spiritually and morally.

> If the Muscular Christians and their disciples in the public schools, given sufficient wit, had been asked to invent a game that exhausted boys before they could fall victims to vice and idleness, which at the same time instilled the manly virtues of absorbing and inflicting pain in about equal proportions, which elevated the team above the individual, which bred courage, loyalty and discipline, which as yet had no taint of professionalism and which, as an added bonus, occupied 30 boys at a time instead of a mere twenty two, it is probably something like rugby that they would have devised. (Dobbs, 1973, p. 89)

With its codified rules, rugby expanded into the wider community as clubs were formed by graduates of the public schools, predominantly upper middle-class men who wanted rugby to maintain its major aim of building character through rugged, but gentlemanly, physical

exertion and heavy contact. The pursuit of victory on the field was considered subordinate to this ethos and so rugby advocated the ideal of amateurism, whereby payments would not be allowed to sully its ideals and the game was played for pleasure and camaraderie (Skinner et al., 2003).

According to Horton (2009), rugby was a feature of the cultural hegemony of Britain as it manifested its imperial ambitions across the globe. Sport proved an effective way of imbuing the ideals of the British ruling class into the colonies, as exemplified by the tenets of Muscular Christianity. Like cricket, rugby was introduced to colonials via graduates of the public schools who had become army officers, teachers and industrialists (Skinner et al., 2003). Rugby was first played in Queensland in the early 1880s. By 1886, Brisbane had 17 rugby clubs and the game had begun to spread to Queensland's regional centres (Horton, 2006). Howell and Howell (1992) assert that rugby played a strong role in developing the sporting culture of many Queensland towns during this time. As the major private school winter sport in the south-east of Queensland, it was invariably played by wealthy pastoralists' sons when they attended boarding school in Brisbane (Horton, 2006). Such men became keen players and sponsors of the game upon returning to their regional communities. Mining communities, which had become centres of regional economic growth, embraced the game over its rival, Australian Rules Football. Charters Towers, for example, was Queensland's second city during the 1890s and often toured teams to play against other rugby-playing towns like Mt Morgan, Ravenswood, Townsville and Rockhampton. These games afforded regional towns and players a chance to build their status at a regional and national level as "players, followers and townspeople all gloried in the prowess of the rugby team" (Howell & Howell, 1992, p. 258). Regional team victories over Brisbane-based teams were especially savoured. According to Bickley (1982, p. 26):

> Old Towersites for years never let anybody forget what happened when Brisbane Past Grammars visited Charters Towers in 1892 (and were defeated). Even at this length of time, it can be imagined how the almost unknown country boys gloried in their overthrow of the much boomed city slickers.

So strong was rugby in north Queensland that in 1912, a representative side from there defeated the Queensland team 21-3. Purcell (n.d.) reports that northern players were particularly pleased with this result as they had expressed dissatisfaction with being under-represented in the state team.

The game had become a vehicle for expressing regional identity and parochialism that reflected a city/country divide. This would also impact on the relationship between rugby's governing bodies in Queensland and New South Wales. As the founding rugby union organisation in Australia, Horton (2009) explains that the New South Wales Rugby Union (NSWRU) "had assumed the mantle of controllers of the game" (p. 969). This resulted in an enduring tension between the NSWRU and the Queensland Rugby Union (QRU).

The NSWRU had also played its part in allowing a class divide to become a schism which informed the nature of rugby league in Australia. In England, rugby league had originally emerged from tensions between the Northern Union, made up of rugby clubs from the northern counties such as Yorkshire and Lancashire, who began seeing rugby's popularity as an opportunity to profit from gate takings as well as provide funds to compensate players for loss of income due to playing. These clubs' proposals to change the rules pertaining to these issues were rejected by the London-based Rugby Football Union, who upheld the amateur ideals of playing and watching rugby without payment (Skinner et al., 2003).

The Northern Union clubs' successes allowed them to attract players through financial incentives and to pay administrators (Dyer-Bennett et al., 1996). Consequently, in 1895, the Rugby Football Union regulated in its constitution against any form of professionalism in the game declaring that "if men couldn't afford to play, then they shouldn't play at all" (Fagan, 2006). This left the Northern Union little choice but to codify its own rule variations to the playing of rugby allowing participants to be paid, subsequently leading to the game now known as rugby league.

Similar tensions began to emerge in Australian rugby a decade later. Despite attracting large gate receipts from games, the NSWRU refused to change its stance regarding proposed match payments for players (Fagan, 2006). Mindful of the profits it was accruing from match attendances, the NSWRU's attitude towards compensating players, especially those who lost work due to injuries sustained on the field, fed into a growing class divide in Sydney and later in Brisbane. A breakaway group of players, supporters and sponsors created the New South Wales Rugby League (NSWRL) which played its first games in 1908. It became more popular than rugby union within a few years, "fuelled by a good deal of anti-English sentiment and a sense of alienation. The working class in Sydney readily adopted Rugby League football viewing it as a symbol of their struggle, as the union game so apparently reeked of English imperialism" (Horton, 2009, p. 1617). Those who played the amateur sport

of rugby were mostly upper class, able to afford to play for no financial reward and risk physical injury as their employment did not require manual labour. The image of rugby league as a working-class sport has endured, fuelled by rugby's continued position as the pre-eminent football code played by wealthy private schools.

Despite the new league game growing in popularity in areas of regional Queensland, rugby remained the dominant football code in the state for the next twenty years (Diehm, 1997). However, the decision to suspend the playing of all rugby in Queensland for most of the duration of World War 1 (1916-18) allowed rugby league to establish a strong foothold in schools and the wider community during this time. This effectively forced the game into recession in the state until it re-emerged in 1929 (Skinner et al., 2003). During the 1930s, the revival of rugby in Queensland strengthened however World War 2 forced rugby into recession again while rugby league became more entrenched as Queensland's major football code. It was not until the early 1960s that rugby began to rebuild itself in Queensland. The Queensland Country Rugby Union (QCRU) was formed in 1965 and representative teams began to be selected in 1966. Over the next thirty years, rugby in regional Queensland was a popular amateur pastime promoted primarily by men who had played the game at school. It also provided representative players the chance to regularly compete against international touring teams such as Argentina, Scotland, Italy and Canada as well as engage in tours of New Zealand and the Pacific islands.

Rugby became openly professional at all levels in August 1995. In response to this new commercial imperative, rugby playing nations had to pull down and re-construct their club and competition structures (O'Callaghan, 2021). In Australia, franchises were created to compete in a new inter-provincial competition spanning three countries. This competition was known as the Super 12 and was established by SANZAR (South African, New Zealand and Australian Rugby). It consisted of three Australian teams (based in Sydney, Brisbane and Canberra), four teams from South Africa (based in Cape Town, Durban, Pretoria and Johannesburg) and five teams from New Zealand (based in Auckland, Wellington, Waikato, Dunedin and Christchurch). Subsequently, the traditional pathways for elite players changed and the funding models for game development, schools and club rugby were also significantly impacted.

Since then, the game at club level in Queensland's metropolitan areas and regional centres has struggled. This is a trend that, according to Roy Morgan Research, has continued with

participation in rugby union in Australia falling drastically from 148 000 active players in 2001 to 55 000 in 2016 (Colgan, 2017). These figures appear to support Skinner (2001) who attributed the falling levels of participation and support to the commercialisation and corporatisation of rugby in the late 1990s. Skinner believed this approach undermined the game's traditional values and produced significant tensions between local club administrators and the professionalised governing bodies. The Australian Rugby Union's 2016 annual report attempted to dispute these figures, arguing instead that total participation was more than 270 000 people. They defined participation as five or more games or structured sessions (Rugby Australia, 2017), which meant their numbers were inflated by including school students who took part in an introductory modified rugby programme and those who participated in school rugby carnivals held over several days. The outlook therefore appears nowhere near as positive as the ARU's figures suggest. Many of the participants who would be counted in the ARU's figures would be students at non-rugby playing schools who are provided a rudimentary introduction to the game over a period of a few weeks by rugby development staff during, for example, their physical education lessons. These programmes have been a key component of rugby's governing bodies' strategies to expand into communities unfamiliar with the game (Rugby Australia, 2020).

Perceptions of elitism continue to be a barrier as rugby has traditionally been the major winter sport played by wealthy private schools in Queensland's south-east corner such as those comprising the Greater Public Schools (GPS) and The Associated Independent Colleges (AIC) (see Table 1). Schools which are not in the GPS or AIC system are part of the Combined Secondary Schools (CSS). These schools are grouped into regions as shown in Figure 2. While there are twelve sport regions in Queensland school sport, only ten participate in the Queensland CSS annual championships (Capricornia, Darling Downs, Northern, Peninsula, Wide Bay, Sunshine Coast, South Coast and the metropolitan regions – East, West and North). Prior to 2019, two Queensland Schoolboy teams would be chosen from a selection carnival in Brisbane played between representative teams from the GPS competition, the AIC competition and the annual CSS championships. However, in 2019, the Queensland School Sport board altered rugby's selection process, requiring all players wishing to be selected in the Queensland school teams to participate in the Queensland schools' regional carnival played in late May.

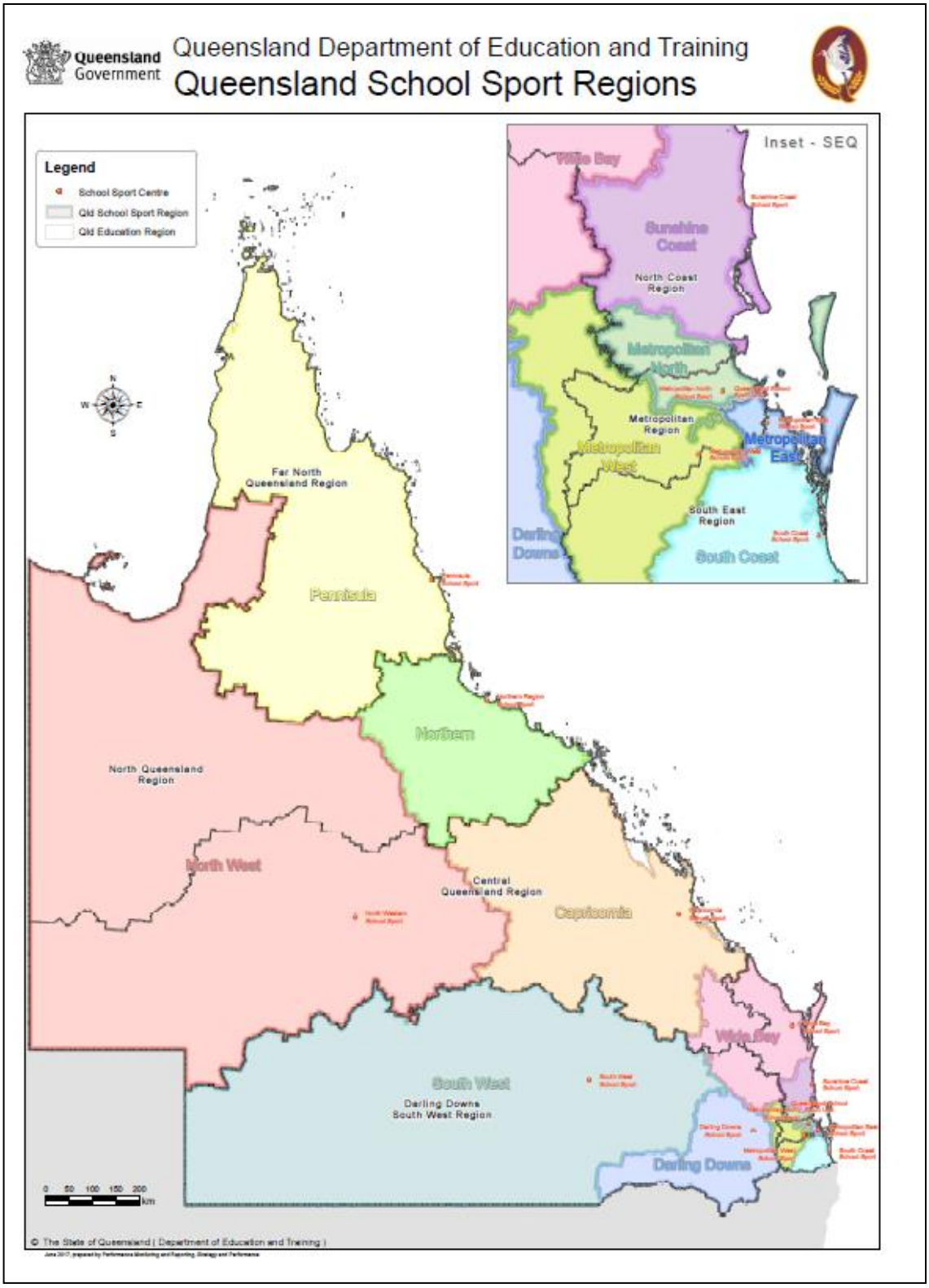
Table 1: Brisbane's Greater Public Schools and Associated Independent Colleges

Greater Public Schools (GPS)	Associated Independent Colleges (AIC)
Anglican Church Grammar School	Iona College
Brisbane Boys College	Marist College, Ashgrove
Brisbane Boys Grammar	Padua College
Brisbane State High School	St Edmund's College, Ipswich
Ipswich Grammar	St Laurence's College
St Joseph's College, Nudgee	St Patrick's College
The Southport School	St Peter's Lutheran College
St Joseph's, Gregory Terrace	Villanova College
Toowoomba Grammar	

This change was considered problematic by various stakeholders. The GPS rugby competition is played in Term 3 (July-September), so participating schools were worried that players might be injured trying to gain selection in the Queensland teams in May, thereby being unavailable for their GPS season (especially concerning if such a player is on scholarship, representing a significant financial investment by the school). CSS officials also expressed fears that players from GPS and AIC programmes, which focus on rugby-specific physical and skill development, would dominate regional teams in their locale, thereby potentially alienating students from non-GPS and AIC schools. Moreover, concerns were raised that teams from regional Queensland, with no access to players from GPS and AIC schools, might be disadvantaged due to their relative inexperience with the game.

Figure 2: Queensland School Sport Regions

(Queensland School Sports, 2022)



In Queensland, these GPS and AIC schools have been the major producers of elite-level players for many years (Lutton, 2016). As evidenced in Figure 3, this still appears to be the case. It has been suggested this is due to the importance placed on rugby as a marketing tool for these schools (Blucher, 2020b) and the corresponding financial investment made towards coaching staff, facilities, training equipment and game days (Bell, 2014). As such, talented players – both locally-based and regional - will seek to enrol in these schools or be offered scholarships to attend them.

Rugby schools will often send staff to carnivals to identify talented players who may be worthy of a scholarship. This has led to concerns being raised about the fairness of schools' recruitment practices, the financial cost of these scholarship commitments and inconsistencies with sound educational principles (Blucher, 2020a; Blucher, 2020b; Lang, 2021). Former Australian School Rugby Union president and Australian Schoolboys' selector, Jim Lucey, warned of the dangers to the game from schools importing rugby prodigies and displacing incumbent players. He further cautioned that: "Some players will not develop until they're 25, but they're not being seen … So, they're dropping out of rugby. And that's where this is going to destroy the code." (GPS lays out concerns, 2010, p.7).

Similar fears have been raised in other countries. While there are still opportunities for Queensland's school-age players to make their way into elite junior teams through playing with their local clubs, in New Zealand, schools provide teenagers their only chance to play competitive rugby. There are no club sides for players from 13-18 years old and concerns have been registered by those involved in New Zealand's rugby clubs who see the dearth of junior players significantly impacting their senior player numbers. According to former All Black, Frank Bunce: "Everything is focused just on that elite schools' level. The top kids are contracted into academies. If you are not in that system, it is very difficult to be noticed now, and a lot of kids drift away from the game" (Bills, 2018, p. 225).

Other commentators in Scotland (Barnes, 2019), England (Jenkins, 2015), and Ireland (O'Sullivan, 2017) have expressed similar worries about their respective rugby unions' limiting the pool from which elite rugby players are drawn to a small number of private fee-

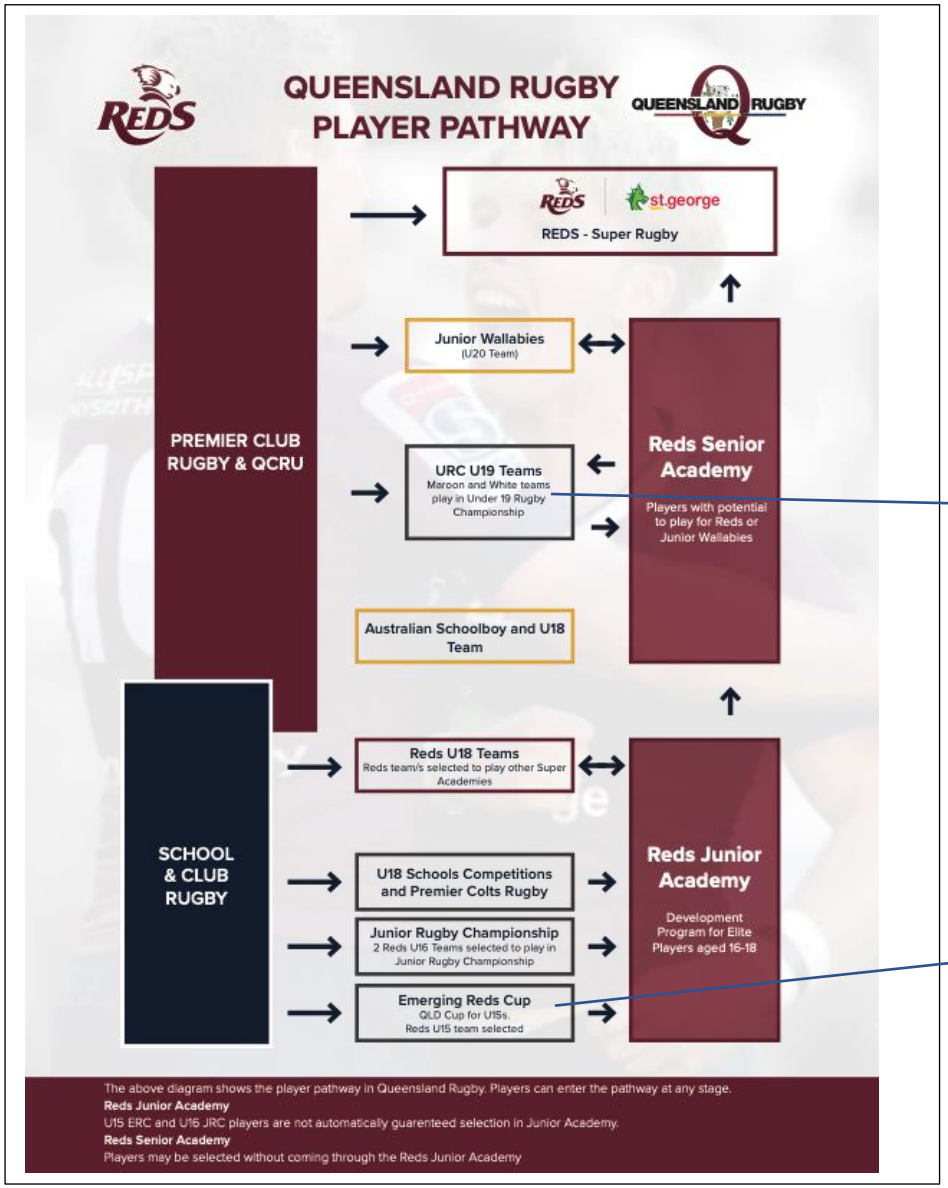


Figure 3: The Queensland Rugby Player Pathway (men)

Of the 38 players selected in 2021 for these two teams:

- 19 were enrolled at GPS schools
- 6 at AIC schools
- 5 at CSS schools (2 regional)
- 8 were not enrolled at school but aligned with clubs.

(Reds Rugby, 2021)

Conducted during the September school vacation. Consists of four teams:

- 2 Brisbane-based
- 1 SE Qld (Gold Coast, Toowoomba, Sunshine Coast)
- 1 for the rest of the state (Central Queensland)

Of the 23 players selected in the 2021 ERC Merit team, 12 were enrolled at GPS schools.

(Reds Rugby, 2021)

paying schools, the potentially exclusionary role of youth player academies, and the declining support given to clubs in developing junior players.

Concerns over the possibility of players sustaining serious injury due to the collisions inherent in the game and the legal and financial ramifications of such incidents have also been blamed for a downturn in the game's participant numbers; even in rugby's traditional strongholds where AFL and soccer have eroded the rugby player base (Georgakis, 2015). Parents and players' awareness of the long-term dangers of contact sport participation, such as serious concussion and/or spinal injuries has increased in the past decade (O'Connell & Molloy, 2016). This was highlighted in a four-week period during the 2018 Brisbane GPS rugby season from which four serious spinal injuries were reported. Georgakis (2015) has suggested that junior and youth rugby teams are being "dominated by early developers –in particular Pacific Islanders, who are larger and stronger in their youth" and contributing to the fears of injury among parents and smaller players (p. 1).

Robinson (2017) conducted research with regionally-based teacher-coaches who identified a number of issues significantly influencing player numbers in their schools and communities. These included the lack of a realistic pathway for young players who choose to base themselves regionally but are seeking higher representative opportunities; the tendency for quality players to leave regional areas to attend rugby-playing schools in the south-east corner; and the south-east-centricity of the sport. As one coach declared: "The stereotype that Rugby is a game for private schools in the Metropolitan areas is definitely still alive and well in our region" (Robinson, 2017).

2.5 THE COMPLEX ROLE OF THE COACH

The process behind successful sporting performance demands that coaches be skilled in recognising and catering for individual differences in their players' skill levels, experience, tactical understanding, social circumstances, cognitive abilities, learning styles and personalities (Purdy, 2018; Wrisberg, 2007). To do this effectively requires mastering interpersonal skills such as relationship- and team building, creating an environment conducive to various athletes and recognising various levels of learner engagement and understanding as well as intrapersonal processes such as self-reflection, identifying their own individual values, beliefs and biases and developing a coaching philosophy (Cote & Gilbert,

2009; Mallet & Lara-Bercial, 2016). Coaches would prefer their performance to be assessed using such complex criteria rather than a simple win-loss ratio (Kidman & Hanrahan, 2011; Roberts, 2011). This may be due to coaches in most sport settings recognising that while they do complete a range of tasks such as planning practices and game strategies, organisational tasks and mentoring athletes and players, there is also a great deal of information, knowledge, evaluation, and decision-making underpinning this process. The coaching role therefore often encompasses far more than teaching fundamental movement skills and tactics (Anshel, 2012; Chelladurai, 1984; Murphy, 2005; Williams & Krane, 2015).

Acknowledging this, Côté and Gilbert (2009) declare effective coaches as "those who demonstrate the ability to apply and align their coaching expertise to particular athletes and situations in order to maximize athlete learning outcomes" (p. 316). Given this broader understanding of the role of the coach, Horn (2008) considers that effective coaching results not just in successful performance outcomes, but also in positive mental and emotional responses from the players. This broadens the coach's scope of responsibility from merely winning or providing quantifiable improvements in their players' performances to also enhancing harder-to-quantify outcomes such as their players' feelings of satisfaction, self-efficacy and enjoyment. Bloom and colleagues (2014) also recognised the teaching of life skills such as leadership, teamwork and character-building as part of a coach's responsibilities. The transformation of the coach's role to encompass one as caregiver appears to be increasingly demanded by sport's stakeholders such as athletes, parents, clubs and the media (Brown, et al., 2017; Mazzer & Rickwood, 2015).

From an athlete's perspective, a coach can fulfil various roles – mentor, teacher, friend, role model and, for some, a surrogate parent (Becker, 2009). They often provide positive interpersonal and intrapersonal outcomes for players such as enhanced self-esteem, confidence, engagement with others and related life skills (Collins et al., 2009; Cote & Gilbert, 2009; Horn, 2008; Horton, 2015). Coaches are considered to have an enduring influence as mentors and role models on and off the field for adult players as well as junior sports participants (Lumpkin, 2011; Paterson et al., 2003; Sewell, 2015). Though not explicitly teaching life skills, coaches may exert considerable influence by constantly modelling positive behaviours and providing physical and emotional support to their players (Gould & Carson, 2008). Hardman and colleagues (2010, p. 345) argue that "the coach plays a central role in influencing the moral terrain within contemporary sports practices." The

coach's standing as a mentor in the current context is therefore even more significant given that some parents, for various reasons, have abdicated their responsibility to provide moral guidance to their children, resulting in other members of the community, such as teachers and coaches fulfilling this role (Antz, 2010; Danish et al., 2004; Frost et al., 2013). Parents often have an expectation that their children's participation in sport will reinforce desirable values such as sportsmanship, discipline, and hard work (Holt et al., 2009).

Interactions between coaches and players, parents and other community members may have even more significance in regional communities, where relationships can be quite intensive and socio-economic disadvantage can be more prevalent. Moreover, communities where people, particularly disadvantaged children and youth, may lack supportive role models are often at greater risk of social isolation. As previously mentioned, the ill-effects of such isolation may be decreased when residents belong to, and are involved with, local groups and organisations. Frost and colleagues (2013) investigated the role of rural AFL clubs in their communities and found them actively supporting the inclusion of players from low socioeconomic backgrounds by providing playing equipment such as jerseys and boots and that coaches provided positive male role models. Research has also found participation in organised sport has health benefits for Indigenous community members (Dalton et al., 2013; Stronach et al., 2019) and brings communities together (Dahlberg et al., 2018). May and colleagues (2020) suggest that participation in sport and physical activity could be used to minimise the increased risk of poor socio-emotional wellbeing and physical health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and adolescents. However, greater socio-ecological understanding of the contextual factors that can impact on community members' participation is required.

Considering that members of regional communities may only have access to a very limited number of quality coaches in a sport, a single coach can have a significant influence – positive or negative – on their players and the continued development of their sport in that area. This can be the result of a variety of factors ranging from players' athletic performances to the quality of the interactions coaches have with players, parents and other parties. As Lyle (2013) observes "increasing participation and maximising the impact of sporting success are often adduced as ancillary elements of the coach's role" (p. 25), a situation that is especially pertinent in the case of regional community sports coaches.

It is not surprising that the complex nature of the coaching role along with the potential impact the coach can have on athletes' physical and emotional well-being has led to greater recognition of its intricacies (Cushion, 2007; Potrac and Jones, 2009). Coaching is also considered to be an activity which can prove turbulent as players, parents, administrators, sponsors and supporters with frequently conflicting agendas compete for ascendancy (Cushion & Jones, 2006; Purdy et al., 2008; Purdy et al., 2009; Purdy & Jones, 2011). The complexities involved in a coach's role, particularly a volunteer coach, highlights the importance of including their voices and subsequent insights in this study.

2.6 VOLUNTEER COACHES – MOTIVATIONS AND IMPEDIMENTS

It has been suggested that the most important personnel in a youth sports organisation are its volunteer coaches due to their frequent interactions with participants, parents and other stakeholders as well as their provision of effective coaching (Bouchet & Lehe, 2010; Busser & Carruthers, 2010; Cuskelly et al., 2006). Recruiting and retaining experienced and qualified volunteer sports coaches is vital to the efficient and effective provision of sport in community clubs (Crawford et al., 2009; Rundle-Thiele et al., 2009). Research has suggested that volunteer coaches are most likely to maintain their involvement if they are motivated by intrinsic factors such as enjoyment; making a positive difference; giving back to the sport; satisfaction from seeing players improve; and, the challenges associated with team building and working with others (Busser & Carruthers, 2010; Raedeke et al., 2002; Rundle-Thiele & Auld, 2009; Stewart & Owens, 2011). Researchers have also found that student-volunteers are seeing volunteer coaching as an opportunity to develop skills, gain work experience and build their resumes (Hayton, 2016) while older coaches considered coaching as more of a vocation or career. Cuskelly and colleagues (2002) broke these volunteers into two groups; "marginal" sport volunteers felt obliged or pressured to give back to the sport while "career" volunteers loved the sport wanted to pass on their passion and knowledge to others in addition to demonstrating dedication to their voluntary work that was similar to their paid employment (Ronkainen, 2020; Tingle et al., 2018).

Coaching literature has also identified several impediments to coaches choosing to continue in a voluntary capacity. Rundle-Thiele and Auld (2009) found poor work-life balance and burnout to be significant factors that contribute to this decision. For some coaches, greater public awareness and heightened anxiety over child safety have led to increased fears

concerning misunderstandings and potential accusations of misconduct (Taylor et al., 2008). There have also been concerns raised by coaches about potential legal liability (Anderson, 2010; Partington, 2021; Piper et al., 2012). Dawson and colleagues (2013) in their report, *Profiling the Australian Coaching Workforce*, found that time constraints, dealing with sport administrators and administrative tasks, and poor interactions with parents to be amongst the most significant issues cited by coaches.

In their *Community Junior Sport Coaching Final Report*, which focused on junior rugby league and rugby union coaches and players, O'Connor and Cotton (2009) found that youth coaches least enjoyed dealing with parents, specifically those who were abusive, over-emphasised winning and who had a flawed understanding of their child's capabilities. Negative interactions over issues such as playing time, non-selection, positions, tactics and the coach's management of training activities are concerning enough for a significant number of coaches to consider quitting (Dawson et al., 2013; Hite, 2015). A lack of coaching self-efficacy – the amount to which coaches believe they can influence athletes' learning and performance (Bandura, 1994; Feltz et al., 1999) – can also increase the likelihood of coaches ceasing their involvement (Kent & Sullivan, 2003; Teques et al., 2019). Linked to this, limited ongoing professional development opportunities were another reason which coaches gave for leaving their role (Rundle-Thiele & Auld, 2009; Sparks, 2003; Stewart & Owens, 2011). Crawford and colleagues (2009) succinctly summarised the situation for many volunteer coaches in Australia by noting that they "are overloaded and under-resourced and feel trapped in their roles with little support" (p. 9).

2.7 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MASCULINITY AND PERSONAL, PROFESSIONAL AND COACHING LIVES

Volunteer coaches often fulfil other roles outside their coaching responsibilities. Research involving professional collegiate coaches in the United States found that managing the expectations and demands of their multiple roles and responsibilities outside of coaching can result in tension and conflict, particularly when trying to maintain a balance between work and family commitments (Dixon & Breuning, 2007; Graham & Dixon, 2014). Many volunteers work full-time in another occupation and must manage the demands of their paying job in addition to family commitments and their voluntary coaching role (Dawson et al., 2013; Rundle-Thiele & Auld, 2009). While their time commitment to coaching may be

less than that of the paid coach, their emotional commitment may be higher (Engelberg-Moston et al., 2009).

Studies have also suggested that coaches' self-image and self-esteem may be closely linked to their identity as a coach (Jones et al., 2004; Potrac et al., 2012) which includes their pedagogical style and practices (Cushion & Jones, 2006; Jones et al., 2004). For example, if a coach lacks confidence in a particular aspect of their tactical understanding but has a healthy self-esteem, and/or sees themselves as a democratic-style coach, they may embrace a collaborative, problem-solving approach with their athletes, openly admitting to this gap in his knowledge.

The culture within a sport and its clubs may also be a source of tension for volunteer coaches. The sport environment is generally male dominated (Dixon & Breuning, 2005) to the point that it has been described as being hypermasculine (Wilson, 2002). This is because heavy contact sports such as rugby value aggression, violence, stoicism, and competition which are characteristics closely linked with traditional images of masculinity and rewarded by admiration from peers and approval from coaches (Kreager, 2007; Light & Kirk, 2000). The violence associated with rugby collisions and confrontations requires the suppression of the instinct to avoid physical danger. Importantly, for males, the heavy physical contact required on the rugby field involves more than players dealing with the threat of physical harm. According to Rubin (2013), the speed and violence of the game tests the masculinity of the male's character and their validity as men by exposing their inner selves publicly.

> When he is on the field, there is no time for deception. He can be only who he is because there is no time to be anything else. Rugby's violence and its spontaneity collude to produce an environment in which the player (as Scarry describes a canvas by Francis Bacon) "is turned inside out, revealing the most inward and secret parts of him." If he is not truly committed or fully disciplined, these "secret parts" will be pulled from his body by the violence and spontaneity of rugby, exposing it for the world to see. This means that a player is always on the verge of being "caught out," because one poorly made decision can expose weaknesses he might prefer to conceal (Rubin, 2013, p. 142).

And should a boy or young man be "caught out" or not be seen to not fully embrace the physical violence of the game, the ramifications can be enduring and devastating. Pringle

(2008) relates the stories of boys and young men in New Zealand who were marginalised by teachers, coaches and peers because they lacked enthusiasm for the violence involved in rugby or exhibited fear of the physical confrontations. Rugby in these contexts had become an instrument of masculine hegemony whereby masculinity, characterised by toughness, competitiveness, emotional stoicism, aggression and physicality, assumes a dominant position against which all other types of masculinity are measured (Connell, 1996; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Those who differ from the 'norm' are subsequently marginalised and ostracised. Their masculinities are subordinated (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) and they are deemed to be less worthy by those in authority.

Research has found coaches to be agents of such cultural hegemonic discourses through their explicit valuing of players who exhibit aggression and violence (Johnson et al., 2018) and their frequent use of narratives associated with war, gender and sexuality (Adams et al., 2010). Examples of this are exhorting players to perform acts of physical violence (Cook, 2014), connecting lack of physicality or poor performance on the field to homosexuality (Adams et al., 2010) and linking gameplay to a test of players' manhood (Macpherson, 2019). The messages delivered by some coaches therefore reinforce and reproduce characteristics of hegemonic masculinity and the perception that this increases the efforts of the players. (Adams et al., 2010; McVittie et al., 2017). Adams and colleagues (2010) contend that:

> Even if athletes or coaches intellectually object to the use of this discourse, the perceived enhancement this discourse has on player effort, combined with the history of gendered (often toxic) language in the sport, reinforces their use of it … Coaches continue to use it, and players continue to respond to it; perhaps in part because of the expectations of others in fulfilling their perceived duties. (p. 291)

Unintentional or not, the effects of these coaching strategies and languages can be negative and enduring. Recalling a painful incident during his schooling when he balked at engaging in a physical confrontation during a match and was subsequently humiliated in front of his team, one of Pringle's (2008) research participants states, "Looking back now, it is quite clear, rugby sort of destroyed me. It made me feel like I wasn't quite good enough. It made me feel soft" (p. 227). On a broader scale, coaches who model and reinforce destructive hegemonic male discourses in their practices may be perpetuating them through reproducing these expectations in their players. These coaches' motives for linking their practices and language to such discourses are often to improve male player performance. However,

adopting an exclusive masculine hegemony which advocates that there is "only one way of being a man" (Morgan, 2019) may be counter-productive considering the successful outcomes associated with coaches using a humanistic approach (Cuka & Zhurda, 2006; Parker et al., 2012) which include focusing on the athlete's individual goals and preferences and facilitating their growth and development as a person (Falcao et al., 2020).

Consistent with social change which has made overt public discrimination and vilification based on race, gender and sexual orientation increasingly unacceptable, there has been over the past decade an emergence in sport of "inclusive" masculinity, which promotes traits such as nurturing, gentleness and caring as valid manifestations of maleness (Anderson, 2009; Stick, 2021). These traits complement the changing societal expectations requiring men to be more active participants in home life by undertaking household chores and greater responsibility for childcare (Anderson, 2009; Connor et al., 2021; Roberts, 2017). This may be at odds with the hypermasculine culture promoted in the contact sport environment which values one type of masculinity revolving around dominant male attributes such as physical toughness, stoicism, loyalty and resilience (Hickey, 2008). Fitzclarence and colleagues (2007) noted that while these are not inherently harmful characteristics, they can be easily misappropriated to serve a more one-dimensional and destructive paradigm.

Coaches can also be affected by their lived experiences of coaching and feel pressured to present hypermasculine behaviours to players which are inconsistent with those they demonstrate in other environments, thereby creating role-conflict (Graham & Dixon, 2014). Concerning this presentation of a coaching "front", Jones and colleagues (2004) draw on the work of Goffman (1959) who suggested the environment and audience shape a person's behaviours. A coach may feel he or she is almost "obliged" to project traits that players and stakeholders would consider consistent with those of a coach "because to maintain established power relationships he or she must uphold the standards of conduct and appearance expected of someone in that position" (Jones et al., 2004, p. 138). This may result in identity dissonance with the other roles that the volunteer coach also holds (Warin et al., 2006).

The notion of 'sacrifice' is important in sport (Dixon & Breuning, 2007). Arguably, this is even more so in contact team sports where a player will risk physical harm to benefit the team. The coach, therefore, must be seen to be just as committed to the team's cause as the

players. Coaching generally requires long hours which often includes weekend games (Dixon & Bruening, 2007). Regional volunteer coaches in Queensland will conduct training sessions after school/work, engage in coaching-related tasks when at home (washing kit and contacting players, for example) and often travel a considerable distance for games. This commitment inevitably takes away from time with their families or professional employment and represents a significant portion of volunteer coaches' time, resources, energy and stress (Hertting et al., 2020; Potts et al., 2018).

Much of the research into family leisure has found the interests of fathers are given priority over other family members (Holland, 2017; Such, 2009; Trussell et al., 2017). In Cohen's (2016) study of the family lives of fathers who were Ironman participants, the participants spoke of the importance of negotiating, listening and consulting with their spouses to enable them to be involved with their time-consuming sport. Fletcher (2020) found that some of the partners of men heavily involved in playing sport enjoyed being involved and were happy to share the experience. Their perception was rather than giving up their own leisure time, they were benefiting from their spouse's leisure activities and sport was seen to unite the family in a common interest. Others, however, felt that the time commitment involved in sustaining the father's sport involvement as deleterious to the family, especially the children. Strategies that the men involved in playing sport included rationalising their continued involvement while ignoring their spouse's concerns, limiting, or ceasing their sporting participation, encouraging their spouse to participate in their own leisure option, attempting to integrate their children into their sport and having family members attend games, thereby sharing the space but not the activity (Cohen, 2016; Fletcher, 2020). But while these strategies might have been used by fathers to redress the balance, this was only using their own perspective and may have been perceived by their spouse and children very differently (Cohen, 2016). Some spouses and children may have felt they were the ones making the greater sacrifice for their husband/father's sporting involvement.

2.8 COACH LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Volunteer coaches who wish to build their knowledge and understanding generally employ three basic methods of learning to facilitate their professional development. Formal coach education is associated with institutional educational settings or National Sporting Organisations (NSOs) with guided delivery and a set curriculum. Non-formal professional

development may involve short courses and seminars which may not be formally recognized. However, the maintenance of formal qualifications may hinge on participation in Continual Professional Development (CPD) activities approved by the sport's governing body over a specified time to ensure coaches have currency with contemporary practices. Informal learning may occur via opportunities which are primarily learner driven. These may arise through a variety of diverse experiences such as previous sporting participation and interactions with other coaches, mentors and players (Cassidy et al., 2016; Jones et al., 2002; Smith & Cushion, 2006). Incidental learning as a by-product of these informal interactions and other processes such as trial-and-error experimentation may also be an almost constant presence (Mallett et al., 2009; Marsick & Watkins, 1990).

There is considerable debate concerning the effectiveness and popularity of formal coach education programmes. Research has found many coaches favour learning through these courses as they provide practical contexts, access to other coaches' knowledge and opportunities to work cooperatively with others (Erickson et al., 2008). However, other researchers are more critical. Cushion and colleagues (2010) question whether formal coach learning is less about education and more akin to "training or even indoctrination" (p. 4) without consideration of participants' individual learning styles or backgrounds. Lyle and Cushion (2010) argue that this notion of "responsiveness to diversity rather than imposition of sameness in coaching" (p. 52) has yet to pervade entirely the practices of coaches, with many adopting a one size fits all approach to coaching players (Hewitt, 2020; Lyle & Cushion, 2010).

Coach education courses which model a similarly uniform approach with coach participants seem incongruent with the athlete-centred approaches advocated in many contemporary coach education curricula (Nash et al., 2008). There has also been criticism of such programmes' assumptions about the coach participants (Nelson & Cushion, 2006); the relevance of the materials presented to the coach participants' realities or needs (Jones et al., 2004; Purdy, 2018); the quality of course presenters; and the transparency of delivery and assessment (Nash, 2015).

Critics of formal coaching programs suggest that most coaches consider informal and non-formal learning situations to be the most effective environments for developing their knowledge and practical skills (Cote, 2006; Cushion et al., 2003; Lemyre et al., 2007; Nelson

& Cushion, 2006). Rynne and Mallett (2012) found that high-performance coaches rated "on-the-job" experience and "trial and error" as the greatest contributors to their coaching development, in addition to viewing the worksite as the best place for legitimate learning to occur (Billet et al., 2005). Coaches have recently been encouraged to adopt reflective practices to enhance connections between the varied sources of knowledge that inform their approach, which is consistent with informal learning. These practices include personal observations, conversations with other coaches, coaching websites, and personal practical experiences (Mead et al., 2016). As Werthner and Trudel (2009) suggest:

> The identification of these sources of information, such as coaching courses, mentoring, and interacting with other coaches, is certainly an important step in our effort to understand how coaches learn to coach. However, this information is of little use if we do not extend our search to explain the variations or idiosyncrasies that seem to prevail in the coaches' learning paths within different coaching contexts (p. 436).

Coaches' past experiences exert a powerful influence on what they consider valuable information, their decision-making processes, their preferred learning platforms and what they believe constitutes good and bad practice (Saury & Durand, 1998; Rynne & Mallett, 2012; Hasanin & Light, 2014). This is consistent with studies of individuals such as intelligence officers (Moss et al., 2013), nurses (Matiti, 2005), school principals (Poloncic, 2016) and female lawyers, who work in regional and remote regions (Mundy, 2014).

Considering the close similarities between the tasks involved with coaching and teaching, parallels may be drawn with research into the impact of past experiences on teachers' practices. The term 'the apprenticeship of observation' attributed to Lortie (1975) describes a process whereby student teachers refer back to their schooling experiences and either incorporate or discard approaches and methods their own teachers used. This process results in positive attributes and practices being selected for emulation (Ross, 1987; Mewborn & Tyminski, 2006) and the filtering of new knowledge through this lens (Klausewitz, 2005). Similar processes have been identified in sports coaches' development (Jones et al., 2003; Trudel & Gilbert, 2006) and may have significant impact on the values which underpin their practices.

In this way, Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* is also relevant to coach development and education. According to Haywood and colleagues (1995), "habitus functions as a collection of perceptions, tastes, preferences, appreciations and actions; forming a way of perceiving the

world and distinguishing between appropriate and inappropriate activities" (p. 240). Shaped over a long period of time unconsciously by childhood events, class and social settings, family and schooling, habitus becomes engrained within a person. The dynamic and malleable social and cultural arena in which people interact and the habitus develops is labelled the *field*. So entrenched within a person can the habitus become due to its everyday reinforcement, it creates corporeal knowledge (the social enacted unconsciously through the body) which manifests itself into the way people physically grow, move and adapt – their *body habitus* (Light, 2012). According to Jarvie and Maguire (1994), a boxer, over many years will have absorbed lessons "about manners, customs, style and deportment that become so engrained in the boxer that they are forgotten in any conscious sense' (p. 189). Similarly, it is through many years interacting with the field of sport that the key features of a coach's habitus (their skills, insights, preferences and inclinations) have been developed to shape their coaching practices (Light & Hasanin, 2012). Coaches who have been raised in the same field will have the same habitus. This, according to Cushion and Jones (2006), can encourage them to exhibit behaviours considered legitimate and correct within that field at the expense of trialling other methods; thus, positioning them as more unreceptive to ideas presented in, for example, formal coach education courses.

By gaining a greater understanding of their participating coaches' habitus, and their past and present fields– their biographical and vocational backgrounds, experiences as players and coaches (of any sport), their learning preferences and their role models – coach educators can more effectively tailor professional development curriculum to their coaches' needs and the complexities of their life worlds.

2.9 ARTICULATING A COACHING PHILOSOPHY

The formulation of a coaching philosophy is considered by some to be an essential task in a coach's development (Cassidy et al., 2009; Goodman, 2006) and effectiveness (Collins et al., 2009; Gilbert & Trudel, 2004). However, the process of developing a coaching philosophy appears problematic. Cushion and Partington (2016) suggest, for many coaches, such a process may be dismissed as impractical and of limited value. This may be due to confusion about definitions and terminology relevant to research conducted on coaches' philosophies. Indeed, Cushion (2013) questions whether the term 'philosophy' is even applicable since what a coach considers to be their beliefs is usually more reflective of results-driven practices

('what works') than ethics-driven ('what is right'). In particular, the relationship between the two key components seen as pivotal to a coaching philosophy - beliefs and values - appears contentious.

Rokeach (1973) defined beliefs as propositions or premises considered to be true (descriptive), good or bad (evaluative) and desirable or not in their outcome (prescriptive). A coach's philosophy is built on beliefs formed through life events, educational background and their experiences participating in and coaching sport (Nash et al., 2008). The formulation of beliefs over time appears to be a significant factor in coaches' practices (Armour, 2004; Purdy, 2018). Values are enduring beliefs that a behaviour or way of living is preferable to another (Rokeach, 1973). Sproule (2015) posits that values are implemented by coaches developing principles. These are "guidelines for putting values into practice" (p. 55) and steer a coach's behaviour. Developing a coaching philosophy provides a frame of reference through which coaches can monitor the effectiveness of their attitudes and behaviours (Kidman & Hanrahan, 2011; O'Sullivan et al., 2005; Reynolds, 2005). It may also assist coaches in the speed of their decision-making, consistency and effectiveness (Baker & Esherwick, 2013; Bompa, 1999; Burton & Raedeke, 2008). Coaching philosophies will change over time as life experiences impact on practice (Lyle, 2002). This can lead to coaches reflecting on the significance they have assigned to a particular experience and the influence such events may have on their coaching practices (Carless & Douglas, 2011; Jenkins, 2010).

Research into the coaching philosophies of volunteer coaches, especially those involved with children and youth, has found player enjoyment and development of players' technical abilities and life skills to be central tenets (Gilbert & Trudel, 2001, 2004b; McCallister et al., 2000; Nash et al., 2008), which is consistent with a humanistic, inquiry-based approach to coaching. In this regard, coaches view their sport as having qualities that make it a vehicle for developing life skills such as sportsmanship, self-discipline, work ethic and cooperation (Collins et al., 2009, 2011; Bennie & O'Connor, 2010). These qualities are built upon positive learning experiences derived from a coach's practices and provision of a conducive training and playing environment (Dyson & Casey,2012; Light, 2013; Sheppard & Mandigo, 2009).

Such practices have been identified as consistent with Positive Pedagogy. According to Light (2017), three core features of this style of coaching are: (1) designing and managing

stimulating learning experiences to engage players' interest, intellects and emotional and physical commitment to encourage them to take more responsibility for their own learning; (2) questioning rather than telling athletes what to do and encouraging curiosity and creativity in the solving of problems; and (3) using an inquiry-based approach to producing social interactions in the learning process which can develop empathy, understanding and caring connections with others.

Studies on expert and performance coaches have found their philosophies to be predominately athlete-centred, where they seek to focus on developing the athlete as a person not just a competitor (Grecic & Grundy, 2016; Nash & Sproule, 2012). However, these findings should be tempered with the realisation that coaching practices may not always be consistent with stated philosophical aspirations (Lyle, 2002; Martens, 2012). In addition, a coach's values and beliefs can be impacted by a variety of external factors including athlete injury, broader organisational policies, and stakeholder pressure (Dieffenbach et al., 2010).

2.10 SUMMARY

This review of the literature has revealed the importance of sport to regional communities' overall health and the crucial role that volunteer coaches play in providing community members with the opportunity to engage in organised sporting activities. Coaches fulfil a variety of important roles and responsibilities for participants of all ages, abilities and ambitions that extend beyond the training grounds and playing fields. These coaches are critical to a sport's governing body due to the impact their practices may have on players' enjoyment and willingness to maintain involvement in the sport. The literature has revealed a coach's approach is informed by their lived experiences. Considering the impact of these volunteer coaches on the players in their care, other stakeholders, and the sustainability of rugby in their respective regional communities, the influence of these lived experiences on their coaching philosophies, practices and development is worthy of study.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the theoretical foundation underpinning the selection of a research approach considered appropriate to addressing the research inquiry. The intention of the research was to gain a greater understanding of the significance of the lived experiences of volunteer rugby coaches in regional communities with a particular focus on their coaching philosophies, practices and development. It was therefore necessary to choose a methodology that best facilitated the collection and interpretation of significant events experienced by participants' which had significance to their coaching lives. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was selected because it allowed for deep analysis of the personal lived experiences of the participants which can be complex, ambiguous and emotionally laden (Smith & Osborn, 2015). These stories could therefore be presented in a way that highlighted not just the participants' perspective of their lived experiences at the time, but the potential resonance of related events (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Cramer (2006) describes lived experience as the reported feelings, thoughts, attitudes, memories, depictions of situations, associations, values, beliefs, and other psychological events that constitute an individual's existential reality. IPA is positioned within the qualitative research paradigm; specifically, the "interpretive" paradigm. In the following section, an overview of the qualitative interpretivist research paradigm, its philosophical underpinnings, the rationale behind IPA, its benefits and limitations and the researcher's choice to use this approach will be provided as well as a description of the characteristics of this study's research design will be discussed.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

The purpose of this research is to gain insight into regional volunteer rugby coaches' experiences of coaching in regional Queensland. It is intended that exploring their thoughts, feelings, perceptions and reflections will provide information into how they make sense of and comprehend their experiences. Obtaining this data required the accessing and collection

of detailed personal accounts utilizing a qualitative research design. According to Elliot and colleagues (1999), the aim of qualitative research is to "understand and represent the experiences and actions of people as they encounter, engage, and live through situations" (p. 216). Rather than testing a hypothesis, this study will use an overarching guiding inquiry question as the basis from which to explore these subjects' experiences, adopting a data-driven, inductive analysis instead of a deductive approach driven by existing literature and theories.

Carter and Little (2007) posit that there are three fundamental concepts which form the basis for conducting qualitative research – epistemology, methodology and method. Of these, a researcher's epistemological position is the first which needs to be established. An epistemology is a theory of knowledge concerning the production of valid knowledge or, as Hiller (2016) declares, one that addresses "how we come to know that which we believe we know" (p. 100). Carter and Little (2007) also propose that epistemology is axiological in that it has values that underpin the researchers' positioning, including what constitutes knowledge that is valid and trustworthy. The researcher's epistemological stance therefore directly affects the specific research approach adopted, of the methodology, and subsequently justifies the method – those specific techniques and tools used to collect data (Hiller, 2016).

Three epistemological positions are nominated by Madill and colleagues (2000) who assert they are better viewed as existing on a continuum rather than as separate and unrelated. The realist perspective at one end sees knowledge as pre-existing and "detached from human action and disconnected from users' sense-making" (Souto, 2013, p. 55). In this context, the researcher uses an objective and detached approach (Madill et al., 2000). At the other end of the continuum is the radical constructionist perspective which argues that knowledge of the world is a social construction created through language and dictated solely by people's experiences of it. The radical constructionist perspective posits that there are multiple, equally meaningful realities (Andrews, 2012; Madill et al., 2000).

Positioned between these two perspectives is the contextual constructionist approach which is more consistent with the epistemology adopted in this study. Jaeger and Rosnow (1988) argue that it is impossible to view knowledge from a detached bystander perspective and that people are actively engaged in constructing their understandings. As people are always present within a specific time and place with several elements contributing to an individual's experience of a given situation, all knowledge is context dependent and localised,

provisional, and relative (King & Horrocks, 2010). Researchers therefore attempt to understand individual viewpoints; however, this understanding will always be connected to that particular person, during a particular context, at a particular time (Larkin et al, 2006). Logically, then, as a person and part of the context, the researcher also actively contributes to the research process and the subsequent knowledge found and constructed through it. The knowledge produced and how it is presented will therefore be influenced by the researcher's personal standpoint, values, interpretations and cultural context (Carter & Little, 2007).

It has been argued that as a researcher's epistemological stance is directly related to their ontological position this should also be clarified at the beginning of the research process (Mantzoukas, 2004). Ontology is specifically concerned with the nature of existence and what is considered reality. According to Hiller (2016), "ontological beliefs, or assumptions, shape the types of questions a researcher might pursue about how the world works or how people act or interact" (p. 99). A realist position would advocate the belief that there is one objective, independent reality anchored by certain fixed natural parameters such as those involving gravity (Madill, 2008). On the other hand, a relativist ontology proposes that humans construct reality in their minds based not on fixed laws but on their thoughts, experiences and interpretations (Hiller, 2016; Scotland, 2012).

This study cannot produce a 'true' or objective account of volunteer coaches' experiences of coaching rugby in regional Queensland that will correspond to an externally based reality. However, this research will provide important insights into how individual participants subjectively perceive and interpret their lived experiences relative to the phenomenon of their coaching. Reality and knowledge are therefore viewed as subjective and situational instead of objective and fixed and, as the researcher, I will be adopting a contextual constructionist epistemology. Consistent with this perspective and the aims of the research, a qualitative methodology will be employed; specifically, utilising an interpretivist research paradigm which will be detailed in the next section.

3.3 INTERPRETIVIST RESEARCH PARADIGM

This research study has adopted an interpretive approach which seeks to understand the subjective experiences of individuals and groups, including how they perceive and make

sense of these experiences (North, 2013; Potrac et al., 2014). The interpretivist paradigm adopts a relativist ontology which positions reality as socially and individually constructed (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). A single phenomenon may therefore have many interpretations rather than a single truth that can be quantitatively measured, as "there are as many realities as individuals" (Scotland, 2012, p. 11).

Humans interpret their environments and interactions and act on these interpretations. Therefore, interpretive research, requires methodologies that are more empathetic, idiographic and inductive (North, 2013). Interpretive approaches necessarily rely on naturalistic methods of data collection including interviews and observations. Naturalistic methods occur in settings which are familiar to the participant and ensure there is sound communication between the researcher and the participant to collaboratively construct meaning which emerges through the research process. Interactive interviews, for example, allow the researcher freedom to recognise and adapt to the subject's conversational direction to further "investigate and prompt things that we cannot observe … to probe an interviewee's thoughts, values, prejudices, perceptions, views, feelings and perspectives" (Wellington & Szczerbinski, 2007, p. 60). Such opportunities are not possible using purely quantitative methods.

The main disadvantage of interpretivism is the subjective nature of this approach due to the researcher's value-laden perspective (North, 2013). The contextual or subjective epistemology underpinning the interpretivist paradigm assumes that the researcher and the topic area under investigation are closely linked (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This in turn affects how the researcher understands themselves, other people, and the world. Therefore, the values of the researcher are inherent throughout the research process as exemplified by their selection of variables, choice of actions to observe and their interpretation and presentation of findings (Salomon, 1991). Recognition and acceptance of this is a strength of the interpretive paradigm. The interpretive researcher, aware of the values inherently underpinning the knowledge they produce such as their choice of topic, methods, and interpretation of data, can then explicitly identify their values and possible agendas and put in place measures to limit their intrusion (Scotland, 2012). Some of these measures will be detailed later in this chapter.

The complex interactive world of the coach (Cushion, 2007; Jones & Wallace, 2005) lends itself to the interpretive research paradigm, by virtue of its embrace of subjective experiences

and exploration of motives and perceived meanings. Other researchers exploring the area of coaching have adopted similar approaches in looking at the daily world of sports coaches as well as these coaches' experiences during their coaching development (Bennie & O'Connor, 2012; Cronin & Armour, 2015; Dorgo, 2009; Jones, 2009; Lundkvist et al., 2012; Stephenson & Jowett, 2009).

3.4 INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was developed primarily in response to the over-emphasis of psychological research on quantitative approaches (Smith, 1996). IPA is a qualitative research methodology which seeks to explore in depth how participants make sense of their personal and social worlds through the meanings they ascribe to experiences and events (Smith & Osborn, 2015). This assumes researchers using the IPA approach are constantly reflecting on their experiences to understand them (Smith et al., 2009). Shaw (2001) suggests that IPA focuses on the uniqueness of a person's experiences, the meaning they ascribe to these experiences, and how their socio-cultural roles, such as a partner, parent, sibling, employee, student and friend impact on these experiences. IPA researchers have two major goals. The first is to obtain an insider's perspective of the phenomenon under study by listening intently to the participants during their interviews, including their concerns and reflections. The second goal is to interpret these accounts to gain an understanding of what it means for the participants to express these specific concerns and reflections in relation to the phenomenon under investigation (Larkin et al., 2006). IPA frequently draws on the accounts of a small group of people with participants expected to have certain experiences in common with one another, such as the coaches participating in this study.

The philosophical foundations of IPA are informed by three fundamental positions: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ideography (Peat et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2009). To fully understand the focus and aims of IPA, it is important to explore these key areas and how IPA can be used to enhance understanding of regional volunteer rugby coaches' experiences.

3.4.1 PHENOMENOLOGY AND IPA

Phenomenology is the study of experiences. It adopts a philosophical view which examines the ways people exist in the world. Phenomenology focuses on a person's perceptions of the world in which they live and how they derive meaning from their experiences (Langridge, 2007). Phenomenologists advocate that the world and the objects we perceive exist through the meanings individuals ascribe to them, via their interpretation (Berglund, 2007). Phenomenology is concerned with subjectivity rather than objectivity and acknowledges that there are many factors, such as motives and desires, which influence an individuals' perceptions of reality, the phenomenon under investigation and their overall experience of that phenomenon (Eatough & Smith, 2008; Smith & Dunworth, 2003).

In terms of epistemology, phenomenology seeks to explore the nature of the judgements, perceptions, memories, actions, and emotions that make up the essence of our conscious experiences (Trace, 2016). Its philosophical roots were developed by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) who rejected the notion that our understanding of the world could only be achieved through empirical methods. He asserted that knowledge was created from the lived experiences of people or their "lifeworld". Husserl posited that the aim of phenomenological inquiry was to understand this lifeworld from the subjective perspective of the person experiencing it and the meanings and interpretations they ascribed to these experiences (Cope, 2005).

Husserl (1970) proposed that all prior knowledge and presuppositions about a topic under investigation had to be suspended or set aside, a process he termed *epochè* which means suspension of judgement (Husserl, 1970). This "bracketing" of preconceptions means that the phenomenon being scrutinised could be optimally experienced free from the influence of personal bias (Langridge, 2007). Most existential phenomenologists agree that bracketing personal biases and assumptions is not an easy thing to achieve (Moustakas, 1994), and whether it can be accomplished at all (LeVasseur, 2003; Scotland, 2012; Smith, 2009). Nevertheless, the challenge of bracketing for the researcher is to allow the phenomenon to be described as objectively as possible (Langdridge, 2008).

Heidegger (1889-1976), in extending on Husserl's approach, also recognised the essentiality of lived experience. He particularly emphasised the idea that people are fundamentally and constantly involved with the world through practical everyday tasks such as "having to do

something, producing something, attending to something and looking after it, making use of something, giving something up and letting it go, undertaking, accomplishing, evincing, interrogating considering…" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 83). Heidegger introduced the concept of *dasein*, which literally means "being there" or, "being in the world" (Spinelli, 1989, p. 108). This challenged Husserl's approach to bracketing consciousness from a person's everyday engagement with the world. Ontologically, *dasein* describes the way in which humans are and understand themselves, rather than what they are (Davidsen, 2013). Contrary to Husserl's demand for objectivity, Heidegger acknowledged and embraced the significance of a person's pre-conceptions of a phenomenon and their influence on one's understanding of it (Wilson, 2014). He argued that individuals have a subjective perspective and subsequent interpretation of an experience that is informed by their previous knowledge, experiences and socio-cultural background (Krell, 2008; Parahoo, 2014). IPA embraces aspects of both Husserlian and Heideggerian approaches towards phenomenology. It engages with Husserl's ideas by seeking to capture participants' experiences of a phenomenon by "bracketing their fore-knowledge" and by thoughtful focus and examination of participants' viewpoints, perceptions and interpretations of their experiences (Smith, 2004; Tuffour, 2017, p. 3). However, IPA's focus on understanding the individual's experience of the phenomenon through the researcher immersing themselves in the world of the participants and being reflexive in their interpretation of the phenomenon being investigated is reflective of Heidegger's beliefs (Caelli, 2001). By adopting a phenomenological emphasis, IPA's first aim is to understand a participant's world relative to their experience of a particular event, relationship or process. In doing this, the participant's voice, accounts of experiences and understandings must be given prominence. The researcher then describes this as closely as possible to the participant's perspective, cognisant that this account will be constructively created by the participant and the researcher (Larkin et al., 2006).

3.4.2 HERMENEUTICS AND IPA

A major theoretical underpinning of IPA is hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is the art and science of interpretation or meaning (Tuffour, 2017). In this context, meaning is seen as fluid and continuously open to new insights and subsequently revision, interpretation and reinterpretation. Having described the participant's voiced experiences and their understandings of these, the researcher then seeks to comprehend and bring to the surface the

essential meanings of a phenomenon. IPA utilises a double hermeneutic. On one hand, the researcher seeks to understand the phenomenon from the perspective of the participants, referred to as a "hermeneutics of empathy" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 163). On other occasions, a hermeneutics of "questioning" (Smith et al., 2009) will be required whereby the researcher will stand separately from the participant, questioning them and querying their reasons and assumptions for perceiving things the way they do. Through this process the researcher will adopt an "insider's perspective" (Conrad, 1987); in effect, standing *in* the participant's shoes while also standing *away* from the participant. Smith and colleagues (2009) state: "Here the analysis may move away from representing what the participant would say themselves and becomes more reliant on the interpretative work of the researcher. Successful IPA research combines both stances – it is empathetic *and* questioning" (p. 36).

The researcher takes a central role in this dynamic process. Connected to Heidegger's recognition of the significance of previous knowledge, Davidsen (2013) argues that the hermeneutics of questioning would not be possible without preconceptions informed by previously known theories. These theories may also influence concepts which may develop from the analysis of participants' stories and, along with other presuppositions, are required to make sense of the personal world under investigation, resulting in a two-stage interpretation process or a double hermeneutic (Smith, 2004; Wagstaff & Williams, 2014). As Smith and Osborn (2003) explain, "The participants are trying to make sense of their world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world (p. 63).

An important tenet of IPA's search for understanding is that it is relational and developed through interaction with others. This social aspect of forming understanding is evident in IPA's use of symbolic interactionism (Eatough & Smith, 2008). Symbolic interactionism postulates that individuals act according to the meaning they ascribe to objects and other people in their lives. This process of interpretation, which may be subject to continual modification, leads to people adopting specific behaviours in specific situations (Benzies, 2001; Blumer, 1986). Moreover, Eatough and Smith (2017) suggest these interpretations are a way to understand "how we have come to be situated in the world in the particular way we find ourselves" (p. 195). This process of investigating how participants have created meanings through their stories and use of language, actions and emotions can enhance a

researcher's understanding of the social processes and discourses underpinning participants' interpretations of their lived experiences (Smith et al., 2009).

IPA is phenomenological in that it seeks an insider's subjective viewpoint, perception or account of their experience. At the same time, IPA is interpretative in that it recognises the contribution of the researcher's personal beliefs and perspectives. It proposes that understanding requires interpretation through the researcher's pre-conceptual lens (Smith, 2004; Smith & Osborn, 2003). Smith and colleagues (2009) summarise this combination of phenomenological and hermeneutic structures by stating, "without the phenomenology, there would be nothing to interpret; without the hermeneutics, the phenomenon would not be seen" (p. 37). Therefore, in IPA, the researcher assumes a central role in both the analysis and the interpretation of the participants' experiences.

3.4.3 IDEOGRAPHY AND IPA

IPA is said to be fundamentally idiographic as it is committed to detailed analysis of the phenomenon being investigated (Smith, 2004). Each individual case is considered through a detailed and nuanced analysis and valued through its own merits before the researcher engages in a general cross-case analysis. Smith and colleagues (2009, p. 35) explain that "IPA is committed to understanding how particular experiential phenomena (an event, process or relationship) have been understood from the perspective of particular people, in a particular context."

This requires attention to detail and an in-depth analysis so that thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) can be presented. These are defined as going beyond superficial descriptions of social actions and instead provide the researcher's interpretations of the context and the emotions, strategies, motivations and intentions of those involved (Denzin, 1989; Schwandt, 2001). This provides the distinctive features unique to an individual's experiences and contexts and when used with a group of participants will also assist in giving "a detailed description of the shared experiences of the particular cases studied" (Langridge, 2007, p. 58). In terms of the research design, a researcher is required to carefully follow this idiographic approach throughout the process of analysis to undertake a "meticulous detailed examination of the convergence and divergence between the participants' experiences" (Tuffour, 2017, p. 4). Ideography therefore impacts aspects such as recruitment methods and sample size. Its

importance is also represented in the presentation of each participant's individual story and the frequent use of the participants' own words when presenting the analysis of each of these.

3.5 THE USE OF IPA IN SPORTS COACHING RESEARCH

IPA has been applied to a variety of research domains such as health care research (Smith et al., 2009). Over the past decade however, IPA has increasingly been used by researchers within the domain of sport to examine the lived experiences of athletes (Cotterill & Cheetham, 2016; Hayman et al., 2014; Nicholls et al., 2005; Warriner & Lavallee, 2008). IPA has also been used to investigate the lifeworlds of coaches. For example, Gray and Collins (2016) used IPA to research adventure sports coaches' interpersonal teaching strategies and identified themes they considered fundamental to effective coach-participant interactions. Lundkvist et al. (2012) examined elite Swedish soccer coaches' experiences of burnout and recovery and the factors underpinning these phenomena. Using IPA, Human (2015) investigated how cricket coaches experienced and made sense of a holistic performance development programme centred on experiential learning. Miller and colleagues (2015) studied professional English youth soccer coaches' experiences and interpretations of talent identification and the multidimensionality of this process. Tawse and colleagues (2012) employed an IPA approach to examine the personal experiences of wheelchair rugby coaches in developing their athletes. Callary and colleagues (2015a) explored the lived experiences of ten Masters swimmers' experiences with coaches to identify the benefits they hoped to accrue and the coaching styles they preferred, finding the IPA approach allowed for a rich and "in-depth understanding of the particular phenomenon being investigated" (Callary et al., 2015b, p. 73).

3.6 LIMITATIONS OF IPA

Emerging in the mid-1990s, IPA is a recent addition to psychological research methods (Shinebourne, 2011). Its application to the field of sport coaching is still described as being at a "fledgling" stage (Miller et al., 2015, p. 648). The evolution of IPA as a distinctive research approach has been impacted by the lack of a prescriptive methodology. As such, researchers have identified inconsistencies in the way it has been used and a lack of methodological support and understanding (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Wagstaff et al., 2014). A key feature of IPA is its inductive approach whereby research questions are broadly constructed to allow

unanticipated themes and information to emerge (Callary, 2015b). Some theorists have been critical of this flexibility and consider IPA as being methodologically ambiguous (Giles, 2002; Giorgi, 2011). This is despite comprehensive, sequential and clearly communicated IPA research guidelines being formulated by Smith and colleagues (2009) over a decade ago. For example, Brocki and Weardon (2006) see value in its accessibility, particularly when compared with other qualitative research methodologies, noting that it is highly accessible, has easily comprehensible language and straightforward guidelines.

There have nevertheless been criticisms of IPA's interpretative nature (Pringle & Drummond, 2011). As interpreters themselves, readers may perceive texts differently to the researcher and, like the researcher (and indeed, the participants), their interpretations of the recorded experiences may change over time leading to questionable credibility (Finlay, 2009). Willig (2013), too, has identified limitations to the use of an IPA approach. Firstly, a participant's cognitive/emotional ability to reflect on their thoughts and feelings about an experience and then articulate these through their use of language may exclude certain participants. Similarly, the researcher's ability to understand, reflect on and analyse what the participant has said may mean that data is not utilised as well as it might be. It is also recognised that the words a participant chooses may not accurately describe the reality of the experience but rather construct a particular version of it (Collins & Nicholson, 2002).

Another challenge identified by researchers when working with IPA is the time required to conduct deep analysis of the data (Brocki & Weardon, 2006). Smith and colleagues (2009) suggest that the analysis of a single participant's transcript may take several weeks, and this may not fit within a research project's time constraints. Addressing these challenges demands a considerable amount of active engagement from the researcher who needs to prioritise developing and refining their skills in crucial aspects of the IPA process such as interviewing, analysis, interpretation and reflexivity (Smith & Osborn, 2007; Smith & Osborn, 2015).

Strongly grounded in an idiographic approach, IPA is primarily "about the narrative life world of the particular participants who have told their story" (Smith & Eatough, 2007, p. 37) and is commonly used with small, homogenous groups selected through purposeful sampling (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). This makes generalisations difficult and has led to criticism of the approach generally, but specifically its qualitative nature (Higginbottom, 2013; Vasileiou, 2018). However, the deep analytic process involved in IPA research seeks to discover and highlight superordinate themes reflecting the lived experiences, traits, and concerns that the

participants have in common. While not representative of a larger population than those subjects, the deep insights gained may provide broader understandings or prompt dialogue which might have wider implications (Reid et al., 2005). As Smith and colleagues (2009) suggest, IPA's findings may offer "theoretical transferability rather than empirical generalisability" (p. 51).

It should also be recognised that there are different types of generalisability. For example, *naturalistic generalisation* occurs when research resonates with the reader's personal experiences, situations they have been in, events they have witnessed or heard about and people they may know (Smith, 2017). *Transferability* is another type of generalisation through which the reader considers the extent to which a study's findings within one context might be transferable to their own separate setting (Smith, 2017). However, for both these approaches, the reader must be presented with significant evidence, depth of description and contextual details from the participants' data (Smith, 2017; Tracy, 2010). IPA's methodological approach advocates gathering and presenting this amount of detail in an authentic fashion by focusing on the individual's voice.

3.7 CHOICE OF IPA

IPA is not alone among qualitative methodologies in seeking participants' descriptions and articulations of their thoughts and feelings. For example, grounded theory focuses on participants' opinions, giving them opportunities to reflect on issues they feel are significant and then present their understandings of them (Glaser, 1998). This approach, however, focuses on understanding and explaining social processes, rather than on elucidating the meaning of individuals' experiences (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Grounded theory also seeks to produce formal theory (Fernandez, 2005) and demands that the researcher comes to the study with no preconceptions or expectations about what might be happening with the topic nor bind themselves to previously generated theory. The researcher must set aside personal and professional values, beliefs, knowledge, and experience if possible (Kwok et al., 2012). To my mind, this is unrealistic as the choice of study will often be related to the researcher's proclivities and interests in the relevant disciplines and topic areas (Charmaz, 2008). In contrast, it was considered that the choice of IPA for this study would be enhanced by the researcher's own background as a coach, including his knowledge and presuppositions during

the interview process and would assist in interpreting the data and identifying relevant themes. For these reasons, IPA is more conducive to focusing on understanding the participating coaches' lived experiences and their interpretations of them rather than generating a theoretical explanation for them. Moreover, IPA's ideographic emphasis focuses on the individual's stories I found more appealing due to my insider status.

Ethnography, too, seeks to gain in-depth insights into participants' perspectives and behaviours as well as their environs through detailed interactions, observations, and interviews (Reeves, 2008). It requires immersion in the social/cultural setting being studied. However, due to the limited number of suitable candidates who would meet the requirements to be participants and the intended geographical spread from which such candidates would be drawn, ethnography presented too many logistical problems to be effectively used as a methodology. Therefore, IPA has been chosen as the most appropriate choice for this study.

IPA's underpinning philosophy seems more consistent with my epistemological position of contextual constructionism. This is due to its focus on context-dependent knowledge rather than fixed, objective knowledge, its acknowledgment of the researcher's active and interpretive role, its valuing of pragmatic objectives and, consistent with the dynamic nature of knowledge and understanding, its encouragement of a methodological flexibility based on explicit principles rather than adhering to a strictly prescribed procedure. I also found IPA ontologically and axiologically appealing due to its prioritisation of each participant's respective story and research which views participants as "concernful" and practical agents as they reveal the world in which they are involved (Yancer, 2015, p. 107). The depth of interaction with participants and their stories required by the IPA process was also an appealing part of this approach.

3.8 THE RESEARCHER

Insider research describes situations where researchers conduct studies with populations of which they are also members and with whom they share an experiential base (Asselin, 2003). There have been concerns raised that insider research can limit the type and scope of engagement when researchers are working in familiar contexts where knowledge is pervasive and can affects decision making (Moriah, 2018). However, my insider status provided critical advantages in this study. In purposively sampling research participants, I was better able to

identify suitably experienced and knowledgeable candidates who were willing to participate and were able to provide rich data. The participating coaches were more forthcoming because of their perception that I had a greater empathy with their situations, contexts and underpinning culture and organisations because of my familiarity with their role. My understanding of their respective situations allowed me to ask more meaningful questions, without seeking to influence responses, to elicit richer information during the interview process. In addition, my broad technical knowledge of the game of rugby and its institutions allowed the coaches to fluently express their ideas and experiences without needing to explain particular terms and strategies. This insider knowledge of the environment in which regional volunteer coaches live and work was useful in providing additional contextual information when analysing the data, resulting in a deeper understanding of their responses. This provided an additional perspective that an outsider to this community might not possess (Unleur, 2012).

As a researcher, I was also aware that my empathy with the coaches might have led to increased subjectivity and potential bias through role identification. To mitigate against this potential shortcoming, I consistently engaged in a process of self-reflection to ensure that conflict between my dual roles as a coach and a researcher were constantly examined in order to reduce the potential for assumptions and biases to affect the data collection and analysis. My doctoral supervisors provided external review and interrogation of the analysis of the data to continually monitor my awareness of this risk (Unleur, 2012). Callary and colleagues (2015a) identified the same concern in their study, but nevertheless argued that IPA's interpretative element does not require researchers to necessarily suspend their biases but to be vigilant of their potential negative and positive influence.

Reflexivity plays an important role in counteracting researchers' pre-conceptions influencing the research process. Finlay (2008) declares the challenge for the researcher "is to remain focused on the phenomenon being studied while both reining in and reflexively interrogating their own understandings" (p. 29). The researcher is required to position themselves relative to the investigation in terms of their personal values, beliefs, motivation and culture (Clancy, 2013). Dahlberg and colleagues (2008) introduced the term "bridling" as a way to respectfully allow the phenomena to present itself so that the researcher does not understand "too quickly, too carelessly or too slovenly" (p. 130). When planning the interview questions, reflexive thinking is used to consider the reasons behind certain questions being asked. It

may also occur during the interview process by the researcher considering why certain areas were explored further while others were not. In keeping with Dahlberg and colleagues' (2008) warnings, reflexivity during data analysis aims to avoid jumping to connections and conclusions too early.

3.9 RESEARCH DESIGN

The following guiding inquiry question underpinned this study:

> *How have the lived experiences of volunteer rugby coaches in regional Queensland informed their coaching philosophies, practices and development*?

This question was scaffolded by the following topics for exploration:

- each coach's respective life and coaching journey.
- the challenges/highlights of being a volunteer rugby coach.
- the demands of voluntary coaching role on their professional and personal lives.
- strategies and ideas that have worked effectively in each coach's respective regional context.

The following sections outline important components of the study's research design including participant recruitment, participants, ethical considerations, data collection, and data analysis.

3.9.1 PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT

The criteria for the participants in this study included the requirement to have at least seven years coaching in regional communities. This demonstrated the commitment of participants to residing in a regional area and contributing to community sport in those environments. It was also deemed to be an appropriate length of time to build strong familiarity with the context and complexities associated with coaching rugby in a regional setting. Due to the limited pool of potential participants, purposive sampling was used to select five volunteer

rugby coaches. Rugby in regional Queensland is a small world and three of the participants were known to me as we had crossed paths during our time coaching opposing regional rugby teams at tournaments. Two of the participants I had never met. Purposive sampling is a deliberate selection of specific participants for whom the research topic has considerable significance and substantial information based on first-hand experience can be drawn (Polkinghorne, 2005). Because IPA is centred on conducting a deep analysis of each participant's case, small groups of participants are recommended with studies benefitting from "a concentrated focus on a small number of cases" (Callary et al., 2015a; Smith et al., 2009, p. 51). The sample group was homogenous in that the participants were all volunteer rugby coaches with experience of coaching in regional areas, however, age, coaching experience and formal qualifications, locale-types and occupations varied across the group.

3.9.2 PARTICIPANTS

The five participating coaches were chosen based on their experience, regional location, and their willingness to discuss their lived experiences as a voluntary regional rugby coach. Pseudonyms have been provided as per the ethics approval (See Table 2). A more detailed description of each of the participants is provided at the beginning of Chapter 4 to assist in familiarising the reader with their backgrounds and situations immediately prior to the presentation of findings.

Table 2: Overview of the Participants

Participant	Occupational Field	Regional Location (Queensland)	Years Coaching
Chris	Medical	North Coast	30
Harry	Education	Central	30
Joel	Primary Industry	South	15
Steve	Education	Central	10

Brent	Community	Far North	10

3.9.3 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical approval for this study was approved through the University of Southern Queensland Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC), Approval No: H17REA188P4 'Volunteer rugby coaches in regional Queensland: The significance of lived experience on their coaching philosophies, practices and development' (Appendix A). Ethical approval was sought and granted by each of the participants who were invited to participate in this research project. Each participant was contacted initially by email and sent a Participant Information Sheet (Appendix B) outlining the study's aims and what would be required of them. This information also reinforced the voluntary nature of their participation and that they would be de-identified in the study. If they accepted the offer to participate, they were emailed a Consent Form (Appendix C) to sign and return.

Respect, transparency, and trustworthiness were integral, in addition to open and honest communication with the participants. Ensuring they were satisfied with all procedures involved in collecting, analysing and presenting their stories was of paramount importance. This was reinforced through emphasising the voluntary nature of the research, providing the interview transcripts for member checking and modification where required, and the use of a pseudonym to protect their identity. As well, the participants were encouraged to ask questions or raise any concerns throughout the process.

Interview transcripts and recordings were securely retained on a password protected computer with data stored on the university's data servers. An online, password protected transcription service was utilised for the transcription of each interview. Pseudonyms have been used and attempts have been made to obfuscate locations such as clubs and landmarks that may identify the participants. However, it should also be noted that, as the regional rugby community in Queensland is quite small and the number of experienced coaches even smaller, there is a possibility that a reader of the study might recognise one or more participants based on a recount of one of their experiences. The participants were made aware of this at the start of the interviewing process, and all agreed to continue their participation.

3.9.4 DATA COLLECTION

Data was collected via two semi-structured 90-minute recorded interviews with each participant which were transcribed verbatim. These interviews were conducted face-to-face to establish relationships with the participants and were conducted in locations convenient for the participants and which coincided with sporting events. Semi-structured interviews are considered the most effective way to collect the data for an IPA study (Smith & Osborn, 2015) as expansive and reflective responses may not emerge from a more rigidly structured technique (Pringle et al., 2011). The first interview transcript was sent verbatim to the respective coach participant for confirmation of accuracy (member checking). The second interview acted as a "clarifying" interview and was based on questions emerging from the first interview to gain more detailed information and explanations. Participants were initially informed that a third interview meeting might be conducted later in the analysis stage for further clarification or to discuss the themes emerging from research (Wagstaff & Williams, 2014). A third interview took place if participants wished to clarify or elaborate upon any of the information they had previously given or if they wished to talk about some of the issues that had arisen from the first two interviews. All declined this invitation and expressed satisfaction with the transcriptions of their two interviews.

Essentially "conversations with a purpose" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 51), the semi-structured interviews were prepared with a loose structure involving several open-ended questions (see Appendix D). The responses frequently resulted in the researcher and the participants changing direction into other topic areas as per a normal conversation. This was intentional so that the interviewer could actively engage in a mutual, natural conversation with the participants who would subsequently feel free to explore and recount the memories of their experiences in a relaxed atmosphere. Stone (2015) suggests this style of interviewing lends itself to "generating" data rather than "collecting" it. IPA's encouragement of this facilitates a more co-constructive process (p. 13). This allows the researcher and the participants to operate together to make meaning and share views and interpretations of multiple experiences while focusing on their individual experiences at the same time (Pringle et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2009).

3.9.5 DATA ANALYSIS

One of the major appeals of IPA is its flexibility. Despite Smith and colleagues (2009) outlining several stages in the analysis of the data, they are not a strict recipe and can be adapted by the researcher to suit their approach. Conducting IPA involves moving between different levels of interpretation as one engages with the details of participants' personal experience. My insider status helped me see the participants' views more clearly through the "hermeneutic of empathy". I also engaged in a hermeneutic of questioning; standing alongside the participant, examining their motives, and querying their reasons and assumptions for perceiving experiences and events in the way they had (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Smith and colleagues (2009) posit successful IPA research combines both these empathic and questioning stances: "We are attempting to understand both in the sense of 'trying to see what it is like for someone' and in the sense of 'analysing, illuminating and making sense of something" (p. 36). Accordingly, as the data is analysed more deeply, the researcher's interpretation begins to play a more important role.

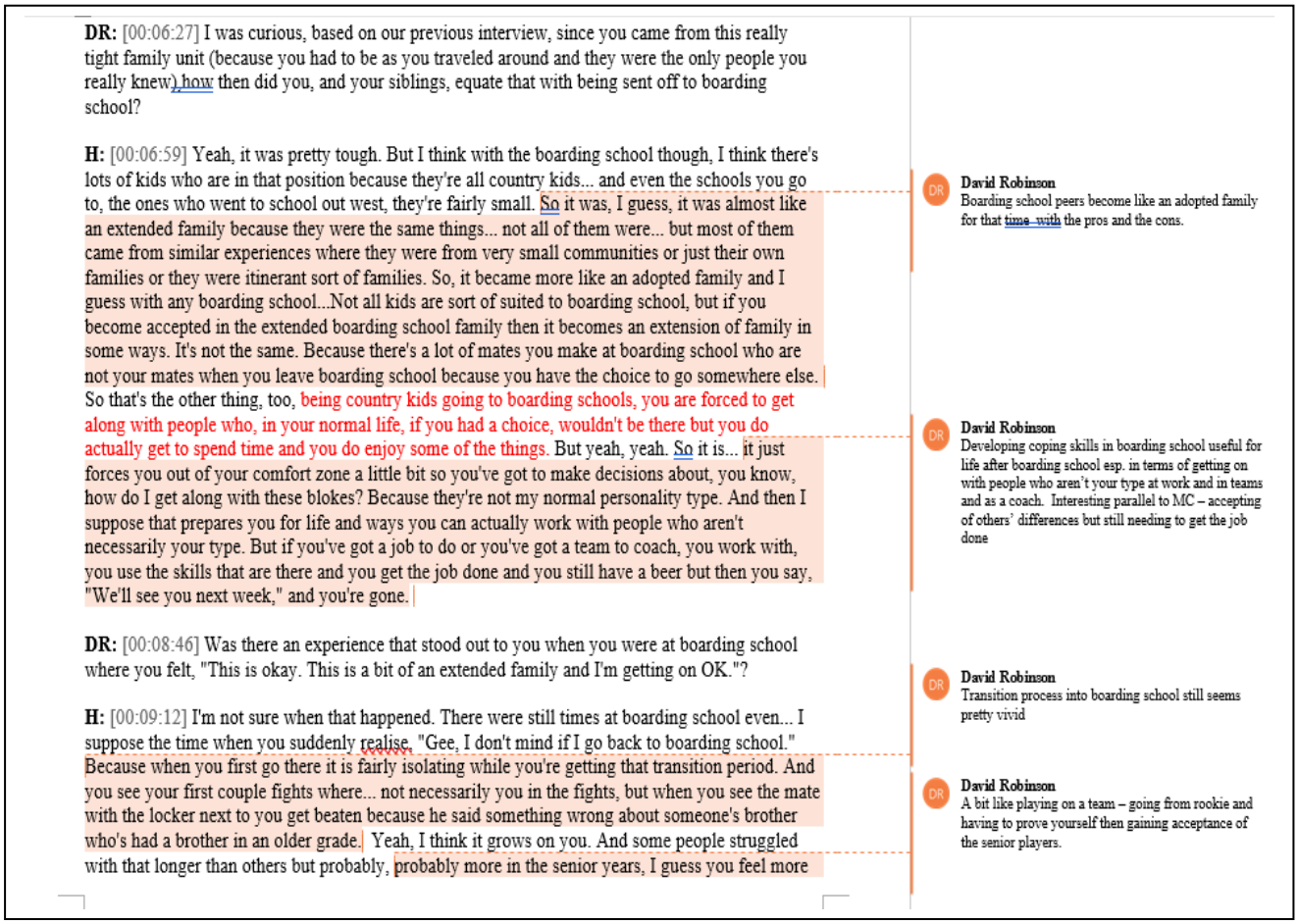
Smith and colleagues (2009) outline a process of six stages of data analysis that can be used with the IPA approach. While cognisant of these stages, I was also mindful that they were not prescriptive and did not feel constrained by them. Consistent with IPA's ideographic nature, I followed Smith and colleagues' (2009) advice that each transcript should be treated separately to "do justice to its individuality" (p. 100). The six stages of this process are described below as are my experiences in implementing them:

> **1. Reading and re-reading** permits the researcher to become engaged with the data and the participant's world. Due to variables such as accents, place names, use of slang or technical terms, background noise and speed of talking, the transcription programme made several minor errors. This required me to work through the transcripts while listening to the audio recording to ensure accuracy. While time-consuming, this process ensured that I was fully immersed in the data which is particularly beneficial for the subsequent stages (Eatough & Smith, 2008).
>
> **2. Initial noting** may be seen as the starting point for exploring the phenomenon and involves the writing of annotations which may be descriptive, linguistic, and/or conceptual (Smith et al., 2009). These may include connections, associations, contradictions, preliminary analysis, use of particular terminology or aspects of the

person being interviewed. Comments and questions were recorded in the right-hand margins of the transcript as they emerged and interesting phrases and passages were highlighted (See Figure 4).

3. Developing emergent themes involves mapping those patterns, connections, relationships, and topics of interest identified in the initial noting phase. Brief statements were developed which reflected an understanding of the essential messages arising from the interview. Although not firmly fixed, I found these ideas, built on the participants' words, and I was able to develop these into loose statements and categories. This stage is where the initial interpretation of the researcher occurs. I was particularly conscious that these initial connections had to be situated in the subject's own words and not based solely on my viewpoint. I found this process to be consistent with the suggestion that "the themes reflect not only the participant's original words and thoughts but also the analyst's interpretations" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 92).

Figure 4: Example of note-taking and preliminary analysis (Harry, Interview 2)



DR: [00:06:27] I was curious, based on our previous interview, since you came from this really tight family unit (because you had to be as you traveled around and they were the only people you really knew), how then did you, and your siblings, equate that with being sent off to boarding school?

H: [00:06:59] Yeah, it was pretty tough. But I think with the boarding school though, I think there's lots of kids who are in that position because they're all country kids... and even the schools you go to, the ones who went to school out west, they're fairly small. So it was, I guess, it was almost like an extended family because they were the same things... not all of them were... but most of them came from similar experiences where they were from very small communities or just their own families or they were itinerant sort of families. So, it became more like an adopted family and I guess with any boarding school...Not all kids are sort of suited to boarding school, but if you become accepted in the extended boarding school family then it becomes an extension of family in some ways. It's not the same. Because there's a lot of mates you make at boarding school who are not your mates when you leave boarding school because you have the choice to go somewhere else. So that's the other thing, too, being country kids going to boarding schools, you are forced to get along with people who, in your normal life, if you had a choice, wouldn't be there but you do actually get to spend time and you do enjoy some of the things. But yeah, yeah. So it is... it just forces you out of your comfort zone a little bit so you've got to make decisions about, you know, how do I get along with these blokes? Because they're not my normal personality type. And then I suppose that prepares you for life and ways you can actually work with people who aren't necessarily your type. But if you've got a job to do or you've got a team to coach, you work with, you use the skills that are there and you get the job done and you still have a beer but then you say, "We'll see you next week," and you're gone.

DR: [00:08:46] Was there an experience that stood out to you when you were at boarding school where you felt, "This is okay. This is a bit of an extended family and I'm getting on OK."?

H: [00:09:12] I'm not sure when that happened. There were still times at boarding school even... I suppose the time when you suddenly realise, "Gee, I don't mind if I go back to boarding school." Because when you first go there it is fairly isolating while you're getting that transition period. And you see your first couple fights where... not necessarily you in the fights, but when you see the mate with the locker next to you get beaten because he said something wrong about someone's brother who's had a brother in an older grade. Yeah, I think it grows on you. And some people struggled with that longer than others but probably, probably more in the senior years, I guess you feel more

DR **David Robinson**
Boarding school peers become like an adopted family for that time with the pros and the cons.

DR **David Robinson**
Developing coping skills in boarding school useful for life after boarding school esp. in terms of getting on with people who aren't your type at work and in teams and as a coach. Interesting parallel to MC – accepting of others' differences but still needing to get the job done

DR **David Robinson**
Transition process into boarding school still seems pretty vivid

DR **David Robinson**
A bit like playing on a team – going from rookie and having to prove yourself then gaining acceptance of the senior players.

4. Searching for connections across emergent themes requires the researcher to draw connections between emergent themes, looking for commonalities. For example, I found Chris' description of his own positive childhood experiences in an alternative educational environment which encouraged independence and self-motivation linked strongly to his description of his coaching style as one in which he does not push players but allows them to choose, for instance, how hard they will train. This process may involve bringing similar themes together (abstraction), an emergent theme becoming a subordinate theme (subsumption), a theme becoming more frequent (numeration) and a theme serving a particular function. An example of subsumption and ultimately abstraction occurred in the analysis of Harry's narrative. I felt that the emerging themes in Harry's story of consistent determination to access the latest coaching knowledge, his preference for humanistic coaching principles and his techniques for building team bonds were all contributors to the larger theme of what he believed to be effective coaching pedagogy. In this sense, subordinate themes

could be combined under the umbrella of a superordinate theme within the analysis of each participant's story.

5. Completing the above process for each participant. Smith and colleagues (2012) suggest it is an aim of IPA to reach a level of satisfaction (or Gestalt) with one's analysis of a given participant's experience. Once I was satisfied that my analysis of one participant's interview data had run its course, I completed the same process with the next participant. I was aware that subsequent analyses may have been influenced by what I had found emerging in others' transcripts. This process of self-reflection involved me consciously focusing on the transcript as its own entity allowing themes to emerge organically and individually. Love and colleagues (2020) suggest that a useful way to determine if one has fully captured the participant's experience is to summarise it in a couple of paragraphs. I found a useful tool in the analytic process involved writing a brief interpretive summary of each subject's transcript. This helped sum up each subject's story as well as recording my basic overall impressions (See Figure 5). The direct voice of each participant is denoted in italics in the subsequent sections of the study.

Figure 5: Example of summary of participant experience (Chris)

Chris is a very positive person who appears to accept situations and people as they present themselves. As a coach, rather than being dictatorial, he seeks to guide his players towards their desired outcomes, recognizing that, like himself, the understandings that come from working things out yourself are the most enduring and resonant.

Throughout both interviews, when discussing the state of the game, his whole tone is one of rather wry bemusement, like he just cannot stop shaking his head at how the powers-that-be can keep getting things so wrong when it comes to promoting rugby in the country and in their treatment of people like him.

This must be very frustrating for a man whose life story has been marked by consistently working out his goals and what needs to be done to achieve them and has successfully got on with the job to fulfil these goals – finish school, finish uni, run his own business etc. - especially in sometimes less than ideal circumstances. His attitude is that if a job needs doing, then you roll your sleeves up and get it done – particularly if you have made a commitment to do so.

Similar to when he coaches and waits for the players to work out that they need to train harder to get what they want, it's almost as if he's waiting for the governing body to finally see what they should have been doing and now need to do. Chris has been vocal in his critical feedback to these bodies but, importantly, rather than becoming consumed by the deficiencies in the macro aspects of the game, he maintains his good humour, it seems, by focusing on the micro – his love of coaching and being involved with the players and like-minded rugby enthusiasts.

6. Searching for patterns across participants requires the researcher to be attentive in identifying patterns that are shared across participants but also cognisant of new themes which might reveal themselves. Considering the size and homogeneity of the participants, convergences in the data would be considered inevitable however divergences should be recognised and respected (Smith, et al., 2009). Themes that begin to emerge as common across the participants and become 'thicker' through this process may lend themselves to becoming superordinate themes. According to Willig (2008), these superordinate themes "reflect the experiences of the group of participants as a whole" and capture "the quality of the participants' shared experience of the phenomenon under investigation" (pp. 61-62). I found the process of graphically organising the thematic statements which were emerging to be a very useful tool in mapping the major (superordinate) and minor (subordinate) themes and their interrelationships. This was a time-consuming exercise which underwent several iterations but ultimately solidified into the superordinate themes and their titles.

In terms of presenting the results of the research, according to Smith (personal communication, 7 September, 2020), IPA is concerned with capturing convergence and divergence. The usual practice in contemporary IPA is to present an extended narrative presenting group themes and illustrating the range of responses within a particular theme from different participants. This is then followed by a discussion section relating the identified themes to relevant literature. In this discussion or in an ensuing chapter, reflection on the research, implications of the study, its limitations, and ideas for future development may also be included (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012).

3.10 SUMMARY

This chapter has defined the epistemological and ontological considerations upon which this IPA study is based, grounded in the commitment to the fundamental principles of phenomenology, hermeneutics and ideography (Smith et al., 2009). The research design, analysis and interpretative stages are also consistent with the researcher's epistemological position and has enabled the overarching guiding inquiry question of the study to be addressed. The subjectivity of this research and my influence on the research process as well as my insider status has been acknowledged, in addition to the processes undertaken to limit

any negative effects of these on the research. The structural guidelines underpinning the research process have been explicated. The next chapter of this thesis will present the findings that have emerged through the analytical process framed by the superordinate themes and the accompanying subordinate themes.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims to provide a rich picture of the experiences of regionally based volunteer rugby coaches. The presentation of the participating coaches narrative accounts are the result of the IPA methodological approach and the associated interpretative analytic process described in the previous chapter.

Five superordinate themes were identified during the analysis and are presented in an interpretative narrative in Section 4.3. While the analysis mainly focuses on the essence of the participants' convergent experiences the researcher has also sought to preserve the idiographic nature of IPA by providing a descriptive summary of each participant, based on information shared during the interviews.

4.2 THE PARTICIPANTS – A DESCRIPTIVE SUMMARY

Consistent with IPA's idiographic focus and demonstrating each participant as "standing for, or representing, himself" (Smith et al., 1997, p. 189), this section provides the reader with a detailed introduction to each of the study's coaches. These summaries or 'broad brushstrokes' are not part of the interpretative analysis but instead serve the purpose of situating each participant contextually for the reader. They build upon the overview of the participants provided in Table 2 of the previous chapter.

4.2.1 CHRIS

Born and raised in the eastern suburbs of Sydney in the 1960s and 1970s, Chris' upbringing was characterised by a degree of instability in his parent's living arrangements. Chris has an older half-sister from his father's first marriage, a sister from his father's second marriage and a half-brother and half-sister from his third marriage. Both of his parents have passed away. Chris' first marriage ended in divorce, and he has since remarried. He is father to a

school-aged teenage girl, step-father to a boy in his late teens, and a girl in her early 20s. Chris has owned and operated a medical practice for almost 20 years in a regional centre on the Queensland coast.

Chris started playing rugby at six years old. He played in the Under 9s as this was the youngest team available to him. He subsequently knew a few of the older players and considers that this made him a better footballer as he *wasn't scared of tackling big blokes at all*. Chris had previously participated in gymnastics, but this did not appeal to him due to the staccato nature of the class and the time spent waiting between activities. This contrasted with the elements that he identified as being enjoyable about rugby. As a halfback, and therefore the primary distributor of the ball to other players, Chris expressed enjoyment in being constantly involved around the ball and being an important decision-maker on the field.

4.2.2 HARRY

Harry is the second child in a family of four children. He is the oldest boy. Harry's older sister is a nurse, his brother is an academic and his younger sister is a psychologist. The family frequently relocated between towns as his father was a railway station master. His mother did not have paid employment and focused her energies on the family as a homemaker. Harry estimates that he attended six primary schools, though this was not the only instability with which he had to contend. For example, for six months when he was nine, he attended a school with 1000 students while his next school only had ten. During Harry's frequent moves, the one constant was his family. His siblings provided him with consistent companionship with people his own age. Harry and his siblings learnt to play musical instruments and connected to the local community they were living in at the time by performing at local concerts. These experiences appear to have resulted in shaping Harry as a self-described family-oriented person.

Harry was sent to boarding school in coastal Queensland when he was 12. All his siblings attended boarding schools in regional centres near the coast as the alternative option was travelling an hour each way by bus to the nearest state high school. Harry is a Head of Department at his school and has been married for over 30 years. His wife is also a teacher, and they have four children – two boys and two girls – who have all completed their schooling.

4.2.3 JOEL

Joel is divorced and has two children – a son who is 15 and a daughter who is 18. He was born and raised in Cantlon on the Darling Downs where he lived on a cotton farm with his three brothers. His parents are still farming but now live in Durham which is approximately 60 kilometres east of Cantlon. Joel enjoyed the farming lifestyle, and his family was always heavily involved in community sporting activities.

Joel's father played rugby for Queensland in the late 1960s and was heavily committed to community sport as a player and coach. He coached his four sons' rugby, cricket and swimming teams. His father's passion for rugby saw him regularly play in Brisbane while based in Cantlon, a 2.5-hour drive away. When based in Rye in outback Queensland, he would drive almost 12 hours to play for his Brisbane club. Joel and his brothers grew up in a rugby environment and he expressed pride that all four brothers played together for a season with Cantlon. His father remains an important part of his life and makes time to watch the teams that Joel coaches.

Joel is the second son of four. Two of his brothers live and work in Cantlon. The youngest brother has battled a 20-year illicit drug addiction but, at the time of the interviews, had been sober and drug-free for eight months. Joel's close family struggled with his brother's drug addiction which has created a rift between the sons.

Like his brothers, Joel was a boarder at an elite private school. He says he thoroughly enjoyed attending boarding school due to the numerous opportunities to engage in sports and the friends he subsequently made. Although small for his age and an average player, Joel enjoyed training and playing rugby at school, particularly the physical contests demanded by the game. After leaving school in Year 10, Joel went to Foales in outback Queensland as a shearer and roustabout until he was 18. He began managing farms over the next six years. Unable to see a financial future in being a farmer he returned to university and during this time was married. Joel has since acquired tertiary qualifications in agronomy and management. For the past 15 years, he has worked as a sales representative, then as the international manager for an agricultural company for whom he travels extensively. Currently he is the commercial manager of an agricultural company.

4.2.4 STEVE

Steve is married to Michelle and has four sons. He was born in 1987 in Brisbane and grew up in the southern bayside suburbs. His father left the family when Steve was 10 years old, subsequently his mother raised him and his sister as a sole parent. She already had two sons from a previous marriage but her first husband had died from a brain tumour. The age gap between Steve and his half-brothers is nine and 13 years respectively, so he did not have a particularly strong bond with either of them while growing up.

While in Year 12, Steve and Michelle fell pregnant. Fortunately, both families were supportive of the young couple. This event motivated Steve to attend university and study to become a Health and Physical Education (HPE) teacher. His first posting was in suburban Brisbane, but he later requested and received a transfer to a school in the mining community of Mt Kunde in Central Queensland where he taught and coached for seven years before re-locating with his family to the Sunshine Coast a year ago.

Steve was introduced to rugby when a Queensland Rugby Union development officer visited his school and began playing games with some of the students. Steve played only a couple of games while at high school and had very little understanding of the game, so his involvement was limited. Michelle's family, however, were originally from New Zealand and were rugby fans who encouraged his interest in the game. Through watching it on TV with them, he joined a local rugby club and developed a passion for the game.

4.2.5 BRENT

Brent lives in Neilsen with his wife and two young children. His father is from Papua New Guinea and his mother is an Indigenous Australian from Yarrabah (Yagalijda) in Queensland's Gulf Country. He has three brothers and one sister. His wife is a HPE teacher. Initially a roofer, Brent began working at a diversionary centre caring for intoxicated and drug-affected Indigenous community members where he is now the manager.

He describes his childhood as focused on physical activity. He and his brothers initially played rugby league. His brothers have been a big influence in his life, especially his footballing life, and they taught him skills such as passing and tackling. While he was growing up, games at home were very physical and competitive.

Brent was a talented rugby league player as a teenager and was awarded a rugby league scholarship to St Patricia's College in Neilsen. During this time, he was obliged to play rugby league for his school and then, when his commitments to that sport were finished, he was free to play rugby union, which most of his friends played. Brent's abilities as a rugby league player also saw him playing for a junior professional team three hours' drive away. However, by the age of 19, he felt he had lost the desire to play high-level rugby league and found playing local club rugby with friends a more social and enjoyable experience.

4.3 SUPERORDINATE AND SUBORDINATE THEMES

IPA has a dual focus on the unique characteristics of individual participants (idiographic focus) and patterns of meaning across the participants' data. The data was generated from the participants' interviews and narratives and led to the identification of five superordinate themes that were representative of their collective experiences (See Figure 6).

These superordinate themes consist of convergences between the participants' personal lived experiences and their role as regional volunteer rugby coaches. This chapter presents the convergent themes which encompass the superordinate and subordinate themes that emerged from the data analysis shown in Figure 6. While many IPA studies can present the major themes in the order of their significance (Smith et al., 2009), I have presented them in a chronological sequence (child to player to coach) which is reflective of the journey taken by the coach participants. These are presented through a persuasive account that explains the significant experiential findings that arose and includes extracts from the participants' accounts and interpretive commentary from myself as the researcher. Using the participants' own words allows the reader to evaluate the relevance of the researcher's interpretations and values the voice of the participants (Pietkiwicz & Smith, 2012). The narrative account will include varying levels of interpretation but does not seek to relate the identified themes to existing literature. This will be followed by the Discussion chapter which relates the data and the identified themes to relevant existing literature.

While IPA is not necessarily highly prescriptive in its methodology, it has been recommended that the narrative account is best kept discrete from the discussion section (Smith et al., 2009). This approach has been followed in Chapters 4 and 5. Contemporary IPA seeks to capture convergence and divergence in the cases researched through an

extended narrative presenting group themes and illustrating the range of responses within a particular theme from different participants (Smith, personal communication, September 7, 2020). Following the Discussion section, reflection on the research will be included in the final chapter, as well as comments on implications of the study, its limitations, and recommendations for consideration.

The five superordinate themes were identified as: Formative development of personal qualities conducive to coaching; The significance of sport; The uniqueness of rugby; Effective coaching pedagogy; Challenges and rewards of coaching regional rugby. The subordinate themes linked to each of the five superordinate themes are depicted in Figure 6. The superordinate and subordinate themes in relation to each of the coach participants accounts are detailed in the following section. Italics have been used to denote the direct voices of the participating coaches.

Figure 6: Superordinate and Subordinate Themes

4.4 SUPERORDINATE THEME 1: FORMATIVE DEVELOPMENT OF PERSONAL QUALITIES CONDUCIVE TO COACHING

As highlighted in the literature review, there are several personal attributes associated with effective coaching. These qualities are conducive to the technical and instructional processes of coaching. They require taking responsibility for the content and methods of training and taking charge of their practical implementation with athletes and teams, often independent of other coaches. Moreover, the effective coach must have personal qualities that lend themselves to working in the affective and cognitive domains where they care about their athletes as human beings, not just performers. In addition, the coach needs to be aware of the broader social and ethical issues concerning their athletes' well-being, including activities off the field (Annerstedt & Lindgren, 2014).

In recounting their upbringings, the participating coaches identified learning environments and experiences which facilitated the development of qualities that subsequently influenced their personal and career development. Currently, four of the five coaches are employed in managerial positions in their workplace and four of the five are working in caring professions. The contexts in which these coaches' everyday activities and interactions occurred during childhood and schooling have informed their beliefs about effective coaching and their role as a coach. This is consistent with research into coaches' values and beliefs (Cushion et al., 2003; Hasanin & Light, 2014; Rynne & Mallett, 2012). Research undertaken on teachers also identified family and childhood experiences as significant contributors to their perceptions of teaching (Knowles, 1992; Klausewitz, 2005).

4.4.1 SUBORDINATE THEME: EARLY INDEPENDENCE AND TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

Growing up in a number of small rural communities, Harry spent much of his recreational time with his brothers and sisters without adult supervision.

> *As kids, we were mustering, we were out shooting, out driving cars underage. It was fairly independent. You'd leave home in the morning and come back in the afternoon. You'd go fishing down the creek, swim in the dams. So, we were fairly left to our own devices.*

With a similar attitude, but in a wholly different environment, Chris' parents supported his independence and self-sufficiency when he was a child. *As 10-year old's, we were catching the public bus because there were no school specials at* [my] *school. So, you'd just jump on the bus and go a few suburbs across town, which I can't imagine kids doing much these days.* Chris was a member of an opportunity class (one which catered for academically gifted Year 5 and 6 students) at a local Sydney school where there were no structured lessons. Work was set for the students *which you had to complete at the end of the week, and you could do it any time you liked*. With two teachers, sixty students and only a few desks and chairs in the classroom, the students had beanbags, a kitchen, and a television available to them. Chris enjoyed this non-traditional approach to schooling and believes it fostered his independence, coping strategies and time management skills.

The ethic of independence and self-responsibility he had acquired while at primary school became a character trait which stood him in good stead when Chris' parents separated. He was 14 years of age. While his sister moved in with his mother, Chris stayed with his father who, in a striking contrast to the maturity he expected from his son, chose to have *a bit more of a party time*.

> *At 14 years old, I became the responsible one in the house. I was doing a lot of the cooking and the washing and stuff like that. But I was still playing all my sport and doing pretty well at school. I knew what I had to do* [and was] *probably goal orientated a little bit at that early age.*

Chris's academic achievements gained him entry into a selective high school where his educational goals recognised the absence of parental involvement:

> [I decided] *that I was going to put myself through the last three years of high school. Who knows what was going on with my parents then, so I had to be pretty strong and oriented then and that, I guess, led into uni and I had to put myself through uni.*

Interestingly, his choice of rugby club upon leaving school also indicated a sometimes stubborn sense of independence:

> *A lot of my mates went to Bryant. I had lived near Tricketts Club since I was a real young fella and obviously Bryant and Tricketts are bitter rivals, so I always wanted to*

play for Tricketts. So, despite most of my mates going to Bryant, I stuck, for some reason, to my principles and went to play for Tricketts.

This demonstrated Chris's innate loyalty to his local club and perhaps the sense of stability that it offered in contrast to the upheaval he experienced with his parent's divorce and taking on an inverse position of responsibility in relation to his father.

Steve was also left on his own growing up in Brisbane's bayside suburbs with a working single mother and half-brothers who were several years older than him. He recalls that his mother left him to make many of his own decisions and to deal with the consequences:

I guess, in my childhood, I was left to my own devices, so I learned things my own way, if you like. And I guess you could translate that into my own teaching and coaching and learning. I tend to go about things my own way. If I want to learn something, I'll just do my own research and find out myself. I was obviously quite independent from a young age.

Steve's mother was originally from Finland where she grew up *dirt poor*. She worked in various administrative jobs while raising Steve, his older brothers, and his younger sister. Steve felt she modelled enduring character qualities for him.

Hard work ethic really and no excuses ... They're the big ones. I'm a lot like my Mum in that we just get stuck in and we get things done and then, at the end of the day, we don't make excuses for things. If a job needs to be done, we just do it and get on with it and don't complain. You know, everything's what you make it.

Steve explicitly connected this upbringing to the later development of a learning style based on self-motivation, which proved particularly beneficial in his late teens. Unlike Chris, Steve was unmotivated at high school and subsequently under-achieved.

Steve met his wife, Michelle, at Joynson State High School. Their lives dramatically changed when she became pregnant in Year 12. Their son, Grant, was born at the end of Michelle's final year of schooling. They decided to remain together and raise their newborn son, drawing from his mother's adage of *no excuses.* While the social impact was considerable and sacrifices were inevitable, Steve recalled both families were very supportive of them. The responsibilities of being a young father represented *a very big learning curv*e. Steve decided to enrol at university to study teaching. A major figure in this decision was

Michelle's father. He was a teacher who Steve considered to be a stable and trustworthy role model, particularly when his own father was absent. *I just matured a little bit in time* (and started thinking) *I've got to do something with my life. I've got to start to knuckle down and switch on a little bit here.*

The university he studied at was four hours away which necessitated a shift to the regional centre of Busston in northern New South Wales for the young family.

> *So, first time living away … It was good. You don't have that immediate support which is obviously challenging. You've got more freedom to essentially do as you please in your own home. It was challenging and rewarding at the same time* [with] *a lot of hard lessons learnt.*

In retrospect, he is amused by how inexperienced he and Michelle were at that time which extended to being unaware of how bills were paid, and how to activate the house's utilities. Steve motivated himself to complete his studies by seeing his teaching degree as crucial to his family's future.

After Steve had taught in Brisbane for a couple of years, he transferred to a high school in central Queensland and was appointed coach of the regional schools' team. The team he was coaching had several players withdraw close to a state championship. Much to Steve's embarrassment, this led to his team needing to borrow players from other regions for the carnival. Steve's response provides an insight into his self-driven personality.

> *It lit a fire inside me to go, that really, really sucked and I don't want to be a part of that again. I'm going to do my best to turn things around in this region. I'm going to work extra hard - whether it be on the phone to make sure kids are involved and engaged with what we're doing, getting them to training sessions, helping them get there and planning good training sessions to make sure it's really rewarding for the players … just developing a strong culture around playing rugby.*
>
> *And, building slowly, I feel it got to a point where a lot of boys <u>wanted</u> to play rugby for this region. They're really motivated to play.*

Similarly, a theme that dominates Chris' story is his determination to overcome obstacles, whether they relate to his role as proprietor/manager of his own medical practice or his volunteer coaching:

I just get on with what has to be done. So, the dryer blew up the other day and I tried to delegate that task and I just seemed to be wasting more time delegating the task, so I just went out bought a dryer and took it back and put it in to save time. So, I guess I try to delegate but when it needs to be done, I roll up the sleeves and do it myself. So, I guess that the guys see me as a leader but also a team player at the same time.

Central to Chris' life has been his enthusiasm for setting goals and his sense of achievement when he attains them. This has influenced his educational experiences, his career choices, and his coaching. *I guess I'd worked hard before to have success. I hadn't ever had anything come to me very easily. So, I was always prepared to work for it and thought that* [the players] *should as well.*

This attitude was also evident during Chris' rugby playing career. His conversation with a future national coach who worked at the Tricketts Rugby Club proved revealing. The coach recognised Chris as having been the Aloya High School halfback the previous year. *He said, "You'll never play first grade here while I'm coaching." And I went, "Well, my job's to prove you wrong." I think the way I answered him I got a bit of respect back from him rather than just sort of sit in my corner or go off to the rival club.* His pride and self-satisfaction were evident when he concluded this recount - *And I did play one first grade game.*

Harry's choice of recreational activities since finishing playing rugby also reveal aspects of his personal values. He became interested in karate when he accompanied his children to classes. The discipline and physical benefits of the activity appealed to him. *It taught you balance and working both sides of the body* and it provided him the chance to participate in an individual sport. He also appreciated seeing a tangible progression in his abilities which gave him a sense of achievement. Harry still enjoys participating in regular physical training but *there's got to be some purpose in why I do something and not just because I want to be fit. You might as well set a goal*. Interestingly, considering his love of the team environment as a rugby player and coach, his goals and his training do not depend on others: *I hate paying money to go to a gym for an instructor to yell at me because I can get that without paying for it. I don't mind if they were paying <u>me</u>. You get these instructors who make you go harder, work harder - "You can do it." I don't need that. I'm self-motivated.*

Considering how his upbringing had developed a strong sense of goal-orientation and responsibility, it is unsurprising that Chris was equally driven when coaching. However, he identified another motive that encouraged him to persevere:

When you put your hand up for something, you follow it through; no matter what. Because sometimes country rugby coaching can be hard and not what you expect. And it's really easy to walk away and I think it showed me that I'm not that person. I think that's a good thing that I like other people to see in me as well - that I'm committed. I've put my hand up. I don't mind how bad this gets. I'm in here for the long haul. So, yeah, I think that's what country rugby means. You're going to have good times and bad times, and hopefully the good times are more, but you've got to stick your hand up. I think it's a good thing to show my kids.

4.4.2 SUBORDINATE THEME: ACCEPTING AND CARING FOR OTHERS

It is notable that of the five participating coaches, four are employed in what might be termed caring professions. Steve and Harry are teachers, Chris is a medical therapist, and Brent manages a diversionary centre looking after intoxicated and drug-affected members of the community. Brent summarises his job as *trying to pick somebody up off the ground and get their life back on track*. This frequently requires sacrifice on his part, one that Brent is happy to make:

Everyone in the homeless sector knows what we do. There's no "I can't do that; we're not funded for that." It's just people's lives. Are you putting a price on somebody's life? Is that what you're doing here? ... when people want to go home, the flights from Neilsen to Lansley are $500. They're like, "Brent, but they've got no money." So? I don't care. $500? Okay, I'll get them a ticket. I'll pay for it. You want to go home and start your life over, we'll do that. By building that rapport, I want to be that guy they can all rely on.

When he was playing rugby, Brent prided himself on being the friend on whom others could rely, no matter the circumstances.

Friends look to you when they're in trouble. I didn't want to let my mates down. No matter what. Whether they'd be in trouble at the pub or whether they were in trouble on the football field, I wanted to help them - no matter what. I wanted to be that guy they could rely on; no matter what situation, no matter what circumstance, that was me. Did I take that on board a bit too much? (pauses) *Me says now - yes* (laughs).

Back then? No. Put myself in situations that no person should be, to get my mates out of trouble. I guess that's what my world was about.

Joel, while not in a caring profession, is unequivocal in describing himself as a *rescuer*. This is evident in his approach to his youngest brother who has a long-term drug addiction. Although his other two brothers are estranged from their youngest brother, Joel has maintained contact and assumed responsibility for helping him. This came, he believes, at the expense of his own marriage. Joel was upset for a long time that his brothers would have nothing to do with their youngest brother but, perhaps due to the impact his choice had on his marriage says he now understands their reasons. *I spent my life pulling him out of drug houses and trying to get him sober again; probably, probably to the detriment of my, my ... I'm … so I'm divorced or separated from my wife - mainly because she couldn't deal with that anymore. But he's my brother, so that's what I did.*

His desire to help others was further evidenced when he lived and coached in the rural community of Gerrivale in south-west Queensland. Joel sought to positively contribute to the emotional and mental health of members of the Gerrivale rugby community by instigating a rugby tour for fathers and sons to help support families whose sons were travelling to board school the following year:

When I was in Gerry as the president, I started the under 12s. But when you got to Grade 7, that was your last year of being in Gerrivale. Then you'd go to boarding school. So, we wouldn't see those kids again until they come back on the farm when they're 18 years old. So, we started a rugby tour with fathers and sons. We tried to thank fathers and sons for being involved in a community sport like rugby. It was all self-funded. That was part of it. They had to sell raffle tickets, so it was a really good thing. And I think that's been running now for over 12 years.

The timing of this programme – prior to the boys going to boarding school – may be reflective of Joel's empathy with those boys who were about to leave their homes and families. It might also have provided an opportunity for fathers and sons to communicate their feelings in more subtle ways about the imminent separation they were about to experience.

Harry, the son of a stationmaster who was frequently transferred, found that his childhood experiences growing up in small regional communities fostered a wary acceptance of others.

Sometimes you're sort of fairly accepting of other people, but you are a bit reserved in that you don't want to put yourself out there too much in case these aren't people you want to know that well.

He feels his upbringing has inculcated an empathy for players who are new to a town, school, or club, or are looking to join with a group. This also serves a pragmatic purpose in regional sporting clubs where participant numbers can be limited:

> *In regional areas, you don't want to ostracise anyone. Because you don't have enough players to be getting rid of players because they're a bit different to you or their family upbringing might be little bit different. So, I guess part of the country thing is that you tend to be a little bit more, in some ways, accepting of other people. Because some people say, "They're an idiot. Why are you hanging around with them?" and I think, "Well, if I didn't hang around them, I'd be on my own." There's blokes that you hang around with at football but you probably wouldn't invite to your wedding. Then there are some that you will. But you need all that combination of tolerances, I guess.*

Like his experience growing up in small towns, Harry believes that boarding school also required the acceptance of others. Because many of his peers came from similar backgrounds, they became like an *extended family* with the benefits (companionship, shared interests, caring) and disadvantages (competitiveness, lack of privacy, arguments) associated with this type of relationship. Harry sees a clear link between these experiences and his coaching, declaring himself happy to accept others' differences provided this is not to the detriment of the group's goal. This shared goal acts as the connector between each of the team members.

> *Being country kids going to boarding schools, you are forced to get along with people who, in your normal life, if you had a choice, wouldn't be there. It just forces you out of your comfort zone a little bit, so you've got to make decisions about how you get along with these blokes because they're not my normal personality type. I suppose that prepares you for life and ways you can work with people who aren't necessarily your type. But, if you've got a job to do or got a team to coach, you use the skills that are there and you get the job done and you still have a beer but then you say, "We'll see you next week," and you're gone.*

Despite the difficulties he experienced as a teenager due to his parents' divorce and his father's lifestyle, Chris was respectful in discussions about his father who he described as *a hard worker who enjoyed a drink and a punt*, while his mother had a *softer side*. Chris also described an uncle with whom he was close to as a *colourful racing identity* and a *straight-shooter* who lived in *this sort of seedy gambling world, but was honest*. His unusual family circumstances seem to have provided Chris with an empathetic and rather bemused acceptance of the complexities of people's characters, decisions, and the situations in which they find themselves. This was exemplified by his laconic and humorous recall of some of his experiences as a part-time taxi driver while at university.

> *I was caught in the middle of a drug deal back in Kings Cross there one day and the guy had to sell his radio, buy some drugs, and gave me the leftover cash. So, I'm sitting there,* (laughs) *in the taxi, waiting for that. That was a bit of an eye-opener. Another bloke gave me a fifty-dollar tip because he said he wouldn't be needing that where he was going as he was going into the pub to kill a bloke* (laughs). *So, there was some fun times in that taxi. But good money, cash money* [and] *no paperwork.*

Brent's job as manager of a diversionary centre requires him to regularly display high emotional intelligence in working towards a positive outcome for his clients. The role of the centre is to look after intoxicated and drug-affected Indigenous people. The centre staff visit those who have been taken to the police watchhouse and check on their welfare. *If we see anybody who's sick, looks like they need an ambulance, any of that kind of stuff, we'll go and say to the police officer in charge, "Hey. Gentleman in Room 2 needs some sort of assistance. He's not looking well."* The police also deliver intoxicated Indigenous clients to the centre. *We don't have cells. It's a dormitory set-up. Everything's all open. We're residential workers. We're here to look after them, hydrate them, sober them up, sleep it off and we go again.*

Brent was particularly concerned with the process by which police brought clients to the centre and sought to convince them of what he saw as the most efficient and practical method to do this. He therefore worked on a practical, common-sense solution to dealing with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are in custody while intoxicated which he presented to the police for consideration. As many of the police officers in his regional centre were transfers from south-east Queensland, he arranged for them to visit the centre which included the following recommendation for transferring people into their care:

When you open those paddy wagon doors, we will get the people out. That's what my staff will do. You guys step back, fill out the paperwork, hand the paperwork back. You disrespect them, mistreat them in the back of the paddy wagon, they're going to jump out and spit and fight and hit you. If you show a little respect out there, bring them to us, everything's all good. You don't do that, they jump out screaming, we're not taking them.

Brent then described the importance to working with the police as a team and his expectations for everyone involved: *So, for a police officer to sign them over to us, it takes 10 minutes and that's the drive. If they lock somebody up in the watch house, it takes 45 minutes to log them into the computer. I said, "What do you want to do? I know I want all the Indigenous people here. If you want to make it hard for yourself that's all good. But you can expect this professionalism from us and what we expect from you guys is the same."*

Brent's proactive approach to this potentially high-risk process highlights his understanding regarding the importance of building strong, trusting partnerships with the police for the benefit of his staff and clients. He also sees the need for his clients to be treated with respect, empathy and caring and has built his processes for looking after them when intoxicated. Brent also follows up on their well-being after they leave the centre. As the leader of his centre, Brent recognises the practical importance of reaching out to the local police and forming both a professional but personal relationship with them, with mutual benefits to be gained from following his suggestions. This managerial approach is very different to the one he witnessed when he first started working at the centre. He describes his initial manager as being a strong Indigenous activist. *He used to be in the marches in Canberra and fighting the police*. Brent, however, felt that this manager's targeting of the *white, church-based* administrative body of the centre was counter-productive. It was during one of his manager's outbursts that Brent demonstrated his goal-focused and assertive approach.

He was getting up the Senior Manager on the phone, He's on the phone swearing at them again. I leaned over, hung the phone up. He says, "What are you doing?" I said, "You need to stop. That's your manager. If you get fired today, your job here's not done. You know, we've got all these Indigenous people in our shelter who need us to work together to get them on the front foot. And you're swearing at our manager." And then my phone rang. Senior Manager. "Hey, Brent, you are now the manager of the diversion centre."

Brent is empathetic towards the social and cultural problems associated with the treatment of Indigenous peoples in north Queensland and revealed his grandfather would tell him stories about his great-grandmother's experiences as part of the Stolen Generation. However, Brent seeks to practice a collaborative rather than a combative approach to achieving his desired outcomes for his clientele and staff. When asked during his interviews about his cultural values, Brent chose to speak about the importance of family and the values his parents imbued in him. *The guys and the girls that I offer a service to from the Cape communities, they always say to me, "Brent, why have all these white people gotta make rules?" and I said, "There's rules for everybody, you know, it's not just white people make rules and rules are guidelines for us to make sure we do the right thing."* As a manager, the rules Brent sets in his workplace must be implemented consistently and equally *to empower people that are broken and at their lowest* and to ensure his staff are fairly treated. He advocates a similar attitude with the teams that he coaches.

As manager of the diversionary centre, Brent is on call 24 hours a day and often deals with people at their lowest ebb. After leaving the centre, some of his clients have died from health-related conditions exacerbated by what Brent describes as poor lifestyle choices. Brent feels he has had to learn to accept a person's decisions, actions, and context as well as his own limitations and regularly undertakes a self-initiated evaluation and reflection process. This serves an obvious professional purpose but also appears to provide him with a way to cope with the trauma and grief he experiences in such a challenging role:

> *Two weeks ago, I made an appointment to pick someone up. Went down the camp … and they're dead in their tent. So, that's number 17 this year that we've lost. So, I rung the police, rung the ambos. Every time someone passes away, I go back to my office and I go, "Okay, he's been in my centre this many times. What support did I offer him?", because everything I do for every single client, I put in the notes. I can reflect, "Okay, he came in six months ago. Wasn't well. Got him checked out, got him to the specialist. Offered him housing. Didn't want housing. I asked him about rehab. He didn't want rehab. Asked him if he wanted to go home. He didn't want to go home." Well, I've given him 15 options in six months. And that's real-life stuff.*

Brent seeks to provide his clientele with opportunities and information but understands he needs to respect their choices to make use of these or not. Accompanying this acceptance of

others' motivations and decisions is the ability (and, perhaps, need) to remove himself emotionally from these people's choices and their consequences.

As a medical professional, Chris also must avoid an over-identification with people he deals with in his professional capacity: *If you're going to have a knee reconstruction, for example, and you're not prepared to put in six months of work, well, then your result is not going to be as good. As long as you know that, that's okay.* By viewing people as being responsible for their choices, Chris avoids rationalising or excusing these choices. He informs them of the potential consequences of their decisions as well as the likely benefits of following his advice but, ultimately, he accepts that the choices patients make are out of his hands.

The participating coaches expressed their appreciation for being given independence early in their lives to make decisions and deal with consequences. This appears to have fostered a sense of self-confidence and resilience. As well, the importance of caring for others and accepting their choices has been imbued through their experiences with family, friends, schooling, and career. These characteristics may be considered relevant requirements to a career in coaching.

4.5 SUPERORDINATE THEME 2: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SPORT

Each participant coach spoke of the significance of sports participation in their formative years. All had found sport provided them with a means of assimilating into their community or new social environments such as boarding school. As well, sport had given or reinforced their social identity amongst peers or family members. This was especially the case in regional and rural areas where they resided as children growing up and then re-located to these communities as adults.

4.5.1 SUBORDINATE THEME: PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Harry and Joel spent most of their childhoods in small rural communities while Brent grew up in a large regional centre. Steve was from the bayside suburbs of Brisbane and Chris' family was based in the eastern suburbs of Sydney. Despite these different locations, all of the participants remarked on the importance of sport and physical activity to their childhoods.

As well, four of the five coaches grew up in highly masculinised environments as a result of their family configuration or their enrolment in an all boys' school. Of the participating coaches, only Steve spoke specifically of his mother's influence on him. This is unsurprising considering he was raised by a single parent. Steve sought out male companions of his own age primarily through participating in vigorous (and sometimes violent) arbitrary play.

> *All the neighbourhood kids, we'd get a game going in the park or whatever, or someone's backyard, just thrash around (laughs). Played a lot of backyard footy, park footy, you know, more rugby league because we didn't know what rugby union was. Just kick a footy around and belt each other.*

Joel grew up on a cotton farm west of Toowoomba with an elite-level rugby-playing father and three brothers. When not working on the farm, all were heavily involved in sport. *Played cricket, played football, swam. Any sport we could do. We were half an hour out of town but we were pretty lucky and, probably to the detriment of the farm, Dad was involved in everything. He coached our footy team, our cricket team, our swimming team so we did everything. We were a very sporting family.*

Brent was raised with two older brothers who played rugby league and modelled the aggressive play and attitude required to participate in such a combative sport. He described his childhood as *action-packed.* As a child in Sydney's eastern suburbs, Chris also found sport and physical activity as integral to his childhood.

> *I played just about anything that went. We'd all do backyard sports. We'd play footy, cricket, tennis, go down and play golf, whatever was going, you know, ride bikes, very active lifestyle. As I got a bit older, I'd run to the beach every afternoon and have a swim. I did a little bit of Nippers. I did a lot of sailing from when I was about five or six years old up until 17, 18. I used to sail little skiffs.*

Growing up in small rural communities and moving frequently due to his father's job, Harry found participating in outdoor physical activity with his three brothers and sisters alleviated his boredom. Even then, opportunities to engage in sporting activities such as tennis were limited due to the heat, hardness of the ground, and lack of lighting.

> *It was a good experience. Like we learned to ride horses, go fishing down the creek, swim in the dams. We had no TV either, so you had to be outside doing stuff. I remember when we were in* [the small outback community of] *Darmack - just leading*

up to Christmas was so bloody hot - we had a sort of fun ride-run. So, I end up running 10 kilometres through the middle of a very hot day because it was something to do. I played a fair bit of tennis. That's what you can do with a family of six. There's always tennis courts out west so I was very good at tennis.

4.5.2 SUBORDINATE THEME: SCHOOLING

Four of the coaches attended all-boys' schools as teenagers; two of them were boarders. In these schools, sport was institutionalised as an integral and mandatory part of extracurricular activities. Harry's transition to boarding school was *testing* as he had been so reliant on the constant presence and support of his family who were now several hours away:

> *When you first go it is fairly isolating while you're getting through that transition period. And you see your first couple of fights where you see the mate with the locker next to you get beaten up because he said something wrong about someone who has a brother in an older grade. Yeah, I think it grows on you; you've earned your stripes. And some people struggled with that longer than others.*

Smaller than his peers, Harry's sporting abilities allowed him to establish himself in the boarding school's all-male environment. While Harry was a good tennis player and he had played a year of rugby league in Reaburn in south-west Queensland, he believed that the physicality of his experiences growing up in rural communities proved vital in helping him adapt to learning and playing rugby, the major Winter sport at his new school. *I think maybe riding horses and doing a bit of rodeo and mustering* (meant) *I wasn't scared of running into people or certainly I didn't mind the rough and tumble of playing a bit of rugby.*

Chris also found sport in the boys' school environment, and rugby, provided him with an opportunity to build his self-esteem and standing among his peers when he played for the First XV, the College's premier sporting team, during his final two senior years. Brent attended an all boys' Catholic school on a rugby league scholarship and Joel attended a Greater Public School (GPS) for boys as a boarder. Both found the friendships they developed with peers were strongly connected to their participation in sport.

4.5.3. SUBORDINATE THEME: REGIONAL AND RURAL COMMUNITIES

Despite the differences in context, each of the participants acknowledged the importance of sport to the regional communities in Queensland in which they had previously lived or were currently living. They also saw sport's significance in the development and maintenance of a collective Queensland regional identity. Chris recalls the importance of sport to the small regional community in which he first started coaching: *For a town of 7000 people, they had three men's teams and a women's team which is quite amazing for a small town like that. There were two rugby league teams, an AFL team and soccer teams as well. I think everyone played sport of some description.*

Having moved to the country to start his business, Chris found that sport provided a point of access into this new community. His involvement in rugby led to an equally rapid social acceptance. Sport was tightly linked to one's identity within the community - *your sporting group was your social group.* And while his coaching was socially beneficial, Chris also acknowledges the practical advantages that accompanied this shaping of his social interactions. *It was obviously good for my business, too, because straight away I met 20 or 30 people that first night I was there* [at training]. *So, that's a bit of word of mouth in town already.*

Joel was effusive in acknowledging sport's importance in easing his acceptance into local regional communities in which he lived. He had previously benefitted from the social capital that he had built as a member of his hometown, Cantlon's rugby club. This continued when he moved 200 kilometres south-west to Gerrivale. Through his participation in the local rugby club, Joel was quickly able to foster new relationships and connections within his new community: *I enjoyed being on a team, part of the community. As soon as I moved* [to a town]*, other than football, I knew no one. So straight back in there again, meeting people.*

Joel was also adamant in his belief that community sport involvement is vitally important to the mental health of rural/regional towns. Moreover, when he became club president, he sought to use rugby to build the social capital of his local community. *It's a big thing ... what it means to the kids but also to the mental health of the parents - getting them away from the farm. We did this programme in Gerry where we'd make all the parents come in and help with a training session, even if they knew nothing. It brought them all closer together.*

The participating coaches spoke of predominantly positive experiences with various sports throughout their lives. Moreover, because sport formed an important part of their social interactions, it was unsurprising that they considered sport participation to be beneficial to others as well.

4.6 SUPERORDINATE THEME 3: THE UNIQUENESS OF RUGBY

While all the participants had played a variety of sports, each felt that it was rugby which possessed an enduring appeal for them. Each coach spoke of the special attributes associated with the game which set it apart from other sports. They described how these attributes were evident on the field via the unique features of the game and its laws as well as off the field in the traditions surrounding the game like the post-match rituals such as tunnelling opponents off the field and socialising with them after the game.

4.6.1 SUBORDINATE THEME: ON THE FIELD

Rugby is a physical collision sport and this formed part of its allure to the participating coaches. Soccer in winter and cricket in summer were Steve's major organised sports as a child. He acknowledged that he was quite a physical player who tested the boundaries of what was legitimate contact during the game and was *pretty ruthless on the field…a lot of yellow and red cards*. Steve felt that rugby provided him with an outlet for his frustrations - *just that testosterone for 17, 18-year-old young males* – and enjoyed the greater physical contact and aggression that was encouraged on the rugby field, but for which he was penalised in soccer. Brent, too, saw the collisions in the game as akin to one-on-one combat: *We were playing a big Torres Strait Islander team and the biggest guy on the team was the captain - mouthing off. So, every time he got the ball, I made him my priority. So, first time I hit him, dropped him. Second time, I spear tackled him. Penalty. He ran at me again. Penalty. Run at me again. Penalty* (laughs).

All the participating coaches saw the rules of the game and associated techniques and tactics as essential to rugby's uniqueness. These include the clear demarcations associated with the game's positional roles. While all players are required to pass, catch and run with the ball,

it is specifically rugby forwards who engage in ‘set piece’ activities on the field, such as scrums (Figure 7) and lineouts (Images 2 and 3).

Figure 7: A scrum

Wales Online (2019). Rugby star explains stark reason for emergency new law that just changed scrums forever.

https://www.walesonline.co.uk/sport/rugby/rugby-news/rugby-star-explains-stark-reason-16561012

Figure 8: The set-up for a lineout

Networld Sports Blog (2016). Rugby Explained: Lineouts.

https://www.networldsports.co.uk/blog/rugby-explained-line-outs/

Figure 9: Lifting and competing in a lineout

Rugby Strength Coach (n.d). The Rugby Lineout.

https://rugbystrengthcoach.com/lineout-specific-warm-up/the-rugby-lineout/

These are primary methods through which a team will gain possession of the ball, without which they cannot score and require physical dominance over their opponents. They are also cooperative group activities which rely on each forward performing a specialist role within the forward 'pack' to achieve the goal of either gaining possession for their team or disrupting their opponents' efforts to do the same. If a team's set piece is not working effectively, opportunities for the rest of the team to attack are severely limited. The type of strategic cooperation required to successfully deal with such issues on the field appealed to the participating coaches:

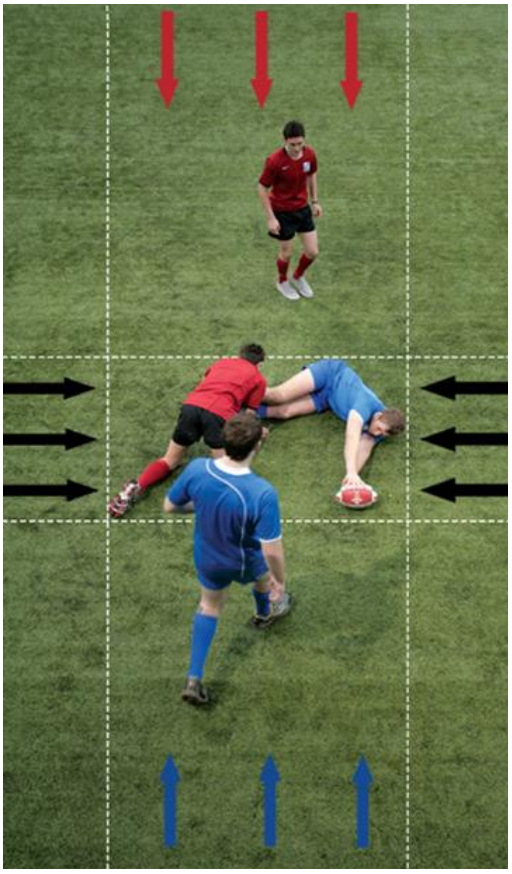
> *It's very, very technical. A set piece relies on at least 15 people doing their job otherwise your team's not going to be very good. A lot of other sports don't have that, and it really drives the value of teamwork.* (Steve)

> *I like the chess game of it. I like seeing two or three plays ahead* (Brent)

As a player, Harry quickly appreciated the values of support and cooperation required by rugby, having come from a predominantly rural background where there were rarely enough children his own age with whom to play team sports. *I think rugby just gave me an opportunity to be part of that team. I think sometimes with rugby league teams, you probably have to be more of an individual player. I think rugby allowed me to be part of the team - not necessarily the best in the team - but I think I liked that sort of thing.*

Moreover, in rugby, a player must be willing to put themselves in harm's way to support their teammate. When a player is tackled and goes to ground, they must release the ball. They are allowed only a couple of seconds to pass or release the ball. If unable to pass to a teammate, the tackled player, to maintain possession for their team, will position their body on the ground so that they may place the ball closer to their own team than to the opposition, essentially putting their body between opponents and the ball (see Figure 10).

Figure 10: The Tackle Gate



World Rugby (2022). *The Tackle Gate*. World Rugby Passport. https://rugbyready.worldrugby.org/images/content/65/tacklegate.jpg

The area demarcated by the extremities of the tackler and the tackled player forms the 'gate' through which supporting players may respectively enter the tackle area. The directions from which each team's supporter/s may enter are indicated by the red and blue arrows. The black arrows show where players are not allowed to enter.

Figure 11: a basic ruck

Lunsford, R. (2020).*Rugby Rules 101: What does Ruck Mean?* FloRugby. https://d2779tscntxxsw.cloudfront.net/5d9b638531f99.png

Figure 12: a more complex ruck

World Rugby (2022). *The Ruck*. World Rugby Passport. https://passport.world.rugby/media/s3rbybsk/rucking.jpg

An opponent is permitted by the laws of the game to contest for possession of the ball if they are on their feet and have entered the tackle area from the direction of their own goal line and through the 'gate' (Figure 10). To stop this, a teammate of the player on the ground may seek to protect possession by positioning themselves over them (Figure 11) or may "clean out" the opponent seeking to get their hands on the ball. This involves the support player forcefully contacting and holding the opponent and driving past the ball on the ground, pushing the defender away from the ball so that another member of the ball-carrier's team may pick up the ball. A ruck is formed by two players from opposing teams meeting over the ball on the ground (Figure 11) and there can be several players on their feet, wrestling for territorial advantage over the prone tackled player and tackler (Figure 12).

Steve appreciated that rugby was a sport that demanded physical commitment. Seeking to be involved at a more competitive level after finishing university while living for a couple of years in Brisbane, Steve joined a larger and more successful club in the Brisbane Premier Grade competition. Here he enjoyed the meritocracy and challenge required to fulfil his ambitions in a more demanding environment. *You'd show up to pre-season and there'd be a hundred guys pre-season training, all vying for spots. And, of course, everyone there, they want to play Prems. Loved it! It was very competitive, and I quickly found out there's guys better than you. If you want to get better, you've got to work really, really, hard. You're not gonna come straight in. You're nothing, man. There was a learning curve – a really good one.*

4.6.2 SUBORDINATE THEME: OFF THE FIELD

Consistent with the opinions expressed by the other participants, Steve and Chris explained why they considered the cultural practices surrounding the game provided them with the opportunity to gain and teach valuable life skills.

> *The core values that it teaches you like thank the referee, shake each other's hands, thank your coach… those values of respect and camaraderie. With the other team, no matter what happens, you tunnel them off and shake their hand and talk to them after the game, not talking to the ref on the field and obviously showing up to training and putting your hard work in, knowing your role within the team.* (Steve)

> *I think it's because it's a team game and it's a physical game that depends on everyone doing their job to protect each other in some ways, you know. So, I've always thought that guys that played rugby together have a lot of respect for each other and a lot of respect for the guys you play against as well. So, yes, I think there's a lot of respect and a real closeness in that camaraderie that you have.* (Chris)

Active participation in the rugby club was an important aspect of the sport's appeal as it became a focal point of the participants' social lives and the friendships they developed. For Chris, the touring culture often associated with rugby provided a pivotal experience for him as a young player. He recalled a tour of the USA that his club undertook in 1987 where those who could afford it travelled and played together as one group regardless of their playing abilities. *We had fifth graders and sixth graders mixing with Wallabies on this tour and we all had a great time and it was all good fun and I learned it doesn't matter about your* [playing] *ability. Your ability to mix makes for a successful group and a successful team. These 30 blokes just mixed and melded so well. We came back from that tour, and* [a Wallaby player] *went back to first grade and I went back to third grade but the whole club just went up the table! And I just had the feeling that it was something to do with that tour, that camaraderie, and I guess that stuck in my mind a lot.*

After leaving school, Harry was selected in some regional representative teams, one of which toured New Zealand. He appreciated that rugby could provide social and travel opportunities further afield: *I think that's when I started to think that rugby can give me those chances to go and spend a bit of time with a few blokes, having a few beers and playing a bit of rugby and seeing some places you wouldn't have seen otherwise.*

After finishing his science degree, Harry relocated to Brisbane to study for his teaching qualification and played for a strong local club. He enjoyed this experience although he mainly played Third Grade as the two players in his position in front of him were Queensland representatives. Still, he also recognised that he was partly responsible for his grading and learned an enduring lesson about loyalty to the team: *I was playing third grade then I went home for a weekend and didn't tell anybody, and I came back to fifth grade (laughs). So, I did learn that, if you don't turn up, don't expect to play where you want to play.*

This was very different to his country rugby experiences where smaller player numbers meant that training attendance was not critical to selection, and one could often play without

having attended training that week. However, Harry appreciated rugby as a meritocracy as well as a game people played for fun, regardless of their skill level or previous experience. Because many former elite players maintained their connections with their clubs at that time, Harry enjoyed playing with and against former international players in the lower grades. The fact that players who had represented Australia would still play for their clubs in the Third, Fourth and Fifth Grades impressed upon Harry the importance of club loyalty and commitment as well as devotion to the game itself.

Brent primarily found the community rugby club environment corresponded strongly with his caring nature and his feelings of loyalty to his teammates. He saw the rugby club's less intense training environment (compared to his experience in rugby league) as a communal time to check in with his teammates: *What I liked about rugby was 70 percent was off the field. When we went to training, we'd find out if something's gone wrong in someone's life. It was our time to bond and have a bit of a pass and a run around and to find where people were in their lives and things like that.*

Interestingly, such compassion and caring would often disappear if one was facing a friend or former teammate as an opponent on the field. Harry changed clubs during his second year at university, primarily because many of his school friends played for his new club. As well, he had begun to take his rugby more seriously and wanted to be with a club whose players' enthusiasm matched his own levels of commitment. He laughingly recounted the on-field altercations he would have with his best friend who still played for the University team. *My best mate played for University; my age, but he played five-eighth, A Grade, first year at university. So, we had a few good run-ins when I eventually got to play A Grade at some point against University.*

In a similar vein, both of Brent's older brothers were skilled rugby league players with one being paid a significant amount to play for a different club to his brothers for a season. This led to some friction between the brothers on the field which Brent laughingly accepts as normal in football circles but which his parents found difficult to cope with especially when it led to a violent on-field confrontation between the two brothers. *My Mum and Dad used to watch us play every game until my two brothers had a punch-up on the field. And both got sin-binned. That was the last game they watched* (laughs)*... of league, anyway.* Brent's dismissal of this incident is indicative of his tacit understanding that the physical confrontations in rugby are finely balanced between hostile and instrumental aggression. This

similar dynamic in competitive rivalry was apparent in his description of the rough games he played with his brothers growing up.

Chris believes that sport provides unique opportunities to develop relationships and respect for others. He has seen the power of rugby to change some people's lives. He recalls a local youth from a difficult background who came to training and began to enjoy the game and its social side. Rugby appeared to provide him with an appropriate context to be physically aggressive but also a safe social environment in which to relax and relate to others. Unfortunately, he broke his jaw in the season's first game, but found his new teammates supported him while he was injured. He has since played for several seasons and, according to Chris, has become a leader within the club. Without the rugby club, Chris feels this player's path would have been quite different and a lot more destructive.

> *I wonder if it was finally being accepted in a group. And even after he broke his jaw, the social group still looked after him. He's still, to this day, mates with all those guys that were around him when he played that day and that happened. So, maybe that was what helped him – having a bit more support and seeing that rugby could be a social game as well as a physical game.*

Brent, too, found the team aspect of rugby exerted a positive social pressure on students as well as providing opportunities to attain personal goals. He related an experience about a 15-year-old prop forward who was not allowed to attend regional trials due to truancy issues at school. Brent presented the player with the opportunity to represent the region on the proviso that he attended school more regularly. This was negotiated in collaboration with the boys' parents and the school:

> *Education is the key for a lot of these rugby kids. They're coming from backgrounds where sometimes school's not important. He was turning up Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday* [for his school's rugby training], *so we started training* [the regional team] *on Monday and Friday. The guys are like, "Why are we training so much?" We said, "Well, we need to get ready for this trip." This kid came to school every day, because I said, "You need to go to training, but you can't come from home to training. You come from school to training. I'll pick you up on the way if I need to." So, we just made those allowances to benefit not just the one kid, because him being down here has benefited the team. His mum gave us a hug before we got on the plane, so I guess that's straight away a big tick.*

Each of the participants, having played a variety of sports during their formative years, spoke of the unique features of rugby's on field demands and corresponding actions and off-field interactions. This etiquette, or code of conduct, was applied to teammates, opponents and officials and the participating coaches saw these elements as fostering a special bond with other rugby enthusiasts.

4.7 SUPERORDINATE THEME 4: EFFECTIVE COACHING PEDAGOGY

Having coached rugby for several years, each of the participating coaches spoke of a preference for particular styles of coaching that were centred on progressing the player's skills and decision-making abilities, assisting their development as a person and building a strong culture in their teams. In achieving this, they all spoke of the importance of improving their own knowledge and skills and creating a training and playing environment which fostered positive interactions between coach and players and between the players themselves.

4.7.1 SUBORDINATE THEME: BUILDING KNOWLEDGE AND MAINTAINING CURRENCY

Even after coaching for many years, Harry maintains an enthusiasm for enhancing his knowledge and keeping up with the new developments and trends in the game. *Thirty years later, there's still a lot to learn about. You've just got to keep learning and, I know it's a bit cliched, I learn something new all the time and if you don't learn something new, you're not paying attention.*

When reflecting on his early experiences as a coach, Harry is frustrated that his tactical understanding at the time was so limited. He attributes this partly to his lack of knowledge and to the challenges of coaching rugby in country areas: *When I was coaching the rep side for four or five years, I had really no idea what I was doing. I didn't really have a game plan. And I just think that for 25 years I'd been coaching probably basic skills and I hadn't actually moved on to a game plan. You had a very limited time with players and lots of times you were set on basics like your set piece stuff. I don't think we would spend any time on defensive practice – except man-on-man or drift. And you just hoped you had players who were good enough to do their job and just tackle anything.*

Due to players' inconsistent attendance at training and his own lack of tactical knowledge, Harry focused on individual skills and player fitness because *the next training run, you'd have a different group of blokes so you'd have to go over the same stuff again*. This resulted in his players being technically skilled but lacking sufficient tactical structure to put those skills to best use. *The regional side I was coaching was a really skilful side but in continuous game play, we would get lost. We'd be right for one or two phases but then we'd have no structure to fall back to because that just wasn't part of my experience.* This disparity was especially evident when Harry's teams would play against sides from Brisbane whose structures and patterns of play were more established and effective. *There were things we weren't doing well, and the reason was I wasn't actually taught that or exposed to that. So, I do look back and think, "… the poor guys didn't have a chance really."*

Steve, too, does not rate his coaching very highly in those initial years but feels it has progressively improved. His involvement with representative rugby has exposed him to other coaching ideas and methods:

> *You see other coaches operating and, you know, you pick up things here and there; both good and bad and I feel I'm pretty analytical so, like most other coaches, you can look at something and say, "Oh that's really good.", "That's crap," and you can filter that out quite easily. I watch a lot of rugby, so you look at what a lot of pro teams are doing, and you just try and understand the reasoning behind what they're doing and why they're doing it and that helps.*

Steve has found participation in formal coach education courses has enhanced his self-efficacy by reinforcing the validity of his own practices and ideas. Considering the marginality of the sport in his regional community and his isolation from other coaches and people educated in the game, it is unsurprising that he enjoyed attending courses that provided him with the opportunity to immerse himself in studying and discussing the sport with other enthusiasts.

Brent, like Steve, found that he could learn from interacting with other coaches. In what may be a precursor to building his knowledge prior to coaching in an official capacity, Brent learned the value of being open to others' ideas and being willing to compromise his own. Upon returning to Neilsen after 18 months playing at the Gold Coast, and consistent with the collaborative approach he uses at work, Brent, as the flyhalf (a key tactical decisionmaker in a team) sought to improve his relationship with the new coach of his old team to improve the

team's chances of success. *Me and him didn't see eye to eye. What he saw on the field was different to what I saw. And it took three weeks of us meeting up every Friday night for dinner about what he wants me to do at 10* [the flyhalf's jersey number] *to what I think needs to happen. So, we won the first premiership for our club that year which was fantastic. Then we went back-to-back.*

4.7.2 SUBORDINATE THEME: HUMANISTIC COACHING AND POSITIVE PEDAGOGY

As an experienced schoolteacher, Harry is aware that his pedagogical practices need to be responsive to his players' interests and learning styles. *It's like when you have a school class, getting to know who your kids are. Every group of Grade Sevens that comes in is different and there's always going to be one kid in that class that's going to challenge you. And I think, as a coach, you've got to be prepared to coach that kid as well.*

Harry recognises the position of power that he holds, and like teaching, he understands the importance of choosing the right tone and approach when speaking to players, which is dependent on their personality and the context of the interaction: *Some kids you can approach differently, and you can be very hard on them and they will respond to it. But some kids you're hard on, you'll never see them again because you've just destroyed their world.*

Brent, too, appreciates the importance of ensuring junior players have a positive experience and the significance of his role in creating such an environment. He recognises that *one passing comment from me could ruin a kid.* Brent advocates the need to be calm when delivering feedback and regards coaches who *yell and scream and jump up and down* as ineffective because players *just switch off.*

Similarly, Harry advocates a considered approach to his conversations with players. *I've learnt that in teaching it's better not to say it unless you've thought about it. Because if you say it, it's out there - even if you retract it. It just causes annoyance or angst.* In light of this circumspection and consistent with his personality, when coaching a game or conducting a training session, Harry always tries to adopt a practical, outcomes-driven approach: *I think you need to say things that are important … I was talking to a parent today in our game and he said, "I would've gone at those kids today." I wanted to do that, but I had to stop myself*

and say, "That's not going to help. What do I need to say to these kids to help them play better?"

While understanding these individual differences, Harry feels that instilling players with confidence in his ability to help them achieve their goals is crucial. To facilitate this, Harry encourages players to reflect on their performances, to look for improvements in their own skills and capacities, and to evaluate their decisions and those of their teammates *because their biggest coaches are really going to be themselves ... The biggest thing I've learnt is that it's not really me that's making them better.*

Brent sees building positive relationships as the crucial component in the coaching and player management process. He recounted a pivotal conversation with his father which helped him to understand the importance of positive reinforcement when coaching.[We sat down] *after the game and he'd go, "So, how do you reckon you went today?" And I'd say, "Aw, I did this, this and this wrong." Dad goes: "Why do you always start with the negatives? You just scored five tries and kicked 15 points. No one remembers the five things you did wrong." I'd say, "Yeah, but I'm the playmaker, I need to be perfect." He goes, "No, you don't. You have to be a part of that team that makes the team perfect. No one cares that you dropped that ball." I didn't realise that I started with the negatives when I broke the game down and he's going, "Did you even enjoy yourself out there?" And I'd be like, "Yeah, I had fun." And he goes, "Doesn't sound like it."* (Laughs).

When coaching juniors, Brent sees his role as an educator and facilitator. *I'm giving them an option, and, on the field, they make their choices. It's just about giving them the tools to work it out.* Integral to this process is a willingness to accept that errors will occur. *I don't care if you make mistakes. I'd rather you go in and give 100 percent and get it wrong than going in at 50 per cent and do nothing.*

Brent also adopts strategies that will build players' confidence and motivation to trial different strategies and skills, to take risks and be creative so that their learning will be enhanced. He described how he instigates a guided reflection process with his players, an athlete-centred approach which encourages players to examine sensory information and their own priorities which contribute to their on-field decisions. Brent then suggests possible improvements. [(So, I'll ask a player], *"When you were throwing that pass, did you feel like it was a chance? Or you were throwing it because you didn't want to get caught by yourself?" And then the kid will go, "Oh, I didn't want to get caught by myself." So, now we need to*

work on: "You're worried about being caught with the ball. So, then we'll work on holding your feet longer, waiting for your team mate to turn up to tell you to go down." And he'll say, "Okay, I'll give that a try."

Harry has also advocated a more self-reflective approach with his players as his career has progressed and posits relationship-building with players and fellow coaches as essential. *As a coach, it's not just about teaching them the skills, it's about teaching them how to play their own game* [and] *reflect on their game. So, I do a lot more of that with players now when we play or when we train. I get them to think about their good points and their bad points.* This more humanistic approach is one that Harry promotes to less experienced coaches when engaging in their own self-analysis. *Self-reflection on the game, as a coach, is about developing players* as people and learners*, not just their skills.* In addition, the ability to quickly adapt one's coaching style or activities to suit the learner is a skill he values highly.

> *It's like young teachers who spend all their time developing their lessons but forget to look at the kids and what they need. So, your lesson is good, but the kids don't need that yet. They need something more. And I think as an older coach, you develop that ability to change your lesson on the spot. But that's the skill of teaching. Generally, teachers do make good coaches because they understand* [how] *to help people learn.*

Steve described his upbringing as being typified by *tough love.* This appears to have translated to the high expectations he has for his players which is underpinned by strong core values to help them improve and to deal with life's challenges. *I'm never one to be softer with the players. At the end of the day, we're playing rugby and you've got to be tough physically and mentally. A lot of lessons you can take off the pitch as well to help boys be stronger and tougher.*

Steve believes that rugby is *best played when you can express yourself and play how you want to play*. He coaches his players to be aggressive and to physically dominate their opponents. From a practical perspective, this will allow them the time and space to engage in creative tactical ploys and displays of skill. Steve is critical of coaches who conform rigidly to a set game structure, instead preferring to give players the freedom to adjust and make decisions in response to the varying situations that present on the field, and then later to critically reflect on the outcomes. This process also requires the coach to accept the inevitability of mistakes and treat them as opportunities for player learning and development.

Steve recognises the importance of feedback and questioning which he sees as vital to facilitating this process:

> *Part of my philosophy of playing rugby is I don't like playing pattern too much. We set a shape and then make decisions. I see coaching as you give the players a platform to build upon, a quality set up, and then, "Right. These are our options," play from there, and then, just reviewing and giving feedback on things. So, if they make a mistake in a game, you go over it straight away: "If they show this in their backfield and if he's not covering that corner, what can we do here?" (And the player responds)"Punch the corner." "All right. Let's have a look at that next time. If he's not covering the corner, let's put it in the corner then."*

Steve has found this player-centred style of coaching (which also focusses heavily on the coach questioning rather than telling) to be successful with his players. He believes they respond positively to him recognising that they know the answer or solution to the problems they encounter on the field and generally trusting them to find it. He does, however, admit that *sometimes you outright tell them what to do to get the job done.*

4.7.3 SUBORDINATE THEME: BUILDING A TEAM

As the new manager and the youngest employee of the diversionary centre looking after intoxicated and drug-affected Indigenous members of his regional community, Brent initially struggled with *being part of the team with everyone else* to later when he was responsible for getting *rid of people that weren't making the service better*. However, Brent acknowledged he needed to strongly assert himself and his vision for the centre if he was to succeed in fulfilling what he saw as its mission. *I had to get rid of seven people before everyone else sort of fell into line.* The strategy Brent adopted when he took charge of the diversionary centre is strikingly similar to his attitude when he became head coach at his rugby club as he again showed his willingness to do without those who were not committed to the culture and processes, he was trying to implement.

> *We had a couple guys coming back from injury - our A grade star players. The rest of the club said they should have just been straight back into first grade. I made them play reserve grade. "Come back through because the Reserve grade players have*

stepped up and deserve their jersey. They haven't done anything wrong." We were winning, too. "So, you play a game of reserve grade, sit on the bench for A grade. We'll mould you back into the team." Three out of four players stuck around, and one cracked it. And I said, "Well, it's up to you, mate. I'm not dropping you from the team. Everybody else must come back through. The rules haven't changed." And I think that's what turned me from a coach to a player manager, moulding them back into the team. Got a lot of respect out of it, which was good for the boys, and it was good for me - boosted my confidence as well.

Joel adopts a similar approach when selecting representative teams. He considers a player's willingness to orient themselves to the values of the team as being worth more than their on-field abilities. As such, he believes there are times when he can strengthen the team by removing certain individual players who may be undermining the collective environment: *I've sent people home for doing things that aren't right. I've not picked the best players. The first year I took over the rep* [team], *I dropped three Queensland Country players because they didn't want to do what the rest of the team wanted to do.*

Brent sees rugby as a game revolving around the key principle of teammates supporting each other. As a leader in both contexts, he actively encourages people to make and reflect on their choices and then focus on what they can learn from these decisions. In addition, Brent describes how he seeks to build an enjoyable learning environment conducive to maintaining players' positivity by prioritising mateship. *When I get a kid to go on the field for me, I say, "The first thing I want you to do is go and have fun with your mates."* Consistent with this concept and his own experiences as a player, Brent emphasises the importance of encouragement and support. *I always tell the kids on the field, "If you've got nothing nice to say about someone dropping the ball, don't say anything. They know they dropped the ball. They're already feeling terrible. You need to pick your mate up off the ground and go, 'Right. We need to get that ball back.' You'll get a lot more reaction."*

Brent recognises that an essential part of this process requires him to develop players' sense of security through the environment he creates and the manner he adopts. *I don't care if you make mistakes, we all make mistakes. I care about the way you bounce back.* He conceptualises his role as building players' confidence and motivation to trial different strategies and skills, to take risks and be creative so that their learning will be enhanced.

This requires questioning the player about their thought processes and decisions relevant to their performance, and then to suggest possible improvements.

Joel defines coaching success as players improving their qualities as teammates and as individuals rather than on-field victories. As an accredited coach, Joel considers that he has sound technical knowledge, However, he sees his skills as better suited to team building and bringing players together for a common purpose. This is challenging with regional representative teams as the time constraints and travel distances inherent in country rugby in Queensland often result in limited preparation. *The ability I seem to have is to be able to make players better people and make a team a better team. We're not coaching rugby; we're coaching life skills.*

An integral part of this process requires players to respect the team entity and their teammates as well as Joel's stated vision for the team. This frequently requires the suppression of strong rivalries that may have built up between players over the years, a process that Joel enjoys facilitating. *So, they've been playing each other, they've been hating each other, and you've got to bring them together. Some of the best feedback I ever get is someone ringing me and saying, "You know, I played against that bloke for 10 years and thought what an idiot he was and then you brought us together in the rep team and, gee, he's a good bloke ..." Yeah, that's pretty exciting to me.*

Similarly, Chris's priority is that his players, whatever their age, become more familiar with each other, whether in a representative team or as a local club team. Using games and activities that promote relationship-building among teammates is a key tool in developing this. Training together, having fun together and eating together are all ways that Chris facilitates this process. Chris sees team cohesion and unity as essential in a game like rugby that relies heavily on players committing to potentially putting themselves in harm's way to support and protect their teammates: *I tell them that at the end of this camp, you're all going to be mates. You've got to depend on the guy next to you. If you don't know him, you don't know if you can trust him. That doesn't make for a good team. So, I think that bond, that knowing your teammate, he's one of your comrades, he's happy to mix with him socially, I think that's really important in rugby.*

As a coach, however, Joel feels that it is essential to maintain a distance between himself and his players and this means monitoring or limiting his own social interactions, especially those involving alcohol. While it is important for the players to develop tight bonds with each

other, he views becoming too close to the players as creating potential complications. *Don't drink with your team and don't go to the pub afterwards with the team because you'll get yourself into a lot of trouble. If you are coaching a team, you've got to be seen to be a little bit separated from the team. You can't be their mate.*

As with the other coaches, there is a strong link between Chris' upbringing and his pedagogical approach. As a youth, he routinely set goals for himself in his education and his sporting ambitions and found this fostered his sense of self-belief- *I think setting small goals and achieving them made me feel good.* As a coach, Chris works collaboratively with the players to set the goals for the team, as he finds this also engenders a sense of ownership by everyone involved. *I'll go, "What do we want to achieve this year? Like are we here just to have a good time? Or are we going to try and make the semi's? Or do you want to win all our home games?" So, if the aim is to have a good time, then it might be coming up with some fun plays. If it's to get better so that we can win the comp next year, then we can work around that as well.*

Chris believes goals need to be negotiated and accepted by both the player/s and the coach to be effective. He recounted a story from early in his coaching career which proved pivotal in his acknowledgement of the power of goal setting and in his developing self-belief as a coach: *We were 20 - nil down at halftime. I walked away with about three minutes to go before halftime and said, "What am I going to say? What are we going to do?" And I just got them in a circle around me and I kept coming back to one guy - a front rower from Jindaroo - his eyes. He believed every word I was saying. And I knew if he believed it, the rest of the team believed it. I just have a really vivid memory looking into his eyes and knowing everyone believed me. And then we came back and won that game. And that was from just setting goals - "This is what we're going to do in the second half." And I could see that they trusted me.*

Chris believes in player self-determination and seeks to motivate players by persuading them of the benefits of doing the assigned training activities, rather than simply demanding that they do them. *As a coach, I probably leave it up to the players to make that decision. I don't force them to push themselves hard, but I try and tell them the value of that. And I probably don't criticize those that don't push themselves that hard because I see that that's their choice; but I'll let them know what they're missing out on, and the reasons why they should push hard. I don't want to be the one with the whip. You've got to let them learn that, because*

otherwise they won't fit into the team; they won't feel comfortable because they're trying to be someone that they're not. He also acknowledges that this approach has a pragmatic benefit as well since he frequently had small numbers of players at training and simply could not afford to alienate any participants by being too insistent or dictatorial.

As representative coaches, the participating coaches often referred to the city-country divide and the perceived benefits associated with rural living, particularly in the context of forming a team identity. Steve revealed that there was a distinction between the country junior players in comparison to their city counterparts. ... [they] *do tend to be a little bit tougher. For sure. Whether it's related to a lot of farm kids, outback kids or their upbringing. Playing rugby league* [where] *probably the hits are a little bit bigger… it's a bit more physical in junior rugby league in comparison to junior rugby union. Definitely, they are a bit tougher in general. Probably a little less coddled by their parents as well. That's my feeling anyway.*

Harry also saw a different attitude amongst the regionally-based coaches compared to those who live in the metropolitan areas. *I think it makes you persevere more. I don't know if it hardens you, but I think it builds a tolerance where you're all prepared to stick things out and if it gets hard you don't just say, "Well, I'm not playing rugby anymore because we don't have players or because it's too far to travel." It's accepting that things are tough out in the Bush and if you can't put up with some of those things then ... life doesn't happen for you. Whereas, if you're in the city, I imagine, like at a GPS school, if you didn't have your whole squad of 23 players turn up to train, you may call it off and say, "Come back when you're serious," but, you know, in the bush, if you get 12 players to training you think you're having a good night.*

Harry feels that his own rural upbringing has given him an empathy for the challenges his players face: *You accept that there are difficulties. People can't be at places because they're either working or they haven't got money or they're drought stricken, and the cows are dying, or they've just spent two and half hours on a bus getting to school or coming home. Or they're off to boarding school and they only see their parents three times a year.*

Joel exploits the rural lifestyle image of by specifically linking physical aspects of the game to the players' self-image as 'Men from the Bush'. *One of the main things we talk about in country football is our toughness and resilience, never backing out of a confrontation. And we're not talking fighting ... But every single thing in a rugby game is a confrontation. So, for the tackle, one on one, you don't back out, you win it. If someone is trying to get the ball, you win it. Jumping in a line out ... So that's a big thing we talk about a lot in country football;*

well, I certainly do. I play it up. That makes us different to other people - we don't get beaten in those one on ones.

4.8 SUPERORDINATE THEME 5: CHALLENGES AND REWARDS OF COACHING REGIONAL RUGBY

The participating coaches were well-placed to provide observations and perspectives on the challenges associated with being volunteer rugby coaches working in regional areas. All spoke of the difficulties they encountered with the times and distances involved with travelling to matches and training as well as the challenge of balancing their coaching commitments with their other roles as spouses, parents, employers, and employees. Each coach also identified challenges they experienced with promoting rugby in regional areas and with coach and player development in regional areas. The coach participants were quite passionate in voicing their frustrations concerning how rugby's governing bodies could better meet their needs.

4.8.1 SUBORDINATE THEME: TIME, DISTANCE AND BALANCING COMMITMENTS

In comparing the issues he has to deal with as a regional/rural coach to those dealt with by a metropolitan coach, Joel identifies with the hardships faced by his players and recognises his responsibilities concerning the demands placed on them. He also appreciates that in difficult circumstances such as drought and financial downturns, families may find it hard to support their sons playing a contact sport that requires significant travel like rugby. *Distance is our biggest problem. We're trying to pull people from huge areas so training is something we can't do. Back when I was playing* [representative rugby], *we'd train during the week on a Wednesday night. The Gerrivale boys would leave at five o'clock and we'd train at seven - two-hour drive. Then they'd drive home. We can't do it anymore. We won't make our players drive home after training runs, so we have two sessions a year on a weekend. Sometimes that's after they've played on the Saturday so there's issues like that* [which] *I don't think you'd get in the city.*

A constant issue experienced by the participating coaches was the difficulties they had in balancing coaching responsibilities with professional and family commitments. Steve found the travelling involved in playing and coaching rugby, especially at the representative level, required considerable sacrifice in terms of time with his family. His work with representative junior club rugby (as opposed to school-based rugby) would take up the winter/spring school holiday. Again, the distances involved in these endeavours were extensive, with players driving up to seven hours for training or games. This presented significant challenges in communicating with players, parents and other coaches when organising training sessions, travel, accommodation, and games.

Steve regards the travel, expense and time involved as part of his role as a voluntary regional coach: *Quite often your training session is your weekend. It's just one of those things that's well accepted and that's what you must do. If you've got no other option, well, that's what you are going to do, isn't it? At the end of the day, I chose to be involved as much as I did.*

Chris moved from Rasmussen to the coastal community of Williamstown after he remarried and become father to two teenage stepchildren, in addition to his own baby daughter. The travel requirements involved with coaching rugby at his new regional club were especially draining with his escalation of family responsibilities. It was almost inevitable that he began to see the sacrifices he was making for rugby as detrimental to his other commitments: *The travel is every second week. So, five hours of travel and then you've got four hours of rugby in the middle of it. That's nine hours. So, it's a massive part of your weekend and you're just exhausted the next day as well. And so that became really, really, difficult to maintain. I had a young family at that time and then having to go and do a hectic job during the week ... It was pretty tiring.* Chris eventually had to make a choice between coaching and his family: *Do I spend time with these people, some of whom don't even want to come to training? Or do I spend time with my young family? So, the decision was pretty easy*.

Facing a similar problem, Joel revealed that he did not find balancing coaching and family commitments as easy to navigate. Instead, he believes his *habit of putting others first* and committing much of his free time to coaching rugby damaged his marriage. He recounts an incident when he agreed to help a friend with coaching a representative team without discussing it with his wife. *She read it in the paper before I told her. So that didn't go down so well.*

Despite his wife working in the same agricultural products industry as him and enjoying sport, Joel recognised that his rugby coaching was impacting on their relationship. She was *stuck at home, not having a good time* while he was coaching and enjoying the social opportunities associated with the rugby club. So, upon moving to a bigger regional centre, Joel tried to redress this imbalance by giving up coaching. He did not mention if he had sought an alternative activity to coaching that perhaps he and his wife could have done together. Within a few months, his wife noticed that he was unhappy and intuitively knew the reasons for this. *We were there six months and then Liz actually said to me, "You're bloody depressed. You can't do this. You've got to get back and start doing some coaching again."* Joel acknowledges that her instincts were correct and when he returned to coaching, he was much happier: *Oh, I missed it, no two ways about that. And without lying on your couch... I'm not the most social person in the world. So, I guess some of the reasons why I also coach is I don't like standing on the sideline drinking beer, talking to people. If I'm going to be there, I want to be involved.* [My wife] *could tell that I needed to be involved in something.*

Joel also recognised that he had created a similar dynamic in his relationships with his children. He identified one of his major *character flaws* was to *put other people's kids before my own* since he had spent so much time engaged in coaching-related activities. Ironically, his second interview took place at a school where he was assisting with a holiday coaching clinic while his son was at home *probably playing X-Box.* His son, Ty, attends a rugby-playing school but, due to a shoulder injury, does not play rugby and prefers participating in chess and the arts. Joel expressed he was pleased with Ty's participation in these activities as he seemed to enjoy and be doing well in them. Joel recognises his prioritising of rugby coaching ahead of his family has not always been beneficial. However, he had found rugby recently provided a pleasing connection with Ty, even though he doesn't play. *My son when he did play, was a very bad football player. But he enjoyed it. He loved it and loved coming with me to football; and to this day, most coaching jobs I do, my son comes with me. He just doesn't want to play.*

Joel spoke of conducting a coaching clinic with Ty as his assistant and that, despite not playing, Ty had taken on the role of manager for his peers' school team. Ty, he believes, *spends too much time inside*, which is why Joel feels the need to encourage him to be involved in assisting him with coaching rugby. This appears more to do with Joel's spare time being predominantly rugby oriented rather than an attempt to force Ty into being involved with the game. He did specifically recall enjoying Ty's help when coaching his

daughter's high school Rugby 7s team, all of whom had never played before, and described it as *probably the best six weeks of coaching I've ever done in my life* because he enjoyed the interactions with his daughter and her teammates so much. Still, when asked about balancing his rugby commitments with spending time with his children as a divorced parent, Joel lamented that he does not see them that often.

All the participating coaches commented on the importance of the support provided by their spouses but also recognised their commitment to coaching rugby in regional Queensland monopolised time that might otherwise be spent on doing other activities with their families. For example, Steve expresses gratitude for his wife's willingness to travel with him and look after their children as he fulfils his coaching commitment; however, this is stated with the caveat that *Michelle's the one that probably got me into rugby union*: *Michelle is very supportive from that end* [and] *mostly happy to go away to the bigger regional centres for at least a whole day and* [let me] *do a training session and then come back; essentially taking up your whole weekend. So, I was fortunate in that.*

Whereas Joel and Steve have had difficulties in balancing their commitments, Harry and Brent saw they needed to make sacrifices if they wanted to maintain their relationships with their spouses and families as well as play/coach rugby. Once married, Harry gave up playing cricket commenting that *if you want to talk about time away from home, cricket was a really big one*, and began coaching junior teams in which his children were involved once they were old enough. He also spent many hours transporting them to and from their sporting events (swimming, equestrianism, cricket) throughout Central Queensland.

Brent credits his wife with helping him change his priorities. Considering his heavy work responsibilities as manager of the diversion centre, Brent felt the need to make some major changes so that he could spend more time with his young family. *I changed my whole life to make it fit. I gave up drinking and partying.* Whereas previously he felt *if I don't go out tonight the boys might go out and have some fun and I might miss out. Now I feel like I'm not missing out on anything. My life's at home.* Brent's description of his current daily schedule is focussed on his family.

> *If I want to go to the gym, I don't go when my kids are awake and my wife's awake - that's family time. I go when everyone's asleep. I'll go to the gym, come home, make breakfast for my daughter, get her ready for day care, iron my wife's clothes, get* [our son] *changed so when I'm walking out the door, all my wife's got to do is put the little*

fella in the car and go shopping. When I knock off at four o'clock, I have the ability to switch off - from work, rugby. And that's my time with my wife and my daughter. And my daughter is like, "We go for a pushbike ride, Daddy?" So, I'll chuck her on the back of the bike and go for a ride. My wife's had her all day [so I'll] *balance it up a bit. We'll go and see the horses, down the creek. That's our time. I see my time is when my wife and daughter are sleeping. I want to try and be the father that* [my daughter] *can really look up to and come to me with anything she wants to ask me.*

Even though he has made these changes and has a well-intentioned and functional schedule, Brent referred to the demands on him as a coach which had little to do with actually coaching; this appeared to be a common experience among the participants. *This year, we had a lot of kids that couldn't make training. I went to my organisation and said, "Hey, we've got mini-buses here. How would you like to support our rugby club?" And my CEO's an ex-rugby player from England. We gave him a jersey, a shirt, brought him down to the sponsors' day. And now he's on board. So, we're picking up 22 kids and driving them to training every Tuesday and Thursday.*

Brent's wife, a HPE teacher, arranged for him to voluntarily coach and coordinate rugby teams for her school. She is supportive of those times when club commitments encroach on his time with their family even when there have been times when *she wouldn't see me from 7:00am in the morning till 8:00pm at night when I'm dropping these kids home.*

Chris discussed his frustration with having to undertake administrative tasks for the club due to the lack of volunteers that are available, which is a common issue in regional areas. This administrative work impacts on the limited time he has for coaching: *The worst thing about being a coach in the country is that you don't always get to spend your time doing coaching. I'm a really bad administrator and a really good coach. I love coaching kids, love being on the field* [but] *you get lots of other roles thrust upon you because you're seen as a leader and so it'll become your responsibility to do the administration, collect the money, phone everybody, make sure that the ground is set up…* Consequently, Chris declared that he has given notice of his intention to step down from all administrative duties in the coming year. It is difficult however to see Chris following through with this intention if no one else takes on these duties.

The participants' willingness to commit so much of their time to their coaching roles was also challenged by a lack of corresponding dedication from players. While the coaches expressed

an understanding and empathetic attitude to players not being available to train or play due to work-related issues, such as work rosters and harvest time, or environmental conditions such as drought and storms, the lack of commitment from some players was frustrating. They often found it difficult to understand why players would sign up to play the game but not be motivated enough to attend training or turn up for games. Chris's experiences of player commitment in his current regional community, Williamstown, were very different to those he had found at his previous clubs. *Straight away the cultural difference just struck me. This was a club where the rugby was something you did if you didn't have anything better to do. So, you might turn up this week but you're not going to be here the next three weeks and then you'd show up again. If it was your girlfriend's birthday, you didn't come to training. I was just a bit taken aback about how casual it was.*

As a teenager, Chris had found his rugby club to be a source of stability and reliability in his life, contrasting with the unsettled nature of his homelife growing up. This may explain his disappointment with those players who he believes lack commitment to their teammates and who de-stabilise the team by not attending training. Chris therefore employed his usual strategy of encouraging comradery by arranging communal dinners on a Thursday night and selling raffle tickets on a Friday afternoon, but to little effect. He would, as before, set goals for the club, however the players appeared indifferent. His willingness to set goals and work diligently to achieve them were at odds with the club's indifference to training, social activities, celebrating club successes, and trying to improve performance. *I'd seen success before in rugby and knew that it doesn't come just from rocking up and how great it was when you can actually achieve that. So, I was always prepared to work for it and thought that they should as well.*

The apathy he found amongst many of the Williamstown playing group contrasted with his personal rugby experiences but, most importantly, was anathema to Chris' core values concerning team cohesion, individual work ethic and personal responsibility. Chris persisted in his efforts to change the entrenched culture, confident that he could achieve an improvement in club culture. However, after three years, he felt worn down by the apparent futility of his efforts and he stopped coaching the club's senior team. *I'd go to training; we'd have six blokes there and what's the point of me turning up? What's the point of me planning a session? I've wasted an hour or so planning a training session and six blokes turn up. I would have liked to have known that they weren't coming. But I found that really, really, frustrating when people wouldn't come and wouldn't tell you that they weren't coming.*

Steve also struggled with player numbers at the rugby club in the mining community of Mt Kunde and found that *being a coach there is just getting a game day 15* [players] *together* due to changing shift rosters. *Then with the mining downturn, you could barely get 10 guys to training.* When trying to introduce the game to juniors Steve also encountered difficulties promoting rugby. Because of its marginalised position in his regional area, he had to contend with the limited knowledge of parents about the game and the importance of loyalty to the specific code. *In some cases, their parents would limit them from playing rugby because they didn't know what it was, and they'd labelled themselves. "No, we're a league family. We play league."*

Rugby's marginalised position was reinforced to Steve when he first coached his regional area's Open Schoolboys. Having picked a squad of 22 players for the Queensland Schools' Championships to be held in Brisbane, ten players from the same school inexplicably pulled out, leaving Steve with only twelve players. The reason became clear when Steve found out the school, which was predominantly a rugby league school told their students they would not be eligible to represent the school in a major rugby league tournament to be held a month later if they went away with the rugby union team. This mass withdrawal of players led to an exodus of players from other schools, too. *That was my first year being involved and it was really eye-opening. It was a very, very destructive sort of thing; an incredibly destructive culture to have.* For Steve, this was a pivotal though uncomfortable experience that he determined to ensure would not re-occur. It highlighted to him rugby's lack of identity in regional Queensland and that those regional parents and players did not understand the game as a sport nor as a potential avenue for talented athletes to challenge themselves and experience new opportunities.

4.8.2 SUBORDINATE THEME: DEVELOPING THE GAME, ITS COACHES AND PLAYERS IN REGIONAL AREAS

All participants spoke of the need to enhance rugby's profile in regional Queensland. They saw this as the responsibility of the sport's governing bodies, the Queensland Rugby Union (QRU) and Rugby Australia (RA), formerly known as the Australian Rugby Union (ARU). The coaches identified and suggested solutions to the major areas of concern in regional areas

such as coach education, increasing rugby's profile and balancing the resourcing of elite player pathways with community participation initiatives.

Harry laments the current situation where he only sees limited coaching development opportunities for country-based coaches. He remembers a time when such courses were conducted locally and during school holidays or over a weekend if travel was involved. According to Harry, the Queensland Rugby Union (QRU) has committed limited resources and shows little interest in regional coaches' development. This erodes the aspirations of coaches and their players and is beginning to also have a major impact on the health of the game in metropolitan areas as this is where talented country players will often go to play. *I know the coaches in Brisbane aren't any better than us. If you want to develop your rugby, you've got to make sure the kids in Bundaberg or Emerald are getting the same information as the city kids. And the only way they're going to get it is from their coaches. Somehow that information has got to be freed up. Otherwise, how are you going to get those good country kids competing against these* [city] *kids if they don't have the information?*

At times, the governing bodies (Rugby Australia and the QRU) have declined to share material with regional coaches. Harry sees this proprietary interest in their coaching materials as effectively hindering the development of the game at a grass roots level. *A lot of these skills now seem to be very secretive. Surely, if they're trying to develop rugby in Australia, everybody should have access to that skill information.* He suspects that the governing body is not confident that regional coaches have the understanding to implement the latest technical information correctly or might adapt it without due regard to its appropriateness. *I just want the information. I'm smart enough to work out how I want to use it, but I need to have it. When you play* [the city teams], *it's not that those kids are necessarily better, they're just better organised and this organisation comes through knowing stuff.*

Harry believes the Junior Gold programme instituted by the Australian Rugby Union (ARU) in 2010 was very beneficial in sharing such information. This was a national talent development programme for identified players from under-15 to under-18, co-ordinated by the Australian Rugby Union's High-Performance Unit (HPU) throughout twenty-three centres nationally (ARU, 2012). In regional areas, this involved off-season and pre-season development programmes designed by the ARU HPU being delivered by qualified local coaches to identify junior players who would regularly travel to a regional centre for the training. Harry found that it provided structured skill development and high-quality training

for regional coaches and players. He expressed disappointment that the programme is no longer offered.

This type of professional development for regional coaches has ongoing benefits and ensures they can work with the most current information to support their players. These players are then as familiar with the various techniques, tactics and terms as their city counterparts, particularly if they choose to relocate to the metropolitan areas for work, study or sport. This knowledge may also provide these country coaches with the expertise to assess their players' abilities. They are then better able to nominate their players for opportunities at the next level which can build that regional coach's credibility with representative selectors. Harry understands that the expenses involved with providing coach education opportunities face-to-face in regional centres may be prohibitive for governing bodies. However, given the ubiquitous nature of current technology, such as Skype and Zoom, which were particularly beneficial during the isolation created by COVID-19, it is surprising that these types of professional development opportunities are not offered online to regional coaches.

Steve, having recently moved from his regional community in Central Queensland to south-east Queensland, has found professional development opportunities far easier to access. As a regionally based coach living nine hours away from Brisbane, he had been unable to access the coaching development opportunities offered by the state/national body, such as national coaches presenting a seminar mid-week during the school term. Considering Steve's status as a leading coach in his regional area, he sees this as an indictment of the QRU's lack of interest in regional rugby as information and resources were only provided to coaches who could attend in person.

Steve suggested the state governing body should provide more opportunities for coaches from different geographic areas to work together. Instead of coach educators travelling to the regions, opportunities already exist for regional coaches to come to the coach educators at little expense to the governing body. Each year, Queensland School Sport organises and conducts state carnivals in which ten educational regions participate. Steve referred to these carnivals as frequently collaborative and cooperative due to his fellow teacher-coaches' preparedness to engage in networking and sharing. He felt these school carnivals and the club-based state championships were ideal opportunities to bring volunteer community coaches together for professional development. *The clubs' carnivals, (the coaches) tend to do their own thing and there's not much networking. At that carnival, the QRU don't provide any*

opportunities for learning things. You'd think it'd be a good time to at least put on a speaker about something. But they don't do anything like that.

In further discussion Steve wondered if the missed opportunities to provide volunteer regional coaches with professional development was an indication that the state body did not value their contribution. *So,* [these] *country guys, that are really putting in the hard yards, going away to a state carnival, the kind of guys putting huge amounts of time and effort into those things and travelling hundreds of kilometres, thousands, over the course of getting prepared for a state carnival* [and] *you play your carnival and then you go home.*

Some of the coaches have forged relationships over the years with metropolitan coaches, including old teammates, rival coaches at carnivals and fellow coach development attendees, which can allow for exchanges of rugby ideas and knowledge. However, the restrictions associated with the recent COVID-19 pandemic have been prohibitive to such coach professional development opportunities. Steve believes that technology such as videoconferencing can be easily harnessed by governing bodies to address this issue and simultaneously build networks among coaches throughout the state. From his conversations with other regional coaches, Steve believes many of these people want to develop their coaching abilities but are unable to access the most current information to facilitate this. This extends to those involved in other types of roles in regional rugby clubs which are often managed by a dedicated core group of volunteers at the grassroots level. Steve expressed his concerns about the sustainability of these volunteers' commitment as his experiences found volunteers stopped contributing when their own children ceased their involvement in the game due to finishing school or moving away from the region.

Chris expressed concern over a perceived lack of support from his governing bodies as a coach/administrator in his regional area. This had consequently led him to feel disenfranchised: *I feel really separate from the guys in Brisbane and don't feel like I'm part of their organisation, not part of the rugby community. It's sort of almost the opposite of what rugby should be - everyone working together and that comradeship and that mateship. It's like, "We're doing this here. Good luck out there."*

Chris is frustrated by what he sees as a disparity between the ethos of rugby as he understands it and what he considers to be the governing body's poor treatment of volunteers. *They have no respect for the volunteers. They don't think that the volunteers can do as good a job as they can do.* Chris wants rugby's governing bodies to conduct courses to upskill

clubs' volunteers so that they can run school coaching sessions and enhance their administrative skills. Volunteer development programmes like this would, in Chris' opinion, allow for a greater exchange of ideas which would benefit all parties but instead he laments that *you've got this whole army out there willing to help, to put up their hands and they are treated like the enemy.*

One initiative Harry did find valuable in addressing regional coach development was funding by his district rugby union of a highly experienced coach who was employed as a rugby administrator for the region. Harry found him to be highly influential in developing a more player-led, reflective approach. This person had coaching experience with the National Rugby League and abroad and *was coming from a diverse background. So, if he's telling you, "This is what to do..." well, there's probably something in this.*

The rugby administrator was paid to develop and coordinate rugby in an agriculture and mining region, which required him to drive to various regional centres up to 300 kilometres away to assist local clubs with tasks such as organising travel for representative junior teams. According to Harry this took a significant burden off local volunteers. Speaking of his own experiences he said *I don't think I do my job well at school sometimes because I'm busy planning my rugby stuff.* Harry believes that employing rugby administrators would assist in the areas of organisation and sustainability and thereby ease the strain on those teachers who volunteer to coach school teams. He asserts that rugby in a regional school often rests on the shoulders of one teacher and when that teacher leaves, as can often occur when a country service term expires, the sport then collapses.

Steve identifies the qualities a regionally based rugby coach requires as resilience, a strong work ethic and a willingness to do the job yourself *as you're not really going to get a lot of help.* He acknowledged that coaching and developing the game in his regional area was a taxing and solitary undertaking. *It does take its toll. Obviously, big, big workloads and it gets draining at times, for sure, if you're trying to do the lot yourself with limited resources, limited support. You are trying to get Juniors into the game at a school or club level in your local area. So, you'll probably be involved in Bushrangers* [the regional club-based representative team] *or a school carnival because they always need coaches. But if you had some sort of help or resources or support structure and stronger organisations to help you through things, it'd be greatly beneficial up here.*

A regional administrator can also link coaches with each other and outside experts. Harry recalled the local rugby administrator setting up a coaching panel to talk with clubs and coaches about trends in the game as well as organising experts to present information to representative players on relevant subjects like sports medicine. His frustration at the ease with which such initiatives could be done and the unwillingness of QRU to look at such initiatives was apparent in his discussion. *It should be coming from the* [QRU]. *They should be appointing a person, give them a decent salary, to run that integration of developing players, getting coaches together, running a seminar with coaches every fortnight or something; just to go have a chat and a beer around the table and say, "You guys, this is the latest thing that's going on in Brisbane. Have you seen this? The law changes are this..."*

While development staff are employed by the QRU, the coach participants expressed frustration with what they saw as role confusion and a gap between what they needed from such staff and what is provided. Chris, for example, feels more development needs to occur in schools since sports such as rugby league, AFL and soccer have a far more visible presence in regional areas because of their greater free-to-air television presence and elite players' subsequent exposure to the public. *Rugby has no face here. We've got no one here pushing rugby except for people like myself. So, with small numbers, it's just not cool for a 15-year-old kid to go, "I want to go play rugby union." It's not on TV. No one even knows what rugby union is at that age level. They'll go play basketball instead.* He sees rugby as a sport which children need to experience to develop their appreciation, rather than having minimal participation through one-off school visits by development personnel. He believes the QRU has shifted the workload for setting up schools' competitions in his district on to teachers who coach in their own time. With no dedicated local rugby development personnel funded by the QRU, he believes it is difficult to promote the game in local schools and provide greater opportunities for junior players in his area.

Similarly, Steve expressed frustration and confusion at the limited role the QRU's game development personnel had in regional areas. He saw a disconnect between the state body's perspective of their development staff's roles and what regional coaches and clubs required from them. Not surprisingly, Steve saw a strong need for the state body to employ more development personnel in regional areas. Such staff could lighten the load considerably for volunteer coaches who often have full-time jobs. They could also introduce junior players to the sport while they were at school and expose them to the basic skills of the game. This would effectively take the time-consuming initial recruiting role from teachers and voluntary

coaches. As well, such staff might act as disseminators and brokers of information and resources from the major centres, maintaining contact between the regional coaches and their governing body. Those development staff who are positioned in regional areas are often too far away to be regularly accessible or the area assigned to a Development Officer is too large to make them effective.

Harry argues there should be greater diversity of experience amongst the personnel who are employed to develop the game in regional areas as this would build their credibility among regional coaches. He expressed his frustration with the QRU which he believes often appoints young, inexperienced development personnel to regional areas. Harry is concerned their coaching pedagogy is narrow as they often have limited coaching experience. He feels these development officers do not have the skills and knowledge to adapt their presentations to suit the unique regional context. In addition, drawing on the expertise of experienced regional coaches would alleviate issues related to experience and potentially bruised egos. As Harry posited: *You get a young guy who's 23, he's got a Reds shirt on and he's coming in, teaching you. Look, they're young blokes, they've got a job to do and they're doing the best they can* [but] *I don't need to be taught that by someone from QRU, who's 23, sitting up there saying, "Oh, let's go through the motions of how we develop a lesson plan." I feel like saying, "I should be at the front of this lesson telling <u>you</u> how to do the lesson plan!"* What Harry desires is the access to the information *so I can take that and decipher it, cut it up into parts and say, "I need this, this and this" and I'll give it to these kids. I'm an expert at that. I've done it for 33 years.*

Frustrated with the lack of development support he receives from the QRU, Chris found it difficult to understand why his club paid their affiliation fees (which allow the club to participate in officially sanctioned competitions with accredited officials, access resources supplied by the governing body and subscribe to insurance packages negotiated by the governing body). *Our development officer lives in Brisbane (4 hours' drive away) and we see him once a year at a schools-based* [7-a-side] *competition for kids that don't pay any fees to the Queensland Rugby Union. So, I always wonder where our six thousand dollars a year goes that we* [as a club] *pay to Queensland Rugby Union?*

When players register with their affiliated club their fees provide basic player insurance, help pay referees, contribute to the club's purchasing of uniforms and trophies and fund facility fees such as lighting and ground maintenance. However, Brent voiced his concerns about

local club fees and how the funds are disseminated. He noted that almost half of the funds are paying for the governing bodies' administration costs. *Our subs this year for our kids are 130 bucks. For 10 weeks. Sixty-two dollars fifty of that goes straight to Queensland Rugby.* He felt it was difficult to persuade parents that they were getting value for their money when their levies were not being invested tangibly in their local club facilities or enhancing their children's sporting experiences.

A portion of players' registration and clubs' affiliation fees are directed to providing sanctioned competitions. Meaningful and accessible competitions would, in Harry's opinion, be an important contributor to building rugby's profile in regional areas. He believes that a Country Schools/Club Championship offering an authentic and positive rugby experience for regional players would address many of his concerns. He suggests a four-team competition between the major regional areas outside of the south-east corner of the state - Central Queensland, Far North Queensland, Townsville, and the Darling Downs. From this competition, a junior Queensland Country team could be selected to go on a representative tour. To participate in the initial Junior Gold programme and play in the state championships in Brisbane several years ago cost each player $900. Harry believes that parents would be prepared to spend a similar amount for their child to participate in this selected team if they felt they were getting value for their money. *You've got twenty-three boys in the team, that's nearly $20 000 for one country team. Country regions would make it cheaper because they'd find cheaper ways of doing it. They've got to do that because you'd never survive the distances we travel.*

Recognising that players wishing to pursue a career in higher-level rugby need to relocate to the south-east corner, Harry also sees this competition and the subsequent tour as vital in terms of promoting regional talent. *If these kids are the best of Queensland Country, Brisbane schools will be looking at them and the Brisbane clubs will be looking at them. They're going to get snapped up.* His animosity towards the governing body is evident as he explains his idea - *if the QRU aren't going to support us, then they should stay out of the way and let the country regions develop something!*

This last point highlights another issue the participating coaches described with their governing bodies which was in relation to the pathways that exist for talented players to progress towards elite levels. Joel considers the cliché of the young player travelling down from the country and succeeding in the city as belonging to a past era. Talented regional

players are now identified while juniors at high school by rugby league or rugby union scouts and enrolled in a rugby-playing GPS school on scholarship. From this south-east Queensland base (Brisbane, Toowoomba or Gold Coast), the player then has a far more realistic chance of playing high-level rugby: *Is there going to be a kid that's at Cantlon High School playing for the Reds? I don't reckon it's ever going to happen again because he would have got to grade 10, he'd be playing good league, all the scouts would be about, and one of the private schools would pick him up. There is never, ever going to be a Country kid play for the Wallabies and the Reds again, ever, that hasn't lived in Brisbane and gone through their system.*

Joel understands the pragmatism underpinning this situation since the training programmes and consistent high-level gameplay in the Brisbane competition positively impact players' development, particularly around physical conditioning. He laments that his players are disadvantaged in their representative ambitions because they choose to live regionally and that *by the time they're 23 years old, they're too old. No one would look at them.* When opportunities do arise for a regionally based rugby team to play against the metropolitan teams, Joel highlighted some of the difficulties they confront through the following experience. His regional representative team were playing against three Brisbane Premier Grade sides over five days. Arriving in Brisbane on Friday, the team had training sessions that day and Saturday with their first game on Sunday. *We were beating them 10 minutes after halftime when I had to take our five best players off because I knew we had two more games to play. They ended up beating us by 20 points, but we were matching the best of the Prems. They were a bigger team, they were faster, but we matched them around the field.*

Joel revealed that regional players are not regularly exposed to demanding high-level competition and do not have access to the facilities or expertise to build their physical capabilities, unlike their counterparts in metropolitan areas. So, in his opinion, while the regional players are of good quality in terms of skills and tactical nous, *we just can't keep up with them physically.*

At the junior level, Steve was quite disparaging of the concept of talent pathways often promoted by rugby's governing bodies and the inequities in selection of representative teams. *You play at a state carnival and you want to achieve a state team - Queensland 15s or Queensland schoolboys. So, selectors for each of those teams are always Brisbane- based so they don't just select on the carnival. They watch kids for several years. So, who do they see most commonly? Brisbane kids. So, it's no surprise when the team rolls around to be being*

picked that they've got all these Brisbane kids fresh in their mind because they're just off the back of their AIC or GPS season. However, he suggests that having coach development staff run training sessions once a month with regional players and coaches would have a profound impact as players from all over the state would be exposed to the latest coaching concepts, and possible selectors. Through this process, he believes the various parties would be able to *speak the same language*.

At the representative level for schoolboys, Steve described the ending of the separation between the south-east Queensland-based Greater Public Schools (GPS) and Associated Independent Colleges (AIC) respective competitions and the state-wide Combined Secondary Schools (CSS) as shutting down opportunities for regional players to gain recognition on the bigger stage. A subsequent dearth of regional players being selected for next-level representation will also, he believes, have an impact on regional players' aspirations. He fears that closing this pathway for young regionally based players will have a subsequent negative impact on participation rates and player development, making it unlikely for regional players to achieve the next level.

Steve believes that regional schoolboys will be uninterested in playing in a competition where they will most likely suffer heavy defeats to far more experienced GPS-based players. He suggested an alternative approach where a Queensland Country schools' team is selected to play in the National Division 2 titles, where the minor rugby states such as South Australia and Tasmania compete. *So, the Queensland schools carnival is going to be dominated by a big few from the southeast corner in our 18s carnival. Boys going to go away from Capricornia, Northern and Wide Bay, they're going to get towelled up and they're not going to enjoy it. So, give them something to strive for like in the Under 16s, in the club championships, they still have country and city teams. Those Queensland Country guys, they've got to have something to shoot for. Otherwise, it's going way, way, way down the sewer, big time, at a rate of knots. All the good work that's been done by guys like me and you, Johnny Rauch and guys like that ... Why couldn't a Queensland Country team play against South Australia, the Northern Territory and teams like that?*

Brent argues that this, too, will require significant support as he highlights the financial difficulties experienced by representative-level players and their families with the long-distance travel that is required. *Our under 12s last year paid $795 for the plane ride* [to Brisbane], *insurances* [and] *bus ride. So, are parents going to come down? Because there's*

no billeting anymore, that's a thousand bucks - accommodation, food, flights. It goes from a kid being so excited to make a representative team to the parents having to pull them out. We had seven kids pull out last year because of the cost. These are seven of the top kids I've just picked. If you made the cost of a state championship the same for people [regardless of where they're coming from], *one cost for every kid, you'd have more kids coming.*

Harry also feels that country-based players are disadvantaged when it comes to selection for representative teams, regardless of his team's on-field performances. He is frustrated with what he sees as a lack of transparency and clarity concerning talent identification processes in Queensland rugby. As such, Harry feels that selectors of such teams are chasing an already finished product rather than looking at his players in terms of their potential to thrive in better company. *You don't buy a horse in prime condition. You want to see what he looks like when he's in a poor paddock and you say, "If he looks that good in a poor paddock, he's going to be great in a good paddock."*

At the heart of these coaches' concerns about regional player opportunities is a conundrum faced by most sports' governing bodies - balancing the resources committed to building community participation with those dedicated to developing programmes for elite players. Chris is concerned that there is a significant divergence in the mission of rugby's governing bodies and that of country and many metropolitan rugby clubs. The former, he believes, prioritises the creation of 'pathways', a term he disparages, for talented players, whereas the latter seeks a more holistic approach in showing people *how to play rugby, have a good time, create a sport with a respectful sporting environment where people will respect the referees and respect the other players.* While recognising rugby's need to identify talented players and facilitate their development towards elite levels, Chris, not surprisingly, sees regional rugby clubs' purpose as more communal, providing their local areas with a sport that centres on *mateship and comradeship and having fun, which are all the things that I did when I was a youngster. You'll get more kids playing if it's fun.*

In Joel's opinion, it is this perceived focus on the elite levels that has been the most distressing to grassroots clubs, dedicated to attracting participants of all abilities to the game. He sees this attitude manifesting within the game's governing bodies into a lack of respect and appreciation for grassroots players, coaches, and clubs. Like Chris, Joel feels frustrated that, in his opinion, the game's governing bodies have lost sight of the importance of the

community participation element of rugby, where players participate for enjoyment rather than aspire to play at the elite levels.

Joel identifies the strong links between the GPS schools, who are seen as the predominant 'nurseries' of elite rugby talent, and rugby's governing bodies as having negative consequences for the game. He nominates these schools' emphasis on building and promoting a successful premier rugby team (the First XV) as a major reason for a growing number of their students lacking active engagement with the game. *All they care about is winning because it makes them money. So, they care about their Firsts, but they spend too much time at the top and nothing on the middle.* In Joel's opinion, schools are beginning to see the results of this focus on the elite in specialist on-field positions which lend themselves to a specific body type (lock forwards are, for example, generally tall and ectomorphic). He wonders where elite-level players will be sourced in the future, especially in those positions which can be difficult to fill due to suitability of body shape and/or technical skills. Prop forwards, for example, commonly have endomorphic/mesomorphic physiques and significant neck and core strength so that they may withstand the pressures involved in scrummaging. *At a GPS school this year, they had seventy-two players come to their under 15 try-outs and had three props! So, they will have uncontested scrums from their Bs [Second-grade] right through to their Es [Fifth Grade] this year.* Ideally, a team of 23 players (15 players on the field and eight reserve players) should have four props with appropriate physical features and experience so that contested scrums can be implemented. Contested scrums provide an opportunity for a strong forward pack to ensure they have clean possession of the ball on their put-in or disrupt/steal their opposition's possession on their opponents' put-in.

Joel also expresses irritation at the disparities between the resources allocated by the game's governing bodies between the metropolitan areas compared to the regional areas. He nominates the cost of training equipment as significant for regional clubs and is upset that when *you go down to the Reds there's 700 footballs lying around that they don't use. Things like that really get to me.* Like the other coaches, Joel feels frustrated that, in his opinion, the game's governing bodies have lost sight of the importance of the community participation element of rugby, where players play for enjoyment rather than aspiring to play at the elite levels.

> *Certainly, talking to the* [QRU] - *I have a fair bit to do with them - "pathway, pathway" and I kept saying, "What pathway?" A pathway is a C Grade player making*

B Grade. Everyone talks about becoming a Wallaby or a Red. But to me, a Cantlon B Grade player playing A grade is just as important as being a Wallaby because it's as good as they'll ever be. For them, that's their Reds! That's their Wallabies! Rugby's still the game we enjoy. Go and live in St George and travel an eight-hour round-trip every week to play a game of football! They do it because they enjoy it.

This last comment from Joel is significant because it highlights the enjoyment these coaches attach to their sport and points to why they have dedicated so much effort and time, and their families' time, to coaching rugby.

4.8.3 SUBORDINATE THEME: REWARDS

Despite being quite disillusioned with teaching at his first school in Brisbane, coaching rugby appeared to provide an emotional connection for Steve. He offered to organise a Rugby 7s team to play in one-off carnivals with other local schools. This provided him with a pivotal experience where he was excited about not just introducing rugby to his novice players, but with how the game might be used to motivate students who most needed it: *That's the thing that really sparked it for me. The boys came away: "Yeah, we really enjoyed that." Some of the kids who were like me and perhaps a bit disengaged, you've taken them away for an experience and they have a good hit out at footy. They're learning new things, playing with their mates and things like that and you just get that rewarding feeling - the same as the boys are getting.*

Steve's greatest source of pride was the large increase in numbers of juniors playing rugby in his local area. *Like when I started there, we struggled to get two or three rugby players. But my last year there, I was very proud of the fact that we could get a whole 22 players to fill out a district team which is basically our two schools in town. It was years of hard work ... When you see the development of the kids, they really enjoy rugby. And in this area, rugby league heartland, that's all they're really used to, so when they play rugby union and play a free-flowing attacking game and they can express themselves - play how they want to play, essentially - they really enjoy it.*

While there can be difficulties associated with coaching in country areas, Steve also acknowledged some of the advantages, such as greater opportunities to coach at higher

representative levels, the chance to learn from other coaches, and to work with more capable players: *You can, out there, take up two or three major coaching gigs in the year. I mean, it's very time consuming* [and can] *take up your whole year, but very rewarding at the same time. The whole area is requiring rugby coaches and there's barely enough people to go around, let alone quality coaches. So, it really afforded me those opportunities to be able to progress a lot quicker than what I would have in the city.* These representative carnivals also provided opportunities to network with, and learn from, other coaches *who are facing a lot of the same dilemmas as you are.*

Joel values seeing his players enjoying their rugby experience and developing a love for the game like himself. He also enjoys watching his players improve their rugby skills as well as enhancing their personal skills and efficacy. These motives are evident in the following anecdote he proffered when asked about the rewards that coaching rugby in regional areas had given him:

> *There was a young kid running around in B Grade who wasn't good enough to play A Grade. But we were looking for reserves and he put his hand up.* [I said], *"Ah, gee, I dunno, Johnno, you're not quite there, but let's take you. Maybe you might get five minutes in the game." So, we took him to Dirranbandi* [3-4 hours' drive away]. *He turned up with his Mum and Dad, his uncle and his wife and his other uncle; all turned up to watch this kid! So, 10 or 15 minutes into the game, I said to Johnno, "Righto, let's get you out there and have a run." He was so excited; his parents were excited. He got the ball; first time he touched the ball he scored a try in the corner! I'll never forget that, and the kid doesn't forget it and his parents don't forget it either.*

Joel also spoke of gaining unexpected benefits through his coaching. While some participants felt that their coaching commitments frequently prevented them fulfilling their paid work responsibilities, Joel found that his coaching skills and experience have been transferable to his role as a sales manager. *My general manager came up and said, "Joel, you run this like a football team. But I've never seen the staff, in the 10 years I've been here, they've never been happier, and they've never been more productive, and they've never made more money." I take my approach straight off the football field and into my staff and it works.*

Harry, consistent with his measured approach to coaching and teaching, stated that he was happy when players saw him as a coach who had helped them become a better footballer. *They don't need to give me cards,* but he hoped that they might feel they had learned

something from him as a coach. *It might be a lesson in playing football, might be a life lesson, it might be, "I'm never late for training."*

According to Chris, the smaller size of the regional rugby club and the intensive nature of living in a smaller community enhances the successes generated on the field. *That sort of special instance belongs to that team, that special small group. If it's in a big city club where you're watching four or five grades, it gets diluted a little bit.* He also believes the regional games are a more intimate experience. *You feel obviously close to the game in a small crowd and that makes it a bit more fun. You can have banter with everybody in the crowd.*

Having decided to buy a business in the country town of Rasmussen, Chris recalled an example of the speed of communication, known colloquially as the 'bush telegraph', within the regional Australian rugby community. *I coached and played a bit in Sydney and literally, when I moved to Rasmussen, the first day, this guy down there knocked on my door and said we're looking for a new coach for the rugby team. I was painting the walls in this new practice. We were to open in about two weeks' time. So, he took me out to dinner the first night I was there.*

The club became central to Chris and his wife's social life as she coached as well. The culture of the club is something that Chris clearly valued as this sentiment has not changed in the intervening 15 years. *I think the culture of that club is something that needs to be shared around; like it was a really strong culture and a strong bond. But I guess they chose a good logo. They did change their name from the Rasmussen Royals to the Rasmussen Phantoms so their club house became The Skull Cave and the girls' team became the Dianas. It was something different and something interesting. They had funny sayings* [from The Phantom comic strip like] *"Phantom has thirst of 10 camels". It's just stuff like that that adds to that culture and that was a very strong part of that club. I was happy at the time to be involved in that.*

Chris saw that the club's members focused on the social aspect of playing sport together and this was evidenced by the players' enthusiasm in attending training and supporting and reinforcing the club's identity. In Chris's opinion, the players and members felt that *we're all in this club together*. This attitude seemed compatible with the tenets of rugby that Chris enjoyed and the active presence of both men and women in the club reflected the egalitarian and communal aspects of rugby club membership that Chris had also valued as a player when he had played in Sydney.

The social identity which is adopted as a member of a particular sport in a smaller community plays an important role. Chris considers that the image of country rugby players is a positive one; as people who enjoy a demanding physical contact sport, socialising with each other and contributing to their sport within their community. Although Chris also thought that, because rugby is a difficult game to understand and a minor sport in the regional areas of Queensland, the country rugby players are also seen as *quirky*.

A significant reward Chris enjoys through his coaching is maintaining his connectedness with the team environment with which he so strongly identified as a player. He values being a contributor to a team that works together to achieve a common goal. *The coach is probably one- sixteenth of what's going on, but it's a really important sixteenth.* Despite the perceived lack of support and the difficulties he has encountered in developing the game in his area, Chris's belief in the rewards that rugby offers is still strong as is his enthusiasm to introduce young players to the game and assist in their growth. *I'm still passionate. I still think that rugby is a good game. And I would like to do more coaching as I do see one or two kids that have got potential and can go places. So, I really think that I can add value to that kid and help down the track. So, that's why I haven't given up.*

4.9 SUMMARY

Each of the participating coaches felt that sport, and particularly rugby, had provided them with opportunities to establish relationships with peers in new social contexts, positively express their physicality and aggression, and develop self-esteem and enjoyment at being part of a cooperative process with others. They are deeply committed coaching practitioners who, despite the challenges they have experienced coaching rugby in regional Queensland communities, are passionate advocates for the benefits the game has to offer players. Due to the participating coaches' enthusiasm for the game and for the coaching process, coaching has impacted on their family and working lives in negative ways in terms of time and attention away from family and work responsibilities. However, this has been a sacrifice they and their spouses appear to have been generally willing to make, although Joel cited his coaching as a contributing factor in his marriage break-up. Coaching appears to provide them with a chance to implement their values and beliefs about the game of rugby and how to coach players through their chosen pedagogical approaches which focus on players' holistic development, providing a positive environment and encouraging players to make decisions

and subsequently reflect on the outcomes and how they might improve on them. These values and attitudes appear to have been strongly informed by their family and schooling environments and then further evolved during their playing and coaching careers. The participating coaches all expressed frustration with rugby's governing bodies when administrative policies ran counter to their experiences in, and beliefs about, the game, its wider development, and the coaching process.

This chapter has presented the findings of this study through five superordinate themes and their respective subordinate themes. The first theme concentrated on the influence lived experiences have had on the development of these coaches' personal qualities during their formative years. Values such as taking responsibility and accepting and caring for others were formulated through their interactions with family members, peers and school environments during their childhood and adolescence. The participating coaches' values and attitudes were expressed and reinforced through the playing of sport, particularly with the game of rugby. The goals and rules of rugby appealed as they demand specific on field actions requiring cooperation, physical confrontation, tactical creativity, and a subduing of individual interests for those of the team. Importantly, too, the sense of identity as well as camaraderie the participating coaches felt as rugby players and the sociocultural mores associated with the game, such as post-match socialising with opponents and overt respect for the referee, resonated strongly.

These experiences and the values derived from them have subsequently informed the participants' pedagogical perspectives and practices for which they expressed a preference as coaches. They have adopted approaches consistent with the literature involving athlete-centredness, humanistic coaching, team building and positive pedagogy. Their lived experiences have provided important dimensions to their coaching as they have negotiated the challenges their passion for coaching the game has presented. Some of these challenges have derived from rugby's governing bodies and administrators and the policies and decisions they have implemented. Other challenges have involved personal difficulties as the participating coaches navigate their way through the demands of fulfilling their multiple roles as coaches, husbands, fathers, sons, employers and employees. The findings also recognise that each of these coaches spoke of the personal rewards and satisfactions that they had gained from coaching rugby in regional Queensland and of their continuing passion for contributing voluntarily to the game, their players, and their communities.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will discuss the findings of this study relative to the existing theories and relevant literature. It will consider how the findings can elucidate and perhaps expand on previous research and how pre-existing literature can support these findings.

The purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of volunteer rugby coaches in regional Queensland. A qualitative approach was taken using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to provide a detailed examination of the personal lived experience of five participant coaches. There has been a dearth of studies that have explored the lived experiences of volunteer rugby coaches (Australian Sport Commission, n.d; Griffiths & Armour, 2014; Wicker, 2017), particularly those based in rural and regional locations. This study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge and provide insights into the complex role of volunteer rugby coaches working in regional areas.

Five superordinate themes (with underpinning subordinate themes) emerged through a double hermeneutic exploration of the participants' accounts of their experiences (See Figure 6). The identified five superordinate themes were:

- Formative development of personal qualities conducive to coaching
- The significance of sport
- The uniqueness of rugby
- Effective coaching pedagogy
- Challenges and rewards of coaching rugby in regional areas

These and their subordinate themes will each be presented and discussed in turn.

5.2 SUPERORDINATE THEME 1: FORMATIVE DEVELOPMENT OF PERSONAL QUALITIES CONDUCIVE TO COACHING

Each of the coaches described formative experiences which allowed them to frequently engage with their environment independent of adult supervision. The influence of their respective family circumstances and the expectation of additional responsibilities at a younger age appeared to lay the foundation for their leadership styles of acceptance and care for others and their later approaches to coaching.

5.2.1 SUBORDINATE THEME: EARLY INDEPENDENCE AND TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

As the son of a railway stationmaster, Harry moved often during his childhood attending six primary schools ranging from small country schools of 10 students to larger schools of 1000 students or more. This constant moving can have harmful effects on a child's well-being due to limited opportunities to foster long-term relationships. The disruption to a child's schooling may also negatively affect their educational outcomes (Oishi & Schimmack, 2010). However, the narratives revealed that the coach participants' individual circumstances and personal dispositions were crucial and often overcame these potentially negative situations. The support of parents and family members can play a key role in such transitions being successful (Austin, 2008). This was certainly the case for Harry who revealed his family was a constant source of support during the many moves that occurred during his childhood. His siblings provided him with ongoing companionship and company with people his own age as he familiarised himself with a range of new school and community environments.

Cote and Hay (2002) contend that siblings have a major impact on one another's behaviour, development, and socialisation, particularly in childhood and adolescence. Their relationships comprise an important subsystem of the family and can shape the entire family environment. It is not unusual for siblings to involve themselves in the same sport, particularly in rural and regional communities where sporting options may be limited and sporting teams, by necessity, cross over several age groups. This was the case for Joel growing up in Cantlon with his three brothers. Trussell (2014) found that organised sport in such communities provides siblings with the chance to spend time together, to form and put into practice their

understanding of concepts such as fairness and provide each other with encouragement and instruction.

Brent was encouraged through his relationship with his older brothers to become involved with rugby league. His enthusiasm for physical contests with his brothers is consistent with research concerning family dynamics which has found that younger siblings develop a preference for "performance" goals which are motivated by the pursuit of measuring themselves against, and then outperforming, others while firstborns prefer pursuing "mastery" goals (improving their own performances) (Carette et al., 2011). This appeared consistent, too, with first-born Chris who spoke of his commitment to improving his individual skills in rugby as well as achieving good academic results in his schooling. Zajonc's Confluence model (1976) posits that firstborns often hold a teaching function in relation to their younger sibling(s).

The process of children learning roles and expectations by observing the behaviour of those within their families and the community is consistent with the cultural background of Brent's parents (Father/Papua New Guinean; Mother/Aboriginal). Family ties and a sense of obligation and reciprocity to its members are very strong in both Papua New Guinean and Indigenous Australian cultures (Diversicare, 2012; Ristevski et al., 2020). Older family and community members' involvement in sport is also seen to provide a powerful context for role modelling and empowering behaviours in Indigenous communities (O'Brien et al., 2009). Unstructured and autonomous play is encouraged, too, but with an overarching consideration for the child's safety. This is seen as the collective responsibility of the community (Lohar et al., 2014; Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care, 2011). So, while the play between Brent and his older brothers involved significant physical contact and competitiveness, ultimately, their parents expected that the older siblings would also take responsibility for Brent's well-being. This was exemplified when Brent's brothers taught him more effective techniques to protect himself during physical contact situations when he began playing rugby league more seriously.

Sport participation can also foster rivalry between siblings. Joel revealed he did not like being captain when he played rugby for Cantlon. During this time his father was the coach, and his brothers were in the team, including an older brother. Consistent with research by Davis and Meyer (2008) he deferred responsibility during the games informally to his older brother. Perhaps relevant to Brent's brothers' subsequent physical confrontation as opponents on the

field, research suggests that such rivalries may lead younger siblings to express resentment and feel pressure to measure up to their older sibling/s while older siblings may feel a need to protect their superior athletic status in the family (Cote, 1999; Davis & Meyer, 2008). This may manifest itself through aggression and violence. However, similar to the findings of Porto Maciel and colleagues (2021) concerning athletes, most of these coaches generally found family members to be primary initial providers of social support, offering them role models, companionship and information which encouraged their involvement with organised sport. For Brent, Joel and Harry, the appeal of belonging to their club and team (as well as rugby as a game) might be seen to be rooted in their need for the supportiveness they found their family provided them as children. And each of these coaches specifically referred to the need for bonding and togetherness as central to their coaching practices.

The participants' early family circumstances also appeared to foster an environment which encouraged or demanded independence and acceptance of responsibility. As a child growing up in a number of rural communities, without a television, Harry recalled spending most of his recreational time with his siblings exploring the areas around his rural community, *fishing down the creek, swimming in the dams. You'd leave home in the morning and come back in the afternoon.* This is consistent with research by MacDougall and colleagues (2009) which found rural children (aged 8 - 10 years old) described few places in their local environments that were out of bounds as long as they had negotiated these with their parents. These children, according to the reserachers, were expected to play an active role in assessing the risks in their environments and to make sensible decisions to minimise them while maximising their movements. Research commissioned by VicHealth (Rechter, 2014) also found that children who lived in rural and regional Victoria were permitted more independence in travelling to school and in play contexts in contrast to those children living in urban environments whose parents were concerned about 'stranger danger' and traffic hazards. Kytta (1997) found that children aged 8-9 years old from rural townships in Finland were mostly free to independently pursue leisure activities, make their own way home from school and go out after dark. This type of independence connected to a secure home environment, has been linked to children's development of environmental and social competence, resilience, sense of purpose, efficacy and self-worth (Malone, 2007).

In the large metroplitan city of Sydney, Chris had to travel independently on public transport at a young age. He also developed the self-discipline to complete his assigned schoolwork independent of adult supervision. His parents' divorce and his father's subsequent abdication of his parental role demanded that Chris take responsibility for his domestic circumstances and education at a young age. This role reversal has been labelled 'parentification' (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973) whereby the child is called upon to fulfil responsibilities typically considered to be the domain of the parent. A small or gradual degree of responsibility is beneficial to the developing child when it involves age-appropriate tasks and parental validation and support. However, an overburdening of responsibility, such as taking on parental duties, can have adverse effects on a child's mental health manifesting in disruptive behaviour, depressive symptoms and social difficulties. This can often result in a dysfunctional parent/child relationship (Engelhardt, 2012).

Hooper (2007) describes two types of parentification: emotional and instrumental. Emotional parentification requires the child to fulfill the specific emotional and/or psychological needs usually provided by a parent. Instrumental parentification is considered less harmful and refers to the assignment of functional responsibilities such as shopping or cooking meals. This second type of parentification appears evident in Chris' situation. Chris's father was still actively involved in his life via the provision, for example, of organised sporting opportunities for Chris to attend. Still, it is not difficult to see connections between Chris' early taking on of some of his father's responsibilities for his own wellbeing and education and his preference for encouraging his players to take responsibility for their own choices concerning fitness and skill development.

Harry and Joel's respective rural upbringings involved performing regular tasks and jobs for their parents as well, however, this appeared to be traditional parenting. Regardless, the process of requiring the child to take on additional responsibilities can, if handled with appropriate parental awareness and support, result in the child developing greater autonomy, interpersonal competence and self-mastery (Byng-Hall, 2008; Englehardt, 2012; Hooper, 2007). It may also lead to higher levels of individuation whereby an individual begins to demarcate themselves from other people and become a separate entity (Englehardt, 2012). A positive individuation process, which is characterised by an increasing differentiation of self, more autonomy and the formulation of clear interpersonal boundaries, can encourage a child to better express and assert their ideas and feelings (Bell et al., 2007). While Bell and Bell (2005) posit that individuation is a separate and independent process to connection, where

dependent behaviours are nurtured and reinforced by the parent, it is important to recognise that parental input and validation are necessary for a positive individuation process to occur.

5.2.2 SUBORDINATE THEME: ACCEPTING AND CARING FOR OTHERS

The relevance of the individuation process may be seen in the participant coaches' ability to, when necessary, emotionally and socially detach themselves from their workplace, families and coaching situations while still maintaining their functional connectedness with others. Chris' admiration for a relative involved in the morally questionable world of illegal gambling which, if judged critically, involved an illegal drug deal, a potential murder, and tax avoidance, suggests an indifference to others' actions and their possible serious consequences, in contrast to his described coaching approach. His seeming detachment concerning the potential impact of others' behaviours and choices may be rooted in the traits associated with the traditional Australian masculine image such as rationality, stoicism, self-reliance, emotional reticence, and particularly irreverent humour. These traits are often expected from males participating in hyper-masculine sports such as rugby which has traditionally expected the suppression of feelings that may display vulnerability (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Wilkins, 2010).

Conversely, Chris' enduring and successful professional career in the medical field suggests he shares the humanistic or 'philanthropic' emotional characteristics associated with many medical professionals such as empathy and caring (Bolton & Boyd, 2003; Foster & Sayers, 2012). By divorcing himself from any moral culpability in the experience he recounted, Chris may be exercising a degree of 'clinical detachment' commonly utilised by those in the medical field as a coping strategy to buffer themselves from the emotional reality of their patients' experiences so they maintain a clear and objective focus (Austen, 2016).

Joel believes it is important for a coach to ensure a separateness from their players as demonstrated by his cautious attitude towards socialising with them, especially when alcohol is involved. He is aware of the traditional role played by drinking in the cementing of social bonds, particularly between rugby players. Research has found strong links between rugby players and heavy alcohol use (Dunning & Sheard, 1979; Prentice et al., 2014; Quarrie et al., 1996). Frequent media reports have highlighted increasing alcohol-related offences in the sporting sector by high-profile players as well as amateur teams and clubs (Dymock, 2018;

Paul, 2013). Alcohol consumption is inextricably linked to rugby at all levels with post-game drinking being awarded special status as an expression of masculinity (Fuchs & Le Henaff, 2014; Pringle & Hickey, 2010; Willott & Lyons, 2011).

Joel's admission that he is not a big drinker and his advocacy of not drinking alcohol with his team might be seen to be indicative of a man devaluing the demonstration of drinking competence in comparison with other competencies considered markers of masculinity such as sporting knowledge and prowess (de Visser & Smith, 2007). However, it appears more likely that Joel, in recognising his functional role as a coach who may have to discipline team members, cut them from the squad or bench them, recognises the benefits of establishing a clearly defined personal boundary between himself and his players. Not drinking with his team may also be seen as Joel taking responsibility for his own behaviour as a coach and leader of his team. Taking responsibility for oneself and others is a personal characteristic based on broader ethical and moral codes and traditions (Bivins, 2006). Each of the coaches' attitudes towards adopting responsibility for their own actions and for the care of others appeared to be strongly connected to their lived experiences involving their families, peers, workplace, and coaching environments.

Steve was brought up by his single working mother and was frequently left on his own as she had to work to help financially support the family. Steve's mother encouraged him to make his own decisions and to accept the consequences for any choices he made. In hindsight, this prepared him for dealing with becoming a father in his late teens and appeared to provide Steve with a sense of direction and purpose. He chose to fully embrace his impending fatherhood and sought a career path to ensure financial stability by successfully completing his teaching degree. Steve was ten when his father left the family, and his response to becoming a parent while still a teenager is not unusual. Many young males in this situation often refer to the lack of a father figure in their own upbringing as motivating them to 'be there' in helping to care for their child and provide for its future (Clayton, 2016; Neale & Lau Clayton, 2011; Reeves et al., 2009). Parenting appears to provide an impetus to undertake additional education and training to secure better employment prospects and can be viewed as an opportunity for young parents rather than the catastrophe it is frequently portrayed as being (Duncan, 2007; Neale & Davies, 2016). Referring to himself as a coach who is tough on his players and that this will help his players off the field as well as on, it is easy to draw connections between Steve's experiences as a young man in a difficult situation who chose to make some hard choices to provide for his family and this attitude towards his coaching.

Joel saw familial loyalty as a major factor in his assuming reponsibility for helping his younger brother through his long-term drug addiction. Joel was brought up in a highly masculine environment with an athletically talented older brother and a father who was highly visible for his sporting achievements and contributions to the local community. Consistent with research from Davis and Meyer (2008) concerning older siblings, Joel may have seen taking responsibility for others and fixing their problems to be an effective way of proving himself worthy of love and respect. He described himself as a *rescuer*; a role often underpinned by a need to be needed. While rescuers depend on helping others to maintain their sense of identity, it is also frequently described as their 'default' method of connecting with people (Mathews, 2011). According to Kets de Vries (2012), a rescuer's background may involve a childhood in which parental love was conditional on doing the 'right' thing' by following perceived spoken and unspoken rules and behaviours linked to parental expectations.

Joel revealed how the separation and subsequent divorce from his wife after several years of marriage was exacerbated by helping his brother *too much.* In retelling the story this way, he appears to portray himself as a martyr, with his wife as someone not understanding or sympathetic enough to support his good work. According to relationships author Silvy Khoucasian, "empathy without boundaries is self-destruction" (Helgesen, 2020, p. 107) and rescuers often seem to be looking to escape their own issues by immersing themselves in others' problems (Tillet, 2003). By implying that his wife was at fault through having difficulty coping with the unconditional support he gave his brother, Joel revealed a lack of understanding about the destructive impact his rescuing behaviour was having on his marriage. This was interesting considering that he seemed quite aware of the negative effect his coaching, which led him to put *other people's kids before my own*, had on his relationship with his children.

However, Joel also demonstrated that constructive outcomes can also result from rescuing behaviours (Kets de Vries, 2012) such as the positive experiences he described for the girls and himself in stepping in to coach his daughter's school rugby team. Moreover, Joel's devising and organising of the father-son rugby tour programme in Gerrivale – timed to occur prior to boys leaving for boarding school – may be reflective of his empathy with those boys, as well as the difficulty they might have in communicating such concerns to their fathers. To the detriment of their own physical and mental health, and the health of their relationships, rural males will often display characteristics of hegemonic masculinity such as stoicism and

emotional reticence which they model for their sons and frequently perpetuate (Alston & Kent, 2008). Although he enjoyed his time at boarding school and has a close relationship with his father, Joel empathised with the trepidation that boys leaving home for the first time and their fathers might feel at this juncture. This highlights Joel's preference to practice his empathy and rescuing behaviours with other males. While the legitimacy of Joel's understanding of both parties' needs in this situation is evidenced by the enduring success of this initiative, it does provide a striking contrast with Joel's description of his choices to frequently prioritise coaching over his relationships with his son and daughter.

The lived experiences described by the coaches in this study evidences the development of qualities that they have drawn upon in their coaching approaches. These coaches' early experiences of independence appeared to inform their developing confidence to make decisions, their ability to maintain objectivity, and their capacity to lead others. Moreover, these experiences reinforced the importance of empathising and caring for others and a willingness to take responsibility for others' wellbeing while understanding that this may be at times to their own detriment.

5.3 SUPERORDINATE THEME 2: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SPORT

Sport and physical activity provided the participants with generally positive experiences during their childhoods and school years and provided opportunities for them to enhance their physical skills and confidence, develop social interactions in new environments and a way to build a sense of identity. The importance of sport in the regional and rural communities in which the coaches lived aligned with their own values and beliefs about sport as a positive force in their own and others' lives.

5.3.1 SUBORDINATE THEME: PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Each of the coaches expressed their passion for sport and physical activity which had developed during their formative years. Their participation in sport has occurred in a variety of contexts – informal, unstructured, organised, individual, team, community clubs and school-based activities and served a crucial role. Each of the participant coaches considers that participating in sport, and particularly rugby, had provided them with opportunities to

develop their self-identity, build relationships with peers, positively express their physicality and aggression, and learn things about themselves and others.

Growing up in a single-parent family and separated from his older brothers by a significant age gap, Steve sought companionship with other boys in his neighbourhood. These appear to have centred around numerous physical activities including unsupervised 'pick-up' games played with a ball in a suitable space such as a local park, characterised by a lack of formal rules and a high degree of physical contact. Such informal sporting activities have been identified as providing opportunities for children to engage in unstructured play which requires them to interact with others in an unsupervised environment. These interactions expose them to competitive situations and methods of negotiation, acceptance of divergent ideas, problem solving and conflict resolution (Gray, 2009). It has also been suggested that non-structured sporting contests may reproduce the inequities and hegemonic norms seen in adult mainstream sport (Fahlen, 2015), particularly those involving heavy physical contact (Kreager, 2007). From his good-humoured recollection of getting together with his friends and *belting each other*, these experiences may be connected to Steve's enthusiasm for his players to pursue physical dominance over their opponents. However, these unstructured games may also have fostered his enjoyment of meritocratic competition, the strategic aspects of sport and the values he associates with rugby.

5.3.2 SUBORDINATE THEME: SCHOOLING

Of the five participants, four attended single-gender schools, two of them as boarders and the other two as day students who had received scholarships. Sport was an integral component of these all-male schools. Many rural families send their children to boarding school as part of their family tradition and the sporting offerings and extracurricular activities as well as the broader educational opportunities are particularly important (Isolated Children's Parents' Association, 2016). This was certainly the case for Harry and Joel's families. Joel's school was an hour away from Cantlon and he attended the same schools as his father and brothers. Perhaps because he had such strong family connections to the school through his brothers, Joel spoke very positively about his school and school sport experiences. Harry, however, appeared more circumspect when describing his experiences during his five years at boarding school. This may have been due to him feeling more isolated from his parents and younger

siblings who were several hours away. For both men, sport provided a crucial way to traverse their new social and educational surroundings.

There has been considerable research discussing the negative experiences students may have at boarding schools. Poynting and Donaldson (2005) painted a grim portrait of the environment at a leading Sydney boarding school where bullying and sexual assaults had occurred. Schaverien (2015) coined the term "Boarding School Syndrome" to cover several symptoms and behaviours she linked to trauma experienced by some students. These included the fear of expressing emotion, a mistrust of authority/attachment figures and a suppression of one's true identity. Duffell (1995) introduced the concept of "boarding school survivor" to describe the graduates of this type of schooling and portrayed the process vulnerable boarders go through in dealing with the psychological stresses of being separated from their families as the construction of a "strategic survival personality" (Duffell, 2000, p. 192). Harry, having experienced starting at new schools several times, initially navigated his way through a *fairly aggressive, testing* boarding school environment far removed from the small schools he had attended with his siblings. However, participating in sport helped him to assimilate with his new schoolmates.

In terms of reproduction and reinforcement of cultural and gender hegemonies, schools, and particularly single-gender boarding schools, have been posited by researchers as active and significant agents (Connell, 1996; Mac an Ghaill, 1994). Boys' boarding schools have long considered organised sport to be an effective tool in the management of students' behaviour and leisure time and the instilling of culturally appropriate masculine values and qualities (Messner, 1992; Messner & Sabo, 1994). To this end, team sports have been encouraged as they involve the subordination of individual goals to those of the team, and by extension the school. Contact/collision team sports such as rugby that require physical toughness, a tolerance for pain and aggression as well as skill are masculine attributes that are particularly promoted in all male environments such as boarding schools (Amin et al., 2018).

Connell (1983) suggests that an adolescent boy's sporting ability is often a key contributor in the formation of their masculine identity as well as their success in creating bonds and gaining prestige among their peers (Pringle, 2008; Serazio, 2019; Whitson, 1990). While he was also a good tennis player, it appears it was his involvement in the violent collision sport of rugby, a traditional training and testing ground for masculine virtues approved by the school's hierarchy, that allowed him to publicly display his conformity to the dominant

cultural hegemonic demands of his school, while also constructing bonds with other boys thereby smoothing his successful socialisation into this environment. For the other three participant coaches who attended single-sex schools, sports, and particularly contact sports like rugby and rugby league, seem to have provided the same benefits in relation to acceptance by their peers. This is consistent with research which found that boys playing rugby at school developed high levels of social and cultural capital in their school environments (Light & Kirk, 2001; Pringle, 2008; Pringle & Hickey, 2010). Interestingly, however, both Harry and Joel acknowledged the significance of their boarding school experiences in engendering empathy and sensitivity towards those rural families sending their sons away to school and, as coaches, their acceptance of players who were newcomers to country towns and those players who shared different values to their own.

5.3.3 SUBORDINATE THEME: REGIONAL AND RURAL COMMUNITIES

Each of the coaches in this study advocated for the importance of organised sport to regional and rural communities. For Harry, prior to attending boarding school, his only experiences of team sport involved playing cricket at 11 and 12 years of age as part of the men's team. Like the experiences discussed by Townsend and colleagues (2002) when examining rural football, a young teenager playing in a team of adults was not uncommon and often occurred so that there were enough players to form a team. Physical activity is an important form of recreation in rural communities, but for Harry it was also a way to stave off boredom as recounted by his story of participating in a Fun Run at the height of summer in his small town.

From a personal perspective, three of the participants specifically referred to their involvement in sport as pivotal to their successful integration when they moved to a new town. Sport provided them with the opportunity to generate social capital – relationships, networks and understandings of local cultural norms that enabled them to act more effectively with others in their community (Putnam, 1995). Social capital, according to Putnam (2000), is powered by social interaction. Participation in voluntary organisations contributes to bonds of trust and reciprocity, although volunteers need to have their goals and motives met (Stukas et al., 2005). Consistent with research findings into volunteerism in regional and rural communities (Atherley, 2006; Lynch & Veal, 1996; Schuttoff et al., 2018;

Tonts, 2005), sporting clubs act as an instrument through which members of these communities can enhance their social capital.

In breaking down social capital further, Tonts (2005) acknowledged the intense sense of community that can develop among members of sports clubs in regional and rural areas (labelled "bonding capital") and the power of sport to provide a common interest for various groups in such locales ("bridging capital"). Putnam and Feldstein (2003) suggest that while both bridging capital and bonding capital are useful to individuals, the former is seen as more beneficial to social integration and cooperative action. Adopting a Bourdieusian perspective might view these coaches' involvement with their rugby clubs as a means of benefitting themselves by enhancing their own social and cultural capital. However, based on their willingness to volunteer their time to their community rugby clubs over many years, it appears more likely that they saw their involvement more as a form of civic engagement (Putnam, 2000) and way of contributing to their communities. For example, Chris spoke of the strong sense of community that he felt as a member of the Rasmussen Phantoms Rugby Club. Similarly, Joel, through participating in the local rugby club, was able to foster new relationships and connections within his new locale. For Joel, rugby acted as "sociological superglue" (Putnam, 2000, p. 23) allowing him to bond with 'locals' through a shared interest and purpose as well as demonstrating a commitment to the community. The Parliament of Victoria's Inquiry into Country Football (2004) found that football clubs gave populations of rural and regional communities a sense of belonging by providing a place to gather and interact with others in supporting a local community activity (Frost et al., 2013). This finding was also supported by the ABC *Landline* episode, "The Final Siren" (Lee, 2015), which found that football clubs were excellent vehicles to combat social isolation and disjuncture in country areas by providing opportunities for community members to gather and communicate with one another.

Based on their experiences as children, the participants developed a strong belief in the personal and social developmental benefits provided by participating in sport. This belief was reinforced during their schooling and as members of their local regional communities. Each spoke of the bonding experiences they enjoyed in these environments and an enthusiasm to provide others with similar positive experiences appears to be a primary motive in the participants' decision to coach and a major component of their coaching practices.

5.4 SUPERORDINATE THEME 3: THE UNIQUENESS OF RUGBY

The participant coaches found taking part in organised sport provided them opportunities to develop personally and socially. However, all felt that rugby particular held a special appeal due to the game's on field physical demands and the technical skills and tactical understandings that the laws of the game required. Another significant aspect of rugby that made it attractive to these coaches was the traditional etiquette and cultural practices that the sport encouraged.

5.4.1 SUBORDINATE THEME: ON THE FIELD

Due to the heavy physical contact integral to the game, rugby has been categorised as a violent sport (Gill, 2007; Kerr, 2017; Kerr, 2019a; Rubin, 2013). Wessels and Joseph (2013) argue violence portrayed in physical contact sports and in other forms such as movies and online games have made society increasingly immune to violence. This type of portrayed violence can often display a lack of respect for others, reinforce negative emotions and social tendencies and ultimately contribute to conflict and dysfunction in society. Researchers have also nominated heavy contact sports, and sports in general, as important sites for the social construction of genders and hegemonic masculinity (Bryson, 1987; Connell, 1983; Gill, 2007; Light & Kirk, 2000). This emphasis on the negative aspects of violent sports has tended to obfuscate intellectual, affective, and social features which are also inherent in team sports (Light, 2007) such as cooperation, tactical thinking, resilience, and teamwork.

Initially a soccer player as an adolescent, Steve was frequently penalised on the field for being overtly physical against his opponents. He suggested this may have been due to him using soccer as a physical release for emotional frustration. Research has suggested that male youth soccer players were more likely to engage in destructive aggression and anti-social behaviours on the field than older players (Aktop et al., 2015; Kavussanu et al., 2006). This may be due to them being more susceptible to being influenced by peers, parents and coaches (Spruit et al., 2019) or through a lack of maturity when dealing with negative events within the game (Fields et al., 2010). When he began playing rugby, Steve felt that the game provided him with an acceptable physical outlet for his emotions as its greater physical

contact requirements allowed him to utilise the aggression for which he was being penalised in soccer. He sees rugby as having a cathartic effect on athletes – especially young men - allowing them to expel negative and aggressive feelings in a socially acceptable forum.

The redemptive qualities of sport such as helping young people develop structure, discipline and responsibility while providing guidance and positive role models have been promoted by "sport evangelists" (Coakley, 2011; Donnelly et al., 2007; Farooq & Parker, 2009; Giulianotti, 2004, p. 358; McDonald et al., 2019; Russell, 2008). Many scholars argue that exposing and celebrating player aggression in the sporting environment results in heightened levels of aggression and violence on and off the field (Nucci & Young-Shim, 2005; Reid & Holowchak, 2011; Steinfeldt et al., 2012). Participants in physical contact sporting activities have been found to display predominantly more positive attitudes towards violence than non-athletes (Forbes et al., 2006). In terms of on field behaviours, Steve's attitude towards his over-aggressive behaviour on the soccer pitch is rather dismissive and reflects his acceptance that sport provides a suitable environment for aggressive behaviour. Brent, too, seems to concur with this idea as evidenced by his jovial recount of being penalised repeatedly due to dangerous tackles and discussing his brothers' on-field fight when playing rugby league. These participant coaches understood and appreciated the centrality of aggression in the playing of a collision sport like rugby. However, they encouraged such aggression and its subsequent actions to be facilitative and instrumental, such as tackling an opponent to the ground to halt that player's forward progress. This is in contrast to being debilitative and hostile, such as deliberately tackling an opponent around the head, which would result in a penalty and be viewed as not being in the spirit of the game.

Steve refers to his attitude and actions when playing soccer as *ruthless,* but these might also be considered callous and unethical. Steve's actions may also have been symptomatic of him having a high ego-orientation, which may drive athletes to primarily focus on winning. This has been associated with the use of unacceptable aggression (Rascle et al., 1998), compared to task-orientation which focuses athletes on working hard and self-improvement (Roberts et al., 2012). For Steve, playing rugby appeared to decrease or at least satisfy whatever motive was underpinning his overt aggression on the soccer pitch to the point that he acknowledged the importance of rugby's strict rules concerning player respect for officials and their on-field decisions.

Proponents of the game have espoused rugby's unique attributes such as teaching players physical courage and self-discipline (Rasmussen, 1997), cooperation, loyalty to teammates, respect for opponents, and a willingness to put the team before oneself (Hickey, 2011). Considering his poor behaviours on the soccer field as a young man, these ideals seem to have resonated with Steve who, like the teachers in Pryor's (2003) study, made a point of expressing approval for rugby's traditional culture of respecting the referee. He considered it an appealing characteristic of the game, especially compared to soccer. Steve's opinions concerning the cognitive demands of the tactical and technical aspects of the game and its emphasis on teamwork echo Kane's contention that playing rugby "integrat[es] the needs of man as a thinker, as a worker and as a player" (Greenwood, 1997, p. viii).

For Chris, the continuous nature of rugby was appealing as were the technical and tactical elements of the game. He reflected that rugby became one of his primary sporting activities while he was a teenager. It appears to have provided a constant in his life when his parents' marriage was ending. His rugby team provided him with a sense of stability and reliability, contribution, companionship, and a feeling of belonging during this difficult time. This reaction is consistent with research by Super and colleagues (2019) who studied young adults' reflections on the role of sport during their socially vulnerable childhoods. They found that sport provided at-risk children with an environment that was safe and supportive and provided them with a sense of identity and purpose. Similar to research findings concerning students' sport participation and improved engagement with school (Collins et al., 2009; Cuffe et al., 2014), Brent sees rugby as exerting a positive social outlet and source of connection for young players.

5.4.2 SUBORDINATE THEME: OFF THE FIELD

Researchers have found that participation in youth sport can benefit players' social identity. This includes their perceptions of bonding and belonging with other group members and the positive feelings that this membership generates (Bruner et al., 2017). A common theme identified in former athletes' discussions of their friendships with teammates is the importance of shared adversity and hardship in forging these relationships (Messner, 1992).

Chris believes the characteristics of rugby breed an extra level of respect and closeness for teammates and opponents compared with other sports. While this view might be perceived as

demonstrating exclusivity, Maxwell and colleagues (2009) suggest that collision sports such as rugby may elicit especially intense emotional responses in participants. Senecal and Nisar (2017) found that athletes who played team contact sports often experienced close and supportive relationships with their teammates and coaches which were built on honesty and trust.

Throughout his time playing for his junior club, his school, Tricketts RFC, and the Rasmussen Phantoms, Chris interestingly identified himself as part of a "tribe" (Garner, 2020). This indicated a collective identity with its own rituals and traditions such as post-match socialising activities, club songs and specific symbols of achievement and recognition and was a group which provided Chris with friendship, acceptance and a sense of community. Chris sees team cohesion and unity as essential in a game like rugby that relies heavily on players physically committing to potentially putting themselves in danger to support and protect their teammates (Collins et al., 2009).

Similarly, the principles and techniques underpinning the game of rugby, especially the principle of support, strongly resonated with Brent' personality. In discussing a ruck situation, where a tackled ball-carrier is on the ground with opponents trying to drive past them to gain possession of the ball while teammates forcibly try to stop them, Brent mentioned that his wife often asked*, "Why are you diving in there when that big [opposing] guy's already there?" And I'm like, "I'm going to help my mate."* This statement encapsulated Brent's primary motive for playing rugby - supporting his friends and teammates. He saw this as an integral feature of his identity. More than a time dedicated towards honing physical capacities, skills, techniques, and tactics to compete more effectively, Brent saw rugby training as an opportunity to 'check in' emotionally with his teammates to see how they were going. Research by Anderson and McGuire (2010) found that rugby players considered teammates to be valuable supporters when they expressed emotions linked to personal matters. Brent's attitude towards training contradicts the image traditionally ascribed to males in competitive team sport environments, particularly a collision sport like rugby, where the expression of fear, pain and/or sadness is considered weak and unmasculine (Light & Kirk, 2000; Pringle, 2008; Schact, 1996). He not only saw his involvement as satisfying a need to physically support and protect his teammates during games and training but also to support them emotionally as well.

Having played successfully for many years, Brent found retirement difficult. *My hardest thing about retiring was the loss of my mateship on the field. I retired three years ago, and I still get antsy now. I'm wanting to put the boots on, wanting to go to do those hard yards with your mates -the pre-season, the gym sessions, all that kind of stuff - that was me. And to go from that world for 25 years to stopping … yeah, the retirement thing was hard*.

Research into the retirement experiences of community athletes is limited (Ballard, 2021; Stankovich, 2019). However, there is a plethora of research into the transitional experiences of athletes at the elite level (Cosh et al., 2012; Eggleston et al., 2020; Jewett et al., 2019; Scwendt et al., 2007). Investigators have found emotional and psychological problems for some sportspeople when they retire, including serious stress, reduced perceptions of self-worth, lack of purpose, loss of identity and alienation from social networks (Brown et al., 2018; Lally, 2007; Newman et al., 2016; Wolanin et al., 2015). It has been suggested that it may be harder for amateurs to finish their playing careers because without the competitive and financial pressure to win that professional players endure, they enjoy the game more (Ward & Williams, 2009) and subsequently miss playing more. However, more than the loss of a structural routine, it was especially hard for Brent to become an ex-player because his identity and self-image were so tightly bound to supporting his teammates in both a physical and emotional way and he no longer felt he was fulfilling this role. Like some of the coaches in McLean and Mallett's (2012) research, while no substitute for playing, coaching provided a way for Brent to remain connected to his sport and his social group. It also provided him with a role that allowed him to still care for and support his clubmates emotionally, maintaining that facet of his identity.

For Chris and Brent, the fundamental principle of rugby is teammate support. This was also an elemental feature of the game which resonated with the other participating coaches as well. Research into the aspects of rugby that appeal to players has also supported the significance of teammates' mutual dependency as a motive for playing (Kerr, 2019a). As a collision sport, rugby players are vulnerable to being hurt and can risk long-term, even catastrophic injury. Expressing this vulnerability and echoing Chris' sentiments concerning the trust that is placed on teammates by players on the field, former All Black and international rugby coach, Sir John Kirwan, observed that:

> I often say rugby's like life. You can have the ball in your hand and be running down the field feeling unstoppable. Then someone tackles you and you hit the deck and

> you're vulnerable; you're lying there exposed. Suddenly your team-mates are there, not just over the ball but over you, protecting you. They're prepared to put their bodies on the line for you. That's what happens in life: you fall over, and your mates come to your aid. (Pagano Coaching, 2018, p. 1)

Contrasting this notion of camaraderie strongly associated with rugby and central to these participants' passion for the game, Harry briefly shed light on an interesting but widely accepted feature of contact sport participation. He changed clubs during his second year at university, primarily because many of his school friends played for his new club. At this time Harry had begun to take his rugby more seriously and wanted to be with a club whose players' enthusiasm matched his own levels of commitment. He laughs recounting the on-field altercations he would have with his best friend who still played for the University team. This highlights the tacit principle that often underpins such situations in sporting contests, and particularly in contact sports; while there is often no deep animosity, former teammates will traditionally be more aggressive in their confrontations with each other as opponents on the field than with other players (Carey, 2014). Some collision sport athletes have equated playing against former teammates with playing against their brother or best friend who "you want to beat worse than you beat anybody" (Gagnon, 2015, p. 1). This may be the result of light-hearted competitiveness, displaying dominance over others, or to moderately punish what might be seen as a small betrayal (Gagnon, 2015).

Brent's description and subsequent dismissal of his brothers' on-field fight during a rugby match with the statement that *boys will be boys* may be perceived as one that normalises and excuses violent and aggressive masculine behaviour (Clemens, 2020). It might also be seen as a comment that avoids critiquing a male's violent behaviour, especially in a context in which such behaviour is often celebrated. That the incident involved his brothers, who it can be assumed care for each other, is perhaps indicative of the masculine need to dominate others – even male family members. It is telling, however, that despite Brent's dismissal of the incident as nothing serious, his parents were upset enough to never again watch their sons play against each other.

It appears that Brent viewed this incident from a sibling vantage point with an understanding of his siblings' personalities and the underlying tensions which may have led to this on-field confrontation. Kaufman (2001) suggested that violent sports such as rugby function as a socially sanctioned stage for the promotion of one's masculinity through defeating a perceived threat posed by another man. Certainly, this seems the case when one considers

Brent's jocular recount of the incident where he illegally tackled a larger opponent three times in a row. This may have been due to his amusement at his reckless tackling technique, hegemonic masculine expectations which included his eagerness to aggressively confront his opponent, or the casual acceptance many players have of contact sport as an activity where violent acts occur. For Brent, the violent collisions inherent in rugby league gave him, in this instance, an opportunity to physically dominate an opponent who, in effect, posed a threat to his masculinity. This was not just through his size, but through his attempts to intimidate and humiliate Brent by running directly at him and denigrating his team by *mouthing off*. It is also significant that this aggressive attitude which underpinned the actions Brent displayed on the field in this incident was reinforced by his brothers' willingness to dedicate time to helping him improve. *My older brother said, "Right. We'll do a bit of work with him now,"* because he had proven himself worthy of their assistance and expertise on the rugby field.

All the coaches saw rugby as a special sport which facilitated the development of desirable attributes in players which could benefit them on and off the field such as cooperating with others, subsuming the goals of the individual to those of the team, courage, resilience, discipline and supporting teammates in an environment of physical violence. In this regard, the coaches appeared strongly aligned with the ideals of Muscular Christianity. Their belief in the character-building benefits of rugby echoed the attitudes of coaches of other contact sports (Collins et al., 2009). However, the participant coaches' passion for rugby as an instrument that could demonstrate care, empathy and concern for their teammates' emotional wellbeing, was in tension with traditional hegemonic male expectations.

5.5 SUPERORDINATE THEME 4: EFFECTIVE COACHING PEDAGOGY

Gearity (2012) found that student-athletes described the characteristics of poor coaching as the inability to provide instruction on the skills related to the activity, not individualising instruction, and lacking knowledge on how to teach effectively. Pedagogy involves the theory and practice of how best to teach. Consequently, expertise in coaching requires the development of effective pedagogical skills (Lyle, 2002; Wilson et al., 2010) which enhance coaches' abilities to communicate relevant sport-specific information to their athletes in a way that is understandable and suitable for that individual (Cassidy et al., 2009).

Having coached for a minimum of seven years, each of the participants have demonstrated a sustained commitment to their voluntary coaching roles and indicated their wish to continue coaching. Harry maintains his involvement in coaching players at his school and at representative schoolboy level. Chris coaches across all age and ability levels from representative senior teams to under 6s. Joel is heavily committed to coaching elite-level senior teams but also conducting coaching clinics for school-aged players. Steve primarily focuses on teenage representative players at school and through his club as does Brent. There appeared to be a consensus among the coaches when discussing their coaching approach, the styles, and strategies they found useful and the values underpinning them. Based on the interview data, the following section will discuss the factors influencing the participants' pedagogical approaches to coaching over time.

5.5.1 SUBORDINATE THEME: BUILDING KNOWLEDGE AND MAINTAINING CURRENCY

Similar to research about coaches and their personal motivations (McLean & Mallett, 2012; Rundle-Thiele & Auld, 2009), all the participant coaches expressed a desire to continue learning as a coach to further enhance their technical knowledge and pedagogical skills. Harry was particularly adamant about the value of having access to the latest technical and tactical information from his governing body, believing this would have far-reaching effects on both the efficacy and effectiveness of regional coaches and the subsequent preparation and performance of their players. Brent and Chris sought to expand their understanding of the game and contribution to their club competitions by also attaining their refereeing accreditations. Joel voluntarily travelled in the evening for three hours twice a week to assist and learn at elite representative men's training in Brisbane while Steve undertook the Level 3 Emerging Talent Coach accreditation programme. Research findings also suggest that the greater an educator's content knowledge (knowing what to teach) and pedagogical content knowledge (knowing how to teach it), the better the outcomes for learners (Guerriero, 2014). Referring to coaches as educators, the International Olympic Committee (2021) described a willingness to continue learning and remaining current with new developments in their sport as a key quality of an effective sports coach.

In terms of the content and process of formal coach education courses, the importance of a coach's biography outside of coaching to their belief system and, subsequently, to their

coaching philosophy has been well documented (Armour, 2004; Cassidy et al, 2009; O'Bryant, 2000; Schinke et al, 1995). Researchers have pointed to the impact of numerous wide-ranging experiences on coaches' effectiveness (Cote & Gilbert, 2009; Stodter & Cushion, 2016). Harry's extensive teaching background has had a significant influence on his pedagogical and philosophical approach to coaching. Similarly, Brent and Joel both drew strong connections between their coaching and their management styles at their paid work. This may align with the findings of Mallett and colleagues (2016) where more experienced coaches placed greater emphasis on the quality and contribution of their previous coaching experiences and self-reflection than on formal coach education courses

5.5.2 SUBORDINATE THEME: HUMANISTIC COACHING AND POSITIVE PEDAGOGY

Consistent with Rokeach (1973), the beliefs (what they consider to be or not be true, good or desirable in outcome) and values (ways of life that they preferred) espoused by these coaches informed their coaching philosophies, their passion for rugby and were influenced by their lived experiences. According to Cassidy (2010), people may adopt practices that are indicative of a humanistic approach without necessarily being aware of the ideology or values underpinning it. This appears to be the case with the participantswho spoke of their preference for adopting principles and behaviours when coaching that are consistent with an athlete-centred or humanistic approach. These terms are interchangeable according to Kidman and Lombardo (2010). One of the key beliefs underpinning a humanistic style of coaching is that athletes' performance outcomes and enjoyment will be maximised if they are encouraged to take ownership of their development and decision-making (Walters & Kidman, 2016). According to Lombardo (1999), coaches who adopt a humanistic approach ask questions of their athletes so they can analyse their own performances as well as those of their team and try to develop effective, practical strategies to enhance both. Brent, Steve, and Harry all spoke of demonstrating a similar attitude when describing their reflective interactions with players. A major motivator for these coaches is player enjoyment. This may be for pragmatic reasons in terms of attracting and retaining player numbers as well as for more altruistic reasons, such as the benefits for participants in playing rugby.

Steve spoke of rugby being a more enjoyable experience for players when they could take opportunities to *express themselves.* Having players "express themselves" is a frequently used phrase which may be difficult to define. Essentially, it can be posited as encouraging players to play instinctively through performing innovative and challenging skills without fear of punishment or chastisement from their coach (Glynn, 2019; Marshall, 2021). In a soccer setting, a skilled player may express themselves through their use of creative techniques to beat a defender (an 'Oxford', for example) or shoot for the goal (such as a bicycle kick). While rugby can also provide players with such self-expression opportunities as exemplified by David Campese's 'goose-step' and Quade Cooper's flick passing, the importance of teammates supporting each other can limit such displays in a competitive rugby context. An individual player choosing to perform an innovative skill such as a short kick behind the defence for instance, without communicating their intent to teammates can result in significantly detrimental consequences such as loss of possession of the ball. This may occur due to a lack of teammates pursuing the kick to put pressure on the opponent who might receive it. While it can be argued that rugby may be more suited to allowing players to express themselves as groups and sub-groups through the use of tactical innovations such as backline plays, lineout variations and backrow moves from the scrum, these are generally meticulously planned and practised prior to the competitive game.

For a player to "express themselves", creativity and spontaneity appear essential. In a team sport, this would require a player to "be able to solve specific game problems in a novel, feasible, unexpected, and original way by starting a single act or flowing in a collective action that will lead to the team's success" (Santos et al., 2017, p. 1). According to research, the development of such players appears heavily reliant upon a suitable training environment and programme which will facilitate their creative abilities and willingness to express these on the field (Hunter et al., 2007; Runco, 2014; Uehara et al., 2018). Kidman (2001) suggests that such an approach puts the player at the centre of the learning process and allows them ownership of their on-field decisions and greater responsibility for their subsequent learning and performance outcomes. This process also requires a willingness on the part of the coach to accept the inevitability of mistakes and treat them as opportunities for player learning and development. Such an attitude may also encourage a player's dedication to constantly practice and refine the skills required to perform creative actions (Ella, 1994).

Steve was critical of coaches he had observed who conformed rigidly to a set game structure and instead prefers giving players a set of guiding principles with the freedom to adjust and

make decisions in response to the varying situations on the field, so they are able to 'express themselves' within the expectations associated with team sports. Similar to sentiments expressed by Renshaw and colleagues (2012), Brent understands it is his role to build players' confidence and motivation to trial different strategies and skills, to take risks and be creative so that their learning will be enhanced. This requires questioning the player about their thought processes relative to their performance and possible improvements.

Focusing on the execution of the skill rather than the athlete's personal error or shortcoming assists athletes with accepting feedback (Gilbert et al., 2007). In the example Brent described questioning his player's motives for throwing a poor pass, he does not criticise the player based on their mistake or skill deficiency. Instead, his questioning of the player allowed him to uncover their intentions, helping him to diagnose the root cause of the mistake, such as the player not knowing methods he might use to avoid being taken to ground and having to release the ball, and then looking to collaborate with the player to redress this gap in his knowledge.

Humanistic theory, according to Dickinson and colleagues (2019) focuses holistically on the individual, their wellbeing, values and dignity. When applied to a sports coaching context, the humanistic coach seeks to enhance their athletes' experiences in and out of sport. Each of the participant coaches has chosen to use strategies and behaviours with their players reflecting Lombardo's (1987) definition of humanistic coaching as "athletic leadership which is process-oriented, athlete-centred, and emphasises the uniqueness of each participant" (p. 23). Moreover, their continued enthusiasm to attend and participate in professional development for coaches is consistent with Mallett and Rynne's (2010) assertion that the goal of the humanistic coach should not just be to foster positive growth and development processes in athletes, but in themselves as well.

Based on their preferences towards a humanistic coaching style, it is unsurprising that the participant coaches spoke of the importance of creating a positive training and game environment since they consider players' motivation and enjoyment to be often dependent on their feelings of accomplishment and competence when performing new skills. Such ideas are consistent with the tenets of Positive Pedagogy. According to Light (2017), this pedagogical approach draws from the field of Positive Psychology which emphasises meaning, achievement, relationships, positive emotions, and engagement. In the context of

sport, positive pedagogy is “concerned with the optimal functioning and human flourishing of performers” and “stems from humanism” (Dickinson et al., 2019, p. 1).

Positive states assist in learning (Erriker,2009), and, according to Light and Harvey (2017), positive learner dispositions are helpful in all coaching contexts, regardless of age, experience, or level of competition. Research has found that the most enduring and successful motivation for athletes is associated with coaches who focus on building their sense of pride, happiness and fulfilment and look to be “demanding but not demeaning” (Thomas, 2016). Brent, for example, regards coaches who *yell and scream and jump up and down* as ineffective. This behaviour may increase players’ stress levels and concentrate their attention on how the information is being delivered rather than what is being said. This can ultimately cause them to withdraw physically and emotionally from the situation (DiCicco & Hacker, 2002; Gilbert et al., 2007).

The participant coaches understand that rugby is a technically and tactically challenging sport. Their approach to coaching junior players seems consistent with constructivist learning perspectives underpinning Positive Pedagogy (Light, 2017). Constructivist learning theory maintains that learning occurs when individuals encounter new experiences which disturb their learning equilibrium allowing them to construct unique ideas based on personal experience and prior knowledge (Applefield et al., 2000). Learning is viewed as development; a process where learners are provided opportunities to devise their own questions, generate possible solutions and test their viability. They are also free to make mistakes along the way. Steve’s dislike of too much structure in game plans is consistent with research that has shown that an overly prescriptive approach to instruction can negatively impact learning (Ford et al., 2010). Moreover, athletes who develop an attitude of “no mistakes, only learning opportunities” (Johnson & Gilbert, 2004, p. 6) will more readily accept such errors as a natural part of learning and be more open to accepting constructive criticism (Orlick, 1998).

Brent spoke of the importance of encouraging positive relationships within the team to create a more secure and enjoyable learning environment. Unsurprisingly, he tries to do this by prioritising his main motivation when he played the game - mateship. *When I get a kid to go on the field for me, I say, "The first thing I want you to do is go and have fun with your mates."* As a proponent of positive psychology, Seligman (2011, p. 21), declares, “very little that is positive is solitary.” Consistent with this concept and his own experiences as a player,

Brent uses the rugby team environment to emphasise the social nature of learning; providing opportunities to hone not just players' game-related skills but to build their social skills and their own and others' self-esteem (Light, 2002). This strategy of players encouraging their teammates, especially after mistakes, and focusing on effort rather than outcome, is supported by Gallucci (2013) who sees this as an excellent tool to reinforce team cohesion.

Chris, too, draws upon his lived experiences to inform his coaching strategies. He sees coaching as giving him a chance to positively contribute to a person's life and provide players with a chance to enhance their sense of achievement. This is consistent with research findings concerning coaches' motivations which have highlighted the satisfaction many coaches derive from adopting a wider view of player development – teaching attitudes and skills which may be beneficial off the field as well as on (Collins et al, 2009; Eitzen & Pratt, 1989; McLean & Mallett, 2012).

Chris applies his successful use of goal setting from a young age in his schooling, sport, his career as a medical therapist and business manager to his coaching. Setting players meaningful individual and team goals for practice and competition has been nominated by athletes as a key attribute of high-quality coaching and an effective motivational tool (Becker, 2009). Reviewing and adapting these goals according to changing circumstances is also a common and necessary coaching practice which may take place at various intervals throughout a season, a practice session or within a game. Discussing goals with his players enhances Chris's understanding of his players' current motivations and aspirations and is consistent with the principles of positive pedagogy (Light, 2017). He believes these goals need to be negotiated and accepted by both the player/s and the coach to be effective. Similarly, Weinberg and colleagues (2001) found limited value in goals that were imposed upon athletes and players and that negotiated goals should also include enjoyment and fun as well as performance targets.

At times the coaches' humanistic and positive pedagogical practices and values did not align with those of their players. Chris expects his players to be invested in his vision for the team and admits to being impatient with those players who are not similarly committed to contributing. The intensity of Chris' commitment to his teams and clubs and the important role these entities have performed in his life may compound this expectation. Research has shown that a lack of player dedication and commitment is a significant stressor for coaches (Bowden & Yow, 2007). Chris noted that he has worked hard to improve his own skills as a

player and this may be seen to inform his professional life and his expectations of people dealing with injury rehabilitation. As both a coach and medical professional, he acknowledges the need to accept that people make their own decisions as to how hard and to what extent they will approach preventative activities and rehabilitation.

Consistent with his own personality, Chris believes in player self-determination. He considers himself to be more lenient on his players than himself. Chris seeks to motivate players by persuading them of the benefits of undertaking the assigned training activities rather than simply demanding that they do them which is a trait identified by athletes as a sign of an effective coach (Becker, 2009). Research into motivational climates in sport has found that divergences in a coach and their players' motivations may cause player dissatisfaction and drop-out (Mollerlokken, et al., 2017). While there is evidence that a mastery-oriented motivational climate is associated with positive cognitive, emotional and social player results (Fry & Gano-Overway, 2010; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003; Ommundsen et al, 2005), it seems the opposite occurred in Chris's case when he took over coaching duties in Williamstown. In his view, his attempts to create a mastery-oriented motivational climate that was more in accordance with his own experiences, ambitions, and beliefs were at odds with many of his players. Instead of them dropping out however, it was Chris who walked away from his position with the club.

Chris' experiences provide an example of the complexities and micropolitics involved in the coaching process. Micropolitics is the use of formal and informal power by individuals and groups with different opinions and agendas to achieve their goals to alter or protect the existing environment (Blase, 1991). Potrac and Jones (2009a, p. 225) suggest that the "turbulent nature of pedagogical practice" would be ripe for such conflicts. This has been evidenced in research conducted with teachers (Fry, 1997; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002) and sports coaches (Cushion & Jones, 2006; Potrac et al., 2009b) which found that the conflicting ideologies and competing agendas amongst stakeholders results in significant unrest as well as questioning of one's self-efficacy and competence. Chris' description of his ultimately unsuccessful efforts to draw the dominant culture existing within the club towards his way of doing things also supports Jones and colleagues' (1993) contention that being politically savvy is a necessary part of a coach's repertoire. Their effectiveness can often owe much to their ability to gain the favour of the powerbrokers in the club.

Perhaps this explains why, when explaining his preference for coaching juniors over adults, Steve jokes that *I make a point of not coaching Men's most of the time because they already know everything.* He further elaborated by noting: *I like coaching juniors because they're mould-able. If they like you and they respect you and they have no reason to not listen to you, they will listen to you. But a lot of (senior) guys, especially in Mt Kunde, would be really stuck in their ways. They're few and far between if they'll listen to you. They're always going to do what they've always done.*

Steve's views on coaching men's rugby seem to be based on his one season coaching the Mt Kunde Men's team and may have been due to various factors. Research into differences in adult-focused teaching and child-focused instruction has shown that adult learners are more deeply involved than children in evaluating the relevance and value of information presented. Adult learners also have more experiences to draw upon in making such judgements and are more self-directed in applying information (Kapur, 2015). It is also relevant that male athletes, according to Janssen (2018), often require coaches to first prove their credibility to earn their trust and respect and are less receptive to criticism of their performances. Interestingly Steve allowed the intransigent attitude of the players in the Mt Kunde Senior team to colour his enduring negative attitude towards coaching adults. Considering his own harsh assessment of his abilities as a novice coach, his perceived shortcomings may have had a significant, but unacknowledged, role in this negative experience. Moreover, the situation described by Steve concerning his players' work commitments and inconsistent rosters was also a source of frustration and may have further shaped his recollections of coaching the team.

The participants have expressed a preference for embedding their practices in the principles of humanistic coaching and positive pedagogy. They spoke of trying to develop their players as individuals rather than solely as athletes by providing them with a stimulating inquiry-based training environment which encourages players reflecting on their decisions and taking responsibility for their learning. While these coaching preferences may serve a functional purpose by being the most conducive, in their opinion, to effective player learning, they also appear strongly connected to the lived experiences of the participant coaches in taking responsibility for themselves, their learning, and the extent of their care for others. This is perhaps why, despite their negative experiences in Williamstown and Mt Kunde respectively, Chris and Steve have maintained their preference for the humanistic and positive pedagogical approach.

5.5.3 SUBORDINATE THEME: BUILDING A TEAM

As a representative regional coach, Joel aims to instil a genuine pride in those players chosen to represent their area. One of the methods he uses is to connect players from the past with current players through jersey presentations and inviting older and subsequently more experienced players to speak to the team. Not only does this reinforce the traditions associated with his regional team and those who represent it, he believes it also enhances players' emotional investment. *One of the best things that I've done is teach people about what the team jersey means* [by] *bringing old players in to discuss what it meant to them 30 years ago.*

Research by Orlick (1986) and Yukelson (1984) found that both coaches and athletes noted that being part of a team that works efficiently together and has strong relationships within the group are highly gratifying experiences. Joel promotes this distinctiveness by linking current players to the traditions underpinning their team identity, an important element of team building (Carron & Spink, 1993). Consistent with team building research (Patten, 1981; Paradis & Martin, 2012; Yukelson, 1997), Joel seeks to strengthen the social and emotional bonds between his players to fulfil individual and group goals. His strategy involves highlighting the common features that the players share with each other and providing an opportunity for them to express feelings of pride in their identity as representatives of their families and communities.

Harry views regionally based teams as having an advantage over the metropolitan teams when he attends carnivals in Brisbane. Whereas those teams from local and surrounding areas would return home at the conclusion of the day's play, teams from regional areas such as Cairns would often stay together, such as in the dormitory of a boarding school. Perhaps reminding him of his own boarding school experiences, Harry found this allowed for deeper, more meaningful relationships to be built among his players. This is consistent with a conceptual team-building model proposed by Carron and Spink (1993) who identified two of the key elements contributing to a team environment as togetherness and proximity.

When selecting representative teams, Joel considers a player's willingness to orient oneself to the values of the team as worth more than on-field abilities. Consistent with research findings (Bloom et al., 2003; Cope et al., 2010; Felps et al., 2006), Joel spoke of times when

he sought to strengthen the team by removing certain players who were undermining the collective environment. Brent demonstrated a similar belief when he started coaching his A Grade Men's team in Neilsen. He held firm in his requirement for his elite-level players to go through the same process as other team members when returning from injury. While one player reacted negatively and chose to leave the club, two others stayed and followed the established procedure. Brent sent a strong message to the rest of the team and his club about fairness and equity as well as his willingness to stand true to his expressed values. Brent's response to this challenge was similar to some of the coaches in Cope and colleagues' (2010) study. They sought to re-frame a negative situation with problem athletes into an opportunity to reinforce important messages about their expectations for the team. Brent's response to the situation in Neilsen reflects Clark's (2003) optimism about coaches' capacities to affect positive changes in difficult team members. These sentiments, which also adhere to their expressed preference for the principles underpinning a humanistic coaching pedagogy, are consistent with those expressed by the other participant coaches concerning the process of team building.

For these coaches, their use of humanistic coaching practices and positive pedagogy may be seen as a manifestation of their habitus through their identification of their perceptions and preferences as well as their assertions concerning appropriate and inappropriate behaviours when coaching. Like Jarvie and Maguire's (1994) boxer, their demeanour, style and penchants when coaching rugby have become engrained through constant repetition and reinforcement. Cushion and Jones' (2006) suggest that coaches raised in similar environments will exhibit the same habitus. While having differences in their biographies, it may be argued that these coaches, through their experiences coaching rugby in regional areas with similar characteristics (low player numbers and extensive travel distances, for example) provide support for such a contention.

5.6 SUPERORDINATE THEME 5: CHALLENGES AND REWARDS OF COACHING REGIONAL RUGBY

Each of the participant coaches spoke passionately about the challenges they face as volunteer rugby coaches in regional and rural areas. One primary challenge involves the difficulties they have encountered balancing their family and employment responsibilities

with their voluntary coaching commitments, particularly with the added distances and time demands coaching requires in a regional setting. The second major challenge they experience is between rugby's governing bodies' policies and ideals concerning the development of the game, its coaches and its players and their complex role as a regionally based volunteer coach.

5.6.1 SUBORDINATE THEME: TIME, DISTANCE AND BALANCING COMMITMENTS

Insufficient time is frequently cited as a common deterrent to people volunteering to coach at the community level (Wiersma & Sherman, 2005; Rundle-Thiele & Auld, 2009). Research has suggested that volunteer coaches spend approximately 11 hours each week in coaching-related activities (Sports Coach UK, 2011; Timson-Katchis & North, 2010). Sports Coach UK (2011) identified coaching-related travel as taking up to 1.8 hours per person. While there has not been an Australian study undertaken, the distances involved with country sport in Queensland are significantly greater than those required in the UK. All the participant coaches in this study found the travelling involved in playing and coaching rugby, especially at the representative level quite taxing on the available time they had to spend with their families and other commitments including paid work.

Four of the coaches' work with representative junior club rugby would take up the winter/spring school holidays in terms of training and playing in state tournaments. Again, the distances involved in these endeavours can be extensive with players' parents driving up to seven hours for training or games. This presented significant challenges in communicating with players, parents and other coaches when organising training sessions, travel, accommodation, and games. However, the participant coaches mostly saw the travel, expense, and time away from family required by their coaching as natural consequences of their choice to be a volunteer rugby coach.

However, just as researchers have found coaches to be particularly prone to work-family conflict due to the demands of afternoon practices, travel and weekend and holiday obligations (Dixon & Sagas, 2007; Sagas & Cunningham, 2005), they have also found that a supportive spouse and family may enhance both the coach and the parent role (Greenhaus &

Powell, 2006; North et al., 2020; Ryan & Sagas, 2011). This appears to have been the case for Chris, Steve, Harry and Brent. Harry, for example, found his decision to get married instigated serious reflection concerning the position rugby would now take in his life – *Rugby after marriage? Is that still going to be a possibility?* While Chris' current wife supported his coaching of the local men's team, the toll it was having on his family life and work responsibilities were his primary concerns as he began to question the viability of continuing to coach. When asked what he has learned from his (now) four sons, Steve nominated patience. By his own admission, he tends to rush things, however he recognises the importance of spending time with his children. While giving the impression of being quite driven in achieving his goals as a coach, it appears that his own lack of a father figure growing up has focussed Steve's efforts on prioritising his family when rugby becomes too demanding of his time and energy. Brent sees the parallels between his role as a rugby coach and as a manager of the diversionary centre he leads. He considers both to be essential interdependent components of a symbiotic triad which is central–to his life: coaching, work, and family. He believes balancing the effort and time he devotes to all three elements allows him to perform each role effectively with each part providing an outlet for the other components.

Recognising that there are multiple versions of masculinity, Connell (1995) describes hegemonic masculinity as a process by which only one type of institutionalised masculinity is "culturally exalted" and positioned above all others (p. 77). Men are compelled to display behaviours consistent with this one dominant form. However, Brent's altered attitude is consistent with the notion that hegemonic masculinity is subjective and dependent on context. Basically, men's actions exhibit a certain type of masculinity considered hegemonic in one situation, then demonstrate another form of hegemonic masculinity in a different environment (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

As demonstrated by the stories Brent shared concerning his brothers, he had a distinctive ideal of hegemonic masculinity imposed on him from a young age. These ideals found expression and reinforcement in the environment of rugby league and union where toughness, aggression, physical competence, and good-humoured acceptance of on-field violence were not just expected but institutionalised and celebrated as masculine (Pringle, 2008; Pringle & Markula, 2005). However, Brent exemplifies tendencies reflective of alternative versions of masculinity, as often demonstrated by fathers of small children or sons with elderly relatives. These might be subordinated and viewed as inappropriate in the hypermasculine environment

of the rugby field. However, this is accepted as a different type of masculine hegemony in private (Whitehead, 2002; Giazitzoglu, 2020). For example, Brent's ease when explaining the reasoning behind his domestic and work routine may be seen as indicative of his unintentional practising of inclusive masculinity theory. This contends that multiple forms of masculinity can exist horizontally - where no one form is hegemonically dominant (Anderson, 2009; Anderson & McGuire, 2010), rather than in the hierarchical format proposed by Connell (1995).

This type of inclusive masculinity might be termed 'contextual' or 'fluid' whereby a man can still demonstrate traditional masculine behaviours such as demonstrating physicality in performing tasks involving strength, supportiveness, sacrifice, problem-solving or competitiveness. These are easily modified to suit the context; like a river responding to the changing contours of the landform through which its travelling. So, while a man might help a teammate up off the ground during a game in a way that suits that cultural environment, the same man would perform the same action but with far more gentleness if it was his elderly relative or a small child. These participants appear to be cognisant of balancing their valuing of traditional masculine traits such as aggression and competitiveness with a more context-sensitive and caring approach to their players and in their other roles as men. For example, Joel mentioned exploiting traditional masculine qualities often attributed to rural males such as resilience and toughness when coaching his representative teams. However, it was interesting to note his support for contemporary off-field health and safety policies concerning rural representative players' travel times to training and acknowledging his responsibilities in this area.

Considering the time and personal effort these coaches have dedicated to the pursuit of coaching rugby on a volunteer basis in their local regional communities, their coaching may be defined as "serious leisure". According to Stebbins (2006):

> Serious leisure is the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer activity that participants find so substantial, interesting, and fulfilling that, in the typical case, they launch themselves on a (leisure) career centred on acquiring and expressing its special skills, knowledge, and experience. (p. 6)

This definition appears particularly suitable in describing the participant coaches in this study who have committed a significant portion of their lives to voluntarily playing and coaching rugby. The motives these participants identified for engaging so fully in their voluntary

coaching are consistent with Stebbins' (2001) research which found that serious leisure generates several personal rewards such as fulfilling one's potential, expressing one's skills and knowledge and developing a valued identity. As well, social rewards may also be experienced such as meeting people, making friends, forming wider social networks, and contributing to others' experiences. Because serious leisure activities are chosen by the participant, it is logical to assume that they must involve several pleasant memories and experiences. Consequently, the more pleasurable the experiences resulting from participation in the activity, the more likely that increased time and effort will be put towards it. This may lead to it becoming a "central life interest in which energies are invested in both physical/intellectual activities and in positive emotional states" (Dubin, 1992, p. 41). Simply, if the value of the outcomes from a voluntary coaching role outweighs those of other roles, the more central it will become to the person's life and less valuable roles will become more peripheral. This is evident to a greater and lesser extent from the participant coaches in this study.

Joel seemed to struggle more than the other participant coaches in seeking to balance his roles as a father, husband, manager, and coach. Joel's self-identity as a "rescuer" appears to have played a significant part in his divorce and his difficulties in maintaining a close relationship with his children. According to Ket de Vries (2012), rescuers need others' approval but when they do not attain this and are stressed by the accompanying negative feelings, their primary strategy for redemption is to look to help someone else. This presents an interesting but destructive cycle that Joel appears to have demonstrated. He likes to be needed and his 'currency' is his expertise in rugby. When Joel would help a club or a team that needed assistance, he was in a familiar masculine environment whose culture he understood. His efforts were explicitly appreciated, and his self-confidence and self-worth reinforced. However, the time he was spending coaching rather than with his family attracted disapproval and criticism from his wife. To redress this Joel would return to his default strategy and donate his time to another club or team needing help. Based on his brief description of his mother, his time at an all-boys' boarding school, his work on rural properties and his heavy involvement in the highly masculine world of rugby clubs, it may also be that Joel had little grounding in effectively dealing with females. Empathising with his situation from my insider perspective, Joel's willingness to choose the easier option of coaching rugby was not unpredictable. He selected an activity in which he was comfortable

and confident over the more difficult and uncertain task of connecting with his wife and daughter and a son not particularly interested in sport.

Research into elite athlete career transition has recognised the significance of voluntary choice to a player's successful retirement processes (Lavalee et al., 1997; Taylor et al., 2005). A strong exclusive athletic identity has been found to create greater potential for emotional difficulties upon the ending of a player's career (Lavalee & Robinson, 2007). Joel had spent most of his life heavily involved with rugby as a player and as a coach so, when he felt he had to make this choice to forego his coaching to re-connect with his wife, it created a tension between his role identities of husband, father, and rugby coach. Ultimately, he chose coaching as the dominant role.

According to Burke and Stets (2009), the term, "identity" describes a set of meanings that comprises who an individual or group member is when they are performing a particular role or specifies characteristics that identifies them as an individual. Role identity theory contends that people align their identities with their varied roles, such as a parent, spouse, coach, or employee. As evidenced by his enduring support for his drug-addicted brother and his willingness to run coaching sessions for those who ask, helping others appears to fulfil a basic psychological need (BPN) in Joel providing him with cognitive growth, active engagement, and a sense of well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2002). Consequently, coaching rugby is so integral to his identity that, in his own opinion, it often overrides his roles as husband and father.

"Identity prominence" is where a person's identities might be ordered according to their core values and principles forming a hierarchy (McCall & Simmons, 1978). This identity prominence hierarchy demarcates a person's priorities and guides their actions in different situations and over time. The higher-ranked identities are considered by the person to be more important and valued and are subsequently enacted more frequently (Burke & Stets, 2009; McCall & Simmons, 1978). Research has linked identity prominence with an individual's commitment, willingness to accept burdens and personal sacrifice (Nuttbrock & Freudiger, 1991). Contributing to these are two significant factors; one is centrality - the importance of that role to the person's image of themselves. The other involves evaluative emotions - the strength of feelings the person associates with performing that role (Pope & Hall, 2015).

Consistent with research conducted by Pope and colleagues (2014) on coaches' role identities, Joel is fully cognisant that his constant willingness to sacrifice family time to coaching rugby has been detrimental to his marriage and his relationships with his children. It may be surmised that Joel's identity as a coach has been more dominant in his identity prominence hierarchy than those of husband and father because coaching has elicited more powerful positive emotions and has been central to how he sees himself.

Joel's use of sport to connect with his children is consistent with his rescuer's *modus operandi* and is not uncommon with fathers in general. According to research conducted by Harrington (2006) with Australian fathers, children's involvement in sport not only gives fathers' interests in common with their children, and ways for them to bond together, but it also provides concrete ways of supporting children in their activities, with opportunities for private and meaningful conversation. So, while Joel sees his heavy involvement in coaching rugby as having detracted from his relationship with his son and daughter, it has also provided each party with a common area to connect with one other. However, it is unclear if Joel has used a more self-critical lens to see that perhaps his children might feel forced to use rugby as their only option to connect more closely with their father.

All the participants spoke of the demands their coaching roles had on their other roles as husbands, fathers, and workers. Each of them has full-time jobs, four of them in management roles. However, when time schedules became crowded, it appears that their work commitments were rarely affected. Joel often gave in to his desire to help others, and the emotional boost this appeared to provide, at the expense of his family. However, while the other four coaches all spoke of the support they had received from their spouses, each recognised the toll their passion for coaching might take on these relationships and sought to mitigate the deleterious effects their coaching might have. Harry and Chris engage with their families by actively supporting their children's non-rugby sporting activities. Steve's family accompany him on his coaching trips and Brent seeks to schedule his time so that he can spend important moments with his daughter whilst also giving his wife time to pursue her own interests.

5.6.2 SUBORDINATE THEME: DEVELOPING THE GAME, ITS COACHES AND PLAYERS IN REGIONAL AREAS

Chris and Brent both mentioned the importance of media coverage, especially free-to-air television, in regional areas to the development of potential players' interest in rugby. As has been noted in this study, rugby occupies a marginalised position in Queensland's regional sport in terms of participation and popularity. Steve identified parents' lack of knowledge about the game as a significant barrier to junior participation, including those who, perceived it as a sport played by wealthy private schools in the south-east of the state (Robinson, 2017).

Rugby's lack of free-to-air coverage has been primarily due to a multi-million-dollar sponsorship agreement until 2019 between the Foxtel Pay-Tv Network and Rugby Australia which first occurred when the sport became fully professional in 1995. Gelman and colleagues (2015) argue that the first step towards motivating juniors to play rugby is an "ignition" (p. 58); an incident or event that generates their interest in the activity. In the experience of the participant coaches, the most significant of these has often been a televised game. Regional teacher-coaches in Queensland agree that watching rugby on television has a positive impact on students' interest in the game (Robinson, 2017). Rugby's contract with subscription TV has also severely limited its public presence in comparison to "the vast number of TV eyeballs trained to its major rivals" (Hinds, 2019, p. 1) such as rugby league and AFL. In 2020, the Nine Network-affiliated subscription streaming service, Stan, signed a $AUD100 million, three-year deal with Rugby Australia. Combining streamed games with one free-to-air game per week, the 2021 Super Rugby season saw significantly higher numbers of broadcast viewers compared to the previous year (Ward, 2021), however, whether this will translate into more player numbers in regional areas is unclear.

The participants in general spoke of the dearth of coaching development opportunities available to them and other regionally-based coaches. For coaches seeking to develop a strong pedagogical base the first strategy advocated by Van Mullem and colleagues (2017) is to seek opportunities to learn. Chris, as a coach/administrator in a regional area, wishes to enhance his coaching knowledge however perceives a lack of support from rugby's governing bodies which has led him to feeling *disenfranchised. I feel really separate from the guys in Brisbane and don't feel like I'm part of their organisation, not part of the rugby community.* Moreover, he is confused about the contradiction of such disparateness in a game that prides and promotes itself as being "the ultimate team sport" (World Rugby, 2016,

p. 1). This feeling of being disconnected from the governing body in rugby has been echoed by other regionally based teacher-coaches of rugby (Robinson, 2017).

According to Nash and Sproule (2012), to be effective, coach educators need to appreciate that extensive experience and expertise of long-time coaches such as Harry, Chris and Joel, may often surpass that of the instructor. The content and presentation of professional development courses will affect how attending coaches view future formal opportunities. Steve, for example, found participation in formal coach education courses has enhanced his coaching self-efficacy by reinforcing the validity of his own practices and ideas (Malete et al., 2000).

Professional development for coaches has been criticised for a lack of quality, consistency, and regular delivery (Gilbert & Trudel, 1999). The perception amongst the participants is that that there is a de-skilling of coaches through a curriculum that requires indoctrination rather than innovation (Cushion, 2011; Cushion, 2013), including a lack of interaction with fellow participant coaches (Demers et al., 2006). Erickson and colleagues (2008) suggest the impact and relevance of such coaching professional development will be enhanced by taking advantage of experienced coaches' pre-existing knowledge and adopting a more experiential and cooperative approach. This is consistent with research that has argued coaches report more effective learning occurs from informal contexts such as observing and interacting with other coaches, from reflecting on their own coaching experiences and from applying new concepts and information to specific contexts (Gilbert & Trudel, 2001; Gould, 2013; Piggott, 2012).

The participant coaches also expressed concern with professional development personnel employed by the governing bodies to promote the game in regional areas. Teachers who coach rugby in regional Queensland schools have nominated similar problems to Harry, Chris and Steve (Robinson, 2017). Like Harry's praise for the rugby administrator his district employed, those personnel who were properly funded and demonstrated commitment to developing their regional players and coaches were highly valued by the teacher-coaches. As one regional teacher-coach stated: "When we had a full-time funded development officer with resources and funds to throw at the grassroots locally, participation increased dramatically in our region (with developmental) comps taking place in schools every term." (Robinson, 2017, slide 14). However, these teacher-coaches also identified inconsistent standards and commitment among regional Queensland Rugby Union development officers

as well as an apparent confusion about their job responsibilities. Echoing Chris' comment that *rugby has no face* in his region, these teacher-coaches expressed frustration that their designated QRU development personnel were often based over 200-300 kilometres away while other sports had a far greater and locally visible presence.

The area of game development, about which the participant coaches all expressed concern, primarily involves the issue of dividing funding between a sport's elite levels with its focus on performance, which is in tension with the grassroots levels with a focus towards increasing the sport's participant base. The frustrations voiced by Joel are shared by others involved in community rugby with significant concerns about the national governing body directing funding towards elite levels of the game in contrast to its investment in grassroots participation and development (Australian Senate, 2017; Parkes, 2019). For several years, the Australian Rugby Union followed a strategy based on successful elite teams driving the game's popularity at a grassroots level. As John O'Neill, former CEO of the Australian Rugby Union, stated, "The health and wellbeing of the game of rugby critically hinges on the Wallabies. The hard, cold truth is what pays the bills is the Wallabies and the Super Rugby teams. They are the rainmakers" (McDuling, 2018, p. 4). Many sports have reported an upsurge in interest after international success, especially if televised. However, according to research by Grix and Carmichael (2012), the idea that elite sport success will lead to more long-term participants at a community level, "sounds eminently sensible, but there is little evidence to support it" (p. 7).

Recently, Brett Papworth, an ex-Wallaby and former President of Sydney club, Eastwood, garnered significant publicity with his criticism of the Australian Rugby Union's lack of attention to, and funding for, community rugby clubs (Worthington, 2018). A key complaint in Papworth's letter to stakeholders, entitled "A Clarion Call", focused on the dispersal of funds from the national body in 2014:

> Of the $106 million spent by the ARU in 2014, $56 million was spent on the game's elite elements such as Super Rugby and Wallabies payments and $25 million on head office salaries and benefits. A further $16 million was spent on 'match-day expenses' such as fireworks for Super Rugby and Wallabies matches. Nationwide, grassroots rugby received just $4 million. (Besley, 2016, p. 1)

Unsurprisingly, Chris and Joel both vehemently expressed dissatisfaction with their governing bodies' focus on elite-level players' pathways at the expense of promoting regional participation at a community level. Similar to the New Zealand community rugby coaches

researched by Hassanin and colleagues (2018), the participants readily identified rugby's two branches, one focused on participation (epitomised by community rugby clubs) in contrast to a focus on performance (manifested in elite and professional rugby). They, too, expressed anxiety concerning the threat of professional rugby's demands for talented players at the expense of community club rugby's culture and status.

This typifies the tension identified by Bowers and Green (2018) between those developing high-performance athletes in elite environments (labelled 'Sport Development') versus those who seek to utilise sport as a vehicle to achieve a wider participant base and non-sport developmental outcomes (labelled 'Sport for Development'). While each of the coaches is involved in representative rugby coaching in their regions and work with talented junior and/or senior players, a common motive underpinning their desire to coach is to help develop the whole person, not just the rugby player, regardless of their playing abilities. This was also consistent with Hassanin and colleagues' (2018) research which found community rugby coaches prioritised players' personal and moral development and commitment to the group over performance. This attitude also strongly correlates with numerous studies into players' motivations for playing club rugby which found the most appealing aspects of the game for players were the off-field social interactions and feelings of connection and its inclusivity, especially its suitability to different body types (Dong et al, 2013; Fields & Comstock, 2008; Kerr, 2019b).

Focusing on elite programmes impacts on the identification and nurturing of talented players. Joel's description of GPS rugby coaches seeking out talented regional players and offering them scholarships to move to metropolitan areas accurately summarises the first step for many elite players. Having traditionally served as "the prime talent incubator" for elite rugby in Australia, the national body's reliance on these schools in Queensland and NSW has recently "proven to be outdated and largely incapable of feeding the needs of the Wallaby machine" (Lutton, 2016, p. 1). As Joel revealed in his concern about the lack of front rowers at one GPS school, rugby's traditional position as the premier winter sport played at GPS schools in Queensland and New South Wales is under threat from other football codes, particularly AFL (Harris, 2017; King, 2014). Added to this, in 2018, four students playing in GPS rugby matches suffered well-publicised spinal injuries increasing community fears about the safety of the game (Parnell & Schliebs, 2018).

While this may be seen as simply the workings of a competitive marketplace where students choose to play the sport which they prefer and parents advocate for them to get more opportunities to do so within GPS competitions, Blucher (2020b) highlights the importance of rugby to GPS administrators:

> If their rugby programme isn't strong, their larger donors will threaten to walk, such is the importance of the results, at least to some – many – of the alumni. Other principals need a strong rugby team for marketing purposes – visibility and presence in their local community … the bottom line. Enrolments. Dollars and cents [and] meeting commercial imperatives. For others, it's simply about pride. For all manner of reasons, they can't have their [First XV] being beaten 70-0. It doesn't fit in with the school's standards of excellence. It does nothing for school morale. Besides, what will the Old Boys' think? It's embarrassing. (p. 2)

The importance of maintaining a GPS institution's positive reputation with current and prospective parents and good relationships with its alumni is explored by Baker (2021) who found that former students of GPS schools in Sydney such as Shore School and the King's School are powerful contributors to these schools' fundraising initiatives, raising millions of dollars. This is similar to Queensland's GPS schools where alumni donations are significant sources of funds (Schneiders & Millar, 2021). In an example of the connection between these schools, their alumni and rugby, it is also significant that the national body, Rugby Australia, has an "inordinate number" of graduates from Sydney's GPS institutions in its leadership groups (Elliott, 2021, p. 3).

Rugby's increasingly fragile standing in the GPS sport system is of grave concern to rugby's governing bodies. If the lack of player numbers from traditional sources dries up, clubs will struggle to field teams, participate in viable competitions and attract members. At the elite level, a smaller pool of players from which to draw may lead to lower quality performances and less spectator and media interest (Jones, 2021; McCague, 2020) Combatting the threat of rugby failing in GPS schools may drive more funding from the governing body towards its traditional base at these schools, meaning less assistance for rugby clubs outside these schools.

Moreover, the high percentage of elite rugby players who come from south-east Queensland private schools may significantly reinforce the disconnect between the sport and regional areas since an important aspirational motivator for potential players is their identification with those who they wish to emulate (Boardley, 2013). Rugby's lack of free-to-air television

exposure may compound this. As one of the teacher-coaches from Robinson's (2017) study remarked, "Watching elite rugby motivates and inspires young players. They talk about the game and pick up what skills are important to practice. They learn from watching."

Harry voiced frustration with what he sees as a lack of transparency and clarity concerning the junior talent identification processes in Queensland rugby. He feels there is a bias towards south-east Queensland players and those who attend the major rugby-playing schools. Steve, too, expressed consternation regarding selections based on carnivals he had attended. He believed that serving players from regional areas had been overlooked in favour of those from metropolitan bases. This is consistent with Devine and Blass' (2009) assertion that if talent identification and development procedures are opaque, this can lead to perceptions that they are unfair and discriminatory.

Also linked to talent identification pathways, Brent highlighted the financial difficulties experienced by representative-level players and their families with the extensive travel required to participate in higher-level competitions. He also expressed concern with the costs incurred by his players to simply participate in the game at his club. This is not an isolated situation according to Cull and Parry (2018) who researched the costs associated with Australians' participation in sport. They found respondents paid an average of $1100 annually to play organised sport. In breaking down the costs they found that registration fees levied by sporting organisations were the largest expense for participants. This is compounded by travel costs which were estimated at, on average, $450 per season and could be especially prohibitive for low-income families. Considering the distances involved in regional and rural sport, the travel costs for people in such areas would be presumably higher. Cull and Parry's (2018) research did not include expenses associated with players competing at representative level which can be substantially more due to the greater travel demanded to compete in state carnivals.

Chris also voiced concern about the lack of tangible developmental support his regional club received for its affiliation fees of $6000 annually to the game's governing bodies. He and Brent both felt that the fees being paid by their regional clubs, players and parents are not being used locally to boost participation in the game. Harry and Steve also thought that regional school players could receive more opportunities for the money they were paying to participate in state carnivals and mooted alternative regionally organised competitions, independent of the game's governing bodies. They believe this would provide more effective

and inclusive pathways for regional schoolboy players to not just attain higher representative honours but to also be introduced to the ethos of the game.

The issues in developing the game in regional areas that the coaches identified appear primarily systemic and outside of their control. Their evident frustrations with their governing bodies seem to be predominantly with the inequalities they perceive between the support given to those within an elite bubble (GPS schools, elite schoolboys, professional players, Queensland's south-east metropolitan corner) and those outside it (regionally based coaches, players, clubs, and state schools). These volunteer coaches have dedicated many years to promoting rugby and developing young players in their regional schools and clubs. They feel disenfranchised with the game's governing bodies who they see as pursuing a different agenda which does not support or appreciate their efforts and instead grants presumptive privileges to those who are already financially and geographically advantaged. To foster and maintain rugby in the regions, these coaches see some degree of separation and independence from their governing body and the south-east metropolitan area as a potentially viable solution.

5.6.3 SUBORDINATE THEME: REWARDS

While happy to identify and discuss the challenges they face, the coaches were keen to acknowledge the positive impact that has resulted from their long-term involvement as volunteer rugby coaches in regional and rural areas. These coaches are dedicated to the notion that rugby is a sport that provides many positive processes and outcomes for those who play it such as enjoyment, friendship, physical challenge, emotional release, and personal development. By introducing players to the game and coaching them, they see themselves as contributing to improving players' lives. Joel and Chris valued the relationships they helped forge among players with their representative teams as well as the individual personal growth they believe occurs in specific players due to their involvement in the sport. Harry, Brent and Steve also expressed gratitude with seeing visible improvement in players' abilities, skills and attitudes over time. Each of the participant coaches felt that they had something substantial to offer their players and that this ability to contribute to others' lives through coaching resulted in a sense of self-fulfilment. These rewards are consistent with research on sports coaches' reasons for continuing to coach (Auld &

Cuskelly, 2001; Hassanin et al., 2018; Raedeke et al., 2002; Rundle-Thiele & Auld, 2009; Sports Coach UK, 2004).

It can be argued that the participants also displayed an existential relationship with their sport and coaching. Aggerholm and Breivik (2021) nominate three fundamental ways of engaging in sport: being, having, and belonging. "Being" may be associated with autonomous and active engagement in an experiential physical activity which is inherently valuable, challenging and utilises critical reasoning. Philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre (2003) opined that "the desire to play is fundamentally the desire to be" (p. 581). During the interviews, all the coaches spoke of the enjoyment they found, as players and coaches, related to playing/being in the game. In contrast, "Having", focuses on possessing or acquisition. An activity is thus a means to an end - valued for what it can produce or what one can achieve from it (Fromm, 2008). It may be posited that the participant coaches engage in rugby, as players and coaches, for similar reasons such as to gain tactical knowledge, to improve physical capacities, to acquire a new skill or to win a close match. Moreover, their expressed valuing of rugby's central tenet of teammate support is consistent with Sartre's notion of the group as a collective unified entity created by individuals who connect their free will to the free will of the other members (Grehaigne, 2011). As well, Grehaigne (2011) posits that the common problem for all coaches centres on how they can organise their teams to get the most efficacy of individual actions in addressing endless variables. This, too, is consistent with the participants' preference for humanistic and positive pedagogical practices as well as their enjoyment of the processes involved with team building.

However, "belonging" may be the crucial reward these regional coaches obtain from their rugby coaching. "Belonging" can be connected to the existential concept of "dwelling" which can denote a person's feelings of being bound to a particular aspect of one's living situation – a house, a community, a group, a city, a culture, a nation (Aggerholm & Breivik, 2021). Each coach has demonstrated their commitment to both the sport and culture of rugby and to their regional communities. Harry, Joel and Brent are currently residing in the regions of their birth and upbringing. Though born in a city, Chris has chosen to live regionally for the past thirty years while Steve had deliberately transferred as a teacher from Brisbane to a regional community and stayed well past the mandatory duration required. They expressed pride in their regional identities and as representatives of their communities.

"Belonging" may be tied to the experiences, personal and social, one has in particular locations (Aggerholm & Breivik, 2021). Participating in sport with friends and belonging to a community club are central features of these experiences. Chris remarked on the social identity that accompanied his choice to play rugby in his small town. The other participant coaches all mentioned their enjoyment of the social mores associated with rugby such as post-match activities with opponents. These would also embed a sense of belonging with one's fellow rugby players and appear to have resonated deeply with these coaches as rewarding outcomes for their involvement with their sport. This may provide a reason for the strength of their emotions in describing their disenfranchisement with their governing bodies as they see the values being demonstrated by these bodies in stark contrast to their experiential association of rugby with belonging.,

5.7 SUMMARY

This chapter has sought to situate the findings of the current study in the context of the existing research and theoretical frameworks. The five superordinate themes identified in the previous chapter framed the discussion while some subordinate themes were discussed in combination as deemed appropriate. These themes involved the formation of these coaches' personal values, the significance of sport to their lives and to their living environments, the appeal of rugby, pedagogical practices they believed to be effective in their coaching and the challenges and rewards of coaching rugby in regional areas. The convergence of these themes across the participants allowed for an exploration of these regionally based volunteer coaches' reflections on their lived experiences before and during their rugby coaching careers.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

6.1 RELATING THE FINDINGS TO THE RESEARCH QUESTION

This study sought to understand the influence of lived experience on the coaching philosophies, practices, and overall development of five regionally based volunteer rugby coaches. Having collected the data from the participant coaches through a series of semi-structured interviews, an analysis was undertaken to elicit and determine common features in their lived experiences which affected their coaching lives utilising Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). These were presented as superordinate themes which encompassed several subordinate themes which were discussed.

The superordinate and subordinate themes drawn from the participants' own descriptions and interpretations of incidents and events, were then situated in the context of extant research.

This chapter will link the findings regarding the lived experiences of the participant coaches, to the overarching guiding inquiry question: *How have the lived experiences of volunteer rugby coaches in regional Queensland informed their coaching philosophies, practices and overall development?*

6.1.1 THE PARTICIPANTS' COACHING PHILOSOPHIES

Examining how the participants' lived experiences have informed their coaching philosophies involves focusing on what they see as important to teach players in the regional and rural context as well as identifying the values which underpin these teachings (Jenkins, 2010; Sproule, 2015). Based on the data collected, the participants have adopted similar beliefs concerning what they see as valuable to teach their players. To begin with, the nature of the game requires dominance in physical confrontations, therefore the teaching of techniques to achieve this effectively and safely is essential. However, the coaches frequently refer to the importance of teaching more than technical skills. Brent and Steve described their role as facilitators, by asking questions of their players and guiding them towards possible solutions which might require technical skill development or tactical adjustment. This could include the various ways a ball-carrier might maintain their feet in the tackle to allow time for supporting teammates to arrive, or to develop greater tactical understanding with their

players. The coaches also accept that for these possible solutions to be trialled, players will need the opportunity to express themselves, and that mistakes should be treated as the process of players learning. To assist this, the coaches sought to encourage players to reflect on their goals and performances, seek to identify the sources of their mistakes and look for remedies. As Harry declares, *their biggest coaches are really going to be themselves. The biggest thing I've learnt is that it's not really me that's making them better.*

While developing their players' abilities on the field was important, these coaches feel their role should focus more on building their players' personal attributes and forging strong connections with their teammates. The participant coaches all saw rugby as providing an almost tailor-made vehicle for the development of life skills such as cooperation, communication, resilience, and empathy. They considered rugby as providing an authentic environment filled with variables such as pressure, pain, and time limits in which to practice these life skills. The lessons from these experiences could then be applied on and off the field in a variety of contexts. Moreover, the coaches valued developing a sense of identity among their players, as individuals and as a group, as men who played rugby and importantly, as men from the country imbued with the traditional qualities associated with physical toughness, perseverance and mateship. For Chris, Joel and Brent, the process of bonding and of being mates, was an essential appeal of the game which they sought to establish with their teams.

Another normative characteristic often associated with rural masculinity in Australia is a stoic resistance to asking for help and revealing emotions (Alston & Kent, 2008). However, Joel and Brent found that asking their players to share their feelings and checking on teammates' welfare strengthened team cohesion. The values the participant coaches espoused were consistent with Collins' and colleagues' (2009) definition of a coaching philosophy as "a set of beliefs that guide our coaching actions, particularly in how these behaviours impact the lives of our athletes" (p. 31). Through coaching rugby, these men all seek to positively influence the lives of their players.

6.1.2 THE PARTICIPANTS' COACHING PRACTICES

Sproule (2015) asserts that a coach's principles and behaviours are the implementation of their values and act as guidelines for putting these values into practice. The participant

coaches all spoke of the importance of athlete-centred coaching, creating, maintaining a positive learning environment, and building strong relationships within their teams. Harry advocated adopting a considered approach in dealing with players and the importance of accepting their individual differences. This subsequently resulted in him differentiating his method of interacting with players based on their individual personalities and the context of the situation. Brent and Harry both recognised the weight their words and manner could carry with players and the enduring effects that a negative interaction could have. Both coaches saw adopting a positive approach to these interactions as being consistent with their values as well as providing a practical outcome, recognising that negativity or being overly critical might alienate players and drive them away from the team. Chris, too, despite the personal and professional successes he attributed to his self-motivated personality, sought to temper his negative views of players who did not share his attitudes and commitment to the team objectives, believing that it may make some players feel uncomfortable *because they're trying to be someone that they're not*. Instead, he sought to highlight to such players the benefits of realigning their motives and behaviours with their teammates and their coach while maintaining their own sense of identity and autonomy. He felt that by respecting the larger group's goals and ambitions greater rewards would be attained.

For Steve, the optimal way to coach rugby was to not be overly prescriptive. Rather he would build on a few simple tenets to provide his players with basic formations in defence and attack. From these, his players would make decisions depending on the situation. Like Harry and Brent, Steve would then encourage players to reflect on the option taken and evaluate the success of its outcome. By asking questions, these coaches sought to engage the players in problem-solving and decision-making processes and provide them with a sense of independence and ownership of what they were doing on the field. Some may argue that this is simply good coaching as the players are the ones who must make the decisions and are on the field in real time. They cannot call a 'time-out' and ask the coach for the solution to the problem. It also demonstrates respect for the players' abilities to assess and solve problematic issues. When speaking of their playing careers, the coaches all mentioned the importance of having input into their own on field actions and frequently those of the team. The participant coaches felt that through encouragement they promoted a positive environment by treating players who made mistakes as being engaged in a learning process.

The participant coaches also acknowledged the physicality of the game for which they were training their players. Joel and Steve both spoke of the importance of being aggressive and

winning the physical contests that players encounter on the field and at training. According to the participant coaches an important contributor to success in these physical confrontations, is the support of teammates. This feature of the game was considered by all the coaches to be an integral part of its appeal to them.

6.1.3 THE PARTICIPANTS' OVERALL COACHING DEVELOPMENT

Consistent with research findings related to coaches' lives (Carson et al., 2019; Dixon & , 2007; Norris et al., 2017) and the humanistic approach to coaching for which the participant coaches subscribed to, a holistic perspective is beneficial when considering how the participant coaches' lived experiences have informed their overall coaching development. This included looking at the ways these coaches felt they could improve their coaching knowledge and skills, the multi-faceted factors which inform their coaches practice, and the impact decisions made by rugby's governing bodies have on their coaching context.

As regionally based coaches, the issues of time, distance and accessibility of current resources and development opportunities have been paramount when seeking to enhance their coaching knowledge and skills. Harry was particularly frustrated with his governing body's seeming reluctance to share coaching resources. Steve and Chris felt isolated from learning and development opportunities that were available to those nearer the south-east corner of the state. All the participant coaches spoke of the necessity of being self-motivated and taking charge of their own learning. Joel would travel to Brisbane to be involved with elite-level teams. Steve, Brent, Chris, and Harry sought representative coaching appointments to put into practice their own ideas but also to learn from the other coaches. Formal coach education courses, informal discussions and interactions with other coaches, representative coaching and active mentoring were all seen as valid strategies through which these coaches could learn. Consistent with their general willingness to take responsibility, and despite the barriers they spoke of encountering, each of the participants primarily wanted the opportunity to choose for themselves the best way for them to develop and ultimately use their knowledge and skills.

The participants all expressed a desire to view their players as individuals for whom rugby is but one facet of their lives. They all spoke of the importance of their role as coaches in developing positive relationships with their players as individuals, supporting players to build strong relationships with their teammates on and off the field, and creating an environment within their teams and clubs that can best facilitate these processes. Consistent with this perspective, the participant coaches recognised that they needed to foster and maintain positive relationships away from the rugby context. Each participant coach spoke of the importance of their families in being able to pursue their coaching ambitions, although they also emphasised the risks of this commitment eroding their relationships at work and at home. It appears that the personal and professional costs of coaching rugby in regional areas does not appear to be sustainable in its current form.

While it appears that the participant coaches have shown a willingness to take responsibility for those aspects of their coaching development and well-being over which they have some control, they expressed significant frustration concerning an area over which they have almost no influence – the development and current state of their sport. Concerns raised included difficulties in club administration, declining volunteer participation, rugby's poor media presence and exposure, inadequate provision of development personnel in regional areas, a lack of viable regional competitions, and the philosophical and practical tensions arising from disparities in focus and funding between elite and grassroots rugby.

Each of these aspects of the participants' development as coaches – their teaching-learning styles and preferences, their personal wellbeing, and their perceptions regarding the status of rugby in the wider community – are direct reflections of their lived experiences and the values and paradigms which have stemmed from them.

6.2 IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study provides a contribution to an understanding of the phenomenon of volunteer sports coaching. There is limited qualitative research into the experiences of rural/regional volunteer sports coaches generally. The idiographic nature of IPA has provided the coach participants with an important opportunity to voice their concerns about this complex role.

At the outset of this study, it was posited that a greater understanding of these volunteer regional rugby coaches' influences, values, needs and motivations would benefit their sport's governing body, their communities, coach educators, and the coaches themselves. These findings have implications for both the Queensland Rugby Union and Rugby Australia in providing rugby administrators with a greater understanding of their volunteer workforce. This includes what coaches in regional and rural areas need in terms of face-to-face and online resources and support as well as the successes their policies and initiatives have garnered. Moreover, this study, through its idiographic approach, provides these rugby bodies with an insight into the coaching lifeworlds of some of their most experienced and committed regional coaches so that, like these coaches' views of their players, they may gain a more holistic understanding of these coaches' lives, experiences, and their feelings of isolation from the wider rugby community. Such understanding may then be used by the sport's educational arm as they seek to provide their volunteer workforce, including coaches, officials, and administrators, with the latest information such as injury protocols, law changes, game guidelines and player registration procedures in ways that cater for their intended audience's regional-rural context.

This study's findings also have implications for regional and rural rugby clubs, their coaches, and their players. Interpersonal relationships and micropolitics are integral parts of the sporting community, particularly in regional areas. Coaches are often the key factor in the success or demise of a sport in such communities. Attracting and keeping good practitioners should be a priority for regional/rural clubs. This study highlights some of the obstacles to maintaining voluntary regional rugby coaches' involvement, in addition to providing the insights of experienced rugby coaches. In this sense, the study's findings might be seen to have implications for other sports as the lessons learned from rugby in this instance, may provide ideas for other regionally based sports clubs with similar needs.

Linked to this wider perspective, the study's results may provide support and inspiration for other coaches – regional or urban, coaching rugby or another sport. Having been a rugby coach for many years as well as having coached several sports in a variety of contexts and locations, I found myself empathising on many occasions with the coaches' stories of criticism, frustration, and success. It would seem unreasonable to think that other volunteer coaches have not experienced similar issues to the ones faced by the participant coaches or have experienced comparable events. The participant coaches in the study are proponents of a

coaching pedagogy that is centred on creating a positive learning environment where players are encouraged to take ownership of their own performances and their team culture, develop strong relationships with and among the playing group, and treat players holistically. They all spoke of the importance of balancing their various roles and commitments, particularly with their partners, spouses, and children. They are also concerned when their commitment to rugby and coaching impinges on their engagement with their families. This emotional openness I found interesting as collision sports such as rugby are often highly masculinised due to their explicit valuing of physical confrontations, aggression, and competitiveness. Such environments, and the men that populate them, have not been traditionally seen as supportive of displays of emotional vulnerability. The participant coaches may be seen as demonstrating a new dynamic in contact sport participants aligned with Anderson's (2009) advocacy of a more nurturing and inclusive masculinity in sports participation. It is therefore hoped that other coaches will benefit from reflecting on some of the experiences, insights and actions detailed by the participant coaches in this study to better inform their pedagogical practices and support their personal wellbeing.

6.3 METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The strength of the IPA methodology used in this study was its ability to provide an in-depth exploration of the participant coaches' experiences. Each interview was read repeatedly and analysed carefully to ensure that participants' experiences and reflections were captured, and to facilitate a high level of interpretative engagement with the text. While some critics consider the small sample size to be a weakness, I viewed it as a strength because it allowed for a deeper analysis and, importantly for me, ensured that the voices of all participants were heard in greater detail and richness than if the sample was larger. This fulfilled the commitment of IPA to an idiographic stance (Smith et al., 2009). Identifying and recruiting the participant coaches relied on my insider status which proved valuable to eliciting information that may not have been possible otherwise. The coaches felt comfortable discussing situations using technical jargon which they did not need to explain and referred to entities, people, and events which I was familiar with. Considering that the aim of qualitative research and IPA is to examine people's lifeworlds in rich detail to reveal the true nature of the phenomenon under study (Lewis & Ritchie, 2014; Sparkes & Smith, 2014), I believe that

the use of small, purposefully selected participants and my insider status were strengths that were facilitated by this methodology.

While engaging in the double hermeneutic feature in IPA where the researcher seeks to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their experience, I felt it appropriate to institute member checking of the interview transcripts by the participant coaches to ensure they were comfortable with what had been said and the meanings emerging were consistent with what they intended to say. I believe this instilled further trust between the participant coaches and myself as they understood that I valued their words and was respectful of what they wished to convey.

However, while I anticipated that my insider status would prove advantageous in the data gathering process, I became increasingly aware of the data's resonance with me. As I began to observe themes and sub-themes developing, I found them aligning with my own experiences and beliefs and had to be particularly conscious of the influence these might have on the analysis, emergent themes and how I chose to present the information for discussion. This self-awareness I believe was important in allowing me to maintain an appropriate distance from the data while still empathising with my participants and their experiences. Ultimately, I feel the resulting analysis is richer for this.

As part of this study, it is important to acknowledge the limitations. The study population was deliberately limited only to men. The population base of experienced rugby coaches in regional Queensland is quite small and predominantly male. The IPA methodology prescribes that participant groups be homogenous, and it was felt that the lived experiences of regionally based female rugby coaches might provide too great a divergence from the others in this small sample. However, a similar investigation from the perspective of female rugby coaches would be extremely interesting and worthy of its own dedicated research in the future as this is a valued perspective if women's rugby is to grow in all areas of Australia.

Qualitative research produces findings that are derived from the subjective interpretation of the participant and the researcher. Therefore, it is accepted that another researcher, with or without insider status, would have collected and analysed data in a different manner potentially resulting in divergent interpretations and the emergence of different superordinate and subordinate themes.

A perceived limitation or weakness of qualitative research has been its lack of generalisability and transferability (Smith, 2017). In discussing the methodological approach chosen for this study, I agree with researchers who argue that naturalistic generalisability and transferability are valid forms of generalisation which resonate with the reader because the participants' stories and reflections create verisimilitude (Lewis & Ritchie, 2014; Smith, 2018; Tracy, 2010). Having spent almost thirty years heavily involved in coaching regional and representative sport, I consider the findings from this study to be highly transferable to other sports, coaches, and settings.

6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

These implications lead to several recommendations which may be considered by rugby's governing bodies or, accepting differing circumstances, other sporting bodies:

1. **More user-friendly or user-specified educational opportunities for volunteers**. Currently Rugby Australia uses a web-based platform with several online courses offering accreditations in a variety of programmes, some generic, such as the General Coaching principles module, and some rugby-specific. However, these may not be suitable platforms for some coaches and volunteers due to lack of computer skills, appropriate bandwidth, hardware etc. Others may simply benefit from a more interactive presentation via Zoom links, for example. As Steve suggested, considering the distances country coaches travel to participate in state championships and the dearth of courses run face-to-face outside of the metropolitan areas, a professional development opportunity for visiting coaches would be appreciated by coaches. As well, a live streaming of presentations from elite coaches in Brisbane and other major centres throughout Australia to regional coaches would also be useful for coaches who cannot travel long distances to attend face-to-face sessions. The linking of elite Brisbane-based coaches to coaches in country areas might also provide mentoring opportunities for the regional coaches as well as connections for country players with coaches and clubs in Brisbane who may be looking to re-locate for study or employment.

2. **More locally-based regional development personnel with a particular focus on school contexts.**
   Currently Wide Bay, for example, is serviced by one regional education manager whose area extends from north Brisbane through the Sunshine Coast to Bundaberg. This, based on past experiences related by Chris, is not conducive to effective game development due to a lack of meaningful relationships developed with local stakeholders. Based on Harry's experiences, a district rugby administrator to assist with coaching accreditation, competition/carnival management and dissemination of new policies and information might be more applicable.

3. **Greater education and awareness regarding volunteer coaches' well-being.**
   Considering the importance of developing and maintaining relationships within teams and clubs which the coaches highlighted as well as those with family and friends, it is recommended that an initiative be encouraged to monitor and raise awareness of the psychological wellbeing of coaches, players and club members. The use of a buddy system might also be useful as an informal way for regional coaches checking in on each other, especially considering the sense of isolation mentioned by the participant coaches. These relationships could be encouraged and established by the governing body at the annual carnivals to which regional coaches travel. Participating coaches could nominate another coach (or coaches) with whom they will keep in regular collegial contact throughout the year. This may also prove beneficial in terms of assisting regional coaches communicate with each other about relevant development opportunities, problems they are experiencing and new coaching ideas. It is worth noting that within the past year, the Queensland Rugby Union has funded a Mental Health unit which delivers workshops around the state to metropolitan and regional rugby clubs.

6.5 FUTURE RESEARCH

Future studies could address some of the limitations in the current study and body of research identified in the literature review. Regional and rural sport in Australia has the potential to provide a rich vein of research data. Specifically, the lived experiences of regionally based coaches of sports other than rugby would begin to paint a more detailed picture of the

challenges faced by coaches and volunteers outside the major metropolitan centres. As rugby is a relatively minor sport in regional Queensland, it would be interesting to compare the lived experiences of coaches of more popular sports such as netball, cricket, and rugby league. Similarly, research could be conducted with different categories of sport in regional or metropolitan areas to highlight the differences and similarities between coaches of individual sports such as tennis and triathlon, in comparison to team sports such as basketball and soccer, and other collision sports such as rugby league and AFL.

It would also be valuable to compare the pedagogical practices of coaches of these different types of sports to those of the rugby coaches in this study and the lived experiences that may have underpinned them. As previously mentioned, the experiences of female coaches of traditionally male-dominated sports, particularly in regional contexts would also potentially provide rich information. Finally, exploring the regional sport experiences of other stakeholders such as administrators, parents and players could prove useful for various government and non-government agencies.

6.6 SUMMARY

The coach participants' reflections on their values and the lived experiences that have shaped their coaching philosophies, practices and development encompass far more than rugby. Their passionate involvement with the game as coaches has revealed to them their strengths and weaknesses, what they consider meaningful and valuable, how they define success and failure and deal with these, how they treat others and how they let others treat them. However, while coaching may be credited with providing the participant coaches with these insights, they have also contributed insights and values they have gained. These coaches have brought to their coaching learnings from their lived experiences, including their personal and professional roles, which have informed their identity as a voluntary regional rugby coach. An aphorism about good teaching is that it is more about who you are as a person than what you know. Like all of us, who each of these coaches are has been shaped by a myriad of influences and experiences over their lifetime.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Ethics Approval

From: <human.ethics@usq.edu.au>
Date: Tue, Sep 5, 2017 at 2:52 PM
Subject: USQ HREC Exec Review - H17REA188 - Application Approval notice
To: human.ethics@usq.edu.au, ROBINSOD@umail.usq.edu.au

Dear Dave
I am pleased to confirm your human research ethics application has been granted full ethical approval by the Human Research Ethics Executive Review Process, as your research proposal has been deemed to meet the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).

Project Title: H17REA188 - Volunteer Rugby Coaches in Regional Queensland: The significance of lived experience on their coaching philosophies, practices and development
Approval date: 05/09/2017
Expiry date: 05/09/2020
HREC status: Approved

The standard conditions of this approval are:

(a) conduct the project strictly in accordance with the proposal submitted and ethics approval, including any amendments made to the proposal required by the HREC
(b) advise human.ethics@usq.edu.au, immediately of any complaints or other issues in relation to the project which may warrant review of the ethical approval of the project.
(c) make submission for approval of any amendments to the approved project prior to implementing changes.
(d) provide a 'milestone report' for every year of approval.
(e) Provide a 'milestone report' when the project is completed.

The additional conditionals of this approval are:
(a) Nil.
Please note that failure to comply with the conditions of approval and the National Statement (2007), may result in withdrawal of approval for the project.
If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to make contact with an Ethics Officer.

Congratulations on your ethical approval! Wishing you all the best for success!

Kindest regards,

Human Research Ethics
University of Southern Queensland
Toowoomba – Queensland – 4350 – Australia
Ph: 07 4687 5703 – Ph: 07 4631 2690 – Email: human.ethics@usq.edu.au

Appendix B : Participant Information

University of Southern Queensland

Participant Information for USQ Research Project Questionnaire

Project Details

Title of Project: Volunteer Rugby Coaches in Regional Queensland: The significance of lived experience on their coaching philosophies, practices and development

Human Research Ethics Approval Number: H17REA188P4

Research Team Contact Details

Principal Investigator Details

Mr Dave Robinson
Email: robinsod@usq.edu.au
Telephone: (07) 41256852
Mobile: 0414 700 823

Supervisor Details

A/Prof Kenneth Edwards
Email: Kenneth.Edwards@usq.edu.au
Telephone: (07) 3812 6149
Mobile:

Description

This project is being undertaken as part of a PhD Project.

The purpose of this project is to examine and provide deeper understanding of the lives and experiences of regionally-based volunteer rugby union coaches in Queensland. By exploring the motivations, values, challenges and rewards underpinning your coaching experiences, I hope to gain insight into the impact these experiences have had on your coaching philosophies and development. Hopefully, sharing these experiences will inspire other regionally-based sports coaches as well as inform those responsible for coach education to look more closely at the needs of their respective sport's coaches in country Queensland.

The research team requests your assistance because of your considerable involvement with rugby union in regional Queensland communities in a voluntary coaching role.

Participation

Your participation will involve participating in 2-3 separate interviews that will, in total, take approximately 4-5 hours of your time.

Questions will involve how you started coaching, what coaching rugby means to you, what has kept you coaching etc. Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary. If you do not wish to take part you are not obliged to. If you decide to take part and later change your mind, you are free to withdraw from the project at any stage. Please note, that if you wish to withdraw from the project after you have submitted your responses, the researcher may be unable to remove your data from the project (unless identifiable information has been collected). If you do wish to withdraw from this project, please contact the researcher (contact details at the top of this form).

Your decision whether you take part, do not take part, or to take part and then withdraw, will in no way impact your current or future relationship with the University of Southern Queensland.

Expected Benefits

It is expected that this project will directly benefit you by allowing you the opportunity to reflect on your lived experiences (not just coaching) as well as share your thoughts and opinions on coaching rugby in regional Queensland or on relevant wider topics. As well, your contribution may benefit other coaches by suggesting ideas, by challenging their existing mindsets or by reinforcing their coaching values and techniques.

Risks

While I don't foresee any major risks, it is important to consider that there is a risk that you may share some personal or confidential information by chance, or that you may feel uncomfortable talking about some of the topics that may arise in conversation. You do not have to answer any question if you feel the question(s) are too personal or if talking about them cause you some distress. You will be given a word-for-word transcript of the full interview and will have the opportunity to discuss with the researcher any part of the interview that causes you discomfort (or which you may then feel more comfortable elaborating upon).

If you need to talk to someone about any of distressing issue that has come up, please contact Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Beyond Blue on 1300 224 636. You may also wish to consider consulting your General Practitioner (GP) for additional support.

Privacy and Confidentiality

All comments and responses will be treated confidentially unless required by law. A pseudonym of your choice will be used in the interview transcript and care will be taken to ensure identities of people/communities etc. you refer to during the interview are disguised.

Any data collected as a part of this project will be stored securely as per University of Southern Queensland's Research Data Management policy.

Consent to Participate

The return of the completed consent form is accepted as an indication of your consent to participate in this project.

Questions or Further Information about the Project

Please refer to the Research Team Contact Details at the top of the form to have any questions answered or to request further information about this project.

Concerns or Complaints Regarding the Conduct of the Project

If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project you may contact the University of Southern Queensland Ethics Coordinator on (07) 4631 2690 or email ethics@usq.edu.au. The Ethics Coordinator is not connected with the research project and can facilitate a resolution to your concern in an unbiased manner.

Thank you for taking the time to help with this research project. Please keep this sheet for your information.

Appendix C : Participant Consent Form

University of Southern Queensland

Consent Form for USQ Research Project Interviews

Project Details

Title of Project: Volunteer Rugby Coaches in Regional Queensland: The significance of lived experience on their coaching philosophies, practices and development

Human Research Ethics Approval Number: H17REA188

Research Team Contact Details

Principal Investigator Details

Mr Dave Robinson
Email: robinsod@usq.edu.au
Telephone: (07) 4125 6852
Mobile: 0414 700 823

Other Investigator/Supervisor Details

Assoc Prof. Keneth Edwards
Email: Kenneth.Edwards@usq.edu.au
Telephone: (07) 3812 6149
Mobile:

Statement of Consent

By signing below, you are indicating that you:

- Have read and understood the information document regarding this project.
- Have had any questions answered to your satisfaction.
- Understand that if you have any additional questions you can contact the research team.
- Understand that you are free to withdraw at any time, without comment or penalty.
- Understand that you can contact the University of Southern Queensland Ethics Coordinator on (07) 4631 2690 or email ethics@usq.edu.au if you do have any concern or complaint about the ethical conduct of this project.
- Are over 18 years of age.
- Agree to participate in the project.

Participant Name	
Participant Signature	
Date	

Please return this sheet to the Principal Investigator prior to undertaking the interview

Appendix D: Semi-structured Interview Question Schedule (interview 1)

1. **Tell me about your history.**
    - When and where were you born?
    - What's your family/cultural background? Siblings? Parents? Schooling? Higher education?
    - Interests and favourite pastimes/sporting activities?
    - Employment and vocations over the years?
    - What have been important events in your life? Why these?
    - Current life situation (Single? Children?)

2. **Your experiences with sport?**
    - What sports did you play and for how long?
    - Which did you enjoy the most? Why?
    - How did you come to be involved with rugby? Why rugby?
    - Who stands out as a memorable player/coach in these times? Why memorable?

3. **Tell me about your coaching and life journey?**
    - Why did you begin coaching?
    - What were some of your early coaching experiences?
    - What was going on in your life during these early times?
    - What are some of the things that stand out to you as you look back over your time coaching?
    - What things have been important to you over the past years in your life? How have these things affected your coaching? How has your coaching affected these things/people?
    - Can you tell me how you have changed in the way you see yourself now versus in the past?
    - Why have you stayed coaching rugby (esp. in regional Queensland?)

4. **What does coaching rugby mean to you?**
    - What is it like coaching country rugby?
    - What motivates you to keep going?
    - What have been the rewards of coaching country rugby?

- What have you missed out on? What have been the challenges to you as a country rugby coach?
- Who has been important in your coaching life (eg. role models, mentors)?

5. **Can you tell me about an experience (from any aspect of your life) that impacted on your coaching values/philosophy/development?**
   - What were the circumstances?
   - Why was this significant?

6. **Can you tell me about things you've been involved in as a rugby coach that you feel worked effectively to build the game in your community (eg. training ideas, onfield tactics, promoting the game, building club culture, social/fundraising events, player recruitment etc.)?**
   - Can you tell me about a time when things worked really well for you as a coach? When you felt you were at your best?
   - What allowed this to happen? What was in place?