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### 'Time to take the stage': a contextual study of a high performance coach

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## ‘Time to take the stage’: a contextual study of a high performance coach

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Fayyaz Ahmed, generally known as Fuzz, is the UK Athletics National Event Coach for High Jump, and the coach of Olympic bronze medallist Robbie Grabarz. Fuzz trained at The Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA) in London and implements RADA principles into his coaching. The aim of this study was to explore the complexities and shades of self, social interaction and micro-behaviour through an illumination of a case study using this elite level coach. An interpretive phenomenological analysis using Goffman (1959) as a theoretical lense, explored Fuzz’s delivery through semi-structured interviews and observational field notes. We used a multifaceted approach in data interpretation, incorporating a deductive method alongside continual analysis and theme generation. The main findings, drawn from Goffman’s concepts of performance, manner and front, highlight the intricacies of the coach–athlete relationship and the continual development of the coaching persona.

**Keywords:** Goffman; athletics; high jump; coaching styles; theatrical training

### Act I: Introduction

#### *Prelude*

Coaching has to be, smell, taste, feel [to] emotionally connect with me. And that has to be probably *the* most important thing that RADA taught me, so when they’re shit, you tell them, and when they’re good they believe you. (Fuzz)

The premise that individuals are actors is certainly not new. When Shakespeare writes, ‘all the world’s a stage and all the men and women merely players’ (Shakespeare, 1995) he built on the works of Erasmus and Petronius before him, extending the metaphor of life as theatre. With this in mind, psychologists and sociologists have explored the concept of social identity and the nature of self in terms of its construction, presentation, deconstruction and reaffirmation (Cooley, 1998; Maslow, 1968; Yeung & Martin, 2003). When applied to sports coaching, an underlying theme within the literature refers to the construction of an image or persona; ‘it can certainly be argued that coaches must construct a front, or image, in the eyes of their respective athletes in order to achieve stated goals’ (Jones, Armour, & Potrac, 2002, p. 41). According to the situation or circumstance, we play different roles or take on different aspects of our characters in an attempt to drive the behaviours of others to achieve desired outcomes.

#### *Act I, scene I: Who is the real performer; the coach or the athlete?*

The question remains, how does an athletics coach go about the business of constructing a coach persona, as well as developing his or her abilities as a coach? Research into coach education suggests that formal training may put the coach into the ‘starting blocks’ in

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terms of developing their coaching knowledge and skill, but experience makes a far greater contribution (Jones & Wallace, 2005). Jones et al. (2002) suggested that a semi-theatrical performance is key to unlocking athletes' potentialities, which aids the creation of a coaching persona and can be related to Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical concept of presentation of self and the construction of a front.

### *Act I, scene II: Reading the script*

Prior to the late 1990s research into coaching focused on the technical elements of the process, practically sidelining the social and cultural nature of the activity (Jones et al., 2002). In a response to Lyle's (1999) and Woodman's (1993) appeals to recognize the erudite nature of coaching, and the complex interplay between characters, research has now been turned toward coaching as a dynamic social activity focusing on coach–athlete relationships, and more importantly incorporating the question of 'who' is coaching (Jones, Armour, & Potrac, 2004; Jones, Bowes, & Kingston, 2010). This change of emphasis, however, has yet to be transferred to the continued prescriptive processes and practices recommended by National Governing Bodies (Vella, Oades, & Crowe, 2010).

This paper seeks add to the existing body of knowledge that grounds coaching further within the social sphere, focusing on the activity as a complex and interpersonal enterprise with the coach at its centre. This neatly ties in with Goffman, who offered 'a microscopic analysis of the many nuances of self-presentation, face work and ritual [to] assure that one's own performance is genuine' (Langman, 1991, p. 114). Goffman also argued that the self is a social product, or a 'performed character' viewed as a 'situationally specific creation rather than an enduring essence within the person' (Langman, 1991, p. 115). Goffman explains:

...the self, then, as a performed character, is not an inorganic thing that has a specific location, whose fundamental fate is to be born, to mature and to die; it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented, and the characteristic issue... is whether it will be credited or discredited (1959, pp. 252–3).

This concept of self is born out of human interaction: 'a product of the performances that individuals put on in social situations' (Branaman, 1997, pp. v1vi). This affords the individual an opportunity to mould the impressions of others, yet is paradoxically 'constrained to present images that can be socially supported in the context of a given hierarchy' (pp. xlvi). It is the seemingly contradictory ideas regarding the nature and presentation of self that have caused Goffman to be criticized in some quarters (Denzin, 2002; Giddens, 1984). There are others, however, that reinforce Goffman's value. For example, Langman argues that:

...despite variety and even contradictory expressions of selfhood, identity includes a repertoire of available presentational styles that when called for provide a basic script or outline of selfhood upon which the person will improvise and create a self-appropriate to the situation or group. (1991, p. 116)

Through interaction and role play we need the agreement or collaboration of others in which to sustain this image or 'front' (Jones, Potrac, & Cushion, 2011). When applied to sports coaching, studies have shown that elite coaches employ a sophisticated use of 'impression management' and a variety of strategies to sustain an ideal image of themselves (d'Arripe-Longueville, Fournier, & Dubois, 1998; Jones, 2006). Some of these strategies include the use of 'white lies, humorous friendly personas and constant face work to make athletes believe in them and their coaching agendas' (Potrac & Jones, 2009, p. 226). Other studies who have used a Goffmanian framework to analyse coaching include Partington and Cushion (2012) who applied Goffman's thinking to analysing coaching

behaviours during competition which extended its use beyond practice and training scenarios. In doing so, they discovered coaches reverting to expected 'traditional' coaching methods during competition rather than activities linked to instructional ideologies or needs of others.

This paper seeks to examine the complexities and shades of the self, social interaction and micro-behaviour through an illumination of a case study using an elite level coach, and to identify how elements of theatrical training are interwoven into his delivery and interaction with athletes. The study reported within it then, aimed to analyse the methods used through his specific coaching style and their application to Goffman (1959) theory of presentation of self, as well as to substantiate Goffman's dramaturgical perspective when applied to 'the social complexity and politically laden activity of coaching' (Potrac & Jones, 2009, p. 228). The significance of the study is consequently grounded both in extending Goffman's presence within the coaching literature, and in taking his writings to individual sport settings where 'face work' and 'front' could be even more crucial in drawing improved performances from athletes.

### *Act I, scene III: Setting the scene – Fuzz Ahmed*

Fuzz, the coach in question, is the current UK Athletics National Event High Jump Coach. He developed Robbie Grabarz from 88th to joint 3rd in the World Rankings, and a winner of the Olympic bronze medal in London 2012. Currently, at the start of 2014, Robbie is joint 22nd on the all-time list (IAAF, 2014). Fuzz gained a degree in Film and Television Production at the University of Manchester, and subsequently trained at The Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA) in London. Being heavily influenced by his experiences at this world-renowned drama school, Fuzz implements elements of RADA inspired acting principles into his coaching. Fuzz started out as a high jumper himself and was coached by the well-regarded Mike Smith of Team Solent, competing for Shaftesbury Barnett. During this time Fuzz was offered a scholarship at an American University; an experience which resulted in injury and cut short his athletics career. He blames this on the quality of the coaching received; 'I was injured, majorly injured within eight months as I did a training programme which was designed for a sophisticated athlete. Wasn't right for me ... at all.'

When Fuzz returned to the UK, he enrolled at RADA to study acting whilst simultaneously coaching his housemate to play rugby. He was then invited to coach at London Scottish Rugby Club which helped Fuzz to fund his training at RADA as well as to gain valuable coaching experience. He implemented the key principles he learnt from RADA to become in his own words 'one of the most innovative coaches at the time.' However, it took time for his approach to gain credibility; time during which his approach was often ridiculed by others:

They used to take the piss all the time, about how I used to think out of the box, all this 'airy-fairy' shit. I defy any team sport not to do what I was doing in 1992; they all do it, copied it.

During his time as an actor, Fuzz, who's stage name was Alex Caan, worked extensively in television and theatre in addition to working for UK Athletics as a consultant coach. He became a Level 3 UKA High Jump coach and has coached elite level athletics since 1994. The 2008 Olympic silver medallist, Germaine Mason, and the Commonwealth Games silver medallist Julie Crane were two of his charges. In 2012, he was appointed as the National Event High Jump Coach for UK Athletics. He argues that communication is a vital aspect of coaching and that RADA acting principles should be included in the UK Athletics Coach Education programme.

## Act II: Methodology and method

An interpretative phenomenological analysis was used to explore Fuzz's personal experiences in coaching (Smith & Osborn, 2007). This phenomenological approach included semi-structured interviews ( $n = 4$ ; Bernard, 1988) and field observations. The first interview occurred at the High Performance Athletics Centre (HiPAC) at Alexander Stadium, Birmingham after observation of a technical session. The main purpose was to tease out Fuzz's coaching experience, explore the impact of RADA training on his coaching persona, and to examine his coaching philosophy. The outcomes informed the questions for the second interview, which took place a week later at the 2012 UK Sport World-Class Performance conference in Leeds. This interview focused mainly on the coach-athlete relationship, and the further development of his coaching style. The first two interviews were conducted in the autumn during the preparation phase of the athletes' programme. The third interview occurred at the HiPAC at Loughborough University after Fuzz had delivered the final training session before leaving for the 2013 World Athletics Championships. Assessment of the previous two interview questions resulted in the development of a specific set of questions extending the earlier themes, which also focused on athletic preparation, and allowed elaboration on front, styles of delivery, communication and coach-athlete interaction. The final interview was conducted by telephone during the winter of 2013 to further evaluate the impact and influence of RADA and to track any changes (if any) in his coaching style. Interviewing the participant multiple times created an opportunity to delve deeper into the aspects of interest cumulating in six hours of interview data. Field notes and video data were taken separately, during the pre-season training sessions at the HiPAC centres at Birmingham and Loughborough. Interactions between Fuzz and his athletes were filmed from a variety of aspects and angles, which were consequently analysed and interpreted with the interview data. Utilizing a variety of sources over subsequent periods allowed for a richer exploration of the unit of analysis, which facilitated the 'deconstruction and subsequent reconstruction of various phenomena' (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 544). Informed consent was obtained, prior to the interviews, resulting in permission to record, store and use the collected data. Ethical approval was obtained from the Manchester Metropolitan University Exercise and Sport Science Ethics Committee.

The research team adopted a multifaceted approach to the process of data interpretation by transcribing and analysing interviews independently (Halcomb & Davidson, 2006). Together with the field observation notes, these data were coded using inter and intra methods (Steinke, von Kardoff, & Flick, 2004). Using a deductive approach and Goffman (1959) theoretical framework, continual analysis and synthesis of developing themes and elements was undertaken using a hermeneutical loop. The team thus were engaged in a continuous debate to de-construct meaning, resulting in an array of evolving concepts that continued to be considered and refined. The data were interpreted through the application of Goffman's dramaturgical perspective, explored in his 1959 work 'The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life'. The aspects of Goffman's theoretical framework decided as having key relevance to Fuzz's coaching persona were performance, manner and front, whilst acknowledging the concepts of appearance, front stage, back stage and off stage as also being of related importance.

## Act III: Key themes and discussion points

### *Act III, scene I: The impact of RADA*

Fuzz is a performer. He embodies Petronius' notion of '*quod fere totus mundus exercent histrionem* (because almost the whole world are actors)' (Papadinis, 2011, p. 168), and

plays upon it. Fuzz actively draws upon elements of his RADA training to present a credible image of himself as an elite coach; ‘it’s fascinating how language effects one’s perception, how you communicate with your body, how you use pace and how you use pitch, have a third eye, have a fourth wall; it’s all RADA.’ These acting principles of RADA resonate in his choice of words, and it is the interaction of pitch, pace, intonation and cadence that alters meaning and affects the audience’s perception of him, the performer (Chekhov, 2013). In addition, body language, gestures and facial expressions are used to strengthen and reinforce meaning in both subtle and marked ways (Hodge, 2010). Being aware of the ‘third eye’ which can be interpreted as perception beyond ordinary sight or one’s inner monologue is an essential RADA attribute (Struve, 1954), and can be used in the construction of the image that a coach wishes to assume and present (Goffman, 1959). Reading the situation and being able to act or re-act is a quality of the consummate performer which makes the performance more plausible. The final principle employed by Fuzz is the fourth wall. This refers to a theatrical device made tangible in the nineteenth century by the playwright Diderot, who maintained the existence of an invisible wall that separates the actor from the audience (Longman, 1981). By way of contrast, Fuzz deliberately ‘breaks the fourth wall’ to actively engage with the audience (e.g. athletes) and so affect their actions and modify their behaviour. The question of how influential RADA has been to Fuzz was unequivocally answered: ‘I would say that 80% of what I do psychologically comes from RADA.’

### *Act III, scene II: Performance*

Goffman (1959) defines performance as the contextual role portrayed by an actor and its effect on the audience. This relates to all the activity of an individual in front of an audience. The individual then, via his or her performance, gives meaning to themselves, other actors and to the context. This is important, as impressions are formed or reinforced to confirm identity. According to Goffman, an actor may not be aware of his performance or have an objective for the performance, yet Fuzz consciously uses his chosen five RADA principles: ‘the way you walk into the training arena and the way you move, is just as important in communication with your athletes, as the words that you choose to use. [The performance] should be enticing, positive and imaginative.’

The observed training sessions focused on the positive value of clear communication tailored to each athlete. Fuzz used his body as a vehicle to communicate ideas, substantiate technicalities and punctuate session aims. Gestures were demonstrative and reinforced the phrases used to encourage athletes’ full engagement in the session. He maintained that ‘high jump is belief’ and that self-doubt hamstring the athlete. His dialogue then, concentrates on removing misgivings; ‘come on I want to see 180, you’re better than this!’ Key phrases are delivered in rhythmic tones to mimic stride cadence; ‘engage-right-side’ and ‘drive-final-section.’ Throughout, Fuzz incorporates a positive performance adopting an encouraging style with all his athletes, even when they do not quite hit the mark; ‘ok, you didn’t have the “woof” in the air but you accommodated it’; ‘focus on your check points! You’re giving it away!’ During error correction, he mimicked the athlete’s technicalities, followed up by a demonstration of what he actually wants; ‘your high point was past the bar and you took it off with your leg, *here*. If your leg had been *here* and not *here ... then?*’

Although communication was delivered in a positive manner he could also be quite direct, challenging athletes when they waived. Fuzz remembered asking an athlete, ‘Why are you so comfortably numb? Why are you happy to be shit?’ In another instance,

remembering why a particular athlete left his squad, Fuzz mused ‘he didn’t want to hang out with me any more because I challenged him, so then, I become a bully. But that’s what a coach does, I challenge every day.’ Fuzz does not shy away from conflict. This was evidenced during the final training session where Fuzz used anger to send a strong message to an athlete who appeared to be disengaged. When questioned about this incident, this too was a performance and came from having ‘access to anger and passion’ through his RADA training. ‘You saw immediately after [I] had the conversation with Mike (all athletes’ names used are pseudonyms), he changed his demeanour and jumped. That was a clear example of role change.’ For Fuzz this was a strategy purposefully employed to create change in the mood and attitude of the athlete in order to fulfil the objectives of the session.

### *Act III, scene III: Manner*

Goffman defines ‘manner’ as the way in which a person plays a particular role. When applied to a sporting context, role playing informs the perception of the coach persona which, in turn, influences the coach–athlete relationship. According to Jones et al. (2004), Goffman can be used to explore coach–athlete interaction by the ways and means that coaches guide and control the impressions that athletes form of them. This manner can change according to the context; for example, the manner that Fuzz adopted with Richard when he was an unfocused athlete was to go from being ‘essentially a nice guy’ to unflinchingly ‘giving him both barrels’;

I had a three minute conversation with Richard which said, ‘go away, you’re wasting my time, you’re an embarrassment, unless you want me to coach you’. Three days later, he had moved to Birmingham, decided to give me 100%, and became the most professional athlete that I had ever coached.

This is his RADA legacy; ‘look for the minutia, dissect it, and then if you don’t like it, tell them. Sometimes you need to tell them in a horrible way.’ The reliance on theatre techniques and dramaturgical skills is obvious; Fuzz knows that he has power and influence, and uses it to motivate athletes. Denzin (2002) criticizes Goffman’s under theorizing of power and its workings, yet other authors have examined Goffman’s micro-focus on power phenomena as an intrinsic aspect of his work (Dennis & Martin, 2005; Jones et al., 2011). The coach has power: Fuzz knows and exploits this hence the careful use of criticism at the right time to the ‘right’ athlete.

By way of contrast, control is somewhat given back to the athlete. Fuzz does not provide all the answers and makes concerted efforts to ensure personal accountability for actions. Fuzz (with more than a hint of contradiction!) maintained that his coaching philosophy and method is ‘athlete-led, coach vision’. This was observed in the coaching sessions, where feedback involved asking the athletes what went wrong and providing frequent unsolicited detailed technical feedback. Such (latter) behaviour was characteristic of his claimed previous coaching persona; ‘I used to micro-manage, I used to give everyone the answers because I couldn’t be bothered to wait for people to discover them.’ Following reflection on his style of delivery and manner, Fuzz’s current conscious response is to hold back on the immediate feedback ‘because if you give them all the technical, if you give them all the answers then they don’t have to figure out the questions.’ The athletes were consequently encouraged to think and analyse for themselves. By treating athletes as cognitively aware and not just passive recipients, he empowered and encouraged them further. Actively connected with Fuzz’s desire for his ‘athletes to feel empowered when they retire’ is the theme of honesty in the coaching process (a perhaps surprising admission taken into account his emphasis on a performing self);

‘being passionate and being honest with someone and telling them they’re good is the most powerful thing you can do to someone.’ Through careful analysis, coach–athlete exchanges were specific, motivating and affective, which contributed to developing trust and empathy. Phrases such as ‘stop thinking, keep running’ and words like ‘unique and different’ complemented with tone, rhythm and body language accentuated meaning and manner. His coaching philosophy was bound up with these approaches when Fuzz reflected on why an athlete produced a particularly excellent performance; ‘I empowered him enough to make him believe that he was ready to jump high.’ In this way, his manner or approach was built around the notion of moulding an athlete, of developing the potential within:

... you see an athlete is like a piece of metal in the forge, I blow oxygen onto the coal and the hotter it burns, the harder they train, the hotter the metal becomes which means the athlete becomes more malleable.

### *Act III, scene IV: Front*

The notion of front refers to the image or impression that the actor gives the audience. More specifically front is ‘that part of the individual’s performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the social situation for those who observe performance’ (Goffman, 1959, p. 32). Goffman relates this social front to choosing the correct script for the performance. However, ‘great care has to be taken not to present a “transparent” or “phony” coaching front which would undoubtedly result in a loss of credibility’ (Jones et al., 2011, p. 22).

Although Fuzz’s coaching persona was based on a genuine charm and care, he could also be manipulative and scheming. This dichotomy seems at odds with a modern coaching philosophy of empowering athletes and instilling in them a sense of autonomy (Kidman, 2005) but we need to acknowledge the coach as the driving force in the paring (Chelladurai, 1990). He maintained that there was a different strategy for everyone which is why he used a different approach with certain athletes. He claimed that particular athletes needed challenging, but also needed to be handled sensitively; ‘now he needs pushing but at the same time he needs lots of love; because if you push him too hard he will break... there’s a different strategy for all these people...’

### *Act III, scene V: The subversive Machiavellian*

This is a potentially contentious idea associated around the notion of front. After repeated contemplation of the data we constructed the notion of the subversive Machiavellian as a device to analyse Fuzz’s approach to coaching. The term ‘Machiavellian’ is predominantly associated with the ability to manipulate and direct, and has similarities with Goffman’s description of someone acting in a ‘thoroughly calculating manner, expressing himself [sic] solely in order to give ‘the kind of impression to others that is likely to evoke from them a specific response he is concerned to obtain’ (Goffman, 1959, p. 17). Fuzz was a self-confessed manipulator, but always in a way to better his athletes and draw out their competitive edge. His behaviours ranged from the subtle to the obvious, and it was this range that enabled him to alter his approach and tailor his interaction with different squad members. With this theme becoming evident we asked Fuzz how felt being described as a ‘subversive Machiavellian?’

Great! I would say that I’m thinking one step ahead, which one could argue as subversive to a certain extent. If you’re Machiavellian for negative reasons then that is dangerous, but you do it for the positive, what’s the danger in that?



The dichotomy here is that although Fuzz was calculating in his behaviour, he was also very caring, both in and out of the training zone. Athletes were welcome at his house for dinners, talks and support. However, this did not stop him from adopting a more blunt approach exemplified by his confession ‘I sit on my bed and think, right, how can I twist the knife?’ For example, during an observed training session Fuzz made an athlete wait whilst he temporarily ignored him. The intention was to reinforce hierarchy within the squad and to motivate. This was substantiated later during the interview:

One has to have a pecking order in the group... sometimes I make Kris stand around on purpose. He was an Olympic finalist but since he's been nothing but injured so actually "Kris", know your place. You're no longer top dog.

This aspect of Fuzz's persona was intriguing especially when viewed in light of his outward attitude towards coaching and his athletes ‘I see them all as friends... it's all intertwined, I see them all playing croquet at my house in 10 years' time.’ He also attributed his success to this nurturing ‘Machiavellian’ approach. In his own words:

... people talk about the management of athletes – its coaching, all coaching. I coach them 24 hours a day; when they dig a hole in my garden – it's coaching. When they cook me food – it's coaching. We are a team, we work together.

The importance of the coach–athlete dyad and its effects on performance has been the focus of considerable contemporary research (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Lafrenière, Jowett, Vallerand, & Carbonneau, 2011; Lorimer & Jowett, 2009). Fuzz's attitude and approach reinforced the importance of strong interpersonal relations, and shared common goals in the creation of a high quality coach–athlete dyad (Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004). Yet Fuzz played the lead character in all of this; he drove the process. These interactive affairs can be regarded as a vibrant product of social collaboration (as seen through the Goffman [1959] lens). Recent research has centred on the complexity of these many-sided, vibrant, reciprocal, power-laden relationships in the furtherment of athletic performance for ‘coaches have a powerful and unique potential to influence their athletes (for better or worse)’ (Poczwardowski, Barott, & Jowett, 2006, p. 136).

#### **Act IV: The plot thickens**

The concepts of performance, manner and front are interrelated, and inform each other in the complex interplay between coach and athlete interaction, role development and micro politics, Fuzz, our practical elite coach was continually looking for ways to develop and strengthen his coaching persona in order to fulfil his agenda and develop athletes. Although he was blasé about his coaching ability, he acknowledged the need to ‘shift gears’; ‘I make it up [coaching] as I go along, because the athletes change and if I'm doing the right job, then they get better, therefore I get better.’ When pressed further on this, he outlined how he has developed:

I'm a better coach this year because I've used fewer words... I'm more selective about what I say, so I think more. I'm a better coach because I've seen better performances, so I have more belief in my programme.

Furthermore he substantiates his evolving coaching approach when he declared:

I coach by text with Richard. That's how its developed, that's the stage its at. It becomes less technical... more emotional... less cognitive... more story. That's what I wanted to see: someone in the moment and truthful to themselves.

This driving force for change was studied by Poczwardowski, Barott, and Henschen (2002) where they identified that coaches experienced professional development and

maturation with every relationship they build with athletes. Coaching is a fluid process subject to change, which resonates with Fuzz who feels that ‘he is growing as a coach, like a director grows with his actors.’ The creation and presentation of his coaching front then, was not static, but a flexible, dynamic identity capable of evolving with his athletes. This is not to say that each performance was so very different from the one before; athletes need to know where they stand and to take cues from their coach’s outward persona, activities and projected image. Rather, a definitive, compelling front must be grounded in certain aspects of Fuzz’s character and temperament to be projected in order to maintain professional ‘face.’ The data suggested that Fuzz was playing a complex role, which echoes Goffmanian notions that ‘the sense of self arises out of publically validated performances.’ This reinforces the premise that, though the individual is central to this construction of self, it is the audience or other actors that actively decide on the image. This is a theme further explored by Goffman (1961), who stated that despite social actors not having complete autonomy over all the disparate impressions that surround them, they are still able to ‘actively participate in sustaining a definition of the situation that is stable and consistent’ with images of themselves (p. 104).

Similarly, Branaman (1997) argues that ‘the self is the mask that the individual wears in social situations, but it is also the human being behind the mask who decides on which mask to wear’ (pp. xlviii). We would argue that the consummate coach adopts almost a caricature of themselves, enhancing some characteristics and downplaying others in an attempt to persuade the audience (the athletes) to believe the performances given. However, we are not suggesting that Fuzz represents a precise model for aspirant coaches to copy, or that coaches need formalized theatre training per se. Indeed, this was reinforced by Fuzz; ‘not everyone should coach like me because they are not me’. Rather, we argue that the aspirant coach could reflect on those elements from RADA that resonate. Such coaches must find their own ‘persona’, thus putting the coach at the centre of the coaching process (Cross & Lyle, 1999; Woodman, 1993). Thus, for Fuzz, RADA acting principles were simplified, distilled and incorporated to give him (the coach) the esoteric ‘tools’ of his trade. In this way, they allowed him to explore the coach he has become. So, the question remains how does a coach go about the business of developing a coaching style and an evolution of their coaching persona? Fuzz’s response was to go one step further in presenting the case for incorporating elements of theatrical training within coach education programmes. This is not to suggest that coaches need to become accomplished actors, but that understanding what makes a good performance and knowing how to improve interaction is at the core of coaching. His conviction in this unconventional notion was supported by an underlying belief in the importance of communication; ‘coaching is words’. Furthermore, Fuzz as an accomplished public speaker who runs communication workshops for organizations and businesses. He explained;

I go into a lot of businesses and do RADA one-on-one and it’s a three hour workshop. I go in there as an Olympic coach and they go ‘wow, you’re amazing!’ Actually, I’m teaching them RADA mixed with international sports coaching. If I went in as a RADA graduate they’d just pay me fifty quid, but because I have the tag of a coach it becomes more official ...

Returning to coach–athlete interaction, Fuzz carefully considered his athletes’ perception of his coaching front, simultaneously challenging them with various aspects of his multiple self. This reinforces Goffman who wrote ‘it is the success of the performance and its credibility to oneself and to others that leads the audience and the performer to impute a self to a performed character’ (1959, p. 252). Therefore, the contribution of the audience to this creation cannot be underestimated. Of course, a metaphor (even an

articulately expressed metaphor) cannot be pushed indefinitely. Life is unplanned, spontaneous and unpolished; a far cry from the meticulously planned and practiced performances of the theatre. In this way, Goffman freely admitted ‘all the world is not, of course, a stage’ (1959, p. 72). Whether he is acting or not, Fuzz nevertheless had access to a vast coaching repertoire; aptitudes gained through his theatrical training and coaching experience. He constantly used these skills, working towards an outcome with every position he took, every gesture he made and every word he spoke. Through these actions and communications he manipulated situations and stimulated reactions to move the athletes closer to the desired outcome. The performance was improvised and highly influenced by his RADA training.

### Act V: Conclusion

This study has uncovered a rich variety of behaviours and strategies employed by a unique and impassioned athletic coach. The data give credence to the concept of coaching self (as a performed character) as bound up with expectations of athletes as much as anything else. Some people are better able to play their roles effectively or convincingly, and this leads to a plausible representation of their chosen character. In this way, Goffman (1959) stressed that the collected agreement of others is vital in controlling the impressions that the audience receives. Similarly, athletes have to ‘buy in’ to what the coach is doing, which requires the coaching performance to be a plausible and engaging one. Through direct involvement with Goffman (1959) performance, manner and front, Fuzz successfully created a feasible coaching persona that allowed him to control, motivate and develop the athletes in his squad. Similarly, through employing aspects of his theatrical training Fuzz appeared to have encapsulated the flair and individual nuance required in the development of a unique and effective coaching style.

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