

University of Stirling and **sportscotland**
Coaching Symposium, 18 Nov 2025: *Exploring Coaching Practice*
Programme

Overview:

Following on from the previous Symposia, and in partnership with **sportscotland**, the University is delighted to be hosting our next Coaching Symposium this coming November. Given the feedback received last year, this year's event will be another collective exploration of coaching practice.

Join us for a unique symposium specifically aimed at practising sport coaches and Sport Governing Body staff, where we aim to explore and make sense of the different aspects of sport coaching practice with leading thinkers from industry and academia.

Conference Keynote: How Practitioners Can Harness the Power of Ecological Dynamics



For 2025, we are delighted to have secured Prof Keith Davids to deliver our opening keynote, to say that Keith is a world-renowned expert in the motor learning would be an understatement. He is Professor of Motor Learning in Sport & Human Performance at Sheffield Hallam University, investigating skill acquisition, expertise and talent development in sport at different levels of participation from recreational to elite. He has held numerous academic positions around the world, consulted for major sports teams and governing bodies and has a significant list of publications. In all of this, his interest is on transforming lives of participants and learners through enhancing understanding of how to design the best learning and participation experiences which will be to the fore

as Keith leads our opening keynote.

Discussions: Small group discussions following the opening keynote, with a follow-on panel Q&A discussion.

Workshops: Two practical opportunities to explore coaching themes (see table on the next page for options).

Closing Address: Dr Andrew Mark Gillott, Senior Lecturer, University of Stirling

Programme Detail:

| Tue 18 Nov. | Programme | Location |
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| Before 0945 | Arrive University of Stirling, (various food outlets available in main Campus – Cottrell Building) small coffee outlet in Pathfoot Sign in at Registration Desk | |
| 0945 | Symposium Welcome (University of Stirling and sportscotland) | Iris Murdoch Building (IMB) conference rooms 1, 2, 3 |
| 1000 | Opening Keynote: How practitioners can harness the power of ecological dynamics. (Prof Keith Davids, Sheffield Hallam University) | Iris Murdoch Building (IMB) conference rooms 1, 2, 3 |
| 1045 | Reflections and discussions over coffee (possibly with a walk around loch or in the university grounds). | IMB gallery |
| 1130 | Roundtable responding to questions raised | Iris Murdoch Building (IMB) conference rooms 1, 2, 3 |
| 1230-1315 | Lunch (various food outlets available in Atrium for delegates) | Atrium/Andrew Miller Building |
| 1230-1315 | Lunch (various food outlets available in Atrium for delegates) | Atrium/Andrew Miller Building |
| 1315-1430 | Workshop Programme: Unpacking Sport Coaching | All workshops in Cottrell Building |
| | Workshop #1 Workshop #1, Coach observation with SAM, part 1-outdoor practical: Mark Cairns (Coach Logic co-founder) and Ben Cairns (SRU Level 4 coach) | Meet at TBC |
| | Workshop #2 Tapering for Major Championships: A biopsychosocial approach : Donal Moran (Donal Moran Coaching & Mornington Chasers Running Club) | Room 2B45 |
| | Workshop #3 Decoding the Data Revolution: A coaching workflow: Paul Clelland (Ascolta Coaching, linked with Juventus FC) | Room 2B44 |
| | Workshop #4 Coaching physical literacy (sports hall practical): Paul Greaves (UoS) | Meet inside sport centre (main door) |
| | Workshop #5 Spaghetti Junctions – Navigating Coach Wellbeing: Derek O’Riordan (UoS) | Room 4W1 |
| | Workshop #6 The Information fallacy in improving coach behaviour: A case study of the coach-created motivational environment: Dr Mark Carroll (University of the West of Scotland, host: Labours of Sport Coaching Podcast) | Room 2B84 |
| | Workshop #7 Decision making in coaching: Dr Michelle Smith (UoS) | Room 3V2 |

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| | Workshop #8 How do we get coaches excited and enthused to undertake coach education? A critical discussion: Dr Noel Dempsey (University Campus of Football Business) | Room 2B76 |
| | Workshop #9 Unlocking the Power of Skill Acquisition: Practical Insights for Coaches and Athletes: Dr Malcolm Fairweather (Scottish Institute of Sport) | Room 2X4 |
| 1445-1545 | Workshop Programme: Unpacking Sport Coaching | All workshops in Cottrell Building |
| | Workshop #10 Coach observation with SAM, part 2 (indoor, workflow discussions) | Room 4W6 |
| | Workshop #11 Reflection & the practicalities of reflective practice: Dr Andy Kirkland (UoS) | Room 4W1 |
| | Workshop #12 The space between coaching & teaching: Jack Emmerson (Head of Performance Sport, Reigate School) | Room 2B44 |
| | Workshop #13 The Whole is Simpler than the Sum of the Parts: Designing cultural change for coach education: Phil Carson (Scottish Fencing) | Room 2B45 |
| | Workshop #14 The Information fallacy in improving coach behaviour: A case study of the coach-created motivational environment: Dr Mark Carroll (University of the West of Scotland, host: Labours of Sport Coaching Podcast) | Room 2B84 |
| | Workshop #15 Decision making in coaching: Dr Michelle Smith (UoS) | Room 3V2 |
| | Workshop #16 How do we get coaches excited and enthused to undertake coach education? A critical discussion: Dr Noel Dempsey (University Campus of Football Business) | Room 2B76 |
| | Workshop #17 Unlocking the Power of Skill Acquisition - Practical Insights for Coaches and Athletes: Dr Malcolm Fairweather (Scottish Institute of Sport) | Room 2X4 |
| 1600 | Closing Address: Dr Andrew Mark Gillott, UoS | Cottrell, A5 |
| 1630 | Closing remarks (U of S and sportscotland) Departure | Cottrell, A5 |

Campus map: [Getting around campus](#) | [About](#) | [University of Stirling](#)

Cost & Accommodation

Thanks to presenters offering their time for free and the practical support from both **sportscotland** and the University of Stirling, there is no cost to attend the symposium. Delegates are responsible for their own food and accommodation though. [Stirling Court Hotel on Campus](#) offers overnight accommodation if needed, use code 319358 for exclusive discount. There is also a wide range of accommodation available locally if required.

Booking Procedure

To allow us to plan effectively, please [complete the online registration form \(2 mins\) to secure your place.](#)

Thereafter and towards the end of September, delegates will be required to confirm their bookings by email to your supplied email address.

Further information

www.coachingsymposium.stir.ac.uk the programme on this page will be updated incrementally as the programme comes together.

If you have questions or require further details please contact Stephen Macdonald, Symposium
Organiser: stephen.macdonald@stir.ac.uk

Workshop option descriptions:

Session 1 (1315-1430)

Workshop #1, Coach Observation with SAM (Part 1 of 2 – note participants should sign up for both parts of this workshop to get the full understanding)

Facilitators: Mark Cairns (Coach Logic co-founder) and Ben Cairns (SRU Level 4 coach)

Coach observation is a very valuable, but one of the most time-consuming and resource-intensive, parts of coach development. In this outdoor, and interactive workshop, we'll demonstrate how SAM, our AI-powered coach observation assistant, helps solve that challenge by streamlining the process without compromising depth or impact.

Join the facilitators as they deliver a live 60-minute coaching session. Coaches will observe the session pitch side, then see how SAM analyses the footage in minutes, highlighting key behaviours, interactions, and patterns that typically take hours to code.

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Workshop #2 Tapering for Major Championships: A biopsychosocial approach

Facilitator: Donal Moran (Donal Moran Coaching & Mornington Chasers Running Club)

While traditional tapering research has predominantly focused on physiological adjustments, emerging research has shown that the methods required for optimal performance extend far beyond physical preparation.

The workshop is aimed at understanding how other external factors such as psychological resilience, social support, and environmental factors tie in with physiological strategies to create an improved taper, tailored uniquely to each athlete.

We will endeavour to investigate the holistic world of tapering, where science meets real-world experience. Discovering how elite athletes navigated the complexities of travel, acclimatisation, and emotional pressures while fine-tuning their training to arrive at competition feeling fresh, confident, and ready to perform at their peak.

We will discuss some of the strategies they used, how they integrated biopsychosocial elements to ensure they were not only physically primed but also mentally and socially supported in those critical final days.

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Workshop #3 Decoding the Data Revolution: A coaching workflow

Facilitator: Paul Clelland (Ascolta Coaching, linked with Juventus FC)

Data is transforming sport, but how do you make it work for you without being a statistician? This highly practical workshop decodes the data revolution for the modern coach. We'll reframe data not as a threat that replaces intuition, but as a powerful new tool to enhance your coaching craft.

You will master a simple, repeatable workflow—

Collect, Analyse, Interpret, Act—and immediately apply it to your own coaching reality during a hands-on 'Data Audit' activity. We'll demystify key metrics like the Acute: Chronic Workload Ratio (ACWR) and Expected Goals (xG) in simple, practical terms. Beyond the numbers, we will tackle the critical human element, from managing the psychological impact on athletes to navigating your ethical responsibilities.

You won't just leave with ideas; you'll leave with an action plan and a take-home toolkit around how to use the tools you already have and DIY tracking templates you can use the next day, regardless of budget.

Join this session to gain the confidence and skills to turn data into your competitive advantage.

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Workshop #4 Coaching physical literacy (sports hall practical)

Facilitator: Paul Greaves (University of Stirling)

This is a practical based workshop that will explore Physical Literacy definitions, concepts and challenges. The activity will be based around fundamental development in an applied setting that links skill acquisition, physical and psychological development. Another main aim of the session is to bring the FUN part of FUNdamentals at the forefront. Participants will need to wear appropriate casual attire to take part in the practical session.

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Workshop #5 Spaghetti Junctions – Navigating Coach Wellbeing

Facilitator: Derek O’Riordan (University of Stirling)

Information to follow

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Workshop #6 & 14 The Information fallacy in improving coach behaviour: A case study of the coach-created motivational environment

Facilitator: Dr Mark Carroll (University of the West of Scotland, host: Labours of Sport Coaching Podcast)

When a coach feels they know WHAT to do differently in their practice, yet fails to change, WHY is this happening? In this workshop, utilising evidence from case study research around motivational coaching behaviours, I will make the case for coaches and coach developers to see the WHAT of coach behaviour as a mere (and often fragile) start point, requiring further investigation – then intervention – on what must change within you as a coach, and within your external coaching environment, for intended changes in behaviour to come to fruition. In exploring the various antecedents of coach behaviour, I will offer a qualitative, and culturally opposed framework for helping yourself or others change, while addressing the critical questions: is change possible, or the right thing to do? And what source of knowledge rules supreme in the science and art of coaching.

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Workshop #7 & 15 Decision making in coaching

Facilitator: Michelle Smith (University of Stirling)

Coaching is an inherently decision-rich environment, where choices made in the moment can shape athlete development, team culture, and performance outcomes. Yet, while much attention is often given to technical and tactical knowledge, less focus is placed on how coaches actually make decisions, the factors influencing these decisions, and how decision-making practice can be developed.

This interactive workshop invites coaches and sport governing body staff to explore the nature of: decision-making in coaching practice. Drawing on contemporary research in sport psychology and expertise studies, we will examine the different types of decisions coaches face – from planning and preparation, to in-session adaptations, to longer-term developmental choices. Through guided discussion and applied activities, participants will be encouraged to reflect on their own decision-making processes, consider the cognitive and contextual demands they encounter, and identify strategies for enhancing their practice.

By combining academic insights with practical reflection tools, this session aims to support coaches in becoming more aware, adaptable, and intentional decision-makers. Participants will leave with a stronger understanding of the decision-making landscape in coaching and practical ideas to integrate reflective strategies into their everyday work

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Workshop #8 & 16 How do we get coaches excited and enthused to undertake coach education? A critical discussion

Facilitator: Dr Noel Dempsey (University Campus of Football Business (UCFB))

Coaches across the sporting landscape continue to give up their time to engage and help support players and athletes through large chunks of the year, often receiving very little (if anything) in return. To continue to help players and athletes, coaches are also required to undertake some form of coach education to ensure a degree of acceptable standard to coach. Within this space, the question of how enthused and excited we are (as coaches) to undertake such education in our current systems remains a critical one. In this interactive workshop I wish to explore this and critically discuss what and how we can engage and enthuse coaches to continue their education and development. As part of this, I would like to present some considerations for the formation of coach education curricula design at a wider systems level initially. I also wish to present an idea of how this could be (re)imagined in future endeavours for coaches on the ground, as well as considerations for coach developers, course designers and policy makers alike. By navigating this workshop as a collective, the hope is that we can leave curious, excited and enthusiastic to continue our learning to support our players and athletes.

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Workshop #9 & 17 Unlocking the Power of Skill Acquisition: Practical Insights for Coaches and Athletes

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Session 2 (1445-1545)

Workshop #10 Coach observation with SAM, part 2 (indoor, workflow discussions)

Presenters: Mark Cairns (Coach Logic co-founder) and Ben Cairns (SRU Level 4 coach)

In the follow-up debrief, we'll compare human feedback with SAM's automated analysis and discuss how to bring this workflow into your own environment. Whether you're supporting academy coaches or designing CPD frameworks, this session will help you balance efficiency with impact, and bring more observation into coaching.

Drawing on the blog from 'Banter' to Better Coaching, we'll also explore how one subtle moment, surfaced by SAM, sparked a powerful, reflective conversation and strengthened a coach-player relationship. We'll show how regular, light-touch observation builds a continuous learning culture, deepens coach self-awareness, and frees developers to mentor, not just monitor.

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Workshop #11 Reflective Practice in Coaching

Facilitator: Dr Andy Kirkland (University of Stirling)

The most effective coaches use reflective practice to critically examine their decisions, deepen their understanding of athlete needs, and continuously refine their approach for more intentional and impactful outcomes.

Yet reflection is often done poorly. Many coaches don't buy into it—seeing it as abstract, time-consuming, or disconnected from the realities of day-to-day coaching. Without clear purpose or practical relevance, it risks becoming a tick-box exercise rather than a tool for genuine learning and improvement.

This interactive workshop series won't teach you how to be a reflective coach. Instead, it will challenge and expand how you think about reflection itself.

By the end of this workshop, you will have:

Reconsidered what reflection truly means in coaching

Explored practical ways to embed reflection more actively in your practice

Gained a selection of tools to support meaningful, ongoing reflection

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Workshop #12 The space between coaching & teaching

Facilitator: Jack Emmerson (Head of Performance Sport, Reigate School)

Explore how teaching and coaching can learn from each other through shared practices in disciplines such as feedback, motivation, differentiation, and reflective practice. This session invites sports coaches and teachers to explore cross-disciplinary strategies that enhance learning, performance, and personal development—on the pitch and in the classroom.

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Workshop # 13 The Whole is Simpler than the Sum of the Parts: Designing cultural change for coach education

Facilitator: Phil Carson (Scottish Fencing)

Like many sports, fencing coaching in the UK is entrenched in tradition, with a syllabus, language, and culture largely unchanged for over 150 years. Many governing bodies face a similar challenge: how to shift technique-heavy curricula to better reflect how athletes actually learn and perform.

In 2017, Scottish Fencing made a bold move by adopting ecological principles to redesign coach education. Instead of hundreds of prescribed techniques, path dependencies, and folk theories, the system now rests on three interconnected ideas: the coach as the curriculum, coaching the essence of the game, and creating an emergent learning community.

This may be the first fully established coach education system in the UK built on ecological principles, supported by professional accreditation from CIMSPA and qualification standards from Qualifications Scotland. While deeply embedded in Scotland, wider adoption still faces cultural barriers.

For coaches, educators, and policy makers, this case study highlights both the opportunities and challenges of cultural change. Performance has improved, coaches remain invested, and many re-engage for ongoing professional development. The experience suggests that, in coach education, the whole is not only simpler—but more powerful—than the sum of the parts.

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Workshops 14-17 are repeated from the morning and described above.

Workshop #14 The Information fallacy in improving coach behaviour: A case study of the coach-created motivational environment

Workshop #15 Decision making in coaching

Workshop #16 How do we get coaches excited and enthused to undertake coach education? A critical discussion

Workshop #17 Unlocking the Power of Skill Acquisition: Practical Insights for Coaches and Athletes