

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

**Overview:**

Building on the success of previous Symposia and in partnership with sportscotland, the University is delighted to host the upcoming Coaching Symposium this November. In response to last year's feedback, this year's event will once again offer a collaborative 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



We're thrilled to announce that Professor Keith Davids will deliver the opening keynote at our 2025 Symposium. Calling Keith a world-renowned expert in motor learning is no understatement. As Professor of Motor Learning in Sport & Human Performance at Sheffield Hallam University, his research spans skill acquisition, expertise, and talent development across all levels of sport—from recreational to elite. Keith has held academic positions globally, consulted for leading sports teams and governing bodies, and authored an extensive body of work. Central to his career is a commitment to transforming the lives of participants and learners by deepening our understanding of how to design optimal learning and participation experiences. This passion will be front and

centre as he leads our keynote session.

**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
Before 0945	Arrive University of Stirling, (various food outlets available in main Campus – Cottrell Building). <b>Sign in at Registration Desk</b>	Iris Murdoch Building (IMB) conference rooms 1, 2, 3
0945	Symposium Welcome (University of Stirling and <b>sportscotland</b> )	
1000	<b>Opening Keynote:</b> How practitioners can harness the power of ecological dynamics. Prof Keith Davids, Sheffield Hallam University.	
1045	Reflections and discussions over coffee (with a walk round the loch for those who want fresh air).	IMB gallery
1130	Roundtable responding to further questions raised	Iris Murdoch Building (IMB) conference rooms 1, 2, 3
1230-1315	<b>Lunch</b> (various food outlets available in Atrium for delegates)	Atrium/Andrew Miller Building
1315-1430	<u>Workshop Programme: Unpacking Sport Coaching</u> – Full descriptions p5	
	<b>Workshop #1</b> Coach observation with SAM, part 1-outdoor practical. Mark Cairns (Coach Logic co-founder) and Ben Cairns (SRU Level 4 coach)	Meet outside Iris Murdoch Building conference room
	<b>Workshop #2</b> Tapering for Major Championships: A Biopsychosocial Approach. Donal Moran (Donal Moran Coaching & Mornington Chasers Running Club)	2B45 (Cottrell building)
	<b>Workshop #3</b> Decoding the Data Revolution: A Coaching Workflow. Paul Clelland (Ascolta Coaching, linked with Juventus FC)	2B44 (Cottrell building)
	<b>Workshop #4</b> Coaching Physical Literacy (practical). Paul Greaves (UoS)	3.04 (Campus Central)
	<b>Workshop #5</b> Spaghetti Junctions – Navigating Coach Wellbeing. Dr. Andy Kirkland (UoS)	4W1 (Cottrell building)
	<b>Workshop #6</b> 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)	2B84 (Cottrell building)
	<b>Workshop #7</b> Decision making in Coaching Dr Michelle Smith (UoS)	3V2 (Cottrell building)

	<b>Workshop #8</b> How do we get Coaches Excited and Enthused to Undertake Coach Education? A Critical Discussion. Dr Noel Dempsey (University Campus of Football Business)	2B76 (Cottrell building)
	<b>Workshop #9</b> Unlocking the Power of Skill Acquisition: Practical Insights for Coaches and Athletes. Dr Malcolm Fairweather (Scottish Institute of Sport)	2X4 (Cottrell building)
1445-1545	<u>Workshop Programme: Unpacking Sport Coaching</u> - Full descriptions p7	
	<b>Workshop #10</b> Coach observation with SAM, part 2 (indoor, workflow discussions)	2B76 (Cottrell building)
	<b>Workshop #11</b> Reflection & the Practicalities of Reflective Practice: Dr Andy Kirkland (UoS)	4W6 (Cottrell building)
	<b>Workshop #12</b> The Space between Coaching & Teaching. Jack Emerson (Head of Performance Sport, Reigate School)	4W1 (Cottrell building)
	<b>Workshop #13</b> The Whole is Simpler than the Sum of the Parts: Designing Cultural Change for Coach Education. Phil Carson (Scottish Fencing)	2B45 (Cottrell building)
	<b>Workshop #14</b> 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)	2B84 (Cottrell building)
	<b>Workshop #15</b> Decision Making in Coaching. Dr Michelle Smith (UoS)	3V2 (Cottrell building)
	<b>Workshop #16</b> How do we get Coaches Excited and Enthused to Undertake Coach Education? A Critical Discussion. Dr Noel Dempsey (University Campus of Football Business)	2B44 (Cottrell building)
	<b>Workshop #17</b> Unlocking the Power of Skill Acquisition - Practical Insights for Coaches and Athletes. Dr Malcolm Fairweather (Scottish Institute of Sport)	2X4 (Cottrell building)
1600	Closing Address: Dr Andrew Mark Gillott, UoS	Iris Murdoch Building (IMB) conference rooms 1, 2, 3
1630	Closing remarks (UoS and <b>sportscotland</b> ) Departure	Iris Murdoch Building (IMB) conference rooms 1, 2, 3

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 book via <https://CoachingSymposium.eventbrite.co.uk>

## **Further information**

[www.coachingsymposium.stir.ac.uk](http://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](mailto:stephen.macdonald@stir.ac.uk)

## **Free Access to **sportscotland**'s Brightspace eLearning Platform**

As part of our partnership with **sportscotland**, we're pleased to offer you free access to their eLearning platform, Brightspace.

Many Scottish Sports Governing Bodies (SGBs) use Brightspace to deliver coach education qualifications. In addition, **sportscotland** offers over 50 free courses covering topics such as: Safeguarding, Training Methods, Wellbeing, Inclusivity, Mental Health, Coaching Psychology...and much more.

If you don't already have a Brightspace account, please use the following link to enrol:

[Welcome to sportscotland Learning on Brightspace](#)

As well as Brightspace courses the new **sportscotland** learning course catalogue is at the following link where all **sportscotland**'s learning opportunities can be viewed: [The sportscotland Learning Catalogue](#)

## **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:** Dr Andy Kirkland (University of Stirling)

Coach wellbeing is fundamental to how we perform as coaches and plays a key role in shaping the quality of coach–athlete relationships. This workshop will create space for meaningful conversations about your wellbeing, explore the factors that influence it, and share practical tools to help you maintain and enhance it.

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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 knows 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:** Dr 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

**Facilitator:** Dr Malcolm Fairweather (sportscotland institute of sport, Honorary Professor University of Stirling)

This workshop will define the skill acquisition area and its' relevance in sports coaching. Following this background introduction, we will explore skill acquisition principles, evidence and insights that can empower the coaching process and enable athlete performance. This exploration will include how to apply skill acquisition principles, processes and measurement in your coaching to help monitor, understand and reflect upon athletes' skill acquisition progress. We will consider practical questions such as, 'how can I confidently apply skill acquisition knowledge and evidence within my coaching programme?' With the help of some practical activities we will address this particular question alongside the following skill acquisition areas; impactful feedback, practice designs, coordination change, environmental design, athlete engagement and athlete self-regulation. To help understand how to periodise skill acquisition in coaching, we will consider skill acquisition measurement frameworks that help monitor and inform the periodisation process.

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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