DANNY LENNON: So I think maybe as a good jumping off point, just to give people that are listening some context, maybe I'll go to you, Pete, first. How would you typically introduce the area of work that you're involved in, some of your research interests and anything else that might be relevant to today's discussion?

PETE OLUSOGA: I'm a senior lecturer in psychology. My area of research is in stress and burnout and well-being in high performance sport, but in particular with relevance to high performance sports coaching. My PhD research was all around stress, anxiety, and coping mechanisms that high performance coaches use; and then since then my research has kind of branched out and focuses more on the areas of burnout and well-being.

HUGH GILMORE: Well, I'm nowhere near as academic as Pete. My background is in applied sport psychology working with Olympic and Paralympic athletes in the UK sport high performance system, British athletics and British weightlifting. I suppose from my understanding today the area of coach and coach burnout is something that I haven't researched but it's something I experience on a daily basis as the demands of the coach and working with coaches who are under those pressures.

DANNY LENNON: So of course burnout is something, I'm sure, every listener has heard about in some format whether that's in a sport setting or outside of that, but maybe, Pete, can you give us a kind of definition of maybe burnout generally but also then specifically as it applies to the coaching context here as well?

PETE OLUSOGA: I think the first thing is to distinguish between physical burnout which is a result of overtraining and what we're talking about here which is psychological burnout. The definition would really be an ongoing enduring psychophysiological syndrome, and that just means that there are physical elements to it, but there are also psychological elements to it. And there are really three things that characterize this syndrome, there's physical and emotional exhaustion associated with just intense training and competition demands, and athletes experience this as well; there's what's called a reduced sense of personal accomplishment, and that's related to coaches really feeling like they're not achieving much anymore, it's almost like a sensation, a feeling related to their skills or abilities, just feeling like you're not really achieving; and then there's something called sport devaluation which is just a loss of interest almost that kind of I don't really care about what I'm doing anymore type attitude towards the sport, not really seeing the benefits, the values of participating in sport. So those are really the three major characteristics that characterize this syndrome of burnout.

DANNY LENNON: I suppose, as with any syndrome, we can look at these various different symptoms that may lead us to a diagnosis of burnout. But I'm just wondering, how do we distinguish when something is a burnout event as opposed to someone just has a symptom that is one of these that we've just mentioned?

PETE OLUSOGA: Well, I think that's inherent in the question that you just asked, you used the phrase

burnout event, and really this is experiencing all of these symptoms or a combination of these symptoms for an extended period of time. So rather than the coach who's just a little bit tired or kind of a little bit fed-up, it's are they experiencing these three, this collection of characteristics, this collection of symptoms for that extended period. It's really important to determine in research as well as in practice what is burnout and what is just the ordinary day to day stresses of coaching, because it is a stressful occupation, it is a stressful job, especially in high performance sport, so we do need to be really careful in distinguishing between what's the normal day to day stress of the job and what is burnout, and it lies in these three specific characteristics that physical and emotional exhaustion reduce personal accomplishment and devaluation, like I said.

DANNY LENNON: That gets to the point of noting that there's probably an overlap between stress and burnout, but there's also a disconnect between stress and burnout.

PETE OLUSOGA: Yeah, absolutely. I think it lies in – there's a number of different ways of explaining burnout, and one of the more widely used explanations is that burnout is actually a response to chronic stress. So in that case it is separate from stress. If you've been experiencing ongoing stress, burnout is a likely, well I don't know if it's likely, but is certainly a potential outcome of that.

DANNY LENNON: So speaking of it being an outcome, what are the drivers that typically result in burnout?

PETE OLUSOGA: Again, I can talk to the research that I've done in this area, and I'm sure Hugh can come in with some practical examples as well, but a lot of the key drivers or the key precursors for burnout are just the stresses of the sport. So, for example, long irregular hours that coaches have to put in, some of the coaches that I interviewed for my PhD study were talking about working 25 weekends a year, being away

from home, being up at five o'clock in the morning and finishing at eight, nine, 10 o'clock at night. So there's long irregular hours, time away from family – the isolation that goes along with that, it can often be quite a lonely role as a coach. Again, in high performance sport, coaches often will prioritize their athletes' well-being and perhaps neglect their own ability to deal with stress, the coping strategies, their time to recover from the stresses of the job. Again, it's another precursor. Depending on the sport, there's things like job insecurity – I mean, if you look at football coaches and football managers, for example, I mean, how many of them last until Christmas? There's constant job insecurity. Again, it's just another one of those stressors. And just a culture of high performance sport in itself where things like strength and toughness and grit are all desirable characteristics, right, because it's high performance sports, we should be gritty, we should be able to push through obstacles and things like vulnerability and seeking help when we are emotionally exhausted, when we're not feeling like we get – that's not necessarily accepted, not necessarily something that's done a lot in high performance sport. So just the culture of the sport itself mixed with all the stressors that go along with it are the things that typically in research settings anyway we see as those precursors of burnout.

DANNY LENNON: So maybe Hugh, I'll kick it over to you from an applied setting, do you see typical patterns that lead someone down that road towards burnout?

HUGH GILMORE: I feel that Pete's given a very accurate prescription there, and obviously some of the research that he's produced in terms of the qualitative studies really portrays what I can see on occasion within elite sport, which is coaches who have been held responsible for another human being, but not only that human being's performance but also their ability to develop that performance, and it's nearly as if

this magical coach is given a rule of responsibility over somebody who should have their own responsibility, and it's that feature of uncontrolling, or not being able to control the outcome, that can lead to additional stress because they can only focus in their own actions as a coach, but their performance as a coach has been judged by the performance of another human being, so that's quite an interesting position. For instance, if you were a nurse, you are getting judged maybe in your ability to heal somebody, or a doctor, your ability to heal somebody. But that person might actually be going off and chain-smoking and shooting up heroin or whatever it is the person's doing on top of their condition. So it's a stressful position to be disconnected from the thing you're trying to affect. I think the other thing that what Pete said already is the pressure of the job, the uncertainty around some of the work that Pete's produced mentions the feeling of entrapment; and I think actually this is something that maybe some of your listeners will reflect on in terms of their career choices, if you're a sports scientist and you want to get out of that field where do you go to; if you're an S&C coach or a fitness professional or a nutritionist, what's the other position that you can take or pursue if your field is no longer a viable income. So I think it's like the lack of options, the uncertainty of future funding; and I suppose in a sense, if you're a good coach, you're successful, you get recruited, you get pulled up, and then you get handed maybe a salary that outweighs what you would get in another position, therefore you fit into a lifestyle that essentially you can only pay for because of the amount of money you get but your other options wouldn't be that well paid. So there's just like this cliff edge, a financial cliff edge, so it's like how do I maintain my own personal life, my family's life, and also have a job that's not stressful.

So I think those are some of the things that I see people struggling with. I think the other thing that really bothers me is, I see a lot of

coaches and I look at them and I just go, you're not a healthy person, you're not looking after yourself. And I think I'd like to hear Pete speak to that as like, how do you, from the research point of view, how do we actually combat this, because I think it's a common thing in a lot of professions, a lot of industries, especially with entrepreneurs as well, it's not just a coaching phenomenon of burnout, it happens everywhere. And I believe my last point on this long and arduous ramble is that nurses actually experience compassion fatigue which means they no longer give a shit about the patient because they've run out of compassion to give or shits to give about the job. I think that's kind of interesting that this is a global problem in many professions.

PETE OLUSOGA: It's interesting that you bring up nursing because the burnout research originally stemmed from those types of occupations. So nursing, there was early research in the 70s from looking at burnout and poverty layers. These are all relationships where there's a carer and a recipient of care and burnouts stem from looking at those types of occupations, and coaching is exactly the same. Hugh, you just talked there about coaches who, you know, you look at them and you think you're not very healthy, and it's exactly what we talked about earlier, you know, can we encourage coaches to see themselves as performers. And same in the business world, same with entrepreneurs that you mentioned, can you see yourself as a performer? And in doing so, well, what are the skills and attributes that you would want your athletes to have, or the people that you're caring for to have? And can you embody them yourself? So if you want your athletes to have good relaxation skills, the ability to handle stress and pressure, all of those coping mechanisms, well, have you got the same? If you want your athletes to be able to relax and take time away from the sport because that's important for their mental health, well, are you doing the same as well? Or are you all about the coaching role?

Interesting, you also talked about entrapment as well, this is Tom Raedeke's work from sort of early 2000s and the notion of commitment in sport. So Tom Raedeke talked about these three different commitment profiles, there's attraction, entrapment, and low commitment which is just not being committed at all, in which case you're probably not coaching anymore anyway. But commitment was all about seeing the benefits of sport. There's a lot of benefits to maintaining a coach. There are low costs to being a coach. There are, you know, you've invested a significant amount of time in the role but also you see yourself continuing in that role. Coaches who are entrapped perceive that there are pretty high costs to what they're doing emotionally, financially, they don't necessarily see the benefits of their role anymore which is again that sort of reduced personal accomplishment and that devaluation. There's a lack of attractive alternatives that you talked about, I've invested so much time in this, what else is it that I can do. And other people want them to continue in the role, so there's external pressure as well for them to continue what they are doing. So coaches who display that level of entrapment, they're kind of in the role because they feel like they haven't got anything else to do and have invested a lot of time in it. They're the ones that the researchers are more susceptible to burnout.

DANNY LENNON: On the entrapment aspect, and I think this also relates to the responsibility piece that both of you mentioned, I'm just wondering, when it comes to coaching burnout specifically, is there then a distinction between that and athlete burnout in the fact that for athletes who burn out one of the mechanisms that they have to stop their suffering essentially is to quit the sport altogether or to move away from it or to stop training or they go missing for X period of time, whereas does the responsibility of a coach and people counting off them lead to this cycle of entrapment they might want to get away but

they have too many people counting on them that it's not as easy as an option perhaps as an athlete. I don't know if that plays out in practice or not.

PETE OLUSOGA: Yeah, I suppose it does in a way. One of the things that's come out of some of the research that I've done is this idea that coaches feel like they need to be all things to all people, we call it like a superman complex where they don't want to delegate any responsibility. They feel that pressure to not only take on the coaching role but to take on all of the other roles around that. So to think about the finances, think about team selection, think about dealing with the press and the media and just feeling the responsibility and the weight of all of that on their shoulders. So I think it is probably a little bit more difficult, and again, this depends on the sport and the context obviously. But it is probably a little bit more difficult for them to step away from some of that than it is, for example, for an athlete to say, look, I'm tired, I'm exhausted, I need to take a few days off here. I think it's probably a lot more difficult for coaches to do that. Again Hugh, I don't know what your kind of experience of that is.

HUGH GILMORE: Well, I think elite sport is very interested in it, and I've said this before, and it's essentially no matter what you achieve, it always looks better if you could achieve it three weeks sooner. And as an athlete, the support system is around you and is being aware of the level of pressure and stress on you and will, at times, we've had to say, you're not allowed to train in scenarios that I worked in. But I mean, can you imagine UK sport or a governing body turning up to a bunch of coaches and saying you're not allowed to coach and it's a different role because that's an employee. And I suppose, if it's a paid coach which most coaches in a high performance system would be, it's like that's your employee, they're expected to deliver, but part of the issue is that they're going home and thinking and planning, they're always dealing with the same problems, they never get to put the problem

down. It's the same with an entrepreneur, in that, you're worried about your cash flow, you're worried about your business and your network, and that problem is always there. And I kind of think of it like there isn't a set time point for coaches. I think the only time within Olympic and Paralympic cycle is like the two weeks potentially after the Olympic Games or Paralympic Games is maybe a bit of downtime, but it very quickly picks back up again to "right how's our pathway looking? what's the next four years look like?" I don't think there is people coming in and saying to coaches you need to step off. In fact, in fairness, that's actually my role as an applied sports psych in working with coaches is I'm always asking people when are you taking time off, what are you doing this weekend, what are you doing for recovery. And I had my own experience funny enough working as a coach for, believe it or not, the GAA in County Monaghan as a Hurling Development Manager, which for Pete's reference and people who follow basketball, that's like trying to develop basketball at sea is the same type of thing is trying to develop hurling in Monaghan. But I get so burnt out and run down as an employee of the GAA that when I went to the doctors, the doctor loved me and said, when's the last time you had two days off in a row. I was like, I can't remember because sport takes place in the hours outside of the nine to five, so even if you are nine to five job, then you've got your sport outside that and your life before doesn't have any boundaries. And she said, she thought that junior doctors were bad, but that's horrendous that I didn't know when I had two days off in a row. So I think it's a good checkpoint for any listeners is like, when's the last time you had two days off in a row where you didn't do any work; and when's the next time you're going to have two days off in a row.

DANNY LENNON: Even for people as personal trainers or people just in the fitness industry coaching now, you not only have a situation where I know plenty of coaches who said the point in their life where

they're probably the least healthy was when they opened a facility themselves and opened the gym, because they're working, like Pete said, 5 a.m. to 10 p.m., it's pretty usual, probably six to seven days a week, and that's for at least the first year, that's kind of like the norm for the full period of time. And I think now we're in a situation where people, even when they leave the gym, online coaching is normal. Any of the people that either come to a physical or online clients can message people, email people, there's always work to be done, there's ways to do all the marketing and branding outside. So there's even times where you're not technically at work, you are working for a lot of people, and I suspect that it might creep up on people, I'm not sure what you guys think but it's not obvious how much people are doing until they are forced to question, like you said, Hugh, when someone asked you when was the last time you had two days off, it's probably only at that point when you actually thought about that, and it kind of snuck up on you in that sense. So I suspect that maybe that's what's going on for a lot of people.

PETE OLUSOGA: Yeah, I think so. It's like you said, it's about being always on. So even if you are taking that two days off or that day off, it's about getting away from what it is that you're doing because as an academic we have the same thing, so I take a day off, but it's not like I'm a bus driver, I leave the bus at five o'clock, park it in the garage and go home. Like, I don't have to think about driving the bus the rest of the day. But as an academic, I have to think about, okay, well, I've got a lecture tomorrow that I've got to prep for, I've got a seminar that I need to... So even if you're not doing things, you're always thinking about it which is, I guess, what you're talking about in terms of both coaches and people working in the fitness industry – even if you are having that break, you're still always on. Some of the coaches in the studies that we've done have talked about this idea of burnout spilling over into their home environment, and that's when they kind of

notice that their relationships at home are affected, their work life balance is all off. When they're at home, they're always on their work, and they're thinking about this and they don't have time and then notice that they're not spending as much time with their kids or they're a little bit snappier at home and it's affecting those relationships. So yeah, absolutely, it's checking in and noticing some of that stuff, I think, that's really important and recognizing when perhaps we've gone from the normal stresses of the job to experiencing more burnout like symptoms.

HUGH GILMORE: You know Pete, it just struck me there about what you said, I'm curious, is there any research on the effect of social media interaction and burnout, because I find social media as somebody who's maybe trying to promote something – you're smiling Pete.

PETE OLUSOGA: I'm just thinking about my social media activity in the last 24 hours. I'm wondering if this is a loaded question.

HUGH GILMORE: The gun's always loaded but I'm not pointing it at you Pete. But the point I'll make is I'm curious Pete in terms of social media, is like these constant interactions of ping and I have it in my head that I need to reply because somebody asked me a question on social media, and I know I need to give a quality answer because I've got my reputation at stake, but until that's done, I can't put that out of my head, and then I go, I'm on my phone and I get another social media insight or tag or something that I need to reply to and put forward this persona of, I am the psychologist who knows things, I can answer your questions – is there anything on burnout, on social media interaction because I think that might be something that's also even more so not allowing us to get away from our tasks that we have to do on work or other issues?

PETE OLUSOGA: My honest answer is I'm not sure, I don't know if there's any specific research on the role of

social media in burnout. What I do think is that it speaks to that always on mentality where, like you say, you feel obliged to reply to certain things or to be engaged with the media. The other thing is that if you think about the role of social media, we talk about coaching in high performance sport – before a game is even finished, before a match is even finished, if you're coaching, you've got thousands, millions of people tweeting about how terrible your performance was and you've not even finished yet. And that's something that's new, that's something that's fairly recent in terms of the way that social media is developed. You criticize around, there's video clips of your performance, there's video clips of your media interviews after competition, and they're all halfway around the world before you've even finished speaking, that's new and that's an added stress and an added pressure that these coaches in high performance sport have to deal with. And I guess, it's the same as what you're talking about, it's maintaining that persona in a way that you want, and a carefully curated persona, I guess, and kind of having to maintain that all the time, it's just an added stress and added pressure. I don't know if there's any specific research on that in terms of its relation to burnout, but it's certainly something that we've seen in the research that coaches have talked about that again always on, always having to reply to these things, to present that carefully cultivated image.

DANNY LENNON: I also wonder with social media does that also have an impact via comparison which is probably one of the most toxic aspects of social media generally, never mind in this context, but it tying back into coaches looking at other coaches and this idea of, oh look, they're working so hard, they're super focused, they're obsessed about what they're doing, they seem to be putting out content or doing work all the time, and this whole kind of hustle mentality and whether that breeds back into the cycle you mentioned earlier Pete of like this mental

toughness, I can't show that I have a weakness here, or I can just push through it.

PETE OLUSOGA: Yeah, because we're all liars on the internet, aren't we? I mean, we are. Our Facebook profiles, our Twitter profiles, they are not really us, they're carefully curated, they present exactly what we want people to see about us, and that comparison that you mentioned there Danny is really important, you're looking at what other people are doing, again, because of the world of social media, you can see and you can digest what other people are doing, it's in the palm of your hand, 24 hours a day. You can constantly see what other people are doing and that looking over your shoulder, seeing what other coaches are doing, seeing what other people are doing, and constantly feeling that pressure to have to keep up – and especially in the world of high performance sport and sports coaching, one of the things that coaches have talked about a lot is perhaps, I guess, you could describe it as mistrust in the environment that, we talked about job insecurity earlier on, but there's always somebody else who's looking to take your job. If you're a head coach, there's always 10 other people who want that job, and that environment leads to the desire to not show any weakness, to not show any vulnerability, to not say, you know what, I'm tired, like, I need a day off, I'm not coping with this, can I have some help with this aspect, can I have, you know, can I get some support and on this we tend to not want to do that. And you're right, I think that presentation of ourselves on social media, the comparison to other people certainly, it has to have an impact on that.

DANNY LENNON: It kind of reminds me of something we've talked about in relation to athletes before, Hugh, and when an athlete gets too tied to their identity, how that can become this double edged sword of yeah it's very motivating in that moment, but they're more susceptible to negatives like an injury or performance going badly if their whole identity is tied up in just

sporting performance. And I'm wondering, do you see the same thing then with coaches that they create this identity about themselves, and therefore that becomes maladaptive at some point?

HUGH GILMORE: I think actually that's mentioned in some of your research, Pete, if I remember rightly, unidimensional and mono-dimensional identity. And I think the time that you invest as a coach into things means it's very difficult to have another identity, and also when you go home to your partner you're using your partner as somebody to help debug and relax from your job, so actually you talk about your work a little bit, so again, even that relationship becomes dealing with your work problems sometimes. So I see this as coaches who are very much invested in what they do, but I see this also with practitioners in psychology and S&C people, they are very invested in what they do and they never get to do anything else. Peter, what are your thoughts on the role of identity from a research perspective, how would you seek to build a better identity potentially within a coach to mediate against burnout?

PETE OLUSOGA: Yeah, I think the role of identity is important, like you say, again, there are alternative perspectives on burnout where actually having that singular identity as a coach is particularly important. I guess, in terms of doing something about that, I'm very aware that, as psychologists, we often talk about what coaches should do. I study coaches in elite sport, but I am not a coach in elite sport. I've got experience of coaching but not at that level. So this is all very context dependent and I don't want to come across as, okay, well, coaches should do this, coaches should do that, because it's easy to say. But it's about connecting with what do you value in life, what other aspects of your life are important to you – is it about being a good parent, for example? Is that something that's really important? And if so, can we work on that aspect and separate that from the coaching role? How do I develop

those other aspects of my identity? How do I put time into those other aspects of my identity so that if coaching becomes something that's stressful, well, that doesn't necessarily mean that my entire life is stressful, because I've got this aspect and this aspect and this aspect as well. So, like I say, it's easy for me to sit here and say that coaches should do that when we've just talked about all of the pressures and stresses that they're under, but can people do that, can people connect with what's really important to them in different domains of their life? So is it important to live a healthy lifestyle, for example? Am I making sure that I'm taking care of that? Am I always making sure that I'm getting enough rest and recovery and going to the gym? Am I being A good husband or wife or father or mother or whatever?

And, Hugh, you'd probably do the same thing with athletes, wouldn't you? How do you invest in other areas of your identity to stop you becoming this kind of singular obsessive coach where everything is wrapped up in what it is that you're doing and if one thing goes wrong in what you're doing, then that means your whole life crumbles.

HUGH GILMORE: It is a common thing with athletes, we don't want mono-dimensional identity, we want to have multiple identities. So I suppose, what I say to athletes who are very mono-dimensional, I say to them you're like a banjo, you're hollow in the inside and then I laugh and see did they get the joke or not. But actually, what I do is, as I say, like a banjo with six strings, and if one of those strings is really good, brilliant, that maybe your sport. But if all the other strings are not working or broken, then you're not a good banjo, and you're not going to play a good tune. And it's kind of like in life you need to have a number of other strings to your banjo because nobody wants a broken banjo string where it's not going to, you know, you're not going to play a good tune in that. But the thing about that is, if you know, and I'm sure we've talked about social media as

a listener, if you take out your Instagram – please continue listening to the podcast, it is Sigma Nutrition after all – but if you take out your Instagram and look at your Instagram and look at the last 20 pictures, and then start categorizing them as what is that value or what is that activity that I'm portraying to the world, it's quite interesting because when I've done this with athletes, it's all their sport. And then what I've done this with some other people, it's basically all pictures of pints and kebabs. And I say, what is important in your life, this is it, pints and kebabs are all your sport, and what variety, if this was actually a true reflection of you, what they would be in your top pictures on Instagram. So I think it's a good way of working with somebody to help them realize that they need a bit more variety within their life and that 20 images, last 20 images on Instagram is a really good way of doing that for people who are active on Instagram.

DANNY LENNON: Earlier, Pete, we talked about some of those potential factors that could lead to a coach becoming burned out, and obviously many coaches face some of these same external things, but presumably their susceptibility varies among individuals. Why is it or what type of differences do we see in some people who could be put under similar levels of stress, let's say, from their job as a coach but may not succumb to the same degree of burnout or at least experience it with the same degree of intensity?

PETE OLUSOGA: When I talk about stress I always like to use the analogy of a seesaw. So if you imagine on one side of the seesaw are all of the demands that you experience, so that's all the things we talked about before, the long hours, the pressures, the stressors, the culture of high performance sport; and on the other side of this seesaw are your coping resources, your ability to cope with those demands, so that might be things like your own psychological skills, your own ability to relax, friends and family, social support, all of those types of

things. So when that seesaw tips one way or the other, usually when the demands become heavier than our ability to cope with it, that's when we experience stress. And as we talked about burnout as perhaps a response to that chronic experience of stress, there's two things that we can do, there's two things that we can work on here, we can work on removing some of those demands or we can work on developing our coping resources. So coaches with many, many more coping resources, many different ways of coping with stress, so they have that support structure in place, they're able to delegate some of the work, they're able to be a little bit vulnerable and take some of that time off, those are the coaches that will experience a little bit less stress. The other way of looking at it is the way that we perceive that stress. Think about it, we've all experienced stress before, sometimes that can have a positive motivating effect. If you think we've all been in a situation where we've had like an essay due in, or three essays due it, at the end of the week, we haven't done any work, and that's stressful, right? But we perceive that as, right, this is a challenge, I've got to get this done, and suddenly we're able to work a lot harder. The alternative response to that is to think, oh shit, I've got these three essays in, and to panic and to be anxious about it and to withdraw from it and just shut down and pretend it's not happening, right? So the way that we perceive that stress that we experience is again a defining factor in how we might respond to it – do we respond with anxiety and it just gets worse, and then we experienced that burnout, or do we see it as a challenge and it motivates us. Most of the time that chronic stress isn't good for us, and we respond in ways that aren't particularly helpful. But as I say, the way that coaches respond to it, the way that we perceive that stress that we're under, might determine whether we end up experiencing burnout or not.

DANNY LENNON: If we focus in on some of those coping strategies, I think it's worth exploring coping

strategies that are actually beneficial versus what people might presume is a coping strategy but may be detrimental or maladaptive in some format. And actually, I want to take one of the lines that I made a note of from one of your papers, Pete, that particularly stood out to me, and I think will resonate with people. You said that coaches might choose to suppress emotional difficulties in order to maintain a mask of mental toughness and stoicism. So again, two things that people may see as something that's beneficial becomes problematic. So how do you make that distinction of a coping strategy that is beneficial versus someone having a behavior that could become problematic?

PETE OLUSOGA: We know from the research literature that certain types of coping strategies are perhaps more effective than others, so that's what's called problem focused coping which is actually trying to deal with the stressor itself. So if there's something that's causing a stress, okay, can we actually tackle that and handle that and perhaps remove that stressor. So again, it's taken stresses from one side of that seesaw that we talked about earlier, trying to maintain that balance. Other types of coping strategies are emotion focused coping strategy, so if we're anxious, we try and deal with the anxiety; if we're sad, we try and deal with the sadness; if we're upset, we try and deal with the upset. That might be beneficial in the short term, but actually the problem is still there. And then there's avoidance coping which, funnily enough, actually comes up quite a lot in the literature, pretending that the stressor isn't there which is, I guess, what we're talking about, they're putting a mask on it and just pretending that everything is okay and trying to power through, trying to show that mental toughness when we know that everything is not all right. From a practical perspective, we can see why those things might not necessarily be useful, but from a research perspective as well, we know that emotion focused coping and that avoidance coping actually leads to less positive

outcomes, so it leads to more anxiety, it leads to burnout or leads to an increased risk of burnout, let's say. So we can look at it like that, there's problem focused coping strategies, dealing with the problem, emotion focused coping strategies, dealing with the actual resulting emotions and an avoidance is just pretending it isn't there. And if we kind of think about, okay, well, how can we address the actual problem, that's probably going to be the most beneficial way of dealing with some of that stress. I don't know, again, Hugh, from a kind of practical perspective, what would you say to that?

HUGH GILMORE: Well, Pete, I think the way that you've categorized those or the researchers categorized those as problem focused or avoidance and things like that is really important. And from an applied perspective, I can think of this as long term versus short term interventions. And going for a pint might be a short term solution to stress. But in the long term, repeatedly going for a pint to deal with your stress is not a good solution and is going to cause further spirals potentially. And again, it depends on how you go for a pint – are you going for a pint to discuss and chat with your friends in a relaxed manner? Or are you going for a pint to sit in the corner by yourself? Very different ways of dealing with something. Is the intervention that you take a short term thing to get you over this little bit of stress or little tight spot that you're in, or is this a long term beneficial support for stress? I think the other thing that is really interesting is you talk about stoicism and mental toughness, there was a paper in – if you look it up, it's PTSD in veterans and mental toughness as search terms, but what's really interesting is that veterans who have an idea that mental toughness is a desirable characteristic are more likely to suffer from PTSD. And this speaks to what Pete talks about which is people who overly emphasize the toughness and grit aspect of their cart as a desirable characteristic are going to suffer in other ways because they don't

have that outlet. And again, stoicism is wildly popular, and like every Tom, Dick, and Harry is quoting Marcus Aurelius at the moment, but there's a paper which actually talks about how agrarian values or the stoic values are really good at coping but that they actually reduce the likelihood that somebody will ask for help in a situation because they just have to suffer. So it's all right having a quality or an approach, but how does that approach have a downside, and every approach will have a downside. So it's been smart enough as an applied person to think about what's the downside of my coping mechanism, and what's the upside of it, and is this a long term or short term coping mechanism.

PETE OLUSOGA: I think there's a bit of an interaction effect going on there as well, and we talked earlier about the idea of coaches having different commitment profiles, so either being entrapped or feeling like they're trapped in the role and coaches being highly committed to the role. And just some preliminary findings, so this is – I presented this data as a poster at a conference, we haven't written the paper up yet – but for coaches who were entrapped in their role, so again, high costs, low benefits, low attractive alternatives, didn't see what else they could do, felt pressured to stay in the role, for those coaches, high levels of what we call grit were actually less beneficial to them in terms of the burnout outcomes. For coaches who were just highly committed to the role, so are quite happy in the role, they're doing it because they want to do it, actually, high levels of those traits that we think of as positive can be beneficial, can be maybe protective against burnout. So we have to think about those long term and short term coping strategies that Hugh mentioned, but we have to delve a little bit deeper into, okay, well, what is this coach experiencing, are they highly committed in a positive way, or are they committed because they are stuck in the role. And the type of coping strategy that we might use might be very different for those two different types of coaches.

HUGH GILMORE: Yeah, Pete, it's interesting that the way that somebody perceives their stressor and situation mediates the outcomes depending on those sort of approaches they take. One of the things that I've been thinking on after reading some of your research is the idea that appraisals is one way to deal with stress but actually that doesn't take – that's a cognitive process, and it doesn't take into account maybe the biological features that are underpinning such as lack of sleep, nutrition, etc., and fitness. And one of the things that we've done from an applied perspective is looked at the work of Robert Sapolsky, who wrote Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers, and then we've integrated that into our culture aspect for athletes. And what this conversation has me wondering is should we be integrating that into our staff, but the key cultural aspects that we're trying to put in building with athletes are social support and outlet for frustration, signs, monitoring signs that things can get better because if I want to create a stressful situation, I would tell you things are getting worse, I'd tell you, you have no control and don't know when it's going to end, and tell you things are getting worse. And then also social isolation, so if I want to isolate – if I isolate you, you're going to be more likely to be stressed. And if you think of a coach's role, it's very isolating because you can't turn around and talk to the athlete about how you're suffering from this burnout because that athlete's going to go like, he's supposed to be helping me and he can't help himself. But then if you think of the time commitments they put in, again, they've been isolated from friends and family potentially because of being overworked and therefore their social circle decreases. So how do you create social support within a coaching group would be very critical for reducing burnout. But there's other points in there with Sapolsky's work about how do you reduce stress, and I think they're critical from a biological perspective of dealing with burnout and not just the cognitive aspect of that coach's values and how they perceive and cope with a

situation. Pete, do you have any thoughts on that?

PETE OLUSOGA: Yeah, I was just going to say that fits in really nicely with some of Altfeld's work on burnout, whereas rather than looking at the stress in itself as one of the precursors to burnout, they focus more on recovery. So it's not necessarily just the ongoing stress that's the problem, it's the time and ability to recover from that, which speaks to exactly what you said, you kind of monitor that maybe with athletes but could we do a better job of monitoring almost, I guess, enforcing that recovery time for coaches as well. Again, I don't know how easy or difficult that would be to do with some of the high performance coaches that I know.

DANNY LENNON: Well, one of the things I was going to ask off the back of that is, are there set evidence based treatments, so to speak, for this that are already established, or at the moment, is it still trying to piece this together mechanistically and do some of the things that Hugh has just mentioned in practice, or do we actually see clear benefit for interventions that seem to resolve some of this issue?

PETE OLUSOGA: There's a lot of research into coach burnout, it's a big area of research and coaching stress has been an area of research for a lot of years now. What is missing perhaps is the intervention research, how do we deal with this, how do we make it better, there are a few studies that I can think of that have proposed interventions, there's a couple I've looked at mindfulness based interventions. So a researcher called Kat Longshore, she put together a mindfulness based intervention for coaches that looked at how incorporating mindfulness, and it was only kind of brief mindfulness session, how that could have a positive impact on coaches' well-being and another study that looked at the same sort of thing. So there is preliminary evidence that mindfulness based interventions can have positive outcomes for coaches in terms of their well-being. Other than that, I

think you're right, I think it's a case of kind of piecing some of those things together, what do we already know from the psych literature about coping with stress and managing burnout and recovery and how can we incorporate that into working with our coaches, but I think there's probably multiple levels at which we can intervene. So yes, there's things that coaches can do, absolutely. And the role of psych is important as well. So there's those mindfulness interventions that I talked about, there's developing all of the psych skills that coaches would want their athletes to have. Again, I mentioned this earlier, can we encourage coaches to see themselves as performers as well, to reflect? Are my responses to stress normal or have they changed? Am I experiencing stress in a different way to what I was before? So that self-reflection, that self-awareness is really important, developing those support systems as well – I always talk to coaches about you need to find somebody from outside of your sport to talk to, because I think having somebody either from a different sport or outside of sport altogether is really important just in terms of being able to vent and being able to rant, being able to talk about some of those things and feel safe in doing so, showing that vulnerability and feeling safe to be able to do that.

As much as coach based interventions and things that coaches can do are important, we talked about the culture of high performance sport earlier and, I guess, the way they always describe this is if I'm getting shot at, if there's a sniper on the other side of the park or whatever and I'm getting shot at, yes, being mindful and being able to relax might help me be able to make better decisions in the moment, but I want the guy to stop shooting at me. Right? That's what's going to really help. So at an organizational level, if the mental well-being of coaches is really important, if the mental health of coaches is really important, then it's organizations are duty bound to help with

some of this stuff, to give coaches the time and the space to recover, to encourage recovery, to provide a sustainable workload, more reasonable expectations. You can't expect somebody to thrive mentally if they are going to be sacked for losing the first two games of the season. So organizations are kind of duty bound to do this, to look after the mental well-being of the coaches, and I think there's more that we could do to make that happen and to kind of push that agenda.

DANNY LENNON: Just as you bring up some of the culture around certain organizations, it also ties into both when earlier you guys mentioned isolation but also that if someone's entrapped within a role where maybe they can't see how to progress from that or they feel they're getting underpaid relative to the work or maybe there's some unfair conditions, all these things that could have a negative impact. I'm wondering when we think of the culture of organizations, do we see differences therefore between certain groups of people, so as two of the most clear examples, if we take women working in coaching roles within elite sport, they're probably, at least depending on the sport, depending on the organization, of course, maybe represented much less, so they're going into a workplace where they're more outnumbered by their male colleagues or maybe there's just been a culture within the organization that doesn't have the same bias in each direction. Or similarly, we have clear issues that thankfully now have been more brought up in the recent past around coaching roles, for example, in the English Premier League or the Football League around how little Black coaches get even interviews never mind roles. We see the same thing in the NFL where we have 70% of the players being Black and three head coaches I think, something like that. Does that even add further to these stresses related to work? Does it even lead to more of this feeling of entrapment? And does that tie back into the culture that maybe some of these organizations have to look at?

PETE OLUSOGA: Yes, I think is the answer to that question. Again, in terms of the research, I know we wrote a paper recently on women's high performance coaching, and some of the stressors that women experience in that environment that are perhaps unique, and you kind of spoke to some of them earlier, is that culture of a high performance sport that is very male dominated, it's a very masculine culture, and a lot of the characteristics that are needed to survive in that environment is seen as typically male characteristics. So there are a lot of barriers to women in high performance sport. In terms of the research on Black and kind of minority cultures, again, I'm not sure whether anybody's specifically looked at those barriers and their experiences of those cultures, but absolutely, there is evidence to say that, as you say, they are vastly underrepresented in coaching roles, at board level roles, support staff roles as well. So there are a number of barriers to minorities, to women accessing those types of roles, and that can only add to the stresses and pressures once you get into those roles as well, because the microscope is on you far more I think if you are a person of color or if you're a woman in high performance sports.

HUGH GILMORE: I think to add to that Pete is that we talked of the idea of the sniper and the mindfulness not being effective, but someone's ability to speak up in an environment is going to be influenced by how safe they feel and supported that they can speak up without any undue consequences. I think it's an issue within sport, but I think it's also compounded by people who maybe don't feel as if they are supportive because they can be unfairly caricatured, if that's a word, or misrepresented because of their sex, race, nationality, skin color, whatever feature.

DANNY LENNON: Just to round out this topic of coaching burnout, maybe as a quick couple of minute overview, and I'll go to each of you maybe separately, what is one or two of the kind of key

things that you want listeners to come away from this conversation understanding about coaching burnout? And maybe I'll start with you Pete, and then I'll come to you afterwards Hugh.

PETE OLUSOGA: Okay, so for me I think it's about recognizing what burnout is and when we're experiencing it. We talked early on about it being more than just a regular stress that we experience, it's that ongoing syndrome of just not really caring about what we're doing anymore, feeling that emotional exhaustion and kind of disengaging from what we're doing. And I think for your listeners, I think that self-awareness and reflection is probably the most important thing that they can do, because we get so caught up in our daily lives and in what we're doing in our work that we don't stop to recognize when our responses to stress are abnormal, because we all experience stress, we all deal with it in various ways, but it's having the self-awareness and being able to reflect enough to notice that, okay, well, actually I'm responding to this in a way that's different to normal, I'm taking this out, you know, I'm taking this home with me, I'm more irritable than I normally am when the same stressors are occurring. So having that self-reflection, the ability to reflect that self-awareness, being able to recognize when it's just a little bit different to the ordinary stress, I think that's probably the most important skill that we can develop.

DANNY LENNON: Brilliant. Hugh, I'll turn it over to you.

HUGH GILMORE: I suppose what I would take from this is probably the biopsychosocial model of trying to deal with this, in that psychologically I can modify my thoughts, I can pursue my values and evaluate my life in terms of how I am living up to my values within my family, within my job, within my friendship groups and my hobbies, or whatever it is I want to achieve, so cognitively align there. But then from the biological approach you know your sleep, your nutrition are vital within that, and then your

health, you know your physical activity as a reduction in stressors are going to be vital as well. So do you have that biological sort of kip on because if you're getting your sleep, your nutrition and your physical exercise, that's going to help you moderate any effects of stress. And then lastly of the biopsychosocial model is the social aspect of don't underestimate the power that connections to other humans are, indeed humans are the only things that we really connect with in the world that let us know that we exist because of how they interact with us, and it's that connection and interaction that I think allows us to reduce our stress, that will be my takeaway from this.

DANNY LENNON: You both have a new podcast and I'm sure many people who have just listened to this conversation will be very interested to hear about that, so maybe, can you just describe what the podcast is and what you're trying to achieve with the podcast, what's the goal of it, and then maybe some more information for people who might find that useful to listen into?

HUGH GILMORE: I just want to say that Pete won't agree with this but it is the goal, we do have it written down, but the goal is that one day we will get to interview Eric Cantona, and that is sole aim for this entire podcast regardless of whatever garbage he's about to say. Pete, what are your views on why we're doing this podcast?

PETE OLUSOGA: Well, I mean, that's the dream, right, that's the ultimate goal is to have Eric Cantona on our podcast. Now, seriously though, it's a podcast called Eighty Percent Mental, and it's about trying to demystify, I guess, sports psychology, and we talk about all of the mental aspects of sport performance. I think what we do slightly differently to a lot of the podcasts that are out there is that we start each episode by asking a particular question about sports psychology. We have a theme for each episode. We ask a question and we get experts in to try and answer that question. So questions like what's

the deal with mindfulness. So we had Dr. Joe Mannion come in and talk all about mindfulness, he's kind of world renowned expert on the subject, what is anxiety and how do I deal with that. Again, we had a couple of sports psychs come in to explain that and look at the research. But we also have a little bit of fun with it as well, and we try and do things in some slightly different ways. And Hugh and I have had a lot of fun recording the first series, and I hope that comes across to our listeners as well. The first series is all about the kind of nuts and bolts of sports psychology, and then later series we're going to kind of get under the bonnet a little bit and explore things in a little bit more depth and detail.

DANNY LENNON: For anyone that wants to connect with you guys on social media or in any other format, is there anywhere you'd like to direct their attention to go on the internet?

PETE OLUSOGA: So for me it's probably Twitter is the best, and my Twitter handle is @ peteolusoga, and I'll spell it, OLUSOGA. Or you can tweet me at EPM Podcast, which is the Eighty Percent Mental podcast Twitter handle as well.

HUGH GILMORE: For me, you can just go to the EPM Podcast that Pete has just said on Twitter, and then my handle is in the description.

DANNY LENNON: And so with that guys let me say, thank you for taking the time out to come and talk to me today and for both your time but also the great conversation and I look forward to listening to many of your podcasts in the future.

PETE OLUSOGA: It's been a pleasure. Thanks for having me.

HUGH GILMORE: Thank you Danny. Keep up the good work. As always, we are a little bit inspired by your podcast and the level of success that you've had, and also your interview skills, that's something we're hoping to emulate a bit.