

Behind Closed Doors: The Delivery of Performance Analysis in a Professional New Zealand Rugby Club

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Abstract

Introduction: Despite the prevalence of technology with high performance environments, limited attention has been paid to understanding how Performance Analysis (PA) is being delivered by coaches and practitioners to impact on player performance and learning within competitive contexts (McKensie & Cushion, 2013; Middlemas & Harwood, 2015). The aim of this case study research was to gain an in-depth understanding of how a professional rugby team integrated PA support into their practice within a competitive season in New Zealand. It is argued that knowledge gathered in-situ can be valuable in guiding further research in applied sport science and informing best practice within applied settings (Williams & Kendall, 2007).

Methods: Permission was granted from the coaches, support staff and players to observe and capture team processes surrounding the use of PA, including pre-match and post-match team meetings, training sessions and pre-match preparations during a professional rugby season. Multiple ethnographic techniques were employed to generate a comprehensive picture of the phenomena, including participant observation, video recordings, formal and informal interviews, field notes, descriptive statistics and document analysis. Each meeting was transcribed separately and analysed using an inductive content analysis process (Neuendorf, 2002) and themes were identified and discussed with an independent researcher, acting as a 'critical friend'.

Results/Discussion: Some of the key theme that emerged included: (i) results v performance focus, (ii) learning environment (iii) group dynamics and (iv) coach vs. player driven. The findings reveal that while considerable emphasis was placed on the importance of player learning and engagement in the PA process, delivery was often ad hoc, coach-driven and results-focused. This applied case study highlights the messy reality of delivery effective support within a high performance environment, and the importance of personal relationships at the heart of effective delivery of PA.

References:

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