



**Research Team Briefings no.8**

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**Why it is important for coaching to meet participant needs – using young people (14-18) as a case study example.**

**1. Introduction**

Promoting a culture of self-improvement is one of the four key objectives of the UK Coaching Framework. And year on year results from the Coaching Panel Survey have shown some very positive progress towards this aim. For example, 84% of coaches have undertaken some form of continuing personal development (CPD) over the past 12 months, increasing from 76% in 2014.

However, while this suggests the vast majority of coaches are committed to self-improvement, it does not tell us whether they are prioritising their development in the right areas, particularly for what they might encounter in future.

One of the things we know they will encounter in future is an enhanced focus on ensuring their coaching meets the needs of their participants. This is, after all, one of the main objectives of the Coaching Plan for England, currently being developed by Sport England and supported by sports coach UK.

While meeting participants’ needs may sound like an obvious consideration for coaches, there is limited evidence to show how this links to and impacts on participation. This briefing aims to change that by using data from our previous surveys – and focusing on young people as a case study example – to show how participants can benefit from a needs-led coaching approach.

**2. The Current Picture**

The Coaching Panel 2015 showed that 51% of coaches sought to develop their knowledge in *‘understanding the needs and motivations of the individual’* in the last twelve months.

While it is positive that over half the workforce are looking to develop in this area, Table 1 below shows that more experienced and higher qualified coaches are more likely to try and develop themselves in this way (i.e. Level 3 or above).

**Table 1 Proportion of coaches seeking information on *‘understanding my athletes/players and their motivation’* by level of qualification**

All Coaches	No qualification	Level 1 (or equivalent)	Level 2 (or equivalent)	Level 3 (or equivalent)	Level 3 (or equivalent)
51%	48%	44%	53%	59%	58%

We already know from the Coaching Panel that these coaches are the least likely to coach the youngest, most impressionable participants. And this also extends to beginners/improvers who are just at the start of their playing journey (Table 2).

**Table 2 Proportion of coaches who coach beginners/improvers by level of qualification**

<i>All Coaches</i>	<i>No qualification</i>	<i>Level 1 (or equivalent)</i>	<i>Level 2 (or equivalent)</i>	<i>Level 3 (or equivalent)</i>	<i>Level 3 (or equivalent)</i>
23%	34%	34%	19%	13%	13%

So what does this mean for people in this group?

The 2014 Participant Survey showed that young people in the beginners/improvers group are the most likely to consider dropping out of sport and the least likely to consider increasing the time they spend playing in future. They are also less committed to sport than young people who take part in more competitive forms of coaching<sup>1</sup>.

Based on these results, it is fair to suggest this group are most in need of coaches who can understand their motivations for playing and provide coaching that meets them. However, the evidence above suggests they are currently being coached by the individuals who are least likely to be developing themselves in this area.

This is not totally surprising. We know less experienced coaches starting out their coaching career are more likely to focus on the basics, such as ensuring their sessions run to plan and include the content they want them to include, rather than specific considerations for how they can meet their participants' needs during the sessions.

However, further data from our Participant Survey shows why it may be worthwhile for National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs) to consider helping their coaches develop a more needs-led approach.

### **3. The impact meeting participants' needs has on playing experiences**

The three charts below compare young people's results<sup>2</sup> for three key indicators of participation – enjoyment of sport, likelihood of spending more time playing and likelihood of dropping out. The young people all play sport for the same reason, to have fun.

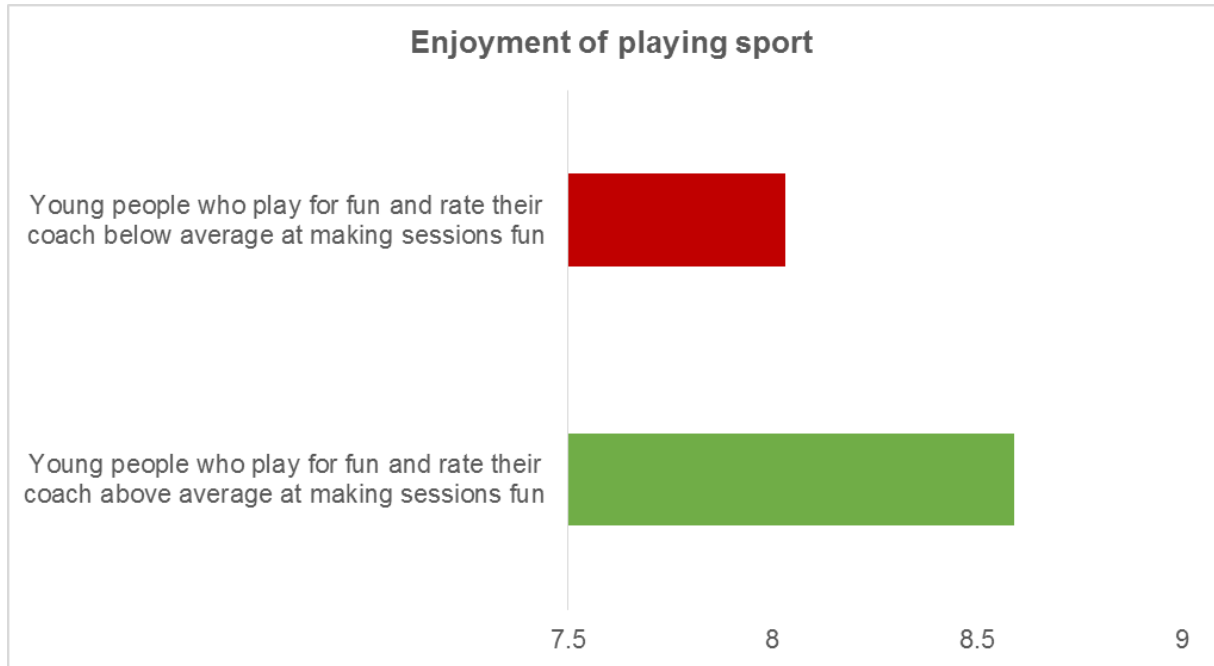
However, their results differ by their views on how far their coaches currently meet this need. The first group rate the ability of their coach to make their sessions fun below average (i.e. 6 out of 10 or less), while the second group rate their coaches above average (i.e. 7 out of 10 or more).

The charts show that when a coach is good at meeting a young person's needs, they enjoy sport more, are more likely to play more often and less likely to drop out (Figures 1 to 3).

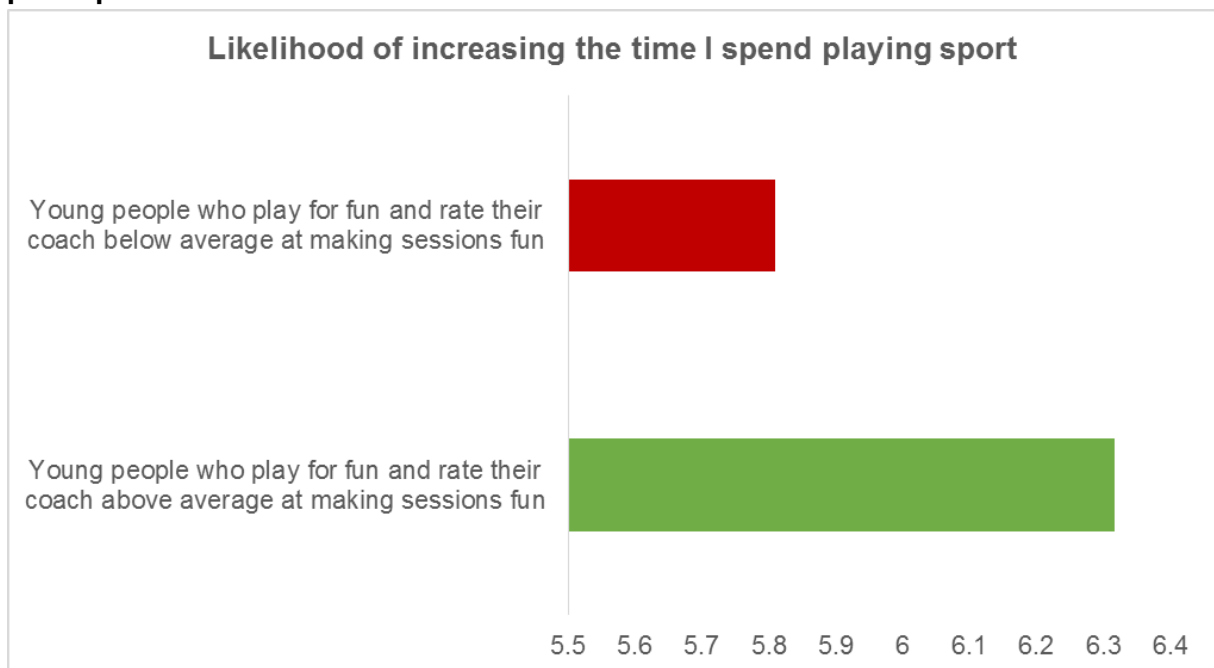
<sup>1</sup> Competitive (i.e. club squads or individual competitions), County/Regional or National/International level

<sup>2</sup> Data used is from the 2014 Participant Survey. Data from the 2015 Participant Survey shows the same correlations, however the 2014 data has been used for this briefing due to the much larger sample size.

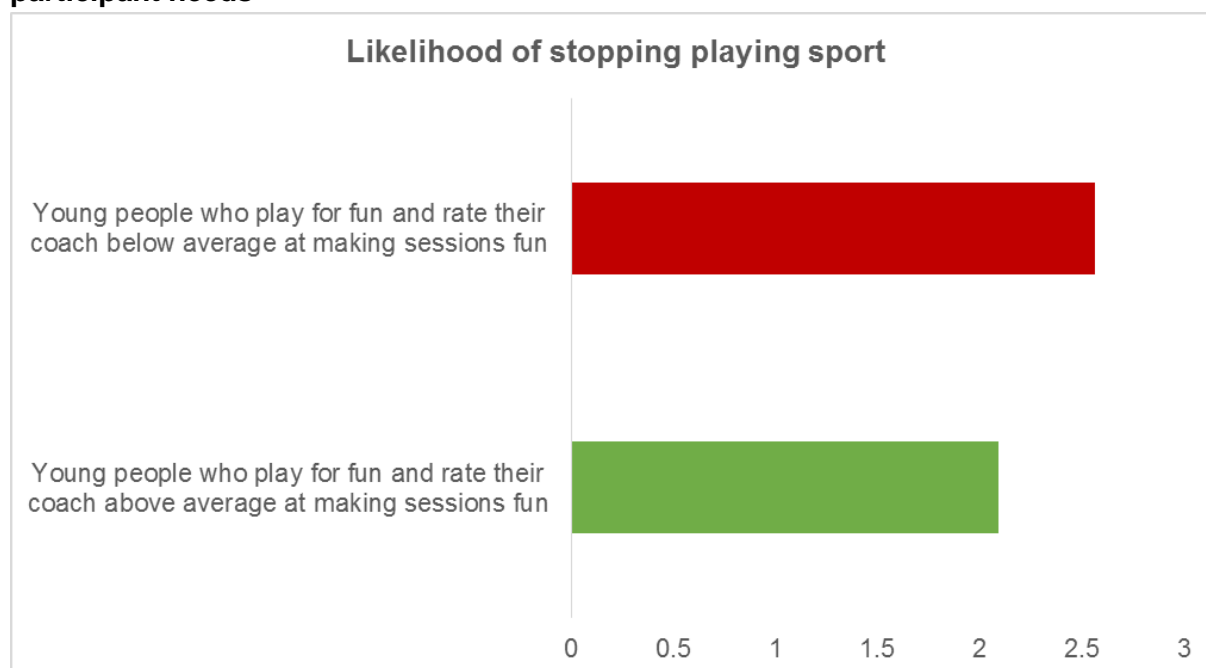
**Figure 1 – Enjoyment of sport by coaches’ ability to meet participant needs**



**Figure 2 – Likelihood of increasing participation by coaches’ ability to meet participant needs**



**Figure 3 – Likelihood of increasing participation by coaches’ ability to meet participant needs**



Additional analysis shows the same pattern is evident in results for young people’s other key motivation for playing sport – improving health and fitness<sup>3</sup>. These findings suggest a link does exist between meeting participants’ needs and better playing experiences (and retention).

The message to NGBs is clear, the more your coaches understand your participants and reflect this in their coaching, the more likely it is they will enjoy playing and keep coming back.

#### **4. How can NGBs help coaches better understand and meet their participants’ needs?**

We recognise that it is relatively easy to present evidence that shows more coaches should consider developing their ability to meet participants’ needs. However, it is much harder for coaches to actually do this in practice, particularly those who are less experienced at analysing and reflecting on their coaching.

Aside from encouraging coaches to ask participants about their motivations and needs, NGBs may consider using the insight available to help coaches understand the core motivations for different groups. In the case of young people, Table 3 below ranks the most frequently cited motivations for playing sport according to the different levels at which young people play.

Regardless of level, having fun, improving health and fitness and getting better are key motivators for all young people<sup>4</sup>. And the only real difference between them is when

<sup>3</sup> Charts are not included in this briefing for brevity.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Fun’ and ‘health/fitness’ were the fourth most popular motivations for ‘competitive’ and ‘county/regional’ participants respectively (both were chosen by only 3% fewer respondents)

competition is added to the mix. Those playing at the higher levels want to compete, whereas beginners/improvers and recreational participants do not (initially at least, though they may advance into one of the more competitive groups in time).

**Table 3 – Motivations of 14-18 year olds playing coached sport at different levels**

Level of Participant	Main Motivation	Motivation 2	Motivation 3
<i>Beginner or improver</i>	For fun	To improve my health/fitness	To develop my sport skills/ability
<i>Recreational (i.e. you play for fun rather than training for competition)</i>	For fun	To improve my health/fitness	To develop my sport skills/ability
<i>Competitive (i.e. club squads or individual competitions)</i>	To improve my health/fitness	To develop my sport skills/ability	To compete for a local club/team
<i>County/Regional</i>	For fun	To compete for a local club/team	To develop my sport skills/ability
<i>National/International</i>	To compete for a local club/team	To develop my sport skills/ability	For fun
			To improve my health

NGBs could provide coaches with this information and encourage them to consider how these core motivations align to the motivations and needs of the participants they coach. The next, more complex, step is for NGBs to help coaches understand how they can design their coaching sessions and plans to ensure their participants' needs are met in the ways they want them to be met.

This process can be guided by more in-depth research and materials. The recent *Self-Determination Theory and Young People* report, for example, includes various ways for coaches to create environments which meet young peoples' motivational needs. It also considers how these needs can vary, for example by age and gender.

As a grounding in this area, however, it is hoped that this briefing helps to promote the benefits of needs-led coaching to a wider audience, particularly NGBs, who are well-placed to support coaches, particularly those with less experience working with young beginners/improvers.

### Further Reading

NGBs and coaches interested in learning more in this area can consider the following resources:

*Self-Determination Theory and Young People*

<http://www.sportscoachuk.org/resource/self-determination-theory-and-young-people>

*The Impact of Coaching on Participants*

<http://www.sportscoachuk.org/resource/impact-coaching-participants-0>

*Research Summary No13: Increasing Young People's Motivation to Play through Coaching*

<http://www.sportscoachuk.org/resource/research-summary-no13-increasing-young-people%E2%80%99s-motivation-play-through-coaching>