

22

Performance



Character Over Cover Drives

The rise of Justin Langer's Australia

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The Benefit of Hindsight

John Portch
Editor
Performance



The ability of sport to pivot during this pandemic has been impressive.

Inspired by steps taken by athletes, coaches and practitioners across the globe, *Performance* asked as many as we could to reflect on what they had learned. Here, we present their problems, challenges and opportunities in their own words. As you might expect, there were a range of answers, but a common thread was the increased time for personal growth and self-reflection. “With great respect and compassion for all those affected, it’s been an amazingly inspiring period,” says Justin Langer, our cover star.

In a little over two years as Head Coach, Langer has led the Australia men’s cricket team back to the top of the world rankings and earned universal respect in the process. The cricket fans amongst you will recall him opening the batting for Australia in the 1990s and 2000s and recognise a team he has fashioned in his own image: resilient, determined and blessed with considerable skill. Here, he reflects on his tenure thus far and how cricket has shaped him as a leader.

Elsewhere in this edition, we speak to Seattle Storm GM Alisha Valavanis about her team’s latest WNBA championship and how the league is powered by its advocacy for causes of social justice.

The New Year is also an opportunity for *Performance* to resurface some of the Leaders *Performance* Institute’s best stories from 2020. To that end, we highlight the initiative shown by McLaren F1 who, when their season was postponed, turned their attention to the production of ventilators at the request of the British government; we also bring you respected GB field hockey coach Danny Kerry and his views on building a winning environment; and finally, neuroscientist Julia Jones – AKA Dr Rock – detailing why music and sound could be game-changers for sport.

We wish you a happy New Year and trust you will find something within these pages to pique your interest or inspire your next project.

Stay safe and well.

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Contents



06

Community Knowledge Four Performance Themes for your Consideration

How members of the Leaders Performance Institute have been using Leaders Virtual Roundtables to share best practice insights during sport's lockdown.

12

Reading List At Home With Leaders

A list of lauded performance-related titles suggested by coaches, general managers and directors of performance on our in-house podcast series.

26

The High Performance Community 13 High Performance Minds Reflect on a Year Like No Other

Athletes, coaches and a variety of practitioners across a range of sports and territories reflect on their lessons learned during an unprecedented year.



14

Justin Langer Character Over Cover Drives

The Head Coach of the Australia men's cricket team tells Performance why he prioritises character over talent in his quest to make Australians proud of his players. Langer also delves into his approach to leading the athletes who comprise the No1 team in the world.

COVER STORY

38

Alisha Valavanis More Than Hoops

The GM of the WNBA-winning Seattle Storm explains how the team's commitment to promoting social justice underpins their success on the court.

46

Danny Kerry Building an Olympic Gold Medal-Winning Environment

Danny Kerry won gold in Rio with the GB women's team and here illustrates how he is seeking to bring that winning mentality to the men's team ahead of Tokyo.

54

Julia Jones Why Music Could Be the Key to Your Athletes' Performance and Wellbeing

Neuroscientist Julia Jones says that music and sound should be viewed as 'nutrition for the ears'.

62

Mark Mathieson & Piers Thynne Rapid Response

Mark Mathieson, Director of Innovation at McLaren Applied Technologies, and Piers Thynne, Production Director at McLaren Racing, describe how the F1 team went from making fast cars to producing ventilators at the start of the pandemic.

Community knowledge

Performance reveals how members of the Leaders Performance Institute have been using Leaders Virtual Roundtables to share best practice insights as sport continues to emerge from the pandemic.

Leaders Virtual Roundtables are a staple resource of the Leaders Performance Institute. These member-only online gatherings came into their own during the pandemic, with the great and good of sport sharing and discussing the performance questions of the day from the comfort of their homes and offices. With topics ranging from coaching and development to data and innovation via human performance, the Leaders Performance Institute has been there to help our members navigate the ever-changing challenges posed by the pandemic. Here, *Performance* presents four common themes for your consideration as we enter 2021.



The fostering of learning environments

Despite most teams being incredibly intentional in their approach to creating learning environments, there are few areas where insecurities run so deep. Those who feel comfortable enough to share their experiences cite the importance of structured activity, frequency and the use of language. The attributes required to win are developing - can you say the same for your athletes?

Key considerations

- You must be able to frame what you are trying to achieve. Learning must be embedded in your daily culture, which means visiting performance questions daily, weekly and monthly. Regular reviews can generate feedback loops that encourage athlete self-reflection. Personal development plans are an invaluable resource, particularly for younger athletes.
- Psychological safety is the most crucial factor in any functioning and successful team. Athletes and coaches require safe spaces to step out of their comfort zones and analysing their deficiencies. They will more comfortable exploring the outer reaches of their talent if they know they will not face dire consequences should they fail.
- Athletes often lack clarity because their coaches fail to grasp their personal motivations and purpose. Work with your athletes to close learning gaps by illustrating the path to the destination. Equally, do you ever consider ways in which you can stimulate excitement and engagement in your sessions?



2.

Performance under pressure

The ability to perform under pressure should, in numerous respects, be a product of your learning environment. But how can training environments be constructed to replicate the competition and consequence of the contest? There is no fool-proof method to guarantee performance in clutch moments but developing an understanding of the athlete when subjected to pressure is a good starting point.

Key considerations

- A number of sports work to periodise their athletes' exposure to pressured situations, just as their physical conditioning might be periodised in the build-up to a competition. Can you think of spells in your training programmes where it would be beneficial to turn up the dial? This is particularly lacking in the periods between major competitions.
- The ebb and flow of sports performance has left some practitioners asking if it is time to roll back on some of the support services provided for athletes. While the pandemic has certainly lent a hand in that regard, there might be value to be gained to letting athletes experience struggles 'in the pit', as one Leaders member put it.
- Ultimately, when considering performance under pressure, coaches need to know if athletes can execute in their control state. There has long been a tendency to focus on the psychological aspects of performance but coaches too often lack an understanding of the physiological responses to pressure.

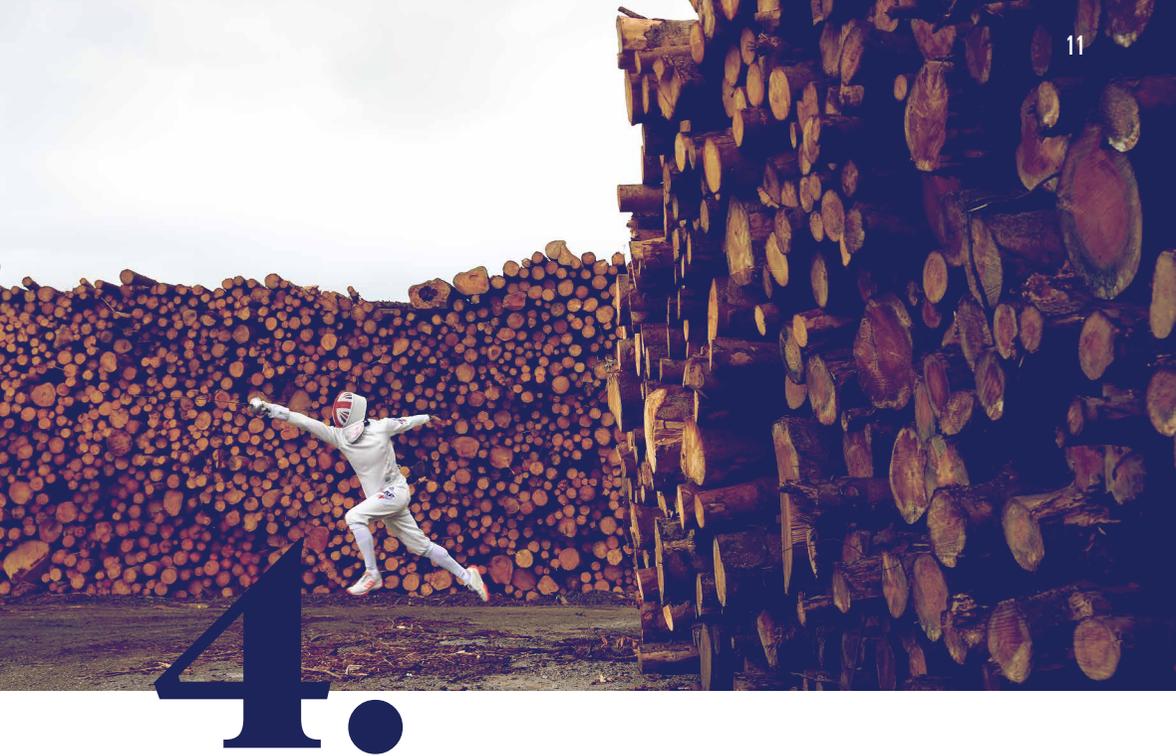


Organisational diversity

The moral case for organisational diversity is sound but it also can bring 'cognitive diversity'. There is no doubt that groups, such as coaching teams and performance staff, can benefit from people who approach problems in different ways while also bringing germane and synergistic qualities to the table. Mindsets need to change in those doing the hiring, but what are some of the other levers that teams can pull to make it a reality beyond the soundbite?

Key considerations

- Do your coaching pathways permit opportunities for all or are their parameters narrowly defined by norms, perceptions and assumptions of a single group or demographic? Consider such aspects as language: does the language of your coaching environment harm, hinder or promote acceptance? It might be that coaches are encouraged to further explore different sports or codes where practices differ.
- Is diversity celebrated in your organisation? Storytelling is important at all levels of team and coaching is no different. Are you as a team providing opportunities for staff to speak of their backgrounds, experiences? There is often complexity in people's backstories that influence how they think and communicate. Therein may lie the cognitive diversity you seek.
- The question of mentoring is receiving ever-greater attention. Having a diverse array of mentors can be the catalyst that encourages greater female or minority participation. Female mentoring programmes, for example, may have considerable benefit but teams want to reach a stage where terms such as 'female coaches' fall out of common usage because diverse workforces are the norm.



Change management

The pandemic has forced change upon teams at a greater rate than anyone was expecting this time last year. When you decide and plot a course, how can you be sure that your athletes, coaches and support staff will follow? Identifying effective strategies for helping people to navigate cultural or individual change could be crucial in 2021.

Key considerations

- A sense of agency in times of uncertainty is essential. Teams need to involve as many employees in their change process as possible if they are to obtain the necessary buy-in. Staff need to understand the organisational reasons for the change, where they may be better off as an individual, and how they can best contribute to the change.
- Your process could easily be derailed by a sense of ambiguity if you do not maintain regular lines of communication. It could be that you do not have the answers but, if that is the case, then you need to inform your people and, if possible, provide deadlines. Showing some vulnerability and proving you do not have all the answers can be a positive.
- What are your organisation's desired behaviours and values and do you strive to live those? You will be in good stead if they carry connotations of growth mindsets, adaptation, embracing challenge and change. If you give such values a platform then you increase the chances of the required change happening. ✨

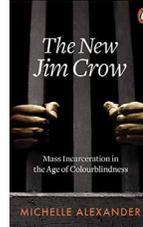
Reading List



**The Power of Moments:
Why Certain Experiences
Have Extraordinary Impact**
Chip Heath & Dan Heath

**Chosen by Danny Kerry,
Head Coach, Great Britain
men's field hockey team:**

"It's brilliantly written in a way that makes you think about how you create moments in people's lives that stick. That's been a really useful tool for thinking about my role. Do we give enough thought to creating sticky moments that will live with your athletes in a good way and pay its dividends when it needs to?"

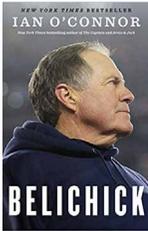


**The New Jim Crow: Mass
Incarceration in the Age
of Colourblindness**
Michelle Alexander

**Chosen by Ben Cherington,
General Manager,
Pittsburgh Pirates:**

"It was recommended to me by one of our players while we had a conversation about racial justice in the wake of George Floyd. It's about the expansion of the prison system and criminalisation of drug use in the United States and what that's done. It's not about baseball but it increases the awareness of someone who looks like me of the experience of someone who does not look like me."

The *At Home With Leaders* podcast series has been a staple of our content here at the Leaders Performance Institute since the beginning of the pandemic. At the end of each interview, we have asked our guests - head coaches, general managers and directors of performance - for a book that provided some food for thought during 2020. Here are five of the best.

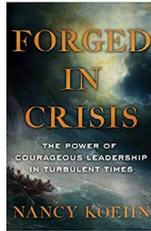


Belichick: The Making of the Greatest Football Coach of All Time

Ian O'Connor

Chosen by Simon Timson, Performance Director, Manchester City:

“There’s a really interesting chapter about his departure from the New York Giants and how the GM of the Giants didn’t think Bill had the charisma to be a head coach. It made me reflect on what we think ‘good’ looks like, what do we really know about people, what makes them tick, how do they operate, how do they deliver success? It’s the interaction of their beliefs, traits, behaviours and the environment that they’re in. We often just need to manipulate the environment to allow people to flourish.”

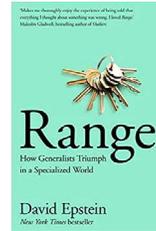


Forged in Crisis: The Power of Courageous Leadership in Turbulent Times

Nancy Koehn

Chosen by Jill Ellis, Ambassador, US Soccer:

“It’s about five leaders [explorer Ernest Shackleton, US President Abraham Lincoln, abolitionist Frederick Douglass, Nazi-resisting clergyman Dietrich Bonhoeffer and environmentalist Rachel Carson] and what she’s done is looked at how they’ve managed in times of crisis. What were the common elements and what were the differences. I am always curious to see what different leaders did.”



Range: How Generalists Triumph in a Specialized World

David Epstein

Chosen by John Thorington, Vice President of Soccer Operations, Los Angeles FC:

“I’m not alone in this, but I found it very thought-provoking, especially as a father, but also in light of our academy and really maximising the potential of all this talent that’s here in Los Angeles and how you do about that in different ways. It starts off comparing Tiger Woods and Roger Federer, as well as ‘kind’ and ‘unkind’ environments. I would recommend it to anyone with a curious mind, parents, or anyone interested in talent development.”

Character Over Cover Drives



A man wearing a green and white Cricket Australia jacket and cap, with his right arm extended. The jacket features the Cricket Australia logo and the text "CRICKET AUSTRALIA". The background is a solid green color.

The rise of Justin Langer's Australia

Justin Langer recalls a Sunday morning stroll through the Fremantle Markets in March 2018. "I went down with my second daughter, which I've done for the last five years whenever I am in Perth," he says.

At the time, Langer was still serving as the Head Coach of Western Australia and the Perth Scorchers. "On most of those visits no one bugs me; we just have our coffee, and we go about our business. The day after 'sandpaper', I reckon 30 or 40 people came up to me."

A day earlier, as Australia played South Africa in Cape Town in the third Test of their series, Australia's Cameron Bancroft had been caught illegally altering the condition of the match ball with sandpaper. A Cricket Australia investigation found Bancroft guilty along with his captain, Steve Smith, and vice-captain, David Warner.

That Sunday morning Langer, who was still absorbing the news himself, became a lightning rod for the locals' emotions. Cricket is arguably the most-popular sport in Australia, with players on both the men's and women's national teams amongst some of the most recognisable faces across the nation. "People were angry and sad. They couldn't believe it," says Langer.

Langer was still coaching Western Australia and *Performance* had not planned to touch upon the incident, which saw Smith, Warner and Bancroft banned for periods varying from nine to 11 months, but he sees it as the natural starting point when discussing Australia men's rise to No1 in the International Cricket Council's Test Team and T20 Team Rankings under his tenure as Head Coach, which began two months later when he signed a four-year contract to succeed Darren Lehmann.

"When I did my first press conference, the most-asked question was: 'how are you going to change the culture of the Australian cricket team?' I remember saying that culture is about behaviours. Positive behaviours to win back the respect of our opponents around the world but also to make Australians proud." Over the course of nearly an hour, Langer continually returns to themes and notions he cited on that day in May 2018.

It is an early November evening and Langer is talking to *Performance* from a hotel room overlooking Sydney Harbour. Australia are due to meet India in a one-day series beginning at the Sydney Cricket Ground just four days later but training had been cancelled that afternoon and Langer has asked to speak a little earlier than the appointed time.

"I presented to the boys this morning and we've still got a big challenge ahead of us because we've got half our squad, those coming back from the IPL [Indian Premier League], staying in quarantine 20km away and those that didn't travel to the IPL staying here," he says, reminding us instantly of the ongoing pandemic. "Our two squads don't come together until the day of the game. That's unprecedented - who would think that could ever happen? It's like a reunion and I cannot wait for Friday afternoon."

Langer is an open, friendly and engaging conversationalist. His answers are considered and pleasingly direct; and the fierce competitor that scored 7,696 runs for Australia across 105 Tests is never far from the surface. "I hate losing and I don't think that will ever leave me," he admits. "I get really introverted and I aware of it. I come out of it a lot quicker now. By the time I wake up the next day I'm usually ready



“WE’VE GOT A PHILOSOPHY IN THE TEAM: ‘WE OVER ME’. IT MEANS ALWAYS CONSIDERING WHAT’S BEST FOR THE TEAM NOT WHAT’S BEST FOR ME BECAUSE IF YOU DO THAT THAT’S HOW IT GETS SPLINTERED; CARING FOR EACH OTHER, LOOKING OUT FOR EACH OTHER.”

JUSTIN LANGER



to go but I talk about being the zen coach, trying to stay as calm as possible. On the days where we lose I want to try and keep a bit better perspective.”

He was a crucial part of the Australia men’s cricket team that dominated international cricket from the mid-1990s through to the mid-2000s. People still talk about Langer and his fellow opening batsman, Matthew Hayden, as one of the finest partnerships in Test cricket history.

The conversation turns to team culture. He says: “I haven’t actually spoken about this publicly before: a lot of people talked about the culture of the Australian after the incident in South Africa, but I would argue that the culture of Australian cricket, maybe not the team in that moment, is as strong as any in the world.” He presents the swift and decisive way in which Cricket Australia conducted its investigation into the incident as evidence. “They took a very strong stand. Whilst it was hard on those three guys, who are like my sons now, I think it just goes to show the strong culture of Australian cricket, which has been successful for so long.”

“IT’S HOW YOU BEHAVE ON THE FIELD, HOW YOU BEHAVE OFF THE FIELD. IF YOU CAN GET UP EVERY DAY AND THINK ABOUT MAKING PEOPLE PROUD OF YOU THEN YOU’RE GOING TO BE OK.”

JUSTIN LANGER

At his inaugural press conference, Langer suggested that the camaraderie of the Australian team at the time was perhaps not as tight as it needed to be when the pressure was on. He said: “One thing I know about Australians, is that mateship is really important and elite mateship within the Australia cricket team is going to be a key value. We’ll have to work and develop that camaraderie.



"We've got a philosophy in the team: 'we over me'. It means always considering what's best for the team not what's best for me because if you do that that's how it gets splintered; caring for each other, looking out for each other." The last point is particularly important to Langer. "I'm supposed to be the tough guy," he says, mindful of the reputation he feels he has earned inaccurately. "You have to care for people and show them love; that's incredibly important."

He tells *Performance* that making Australians proud also remains top of his agenda. "When I presented this morning to my players and staff as a reminder, I keep saying to them, whether it's David Warner, Steve Smith, or Cameron Green, who's coming in for his first tour, 'guys, if you wake up every day thinking of making Australians proud of you, you will never go wrong because 'Australians' means your mum, your dad, your grandparents, your brother, your sisters, your mates and the wider Australian community. It's how you behave on the field, how you behave off the field. If you can get up every day and think about making people proud of you then you're going to be OK."

ABSOLUTE CLARITY

Langer was appointed Head Coach of Western Australia and the Perth Scorchers in November 2012 and he draws parallels with his appointment to the national team post six years later. "I had a very strong foundation and vision of where I thought the team needed to go and I was very clear, from the chairman to the CEO, the Cricket Australia board, and then to the players," he recalls.

"I took over in a crisis period in Western Australian cricket when I first became Head Coach and I was very clear on where we were going and what our behaviours needed to be. Some people call them 'values' but we call them 'behaviours', and they are based on honesty, professionalism, humility, learning and mateship. I was really clear with the captain and I was really clear with the vice-captain, I was clear with the senior players right down to the rookies; 'this is how we're going to go and you're either in or you're out'."

Langer had long been seen in some quarters as Lehmann's successor and had taken the reins from his former Australia teammate for a one-day series in the West Indies in 2016. Now he had the job on a permanent basis, having signed a four-year contract. He had to ensure the values he espoused came to life.

"A lot of psychologists will say you've got to have shared visions and behaviours; that you've got to sit down and you've got to work through them together," he says. "Now, what I've learned, as a past athlete, and I see it all the time in different teams, is that every pre-season, everyone sits down, they work on their mission statement or vision, they set their goals and they set their values, and they write them up on fancy posters around the walls and they put them in their gyms. They're nice words but they're also like toilet paper because no one lives them. For a period in the pre-season, everyone's sitting around singing Kumbaya and



hugging each other; but the thing I've learnt clearly, unless someone is leading those every single day; whoever has got the title, whether it's the captain or the senior players, the head coach, the assistant coaches; unless someone is living them all day, they're just fancy words.

"That's the hardest thing about the job. You've got to be on top of the behaviours every single day and that can be uncomfortable because we all like to be popular. The flipside is that it's not just about catching people when they don't behave the right way – that's not the way to do it in my view." Instead, Langer prefers positive reinforcement. "When they do the behaviours that you expect within your environment, you give them a pat on the back, you give them a hug, you let them know. I've got four kids, and if you tell kids they're doing a good job then they'll want to continue to do the same."

Clarity is essential. "Absolute clarity," he emphasises, "of where we were going and how we were going to go about it; and, because of that, I think it's easy for people to come with you. If it's a bit wishy-washy then it becomes difficult. Then you work hard with the other leaders; in my case Tim Paine [Australia's Test captain], Aaron Finch [Australia's one-day captain] and Pat Cummins, the vice-captain. Alex Carey's been a vice-captain too; we went through a two vice-captain model for the first two years to try and build our leadership. You get them to help you on the path and it makes their job easier because the vision is all set out and it's clear to everybody involved."

MAKING AUSTRALIANS PROUD

For all the promising results in his first two years, Langer tells *Performance*, "at the end of my coaching career, I'll judge myself not on how many titles I win, but how many wedding and Christening invitations I get because it means that I've had an effect on a player's life; they know I care for them. Obviously, our business is winning games of cricket, but if I get wedding and Christening invitations, I know it's more than just winning and losing games of cricket."

"I had lunch with [former Manchester United Manager] Sir Alex Ferguson before the Old Trafford Test last year," says Langer of their engagement during the 2019 Ashes series in England. "It was one of the great moments of my life. I got the same impression, that he really cared for his people and I think that's what the great coaches do. If your players know you care for them, then gosh, they'll run through brick walls for you. That's my experience of the leaders I love and admire the most. Often that care means they can be the hardest on you at times because they're telling you the truth and you might need to be a bit grounded every now and again. What I've learned in life is mentors who have been the toughest on me in life are the people I respect, admire and love and they're still my best mates or my best friends."

Langer argues that players who pull on the baggy green cap for Australia can and do find a deeper fulfilment than winning cricket matches. "I know from first-hand experience you get extraordinary opportunities if you're part of the Australian cricket team. I've been lucky to do it for a very long time. You get to meet and learn from amazing people, you get to be involved with a number of different charities; you get the opportunity, if you want to take it, to make people's lives happier, whether it's sick kids, adults or people who need a lift. The more we can put this in front of our players the better."



“THAT’S THE HARDEST THING ABOUT THE JOB. YOU’VE GOT TO BE ON TOP OF THE BEHAVIOURS EVERY SINGLE DAY AND THAT CAN BE UNCOMFORTABLE BECAUSE WE ALL LIKE TO BE POPULAR.”

JUSTIN LANGER

He also places value in storytelling. “I think the other beautiful thing about sport and cricket, is there’s so many beautiful stories, isn’t there? We’re great storytellers, certainly in Australia we’re great storytellers and I told this story to our players this morning: in 1981, I was 11 years old and Dennis Lillee bowled Viv Richards on the last ball of the Boxing Day Test Match. That was the moment I wanted to be a Test cricketer. I still remember the crowd at the MCG [Melbourne Cricket Ground] was going mad. Dennis Lillee was bowling to my absolute hero Viv Richards, two gladiators going at it, and that was the moment.

“What I say to our players is: ‘this is your moment to be a hero. If you’re a hero, Australian cricket will be alive and well forever, so go and be a hero’. A lot of us our driven by a fear of failure but, because of that drive, it gives us a chance to be heroes. ‘Show us what you’ve got; bring magical moments, win magical games, take a specky catch, do something brilliant because that’s what’ll inspire the kids and your teammates’. Again, that’s the bigger picture than just winning and losing.”



Langer has also continued the long-held tradition of Australian teams bound for England making a stopover at the Gallipoli Peninsula in Turkey to commemorate the 8,709 Australian and 2,721 New Zealanders of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps [ANZAC] who lost their lives in the ill-fated 1915 Dardanelles Campaign of World War I. "We took the guys to Gallipoli and the Western Front before we came

"OBVIOUSLY, OUR BUSINESS IS WINNING GAMES OF CRICKET, BUT IF I GET WEDDING AND CHRISTENING INVITATIONS, I KNOW IT'S MORE THAN JUST WINNING AND LOSING GAMES OF CRICKET."

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JUSTIN LANGER ON USING ANALYTICS

"In our world, it's like all sport, where everything is measured, every statistic. But again, in that sense, you go to the analysts and I say: 'look guys, you're so important to me. You're like another selector, you're like another coach, but

I'm not good at numbers.' I love the movie Moneyball and I love the philosophies but I found the book quite hard to read because there's so many numbers in it. What I say to all our analysts and all our coaches, is: 'guys, sift

through it all and if you can give me the gold nuggets I'll sell it to the players, I'll sell it to the public. I'll sell the gold nuggets and we'll get better because I want to simplify it as much as I can for the players'"

to England for the World Cup in 2019 and Ashes and the year before too." The shocking losses endured by both nations in that expedition are etched in their collective memories. As a national day of remembrance, ANZAC Day is observed in Australia and New Zealand on 25 April, the date in 1915 that the ANZAC landed in Gallipoli and is observed alongside the more widely commemorated 11 November.

He has often spoken of these visits, which include the Commonwealth War Grave Cemeteries of northern France and Belgium, in interviews and press conferences. "They are some of the most sobering experiences of our lives," he tells *Performance*. "And why do we do that? you talk about fulfilment outside of just winning or losing games of cricket and what we get to see is what we are representing, the incredible history of our country; that's a big part of what we're about.

"I talk about making Australians proud and that we develop great cricketers and great people; I've spoken about it for ten years and I've certainly spoken about it to our players. When I spoke this morning, I sent Cameron Green, our new kid on the block, the presentation that we have about the cultural expectations and the player attributes we're looking at. That has been the happiest part of my job over the past two years.

"Not once have I talked about how we're going to be the No1 cricket team in the world and we're going to win this. We're not only a very likeable team again, we've also earned some respect back from overseas, we're also ranked No1 in Test cricket and No1 in T20 cricket. My point is that you can have both; you can be great cricketers and you can be good people. You can get more fulfilment than just how many wickets, runs or wins you can get."



ME OVER WE

The role of the head coach can be limited in cricket compared with some other sports, despite a growing recognition of the importance of making the best possible appointment. "I would say coaching in cricket, compared with other codes, is still quite immature," says Langer. "We'll always have the captain, who does the lion's share of the work on the field, but the head coach's role has certainly changed. I remember particularly the advent of professionalism and how big the game is now with three forms of the game; the guys are on the road 300 days of the year. Certainly, the role of coach is very important. My philosophy is that I never like to say that the head coach is the boss, or the captain or the best player is the boss. I think what I've learned over a long career is that it's people working together and if you have the wisdom to drop the ego of who is the boss, you can create some miracles. If all the leaders are going in the same direction, it's a powerful dynamic and, alternatively, if the leaders aren't going in the same direction it can be a complete disaster."



Langer's captains, from Simon Katich and Sam Voges in Western Australia to Tim Paine and Aaron Finch with the national team, each provoke a reaction in him that ranges from paternal to friendly. He has known each since they were young and watched them grow into some of the finest players in international and first-class cricket. Of Katich and Voges, Langer says: "We played together, and I love their integrity and their character, they've got a great work ethic, and they've got a good way about them.

"Then I fast-forward to taking over this role, and Tim Paine had just come in as captain after South Africa. We've been good mates, I respect what he brings to the table; he's an elite athlete, he's an elite professional, he's savvy in the media, he's got a nice way about him.

"I've got an old saying that I pick character over cover drives any day of the week. What I mean by that is there's so much talent out there but I'm going to back the person with strong integrity and strong character every day of the week over someone with perhaps a little more talent but with less of a character. I will back them every day of the week because under pressure they'll come good for you. This might sound like a silly thing to say, but we try to make each other look good. They'll do their job and I'll do my job, and if we do it well then we make each other look good."

'NO RULES CRICKET'

For Langer, when his playing group returned from the Covid-enforced shutdown in tip-top shape it was evidence of their growing self-reliance and the success of his team's culture. "I was so pumped," he says, while suggesting that international cricketers may be more accustomed to a hub lifestyle and biosecure environments than many others.

He also personally enjoyed the opportunities afforded by the sport's shutdown. "Over eight months I've spent six or seven of those at home with my family. It's been incredible doing all the things I don't do during the year. I've been in my own bed, eating home cooked meals, and I've had no hotels or no airports; I've loved that. I have also given about 40 presentations on leadership."

Langer has also been discussions with other coaches, and turned to books, podcasts and anything that offers an insight into leading because, as he admits, it is not always easy. "To be honest, in the first six months of me taking over the job, that probably got up the nose of a few of the players in training. We have very high standards with our throwing, fielding work and in the nets. In my view, you've got to be strong in your preparation and then, when it comes to match day, it's almost like we play 'no rules cricket'.

"I think what happens in a load of sports is that there's so many rules and so many constraints on the players on match day. Then they start overthinking, but if we can have a scenario where they're just playing what's in front of them, they're playing their role and they're playing no rules cricket, in other words they go about their business. That doesn't mean to say they can be reckless in their approach, in fact it's the opposite. They know their role and they play what's in front of them so on match day it's playtime, whereas at training, for me, it's when you set the standards high. Because the

truth is, certainly in the Australian cricket team, if they don't perform, they don't get selected because there's plenty of talent. That's how I think we go about our business. That old SAS motto 'train hard, fight easy' is something that features in my philosophy.

"I think the other thing that's really important for winning lots of games, whether it's the players or the coaches, is people being clear what their roles are. It takes pressure off the players; they're not thinking about everything, they're just thinking about what they must do to be successful. All the great players I've seen, particularly in cricket but in various sports, they're like zen masters because they simplify it down to a couple of important cues and they simplify their games to the point that they know exactly what to do at different times."

Then when the match begins, it is over to the players and Langer takes his place in the pavilion or balcony. "One of my favourite rituals is that moment just before the first ball is bowled. I'm nervous in all forms, but I go and get myself a cup of coffee and I take a big breath and I go 'sit back and enjoy the show'. We work hard on helping our guys become the best they can be on and off the cricket field. But then you sit back and enjoy the show." ✨



"YOU CAN HAVE BOTH; YOU CAN BE GREAT CRICKETERS AND YOU CAN BE GOOD PEOPLE. YOU CAN GET MORE FULFILMENT THAN JUST HOW MANY WICKETS, RUNS OR WINS YOU CAN GET."

JUSTIN LANGER

JUSTIN LANGER ON HIS APPROACH TO RECEIVING FEEDBACK

"Throughout my whole tenure as a head coach, I'm always asking for feedback. There's two parts to this, though. If you do ask for feedback, which we do regularly and I do regularly, personally and

collectively, then you've got to be ready to take the feedback; and a lot of people aren't willing to do that because it's so confronting. The second part of it is that if you do get feedback and learnings, you've

got to make sure you act on it otherwise people think you're just have meetings for the sake of meetings. It's something I've worked hard on because, if you don't, it doesn't actually mean anything."

13

High Performance Minds Reflect on a Year Like No Other

At the end of 2020, *Performance* asked athletes, coaches and a variety of practitioners across a range of sports and territories to reflect on their lessons learned during an unprecedented year. These are 13 responses from individuals who each experienced sports' shutdown (and re-emergence) in different ways. Some of their stories are professional, some personal, but their reflections are presented in their own words.



2020 was a big inhale and long exhale

By Asha Philip, Olympic bronze medallist, Great Britain

Throughout 2020 I've realised I could probably do more than I thought I could. This year wasn't so stressful knowing that I wasn't going to race and there wasn't going to be an Olympics. I took a different approach and I feel like I took this year with less stress and more enjoyment and I relaxed. It opened my eyes to things

I could improve on or things that I thought weren't broken; this period helped me to see all the cracks. When I started training again in October, my plan, from the first day I walk in to the Olympic trials, was written out already; and it just had a different effect on me. I think it's because I planned everything; it just made it easier to go with the flow. Usually, I look up to Steve Fudge, my coach, but I wouldn't do much myself. I took more of the reins this year and put on my big girl pants and took some actual decisions which I'd been avoiding.

I got time to spend with my family and I've been able to relax. I've been doing sport since the day I could walk so it was great to have a year off where I could sit back and appreciate how far I've come. Now I've had that break I am going to fight harder in 2021. I was just a bit annoyed that there wasn't any clarity at the beginning. 'Is the Olympics on? Is there going to be any racing?' But, once I'd come to terms with what I was going to do, it was perfect. My mind felt better, I felt relieved; 2020 has been a big inhale and a long exhale and that's exactly what I needed.



Feeling a sense of belonging amid the chaos

By Ian Mitchell, Head of Performance Psychology, FA

While the pandemic introduced chaos, I did find that this was facilitative in many ways and helped me and those I worked with appreciate how and why uncertainty isn't always a derailer. Uncertainty can never be seen as something that we can't learn from as we know in high performance sport; this is the way it works – in fact it's fundamental in the environment in order to be successful at the highest level. A lot of the chaos and resultant uncertainty during

the pandemic forced people to start thinking about things that were out of their control and encouraged an element of threat – so thoughts about what could go wrong as opposed to what opportunities this may bring. That is hard when you're leading teams from a distance whilst trying to develop an enabling culture to be successful. So, a key learning for me was to understand how I could strive for a deep level of trust and a shared sense of belonging with others – the people I worked with and was leading. As we know, in the past, building trust has been quite primitive in that face-to-face connection is critical. In larger groups (e.g. teams and support staff), during the pandemic, the normal lifestyle structure was fractured because of remote leadership and working through distant social connections; and there was a danger of a sense of lost trust in others. The shared sense of identity with others whereby the power of our story and awareness of who we are and what we represent became pivotal in our work for people to feel a real sense of belonging which I believe provides the core foundation for resilience to develop and enable people and groups to thrive.



The search for personal meaning

By Zach Brandon, Coordinator, Mental Skills, Arizona Diamondbacks

In an era where everyone is striving to optimize human performance, 2020 has reminded us all that the word 'human' comes first for a reason.

As human beings, we often default to resist change, yet change is the basic fabric of life. One of the inherent challenges with change is that it is accompanied by loss. We can't experience change without losing something. Loss in 2020 for athletes, and even staff, included obstructed seasons, delayed goals and opportunities, adjustments to new

routines, and in some cases a diminished motivation and vision for the future, among other things. All of these experiences added together created a perfect recipe for feelings of uncertainty and stress.

In January 2020 (which feels centuries ago), I read a book called *The Upside of Stress* by Dr Kelly McGonigal. Little did I realize how timely and influential this book would be throughout 2020. McGonigal outlines substantial evidence that illustrates how our perspective toward and relationship with stress is what dramatically shapes its effect on us. We are far better off not trying to rid it from our life, but rather embrace what it provides for us which is energy that can be mobilized and a reminder of the things that are personally meaningful to us.

I've revisited the principles and lessons in this book frequently over the past year and they've become common themes in my daily conversations with players and staff. We may not be able to control the events in our lives, but we can choose our response (our perspective) to those events. The biggest lesson I've learned this year is that 'Perspective is the only thing that can significantly change the outcome without changing any of the facts.'



A move away from traditional methods and mindsets

By Matt Daniels, Head of Strength & Conditioning, St Helens RFC

In highlighting the challenges we continue to face, I feel it's important that we recognise that we are not alone in experiencing such feelings and we must acknowledge and be empathetic more than ever within our workplace particularly with the athletes we are in contact with.

A positive and enthusiastic mindset, whilst maybe not 100% sustainable, is a good foundation on which to base our approach both to work and day to day life in general. We have found with our athletes that an authentic level of positivity and honesty supported by clear and concise plan which is adaptable has been of real benefit during these difficult times. The progression of the 'person first' approach to the athletes has increased genuine relationship engagement which has transcended both playing and coaching group.

We have seen many positives and learned a great deal in the face of this adversity. One of the biggest with our group came during the lockdown period. We provided a pick and mix home training program of activities and drills (on feet conditioning, skill drills, speed/agility, strength, power, cardio) and gave players autonomy over their training. For most this was an alien experience as players are institutionalised in turning up and being directed through a day which is as we know is common practice



in the vast majority of professional sporting organisations from youth to senior level. To lose this level of dependency upon staff and to engage in the process of time management preparation and planning was a major area of growth within our playing squad and one that they embraced. This was evident in the detailed feedback of training diaries and was further supported by improved fitness testing scores upon return to training. This was pivotal to performance with a short lead time (2 weeks) to the competition restart. Through this process players further enhanced trust and respect from the coaching group but more importantly from their peers.

Return to training post lockdown also brought about an enforced but subsequently beneficial learning curve. The introduction of Covid-safe restrictions, regulations and practices dictated a complete change in logistics and 'normal' programming/structures. This alternative way of thinking and the approach to what we do and how we do it inadvertently paved the path for some impactful positive changes which would have never been considered under normal circumstances and traditional methods. The increased element of change and adaptability of both staff and players is further evidence of clear shift away from those traditional methods and mindsets.



Finding compassion for yourself and others

By Dehra Harris, Assistant Director of High Performance, Toronto Blue Jays

2020 taught me a great deal about compassion – for myself and for others. As we all faced new challenges and unprecedented levels of global stress with Covid, my family was also experiencing the significant personal loss of my son to cancer.

High performers have often been taught to approach so many of our challenges by working harder or by ignoring adversity and pushing through and yet suddenly we were forced to turn inwards – into our homes for work and into more self-reflection as the world took on a new form. I have new questions now about how much of our mental focus should go to errors and things to fix and how much should turn to repeating what makes us effective.

Recent work in neuroplasticity shows that we increase the frequency of the things we focus on – and it has led me to think carefully about some of the wisdom around self-awareness. Is it true that we have to be relentless to improve – or is it instead a balancing act where self-awareness is more about self-compassion – and handling ourselves with open thoughts and belief in our potential to change? I wonder how many of us are mistaking our perfectionism and fear of failure as being the power behind our drive to succeed. Could we perform at a high level of



joy and not fear? There are many ways where I want even more out of my life and career after the loss my family experienced – and in other ways, I have deepened my understanding and acceptance that many parts of my journey are truly out of my control, and it is important to experience joy each day with the people who matter to me. Some of my favourite mentors have careers defined by their curiosity – they are playful and connected and yes – relentless about the things that interest them.

Curiosity is my favourite kind of self-awareness – because for me it signals presence and appreciation for the beautiful task in front of you and a natural optimism that you will find the answer. On a personal level, I am finding more joy focusing on what works – and in the simple moments – like returning to dance, and I am less convinced that being driven has anything to do with fear. At the very least, I find compassion helps me find ways to enjoy the moments of our game – how the field looks when the sun hasn't yet fully come up, the first notes of music from the cages as the morning work begins, the sound of the first pitch hitting a catcher's mitt. It is a beautiful privilege to spend time on sport – to spend time on individual and team pursuits – and to truly be part of a team that wants something we can only create together.



Try, fail and adapt

*By Joe Boylan, Assistant Coach,
New Orleans Pelicans*

This year, I learned more about the power of the mind. Words alone aren't effective in coaching or teaching. Only through experiencing ourselves do lessons take footing. I should know, friends and mentors had long been telling me about how valuable mental quickness was in sports and in life. I learned by reading books like *Range* and *Seeking Wisdom: From Darwin to Munger*, that building a latticework of knowledge about foundational principles across a variety of domains is what saves smart people time. In reading *Neuroteach* and *The Feedback Fallacy*, I began to see how focusing on errors in training and trying to coach a player with their guards up was a fool's errand. I found I

correct too much as a coach and don't spend enough time designing the environment that lets the flower bloom on its own. I learned that a player's abilities, their knowledge and their know-how, are all built off their existing scaffolding. You have to meet the player where they are, not the other way around.

When Covid forced changed in coaching, I worked with a brilliant psychologist named Jenna Rosen in New Orleans and we collaborated to provide a pilot program of mental skills services to our players. We spent time on Zoom daily with a handful of Pelicans players, breathing and building together. We set intentions, had a beginner's mind and did daily work. With every player we worked with, it was different. I was drawn back to the idea of scaffolding — everyone's plan and path was unique. All of a sudden, I learned I could let them teach me too, on the best way to get the best out of them. Again, I was learning about the power of the mind. Mental imagery and meditation became bedrocks of my daily life this year. I started listening to *The Strangest Secret* by Earl Nightingale. When I told Rachel Woodland at Leaders Institute about my interest in this topic, she introduced me to both Larry Lauer, the Mental Skills Specialist from the USTA and Zach Brandon, the Mental Skills Coordinator from the Arizona Diamondbacks. They both received my questions openly and encouraged me to continue to try, fail, and adapt at coaching the mental side of the game.



The death of the handshake

*By Mo Bobat, Performance Director,
England & Wales Cricket Board*

It's difficult to know where to start as the learning opportunities have come thick and fast. We can probably all reference technical areas of learning across a range of subject areas – I'm pretty sure I've never used words such as 'furlough' or 'biosecure' before. Similarly, I certainly wouldn't have predicted 'the death of the handshake' or 'the death of the buffet'!

Some of my strongest areas of learning have been...

- During lockdown and the early stages of the return, players took ownership for their own training in a manner that exceeded expectations. Just shows how much more independent players can be given the opportunity.
- As we returned to small group training, players practised with greater purpose and intensity. The time constraints on training appeared to sharpen the focus of players and coaches.
- During our Behind Closed Doors series, larger player groups meant that we had more 'best versus best' interactions, which was great for development and benchmarking. Players, coaches and support staff valued this and it left us all craving more.
- It hasn't always been possible or beneficial to plan as far in advance as we would normally. Instead, we've aimed to plan

with flexibility and options in mind and have made decisions late. I've personally attempted to be clear on my 'main effort' at any given time, which has helped me to prioritise and concentrate on execution.

- It became obvious how much we all crave certainty and how without it, we tend to expend a lot of anxious energy. Getting better at tolerating uncertainty is probably a healthy individual and collective aspiration.
- From a personal wellbeing perspective, freedom of the mind came from the discipline that I imposed on myself – positive routines, habits and boundaries.
- Our relationship with risk has been hugely disrupted which has presented challenges for decision making. Try to be the person that brings the positivity and looks for the opportunity in a scenario... but be warned, this will take persistent motivation and demands energy!
- With our global and sporting context likely to remain as it is for the time being, we need to 'win' on two fronts. We must beat our schedule if we want to beat our opposition. This will demand that we prioritise effectively and that we are brave and creative in our decision making. A proactive approach to selection, preparation, rest and rotation will increase our likelihood of success, and give us a better chance of managing player and staff wellbeing.
- While more is being demanded of all of us, resources are going to become constrained and, in some cases, limited. Individually and collectively, we will need to be able to offer a greater breadth of specialism.
- When delivering difficult decisions, ethical intent, conviction and compassion have proven to be important ingredients.
- If all else fails, hide behind 'the science' or 'the data'!



Improvise, adapt and overcome

By Troy Cooley, cricket coach

I was made redundant; the organisation didn't need me as a coach in this pandemic. Given this Covid-19 challenge and the ongoing adjustments, there will be plenty of stories to be told and lessons learnt that will be on my reading list through Leaders in this review project. Besides the huge financial losses and staffing cuts, industries that have been creative, and change are finding ways to not only keep trading but are thriving.

When our organisation stood down 80% of the employees, which included all coaching staff, on one day a week for two months in a bid to reduce operational costs it was hard not to take it personally.

Dusting off the ego the first reminder was realising how important your network of family, friends and colleagues is. Three words readjusted my personal value. A military hardened colleague's timely reminder about my creative skills as a coach and leader was summarised in three simple words: improvise, adapt and overcome.

- Networking is not just a key to adding knowledge to your job and life skills it's great for your well-being. (Thanks Lee Campbell – B. Firm). My lesson, two heads are better than one and when given complex problems help is not far away.

Houston, we have a problem and it's not going away fast. I needed to adapt to this new challenge. As I watched people fumble around

with how to fix this problem, the bottom line was money and how we can survive with less until it blows over. It was a quick reminder that development was pushed back and that youth programs were going to have to improvise until further notice. Forget youth at your peril was front and centre in my thinking but unfortunately not at the decision-making table. My role had recently moved to 70% development and it was very evident that not only coaches, but youth was being relegated in the decision making in this complex issue. Coaches are change agents and solving problems is part of the DNA requirement. Only operating on one day a week to support my needs as a family provider I looked for other ways to solve problems. My brother, a Doctor of Psychology, sent me a podcast to listen to as we discussed the many issues being confronted dealing with this pandemic. John Aaron the architect of the safe return of Apollo 13 gave me a gentle reminder my decision-making process might need a tweak; this was a complex time not a complicated time. 'There are two types of problems, ones you can manage and ones you have to fix,' Apollo flight controller, John Aaron.

- Complicated and Complex problems need a clear decision-making process. (Thanks, Big Brother and John Aaron). My lesson: you need decision-making processes that can handle complicated and complex issues. Sometimes satisficing is required over optimising.

Organisations need to be nimble and make changes on the run. Finding the core problem to fix or manage Nigel Collin [author of the Game



of Inches] is quick to highlight the three key ingredients in implementing successful change. 1) Change is the property of everyone; 2) you need to find the core problem; and 3) an incremental step process to firstly gain momentum and get things moving underpins sustained success.

- Change needs a plan and it needs good leaders with skills in both management processes and people behaviour to have any chance of motivating people to set up for sustained success. My lesson - make sure I was tackling the core problem.

Leaders have a great opportunity to be motivators. Listening to Ayrton Senna, he had a plan for negotiating the difficult corners to set up for what was a chance to take the advantage of the straight. Leaders need to have good knowledge of what the organisation's purpose is, what is making people get out of bed to come to work, the scope of the role/task and then how to combine these two needs will foster an autonomous motivational environment. If your leadership models the right behaviour, you can connect with your team and ensure you involve them in the problem solving and goal setting you will create a working environment that all the benefits autonomous motivation brings from high self-determination of the people working in it. This positive environment is where people lift their input because they want to, they love coming to work and striving to improve and they will be more creative and hang in there longer to get the job done. For me as a coach this is an environment what you wanted the skills to be managing as it was the best chance to overcome challenges and deliver on the goal. No doubt there are more mistakes to be made as we move into the next stage of Covid-19 life cycle – the hybrid stage. I look forward to improvising, adapting and overcoming because the alternative is not on my radar.

- Leaders keep building knowledge and understanding on a key stakeholder in organisational context – people. My Lesson – people are a great return on your investment.



It's been about surviving - together

By Huw Jennings, Academy Director, Fulham FC

In many ways 2020 has been a year when I have learned the most about myself and my colleagues. These are unprecedented times and the new experiences that we have all faced have tested us to the limit. I have learned to try to be agile in my communication and decision making, resilient when dealing with adversity and not to be surprised by have to deal with new and alternative norms. Keeping a sense of perspective and humour have also helped, this year isn't about football or sport it's about working and sticking together to survive.



The welfare of people is the priority

*By Gavin Makel, Managing Director,
Manchester City Women's Football Club*

It seems to be quite apt that I'm writing this on the first day of the second UK national lockdown, where after some 7-8 months since the first one began change and adaptability have been the cornerstones of what has been required. Yet, whilst at the beginning of March there was maybe a feeling of anxiety, panic and confusion, as everyone struggled to come to terms with what was going on. This time around however, although some of those feelings may persist, there is now an acceptance of this being the 'new normal'.

Gone is the novelty that may have lived in the early part of spring from connecting virtually for both business and social purposes, as we look at our daily calendars and see the overlapping number of video calls that fill the day. The opportunity to connect with people face to face by the coffee machine or office printer is something that cannot be replaced and ultimately something which as human beings we all crave for.

Within that time, however, sport has had a huge important role to play in ensuring people feel connected and have something to look forward to, despite the eerily and saddened view of empty stadia. In our recent visit to Wembley for the Women's FA Cup Final, it was difficult not to think about how the day would have been made even more special had we'd been able to share it with fans in what was a



great advertisement for the women's game, but of course the safety and wellbeing of all takes priority over everything.

However, rather than looking at things that are somewhat out of our control, my reflections on events over the last nine months are generally positive in nature when looking through the lens as a business leader. Of course there have been operational and logistical challenges along the way but the way in which I have seen my team pull together and be persistent in finding solutions to the myriad of challenges and scenarios that we have faced has been mesmerizing to say the least. The welfare of all our people within the business, whether they are an athlete or member of staff has always been the first priority, but I believe the lockdown as a result has made us feel ever more grateful for the relationships that we have, which has ultimately brought the group closer together.

We therefore need to consider how we harness and foster these relationships whilst continuing to put the welfare of everyone at the forefront of our thinking, when things do return to some sense of normality. Throughout this period, one of my biggest learnings has been in just how resilient we are as human beings and as a group but really I should not be surprised, as elite performers within any field or industry in any job role will always find a way!



Dancing in the rain

By Frank Ponissi, General Manager, Melbourne Storm

In November 2019, I read a quote on a park bench in Central Park in New York which read 'Life isn't about waiting for the Storm to pass. It's about learning how to dance in the rain'. In 2020 I have learnt that you cannot successfully dance in the rain without a high and consistent level of adaptability and resilience.



Family values

By Jill Ellis, Ambassador, US Soccer

I learned that I really love my family! For five and a half years I was literally this satellite; you bounce in and out. It sounds silly but it's reinforced what I love about my family; being able to spend so much time with them.



Combating the arrogance of ignorance

By Xavi Schelling, Director of Sports Science & Athletic Performance, San Antonio Spurs

- This pandemic is proving once again how resilient humans are. Facing social distancing, isolation, lower incomes, it's not easy, especially considering the asymmetric effects of this pandemic on different populations. Covid-19 is reminding us the hard way that collective adaptability and collective recovery from adversity is critical for survival.
- Crises bring out the best and worst in people. We have seen generous people going out of their way to help others in more need or at risk (e.g. health care workers), and selfish people sabotaging simple rules that have been proven to help the community. How we act in critical times defines who we really are as human beings. And this is another lesson from this pandemic.
- This pandemic has also shown the arrogance of ignorance. Instead of letting systematic processes and experts (i.e., science) to drive the actions, in this post-truth world decisions are framed by self-interest and appeal to emotion disconnected from facts. ✨

More Than Hoops

The Seattle Storm blew away the competition during the 2020 WNBA season and continued the team's commitment to supporting social justice causes.





When *Performance* asks Alisha Valavanis about the typical profile of a Seattle Storm player, her answer is emphatic.

“I can even speak more broadly that the Seattle Storm,” says the team’s CEO and General Manager. “This season, the players of the WNBA continued to show they represent something more than just the best women’s basketball players in the world.”

In July, the WNBA formed its Social Justice Council, its mission to raise awareness on issues concerning race, voting rights and LGBTQ+ advocacy. Throughout the season, players entered the court inside the Covid-secure bubble at IMG Academy in Bradenton, Florida, wearing jerseys emblazoned with the name of Breonna Taylor, a black woman who was killed by police officers in Louisville, Kentucky, in March.

Ahead of the Storm’s first game in the bubble, against the New York Liberty, both sets of players left the court ahead of the playing of the US National Anthem, save for the Storm’s Breanna Stewart and New York’s Layshia Clarendon, both members of the Social Justice Council, who remained on the floor to speak about Taylor.

“Along the way we watched those initiatives play out,” says Valavanis from Seattle in a FaceTime interview, “and it was really special that the bubble was more than hoops.”

Yet the Storm excelled at the hoops. As the No2-seed, they went through the postseason 6-0, winning by 15.3 points on average before routing the No1-seed Las Vegas Aces 92-59 in game three of the finals. The result was the franchise’s fourth WNBA championship.

Just days later, Russell Wilson, the Seattle Seahawks quarterback, appeared at an NFL post-game press conference sporting Sue Bird’s jersey in a gesture of civic, sporting solidarity. “I feel like Sue Bird in the clutch,” he told journalists of his tribute to the 17-year Storm veteran when asked about his own sterling performance.

“Saying something like ‘Oh, I was like Sue Bird in the clutch,’ is putting it on the same level without the comparison [to men’s sport],” Bird said when asked about Wilson’s comment on *The Old Man and The Three* podcast. “And so it does mean a lot and that was really cool for him to do and for me to see.”

Bird was one of the figureheads of the Storm’s recent rebuild and, with her teammates, helped to elevate the team to a level where it has claimed two of the last three WNBA championships.

Here, *Performance* investigates how the Seattle Storm’s commitment to promoting social justice underpins their success on the court.

Sisters in arms

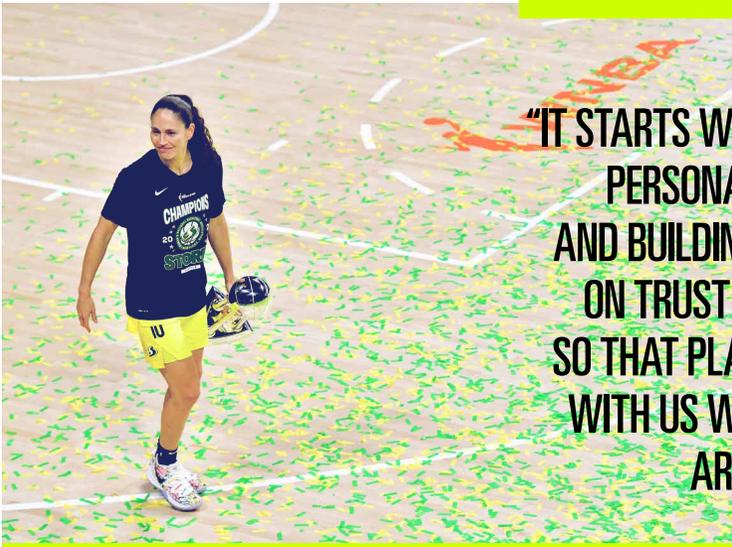
Back in January, Bird, in her position as a Vice President of the WNBPA, the players' union, was involved in the negotiation of the players' new eight-year collective bargaining agreement, with landmark stipulations that included improved salaries and greater maternity benefits.

Then the pandemic intervened. The WNBA draft went virtual, the planned 36-game regular season was postponed and reduced to 22 games [with a truncated preseason], and Storm Head Coach Dan Hughes was unable to enter the WNBA bubble in June due to health concerns. He would hand the reins to his assistant, Gary Kloppenburg.

Nevertheless, the Storm's depth and cohesion amid the disruption always placed them in good stead to reclaim the WNBA championship they had won in 2018, but nowhere are the threads

of sporting excellence and social justice more tightly entwined than the WNBA. Decisions, such as the creation of its Social Justice Council, feel inevitable with the benefit of hindsight. The league may have been moving in that direction but the cause gained momentum in March when Breonna Taylor died.

Against the backdrop of the pandemic, various incidents of racially-motivated police brutality, and an increasingly toxic US presidential race, the players felt they needed to act. As Bird told *NPR* in October: "Our season was going to have to be played with social justice messages, on our jerseys, on the floor — forefront and, to [the league's] credit, right from the jump, they were in." With the national elections on the horizon, the WNBA also committed to combating voter suppression through a series of voter education and registration initiatives.



**"IT STARTS WITH ESTABLISHING
PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS
AND BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS
ON TRUST AND CONNECTION
SO THAT PLAYERS CAN SHARE
WITH US WHAT THEIR HOPES
ARE OFF THE COURT."**

ALISHA VALAVANIS

SAY HER NAME



Throughout the Storm's 94 days in the WNBA bubble [widely referred to as the 'wubble'], the team never let up in its approach to winning games and fighting for their chosen causes. "Everyone really focused on what the season could be about, how we could stay true to our core values," says Valavanis.

Those values come from the top. The Seattle Storm's culture is driven by the team's owners Lisa Brummel, Ginny Gilder [an Olympic silver medallist in sculling at the 1984 Los Angeles Games], and Dawn Trudeau, who make up one of the few female ownership groups in North American sport. The trio bought the team through their holding company, Force 10, in 2008. The original ownership group also included Anne Levinson, who left in 2010.

"I don't think you can be a part of women's pro sports, or even women's college sports at this point, and not realize, if you're at all awake, that you're on the front lines of trying to generate access to opportunity," said Gilder in a 2017 interview with *ThinkProgress*. "It kind of goes with the

territory still. You don't have the privilege of feeling entitled."

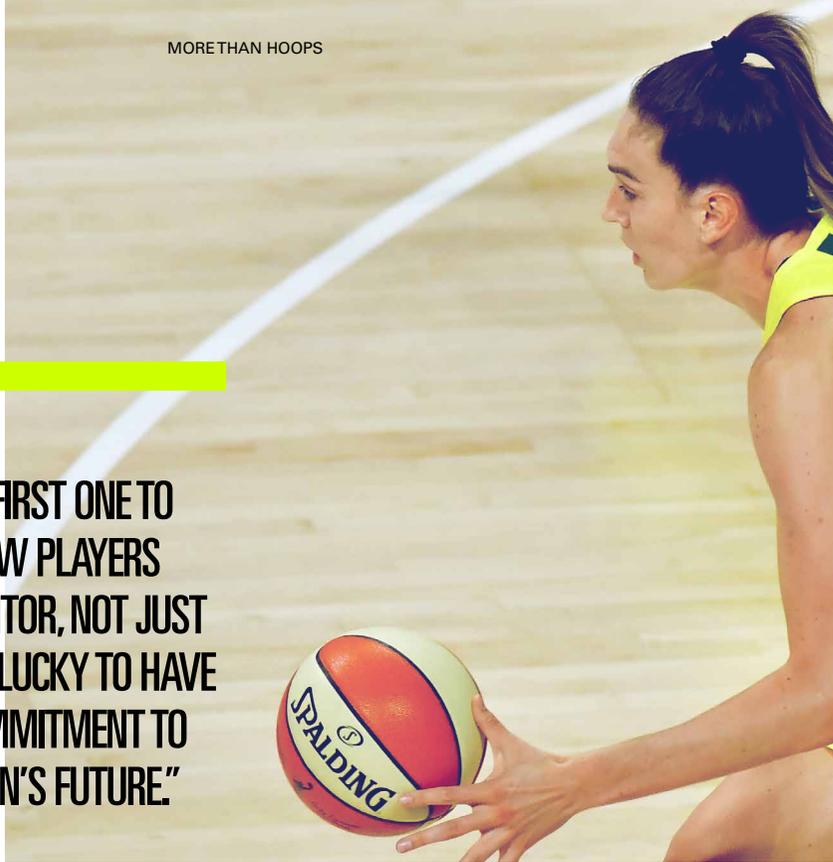
Three years on, the message has been amplified, as Valavanis says: "We focus a ton of time and energy on fostering a positive culture, protecting that culture. On the court, the players are the custodians of that vision."

"We understand what it's like to have to band together and fight for respect," Bird told *NPR*. "When you're a male athlete you're allowed to just play your sport. But everything about us, regardless of our play on the court, we're judged on. We're judged on what we look like, we're judged on who we love. And it's been that way for many, many years."

This sisters in arms mentality galvanised the roster and allowed the team's talents to flourish, even when Bird missed 11 regular games to due to bruising in her left knee. "Night-in, night-out we had different players in different roles," says Valavanis. "The goal of the group was to win - it was not about which player scored 30 points - it was the collective interest in cutting down the nets at the end."

“SUE BIRD IS THE FIRST ONE TO REACH OUT TO NEW PLAYERS AND SHE’S A MENTOR, NOT JUST A LEADER. WE’RE LUCKY TO HAVE HER AND HER COMMITMENT TO THE ORGANISATION’S FUTURE.”

ALISHA VALAVANIS



Being intentional about culture

Delve into the Storm’s locker room culture and Bird’s name comes up time and again. She has played for Seattle since 2002, winning a joint-record four WNBA championships in the process. The first of those came in 2004, the second in 2010.

Valavanis arrived as CEO and GM in 2014 and immediately set upon the rebuild that saw the Storm acquire two future WNBA All-Stars in Jewell Loyd, the guard who was drafted first overall in 2015, and Stewart at forward, who was the first pick in 2016. Piece by piece the roster solidified around a clutch of generational talents and third championship followed in 2018.

It takes a collective effort across the Storm’s locker room and front office to create an environment where the world’s best want

to play. “It starts with establishing personal relationships and building relationships on trust and connection so that players can share with us what their hopes are off the court,” says Valavanis.

“One of the first steps is introducing the new players to the ownership group. That’s a key part of getting to know the organisation you’re going to be part of and gives the player an understanding of the history, core values as well as future goals and hopes.

“There’s a real intentional effort to learn all about all of the individuals in our organisation and we certainly have conversations with players on how we can support them and make sure that everyone is clear what it means to be part of this organisation.” The players feel both welcomed and wanted.



Playing with WNBA icons

Within weeks of the Storm sealing the 2020 championship, Valavanis stated that her attention was turning towards free agency, which begins in January, and the 2021 draft. There can be no greater incentive than the opportunity to play in a team packed with WNBA icons.



For one, Bird is always ready to impart her wisdom and experience. “She’s the first one to reach out to new players and she’s a mentor, not just a leader,” says Valavanis. “We’re lucky to have her and her commitment to the organisation’s future.” Then there are Loyd, Stewart, Alysha Clark and Natasha Howard. “There is also no question that these players are a major part of getting to know new players and those relationships they foster are important.”

Bird and Stewart missed the entirety of the 2019 season through injury. Bird underwent arthroscopic knee surgery and Stewart suffered a torn Achilles while playing for Dynamo Kursk in EuroLeague basketball. The team needed to turn to its bench and, during the season, Bird was replaced at point guard by Jordin Canada, who started 29 games and acquitted herself admirably. This season, Canada started just 11 games but came off the bench on a further nine occasions to influence proceedings. Kloppenburg had made it clear to Canada beforehand how he intended to deploy her in 2020. In truth, his preferred starting line-up tended to pick itself when available, but he needed a sensible player rotation that enabled his veterans to rest and recover, while ensuring the younger players who stepped up in 2019, such as Canada and center Mercedes Russell, were happy despite their reduced minutes.

“We’ve talked to [Canada and Russell], and they understand obviously that their role is going to change this year,” said Kloppenburg on a media call in July. “However, those two starters that are now coming off the bench really established that they’re very good players in this league so it really enhances our team.” It augurs well for the future too.

The signs of Canada’s desire to learn were there in 2017 when she reached out to Bird during her senior year at UCLA. The two spoke on the phone and, eight months later, became teammates when Seattle took Canada as the fifth overall pick at the 2018 draft.

“It’s an honour being able to learn from the best,” Canada told *Fox Sports* that same year. “It’s great for me. I see her in practice and games and what she does, her confidence, the way she leads. It’s unbelievable to experience that first-hand.”

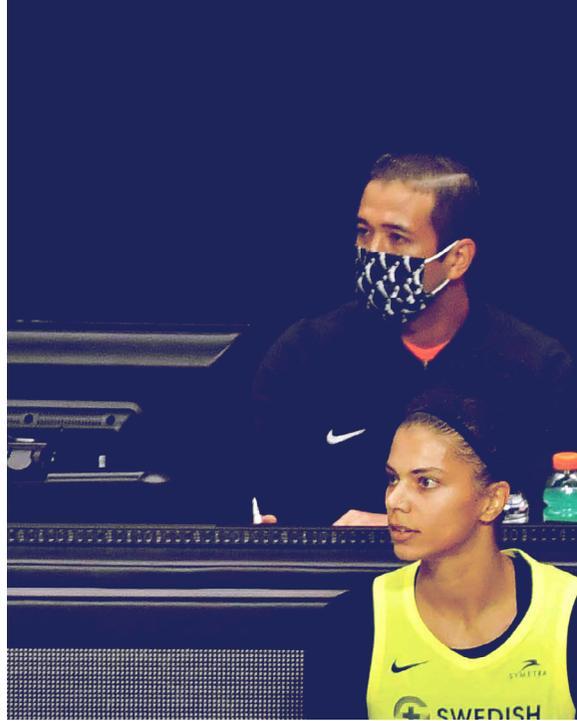
For her part, Bird was happy to talk. “It’s a huge compliment when that happens,” she said in the same article. “They are doing it for a reason. I didn’t know Jordin personally, but had seen her play a few times.” Canada also sent Bird a written note to express her gratitude.

Bird’s teammates laud both her humility and commitment to the cause. “She’s the ultimate professional. She’s incredibly humble,” Clark told *NBC Sports* in November. “I joked one time like, ‘listen if I had all the accolades you had, nobody would be able to tell me anything.’ That’s just who she is.

“She’s always doing her rehab and recovery workouts or just fuelling her body in a way that just helps her maintain and perform at that high level. So when you see that on a daily basis as a teammate, it only inspires you to want to do the same and learn from that.”

“I feel like I’m learning a lot from her in practices and shootarounds,” added Canada. “She is always talking to me in games making sure I understand different terminology.”

“Once this franchise started to rebuild a couple years ago, I always felt like this is my opportunity to help them and pass down as much knowledge as I can,” said Bird. “Prep them to take over and take this franchise and keep it going. That vibe has trickled on to Jordin.”



Coach Kloppenburg steps up

In June, when Hughes announced that he would not be joining his team in the bubble due to his health concerns, his assistant, Kloppenburg, took the head coaching reins. The transition proved seamless.

“I give that to the coaches in terms of how inclusive and how much of a collective the group is,” says Valavanis. “Also to Dan for his willingness to take on a role that was really important as the season played on. Although he couldn’t be in the bubble, he certainly had an important role.” Kloppenburg revealed during the bubble that he sought his counsel, with practices filmed and clips sent to Hughes.

What of Kloppenburg himself? He is a coach of four decades standing whose father, Bob, was also a renowned NBA coach, but did not necessarily expect to be taking a head coaching role at this stage of his career. He first served as an assistant coach at the Storm between 2000 and 2002 and, upon his return to the team in 2017, enjoyed two spells as interim head coach.



"I'm excited for the opportunity to be able to have such a great group of players," he said upon his elevation. "This team is a veteran team that's very savvy, it's a gifted offensive team, a lot more so than last year. We want to take those good qualities from last year, keep blending them in with this team to put together kind of a combination of the last two years. This'll be a really fun challenge to do that."

To meet that challenge, Kloppenburg, a noted defensive specialist, promoted former Storm point guard Noelle Quinn to Associate Head Coach from her position as an assistant. He would focus on defensive matters and Quinn, who won the 2018 WNBA championship with the Storm during her final season, would focus on offensive play. His coaching ticket also included long-time Storm coach Ryan Webb.

Kloppenburg also drew on his existing rapport with the roster. "Throughout the process of Dan being the head coach, we've always heard Klippy's voice," said Loyd in July. "He's goofy and allows us to be our own coach, but also

understands that he needs to step in and say certain things, so it's a pretty smooth transition."

Kloppenburg knew that he needed to let this group of champions express themselves on and off the court. "During these times, the best way I can lead is to listen, learn, follow their example and be an ally," he told the *Seattle Times* in September. "I couldn't be prouder of how these players have educated themselves and used this season to try to enact real change in this world."

"Any time there's something that brings you together that's bigger than basketball, it's a connecting point," says Valavanis. "It's a force to really drive the chemistry and connectedness of the group and drive the impact that the players have set to accomplish this season and beyond. We've watched that play out and it will continue."

As her attention turns to 2021 and the message is clear: "let's stay focused on what we can do off the court as well as what we can do on the court. Let's continue to use these platforms to provide positive change." ✨

Building an Olympic Gold Medal-Winning Environment



Having coached the GB's women's hockey team to gold in Rio, Danny Kerry now oversees the rebuild of the men's team and is armed with a firm knowledge of what it takes to win.

Danny Kerry recalls the time in 2010 when he took the Great Britain women's field hockey team to the Royal Marines Commando Training Centre in Devon.

He was in his first spell as Head Coach and building towards a home Olympic Games in London in 2012.

As the bus made its way, Kerry noticed that the team were uncharacteristically quiet.

"I asked one of them, 'what's going on here?' and they said, 'well, we're all pretty nervous about what we're going to face?' I said, 'what do you know about the Royal Marines?' They said, 'not a lot' and I said, 'well what are you nervous about then?'"

Kerry is talking on the Leaders Performance Institute's *At Home With Leaders* podcast. The Royal Marines anecdote is prompted by co-hosts Matthew Stone and Michael Caulfield asking Kerry about his approach to embedding a team culture.

He is used to fielding such questions. Not only does Kerry have 15 years of working as a coach with England and GB Hockey to draw upon, in his previous career he was a lecturer in sociology & culture. His appearances at Leaders Sport Performance Summits are some of our most well received and it is no surprise when esteemed coaches, such as Eddie Jones of England Rugby, seek his counsel.

What was it about the Royal Marines that unsettled his players? "It was more about what that institution stood for," says Kerry. "That was a moment where I thought if their culture is so ingrained over the decades, and it starts to have an impression wider than its actual group, you're on a good wicket because people coming in are self-selecting. 'I want to be part of that culture; it has these type of values and attitudes attributed to it. These are the standards that I'm volunteering to try and get into.'"

Two years after that bus journey, at the London Olympics, GB claimed a medal for the first time since the 1992 Barcelona Games. It was a bronze medal on both occasions. By the time of the Rio Games in 2016, it was gold, and the team was lauded for its talent, resilience and cohesion. Several the players who travelled to the Royal Marines six years earlier stood on the winners' rostrum that day at the Olympic Hockey Centre in the Rio suburb of Deodoro.

In 2018, Kerry transferred to the GB men's programme and was tasked with restoring the team's fortunes ahead of the Tokyo Olympics. To that end, the postponement of the Games has given both coach and team some much-needed time to reflect. "It has genuinely felt like a gift to us."

Performance presents a series of excerpts of Kerry's musings on *At Home With Leaders* that offer an insight into his approach to leadership and building a team culture.



WHEN GB WON GOLD IN RIO, THE TEAM, LED BY CAPTAIN KATE RICHARDSON-WALSH, EMBODIED ELEMENTS LIFTED FROM THAT DAY AT THE ROYAL MARINES SIX YEARS EARLIER

I thought how wonderful it would be to be part of a team that created that type of culture that people from the outside almost have a sense of what it is to be part of that team and asked myself could we create something similar with the women that left a legacy beyond a four-year cycle. The next cohort of athletes would know 'this is how we roll'. That's not easy to do and there's a lot of hard work getting to that point.

We're very proud of the likes of Kate Richardson-Walsh and others who helped to form that women's identity and what the programme stood for. On one level, it helps

you to get the athletes that you need. On another level, it becomes self-perpetuating and self-reinforcing.

To err is human and, as coaches and athletes, we'll have bad days and there will be days when we just let ourselves down, but the environment makes it hard for that to be easy to do because you want to do your best by your friends and colleagues, who are also trying to be the best they can be. That holds the standards that are going to be needed through the challenging times of an Olympic programme.

“YOU’RE LOOKING TO SLIDE UP AND DOWN A CONTINUUM OF HOW MUCH YOU’RE LOOKING TO EMPOWER, GIVE RESPONSIBILITY, TAKE OWNERSHIP BASED ON THE MATURITY OF INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS OF INDIVIDUALS AND ACROSS THE STAFF”

DANNY KERRY



WITH ATHLETES, THERE IS A FINE BALANCE BETWEEN EMPOWERMENT AND ENTITLEMENT

People talk about collecting data and objectivity, but I would put this firmly in the bracket of expertise and judgement of staff and head coaches and their ability to understand where the group is at in its ability to have the skills to take on responsibility. You can then make judgement calls about how, when and what dosage you give. You start to give more responsibility and allow those athletes to take the responsibility. You’re looking to slide up and down a continuum of how much you’re looking to empower, give responsibility, take ownership based on the maturity of individuals and groups of individuals and across the staff.

The entitlement piece is a fine line. I guess if you’re going to get it wrong between ‘depowering’ somebody and perhaps overdoing it, I’d probably want to over-empower – I don’t know if you can over-

empower – but if it leads to entitlement, I’d suppose I’d rather be there than have them not taking responsibility and accountability for what they’re doing because you’re not providing the environment to do it.

With the men, I’ve spent the last 14 months just getting to grips with understanding the group and where they’re at; and you just start to build, just like you would with any other skill. You just build their capacity to take more and more ownership and accountability.

Sometimes people talk about leadership and making themselves redundant. You’re not necessarily making yourself redundant but you’re just working at a slightly different level than you would have done previously and you’re much more light hand on the tiller, but it is still on the tiller.

KERRY IS CONSTANTLY QUESTIONING HIS ABILITY TO LEAD AND COACH

I definitely asked myself more recently, since Rio, does the generation of athletes coming into the squad come with a different set of value and attitudes and do I have the skills to adjust to that? Do some of their values and attitudes run counter to some of mine? And am I willing to see their perspective or am I skilful enough to understand I need to operate in a different way? As part of that equation, I ask myself, has the nature of sport shifted? Maybe not so much.



When I first became a national coach back in January 2005, there was very much an expectation on you as a coach as a technical expert. Now some of the conversations that come up in individual meetings are around ‘you’re not doing it for me’ – that was never a conversation back in 2005. I think that will possibly get stronger and then we might see a resetting, coming away from that a little bit and it becomes a more median position, where athletes understand their responsibilities and roles and coaches and leaders understand their roles and responsibilities. At the moment, people are still finding their space in that.

ASK YOURSELF: IS FIT MORE IMPORTANT THAN EXPERTISE?

We’ve just gone through a recruitment process for a new assistant coach for the men’s programme. Before we started the due process, we explored the element of fit and what qualities we currently have within the team and what aspects we were missing and what we don’t want to be bringing into this environment in the last year. Where does it rank in comparison to more traditional aspects such as level of experience or expertise?

My current staff is a good blend of different personalities, different viewpoints and perspectives but, critically, they also have the maturity that they can flex their own style to the given environment.

“I OFTEN TALK ABOUT TRYING TO PERIODISE HOW WE ACT AND BEHAVE AS A STAFF DEPENDING ON WHAT WE FEEL ARE THE NEEDS OF THE PROGRAMME AT THE TIME.”

DANNY KERRY



THERE ARE SOME HARD-EARNED LESSONS OVER FOUR OLYMPIC CYCLES

We always talk about periodising and physiologically peaking. I often talk about trying to periodise how we act and behave as a staff depending on what we feel are the needs of the programme at the time.

There may be periods of the programme that we deliberately make very challenging, with elements of conflict and extreme hardship to engender, capability, and resourcefulness in the athletes. Then, as we go into major selection phases and into major tournaments, we're working

with the athletes and very much raising their awareness around strengths that they know they can bring and then building a greater sense of self-efficacy within the team or within the athletes.

We equip them and then, when we get to major tournaments, as a staff, we're not adding to anxiety we're taking away anxieties and creating an environment where the athletes feel very confident in the processes and in their abilities. Then they're able to deliver.

DEVELOPING LEADERS DOES NOT NECESSARILY REQUIRE LEADERSHIP EXPERTISE AS MUCH AS TIME AND HEADSPACE

People will have bad days, but then who is going to step in? You need a depth of leadership. How much space are you creating for people to lead in? You as the coach might always be filling that leadership space, but then how can you expect people on the pitch to lead? How much ingenuity do you create in your group when people have to take a grip of a situation, have to lead, have to take responsibility and accountability for the decisions that they take?

Your job as the leader of the programme is to think about grading that. It is not expecting

some massive jump in ability and, 'sink or swim', but just providing the right level of opportunities at the right time for them just to learn the nuances of what it is to lead, what it is to grip a situation, what it is to have difficult conversations in the moment while the game is going on.

How am I going to make sure that's operationalised on a day-to-day basis and how am I going to make enough space in my day-to-day business that athletes will essentially have to lead and therefore grow leadership?



“YOU CAN TRY TO MAKE THE ENVIRONMENT CREATIVE AND ENGAGING AND INSPIRING, AND YOU HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO DO THAT, BUT AT POINTS IT’S PUSHING HARD. THERE’S NO ESCAPING THAT.”

DANNY KERRY

GB HOCKEY USE THURSDAYS TO BUILD RESILIENCE AND RESOURCEFULNESS

Currently with the men, the first half of the week is where we're installing elements of our play and the second half of the week is where we put it under pressure. There are two teams, and we create an environment where we're very specific in looking at the challenges that come up at the very start of the game, then the middle, then the challenges that happen in the last part of the game. We create all sorts of fun and games around scoring systems and different constraints where if there's good, effective leadership they'll be more successful and better able to win during those periods of the game.

In one Thursday session, we talked about the 'chaotic end', so we deliberately

designed a chaotic end to which the athletes weren't privy. Then there's an expectation for the leaders to try and get a grip of that situation. And at the end of the session I said, 'guys, we're physically finished, we're not running around anymore, but we have 15 or 20 minutes now where we're going to discuss what that last chaotic end looked like, what was good, what did we do well, what did the leadership do, were we all clear and on the same page, what will we do different next time'. It's a strategic priority. You're providing the space for them to have a go at it, but you're also providing the space for them to reflect on it, so when we come to it next week, they can move on and get better, as we would at any skill.

YOU NEED PEOPLE WHO CAN EMBRACE THE PORRIDGE

I worked with a very good strength & conditioning coach, David Hamilton [currently serving as Director of Performance at the Tampa Bay Buccaneers]. He said something to the effect that variety is the spice of life and training is essentially the porridge – and sometimes you have to embrace the porridge. That's always stuck with me. At times, you are trying to create difference, trying to create variety, trying to keep your athletes engaged, but also you have to embrace the porridge because you can only dress up certain things so many ways. That has been interesting. If I think of someone like Kate Richardson-Walsh; to go through four Olympic cycles and keep coming back to do essentially the same hard, challenging thing year on and year on, and then ultimately be successful, it's because she had the ability to keep coming back, keep doing stuff that mattered.

Fundamentally, you can try to make the environment creative and engaging and inspiring, and you have a responsibility to do that, but at points it's pushing hard. There's no escaping that. ✨







Why Music Could Be the Key to Your Athletes' Performance and Wellbeing

JLP are helping sport to understand that sound and music can help you be at your best in work, rest and play.

We are all broadly aware that music boosts performance but there is little understanding across sport of how chosen tracks can be used as tools for preparation, performance and recovery.

“The ears are being underutilised,” neuroscientist Dr Julia Jones tells *Performance* over Zoom, in September. “It is established fact that the latest neuroscience insights and technology can result in better performance, faster recovery and less injury. The key to achieving those three outcomes is getting in the driving seat of your brain so that you’re fully in control of sympathetic nervous system cascades and parasympathetic tone.

“Auditory stimuli,” she continues, “any sounds - voice, nature, tones or music - are highly effective cues that can be utilised in various ways to quickly help an athlete or any regular person to get in the driving seat of their brain and stay there. These auditory cues are a highly effective tool because of the brain responses they trigger but also because of their versatility and ease of use.

“The neuroscience is all there but it’s not being fully harnessed in sport yet. Sound should be given the same level of sophisticated detailed attention and analysis as nutrition. Every sound that enters the ears and contacts the skin is triggering electrochemical responses in the brain and body that impact performance. Even sounds that you just produce yourself internally, by imagining sounds or humming sounds, have these effects.”

However, Jones feels that sport is only accessing a tiny fraction of the full potential of sound. She says: “Most athletes and coaches are using playlists but, in many cases, their choices are not based on scientific analysis and they are not marrying audio with vision and breathing hacks to produce super-fast neurobiological responses that are required for that moment.

“IT IS ESTABLISHED FACT THAT THE LATEST NEUROSCIENCE INSIGHTS AND TECHNOLOGY CAN RESULT IN BETTER PERFORMANCE, FASTER RECOVERY AND LESS INJURY.”

DR JULIA JONES



“It will be like having a nutritionist for the ears. However, ignoring the full potential of sound by just using ‘playlists’ is akin to advising athletes on their breakfast while ignoring the rest of their daily food and drink intake.”

Earlier this year, Jones, also known as Dr Rock, co-founded Jones Long Partners [JLP] with business development specialist Simon Long, who joins us on the call. “Consider the postponement of the Tokyo Games,” he says. “High performance athletes have worked towards a peak but been told they cannot



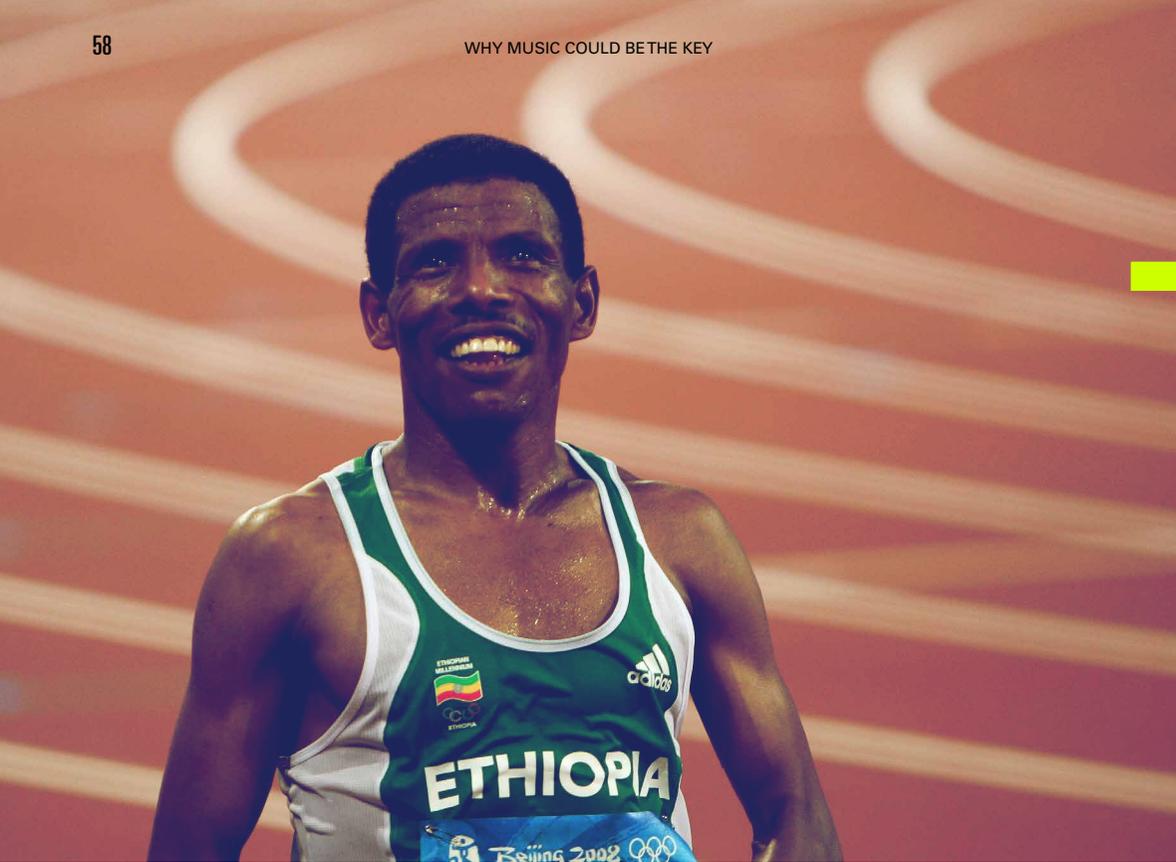
compete. It has a huge impact on mental health and performance levels.” Long is speaking just days before coronavirus outbreaks forced the NFL to postpone the New England Patriots’ visit to the Kansas City Chiefs and the Pittsburgh Steelers’ trip to the Tennessee Titans. “We are able to help athletes to be at their best even if they’re not competing.”

From business and elite sport to public administration and dementia patients, JLP supports a range of clients through its neuroscience-based multi-sensory strategies.

“We show people how to apply the science of sound at a very highly sophisticated level to maximise results. Athletes who start to embed this neuroscience into their daily routines will have a competitive advantage over those who do not.”

Nutrition for the ears

The two-time men’s 10,000m Olympic champion Haile Gebrselassie famously used the 1995 hit *Scatman* by Scatman John to help him set world-beating times. “You know that Scatman



music was perfect for the 10,000m world record,” the Ethiopian told the *Guardian* in 2013. “If you watch back some of my world records you can hear *Scatman* in the background. The rhythm was perfect for running.”

At the time when Gebrselassie was setting world records, Jones was combining her work as a junior tennis coach with being in a band and working as a DJ. Her creative pursuits quickly spilled into her day job. “I was waiting for the kids to arrive I’d be listening to music, as I’d be learning the songs for gigs,” she recalls. “Then I started leaving the music playing, incorporating it into warm-ups and then drills by synchronising the movement to the time of the rhythms and, before you knew it, I had tonnes of clients.

Jones later became a sport & exercise psychologist and worked with British athletes in the build-up to the 2000 Sydney Olympics.

“I would explain how to use music to control anxiety,” she says. “If you take swimming as an example, you have to give up your life, be in the pool at the crack of dawn, be in the gym after school and not have the same social life as your friends. It’s relentless and both the strain and the pressure at such a young age are immense.

“A lot of the work I was doing at the time was in how to control anxiety and using music to try and cope with fluctuations in mood. Some of these young athletes had guilt around the fact their parents were investing so much money and time in taking them on this journey in sport. They found they weren’t enjoying it and didn’t want to do it.”

Why is music such a powerful tool in this process? “It is an evolutionary mechanism,” says Jones. “The brain processes sound in a certain way. It’s our brain’s job to keep us alive and it does that by taking sensory information.

“THAT’S THE KEY: TO LOOK AT HOW THE BRAIN WORKS BUT THEN LOOK AT WHO THE PERSON IN QUESTION IS, THEN DO THE NECESSARY TO MAKE SURE YOU’RE USING THE RIGHT CONTENT TO CREATE THE CORRECT BRAIN RESPONSES.”

DR JULIA JONES

When it comes to sound, loud, sudden sounds are potentially dangerous, so they increase our arousal because we would have to run for our life or fight to stay alive. By contrast, the sounds of a relaxed environment, which tend to be quieter, relax our autonomic nervous system; our arousal decreases.

“Music is designed to play with those evolutionary mechanisms; loud, fast, up tempo music increases heartrate, increases activity in our brains, activates the release of brain chemicals to increase alertness. Slow, relaxing sounds do the opposite. At a very basic level it’s about using music or sounds of different types to be in the desired placed on the arousal scale.”

Jones cites August’s FA Cup final, when eventual winners Arsenal took on Chelsea at Wembley Stadium. “I watched the tunnel cam footage because that’s how boring I am!” she says with a smile. “I was sitting watching people

walk in. It was a very clinical environment; silent and sterile.” Jones noted that while most of the Arsenal squad sported headphones, she was struck by the lack on the ears of their west London opponents. “Sometimes you don’t have control over it but sometimes you do. If you’re wearing headphones you can dictate not only what you’re putting in but you’re also blocking everything else.”

Not that she believes either team necessarily enjoyed optimal auditory input, as neither had control over the music played over the stadium’s PA system during the warm-up. “That music is being processed by the brain but it’s not music that’s been selected by any of those players and it wouldn’t have been a decision made in consultation with the coaches and psychologists of either team,” she says.

At this point, JLP’s work is more educational than prescriptive. “Teams and businesses need to understand how to apply the neuroscience.





I won't start with problems, challenges or objectives, it'll be 'what do you know about how the brain processes sound?'"

Last year, Jones published *The Music Diet: The Rock and Roll Route to a Healthier and Longer Life*. In it she details how music can be used to enhance workplace wellness and tackle work-related stress. She also explains how the functional use of music at work and the promotion of brain health can reduce the risk of developing degenerative brain diseases later in life.

Jones says: "The Music Diet was about trying to pierce a hole in that academic vortex so that a lot of this knowledge comes seeping out into other areas, including sport. Once we get to a point where there's a baseline knowledge regarding the power of the ears then it's going to get highly prescriptive because we are then going to be able to model the effect of the brain stem and the amygdala on sounds and songs."

A new frontier in performance

Jones credits the accessibility and affordability of modern brain scanning techniques for the growing body of research in how sound affects the brain.

On that front, JLP leads through its Surround Sound Strategy. "We conduct a neuroscience led, 360-degree evaluation of your current use

of sound," says Jones. "We then run workshops with your teams and provide recommendations to show how sound and music can boost wellness, performance and experience."

The process involves using software that models and analyses the brain's automated responses. Jones shows *Performance* the result of a scan completed of an individual who listened to the '90s dance classic 9pm (*Till I Come*) by ATB. She says: "The value of this is that you're able to look at all the different tracks and say, 'actually, that's not producing a high level of arousal, that's at very low valence; or it's producing a distressing response in the brain' or 'for this particular purpose we want to achieve a certain mindset and so we need to look at the songs that put your brain in that place and that's what this kind of analysis can do'"

Songs can also be transcoded into vibrations, which can be transmitted to the skin via a wristband. "Our body doesn't just experience sound through our ears, we experience sound through our skin," Jones explains. "The skin is a massive real estate and it's sending information constantly from our touch receptors."

There are major implications for general health, particularly for deaf people, to enable them to develop their cognitive reserve - the ability of the sensory cortex to act as an ear might. "From a performance point of view,"

Jones continues, “you can amplify the effects of sound in many different ways: you can look at different frequencies that have a different effect on neurochemical release; you can look at different sound frequencies that have an effect on the modulation of the autonomic nervous system, going from high stress, high arousal, to rest and digest, switching on the parasympathetic nervous system, reducing cortisol, increasing heartrate variability. That’s training the brain to hear through the skin.

“It’s got a lot of wellness implications because it can help you to sleep better, which is a big component of peak performance. It can help you control anxiety, it can help you achieve high arousal when you need it - and this is just through vibrations on the wrist.

“You can measure the auditory cortex response but you can also use the vibratory version to model what’s going on in the parietal lobe. It means you can put the brain in a mindset like that - boom - and you can also match it with taste preference because each athlete will have different memories of the same song.” It is an approach that appeals in this era of increasing

customisation. “That’s the key: to look at how the brain works but then look at who the person in question is, then do the necessary to make sure you’re using the right content to create the correct brain responses.”

As we wind down the conversation, Long describes sound as the ‘new frontier’ in performance. “Overlay coaching drills with something like music and the engagement is inevitably much higher,” he says. “We also know through research that the combination of synchronised music and movement delivers measurable results around stamina, endurance and general elasticity and coordination. Those undercurrents will inevitably lead to performance gains.

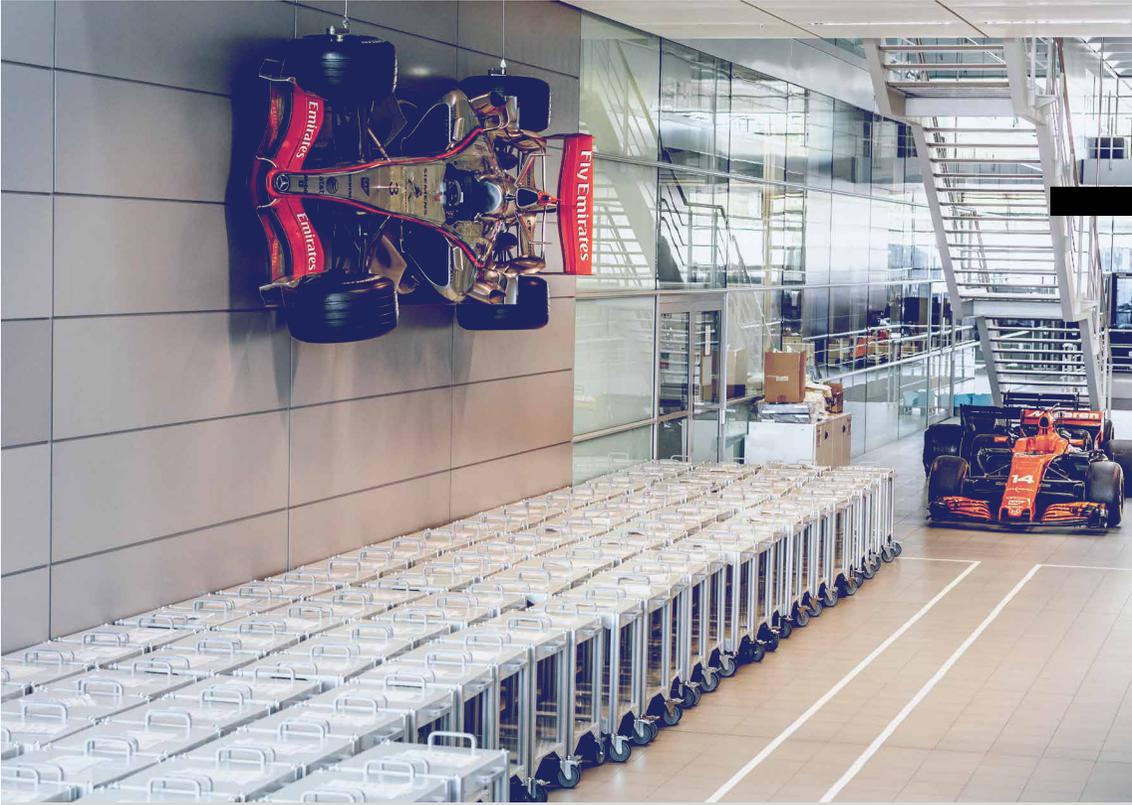
“People will take supplements but because you mention ‘music’ people go down the wrong track. It’s almost like we need to create a vocabulary around sound that resonates as much as other vernaculars do.”

Jones nods in agreement. “Our mantra is that we want to help people be at their best in work, rest and play.” ✨

“OUR MANTRA IS THAT WE WANT TO HELP PEOPLE BE AT THEIR BEST IN WORK, REST AND PLAY.”

DR. JULIA JONES





Rapid Response

When the UK government made an urgent call for ventilators to battle the Covid-19 pandemic, the McLaren Formula 1 team, along with its competitors and other industry giants, responded and embarked on a very different kind of race.

It took a global pandemic to bring the relentless travelling global circus of Formula 1 to a shuddering halt. When the 2020 season stopped before it had even started, with an ill-fated March trip to Australia where the first

scheduled race of the season was cancelled just hours before the cars were due to hit the circuit, a sport known for its unending progress and 24/7 culture of improvement and refinement, found itself placed firmly on pause.

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PIERS THYNNE

Limited by regulation in terms of what it could do to develop its 2020 F1 car and with its automotive production line also stalled, McLaren Group’s attention quickly turned to a different race altogether: answering the UK government’s call to play its part in the design and manufacture of much-needed medical ventilators. By the conclusion of the VentilatorChallengeUK project, an effort by a consortium of Formula 1 teams, their technical partners and other major industrial organisations, the team had helped deliver 13,437 ventilators, doubling stock for Britain’s National Health Service as it prepared for an influx of Covid-19 patients; manufactured over 100,000 individual parts in ten short weeks; and utilised its network and logistical expertise to procure 50 per cent of the parts for the Penlon ventilator it worked to produce.

“The prime minister did his call to arms on Sunday 15th March, making a clear statement that we need a lot of ventilators, we need UK industry to mobilise” recalls Mark Mathieson, Director of Innovation at McLaren Applied Technologies, the arm of McLaren that uses F1 technology and know-how to provide solutions to other sectors. Mathieson quickly received a call asking McLaren to participate, a request he took to McLaren’s CEO Zak Brown. Brown gave Mathieson a week to understand and evaluate what would be required.

“It started with just bringing together the resources, reaching out to some of our friends and colleagues throughout the F1 community in the UK,” Mathieson reflects. “They were all up for it and prepared to dedicate their resources over to this project.” Further calls to Ford, Siemens and Airbus added further expertise to the consortium. Mathieson also spent time with the British Army at a field hospital, his first experience of seeing a ventilator up close.

11 days after Boris Johnson’s call for help, the government formally requested an initial order of 10,000 ventilator units from the newly formed consortium. With the complex and lengthy certification process ruling out an entirely original design, the consortium began work on two already-agreed ventilator projects, including one based on a design by Penlon, a small company based in the English town of Abingdon. Penlon had the idea, but no ability to scale. Enter McLaren and VentilatorChallengeUK.

F1’s culture of rapid decisions and execution

“They came up with something really smart,” says Mathieson, recounting events during the Virtual Leaders Meet: Total High Performance event in November. “They had a ventilator range; they took the constituent parts out of one of their ventilators and reconfigured them into a device that would solve or meet the minimum requirement stated by the clinicians on the frontline to treat Covid patients. So

Thynne continues: “We had the entirety of our machine shop and machine tools that were sat idle due to lockdown and we were able to provide material to utilise a significant quantity of our own factory and the rest of the Formula 1 supply chain to really help with this project. The biggest difference between what we do in Formula 1 and this project is that our standard batch size is one and, if we’re really pushing it, six, whereas we were making batches of hundreds and thousands of parts. In our factory, we had all of the machine tools that were appropriate running, making ventilator parts and a big thank you to the stepping up of the whole Formula 1 supply chain who also were more than willing to turn on their machines and factories to support it as well. It grew very quickly to be able to deliver the significant build demand.”

There were many unknowns and many uncertainties, from new manufacturing methods, unfamiliar components and the scale at which those parts needed to be produced. “We’re not ventilator experts but we’re pretty comfortable at running towards a problem, whatever it is, and breaking it down to find the issue, fix it, and move on,” he explains.

“In some cases, we duplicated or triplicated supply routes; in some cases, we reverse-engineered the tools that had been in existence for some time to allow us to mould parts at multiple suppliers to keep feeding the build line. Normally inside Penlon, there were a handful of guys building, but we had an army at Airbus and an army at Ford and an army at STI [Surface Technology International] that were building at a much faster rate and we had to keep feeding that. There was lots of great lateral thinking and lots of [saying] ‘well, we need to find a way because we can’t slow down or stop.’

“Formula 1 is a pretty agile and time-bound sport although, in the operational side of it, time is probably our biggest currency. We don’t have time to stop or pontificate, we have to analyse, decide and move on. That philosophy applied quite appropriately to this project; it was a bit different because it wasn’t a transmission component or a suspension component or a systems component, it was a specific part of a subsystem in a ventilator. But the philosophy and the culture of our team was very applicable to this project.”





Never say ‘no’ when something is possible

The numbers are remarkable. By the fourth weekend of the project, the consortium had produced over 10 million new parts and built up a completely new supply chain. At its peak, the project was producing 403 ventilator units per day; Penlon had previously been able to build 15 or 20 a week. In just 12 weeks, 23 years’ worth of normal production had been built and supplied.

The procurement of parts, coveted by many around the world working on similar ventilator capacity projects, quickly became fundamental and here, again, McLaren’s F1 know-how proved invaluable in finding ways to open the right doors quickly. “There’s a lot of detail around that in terms of how you build relationships with supplies, many of who we hadn’t met before, and we still haven’t physically met,” Mathieson explains. “How do you influence the key people in those countries so that the UK stood out from the crowd and we could go and get what we needed? Again, a bit of a Formula 1 approach

of ‘never say ‘no’, something is always possible’ came to the fore.”

In one case, McLaren was able to help a Swiss supplier which specialised in producing an essential valve by helping build out the machinery on its production line to help increase its capacity to supply not only the consortium but others. In another, a batch of critical sensors from Mexico made on a Sunday morning were transported by hand into the United States, to Dallas, flown to London and then driven to Wales where they were added into British-made circuit boards; they were in ventilators by Tuesday afternoon.

People management was another core consideration throughout, not least because the Covid-19 pandemic forced the majority of those involved to be working remotely. Keeping the team and consortium focused and fresh was critical, while clarity was maintained by a daily 7am meeting. “When you’ve got that delegated empowerment of the teams, they run at the challenges day-on-day,” Mathieson says. “Every day you have a success and when you’ve got that you keep the energy



high. 'What got shipped last night? Everyone's focused on the number; how many ventilators went out last night on shipment? And everyone is just trying to make that happen. Right, now face forward, what have we got to do today? What is the constraint or what are the constraints? Who's dealing with it and how are we going to clear those? Let's get on with it.' You had that near-term focus and those successes as you're moving forward; it's really important that the team gets energised by that.

"But you can't go at it relentlessly," he adds. "We found that that five or six weeks in, we'd all been working very long hours, seven days a week, 21 hours a day, and we start to see people getting grouchy at that time and decisions are perhaps not the best decisions. We started to impose some days off and people had to go and do something different for a day and then come back to it a bit fresher. We always had cover from the leadership team and, again, shared the load out, so that we managed our teams appropriately over the whole seven days every week. We started to use a phrase we sometimes use around McLaren: 'what would you do if you were standing on the grid now?' That's all about if you found an issue 20 minutes before the start of a race, as example, we found an issue on the car, we can't simply push that issue down the road, you have to deal with it now. You take that philosophy into a programme like this, you can't just push a problem away, you have to get it dealt with today or you're not going to hit your numbers tomorrow."

Running in parallel with the production, procurement and people management was a constant dialogue around the safety and certification of the products being manufactured. "While we were engineering, we didn't know medical products and the certification process,

and Penlon and Siemens Healthineers guided us through that," Mathieson recounts.

After three weeks of testing and trials, the Penlon ESO2 became the first newly adapted ventilator design to be authorised as part of the UK government's response to Covid-19. It was granted approval by the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) and later received the CE mark, the standard across the European Economic Area.

Reflecting in November on the overall project, Mathieson says: "For me, it was really great experience to just underline that some of our really simple, traditional approaches in F1 can apply well beyond what we do. Keeping things simple and focused, that flat structure. We want the best people or the strongest athlete in the car and that team in place; trust them, empower them, and they'll run at the problem as needed, if you support them in doing that, and you spend your time trying to look ahead to make their path easier. That has transferred over to other organisations and off the back of what we've done here." McLaren has now been asked to advise the UK government around further big infrastructure projects, while a ventilator now sits in the impressive boulevard of cars that forms the entrance to the McLaren Technology Centre.

"We have a pretty strong team spirit," Thynne adds, "but it certainly added a bit of fuel to that at what was a deeply challenging time for everybody. It's also great to have people outside of your organisation that you can reach out to who can kind of understand you now because you worked so closely with them, that you can just share some challenges with them and just bounce some ideas around; that's been hugely valuable, and I wouldn't miss that for the world." ✨

Inside the Institute

Matthew Stone

Senior Product Manager

Performance



I am penning these thoughts just days after Margaret Keenan of Coventry became the first person in the world to be vaccinated for Covid-19. Curiously, the first man to be inoculated was one William Shakespeare and, when his namesake wrote ‘we have seen better days’, he could have easily been describing 2020.

We have indeed seen better days, but that doesn’t mean there haven’t been extraordinary achievements this year. Tinseltown was glistening once again as the Dodgers and Lakers reigned supreme in Los Angeles. Across the pond, Lyon ensured the Women’s Champions League remained in the south-east of France, while the Premier League title made its way to Liverpool 30 years after the Reds’ last league championship. Other standouts include Lewis Hamilton claiming a seventh Formula 1 world title to equal the great Michael Schumacher.

Pretty much all these victories were achieved in ways in which we could not have contemplated 12 months ago. To use a basketball term, the industry has ‘pivoted’ from the norm to a new way of working and that’s been no different here at the Leaders Performance Institute. Events have always

been our lifeblood, but we’ve been evolving to provide a more personalised experience for both our members and the wider high performance community, which means more access to the diverse knowledge, skills and networks you need as performance environments evolve.

This year we’ve run over 50 Virtual Roundtables and have made over 300 peer-to-peer introductions. We’ve also established our new Community Groups to enable you to connect more easily with your peers and share insights across the wide world of high performance. We do it for you, because you’ve told us that’s what you want and need, and although it’s been challenging, we’ve enjoyed every ‘pivot’ we’ve made this year.

Who knows what 2021 will bring? Hopefully a bit of the old normal returns, but we also hope that these new innovations and ways of working are here to stay in some capacity. Whatever happens, we’re here to help. Whether it’s connecting online or in person, we’re looking forward to speaking and seeing you all again soon.

All that remains is for me to wish you a happy New Year from everyone at Leaders. ✨

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