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## A qualitative study examining the role of a coach as a communicator: Lessons for coach-player relationship in context of the sport of cricket and player retention

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### Abstract

Effective communication between coaches and players is a key determinant of player development, motivation, and retention, particularly in women's cricket. This study aimed to prospectively examine coach-player communication (and challenges) within the Japan Women's National Cricket Team using a qualitative research design based on semi-structured interviews with three experienced coaches in New Zealand, a country with a highly developed cricket infrastructure. The study explored coaches' personal and professional growth, values, communication strategies, and approaches to overcoming challenges such as cultural and language differences. The findings indicate that effective communication is multifaceted and encompasses technical instruction, mentorship, trust-building, and guidance that supports personal and competitive growth. Coaches' core values (e.g., honesty, integrity, positivity, and team-oriented mentality) directly influence communication practices and player motivation. This first-such study, from a cricketer's perspective, provides evidence-based insights for improving coach-player communication and player retention in Japan and other developing cricket nations, and highlights the need for a culturally adaptable framework for coaching practice and coaching communication assessment criteria.

**Keywords:** Coach-player communication, motivation, player retention, coaching value, Japan, New Zealand

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 Definition of a coach in context of communication

A coach is central to sport with multifaceted roles in the team and for the players. Thus, a coach is a leader and a communicator. Quoting Smith and Smoll (2017), – “Coaches occupy a central role in sport, fulfilling instructional, organizational, strategic, and social relationship functions. Athletes' skill acquisition, success, enjoyment, continued participation, and physical and psychological well-being are all strongly influenced by coaching behaviors” (Smith and Smoll, 2017) <sup>[10]</sup>.

#### 1.2 Coach communication and significance

Communication is essential in the coach's role. Players/coaches cannot work together towards same purpose/goal without communication. A coach needs good communication skills and his/her/their skills have to be up-dated regularly to retain players, increase their motivation and to ultimately develop a high-performing national team. Agnew and Pill (2022) have mentioned that “the coach maintains a pivotal role in influencing enjoyment and contributing to player retention and attrition” (Agnew and Pill, 2022) <sup>[1]</sup>.

#### 1.3 Problem statement

Communication is a central element of effective coaching, directly influencing athlete development and participation. A 2017 study emphasized that coaches fulfill instructional, organizational, strategic, and relational functions, with their behaviors shaping athletes' skill acquisition, enjoyment, continued participation, and well-being (Smith and Smoll, 2017) <sup>[10]</sup>.

Similarly, Japanese researchers argue that coaches must continually update their knowledge, accurately interpret sporting environments, and establish strong relationships with athletes (Yamada *et al.*, 2022) <sup>[12]</sup>. This study examines coach–player communication issues in the context of developing a strong Japan’s Women’s National Cricket Team. Communication and player retention are particularly relevant to the growth of cricket in Japan. Two dimensions are critical:

- 1) Organizational structures, including governance, sponsorship, media promotion, and Olympic Committee recognition, and
- 2) Player-level support, which requires clubs, family understanding, and the balancing of multiple social roles (e.g., student, worker, family member).

Within clubs, coaches, trainers, physiotherapists, and counselors all contribute to sustaining participation, underscoring the necessity of communication across all levels. In cricket, since coaches are basically not allowed to give instructions during matches, the importance of pre- and post-match communication increases significantly. The lead author, drawing on her personal experience as a player who represented the Japan Women’s National Team for 17 years and became the first Japanese professional cricketer (<https://cricket.or.jp/en/archives/21383>), observes that players often do not receive sufficient feedback or mentorship from coaches. This lack of guidance leads to declining motivation and diminished passion for the sport, ultimately resulting in withdrawal from cricket. Referring to the TRINE University blog, it is noted that “coaches’ words, actions, and even body language can heavily influence player motivation and the team’s overall performance” (Coaching Styles Influencing Players’ Performance, 2024) <sup>[4]</sup>. When players do receive relevant feedback and mentorship, they gain clarity in their roles, strengthen motivation, and build trust in their coaches, ultimately enhancing retention. Similarly, in 2022, the pivotal role of coaches in shaping athlete enjoyment, retention, and attrition was highlighted (Agnew and Pill, 2022) <sup>[1]</sup>. Taken together, these perspectives demonstrate that coach communication is not simply supportive but central to sustaining player retention, a challenge, in Japanese women’s cricket.

#### 1.4 Current issues

In the case of Japan, and from the experience of the lead

author (of this study) and placing herself in the shoes of incoming coaches, coming to a new environment (outside their own comfort zone) presents a big challenge. She believes that these coaches struggle with the new culture and language, and that there is a need to invest in cross-cultural communications and skills training prior to their coaching assignment. Especially, it has been observed that the female players tend to wait for instructions and actions from their coaches. The coach, on the other hand, expects the players to think and understand by themselves. Due to this and the pressure to perform immediately, it leads to miscommunication/misunderstanding.

#### 1.5 Research question and objectives

The author initiates this study by asking a question – “How much of an impact does communication from your coach have on your motivation to retain the sport? A qualitative research design was used to guide this study, and which includes face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with the ‘experienced’ coaches (in New Zealand) to identify the underlying causes (Fig. 1). The research focused on the issue of: Player-Focused Coaching and Coach Communication and Possible Factors Hindering the Creation of a High-Performing Japan Women’s National Team. The research idea has been developed from the personal experiences of the lead author. Considering the criticality of the topic, coaches from a highly evolved cricketing culture were selected for this first study. In this research, coaches were chosen from New Zealand, a highly acclaimed cricketing country, including in women’s cricket. Therein, a coach who has coached state women’s teams in New Zealand and India, a coach with over 40 years of coaching experience at a local club, and an ex-coach of both Japan and New Zealand women’s team were selected. The idea behind choosing the coaches and utilization of direct and focused interview approach was to determine precisely how the coach analyzes his/her/their own behavior of communicating/coaching the players, whether they change their behavior/coaching style or not depending on the situation/players. To do so, a detailed interview question list was created. In addition, in the issues (top left, dotted line box), the word ‘unbalanced’ has been used in context of – “something that is not currently balanced and has never been in balance”.

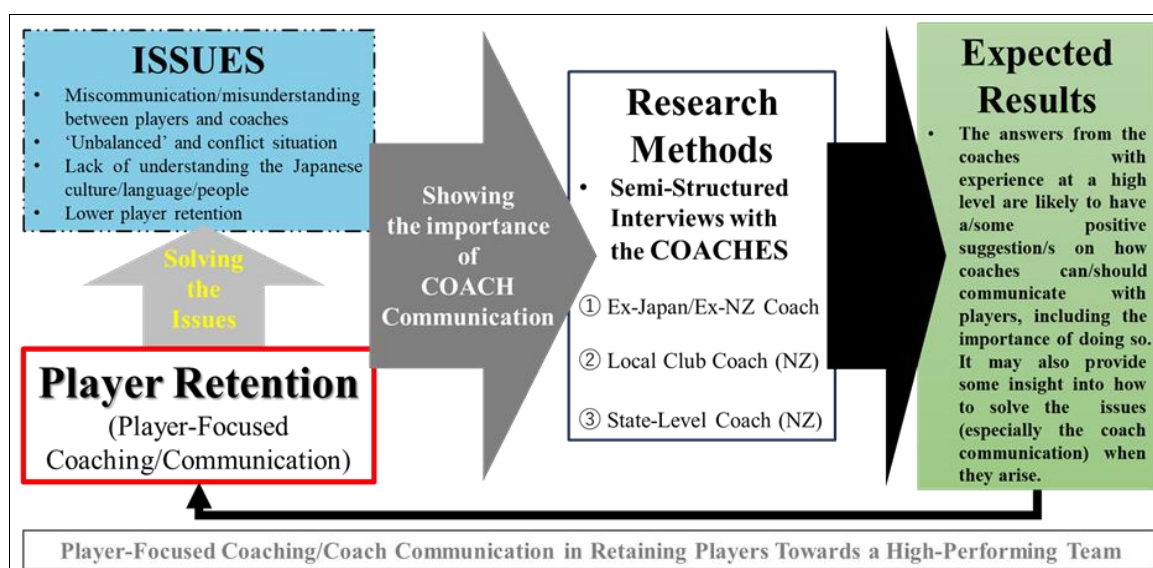


Fig 1: The research questions and objectives

## 2. Research methodology

### 2.1 Research design

A social science-based research methodology and qualitative research design (Arksey and Knight, 1999; Walliman, 2006; Rapley, 2008) [3,8,11] was employed for this research (Fig. 1). Semi-structured interviews were used for this study to dig deeper into understanding the important values for a cricket coach/player and how to communicate with players/coaches. According to (Khanday and Khanam, 2019) [5], it is essential to have a pre-planned approach consistent strategy and specific procedure in order to achieve optimized results for a particular research question. The interviews questions were developed by the authors including from the lead author's own experience as ex-Japan national team player, professional cricket player, and insights during an internship in New Zealand. The interviews questions focused on understanding core value for a coach/a player, frequency and method and timing and situation and content of communication with their players and coaches, and the effect of communication to players/from coaches on player's motivation.

#### 2.1.1 Field visit and location

The locations in New Zealand are based as follows: Christchurch (<https://ccc.govt.nz/>), Club: Sydenham Cricket Club (<https://sydenhamcricket.co.nz/>), Teams: White Ferns (NZ women's national team) (<https://www.nzc.nz/international/white-ferns/>) and Canterbury Magicians (State team) (<https://www.canterburycricket.org.nz/teams/canterbury-magicians/>) (Fig. 2). The Sydenham Cricket Club (Christchurch) was the location for interviewing three coaches; one was the club cricket coach, the other was ex-Japan and ex-NZ women's national team coach, and the third was an ex-Canterbury Magicians coach with coaching experience in India.



Fig 2: The research site

### 2.2 Data collection

According to (Ruslin *et al.*, 2022) [9], a semi-structured interview in qualitative research is an important tool that helps keep the research on track, allowing us to understand in-depth the topic being studied or investigated and contributing to achieving meaningful and effective research findings. For this, study questions were categorized into themes such as Personal and Professional Development, Coaching Style, Skills and Experience, and Communication with Players, and focused on what cricket coaches actually pay attention to

when communicating with players and how they have dealt with challenges they have faced.

#### 2.2.1 Research subjects

Three coaches participated in this study, each bringing distinct playing and coaching experiences (see section 2.1.1). These profiles illustrate a wide range of experience in both playing and coaching, encompassing local, national, and international levels. The diversity in gender, age, and professional background provides valuable perspectives for understanding coaching communication practices and player development in different contexts. All the research subjects were informed of the research and consents obtained as described the below. The following main themes were kept in mind while interviewing: 1) Core Value, 2) Principle, 3) Personal Development, and 4) Frequency/Method/Timing/Situation/Content of communication with their players. The main goal is to understand what values and principles coaches in developed cricket countries have and how they think about and approach their communication with players.

#### 2.2.2 Interview questions

The interview lasted round 45 minutes, and was recorded with permission. Briefly, it was divided into: 1. Personal and Professional Development (≈10 min) [Self-introduction: Name, age, career history; Motivation: Reasons for becoming a coach; Core values: Key principles and characteristics essential for coaches; Expectations: Skills and qualities needed throughout a coaching career]. 2. Coaching Style, Skills, and Experience (≈15 min) [Principles: How coaches communicate priorities (e.g., tactics, training, team management) to players; Professional development: Adapting to different environments and cultures, updating skills and knowledge; Experience: Reflections on coaching in other countries, including cultural differences; Japanese system: Views on women's cricket in Japan]. And, 3. Communication with Players (≈15 min) [Methods and frequency of communication in situations like selection, training, strategy, roles, and post-tournament assessment; Challenges: Difficulties in communication and how they are addressed; Adaptation: Changes in coaching style for different players or situations; Impact: How communication influences player motivation and retention]. Insights from these interviews, is hoped, will inform the development of communication evaluation criteria for Japanese women's cricket

#### 2.2.3 Research ethics

This study was performed under the strict guidelines of the University of Tsukuba Ethics Review Board. The research participants were informed about the study through a written document in person (an explanation was provided face to face), and approval was obtained either as a signature or verbally. Additionally, the researchers handling the study took the information ethics staff course and the training workshop on Research Ethics, Faculty of Health & Sport Science.

### 2.3 Data analysis

The study has not followed any specific theoretical framework, instead, the data were analyzed descriptively (thematic analysis based on the grounded theory). "*Data collected through qualitative research methods as described above were analyzed based on thematic analysis*" (Walliman, 2006) [11]. The following process was followed with regards to thematic analysis: 1) Initial code generation (systematically encode the entire collected data), 2) Theme search (match



similar codes to potential themes), 3) Theme confirmation (themes function in relation to the dataset) check if it does), 4) Narrowing down themes (Narrowing down the details of each theme and the connections between them, looking for propositions, complexity, and relevance). By using this approach helps the author to explore the data more flexibility. By this method, the study ensure that the analysis was deeply rooted in the data by providing some in-depth insights.

### 3. Results

The research investigates the cricket coaches (A, B, and C) in New Zealand (Fig. 3). The reason for interviewing the cricket coaches, was directly related to the purpose of the study “to know a role of cricket coach as a communicator and improve the relationship with players”. The interview was designed to explore the role of a coach as a communicator in cricket, the

challenges faced in fulfilling that role and how they deal with them. To re-state the reason of choosing New Zealand as the study site, it is one of the East Asia Pacific cricket nations to which Japan belongs, and the country has such a high level of cricket that it won the Women's World Cup last year and was key to take back the learnings to Japan. The interview was taken face to face conducted by the researcher (author of this thesis), audio-recorded with the participant's consent, and subsequently transcribed for thematic analysis via coding (qualitative research design). This analysis from the coach interview data is presented below as themes (sub-sections in italics and numbered, 2.1.1 and so on) generated from the codes and interpretations by the author are discussed. The coaches interviewed are with a varied experience and age shown in (Fig. 3).



Fig 3: The background of the three coaches recruited for the interview

### 3.1 Emerging themes

#### 3.1.1 Personal and professional development

The personal and professional journeys of cricket coaches reveal how their early experiences in sport, combined with enjoyment of the role, passion to make their players be better players and demonstrate leadership, and give back to the game have shaped their motivation to pursue coaching as practical communications/communicators. Despite the challenges faced, their drive to stay linked to cricket, have respect all people around them, and eager to learn the new tactics reflects a strong commitment to contribute meaningfully to the game of cricket.

##### 3.1.1.1 Coach role

When imagining the role of a coach in sports, most probably think of teaching skills to their players first. However, the most important thing about the role of a coach is how much fun the coach is having in his/her/their role, i.e., does the coach enjoy coaching? And, it is important that the coaches can be role models for those around them (not limited to players and team support staff), the audience and people (society), and society. All coaches have their own clear reasons for becoming a cricket coach, but it could be said that their passion to give back to the game of cricket that raised them has paved the way for them to become cricket coaches. Below, the views expressed by each coach are presented:

Coach A – “Coaching cricket is enjoyable, it's about seeing players improving and helping them become the best they can be.”

Coach B – “It is important that a coach is a role model and loving every minutes. Not everyone wants to be a coach, but coaches can be proactive and show leadership back in their own areas of areas.”

Coach C – “It is important to enjoy the role and give back to the game. Also, grateful how many coaches put into your life when I was a player.”

#### 3.1.1.2 Coach values

Coach's values are what make him/her/them who they are. Their values directly impact everyone including their players and team staff, the overall sports environment, and the society. The value as a cricket coach can be defined through having knowledge, experience, honesty, integrity, positive attitude and a team first mindset. And it is communication that makes all these values possible, i.e., communication is critical for cricket coaches. This communication cannot be one-way; it has to be two-way.

Below, the views expressed by each coach are presented:

Coach A – “Coaches always have to be correct in what they coach the players, and never give up on their improvement. Bring out the best in them and always stay positive.”

Coach B – “A coach must have knowledge, experience, and fair, and must also have respect and honesty. It should always be team first. Communication is absolutely critical. Always be open communication and two-way.”

Coach C – “Honesty, transparency, integrity, communication are important for cricket coaches. Having communication, coaches, players and staff are all on the same page, making misunderstandings less likely to happen.”

#### 3.1.1.3 Coach expectation

What do others (players, team staff, association/federation, society, etc.) expect from the cricket coaches as they develop their coaching career? What kind of characteristics are required of cricket coaches? Cricket coaches are expected to give their players the right instruction, work with them, keep learning and upskilling, understand the situations and backgrounds of all players they are working with and the environment, and have an understanding of the multi-dimensional coach role. The most important expectation of cricket coaches is that they keep having a passion to improve and grow as a coach.

Below, the views expressed by each coach are presented:

Coach A – “The players know what they need to do, the coach works with the players, and most importantly, the coach is honest.”

Coach B – “Cricket coaches need to be always learning and open to learning and also looking to upskill and challenge their own way of thinking. Then you also have to be clear about what your goal, aspiration is. Committing to learning and understanding are very important too.”

Coach C – “Cricket coaches need to understand all situation and backgrounds of the athletes and have to be open-minded and have different perspective also willing to grow and develop, learning.”

### 3.1.2 Coach style, skills, and experience

The coaching style and skills of cricket coaches are shaped by their eagerness to improve and learn new things daily, and they always keep in mind that it is player first and involve the players in the process, rather than just coach-directed guidance. Coaching in different countries, i.e., international experience, was found to be a great experience in their coaching career, even though there were challenges, such as the language barrier and cultural differences. However, these coaches found a way to overcome these challenges in that they had to make an effort to understand and have respect for the other person.

#### 3.1.2.1 Coach principle

This study also wanted to know what is the most important thing to a coach when coaching players. How they can make the players understand their thoughts and ideas. Furthermore, how they can build a good, strong team. It was found that one of the most important things is to treat the players as individuals. And it is important that the coaches and the players build the team together. During building the team, the coaches and the players need to be on the same page. If the coach's ideas and the players' ideas are different, it may be necessary to listen to each other's ideas and balance them out. In other words, a constructive criticism approach can be applied. In order to achieve these things, planning is very important and communication is everything, i.e., to be able to convey each other's ideas being on the same page. Furthermore, the coaches need to have a good understanding and supporter of their players. It is important that the coaches always pay attention to their players and support them when necessary. This does not mean that the coaches should be a good friend to the players, but the coaches should always be professional.

Below, the views expressed by each coach are presented:

Coach A – “Providing correct information and proper instructions to players.”

Coach B – “Engaging the players in the process and find a balance that we all agree and then have those things written down. Joint effort to find out about what's important to the coach and what's important to the players. So planning is very important and to achieve this and communication is everything.”

Coach C – “Player first before their cricket. Checking the person is okay and help them if they need your help. Be professional as a coach. Sharing a bit about myself and build rapport.”

#### 3.1.2.2 Personal development

The cricket coaches are not always in the same environment, so how they adapt to the ever-changing environment, and the ever-changing format and tactics of cricket are critical in developing their coaching career.

#### 3.1.2.2.1 Adapting to the different environment

Planning and preparation are crucial when adapting to a different environment, as is related understanding the age and background of the players they are coaching, as well as the level of cricket and resources available in that particular environment. Coaches need to make the most of the resources available within their environment. Coaches need to understand and respect the environment, culture, language, and other backgrounds of the people involved, rather than bringing in their own preconceived ideas. It is also important to enjoy the different environments they involve in.

Below, the views expressed by each coach are presented:

Coach A – “With younger kids, the focus is on guidance and building on the experience, and with international-level teams, it's always about making sure the players are doing the right things.”

Coach B – “To adapt in the different country, preparation and planning are very important and also have to understand clearly where cricket is at in that country. You can only do, in the moment, you can only do the best that you can with the resources that you've got. So, I think planning is super important and always have to be eager to learn.”

Coach C – “Being respectful and understanding of their culture and conditions. You should not try to bring your view or way. Accommodating the conditions.”

#### 3.1.2.2.2 Updating knowledge

Cricket tactics change every day and cricket coaches need to understand the tactics and the skills required to play them and at the same time incorporate them into the team. It was understood from the responses that coaches should not be satisfied with simply obtaining a coaching qualification, but rather need to constantly update their knowledge in order to keep up with these changes. So how the coaches update their knowledge. They can do so by gaining various practical experiences and join some courses focused on current tactics and skills. While many coaches believe it is necessary to constantly update their knowledge, it is also true that some coaches with more experience believe that no further updates are necessary. The concern at this time is that they may become stuck in their own coaching style and tactics and be left behind by the changing times, which could affect the development of their players.

Below, the views expressed by each coach are presented:

Coach A – “I've been a coach for a long time and have a lot of experience and knowledge, so I don't see the need to change my current coaching style.”

Coach B – “I took advantage of various modules and practical experiences to update my knowledge about coaching and those opportunities were really critical for my development”

Coach C – “I was continually upskilling myself to doing Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3.”

#### 3.1.2.3 Experience as a coach abroad

What impact their experience as coaches abroad (international setting) have on them. Their experiences abroad may have been good or bad (difficult, tough).

##### 3.1.2.3.1 Experience as a coach for the japan women's national team

What made the experiences of coaching in Japan the best one of her life was that she had someone who could overcome the language barrier (someone who could speak English), and above all, everyone welcomed that person and gave her the responsibility and trust to do everything possible. She also

gained the experience of success that by trusting each other and working hard as a team, they could open up many opportunities.

Below, the view expressed by coach B are presented:

Coach B – “Coaching Japan women's national team was life changing and incredible and perfect. There was a language barrier but some people spoke English so it made me much easier what I wanted to do. Also, they were all open to me coming and gave me full responsibility. We were respectful and had great attitude so that opened up a lot of opportunities for us.”

### 3.1.2.3.2 Experience as a coach in India

What made the experiences of coaching in India a fantastic experience of her life was that it was an opportunity to understand diversity in religions, cultures, etc. She also learned that diversity is not necessarily a bad thing, but is very important in terms of mutual respect and understanding.

Below, the view expressed by coach C are presented:

Coach C – “I actually had a fantastic experience. Understanding the diverse needs and beliefs and making sure that people respected each other, but didn't kind of offend anyone either. Everyone brought a different style or different background.”

## 3.1.3 Communication

Communication is critical in any sports, including cricket. Communication in sports varies widely in both situations and methods. Communication methods as cricket coaches depend on the level and environment. The higher the level, the more diverse the communication methods. However, even if the methods are diverse, the coaches still try to convey the message to the players properly. In other words, it means communication is a two-way street, and one crosses paths, and more. When they face any difficulties in communicating with their players, they may try to deal with the difficulties by trying to rebuild the good relationship with their players, but it is important to understand that this does not necessarily solve these difficulties. Communication in cricket is not just about conveying the coach's thoughts, but also a way to build trust with the players. Therefore, coaches need to constantly review their own behavior.

### 3.1.3.1 Method of communication depending on the situation

There are many different ways to communicate, and cricket coaches change the method depending on the age and environment of the players. While face-to-face communication, where you can see the other person's face, is undoubtedly the best, but sometimes this is not possible.

Below, the views expressed by each coach are presented:

Coach A – “Phone call, video call, email can't see me and sometimes happens misinterpreted. So therefore, what I do is always face-to-face.”

Coach B – “National team level, in camp, face-to-face communication. It could be individual, team, one on one. After leaving camp, email communication and other messaging. Relying on player feedback but also other coaches. It's a real mixture of all of that communication.”

Coach C – “Face to face method whole time if the players live together like in India but with Canterbury team, it was a mix with emails and face to face. I think what method I use is depending on the age of player. If younger athlete I am coaching it tend to be a lot more face to face or with parents, not so much technology.”

### 3.1.3.2 Another method of communication and timing

The timing of when cricket coaches communicate with their players is not something that the coach decides alone. It is very important for their players to feel to communicate with their coaches whenever they want to in order to build a trusting relationship between them. When there is a language barrier, using an interpreter is one way to communicate in an international setting (i.e., coach from another culture). The most important thing is to have two-way communication. It is also important to talk to the players sincerely and honestly, rather than in an overbearing attitude.

Below, the views expressed by each coach are presented:

Coach A – “At club level, there is the best method to use face to face communication.”

Coach B – “You are available to them and make them feel they can communicate with you and have that opportunity. It is important for coaches to be able to pick up on player's struggle (it may be outside of cricket) and offer some support. Always have to be two-way and try to build good relationship with your players and also open and honest communication.”

Coach C – “I was not able to speak the local language so need translator. So, translator is one of the other ways. And I had to ask for a two-way communication if it was okay for everyone.”

### 3.1.3.3 Dealing with difficulties

Expectedly, coaches sometimes face difficulties when they coach their players. What kinds of difficulties they face and how to deal with the difficulties is the question? Some coaches face the difficulties of language barrier. They try to deal with this kind of difficulty by keeping what they would like to teach their players simple, and in taking more time to make their players understand what they told. Also, the use of a translator to make the things easier for both coaches and players was one answer. However, there have been times when players have taken advantage of the language barrier to badmouth their coaches or behave in a way that could lead to misunderstandings. It is also true that there was a coach who has been refused communication because their players were overconfident and did not accept the coach's opinions. When coaches have any problems with their players or face any difficulties, they look back on their own behavior and try to solve the problems/difficulties, but they are not always able to solve them. The coaches may decide to quit their role when they cannot solve them in worst scenario.

Below, the views expressed by each coach are presented:

Coach A – “If working with a group who can't speak English, try to keep it simple, take more time and do things more slowly to make the players understand what I coach.”

Coach B – “I had some real challenges working with White Ferns. It was very sad to me. There were difficulties communicating with players who called world class by themselves. Always tried to look at myself to deal with those difficulties. Sometimes the perceived better players, the more experienced players, the senior players, where they did not want to be accountable for anything. And that's a danger in a team setting. I couldn't deal with those problems and build relationship with that kind of players so decided to quit my role as a head coach for White Ferns.”

Coach C – “Translation might have been miscommunicated and the girls have translated it but didn't translate it right and they could have used the language barrier against me.”

### 3.1.3.4 Paying attention to the players

The coaches try to pay attention to the players. This is done in



order to praise the players, to build their confidence, and to keep reminding them the coaches are always on their side and ready to support them if they need. The coaches always stay (or try to be) positive. The most important thing here is to make sure that what the coaches try to communicate to the players is being conveyed correctly (i.e., the message is received as intended). Furthermore, it is important to make sure that there are no misunderstandings or miscommunications.

Below, the views expressed by each coach are presented:

Coach A – “Always praise players and build their confidence. Including the players in the assessment to make them think about what to do improve.”

Coach B – “When communicating with players, pay attention to my body language and their body language, timing (trying to work out when the timing is) and tone coming from I support you, I believe in you. And find a way to try and get the best out of everybody.”

Coach C – “When communicating with players, try to find ways to get confirmation that the message was received and also check in that they have definitely got it or understand the message.”

### 3.1.3.5 Review own behavior

The cricket coaches review their own behaviors after each session. They think about what went wrong and what they need to improve on for the next session. While self-reviewing is important, one coach believes that having a mentor who can objectively observe their behaviors and give them feedback is also necessary for them to keep improving as a cricket coach. Coaches may not need to change their own behavior. Even if something is not working at the time, if there are any chances for improvement later or it is in line with their values, there may be no need to change their behavior. In short, they need to review their own behavior and determine what should and should not be changed.

Below, the views expressed by each coach are presented:

Coach A – “After each coaching session, reflect on the day and ask yourself if there is anything you could have done better. If there is, write it down and work on it to help your player become a better player.”

Coach B – “As a coach you're always reviewing at the end of the day, what did I well, what have I got to work on. It is important to have a mentor to get some insight.”

Coach C – “You had to learn not to change your behavior if you might have been frustrated or not happy. You had to be calm, clear, patient and consistent.”

### 3.1.3.6 Change own behavior

Coaches vary their behavior depending on the age of their players and environment they have. In other words, they need to be flexible in order to change their behavior. It is important to note that an older player is not necessarily the best player on the team, so while it is important to change their behavior depends on age of their players, they also need to pay attention to change their behavior depending on the level of the players.

Below, the views expressed by each coach are presented:

Coach A – “Coaches should change their coaching style, behavior depending on who their players are and their age.”

Coach B – “Just because someone has more years of experience doesn't necessarily mean they're a better player. There needs to be a balance.”

Coach C – “Change coaching style depends on circumstance. try to accommodate what the players need and don't try to stuck in my plan. always be flexible to shift the plan.”

### 3.1.3.7 Affecting player motivation and retention

Motivation comes naturally from the players; however, the coaches need to guide their players to increase their motivation. Both players and coaches need to take responsibility for their roles. For players, that means working hard to improve and being committed to the team. If players are performing their roles and have the right support from their coaches, they will remain motivated. As a cricket coach, they need to be careful to understand that if their words or attitude are too strict or negative, some players may take it in a negative way. And it is possible to change their life and demotivate.

Below, the views expressed by each coach are presented:

Coach A – “Motivation comes from within the players themselves, but the coach's role is to provide guidance that will help the players improve and ultimately increase their motivation.”

Coach B – “Coaches and players are accountable for their roles. If someone demotivated, the coaches support them on one on one as soon as possible. If you are a coach too hard and too strict then you can really unravel players. If you always go back to your values and make sure you respect the players, are fair, and care them, you are able to align.”

Coach C – “Your communication, tone of your voice, your body language the player may or may not receive something and it could change their life. So be very careful what you say. and be very mindful of what you say or do could really affect someone else.

## 4. Discussion

The research dealt with three New Zealand coaches from different backgrounds. By conducting interviews with the coaches with different levels of coaching experience, from club level to national and state representative level, the author was able to gain a deeper understanding of the role of a cricket coach as a communicator. The results presented above show how coaches in New Zealand, a cricket developed country, have built their careers, overcome difficulties they faced in their coaching career as a communicator, and built trusting relationships with their players. The discussion illuminates what the role of a cricket coach is as a communicator, what values are important as a cricket coach, how they communicate with players and strengthens the team, how they overcome the difficulties faced when they have language barriers and cultural differences, what is important in building a trusting relationship with players, and how the coach's communication methods affect the player's motivation and retention.

The analysis will also provide valuable insight for the stakeholder/s of Japan cricket towards their goal of building a high-performing team in the future. The results from this study and interpretations therein clearly revealed that the coaches considered the role of the coach in cricket to be multi-dimensional (Anderson *et al.*, 2024) [2]. As mentioned by (Smith and Smoll, 2017) [10].

“Coaches occupy a central role in sport, fulfilling instructional, organizational, strategic, and social relationship functions. Athletes' skill acquisition, success, enjoyment, continued participation, and physical and psychological well-being are all strongly influenced by coaching behaviors” (Smith and Smoll, 2017) [10].

It is the view of the coaches that the role of a cricket coach is not just to transfer (teach) skills and tactics, but also to support players as their seniors in the life especially if they have problems in their daily lives. And, to treat players as

people rather than just cricket players. They also believe that a coach in cricket should be a role model and a good leader not only for players and team staff, but for everyone involved with them. This includes the society (audience) at large. There is no doubt that communication is essential to fulfilling these roles. This is consistent with the author's idea of a coach as a communicator with multidimensional roles: organizer, teacher, manager, mentor and role model (Anderson *et al.*, 2024) [2]. Below, the author highlights (sections 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3) some of the key take-away from the 3 coaches' interviews, in regards to their values and their communication methods and impacts on player motivation.

#### 4.1 Value

The interviewees stated that the values that a cricket coach should possess are a wealth of knowledge and experience, as well as honesty, integrity and a positive attitude. To further elaborate the point regarding to the values of cricket coach, it becomes clear that the players are looking for these values too. For example –

"I want them to be 100% honest." (personal communication, Player X).

And also –

"I want them to have an attitude that leads me to a positive, not a negative, attitude." (personal communication, Player Y). Communication is essential to embodying these values. It goes beyond the notion that a coach should simply teach skills and tactics to validate that a coach must also be a good communicator. Furthermore, this can be said what the coaches in any sports should be like in the future as a communicator.

#### 4.2 Ways and means of communication to build a strong team

The research from Mishra and co-workers (2015) mention communication is the key element to a successful team (Mishra *et al.*, 2015) [7]. While the coaches interviewed believe that face-to-face communication is the best method of communication, they also acknowledge that face-to-face meetings may not be possible given the circumstances of the players. Therefore, the reality is that communication methods vary widely. Considering that communication is a key element in building a strong team, communication methods are important, but it seems even more important that the communication is successful (i.e., whether the messages they send are properly understood by the receiver, whether misunderstandings or miscommunications don't happen and two-way communication between coaches and players). One coach described she makes sure the messages she sends out are properly understood by her players, while another said it is important that all players and team staff are on the same page. In regards to ways and methods of communication, it becomes clear that the players are looking for the same. For example –

"It's also important for them to reach out to me and it's like basically a two-way relationship." (personal communication, Player X).

And also –

"I think it is really good to basically just gather everything so everyone is on the right page." (personal communication, Player X).

It implies that both the methods of communication and the process of communication are important.

#### 4.3 Player's motivation and communication impact to and from their coaches

"Depending on the communicative actions, a coach may positively or negatively impact an athlete's self-awareness,

self-confidence, anxiety, autonomy, and motivation. Coaches play an important role in increasing an athletes' confidence level and motivation" (Kim *et al.*, 2020) [6].

The results support the idea that the role of a cricket coach goes beyond simply teaching skills/tactics and has a multi-dimensional role as a communicator. The coaches interviewed shared the view that motivation comes from the players, not something the coaches give them. This view is also shared by a player, –

"I still continue playing cricket, even with or without communication from the coach, and I would still like want to play and still want to improve" (personal communication, Player X),

making it clear that motivation comes from within the players themselves. However, it is the coach's communication that plays a role in guiding the players' motivation in the right direction and further increasing that motivation. And, interestingly, the coaches interviewed shared this view. One coach described that the coaches need to be careful about their own words, behavior and attitude, because their words, behavior and attitude could not only lower the motivation of the players, but could also affect the players' lives. In regards to communication impact from the coaches, it becomes clear that the players feel the same. For example –

"If I didn't know what I want to, if what they were looking for, and if I didn't understand why I was getting dropped from the team, and not getting selected, and that much, I don't think I would want to continue if I placed a lot of importance on that, then I didn't think I would want to continue playing" (personal communication, Player X).

And also –

"When I see that the coach wants to understand me not only as a player but also as a person, my personality and background, and asks me a lot of questions, is always positive, and gives me encouragement and guidance that helps me grow not only as a player but also as a person, it makes me want to work harder and I don't want to quit. From my own experience, when the coach's attitude and language were negative, I wanted to quit cricket." (personal communication, Player Y).

This approach aligns with what the research literature calls the coach's role in player retention (Agnew and Pill, 2022) [1]. The role of the coach as a communicator in any sports is believed to make the sport competitive on the world stage, and furthermore to enrich the lives of the players, team staff, and all those involved, as well as society.

#### 5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that effective communication is central to building strong coach-player relationships and developing high-performing cricket teams. Through qualitative interviews with experienced coaches in New Zealand, the study identified strategies and practices that promote player motivation, trust, and retention. Although the research was limited by the inability to interview Japanese coaches due to recent staff changes, insights from a high-level cricketing environment provide valuable guidance for addressing communication challenges in Japan. Future research should extend these findings by including the perspectives of Japanese coaches and players, as well as coaches and players from other established and developing cricket nations. Collecting this diverse input will help create a globally relevant coach communication evaluation framework, adaptable across cultural contexts. Ultimately, the goal is to develop sustainable communication criteria that not



only improve coaching effectiveness in cricket but also offer broader insights into effective communication and leadership in sports.

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