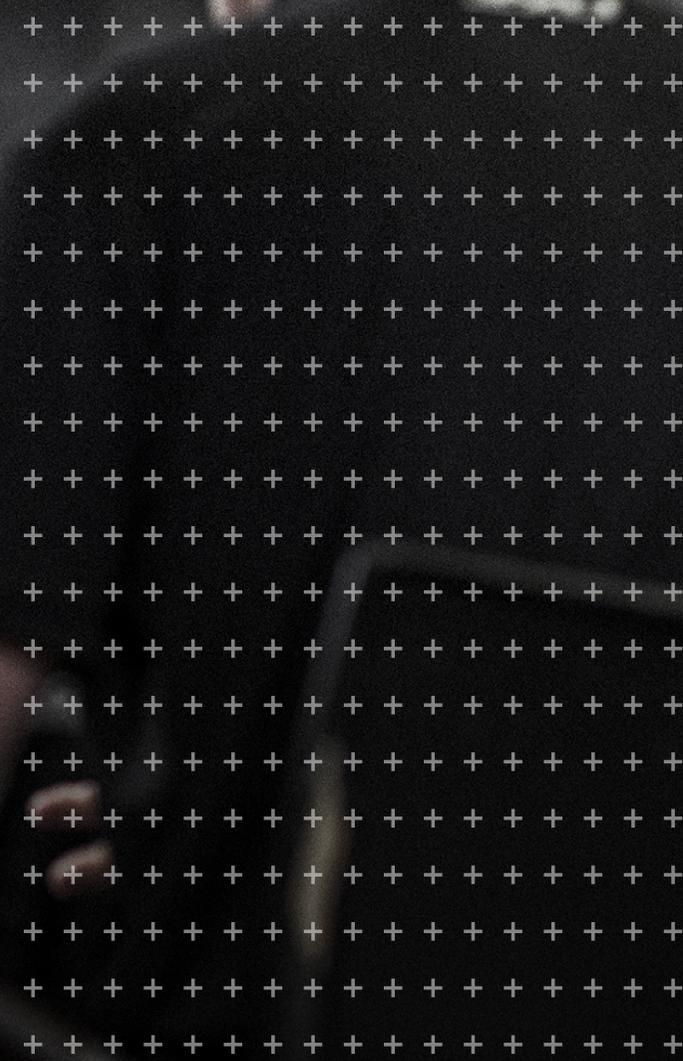




HIGH PERFORMANCE  
SPORT NEW ZEALAND



# HP COACHING C19 INSIGHT REPORT



# INTRODUCTION

The emergence of and response to Covid-19 (C19) has been a first-time experience for us all. Globally, sport has taken a back seat to public health.

To better understand this experience and its impact on the coaches of New Zealand's high-performance athletes, HPSNZ, with support and endorsement from its High Performance Coach Advisory Group, undertook a multi-stage information-gathering process, as set out below:

1

In partnership with AUT, a study was designed and conducted, through a structured survey, of the experiences and reflections of 92 coaches from across the New Zealand high-performance system. Their key findings are represented in an infographic.

2

The survey findings were cross-referenced and supplemented by a desktop review of international research-based literature. A summary is presented (see Appendix).

3

Supplementary interviews were conducted with Ian Foster, current coach of the All Blacks; by Mike Hesson, former coach of the Black Caps and current Director of Cricket Operations for Royal Chargers Bangalore.

4

Finally, a focus group was undertaken with the HPSNZ Coach Advisory Group and attendees of a high performance coach workshop in Waikato, orchestrated by Athletics New Zealand coach, Debbie Strange.



An analysis of the information gathered through this multi-stage process produced 4 key insights.

The purpose of the HP Coach Advisory Group's is twofold:

Enhance Support Provision – Advise on how to improve existing HPSNZ HP coach supports;

Advance HP Coaching – Advise on how to advance the future of HP coaching across the HP system.

HPCAG membership: Tom Willmott (Chair), Raylene Bates, Gary Francis, Mike Hesson, Ross Machejefski, Kirsten Hellier, Shem Rodgers, Jo Aleh, Helene Wilson

**KEY FINDINGS FROM THE SURVEY OF NEW ZEALAND HIGH PERFORMANCE COACHES:**

**The challenge of COVID-19**



**70%**

said COVID-19 was worse than previous challenges they have encountered



**81%**

said COVID-19 created new challenges



**41%**

said COVID-19 magnified existing challenges

**Coaches worried about...**



Wellbeing of others



Financial impacts on family, partner, household



Long term job security



Inability to travel for international competition

**Support**



Family is the most highly rated, and most frequently used type of support for coaches

Coaches indicated high quality support and relationships to the athletes they coach

**PD & Learning**



**61%**

engaged in more professional development/learning in the last 6 months

**Health**



**48%**

said their health was affected by COVID-19 (+VE OR -VE)

Lower average health ratings were shown for coaches who live away from their support network, those who coach over 10 athletes, and those between 40-49 years old.



Overall Health  
**3.97**  
out of 5

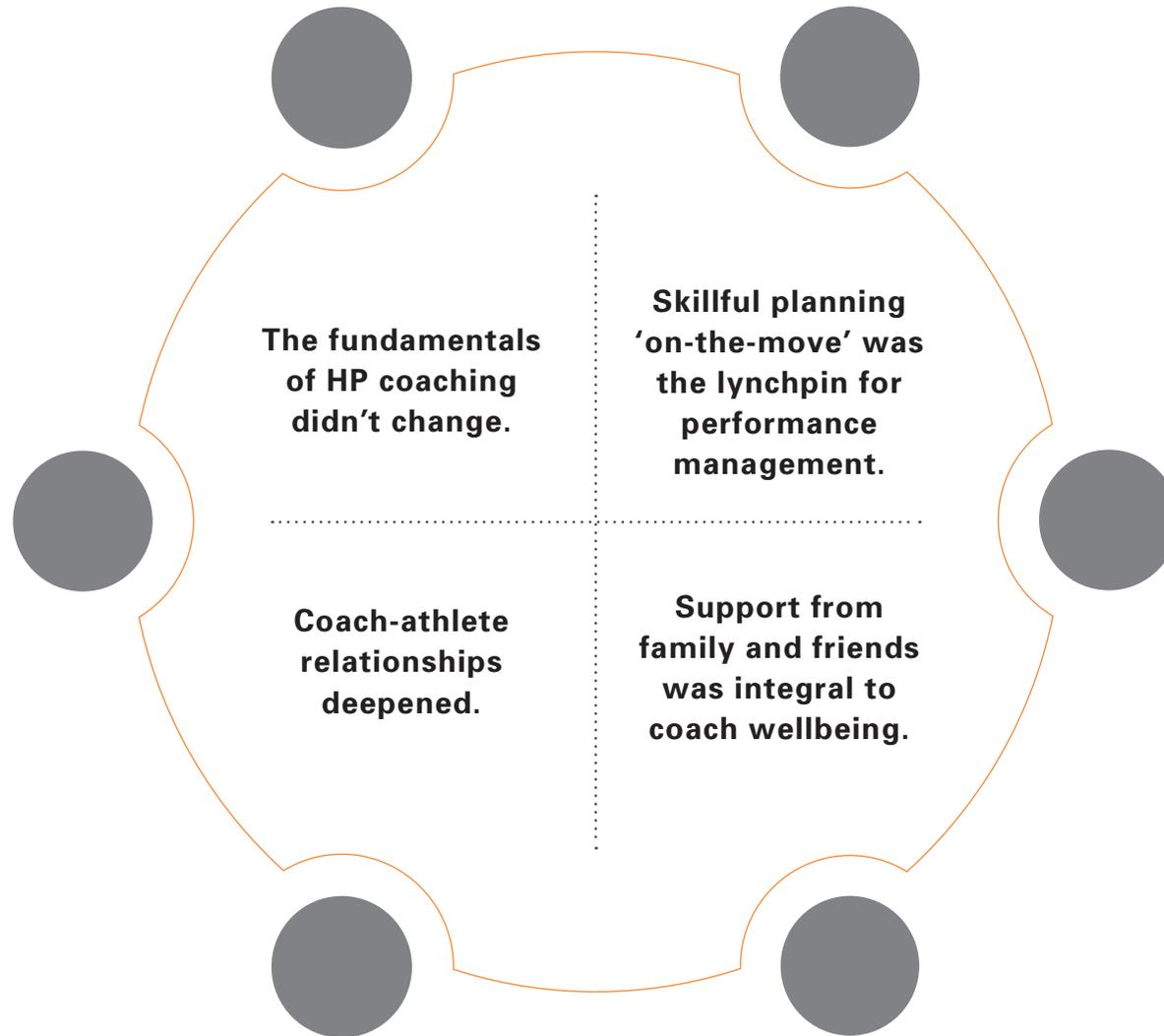


Mental Health  
**3.84**  
out of 5



Physical Health  
**3.71**  
out of 5

# THE INSIGHTS



# THE INSIGHTS

## 1. THE FUNDAMENTALS OF HP COACHING DIDN'T CHANGE

C19 impacted the members of our high performance coaching community in substantially different ways.

The clearest message across the board from coaches was that whilst their methods may have been adjusted for an entirely new context, the fundamentals of high performance coaching – the daily work of performance improvement – remain.

That said, for many there was a sense of increased uncertainty accompanied by a perceived loss of control. Although most fared reasonably well, for some a loss of income and an increased awareness of job security, on top of increases in job-related stress through additional workload, had a negative impact on wellbeing.

However, whilst the challenging aspects of living through the onset of C19 were clear, it appears that for every individual that

experienced significant difficulty, there was another who has valued the extra time to rest, recover, reset, exercise, learn, and be with family. For many, the new ideas and approaches have been engaging, exciting and motivating.

These different impacts emphasise the need for insight into the situations of coaches to be appreciated on an individual level and support provided to be needs-driven rather than blanket.



**Nothing is different. Just the 'how' has changed."**

.....

## 2. COACH-ATHLETE RELATIONSHIPS DEEPENED

After an initial period of over-communication – of being 'Zoomed-out' – communication settled into a routine that generated and sustained connection and productivity.

Coach-athlete relationships saw adjustments, but the general picture was one of richer connections. Many coaches got new perspectives on their relationships with the athletes they coach, including deeper sharing of values and of individual family situations.

Two particular words that stand out in the qualitative dataset: 'resilience' and 'independence'. Coaches found it rewarding and, in some cases, a little surprising, to see just how resilient athletes really were and how capable and driven they were in pursuit of training independent of their usual structures. Other prominent descriptors of athletes were: adaptable, committed, driven, independent, connected, and passionate.

In summary, coaches were checking-in with athletes more often and they were finding themselves talking about wider aspects of life, often with little direct link to performance.



**I learned about their family, values and why they are involved in sport."**

.....

# THE INSIGHTS

## 3. SKILFUL PLANNING 'ON-THE-MOVE' IS THE LYNCHPIN FOR PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT



**I am being more fluid around my planning.”**

Coaches emphasized the importance of being well-planned and organized, and, at the same time, referred to the need to be open to circumstance and opportunity.



**I am planning the ‘what ifs’ better.”**

There was greater impetus behind the need to engage in more robust contingency planning. Where coaches would typically have expected and catered for the inevitable variability between what was planned and what was executed, this process came into focus.



**You can plan as well as you can, but you actually have to just be flexible and be willing to adapt and roll with the punches, otherwise it will eat you up [...] just make sure you just deal with the next day...”**

An increased focus on contingency planning was just one means of catering to the uncertainty brought about by C-19. With it came the emergence of a highly functional ‘response skillset’, a willingness to face the constraints and adapt accordingly.

It is worth highlighting that whilst the quote above emphasises the need for flexibility from a functional ‘get on with it’ perspective, it also brings a both a ‘consequence’ and a ‘coping’ dimension that reflects the impact of working with and through significant uncertainty.

# THE INSIGHTS

## 4. SUPPORT FROM FAMILY AND FRIENDS WAS INTEGRAL TO COACH WELLBEING

The most frequently-used and most valued source of support was that that came from those closest to the coaches – their families and friends.

This insight serves as a reminder that system-based intervention is not the sole mechanism to ensure the health of a community.

This said, alongside these highly valued people – friends and family – value was also placed on other supporters: colleagues, NSOs, and institutions such as HPSNZ that reflect a system-wide support structure. That different coaches valued different aspects of support

again reflects the point that support is not ‘one-size-fits-all’, but something that is shaped around the needs of the individual.

A corollary of the widely-valued support from friends and family was one particularly noteworthy piece

in the data: that C-19 was shown to have been a particularly challenging time for those living alone and away from family.

## CONCLUSION

The C19 study and its related interviews and focus group provided a timely overview of the status of New Zealand’s high performance coaching community as it moved through the early stages of the national and global response to the pandemic.

The direct changes associated with C19 – national and regional lockdowns; the embargo on international travel, training and competition; testing; contact-tracing; self-isolation and the quarantine infrastructure – as with all

New Zealanders, impacted coaches in a range of ways. The picture that emerged from the study was that our high performance coaches accepted constraints and then adapted to change by using the resources around them.

Finally, coming forward from the study were perspectives from coaches on how ‘the system’ – NSO, HPSNZ and other stakeholders could learn and adapt from C19. Those perspectives fell into three broad categories: communication, support and planning.

The picture that emerged from the coaches’ perspectives was simple:

- 1 HP system leaders and stakeholders were encouraged to stay close to the reality being faced by those ‘on the ground’ in order to provide an informed and realistic basis for system-level decision-making.
- 2 In the face of uncertainty, stakeholders were urged to communicate as early, clearly and completely as possible; this as an antidote to increased performance-related ambiguity, as well as a means to minimise anxiety.
- 3 All stakeholders with an interest in the performance and wellbeing of coaches were encouraged to maintain the connections and support available to them across the system.

# APPENDIX 1

## GLOBAL INSIGHTS REPORT SUMMARY

### Global Insights Report on the Impact of C.19

*This brief report is focused on coaches and/or the role of coaching, therefore, by default the impacts on athletes is also reported here; when in relation to coaching.*

#### Key Themes:

1. *Perceived Stress in Coaches* (Article 1a) – male coaches and elite coaches showed to be more in control of the situation (positive stress) than female coaches and non-elite coaches, support can be found through web-based interventions.
2. *Staying Connected with Athletes* (1b, 1c, 2a, 3b, 3m) – coaches being proactive in order to aid motivation, creativity, messaging, exploration of ideas, and provide support during isolation and working from home.
3. *Balance* (1c, 1d, 2a, 3b, 3e, 5a) – understating the athlete versus the at-home individual, i.e. identification of the person as a whole. Athletes sought pursuit of complementary interests in lockdown, explored multidimensional aspects of their lives.
4. *Mindfulness* (1d, 2a, 2b, 2d, 3c, 3e, 3h) – exploration of psychological approaches, coping mechanisms, enhancing well-being, time for reflection and flexibility of processes.
5. *Athlete-Coach Relationships* (2c and 'Staying Connected' articles as above) – “strengthening of existing relationships within the athletes lives in their personal and professional spheres”.
6. *Training Regimes* (3c, 3f, 3i, 3j) – at home programmes plus diet and injury prevention.

7. *Writing* (3g and 'Staying Connected' articles as above) – for reflective purposes.
8. *At risk groups* (3n) - The following group had the highest level of impact mental health during C.19 lockdown; female student-athlete from a medium or low socioeconomic status with high academic demands and poor or inexistent training conditions during lockdown.

In summary, the key 'actionable insights' were maintaining connectivity with the athlete, understanding their at home life-balance, understanding and aiding mindfulness through psychological approaches and tools, and providing training regimes to suit their unique situations. Male coaches and elite coaches were seen to be more in control of the situation, while reflective writing was supplementary to ongoing support.

There are multiple articles that relate to issues that coaches and the wider support team need to consider in terms of logistics and/or managing quarantine (2d, 3e, 3k, 3l, & 5a).

In addition, a quick scan for Rio 2016 for Zika, and Athens 2004 for SARS, produced common themes around preparedness and logistics.

*On the whole our NZ C.19 coaches impact report is supported by the international trends. There are several key points listed about in relation to athlete welfare that I believe coaches would benefit from be aware of (i.e. managing quarantine), but as we did not collect data from athletes, we do not have NZ specific data to compare too.*

*Completed by Dr Sarah-Kate Millar (AUT University), March 12th, 2021 for HPSNZ.*

# APPENDIX 1

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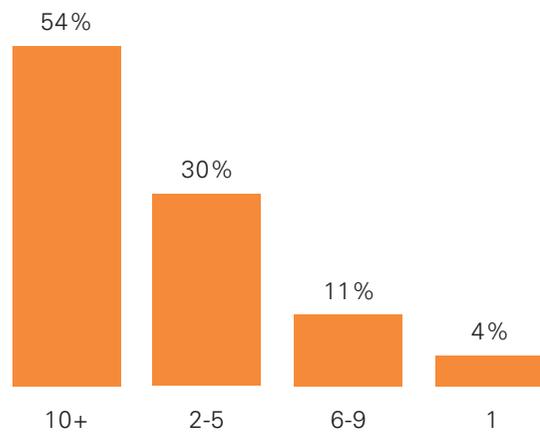
# APPENDIX 2

## COACH DEMOGRAPHICS

Tokyo bound coaches



Number of athletes coached



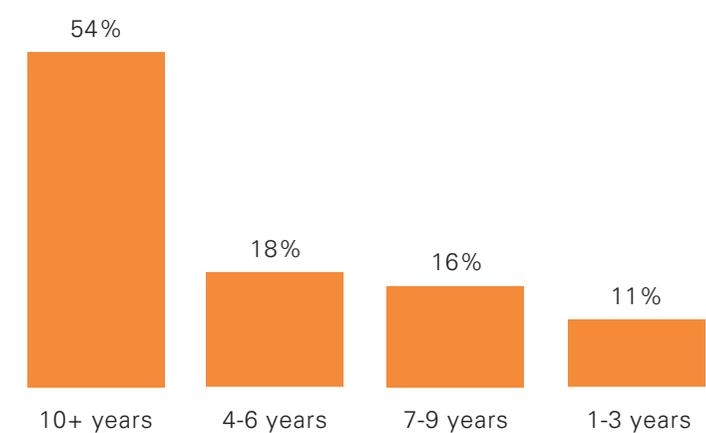
Age and gender of coaches



Coach Accelerator Programme



Years of experience coaching HP sport





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