

Female athlete considerations: Improving coach knowledge and confidence via an online short course

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Introduction

With a growing awareness and recognition of female-specific considerations when training athletes, there is a requirement for coaching and support staff to be educated on current best practice guidelines when working with female athletes. The aim of this study was to assess the effectiveness of an online short course aimed at improving the knowledge of coaching and support staff working with female athletes.

Methods

This study used a mixed-methods survey design, where participants completed three instances of an online survey (pre-course, post-course, and 6 months post-course) before and after an online 8-week short course involving both content delivery and an applied practice block. Questions involved both quantitative (numeric) and qualitative (textual) responses. Open-ended survey questions were analysed thematically to explore two a priori themes of 'Course expectations' and 'Changes in practice'. The data were explored inductively within these pre-determined thematic areas. Finally, overall course feedback was analysed deductively to provide guidance for future course delivery.

Results

Of the 92 participants who completed both pre- and post- surveys, 72% (n=66) were female and 67% (n=62) were from a team sport. The perceived knowledge and confidence of participants both improved following the course ($p<0.001$) and were still above pre-course values 6-months post ($p<0.001$). Two sub-themes were generated within the 'Course expectations' theme: *Empowering [me] to empower and support [them]*, and *Sharing knowledge and experiences*. Within the 'Changes in Practice' theme the subthemes *Relaxing into it* and *Embedding support structures* were observed. Feedback from participants indicated that they enjoyed learning from a variety of content experts as well as each other, and that the online learning format was suitable.

Discussion

Future educational courses aimed at coaching and support staff are encouraged to apply our learnings to design and deliver programs in a way that is accessible and aligned with the learning styles and preferences of these individuals. When delivering specific education regarding supporting female athletes, directly targeting and encouraging men to participate may also be beneficial.