

## The Role of the Coach in Elite Equestrian Sport

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**Abstract :** The British Equestrian Federation (BEF) aims to develop a holistic coach education and certification program, moving away from traditional autocratic instruction in line with the UK Coaching Framework. This framework is based on generic coaching science research where the coach is cited as a pivotal aspect in developing sporting success. Theoretic knowledge suggests that the role of the sports coach is to develop the physical, tactical, technical and psychological attributes of the athlete and is responsible for the planning, organization and delivery of the training plan and competition schedule. However, to the best of the author's knowledge, there is no empirical evidence to suggest that is the role required in equestrian sport as the rider takes responsibility for many of these tasks. This research aimed to address the void in current knowledge by gaining an understanding of coaching in equestrian sport in order to improve coaching education system through awareness of the role of the coach. Objectives were to examine the relationship between coach and rider at elite level in equestrian sport providing empirical evidence to suggest that the rider is, in part, 'self-coached'. To identify the elite equestrian coaches' role in coaching these 'self-coached riders. A qualitative method using semi-structured interviews was used. A sample of elite coaches (N=3) and elite riders (N=3) were interviewed. Analysis of the transcripts revealed a total of 534 meaning units that were further grouped into sub-themes and general themes from the coaches' perspective and the riders' perspective. This led to the development of a final thematic structure revealing major dimensions that characterized coaching in elite equestrian sport. It was found that the riders at the elite level coach themselves the majority of the time, therefore, can be considered as 'self-coached' athletes. However, they do use elite coaches in a mentoring and consultancy role, where they seek guidance from the coach on specific problems, to sound ideas off or to seek reassurance that what they are doing is correct. Findings from this research suggest that the rider-coach relationship at the elite level is a professional one, based on trust and respect, but not a close relationship as seen in other sports. The results show the imperative need for the BEF to educate coaches in coaching the self-coached rider at the elite level, particularly in terms of mentoring skills. As well as incorporating rider education aimed at developing the independent, self-coached riders.

**Keywords :** coaching, elite sport, equestrian, self coached

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