

1 **“Hey, look at me” An {auto}ethnographic account of experiencing ADHD symptoms**  
2 **within sport.**

3 Charles Ing<sup>1</sup>, John P. Mills<sup>2</sup>

4 *<sup>1</sup> Department of Sport and Exercise Sciences, Teesside University, Middlesbrough, UK*

5 *<sup>2</sup> School of Sport, Rehabilitation, and Exercise Sciences, University of Essex*  
6 *Wivenhoe, UK. john.mills@essex.ac.uk*

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

1 Using an autoethnographic approach, the first author, an individual diagnosed with ADHD in  
2 early childhood, explores his lived sporting experiences with the help of the second author.  
3 Although there is a tendency for research into ADHD to be confined largely to clinical  
4 evaluation and subjective interpretations, this fails to advance cultural understanding and  
5 ultimately maintains the status quo. Therefore, by sharing and exploring experiences, both as  
6 an athlete and a coach, we aim to address this in-balance within sport and give a voice to the  
7 voiceless (Holt 2003). By endeavouring to reveal the thoughts and feelings attached to key  
8 episodes within the first author's experience as a player and a coach, the study functions to  
9 provide preliminary evidence to showcase how ADHD can impact upon those who  
10 participate in sport. Furthermore, the vignettes presented act as a vehicle to signpost the  
11 reader in accessing the available academic literature. As a result, it is hoped that this  
12 manuscript will (1) bring further meaning to this often misunderstood condition, (2)  
13 showcase how ADHD symptoms may present themselves within a sporting environment, and  
14 (3) enable coaches to better support those who experience similar episodes.

15

16 **Keywords:** Attention Deficit Hyper Activity Disorder (ADHD); Sport; Mental Health;  
17 Coaches; Anger.

18

1 **“Hey, look at me” An {auto}ethnographic account of experiencing ADHD symptoms**  
2 **within sport.**

3 As a behavioural disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is  
4 usually characterized by abnormal behaviour, impulsiveness, inattention and forms of  
5 hyperactivity (Putukian 2011). As such, youth athletes with ADHD are often singled out by  
6 coaches as trouble makers (Beyer et al. 2009, Vargas et al. 2012, Braun and Braun 2015).  
7 Although scholars frequently describe the condition as an excuse for aberrant behaviour,  
8 ADHD has more recently become accepted as a unique disorder of brain connectivity  
9 (Timimi 2005, Kutcher 2011). According to White et al. (2013) prevalence rates of ADHD  
10 are currently as high as 10% of all children. Furthermore, scholars suggest that higher levels  
11 of ADHD are experienced in males with symptoms such as an inability to focus attention  
12 reported well into adulthood (Harpin 2005, Benkert et al. 2010, Karam et al. 2015).  
13 According to Beyer et al. (2008) ADHD diagnosed athletes are often faced with an inability  
14 to follow directions and remember strategic information. Therefore, when supporting athletes  
15 experiencing ADHD symptomology, Connant-Norville (2012) suggests enjoyment focused  
16 activities and patience when working with young children. Connant-Norville (2012) also  
17 advocates the importance of support and understanding when working with athletes during  
18 adolescence. Although sage advice, Beyer et al. (2008) note that coaching education  
19 programmes often omit such information. With this in mind, Beyer et al. (2008) call for the  
20 adoption of a more varied approach to coach education that better supports coaches in  
21 assisting those with ADHD along with other hidden disabilities and disorders.

22 Although research examining the consequences of ADHD in sport has begun (see  
23 Beyer et al. 2009, Moya et al. 2012, Braun and Braun 2014), as with other mental health  
24 research, qualitative inquiry has lagged behind (Peters 2010). As such, interpretive  
25 approaches may play a central part in shaping, questioning, and enlightening populations

1 (Fuermaier et al. 2014, Defenbaugh 2008, Bochner and Ellis 2016). Moreover, although  
2 diverse views are offered by practitioners as to what ADHD represents (Barkley 2002), first-  
3 person accounts from subcultural “natives” are required to gain a deeper level of  
4 understanding (Denzin 2000). As a result, this autoethnography adds to what is a growing  
5 pool of research using narrative approaches in sport (e.g. Douglas 2009, Zehntner and  
6 McMahon 2013, Mitchell et al. 2016).

7         Diagnosed with ADHD at age 5, the first author has found himself battling many  
8 invisible challenges of the condition. Although his symptomatology has gradually improved  
9 as he has progressed into adulthood, sport was always an integral part of his development.  
10 With this in mind, we will utilise an autoethnographic approach to draw upon his lived  
11 experiences in an effort to contribute to the understanding of how ADHD symptoms may be  
12 presented within sport (Sparkes 2000). Despite criticism (Buzard 2003, Anderson 2006, Wall  
13 2008) autoethnographies have received support in their ability to highlight human  
14 experiences at both an individual and group level (Ellis and Bochner 2000, Carles and  
15 Douglas 2013, Mills 2015). Within the present manuscript, we seek to tackle deep-seated  
16 stigma in society by addressing and exploring the first author’s experiences of “feeling  
17 misunderstood” (Mueller et al. 2012, Michielsen et al. 2015).

18         Although individuals with ADHD may be predisposed to organisational memory  
19 difficulties when recalling personal experiences (Klein et al. 2011), formal discussions  
20 between the first and second author helped to bring structure to the events and increase the  
21 vividness of reflections (Ellis and Bochner 2000). Through the process of collaboratively  
22 writing the manuscript, loose descriptions of lived events were developed with creativity into  
23 thoughtful vignettes that effectively communicate and represent the first author’s experiences  
24 (Smith et al. 2015, Emerald and Carpenter 2016). The stories told explain fragments of  
25 individual experiences and the dramatisation of feelings; projecting silent stories of hopes,

1 fears and vulnerabilities (Purdy et al. 2008, McMahon and Dinan-Thompson 2011, Carless  
2 and Douglas 2013). It is hoped that the vignettes presented provide support to those  
3 experiencing ADHD and allow others to closely feel conditions as they are experienced  
4 (Bochner and Ellis 2016).

5 Adams (2006) suggests successful autoethnographies show rather than tell readers  
6 what the story is meant to theoretically convey. Building on the recent recommendations of  
7 Wall (2016, p. 8), the current manuscript aims to “combine the power of the personal  
8 perspective with the value of analysis and theory”. As such, it is hoped that the stories  
9 presented here will connect and guide the reader to relevant literature (Wall 2016). Further,  
10 as Minge and Zimmerman (2013, p.13) suggest, autoethnography is best “understood [by]  
11 sharing, discussing and reflecting with a trusted friend”. Although the primary author can be  
12 traced as “I” throughout the vignettes, to gain clarity on issues faced by individuals with  
13 ADHD and theoretically guide the reader, the vignettes are critically analysed and  
14 evocatively crafted with the support of a trusted other (Minge and Zimmerman 2013). In  
15 doing so, “we” marks the collaborative “reflexive and theoretical unpacking of the narrative  
16 journey”” (Minge and Zimmerman 2013). However, adopting the approach used by Mills  
17 (2015), we have employed Sparkes’ (2004) personal and academic voice framework. We do  
18 this with the aim of distinctively highlighting the differences between relived experiences  
19 (i.e., personal voice) and sections that provide explanation and signpost the reader to useful  
20 scholarly content (academic voice[s]).

21 The first vignette offered is called “losing it”, which documents the first author’s  
22 experiences of losing control while playing competitive youth football aged 10. The second  
23 vignette discussed, “it’s not just me”, is an account of the feelings attached entering  
24 adulthood, while starting a new coaching position within a football academy and working

1 with young athletes. Like Smith (2013), throughout the manuscript we utilise vernacular  
2 language in the interest of being easily understood by both academic and lay audiences.

### 3 **Losing it: Personal voice**

4 It is match day. I arrive to the game guilt ridden. Yet again I am the last to arrive.  
5 Today feels different though, we play the nemesis, the so called “cool kids” at school. They  
6 have mentioned this fixture all week, so a solid performance from me may go a long way in  
7 finally proving myself. They call me the “naughty kid”. The headmaster always tells me the  
8 same when my parents are summoned to the school. At least, that’s when I am allowed to  
9 attend. Last week they asked my parents to keep me home as they had the inspectors in. I  
10 hate it and I hate them. I shouldn’t be singled out for things I cannot control.

11 I appear onto the pitch to be greeted by my opponent’s leering grins. I look at the  
12 grass and petulantly shuffle my body towards my coach. To stay out of trouble, you have to  
13 keep your space. In position, I hear the coach calm and collectively state the following “if  
14 you believe you will win today, you will win”. For many kids my age this would be a  
15 pointless statement lost in the wind, but from a guy who understands me, who I trust and  
16 respect, it means a lot. I cling to the words, replaying them in my mind. I absorb his  
17 confidence in me. As my team-mates now welcome my arrival, I briefly smile as I feel  
18 acceptance from the group. There is no time for greetings though, as we are ordered to run  
19 in circles around dirty plastic cones in preparation for the fixture.

20 The game eventually starts and we immediately find ourselves on the back foot. After  
21 a few minutes of sustained pressure, we promptly concede the first goal. It feels inevitable.  
22 They have everything and we have nothing. I stoop my head and trudge towards the centre  
23 circle. On my way, however, I am halted by a member of the opposition. He knows me from  
24 school. He is smiling and excessively celebrating directly in my face. “Dick”. How dare he!  
25 It’s not fair, why must life... My eyes dart from side to side as my mind tries to keep up with

1 the waves of emotion. Wherever I hide, I am always found. I stop myself, I know he yearns  
2 for a reaction. I tell myself to not award him the pleasure. But, there is nothing I can do. My  
3 teammate puts the ball down in the centre circle and the game resumes. I, however, am not  
4 ready. Again, I remind myself of the need to ignore what has happened, but I cannot. I am the  
5 innocent victim, plagued by the past and unsure of the future. I can feel my frustration  
6 developing as my brain decides retaliation is the only available option. I need to defend  
7 myself. I now feel my mood turning as the red mist gushes like a waterfall. It's involuntary.  
8 Like a bull charging at a matador, I slide along the cool wet grass and smash into my  
9 opponent. The thunderous thud of bone on bone soothes me and as I stand a wave of intense  
10 relief washes over my body. I believe my behaviour was vindicated as I now feel a little  
11 better. However, as I return to my senses I am greeted with a wall of noise and anger.  
12 Disorientated, I struggle to focus on the words uttered and can only see the venom spewing  
13 from my opponent's mouths. They are shouting at me and at the ref. I don't understand why  
14 they are so furious. I just need the opportunity to explain my actions. It may just be a game to  
15 you, but to me it is everything in my uncertain world. Please, I'll do anything. The referee  
16 marches over and in no uncertain terms tells me to leave the field of play.

17 As I solemnly shuffle from the pitch the opposition manager shakes his head and calls  
18 me a disgrace. The ever-present self-doubts flood into my mind. This isn't fair. He's not my  
19 coach and has no right to criticise me. He should tell his player off for provoking me. Just  
20 remove the hecklers from the game and the shackles from my feet; I need to be free. Free like  
21 everyone else. Can't you see each tear that slides across my face represents a day of pain?  
22 These thoughts now stop and I begin to detach myself from the life that surrounds me.  
23 Everything is black and caving in rapidly. I feel trapped inside my own head. Feeling a  
24 mixture of emotions – too many to contemplate -I turn and run to escape. A few hundred  
25 yards later and I am in the woods. I feel safe, but my mind jolts back into life like an electric

1 shock. Help me! Leave me alone! Kicking through the still brush and screaming hysterically,  
2 I try to resist but the anger boils and overflows inside me. I am drowning head first within my  
3 own mind. Like a boat without a mast, I scream out for a light house, but all I receive is the  
4 open ocean. Save me. Save me from myself! After a few moments the whirring cogs inside  
5 my mind begin to slow and the fog starts to clear. I lift my face to feel the rain and abruptly,  
6 I stop. The voice of reason, missing for the past few minutes starts to protrude through the  
7 mist of anger. I am being stupid, very stupid.

8 I hear the leaves rustle at the edge of the woods. I turn to see my pale faced coach  
9 panting and frantically looking for me. I expect anger, but all I see is concern. Tentatively we  
10 move towards one another. “I’m sorry”, I mumble. The coach stretches out an arm, places it  
11 on my shoulder and tells me it’s ok. I am now calm and just want to re-join the action. I had  
12 been looking forward to this all week. My coach pleads the case for my return but the referee,  
13 without looking, gestures him away. Is life always this cruel? I see the game progress without  
14 me as I am ushered towards an open car door. Bewildered and mid-movement I turn towards  
15 my team. The field looks so joyous. Safely imprisoned in my dad’s three door saloon, I look  
16 longingly towards the referee one last time. I feel my chance to belong shattering into  
17 thousands of pieces. With puffy red eyes that are watery from the previous events, I look  
18 over one last time, but I’m ignored. The referee has already made his choice; my game is  
19 over before it ever really began.

## 20 **Losing it - academic voice.**

21 Although scholars have begun researching the role of sport in the treatment of ADHD  
22 symptomology (e.g. Conant-Norville 2012, Lee et al. 2014), to date, the focus has been  
23 primarily quantitative. In response, the previous vignette aimed to showcase the condition  
24 from an individual’s perspective. Whereby, the vignette first presents the author’s identity  
25 uncertainties developed through difficulties in school – and extended to extra-curricular



1 activity. In doing so, the first author earmarked his potential susceptibility to antagonism, due  
2 to his dynamic identification with ADHD. Despite naturally acknowledging the opportunity  
3 to integrate with his peers as a 'football person', the author soon realised that he would fail to  
4 change his identity attachment to ADHD placed on him by his opposition (Jones 2006). As  
5 a result, the vignette demonstrates how the condition can affect relationships with others, in  
6 this instance the first author was shy, lonely, and confused in the social situation (Gentile and  
7 Atiq 2006, Nazeer et al. 2014). However, putting evident identity discrepancies aside from  
8 the social norm (Gajaria et al. 2011), two key themes ran true through this reflective account.  
9 The first theme captures the reasoning as to why ADHD is misunderstood as a disorder of  
10 both anger and aggression (Singh 2011). Perroud et al. (2016) offer an explanation for this  
11 aggression, stating that individuals with ADHD anticipate fewer negative consequences,  
12 which through a lack of self-directedness, may lead to a greater likelihood of unrecognised  
13 risky behaviour.

14         Within the vignette, the first author's behaviour was perceived to be the result of the  
15 opposition's targeted provocation. In this case, emotional regulation was achieved through  
16 an excessive outburst of anger, which in this instance resulted in the ill-timed tackle (Harty et  
17 al. 2008, White et al. 2013). Subsequently, the first author felt in a paradoxical position  
18 whereby he understands cultural norms around appropriate behaviour in sport, yet achieves  
19 emotional regulation through the transgressive act. This dissonance is thought to lead  
20 children with ADHD to develop heightened levels of stress (Webb 2004, Whalen et al.  
21 2009). The vignette also highlights that, through the forceful removal of the first author from  
22 the football pitch, it can be argued that the referee legitimises and reinforces the need to  
23 warehouse the disordered individual (Whalen et al. 2009). Although the whole event only  
24 lasts minutes, the situation subjectively demonstrates how a hostile team sport environment,  
25 combined with the form of low frustration tolerance associated with ADHD can result in a

1 child's exclusion from a desired activity. As Beyer et al. (2008) and Rizzo et al. (1997)  
2 suggest, when dealing with athletes experiencing ADHD symptomology, those in positions of  
3 authority (i.e., coaches, referees, and parents) should attempt to provide adequate support and  
4 involvement opportunities. Although a positive step, as expressed within the vignette, this  
5 message does not seem to have trickled down to all aspects of competition. In reflection,  
6 individuals in authority should seek successful and acceptable methods to allow their athletes  
7 to release anger to stop similar episodes. For example, leagues could instruct referees to  
8 permit a short time out period, which would allow the athlete to regain their thoughts in a bid  
9 to return to action – although care and subtlety would be required in implementing such an  
10 initiative.

11 The second theme of the vignette surrounds the role of the coach in meeting the  
12 needs of individuals with ADHD. Within the vignette, the first author initially felt competent  
13 within the team. This may be directly attributed to the success of the coach in dealing with  
14 the first author's disruptive behaviour to positively influence his team mate's social  
15 perceptions (Sherman et al. 2008). However, as the story continued and the first author came  
16 in to contact with his opponents, he became confused as self-doubt influenced his perceptions  
17 of others. As Wiener and Daniels (2015) suggest, destructive ADHD behaviours may be  
18 lessened when the individual feels socially accepted and supported by peers within group  
19 settings. With this in mind, the vignette highlights the need for coaches to: (i) show patience  
20 and understand their athlete's needs, (ii) gain extra training and experience in supporting  
21 those with mental health disorders, and (iii) attempt to develop an inclusive culture within  
22 their clubs, which aims to challenge the stigma associated with having ADHD (Bell et al.  
23 2010).

24 **It's not just me: Personal voice**

1           As I step out of the car my ears are filled by the sound of police sirens ringing vividly  
2 in the distance. Razor wire tops the graffiti covered walls of the club house and shattered  
3 glass covers the floor next to an old phone booth. A bench covered by three walls of cracked  
4 Plexiglas and what seems to be an infestation of spider's webs sits by the side of pitch. Every  
5 so often, I can feel the sun's warmth, but its rays are marred by a block of flats, which cast a  
6 shadow over the pitch. As I hide my belongings under the bench, flecks of white paint fall to  
7 the floor. Confident in the knowledge that my personal belongings are safe, I take a moment  
8 to sit quietly and consider where my coaching journey has taken me. I hear the air leave my  
9 body in one almighty exasperated breath; this place looks like hell on earth.

10           I check the time by prising out my phone from the not so hidden compartment of my  
11 tracksuit bottoms. It's 10:06am. Six minutes later than planned, but I am still here before the  
12 players. As the Head Coach appears from the changing room and begins to approach me, I  
13 wonder whether arriving earlier would have made a better impression, but accept it doesn't  
14 matter now. I'm late. I track his movements in the corner of my eye, while trying to keep  
15 calm. However, beads of sweat belie my obvious insecurities. Communication is key for any  
16 aspiring coach; I have to look confident and introduce myself. I place my hand on the side of  
17 my face, but the words are fixed between my teeth and impossible to force out. The Head  
18 Coach doesn't notice and I regain my composure and complete the introduction. Reaching  
19 into the depths of my pocket I retrieve a note with my plans for the session scribbled on it. As  
20 the coach unfolds the outer edges of the paper, he seems happy as I try to explain my ideas.  
21 Within a minute he sends me on my way to scatter torn cones and lay out dirty bibs. I have  
22 passed the first obstacle in getting this far, but my mind begins to wander. It is one thing to  
23 get my ideas across to a coach, but doing the same with a new group of kids may not be so  
24 easy. Hopefully today works out.

1           As the players arrive I make final adjustments to the cones I had just laid out. A smirk  
2 appears across my face as I look back at the meandering line I had just created. I'd better fix  
3 that. As I finish the line, an invisible force attracts me to the slightly deflated ball beside me.  
4 More players are trickling in so I concentrate on the ball. I enjoy the feel of the leather on my  
5 boot as I attempt to keep the ball in the air. As the ball hits the floor I turn around to see that  
6 all eyes are now on me now. I am the object of curiosity, the new coach. I attempt to  
7 stimulate an upbeat mood to hide my insecurities. I remind myself that they are just 10-year  
8 olds. As I introduce myself I see faces switch off and shoulders shrink. I can feel the respect  
9 and authority draining out of my body. My lungs expand with every short breath I take, I  
10 need to stay composed. I force myself to demonstrate the drill and swiftly the session gets  
11 under way. Everyone seems happy to get playing.

12           After twenty minutes or so the skills component of the session ends and we finish  
13 with a game. You can tell this is what the kids have been waiting for as a course of nervous  
14 energy runs through the field. The players eventually take their sides and the game begins.  
15 Like a murmuration of starlings, the players dart right, then left, swarming around the ball.  
16 Like an addict looking for a fix, each of them is obsessed with the ball and desperate for a  
17 touch. After a while, squabbling ensues between two players. Suddenly, anger burns in the  
18 eyes of a player while liquid streams from his eyes. It's not physical pain or tears, but rather  
19 anguish and frustration that boils over. In a fit of rage, he grabs the other boy, wrapping his  
20 arm around the child's neck and squeezing. As the victim's face begins to turn red I shout to  
21 let go, but he won't. As I move towards them the victim breaks free and rushes into the arms  
22 of his distraught father. Both boys are clearly upset and while caring for his son, the father of  
23 the boy recently released from a headlock scowls in my direction with a look that demands I  
24 act.

1 I tap the perpetrator on the shoulder and ask the boy what had happened? He looks at  
2 me in a way that I am familiar with, but can't put my finger on. I continue, but he's in his  
3 own world looking straight ahead and ignoring my questions. I crouch in front of his face, I  
4 ask him again. The light returns to his eyes and awakens from his daze, but the only answer I  
5 can tease from his downturned lips is "I don't know". I press him a third time, but this time  
6 he resists eye contact and shuffles petulantly trying to free himself from the interrogation. I  
7 don't know what to do. The head coach then appears by my side and tells the child to  
8 continue playing. No questions, no apology, no explanation for his action, simply "off you  
9 go". I'm confused: The Head Coach now proceeds to tell me that he has known the boy for  
10 "donkey's years" and that it is only recent that his behavioural issues have come to light.  
11 Captivated, I lean in as the Head Coach quietly mouths "he does this a lot, but what can we  
12 do?"

13 As the session ends, the perpetrator's father heads in my direction. A seemingly  
14 passionate and supportive man, the dad speaks of how his "little shit" struggles to socialise  
15 and is often bullied. Looking at the ground, he then proceeds to tell me that this is why the  
16 boy experiences these explosions of rage – all the while assuring me that he is a "good kid".  
17 For a split second all I see is white as the neurons fire in my brain. I lean my chest back  
18 slightly and take a moment to reflect. The boy's father reaches out his hand to shake mine  
19 and I am brought back to reality. As the boy trails behind his father kicking clouds of dry dirt  
20 into the air, I smile. The Head Coach now congratulates me on my first session, before  
21 quietly whispering in my ear not to worry about the incident, before explaining that it is  
22 because the boy has ADHD.

23 **It's not just me. Academic voice.**

24 Now in the role of football coach, the first author was keen on instilling confidence to  
25 adjust to the behaviour required to be a successful coach (e.g. Mills 2015). He was, however,

1 also ignorant of the need to gain trust and develop a coach-athlete relationship (Glutting et al.  
2 2002, Gilbourne and Richardson, 2006). Instead, he was distracted by his own inattention and  
3 hyperactivity. The vignette then highlights the difficulty in identifying important aspects of  
4 ADHD symptomology within an unfamiliar group environment. Given the first author's  
5 intimate knowledge of the disorder, this may, in part, explain why ADHD is such a poorly  
6 understood condition in sport. Despite the lack of recognisable cues when originally placed  
7 with the group, towards the latter sections of the vignette, he began to recognise and  
8 understand the player's displayed impaired interpersonal skills (Beyer et al. 2008, Tarver et  
9 al. 2014). Whereby, without having information to determine the cause of the incident, he  
10 was still able to acknowledge the athlete's displays of anger were 'typical' of ADHD  
11 behaviour (Braaten and Rosén, 2000). That said, without previously gaining the athlete's  
12 trust, by approaching and interrogating the player in public, the athlete's unresponsiveness  
13 was likely the outcome of the expected 'singling out' of his actions (Nazeer et al. 2014,  
14 Conant-Norville 2012). Nonetheless, despite a long and difficult process in working with the  
15 athlete, the Head Coach's response to the quarrel represents visible disparity from the  
16 situational norm. The discrepancy expressed by not openly condemning the actions of the  
17 athlete, perhaps offered an expressed way of removing the Head Coach from responsibility.

18 Research suggests that individuals with ADHD are more sensitive to immediate  
19 punishment (Poon and Ho 2016) and acquire increased guilt and reduced empathy (Braaten  
20 and Rosén 2000). Therefore, by re-directing communication towards the athlete's parent, the  
21 Head Coach was able to effectively take the athlete away from the centre of negative scrutiny  
22 to search for solutions to the ADHD outburst (e.g. Vargas-Tonsing, 2007). With such details  
23 acknowledged, the vignette promotes the importance of (i) coach awareness of ADHD  
24 diagnosis, (ii) coaches gaining ADHD individuals trust, and (iii) coach resourcefulness in  
25 liaising with significant others to resolving ADHD related behaviours.

## Discussion

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25

To date, scholars have investigated elements of ADHD symptomology using traditional quantitative approaches (e.g. Beyer et al. 2008, Conant-Norville 2012, Lee et al. 2014). However, in doing so, researchers have neglected using alternative qualitative approaches. To fill this methodological void, this study aimed to bring further meaning to the condition by showcasing the realities of ADHD in a sporting context. While the study also offers direct recommendations in a bid to assist coaches in their support. To achieve such aims, the study sought to address telling deficits in the field by providing both creative vignettes as the athlete with ADHD and as a coach in contact with ADHD, to “represent” the condition to a wide audience (Nöth 2003).

However, in centrally portraying the lived experiences of ADHD in sport, both vignettes highlight the potential triggering factors related to the formation of public outbursts of aggression. The vignettes highlight how behaviours deemed to be “abnormal” are often facilitated by a series of events caused by others misunderstanding (Rizzo et al. 1997, Beyer et al. 2008, Putukian 2011). In addition, while both vignettes showcase how outbursts can create allied identity discrepancies which can negatively impact social interactions, they are often caused by athletes accepting the label “disordered individual” (Whalen et al. 2009, Nazeer et al. 2014). That said, in addition to justifying the importance of increased social competency for youth athletes with ADHD, the present study highlights many key factors which potentially advocate why children with the condition are associated with a shorter length of involvement in team sports (Kang et al. 2011, Johnson and Rosén 2000). As the aforementioned scholars report, increased aggression and emotional inhibition were the prime reason for ADHD athlete dropout in sport (Johnson and Rosén 2000). However, despite such factors contributing to the formation of the outburst, the whole process may be mediated by complex rule structures, inter and intragroup dynamics, and trust in the coach.

1           Next, the vignettes both highlight the confusion that can occur when identifying  
2   disordered behaviours. By taking the position of coach, the first author showcases how  
3   difficult it is to detect ADHD symptomology within dynamic context of sporting  
4   environments. Therefore, while sensitivity and understanding are required, both vignettes  
5   exemplify the importance of strong coach-athlete communication, and understanding. The  
6   first vignettes also gives meaningful evidence to the idea that those in youth sport (i.e.  
7   referees/coaches) are usually not trained to work with the disorder (see Murphy et al. 2010).  
8   Therefore, it would be advisable for coaches to remain patient and develop the trust and  
9   respect required to make athletes feel competent and supported (Sherman et al. 2008, Lee et  
10  al. 2014). Further, it would then be advantageous to promote an inclusive club culture  
11  irrespective of ADHD outbursts, as this can challenge the negative outcomes surrounding  
12  ADHD stigmatisation (Bell et al. 2010). Subsequently, coaches may then wish to liaise with  
13  referees to offer cool-down periods in competition to promote such an inclusive culture,  
14  cooperate with parents for solutions to ADHD outbursts or experiment with self-regulatory  
15  techniques (i.e. goal setting or positive self-talk), which may help to motivate athletes and  
16  improve on task behaviour (Braun and Braun 2014).

17           Finally, by adopting a narrative approach, we attempted to create a dialogue  
18  representing an individual with ADHD (Denison and Markula 2003). We did so with the aim  
19  of advancing understanding of the disorder within the sporting community. As a result, we  
20  hope the current manuscript encourages those involved in sport to re-consider the personal  
21  support and environment they create, when working with athletes who suffer from  
22  behavioural disorders. Further, we hope to have encouraged others to use comparable  
23  methods and support the construction of “collective stories” around athlete’s experiences of  
24  similar conditions (Denzin 2000). The first author’s story will continue and so will many  
25  others with the same condition. Rather than providing an ending, it is our hope that the



1 vignettes described here encourage others with behavioural disorders to embrace their  
2 opportunity to speak up (Smith 1999, Mills 2015).

### 3 **Conclusion**

4 In sum, the reflective accounts presented here aimed to illustrate a range of outcomes  
5 associated with experiencing ADHD in sport (Short et al. 2013). To achieve this, the current  
6 study looked to redirect ADHD enquiry away from what is centred on the ‘other’ (e.g. Beyer  
7 et al. 2009), towards utilising a method that originates from the ‘self’ (Ellis 2004). As this  
8 process has led many to announce the efficacy of narrative approaches when navigating  
9 misconceived phenomena (e.g. Lang and Pinder 2017), it is hoped by creating ADHD  
10 associated vignettes the study may provide a deeper understanding of this often  
11 misunderstood condition in sport. By also offering episodes from both an athlete and coach  
12 perspective, the study aspires to illustrate how ADHD symptomology may present itself in  
13 sport. Through the use of theoretical signposting and the use of creative non-fiction, it is  
14 hoped that the current manuscript assists coaches in supporting athletes with ADHD in a way  
15 that is accessible and engaging. Therefore, we hope that the stories presented here encourage  
16 others who experience ADHD or coach those who do, to reflect upon their experiences in  
17 sport, shine a light on this often ‘invisible’ disorder (Beyer et al. 2008, Tarver et al. 2014),  
18 and consider the approach they take to meet and their athletes’ needs.

19

## 1 **References**

- 2 Adams, T., 2006. Seeking Father: Relationally Reframing a Troubled Love Story. *Qualitative*  
3 *Inquiry*, 12(4), 704-723.
- 4 Anderson, L., 2006. Analytic Autoethnography. *Journal of contemporary*  
5 *ethnography*, 35(4), 373-395.
- 6 Barkley, R., 2002. International Consensus Statement Issued. *The ADHD report*, 10(2), 1-1.
- 7 Bell, L., Long, S., Garvan, C., and Bussing, R., 2010. The impact of teacher credentials on  
8 ADHD stigma perceptions. *Psychology in the schools*, 48(2), 184-197.
- 9 Benkert, D., Krause, K., Wasem, J., and Aidelsburger, P., 2010. Effectiveness of  
10 pharmaceutical therapy of ADHD (attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder) in adults-  
11 A health technology assessment. *Value in health*, 13(7), 458.
- 12 Benoot, C., and Bilsen, J., 2016. An auto-ethnographic study of the disembodied experience  
13 of a novice researcher doing qualitative cancer research. *Qualitative health research*.  
14 26(4), 482-9.
- 15 Beyer, R., Flores, M., and Vargas-Tonsing, T., 2008. Coaches' attitudes towards youth sport  
16 participants with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. *International journal of*  
17 *sports science and coaching*, 3(4), 555-563.
- 18 Beyer, R., Flores, M., and Vargas - Tonsing, T., 2009. Strategies and methods for coaching  
19 athletes with invisible disabilities in youth sport activities. *Journal of youth sports*, 4  
20 (2), 10-15.
- 21 Bochner, A. and Ellis, C., 2016. The ICQI and the Rise of Autoethnography: Solidarity  
22 Through Community. *International Review Of Qualitative Research*, 9(2), 208-217.
- 23 Braaten, E. and Rosén, L., 2000. Self-regulation of affect in attention deficit-hyperactivity  
24 disorder (ADHD) and non-ADHD boys: Differences in empathic responding. *Journal*  
25 *of consulting and clinical psychology*, 68(2), 313-321.

- 1 Braun, R. and Braun, B., 2014. Managing the challenges of hidden disabilities in youth sport:  
2 a look at SLD, ADHD, and ASD through the sport psychology lens. *Journal of sport*  
3 *psychology in action*, 6(1), 28-43.
- 4 Buzard, J., 2003. On auto-ethnographic authority. *The Yale journal of criticism*, 16(1), 61-91.
- 5 Carless, D. and Douglas, K., 2013. "In the boat" but "selling myself short": stories,  
6 Nnarratives, and identity development in elite sport. *The sport psychologist*, 27(1),  
7 27-39.
- 8 Conant-Norville, D., 2012. Treatment considerations for the ADHD-affected  
9 athlete. *Psychiatric annals*, 42(10), 376-381.
- 10 Custer, D., 2014. Autoethnography as a transformative research method. *The qualitative*  
11 *report*, 19(37), 1-13.
- 12 Defenbaugh, N., 2008. "Under Erasure": The absent ill body in doctor--patient  
13 dialogue. *Qualitative inquiry*, 14(8), 1402-1424.
- 14 Denison, J. and Markula, P., 2003. *Moving writing. Moving writing: Crafting movement in*  
15 *sport research*. New York: Peter Lang. 1-24
- 16 Denzin, N. K., 2000. The practices and politics of interpretation. In: N.K. Denzin and  
17 Y.S. Lincoln 2000. *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage,  
18 897-922.
- 19 Dória, G., Antoniuk, S., Assumpção Junior, F., Fajardo, D., and Ehlke, M., 2015.  
20 Delinquency and association with behavioral disorders and substance abuse. *Revista*  
21 *da associação médica Brasileira*, 61(1), 51-57.
- 22 Douglas, K., 2009. Storying myself: negotiating a relational identity in professional sport.  
23 *Qualitative research in sport and exercise*, 1(2), 176-190.

- 1 DosReis, S., Barksdale, C., Sherman, A., Maloney, K., and Charach, A., 2010. Stigmatizing  
2 experiences of parents of children with a new diagnosis of ADHD. *Psychiatric*  
3 *services*, 61(8).
- 4 Ellis, C., 2004. *The ethnographic I: A methodological novel about autoethnography*. New  
5 York:Rowman Altamira,17.
- 6 Ellis, C., Adams, T., and Bochner, A., 2011. Autoethnography: An Overview. *Forum:*  
7 *Qualitative Social Research*, 12(1).
- 8 Emerald, E., and Carpenter, L., 2016. Autoethnography: Is My Own Story Narrative  
9 Research? In: Dwyer, R., Davis, I., and Emerald, E., 2016. *Narrative Research in*  
10 *Practice - Stories from the Field*. Singapore: Springer, 27-46.
- 11 Ellis, C. and Bochner, A. 2000. "Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity: researcher  
12 as subject" [online], *The Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Available from:  
13 [http://works.bepress.com/carolyn\\_ellis/49/](http://works.bepress.com/carolyn_ellis/49/) [Accessed 17th August 2016].
- 14 Erhardt, D., and Hinshaw, S., 1994. Initial sociometric impressions of attention-deficit  
15 hyperactivity disorder and comparison boys: predictions from social behaviors and  
16 from nonbehavioral variables. *Journal of consulting and clinical psychology*, 62(4),  
17 833-842.
- 18 Fuermaier, A., Tucha, L., Mueller, A., Koerts, J., Hauser, J., Lange, K., and Tucha, O., 2014.  
19 Stigmatization in teachers towards adults with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.  
20 *Springerplus*, 3(1), 26.
- 21 Gajaria, A., Yeung, E., Goodale, T., and Charach, A. 2011. Beliefs about attention-  
22 deficit/hyperactivity disorder and response to stereotypes: youth postings in Facebook  
23 groups. *Journal of adolescent health*, 49(1), 15-20.
- 24 Gentile, J., and Atiq, R., 2006. Psychotherapy for the patient with adult ADHD. *Psychiatry*  
25 *(Edgmont)*, 3(8), 31–35.

- 1 Gilbourne, D., and Richardson, D., 2006. Tales from the field: Personal reflections on the  
2 provision of psychological support in professional soccer. *Psychology of sport and*  
3 *exercise*, 7(3), 325-337.
- 4 Glutting, J., Monaghan, M., Adams, W., and Sheslow, D., 2002. Some psychometric  
5 properties of a system to measure ADHD among college students: Factor pattern,  
6 reliability, and one-year predictive validity. *Measurement and evaluation in*  
7 *counselling and development*, 34(4), 194-208.
- 8 Harpin, V., 2005. The effect of ADHD on the life of an individual, their family, and  
9 community from preschool to adult life. *Archives of disease in childhood*, 90(1), 2-7.
- 10 Harty, S., Miller, C., Newcorn, J., and Halperin, J., 2008. Adolescents with childhood  
11 ADHD and comorbid disruptive behavior disorders: aggression, anger, and  
12 hostility. *Child psychiatry human development*, 40(1), 85-97.
- 13 Holt, N., 2003. Representation, Legitimation, and Autoethnography: An Autoethnographic  
14 Writing Story. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 2(1), 18-28.
- 15 Vehmas, S., and Vehkakoski, T., 2016. Self-pathologizing, self-condemning, self-liberating:  
16 Youths' accounts of their ADHD-related behavior. *Social science and medicine*, 150(2), 248-  
17 255.
- 18 Houston, J., 2007. Indigenous Autoethnography: Formulating Our Knowledge, Our Way. *The*  
19 *Australian Journal Of Indigenous Education*, 36(1), 45-50.
- 20 Johnson, R., and Rosén, L., 2000. Sports behavior of ADHD children. *Journal of attention*  
21 *disorders*, 4(3), 150-160.
- 22 Jones, R., 2006. Dilemmas, Maintaining "Face," and  
23 Paranoia: An Average Coaching Life. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(5), 1012-1021.
- 24 Kang, K., Choi, J., Kang, S., and Han, D., 2011. Sports therapy for attention, cognitions and  
sociality. *International journal of sports medicine*, 32(12), 953-959.

- 1 Karam, R., Breda, V., Picon, F., Rovaris, D., Victor, M., and Salgado, C., 2015. Persistence  
2 and remission of ADHD during adulthood: a 7-year clinical follow-up  
3 study. *Psychological medicine*, 45(10), 2045-2056.
- 4 Klein, S., Gangi, C., and Lax, M., 2011. Memory and self-knowledge in young adults with  
5 ADHD. *Self and identity*, 10(2), 213-230.
- 6 Kutcher, J., 2011. Treatment of attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder in athletes. *Current*  
7 *sports medicine reports*, 10(1), 32-36. Lang, M., and Pinder, S., 2017. Telling  
8 (dangerous) stories: a narrative account of a youth coach's experience of an  
9 unfounded allegation of child abuse. *Qualitative Research In Sport, Exercise And*  
10 *Health*, 9(1), 99-110.
- 11 Lee, H., Causgrove Dunn, J., and Holt, N., 2014. Youth sport experiences of individuals with  
12 attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, 31(4),  
13 343-361.
- 14 McMahon, J. and DinanThompson, M., 2011. 'Body work—regulation of a swimmer body':  
15 an autoethnography from an Australian elite swimmer. *Sport, education and society*,  
16 16(1), 35-50.
- 17 Michielsen, M., de Kruif, J., Comijs, H., van Mierlo, S., Semeijn, E., and Beekman, A., 2015.  
18 The Burden of ADHD in Older Adults: A Qualitative Study [online], *Journal of*  
19 *attention disorders*. Available from:  
20 <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1087054715610001> [Accessed 22nd  
21 August 2016].
- 22 Mills, J., 2015. An [AUTO]ethnographic account of constructing, deconstructing, and  
23 partially reconstructing a coaching identity. *Qualitative research in sport, exercise*  
24 *and health*, 7(5), 606-619.
- 25 Mingé, J. and Zimmerman, A., 2013. *Concrete and dust*. New York, N.Y: Routledge, 1-6.

- 1 Mitchell, S., Allen-Collinson, J., and Evans, A., 2016. ‘Ladies present!’: an  
2 auto/ethnographic study of women amateur golfers at an English provincial golf club.  
3 *Qualitative research in sport, exercise and health*, 8(3), 273-286.
- 4 Moya, J., Stringaris, A., Asherson, P., Sandberg, S., and Taylor, E., 2012. The Impact of  
5 Persisting Hyperactivity on Social Relationships: A Community-Based, Controlled  
6 20-Year Follow-Up Study. *Journal of attention disorders*, 18(1), 52-60.
- 7 Mueller, A., Fuermaier, A., Koerts, J., and Tucha, L., 2012. Stigma in attention deficit  
8 hyperactivity disorder. *ADHD attention deficit and hyperactivity disorders*, 4(3), 101-  
9 114.
- 10 Murphy, K., Ratey, N., Maynard, S., Sussman, S., and Wright, S., 2010. Clinical  
11 commentary: Coaching for ADHD. *Journal of attentional disorders*, 13(5), 546-552.
- 12 Nazeer, A., Mansour, M., and Gross, K., 2014. ADHD and Adolescent Athletes  
13 [online], *Frontiers in public health*, 2 (46). Available from:  
14 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4060024/> [Accessed 21st August 2016]
- 15 Nöth, W., 2003. Crisis of representation? *Semiotica*, 143, 9-15.
- 16 Perroud, N., Hasler, R., Golay, N., Zimmermann, J., Prada, P., and Nicastro, R., 2016.  
17 Personality profiles in adults with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)  
18 [online], *BMC psychiatry*, 16. Available from:  
19 <https://bmcp psychiatry.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12888-016-0906-6>  
20 [Accessed 21st August 2016].
- 21 Peters, S., 2010. Qualitative Research Methods in  
22 Mental Health. *Evidence-based mental health*, 13(2), 35-40.
- 23 Poon, K. and Ho, C., 2016. Risk-taking propensity and sensitivity to punishment in  
24 adolescents with attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder symptoms and/or reading  
disability. *Research in developmental disabilities*, 53(54), 296-304.

- 1 Purdy, L., Potrac, P., and Jones, R., 2008. Power, consent and resistance: an autoethnography  
2 of competitive rowing. *Sport, education and society*, 13(3), 319-336.
- 3 Putukian, M., Kreher, J., Coppel, D., Glazer, J., McKeag, D., and White, R., 2011. Attention  
4 Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and the Athlete: An American Medical Society for  
5 Sports Medicine Position Statement. *Clinical journal of sport medicine*, 21(5), 392-  
6 400.
- 7 Rizzo, T., Bishop, P., and Tobar, D., 1997. Attitudes of Soccer Coaches Toward Youth  
8 Players with Mild Mental Retardation: A Pilot Study. *Adapted physical activity*  
9 *quarterly*, 14(3), 238-251.
- 10 Sherman, J., Rasmussen, C., and Baydala, L., 2008. The impact of teacher factors on  
11 achievement and behavioural outcomes of children with Attention  
12 Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD): a review of the literature. *Educational*  
13 *research*, 50(4), 347-360.
- 14 Short, N., Turner, L., and Grant, A., 2013. *Contemporary British autoethnography*.  
15 Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 10-12.
- 16 Singh, I., 2011. A disorder of anger and aggression: Children's perspectives on attention  
17 deficit/hyperactivity disorder in the UK. *Social science and medicine*, 73(6), 889-896.
- 18 Smith, B., 1999. The Abyss: Exploring Depression Through a Narrative of the  
19 Self. *Qualitative inquiry*, 5(2), 264-279
- 20 Smith, B., 2013. Sporting spinal cord injuries, social relations, and rehabilitation narratives:  
21 an ethnographic creative non-fiction of becoming disabled through sport. *Sociology of*  
22 *sport journal*, 30(2), 132-152.
- 23 Smith, B., McGannon, K., and Williams, T., 2015. Ethnographic creative  
24 nonfiction: Exploring the what's, why's and how's. In: G. Molner., and L. Purdy.  
25 *Ethnographies in sport and exercise research*. London: Routledge, 59-73.



- 1 Sparkes, A., 2000. Autoethnography and Narratives of Self: Reflections on Criteria in Action.  
2 *Sociology of sport journal*, 17(1), 21-43.
- 3 Sparkes, A. C., 2004. From performance to impairment: a patchwork of embodied  
4 memories. In: J. Evans., B. Davies, and J. Wright. *Body knowledge and control:  
5 studies in the sociology of physical education and health*. London: Routledge, 157–  
6 172.
- 7 Tarver, J., Daley, D., and Sayal, K., 2014. Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD):  
8 an updated review of the essential facts. *Child: care, health and development*, 40(6),  
9 762-774.
- 10 Timimi, S., 2005. NAUGHTY BOYS: Anti-social behaviour, ADHD and the role of  
11 culture. N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan. 1-20.
- 12 Vargas-Tonsing, T., 2007. Coaches' Preferences for Continuing Coaching Education.  
13 *International journal of sports science and coaching*, 2(1), 25-35.
- 14 Vargas, T., Flores, M., and Beyer, R., 2012. Theory into Practice: Coaching Athletes with  
15 Hidden Disabilities: Recommendations and strategies for coaching education.  
16 *Strategies*, 25(3), 32-33.
- 17 Wall, S., 2008. Easier Said than Done: Writing an Autoethnography. *International journal of  
18 qualitative Methods*, 7(1), 38-53.
- 19 Wall, S., 2016. Toward a Moderate Autoethnography. *International Journal of Qualitative  
20 Methods*, 15(1) 1-9. Webb, E., 2004. Discrimination against children. *Archives of  
21 Disease in Childhood*, 89, 804-808.
- 22 Weiner, B., Perry, R., and Magnusson, J., 1988. An attributional analysis of reactions to  
23 stigmas. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 55(5), 738-748.

- 1 Whalen, C., Henker, B., Ishikawa, S., Floro, J., Emmerson, N., Johnston, J., and Swindle, R.,  
2 2009. ADHD and Anger Contexts: Electronic Diary Mood Reports from Mothers and  
3 Children. *Journal of Pediatric Psychology*, 34(9), 940-953.
- 4 White, R., Harris, G., and Gibson, M., 2013. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and  
5 Athletes. *Sports Health: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, 6(2), 149-156.
- 6 Wiener, J., and Daniels, L., 2015. School Experiences of Adolescents with Attention-  
7 Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder. *Journal of learning disabilities*,49(6), 567-581.
- 8 Zehntner, C., and McMahon, J., 2013. Mentoring in coaching: the means of correct training?  
9 An autoethnographic exploration of one Australian swimming coach's experiences.  
10 *Qualitative research in sport, exercise and health*, 6(4), 596-616.
- 11