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11    **A Collective Case Study of Parent-Athlete-Coach (PAC) Triads in British Youth Tennis**

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12 **Abstract**

13     While important for athletic development and well-being in youth sport, knowledge

14 remains limited around the processes underpinning triadic relationships between parents,

15 athletes and coaches (PAC). This study aimed to examine the relational processes that drive

16 the functioning of PAC triads across three developmental stages of youth tennis. Using a

17 collective case study design, 10 players, 10 coaches, and nine mothers completed pre-

18 interview tasks, semi-structured interviews, and provided conversational history. Reflexive

19 thematic analysis led to the generation of two higher-order themes: foundations of

20 relationship quality and factors enabling team effectiveness. Findings highlighted how

21 specific relationship qualities (i.e., commitment, trust, respect, and parent-coach proximity)

22 and team effectiveness constructs (i.e., shared goals, collaborative and adjusted roles, support,

23 and role-specific communication) served to facilitate the tennis experience for triads. Scholars

24 are encouraged to consider integrating small-group principles (e.g., team building) into

25 tailored support programs that address the psychosocial needs of the triad.

26 ***Key Words:*** *PAC Triad, Parents, Coaches, Interpersonal Relationships, Youth Tennis*

27    **A Collective Case Study of Parent-Athlete-Coach (PAC) Triads in British Youth Tennis**

28        Interpersonal relationships between parents, athletes and coaches (PAC) are now

29    widely recognised as an integral part of improving the quality of athletic experiences within

30    youth sport (Sheridan et al., 2014). Research has shown that coaches and athletes who

31    complement each other, are committed to the relationship, and have an emotional connection

32    are more likely to participate and persist in sport for longer, experience greater enjoyment and

33    satisfaction, be more motivated, and achieve higher performance levels (e.g., Jowett &

34    Nezlek, 2012). Similarly, athletes who have supportive relationships with their parents report

35    greater enjoyment and motivation in contrast to parental relationships that focus on rankings

36    and performance outcomes (Gardner et al., 2017). Collectively, the quality of these

37    relationships is a key indicator of effective sport parenting (Harwood & Knight, 2015) and

38    coaching (Jowett, 2017).

39        Parenting and coaching 'best practice' is also defined by the relationships that occur

40    between parents and coaches (Harwood & Knight, 2015; Pynn et al., 2019), with a recent rise

41    in studies investigating the perceptions and experiences of parents and coaches about their

42    relationship to mitigate a lack of understanding in this area. Researchers have suggested that

43    positive parent-coach relationships are characterised by the way parents and coaches rely on

44    each other's parenting or coaching ability, alongside the establishment of trust stemming from

45    honest, open, and frequent communication between both stakeholders (Preston et al., 2020;

46    Wall et al., 2019). Horne and colleagues (2022) affirmed that parents and coaches need to

47    collaborate on their goals for athletic development and performance, whilst O'Donnell et al.

48    (2022) further encourage parents and coaches to be clear about how they intend to take

49    responsibility for their roles within the relationship. Such recent findings resonate with earlier

50    work examining coaches' or parents' one-way perceptions of the practices and behaviours of

51    their parent or coach counterpart. Coaches have reported negative relationships with parents

52  when parents value winning over development, fail to offer unconditional and appropriate

53  support to the athlete, and tell a coach how to coach (Gould et al., 2008; Gould et al., 2016).

54  Conversely, parents' perspectives of negative relationships with coaches have centred around

55  the lack of communication and feedback around their child's development alongside an

56  absence of support from coaches to help them negotiate the challenges of being a sport parent

57  (Harwood & Knight, 2009). Subsequently, negative parent-coach relationships are perceived

58  to induce stress and anxiety in athletes (Lauer et al., 2010) and hinder athletic performance

59  (Preston et al., 2020).

60      While this body of research highlights the importance of parent-coach relationships

61  within the youth sport, scientific advancements remain limited methodologically because few,

62  if any, of these studies have employed relational designs where intact parent-coach dyads are

63  at the centre of data collection. As such, bi-directional relational concepts have not been fully

64  understood because existing data is not grounded within the mutual experiences of actual

65  dyads working in practice. Furthermore, it is important to remember that such relationships

66  operate within the context of a PAC triad. Coaches' perceptions of parenting are often defined

67  by the interactions parents have with their child (e.g., emphasising developmentally

68  appropriate goals; Gould et al., 2016), whilst parents place importance on the quality of

69  coaching provided to their child (Wuerth et al., 2004). Therefore, athletes serve as an

70  intermediary link between parents and coaches with several models illustrating the

71  interdependent and reciprocal nature of PAC triads.

72      The concept of an 'athletic triad' between PACs was first introduced by Hellstedt

73  (1987) who posited that PACs work together as a system to determine the success of

74  everyone's role in sport. Dorsch et al.'s (2022) more recent integrated model of the youth

75  sport system illustrates clearly how parents and coaches form important proximal subsystems

76  surrounding athletes, reinforcing the value of achieving a better understanding of the complex

77    and dynamic affective, cognitive, and behavioural processes that connect these individuals.

78    Triads also offer an important unit of sociological analysis because they provide greater

79    insight into how people affect and are affected by the network of interpersonal connections

80    around them (Siltaloppi & Vargo, 2017).

81         Jowett and Timson-Katchis (2005) first provided empirical evidence for the need to

82    consider how social networks operate in youth sport when they examined the impact parents

83    had on the quality of coach-athlete relationships in youth swimming. This research was

84    grounded in Sprecher's and colleagues' (2002) social network model which proposed that

85    dyadic relationships function within a larger social network, whereby third-party members

86    can influence the quality of these relationships through the support, information, and

87    opportunity they provide. Their results indicated that parents could affect the quality of

88    coach-athlete relationships (as defined by closeness, commitment, and complementarity) by

89    providing emotional support, practical information for resolving potential conflict, and

90    opportunities for communication with coaches. More recently, a series of studies by

91    Lisinskiene and colleagues (2019) explored how specific interpersonal qualities were viewed

92    by PACs in terms of their relationships with other members. First, they administered an

93    online survey to a sample of athletes, coaches, and parents from various sports to investigate

94    how the predetermined dimensions of trust, respect, communication, support, teamwork,

95    motivation, over-involvement, and demotivation were perceived to operate or exist in their

96    athletic triads. In a subsequent qualitative study, as part of a deductive refinement process for

97    item and scale development, Lisinskiene et al., (2019) conducted single interviews with 10

98    intact PAC triads from their initial sample of team and individual sports. Their deductive

99    findings verified the salience of positive group processes (e.g., support and communication)

100   within the triad and motivational qualities (e.g., hard work and passion), in addition to

101  evidence of how overinvolvement behaviour can play out within parents and coaches related

102  largely to imbalances in power dynamics.

103      To understand more inductively how triadic processes may influence athletic

104  experiences in youth sport, a recent interpretative descriptive study by Maurice et al. (2021)

105  investigated how PACs from U9 to U16 level in an elite UK football academy perceived

106  triadic interactions to facilitate athletes' wellbeing and performance during the COVID-19

107  pandemic. Although their research design did not feature intact triads, findings from

108  individual interviews suggested that providing emotional support, using communication to

109  ensure social connections (e.g., getting to know the person behind the role), and an

110  understanding of roles and responsibilities fostered successful and durable PAC relationships.

111  However, Maurice et al. (2021) openly stated that the pandemic may have placed more stress

112  on PAC relationships given the restrictions that prevented PACs from functioning normally.

113  Therefore, their findings may not precisely reflect the typical relational processes that occur

114  within the triad on a day-to-day basis when such extraordinary stressors are likely to be

115  absent.

116      Progressing our knowledge of interpersonal relationship functioning in youth sport

117  requires applied researchers to explore existing and organic relationships much better in

118  practice, and within specific sport communities. Such knowledge and insights would inform

119  sport organisations and practitioners working with athletes, coaches, and parents about the

120  relational nuances that may be influenced by the culture and structure of a specific sport. At

121  present, investigations of parents, coaches, and athletes from entirely separate dyads or triads

122  is a research design limitation that restricts our study of actual interdependent, working

123  relationships. Further, where intact triads across sports have been sourced (e.g., Lisinskiene et

124  al., 2019), the focus has been on more deductively investigating relationship qualities of

125  purported importance through single interviews. The opportunity remains to study triadic

126  relationships more naturally or organically, and by extending data collection beyond

127  individual interviews (e.g., collecting conversations between PACs).

128      A further opportunity for knowledge advancement in this contemporary topic lies in

129  understanding how the functioning of PAC triadic relationships evolve along youth sport

130  pathways. This is important for applied researchers to consider because athletes' and coaches'

131  perceptions of optimal parental involvement are complex and change as athletes transition

132  through key developmental stages (Knight et al., 2016; Knight & Harwood, 2009). In parallel,

133  the stressors and support needs reported by parents are dynamic and evolve with the differing

134  expectations placed upon them as athletes mature and specialise in their sport (Dorsch et al.,

135  2015; Harwood & Knight, 2009; Thrower et al., 2016).

136      The above points are particularly relevant to consider for sports such as tennis where

137  the enduring relationships between parents and coaches become more prominent in affecting

138  the nature of development and performance for athletes. For example, tennis parents are often

139  forced to take up the role of support provider within competition contexts because

140  professional coaches often choose to earn money at their training venue rather than attend

141  tournaments unpaid (Knight & Holt, 2014). Contrary to many other sports, parents are also

142  responsible for selecting and employing their child's coach. This can mean that coaches can

143  feel pressured to appease parents to ensure they remain in their employment with the family

144  (Horne et al., 2020). Given the increased investment and intense involvement that parents

145  have in youth tennis (often negotiated through the interactions they have with coaches), tennis

146  has since offered a context for researchers to explore the interpersonal dynamics and

147  processes that operate in such sub-cultures (e.g., Horne et al., 2020). In Lauer and colleagues'

148  (2010) retrospective study of PAC triads reflecting on transitions in parental behaviour over

149  their developmental journey through tennis, three time periods of athletic development

150  emerged each with idiosyncratic challenges. Supporting Cote's (1999) model, athletes left the

151    early years (i.e., sampling) of development between 8 to 11 years old whilst the middle

152    developmental (i.e., specialising) stage lasted from 10 to 14 years of age on average. Athletes

153    were found to leave the middle stage of development between 13 and 17 years old, entering

154    the elite playing (i.e., investment) years often around 15 years old. Aligned with Dorsch et

155    al.'s (2022) observation that "developmentally informed research is needed to capture the

156    nuances of athletes' behaviors, attitudes, experiences and outcomes over time in youth sport"

157    (p. 10), we would extend this point to reflect the whole PAC triad to better understand the

158    relationship dynamics that operate across key stages within youth tennis.

159          In summary, while a growing body of interpersonal research in youth sport is

160    'relationship-focused', we would argue that it fails to be 'relationship-centred' with recent

161    studies neglecting to use interindividual sampling or richer data collection methods to better

162    capture the relational dynamics between PACs. Further, researchers have yet to explore how

163    triadic functioning evolves across the pathway of a specific sport culture as pressures,

164    demands, and expectations change. To that end, and using tennis as context to infuse the

165    evidence-base for sport psychology practitioners and organisations, this study aimed to

166    understand how PAC triads function in British youth tennis. Specifically, we pursued the

167    following research question: What do the perceptions of parents, athletes, and coaches tell us

168    about the relational processes that underpin triadic functioning across developmental stages

169    within British youth tennis?

## Method

### Philosophical Position and Research Design

172          The current study was conducted from a pragmatist worldview. Pragmatic researchers

173    use research to solve 'real-world' issues that impact human experiences and as such,

174    meaningful inquiry in research (i.e., methods used) is driven by the interaction between belief

175    and action (Poucher et al., 2019). That is, research is used to carefully consider the actions

176    (i.e., methods and designs) most equipped to illicit knowledge that can be used to understand

177    complex issues around human experiences (i.e., PAC triads; Dewey, 2008). In line with this

178    approach and due to the complex nature of the research question, a case study design was

179    used. A case study is "an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity

180    and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, programme or system in a 'real-life'

181    context" (Simons, 2009, p. 21). Although case study designs do not provide a prescriptive

182    guide for how to collect, analyse and interpret data, the key principles include: a) small $N$; b)

183    contextual detail; c) everyday setting; d) boundness (i.e., a detailed description of a temporal

184    or structural boundary which brings context to the phenomenon being studied); e) working

185    research question; f) multiple data sources; and g) extendibility (see VanWynsbergh & Kahn,

186    2007). Specifically, a collective case study (i.e., involving several cases) was used in this

187    study because it allowed us to gather an in-depth, detailed, and concurrent understanding of

188    nine PAC triads that are contextually bound to different stages of the tennis development

189    pathway, and the similarities and differences between them (Hodge & Sharpe, 2016).

190    **The Researchers**

191          The first author is a White, British woman who was conducting research as part of a

192    larger PhD project around parent-coach relationships in youth tennis. She has competed and

193    coached up to an international level in youth sport and undergone post-graduate training in

194    qualitative research. The second, third, and fourth authors have conducted research with

195    young athletes, parents, and coaches in the UK for 30, 25, and 10 years respectively.

196    Specifically, they contributed methodological (second and fourth authors), applied (second

197    and fourth author) and theoretical (third author) knowledge to the current study.

198    **Participants and Sampling**

199          A key feature of a collective case study design is to identify the units of analysis being

200    investigated (i.e., the cases; see Hodge & Sharp, 2016). Informed by limitations within the

201    existing literature (e.g., Maurice et al., 2021), purposeful sampling was used to select

202    information-rich participants and cases (i.e., PAC triads; Patton, 2015). First, instrumental use

203    multicase sampling was used to select PAC triads in British youth tennis that could provide

204    generalisable data that may help inform developments made to sport programs and practices

205    (Patton, 2015). In line with this sampling method, criterion sampling (Patton, 2015) was used

206    to identify participants within operational and intact PAC triads across the youth tennis

207    pathway. This was important to capture the relational dynamics and structures within the triad

208    by comparing partners' perspectives from the same triad. Inclusion criteria required PAC

209    triads to operate within one of three developmental stages: U10s (i.e., sampling), U12s (i.e.,

210    specialising), or U18s (i.e., investment). In this respect, athletes were required to be playing at

211    a minimum of mini-tennis (U10s), county level (U12s), or regional level (U18s) and triads

212    had to have been active for a minimum of six months (U10s) and twelve months (U12s &

213    U18s) prior to the study. The developmental stages used in this study were chosen with

214    consideration to the developmental transitions present in models of talent development (i.e.,

215    Côté, 1999) and critically, the key organisational, contextual, and developmental transitions

216    that occur specifically in British youth tennis (Lauer et al., 2010; Thrower et al., 2016).

217        It is important to note that researchers have argued that "triadic analysis is not limited

218    to specific systems of exactly three actors but applicable to any system of at least three

219    actors" (Siltaloppi & Vargo, 2017, p. 408). Also, Stake (2006) recommended collective case

220    study research includes between four and ten cases. As such, collective case study research

221    frequently falls within this range (e.g., Dorsch et al., 2015; Jackman et al., 2017; Schweickle

222    et al., 2023). Therefore, the final cohort consisted of nine PAC triads across three

223    developmental age groups which included 29 participants in total. This comprised 10 players

224    (5 male and 5 female, $M_{age}$ = 10.4 years), 10 coaches (6 male and 4 female, $M_{age}$ = 43.5

225    years), and nine mothers ($M_{age}$ = 46.6 years). In case one, there were two athletes in one triad

226    and in case three, two coaches considered themselves as lead coaches for the athlete.

227    Although these triads do not represent the traditional three-person system, they were included

228    because they represented the diverse and organic ways that PACs work together in this sport

229    (Siltaloppi & Vargo, 2017). Table 1 provides a full description of the demographic profile of

230    each participant and their triad including age, gender, level, and years of experience.

231                                 [Insert Table 1 here]

232    **Data Collection**

233    Prior to data collection, full ethical approval was received from the research ethics

234    committee at a higher-education academic institution. In line with the key characteristics of

235    case study research which states that multiple data collection resources should be used to

236    enrich a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Smith & Sparkes, 2020), the

237    current study collected three forms of data: a) pre-interview tasks and documents; b) semi-

238    structured interviews; and c) conversational threads (i.e., emails and text messages).

239    Importantly, the language used in the interview guides and pre-interview task instructions was

240    adapted in accordance with athletes' developmental stage, using guidelines from existing

241    research about effectively incorporating children into research (i.e., Fargas-Malet et al.,

242    2010).

243    *Pre-Interview Tasks and Documents*

244    In addition to providing a more comprehensive understanding of participants'

245    experiences in the PAC triad, pre-interview tasks were used as an elicitation tool to stimulate

246    discussion during the interviews (Smith & Sparkes, 2020). Specifically, participants were

247    asked to provide a visual description of their perceptions of the triad and its evolution over

248    time. The use of these visual descriptions allowed participants to provide a comprehensive

249    explanation in their own words around the important characteristics, qualities, and

250    interactions within their triad, and explain how this has changed or remained constant as

251  athletes have progressed through tennis (see Figure 1 for an athlete example). Participants

252  were also asked to share any personal documents that they felt added to an understanding of

253  how they perceived their triad (e.g., tennis rackets, diary entries, and videos of coach-athlete

254  interactions). Visual descriptions and personal documents were provided to the lead

255  researcher before individual interviews and were used to tailor interviews to participants to

256  elicit detailed descriptions of participants' experiences within their triads (Bravington &

257  King, 2019).

258  ***Semi-Structured Interviews***

259  　　Semi-structured interview guides for each PAC member followed similar structures and

260  included probes to generate insightful and more in-depth responses to the initial questions

261  posed. Interview guides were also designed to generate greater insight into the interdependent

262  dynamics between PACs on a dyadic level and their contribution to the structural dynamics

263  between PACs as a triadic system. Each interview began with introductory and discussion

264  questions about participants' experiences in sport and tennis and to gather participants'

265  expectations and values for the roles in the triad (e.g., "Can you describe what it is like being

266  a tennis coach?"). The next three sections of the interview included questions which gathered

267  perceptions on the nature of the three dyadic relationships within the PAC triad (e.g., parent-

268  athlete). Questions and probes encouraged participants to think about the interactions that

269  occur between them and other members of the triad (e.g., "How would you describe your

270  relationship with your parent in tennis?"), the role these relationships have in the triad (e.g.,

271  "What role does the coach-athlete relationship play in the PAC triad"), and the impact these

272  relationships have on participants' athletic experiences (e.g., "How does the relationship

273  between you and the parent impact the athlete?"). The final section required participants to

274  consider the relationships between PACs as a triad. Questions focussed on participants'

275  experiences within the triad, the purpose and role of the triad within tennis, and the types of

276    interactions that fostered a positive PAC triad (e.g., "Can you discuss some of your

277    experiences of working with the parent(s) and player to improve how your PAC group

278    operates?").

279         Due to the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted

280    online. The order in which the interviews were conducted was dependent upon participants'

281    availability. Recurring language (e.g., team and trust) used by participants was posed to

282    participants in subsequent interviews to gain a better understanding of the similarities and

283    differences across cases. Interviews with parents and coaches lasted between 45 and 90

284    minutes ($M = 69.24$, $SD = 12.30$) whilst athlete interviews ranged from 40 to 60 minutes ($M =$

285    $49.50$; $SD = 7.93$).

286    *Conversational Threads*

287         Conversational threads (i.e., emails and text messages) were used to gather a more

288    enriched understanding of the day-to-day dynamics that occur between parents and coaches

289    (and athletes where possible) (Smith et al., 2015). Additionally, these threads were used as a

290    form of naturally occurring data which provided a more authentic view of the types and tone

291    of conversations that contribute to how the PAC triad functions. Following their interviews,

292    parents and coaches were asked to provide data from the conversation history between

293    themselves during the three months leading up to the study. Such conversational data was

294    represented through text messages (i.e., WhatsApp) but some email history was also shared.

295    Where available (i.e., cases in the U12s and U18s stages), participants provided a history of

296    WhatsApp group conversations between all three members of the triad. In total, 197 A4 pages

297    of conversational transcripts were used for analysis.

298    **Data Analysis**

299         The analysis procedure used in this study was reflexive thematic analysis (i.e.,

300    reflexive TA; Braun & Clarke, 2019). Reflexive TA offered a thoughtful account of the

301    researcher's engagement with the data and analytical process (Braun & Clarke, 2019) which

302    is both congruent with the assumptions of pragmatism (i.e., it is the researcher's

303    responsibility to interpret participants' perspectives to produce knowledge most applicable to

304    the research question), and the characteristics of case study designs (i.e., developing a rich,

305    detailed, and natural account of a temporally bound phenomenon). Therefore, these tenets

306    were used in conjunction with case-study-specific guidelines (Creswell, 2013) to further

307    enhance analytical sensibility (Braun & Clarke, 2019). An abductive approach was taken to

308    ensure themes generated from the data were consistent with the conceptual terminology

309    currently used in existing literature within this area (e.g., Lisinskiene et al., 2019). Although

310    more data was available from participants' interviews, equal weighting was given to all forms

311    of data collection during the analysis given the unique insights each type of data could

312    provide in relation to the research question.

313        First, the lead researcher became familiar with the data by collecting, transcribing, and

314    re-reading the data prior to the formal analysis procedure. QSR NVivo12 computer software

315    was used to aid with storage and assist with coding and retrieving all forms of the data

316    collected. Next, data relevant to each case was analysed individually known as within-case

317    analysis. This involved both coding explicitly stated meanings from participants and

318    identifying the underlying and implicit ideas that underpin these descriptive meanings in each

319    case (Braun & Clarke, 2019). For example, quotes reflected the type of communication

320    between individuals (i.e., explicit meaning) and the presence of care between partners in their

321    relationship (i.e., implicit meaning). Upon identifying patterns of shared meaning within each

322    case, cross-case analysis involved interpreting patterns between cases to explore the temporal

323    nature of participants' shared experiences in the PAC triad and generate sub-themes. These

324    sub-themes (e.g., support, shared goals, role collaboration, and role-specific communication)

325    were then grouped around a central organising concept to generate themes (e.g., team

326　effectiveness) which aimed to represent the complex interaction between the data, the

327　researcher's philosophical assumptions, and the resources used in the analysis process (Braun

328　& Clarke, 2019). Finally, these were reviewed and refined to reflect their analytical narrative

329　relevant to the purpose of understanding how the PAC triad functioned in youth tennis (i.e.,

330　the research question; Braun & Clarke, 2019).

331　**Quality Criteria**

332　　　Drawing from a relativist approach to selecting criteria for judging qualitative research

333　(Smith & McGannon, 2018) and existing collective case study guidelines (see Day & Wadey,

334　2016), the following criteria can be used in conjunction with Braun and Clarke's (2021)

335　reflexive TA guidelines as a starting point to judge the quality of the current study. First, the

336　use of conversational threads in this study provided novel *insights* into the naturally occurring

337　interactions within the PAC triad that have not yet been captured by existing literature.

338　Second, *credibility* was demonstrated by using a variety of data collection methods to

339　triangulate PACs' perspectives and provide an in-depth understanding of how the PAC triad

340　functions in British youth tennis (Smith & Sparkes, 2020). Third, the methodology (i.e.,

341　collective case study) used in this study provided rich and contextualised insights into how

342　and why PACs perceive their experiences within the triad. This allows others to make

343　naturalistic generalisations (see Smith & Sparkes, 2020) which adds *width* to the study.

344　Finally, *coherence* was offered through the creation of a meaningful process between the

345　approach (i.e., pragmatism), methodology (i.e., research questions and design), and methods

346　(i.e., data collection and analysis) used in this study. Additionally, members of the research

347　team acted as 'critical friends' by providing a variety of empirical knowledge to guide the

348　lead researcher's actions and interpretations (Smith & McGannon, 2018).

349　**Transparency and Openness**

350       To comply with the Transparency and Openness Promotion (TOP) guidelines, the

351 current study follows the *JARS-Qual* recommendations with interview guides openly

352 available for the reader in addition to data (i.e., visual descriptors, threads, and transcripts)

353 where appropriately redacted for anonymity and confidentiality (these are available from the

354 first author). In addition, due to the qualitative methodological approach used, the current

355 study plan was not pre-registered and did not use computer code or syntax.

**Results**

357       Two higher-order themes were generated from the data that underpinned how the

358 PAC triad functioned within youth tennis: *foundations of relationship quality* and *factors*

359 *enabling team effectiveness*. Each theme contained lower-order themes intended to reflect

360 both within and across-case analysis between each case and developmental stage. Therefore,

361 the themes represent the similarities found between participants and their cases. However, in

362 Table 2, we first provide illustrative details of how these themes and sub-themes relate to

363 participants' experiences within their triads (i.e., cases).

364                [Insert Table 2 here]

**Foundations of Relationship Quality**

366       Perceptions that reflected the quality or state of the relationship revolved around

367 *commitment*, *trust*, *respect*, and *parent-coach proximity* which subsequently shaped the

368 interactions that occurred within the triad.

369 ***Commitment to the Relationship***

370       Commitment reflected participants' intentions to invest in and maintain their

371 relationships within the triad. These intentions represented two levels of commitment across

372 all developmental stages: contract vs care-based commitment. *Contract-based commitment*

373 was characterised by the transactional basis in which parents employed coaches to coach the

374 athlete. Therefore, commitment between PACs was first and foremost defined by parents'

375    intentions to financially commit to coaches and in return, the effort coaches made to provide a

376    'service' that met the performance-based needs of the athlete. Given that this contractual

377    commitment represented the lowest level of intent needed to sustain the relationships within

378    the triad, the expectations parents and athletes had about the coaching qualities they wanted

379    from coaches influenced whether they were willing to contractually commit, as Emma

380    (Parent, T9) explains: "The coach competence, I think if that wasn't there, you would have to

381    look elsewhere, I think that comes before everything" (Interview).

382    The second level of commitment was *care-based commitment* which builds off the

383    foundational, contractual level of commitment between PACs, and reflected the level of

384    intent PACs showed to ensure the relationships within the triad flourished rather than just

385    existed. To do this, participants willingly appreciated the importance of showing concern for

386    each other as individuals to reduce stress and promote enjoyment and well-being. Examples

387    of care-based commitment levels to the PAC relationship involved being friendly, showing an

388    interest in other members' lives away from tennis, and spending time outside of paid

389    coaching hours to share feedback. This is illustrated by Mark, coach to 11-year-old Paul

390    (Athlete, T4):

391        I may send a little link of what I have seen on YouTube on a Sunday afternoon. They

392        are little things that can help the relationship because we are sometimes guilty of

393        spending a lot of court time with them, but don't always have the time to follow them

394        around and watch matches – that is always a stumbling block for coaches. Those little

395        things can really help the relationship (Interview).

396    ***Trusting Each Member's Ability***

397    Participants described trust as the extent to which each member trusted each other in

398    their roles within the triad. Parents and athletes trusted the coach's expertise given the

399    influential role they had on athletes:

400        We are essentially giving [Charlotte] a child to develop. It is a very influential

401        relationship between athlete and coach, especially in an individual sport with

402        individual lessons and not in a team environment. We will have to trust her for us to

403        give her responsibility for a piece of Lisa's (Athlete) development (Caroline, Parent,

404        T5, Interview).

405        Parents trusted coaches because they believed their child had a positive coach-athlete

406 relationship (e.g., was enthusiastic about spending time with them on the tennis court).

407 Likewise, athletes believed that their parent trusted their coach because the parent engaged

408 with the coach and encouraged the athlete to continue to work with them. Additionally,

409 building a trusting coach-athlete relationship was important to ensure athletes could work

410 more closely with coaches over time without parents acting as a mediator. As a result, parents

411 sought to build their child's trust in the coach by giving them time to interact without

412 interfering. Equally, coaches felt trusted and in turn, empowered and competent in their

413 ability to meet the holistic needs of the athlete when parents did not question their coaching

414 decisions. However, coaches did recognise that they could facilitate parents' trust by being

415 reliable during training sessions and explaining their intentions for the athlete as a tool to

416 reassure parents: "I feel trusted by them. You get some parents who say, 'Why is she doing

417 this or not doing this?' but, they are quite happy to have a quick chat and they are very

418 relaxed with it" (Charlotte, Coach, T5, Interview). Across all the triads, participants felt that

419 parents and athletes had positive relationships with each other because parents trusted athletes

420 to try their best and be receptive to support, whilst athletes trusted parents to be present and

421 provide the support they needed to develop.

422   ***Respecting Members' Contributions***

423        Interlinking with commitment and trust, respect was also fundamental to the way

424 PACs experienced their connections with each other. Respect was defined by participants as

425    being appreciative and receptive to the contribution each member made to the triad. As

426    parents expected coaches to provide their children with positive and growth-stimulating

427    experiences in tennis, parents respected coaches when they felt coaches cared for their child:

428    "I respect Ben (Coach) so much more and the effort and commitment he puts into this job and

429    tennis, they are like his children outside and on the court" (Sarah, Parent, T2, Interview).

430         There was a mutual consensus of respect between all three members of the triad. Even

431    when athletes were not able to comprehend the magnitude of their parents' contribution, they

432    still respected that their parents did their best to make tennis an enjoyable challenge.

433    Likewise, although parents were not directly involved with the on-court aspects of athletes'

434    development, parents felt connected to the triad because coaches and athletes appreciated

435    their involvement. Overall, participants considered everyone to be equally important to the

436    functioning of the triad in their own ways: "I think it is a team based on respect, loyalty, and

437    trust … The respect is the degree of interaction between the three of you and whether you all

438    believe in each other" (Emma, Parent, T9, Interview).

**_Parent-Coach Proximity_**

440         Parent-coach proximity refers to how the interpersonal connection between parents

441    and coaches influenced the quality of other relationships within the triad and the nature of the

442    triad moving forward. Parents and coaches who trusted each other enough to disclose

443    personal information about their lives outside of tennis, and to be honest about their feelings

444    created opportunities for stronger relationships with athletes. Athletes considered these

445    relationships between their parents and coaches as a friendship. As a result, athletes felt more

446    reassured that they could open up to their coaches about non-tennis-specific topics and issues

447    within their tennis because they believed the coach was more willing and knowledgeable in

448    their interactions with them. Paul (Athlete, T4) disclosed: "When I first met him, he was quite

449    good friends with my Mum, so he was open to me. He was kind of nicer to me. I have gotten

450    to know him better" (Interview).

451         Whilst not every triad had parents and coaches who were considered friends, there

452    were still instances where the trust between parents and coaches influenced the triad. This

453    included parents arranging opportunities for younger athletes to speak to their coach on the

454    phone, or coaches encouraging parents to watch training sessions so that parents could

455    understand and reinforce their coaching concepts in their absence at tournaments. In triads

456    where parents and coaches had known each other long enough to develop a sense of mutual

457    trust and respect, there was greater evidence of the tailored support that they could offer to

458    athletes. This included collaborating to help athletes resolve specific problems or challenges

459    they may be facing in tennis. In this regard, both Richard (Coach, T9) and Emma (Parent, T9)

460    shared the following example with Richard's thoughts shown here:

461         I remember one time when Stephen (Athlete) was at a real low and he and his mum

462         came around my house. I was just trying to listen to him and he really opened up and he

463         was really crying. I said that was a part of the relationship that you know if we weren't

464         quite close, I don't think it gets to that. If me and the Mum weren't close, she wouldn't

465         feel comfortable with that, but it was really good because it really helped us kind of

466         verbalise what he was feeling and finding difficult to explain (Interview).

467    **Factors Enabling Team Effectiveness**

468         When asked to best describe how they perceived the nature of their triads, participants

469    across all the age groups referred to their triads as a 'team'. Participants' accounts provided

470    insights into elements they perceived as enabling their team to work effectively and included

471    qualities such as *shared goals, collaborative and adjusted roles, support*, and *role-specific*

472    *communication*.

473    ***Shared Goals for the Triad***

474        Shared goals that are clear between PACs provided direction for each member

475    regarding the purpose of the triad and the responsibilities for which each member was

476    accountable. Given parents employed coaches to coach their children to play tennis, the

477    purpose of the triad was heavily oriented around helping athletes improve their tennis

478    performances. However, functional triads focussed on realistic goals which emphasised

479    processes (e.g., skill development and enjoyment) that preceded performance and developed

480    the athlete as a well-rounded person. This was done by identifying and meeting the needs of

481    athletes to allow them to develop the skills needed to play tennis and importantly, foster the

482    enjoyment that preceded athletes' intent to learn: "I see it as 100% a team because if it is not,

483    then that is not going to put me in the best situation where I want to be on court in terms of

484    learning those skills" (George, Athlete, T7, Interview). Establishing shared goals was made

485    easier when PACs had been working together for a long time and subsequently, had a good

486    understanding of the individual needs of the athlete. The following quote from Isabelle who

487    had been Olivia's (U12) coach for four years, supports this point:

488        You have to really understand what a player is like, and I think having them from a

489        young age and growing up is way easier. To just meet someone off the bat, you will get

490        to that team environment at some point, but it will take a while so if you can build that

491        team from a tiny age all the way up, then it will just get better (T6, Interview).

492    ***Collaborative and Adjusted Roles within the Triad***

493        For PACs to work well together as a team, clear and specific roles transpired for each

494    member of the triad. Coaches were responsible for providing knowledge and expertise around

495    the organisational structure of tennis and the technical, physical, and psychological skills

496    needed to be a successful tennis player. Athletes needed to demonstrate an enthusiasm for

497    tennis and older athletes (i.e., U12s and U18s) needed to feedback to parents and coaches

498    about the challenges they faced. Whilst parents recognised that providing tangible (e.g.,

499 transport) support to athletes was a major part of their role, participants explained that parents

500 provided important emotional and informational support to athletes given they spent more

501 time with them than coaches. As a result, coaches felt the need to work closely with the

502 parent to ensure they could maximise the parent's contribution to the athlete's tennis:

503      I've had to really consider how the parent has such an important role in their tennis. Not

504      just a taxi service! Having to discuss much more with the parent, I think they feel more

505      involved with what their son/daughter is going through on court. This can lead to a

506      much more of a supporting role as they have a better understanding (Mark, Coach, T4,

507      Pre-Task, T4).

508      The dyads within the triad also played specific roles within the 'team'. Parents acted as

509 a central point in facilitating feedback, communication, and understanding between coaches

510 and athletes until athletes matured enough to communicate their thoughts and feelings. As

511 such, the relationship between parents and coaches became pivotal to ensuring the triad

512 operated collaboratively in the younger developmental stages. Interestingly, however, parents

513 in the U10s and U12s stages saw their future involvement with coaches as less relevant: "I

514 think the PAC eventually becomes the AC (athlete-coach). Where the parent steps back a bit

515 more, I think at this stage it needs to be less P and more AC" (Molly, Parent, T4, Interview).

516      Boundaries were placed on the roles within the triad to avoid potential conflict and

517 offer direction within the triad. For example, parents were expected to "remain close and are

518 involved but know when to step in and when to let us get on with coaching Olivia (Athlete)"

519 (Isabelle, Coach, T6, Pre-Task). For all triads, boundaries were implicitly set by getting to

520 know each other's preferences that stemmed from previous relationships and experiences in

521 tennis and sport more generally. Despite this, the wider contextual and cultural expectations

522 placed upon participants (e.g., parents' rate of learning around the demands and requirements

523 of tennis) meant it was important that these roles were flexible to the demands participants

524     were under to avoid PACs in the triad becoming frustrated and ineffective. For example,

525     parents were strongly discouraged from engaging in coaching behaviours (e.g., telling

526     coaches how to coach) that could jeopardise the trust coaches and athletes had for parents,

527     and the autonomy coaches had over coaching decisions that they believed they should be

528     primarily responsible for. However, given coaches were often absent at tournaments due to

529     the financial implications of attending, even during the older stages, it became part of parents'

530     roles to "reinforce goals set by the coach and athlete" (Heather, Parent, T1, Pre-Task) and for

531     coaches to facilitate this by encouraging parents to work closely with them as coaches to

532     "provide a consistent message to the player" (Josh, Coach, T8, Pre-Task). The following

533     extract taken from a WhatsApp conversation between Emma (Parent, T9) and Richard

534     (Coach, T9) demonstrates this point:

535        Emma (Parent): Stephen (Athlete) had a tough day. Lost all matches. Hitting FH with

536        much more pace, more winners, but more errors. He said the ball came back quicker

537        and the boys liked the extra pace. For me, lacked variety and didn't use space. Forgot

538        BH completely. Do I suggest anything? Have praised commitment to the new shot but

539        he's very disappointed it didn't magically improve his game!

540        Richard (Coach): You may have a sledgehammer in your tool kit, but it's no good

541        when you are trying to peel an orange. Helping him understand that different

542        situations require different tools would be helpful.

543     ***Providing Support to Negotiate the Challenges of Tennis***

544        Tennis imposed numerous demands on PACs. Therefore, a core component of

545     building and maintaining a functional team was the strength of the three-way support

546     network. To support this point, Richard (Coach, T9) explained in his interview that "to be

547     successful, all three parts have to be working effectively and efficiently and if one of those

548     parts drops, if you have created a really good team, then the other two will be mechanisms

549    and step in to help". In this context, the type of support PACs exchanged was specific to the

550    role each participant occupied within the triad. It was particularly important that athletes felt

551    they had appropriate emotional (i.e., encouragement) and informational (i.e., psychological

552    skills development) support from parents and coaches, which allowed them to gain the skills

553    to critically self-reflect and develop a sense of autonomy over their development.

554        Additionally, parent-athlete relationships were positive for athletes when their parents

555    were present at tournaments, able to provide match-specific coaching points when needed,

556    and when they modelled calmness on the sidelines. Similarly, coaches respected and trusted

557    parents more when they observed parents support the athlete during challenging moments

558    (e.g., after losses). Parents also openly shared the challenges they faced from their athlete's

559    tennis experiences and subsequently needed support from coaches to confidently navigate the

560    stressful nature of organising and attending tournaments. Coaches were aware of the need to

561    be proactive in working with parents even when parents did not explicitly ask for support. As

562    a result, parents relied on coaches to be available to offer encouragement and advice. This can

563    be seen in the following extract taken from a conversation between Mary (Parent, T3) and

564    Lucy (Coach, T3) after a disappointing performance and loss for Tom (Athlete, T3):

565        Mary (Parent): Tom (Athlete) and I are a bit down about it but I guess the positive side

566        is you can now see how things sometimes go in tournaments. Tom (Athlete) said he's

567        embarrassed and hopefully it might sink in this time … probably not straight away!

568        Lucy (Coach): Aw Mary (Parent), don't be down at all. It was a real positive to be able

569        to see and that is the only way we can help. Everything we say is not a criticism at all, it

570        is with Tom's (Athlete) interests at heart. … Sometimes it may be uncomfortable but it

571        is not a negative at all – it is about finding a way forward. Don't be down.

572       Finally, because athletes were expected to focus on their tennis and parents and coaches

573       were seen as the main support agents within the triad, athletes were expected to be receptive

574       to support rather than to provide it.

575       ***Being Open to Offering and Receiving Role-Specific Communication***

576       To ensure the triad worked collectively as one team, participants explained how

577       ongoing and frequent communication allowed each member to share concerns, information,

578       and goals that stemmed from their role-related expertise. Most communication within the

579       triad occurred on a dyadic level given opportunities for PACs to converse as a group were

580       more restricted to training times until athletes were old enough to use their own phone to

581       communicate within group WhatsApp conversations. Parents and coaches mostly

582       communicated via text messages or phone calls, whilst athletes mostly communicated with

583       parents and coaches during training, at tournaments, or in the car. From parents' and coaches'

584       perspectives, dyadic communication allowed them to be honest, express appreciation, and

585       make shared decisions together. Likewise, parents' close understanding of their child away

586       from tennis meant they could offer coaches more relevant information regarding the

587       personality profile of the athlete, alongside stressors or challenges the athlete may be facing

588       without undermining the athlete's confidence in their own abilities. This allowed coaches to

589       tailor sessions to the capabilities of athletes:

590           I used to call (Lisa) the Hulk. She was this lovely little happy girl and then she just

591           flipped, and she would be the angriest thing you have ever seen… her Mum came to

592           me one day and she said 'she has just done a swimming gala and she lost, so she took

593           her fingernails, and she clawed them into her thighs'… Then I would pay attention to

594           it, and I started doing these games to make her lose… and she would freak out

595           massively but every week, she kind of calms down and you kind of defeat that side

596           (Charlotte, Coach, T5, Interview).

597     For athletes, coaches were seen as the most knowledgeable individual within the triad

598     with Liam (Athlete, T2) calling his coach, Ben, "the mastermind" (Pre-Task). Therefore,

599     athletes often sought coaching feedback and advice to help them grow as tennis players by

600     discussing match reports, tactics, and areas for improvement. Communication was also an

601     opportunity for athletes to share their thoughts on how they performed with parents, whilst

602     parents used it to hold their children accountable to certain behavioural expectations (e.g.,

603     playing fairly, trying hard, and managing emotions).

604     **Developmental Differences Across Stages**

605     There were also specific and nuanced differences in how triads functioned in each

606     developmental stage. One key difference related to the emotional proximity between parents

607     and coaches and its position within the structural dynamics of the triad. For cases in the U10s

608     phase, parent-coach relationships were key to how well the triad functioned because athletes

609     relied most heavily on parents working with their coaches to encourage them, provide them

610     with the right messages, and guide them in the right direction. However, as athletes matured,

611     the proximity between parents and coaches became more implicit in the triad's functioning

612     and the way coaches and athletes maintained high-quality relationships with each other

613     became more prominent. As a result, athletes were not always aware that parents and coaches

614     continued to maintain a close relationship and therefore, did not consider it necessary to the

615     triad or their tennis: "I think it is important that [Holly and Josh] talk but I don't think they

616     need to be best friends or anything like that" (Amelia, Athlete, T8, Interview).

617     Another key developmental difference concerned the ways PACs adjusted their roles

618     to ensure they continued to collaborate effectively in the triad. In the U12s and U18s phases,

619     parents and coaches recognised the need for athletes to begin to take accountability for their

620     own experiences. This involved taking over some of the responsibilities parents had been

621     almost solely responsible for in the U10s phase such as being responsible for providing their

622 feedback about tournaments to coaches, providing more guidance to parents and coaches

623 around what type of support they needed from them, and sharing their own goals and

624 aspirations for their tennis: "As I have gotten older, [my Mum] has kind of let me get on with

625 it myself. She used to see if I was behaving myself but now, I think she trusts me to do it all

626 myself" (Stephen, Athlete, T9, Interview). Both Richard (Coach, T9) and Emma (Parent, T9)

627 also agreed that "Stephen (Athlete) is more engaged in goal setting and he also has developed

628 his ability to feedback more accurately. He is driving his development far more" (Richard,

629 Coach, T9, Pre-Task). Nevertheless, parents and coaches were mindful to help keep athletes'

630 aspirations realistic so they were able to still enjoy and feel confident playing tennis without

631 becoming overwhelmed by rankings and results.

632 **Discussion**

633     The present study aimed to understand the processes that underpin how PAC triads

634 function across the developmental pathway in British youth tennis. A total of nine triads were

635 examined across three developmental stages. While not by design, self-selection of

636 participating triads resulted in PACs that were much more positive than negative in their

637 functioning, Nevertheless, the findings revealed a series of relevant and practical insights

638 related to the way PACs work together as a triad in youth tennis. Building on previous

639 research (e.g., Maurice et al., 2021), these findings capture both the qualities and processes

640 (and the interaction between them) that underpin the positive development and maintenance

641 of triads as a collection of dyadic relationships, and as a unifying three-person team in

642 shaping positive tennis experiences for all members over time.

643     First, the findings of the current study suggest that the quality of the dyadic and triadic

644 relationships between PACs are a critical contributor to athletic development and enjoyment.

645 Reciprocal feelings of commitment, trust, respect, and proximity strengthened the dyadic

646 relationships and subsequently the triadic relationships between PACs. These relational

647     foundations allowed PACs to develop a sense of autonomy and competence in their roles as

648     triad stakeholders. The mediating role of needs satisfaction between the quality of sporting

649     relationships and athletic outcomes (i.e., well-being and motivation) is well known (e.g.,

650     Jowett et al., 2017). However, the findings in this study perhaps particularly highlight the

651     importance of needs satisfaction for parents. Specifically, Horne et al. (2022) suggested that

652     in return for their investment and commitment to their children, tennis parents prefer a greater

653     share of responsibility for athletic development. Likewise, parents can often feel anxious and

654     uncertain about the pre-requisites of successful parenting especially when they lack previous

655     exposure to sport (Knight et al., 2016) and subsequently, seek sources of information as

656     opportunities to learn to become more competent sport parents (Horne et al., 2022).

657         Building on these suggestions, the current findings indicate that greater parental

658     responsibility was represented by a sense of self-control over the actions parents take towards

659     athletic development. Parents feel a greater sense of confidence in their abilities to execute

660     this greater shared responsibility when certain qualities underpin relationships between PACs.

661     This includes when coaches and athletes demonstrate care towards parents (e.g., coaches

662     investing in parents outside of paid contracted hours), and when they trust and respect parents

663     to be more involved within the triad (e.g., adjusting roles). Comparatively, coaches who felt

664     trusted and respected by parents and athletes to make and implement coaching decisions and

665     practices also felt a greater sense of control over and confidence in their responsibilities. For

666     athletes, perceptions of autonomy and competence were fostered when parents and coaches

667     respected their input in the triad and trusted them to be accountable for their own experiences

668     but continued to provide support when needed. Therefore, it is conceivable to suggest that

669     needs satisfaction is an important product of high-quality PAC relationships and a catalyst for

670     positive athletic outcomes.

671        Second, the way PAC triads function in youth tennis extends beyond the quality of

672     dyadic relationships they have within the triad. That is, there is a need for PACs to work as a

673     team through shared goals, role adjustments and collaboration, mutual support, and role-

674     specific communication. McEwan and Beauchamp (2014) proposed that team effectiveness is

675     the direct result of teamwork (i.e., how team members execute certain cooperative behaviours

676     to achieve the team's purpose). Consequently, teamwork acts as a mediator between

677     individual, team, and external-level inputs and outcomes working on episodic cycles (i.e.,

678     between matches) and developmental processes (i.e., through the youth sport system;

679     McEwan & Beauchamp, 2014). Hence, in this study, the provision of team-based constructs

680     (e.g., mutual support) contextualises teamwork between PACs to promote enjoyment,

681     development, and performance. The concept of teamwork has also previously been identified

682     as an important group process indicator where for PACs to have successful relationships,

683     everyone must be involved, help each other, express ideas, and work cooperatively in pursuit

684     of shared goals (Lisinskiene et al., 2019). The current findings extend this research by

685     suggesting that team maintenance and performance, two main components of teamwork in

686     sport (see McEwan & Beauchamp, 2014), rely on the provision of certain social processes. In

687     this study, PAC triads that are available and open to offer and receive a range of support and

688     adjust roles and responsibilities to the context of the triad (e.g., during tournaments), allow

689     PACs to feel connected and work through the shared challenges and stressors of tennis

690     together (Harwood & Knight, 2009).

691        The findings in this study suggest that the qualities embedded within positive social

692     relationships are inextricably linked to the way PACs interact on a dyadic and triadic level.

693     For example, parents felt trusted by coaches when they took the time to offer informational

694     support (e.g., guidance), whilst athletes demonstrated trust in parents when they were open to

695     parents reinforcing coaching messages during tournaments (i.e., coaches taking the time to

696    promote the importance of parental feedback to athletes). Coaches felt closer to parents and

697    athletes when parents did not interfere with coaching responsibilities (e.g., trying to coach),

698    and when parents and athletes agreed on and actively worked towards goals that coaches

699    considered realistic and most relevant to the needs and ability of the athlete. In this regard, the

700    present results echo Siltaloppi and Vargo's (2017) observations when they stated how

701    "factors related to the quality of social relationships, such as trust, mutual appreciation, and

702    the presence of shared norms, constitute important coordination mechanisms that allow the

703    triad to function toward common goals" (p. 402).

704        Finally, by taking a developmental approach to case selection, the findings illustrate the

705    salience of PAC relationships through childhood and adolescence, including when athletes

706    gain more intrapersonal (e.g., self-reflection) and interpersonal skills (e.g., communication) to

707    work more closely with coaches themselves. Whilst parents needed to adapt in accordance

708    with the contextual and cultural demands and expectations associated with each

709    developmental transition (Harwood & Knight, 2015), the quality of parental involvement

710    remained crucial for triadic functioning in the later developmental stages even when earlier

711    stage parents forecasted a reduced level of involvement in the future. Overall, parents and

712    coaches appear to share responsibility for leading the triad (until athletes are old enough to

713    exercise more responsibility themselves), provided they fulfil the expected norms of their

714    roles or exercise a degree of care and caution when engaging in actions beyond the normal

715    boundaries of these roles. This concept of dyadic adjustments between PACs in their social

716    network has been similarly and previously highlighted by Jowett and Timson-Katchis (2005)

717    in youth swimming.

718        In sum, the results of this study illustrate some of the structural and systematic

719    dynamics that operate within PAC triads in youth tennis (see Siltaloppi & Vargo, 2017). This

720    includes the way individuals mediate the relationships between others in the triad (e.g.,

721  coaches providing parents with guidance to better support their child at tournaments). It also

722  includes how PACs work together as a whole system (i.e., as a 'coalition') to bring a sense of

723  stability and coordination to the triad (e.g., adjusting roles to the needs and circumstances of

724  the triad to achieve mutual goals).

725  **Practical Implications**

726  Several implications for applied researchers and practitioners are worth sharing from

727  this study. Firstly, given that team effectiveness and relationship quality may provide the

728  conditions underpinning triadic satisfaction and athlete development, we must look beyond

729  dyadic relationships and consider implementing team-focused approaches via small group

730  principles. The positive impact of team building exercises on promoting teamwork

731  behaviours (e.g., setting shared goals), cohesion, and social relationships (e.g., Beauchamp et

732  al., 2017) provides a beneficial starting point for this suggestion.

733  Secondly, at a sport organisational level, there is a need to position the salience of the

734  PAC triad within current parent support and coach development programs. Presently, parent

735  support programs place singular attention on helping parents cope with the demands of youth

736  sport and improve parental involvement (see Burke et al., 2021), whilst training and guidance

737  for coaches around working with parents are often limited to unreliable sources of

738  information (e.g., internet sources) rather than evidence-based initiatives (e.g., peer-reviewed

739  journal articles) (Horne et al., 2022). Relevant programme content may include greater

740  attention to interpersonal behaviours and relational strategies to help parents and coaches

741  optimise their triadic roles and resolve social-related issues. For example, following learning

742  resources tailored to coaches and parents (and athletes, as appropriate) about relationship

743  management, subsequent 'joint' workshops or webinars with coaches and parents together

744  may facilitate active engagement in the social processes that enable them to evaluate, adjust,

745  and optimise their involvement within sport (Horne et al., 2022). Further consideration may

746 also be given to integrating scheduled opportunities (e.g., bi-monthly review/check-ins) for

747 parents, coaches, and athletes to discuss their relationships and interact in a supportive,

748 communicative, and collaborative manner.

749 **Future Research Recommendations**

750      The strengths of the present study should be considered against its limitations. First,

751 although an effort was made to secure triads where fathers were the primary parental figure

752 within the triad, mothers emerged exclusively as the parental figure for each of the cases.

753 Therefore, future research should consider how fathers, acting as the primary parent,

754 influence the processes and qualities in the PAC triad given key differences can exist between

755 mothers and fathers in their relationships with others (e.g., Dorsch et al., 2016). As

756 knowledge in this area grows, future individual case studies may also investigate more

757 complicated social network systems which comprise other social actors (e.g., other family

758 members and peers).

759      Additionally, the self-selecting nature of the recruitment procedures in this study meant

760 that the cohort of PAC triads in this study functioned more positively rather than negatively.

761 As such, it is important for scholars to investigate whether a paucity or deficit of the

762 relationship and team-based constructs identified in this study characterise less stable and 'at

763 risk' triads. For example, the themes identified in the present study may align with the

764 preventative and proactive behaviours that promote functional, collaborative outcomes rather

765 than conflict and dysfunction (Wachsmuth et al., 2018). To add to this point, while features

766 and processes of the parent-athlete relationship contributed to our understanding of triadic

767 functioning, the salience of parent-coach and coach-athlete relationships in the triad appeared

768 to emerge more prominently. We believe that such a finding may relate to the pre-existing

769 closeness, health and stability of parent-athlete relationships in these specific cases, whereby

770 the natural and goal-related focus of triadic members' attentions centred upon establishing

771     high-quality coach-athlete and parent-coach relationships to facilitate the athlete's tennis

772     development. Hence, with careful sampling criteria, it would be interesting to investigate

773     whether the underpinning quality and salience of the parent-athlete relationship is magnified

774     and emerges more in less stable, problematic, or 'at risk' triads, where more negative

775     interactions between parents and athletes compromise triadic functioning compared to the

776     other dyads in the system.

777         In conclusion, the current study has illustrated some of the foundationary qualities and

778     enabling factors that operate between PACs within organised youth tennis. It is hoped that

779     these findings can spur researchers into studying intact triads within other youth sport settings

780     and invigorate practitioners and sport organisations towards more tailored and team-based

781     support to parents, coaches and athletes.

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**Table 1**

*Demographic Description of Cases*

| Stage | Case (T) | Pseudonym | Role | Gender | Age | Nationality/ Ethnicity | Experience in Role (Years) | Level |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| U10s | 1 | Heather | Parent | Female | 38 | British/White | 3 | n/a |
| | | Jessica | Athlete | Female | 8 | British/White | 5 | County |
| | | Beth | Athlete | Female | 10 | British/White | 7 | County |
| | | Kate | Coach | Female | 27 | British/White | 10 | Performance |
| | 2 | Sarah | Parent | Female | 42 | German/White | 4 | n/a |
| | | Liam | Athlete | Male | 10 | German/White | 4 | National |
| | | Ben | Coach | Male | 47 | British/White | 28 | Performance |
| U12s | 3 | Mary | Parent | Female | 41 | British/White | 6 | n/a |
| | | Tom | Athlete | Male | 10 | British/White | 6 | County |
| | | Lucy | Coach | Female | 46 | British/White | 20 | Performance |
| | | Jack | Coach | Male | 55 | British/White | 30 | Performance |
| | 4 | Molly | Parent | Female | 48 | Irish/White | 8.5 | n/a |
| | | Paul | Athlete | Male | 11 | British/White | 8.5 | County |
| | | Mark | Coach | Male | 48 | British/White | 28 | Performance |
| | 5 | Caroline | Parent | Female | 46 | Chinese | 4 | n/a |
| | | Lisa | Athlete | Female | 10 | Chinese/White | 4 | County |
| | | Charlotte | Coach | Female | 24 | British/White | 6 | Performance |
| | 6 | Alice | Parent | Female | 50 | British/White | 12 | n/a |
| | | Olivia | Athlete | Female | 11 | British/White | 8 | National |
| | | Isabelle | Coach | Female | 56 | Canadian/White | 37 | Performance |
| U18s | 7 | Sophie | Parent | Female | 52 | British/White | 13 | n/a |
| | | George | Athlete | Male | 16 | British/White | 13 | National |
| | | Michael | Coach | Male | 42 | British/White | 21 | Performance |
| | 8 | Holly | Parent | Female | 51 | Japanese/Asian | 10 | n/a |
| | | Amelia | Athlete | Female | 13 | British/Japanese/White/Asian | 7 | Regional |
| | | Josh | Coach | Male | 41 | British/White | 16 | Performance |
| | 9 | Emma | Parent | Female | 51 | British/White | 14 | n/a |
| | | Stephen | Athlete | Male | 15 | British/French/White | 12 | Regional |
| | | Richard | Coach | Male | 49 | British/White | 23 | Performance |

**Table 1**

*Summary Illustrations of Themes and Sub-Themes Within Each Triadic Case*

| Case | Foundations of Relationship Quality | Factors Enabling Team Effectiveness |
|---|---|---|
| **1**<br><br>Heather, Jessica, Beth and Kate | • There was a high degree of trust and respect in this triad because Heather (Parent), Jessica and Beth (Athletes) saw Kate (Coach) as a positive role model and someone they admired as a result of Kate's tennis playing history. However, this meant that Beth felt pressured to perform well at times (*Respecting Members' Contributions*).<br>• Because Kate (Coach) was responsible for coaching both of Heather's (Parent) daughters, there was a greater sense of trust needed between Kate and Heather (*Trusting Each Member's Ability).* | • The exchange of support and communication between participants in this triad was particularly important to its functioning. This was because Heather (Parent) was new to tennis and lacked experience (e.g., equipment and tournament selection), whilst Kate's (Coach) relationships with Jessica and Beth (Athletes) were in the early stages of development (e.g., needed context about the athletes' personalities and lives) (*Being Open to Offering and Receiving Role-Specific Communication*).<br>• Collaboration in this triad was high because both Heather (Parent) and Kate (Coach) shared the same goals and values (i.e., long-term development, life-skill development, and enjoyment) (*Shared Goals for the Triad*). |
| **2**<br><br>Sarah, Liam and Ben | • Because of Ben's (Coach) highly regarded reputation and experience in tennis, both Sarah (Parent) and Liam (Athlete) respected him and his ability to coach (although this meant that Liam felt more pressure to perform well at tournaments if Ben was there). Nevertheless, this helped clarify what was expected of each member in the triad and establish boundaries that each member respected and could be measured against (*Respecting Members' Contributions*). Sarah also saw Ben as a "family friend" and a "tennis dad" because of his commitment to Liam and his tennis (*Parent-Coach Proximity*). | • Support in this triad was largely unilateral with Ben (Coach) providing a high degree of support to Sarah (Parent) and Liam (Athlete). This was because Sarah was enthusiastic and committed to Liam's development but relatively inexperienced so frequently sought reassurance and guidance from Ben (*Providing Support to Negotiate the Challenges of Tennis).* |
| **3**<br><br>Mary, Tom, Lucy and Jack | • The basis for the teamwork and communication between the triad as a whole was established from the nurturing connection Lucy and Jack (Coaches) had managed to create with Tom (Athlete). This was important for Mary (Parent) to see because it rebuilt Tom's confidence and made it easier for Mary to trust them with her son's development (*Trusting Each Member's Ability*).<br>• Because Tom respected both of his coaches, he often felt pressured to perform well (*Respecting Members' Contributions*). | • As Tom was a U12 athlete, Mary (Parent), Lucy and Jack (Coaches) agreed that it was important to give Tom more accountability so Mary could take more of a step back and allow Tom to manage his own tennis experiences (although this presented a challenge to Mary who was very involved and invested in Tom's tennis) (*Collaborative and Adjusted Roles Within the Triad*). |

| Case | Foundations of Relationship Quality | Factors Enabling Team Effectiveness |
|------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| **4**<br><br>Molly, Paul and Mark | • Molly (Parent) and Mark (Coach) saw each other as friends because Molly volunteered at the tennis club where Mark worked and therefore, they saw each other frequently to be able to talk about non-tennis topics that allowed them to get to know each other as people. As Paul (Athlete) described, they talk "non-stop. I like that they have been talking a lot more about ways to help me mentally" (*Parent-Coach Proximity*). | • For Molly (Parent), it was important that she felt she and Paul (Athlete) could "knock on Mark's (Coach) door" at any point should they feel they needed it. This facilitated trust and respect between the members of this triad which allowed them to define their roles and responsibilities within the triad (*Being Open to Offering and Receiving Role-Specific Communication*). |
| **5**<br><br>Caroline, Lisa and Charlotte | • Caroline (Parent) and Charlotte (Coach) both felt they had an open and relaxed friendship between them. This encompassed being able to talk about non-tennis topics, feeling comfortable in each other's presence, and celebrating birthdays together. In doing so, Lisa (Athlete) was able to discuss non-tennis topics and share information about her personal interests and events with Charlotte because she felt Caroline and Charlotte were friends (*Parent-Coach Proximity*).<br><br>• Trust and respect in this triad were also high as each member appreciated the role each other played within the triad (*Trusting Each Member's Ability/Respecting Members' Contributions*). | • Caroline's (Parent) depiction of the triad was very much focused on ensuring the coach-athlete relationship between Charlotte (Coach) and Lisa (Athlete) was as strong as possible. To do this, Caroline allowed Lisa to call Charlotte on her phone and encouraged Lisa to seek information from Charlotte rather than herself (*Collaborative and Adjusted Roles Within the Triad*).<br><br>• The triad also had a very clear focus on Lisa's (Athlete) holistic development (e.g., building self-esteem and resilience) (*Shared Goals for the Triad*). |
| **6**<br><br>Alice, Olivia and Isabelle | • As Isabelle (Coach) had been coaching Olivia (Athlete) since she was 4 years old, participants felt that everyone was equally committed to developing relationships that benefited the triad because they showed genuine interest and care in each other as stakeholders and as people. (*Commitment to the Relationship*). As a result, participants had more respect for what each member could bring to the triad and trusted each other to deliver on these expectations (*Trusting Each Member's Ability / Respecting Members' Contributions*).<br><br>• Participants also considered Alice (Parent) and Isabelle (Coach) to be friends in this triad which helped to build positive and strong relationships across the triad (*Parent-Coach Proximity*). | • Even though the triad decided to bring in another coach to help support Olivia's (Athlete) development, there was still a sense of teamwork that everyone (including Isabelle) was working together to support Olivia's development (*Collaborative and Adjusted Roles Within the Triad*).<br><br>• Participants shared instances where the collaboration between Alice (Parent) and Isabelle (Coach) allowed them to resolve a problem with Olivia's (Athlete) match play (i.e., all sharing the same information with Olivia was seen as a "team effort") (*Collaborative and Adjusted Roles Within the Triad*). |

| Case | Foundations of Relationship Quality | Factors Enabling Team Effectiveness |
|---|---|---|
| **7**<br><br>Sophie, George and Michael | • Sophie (Parent) and Michael (Coach) demonstrated *care-based commitment* and *parent-coach proximity* by scheduling time to get to know each other as people. This allowed each other to be sympathetic to the challenges going on in each other's lives in an efficient way that didn't detract from George's (Athlete) time with Michael. However, Michael highlighted the need for him to fulfil his contractual commitments to ensure they continued to have a positive relationship/triad (*Commitment to the Relationship*). | • Comparative to some of the other triads in this study, George (Athlete) took more responsibility for his development by determining what he wanted to get out of training sessions and the competitions he wanted to play (*Collaborative and Adjusted Roles Within the Triad*).<br>• Sophie (Parent) was supported by George (Athlete) when he provided clear thoughts about what he wanted to do regarding his tennis and what he expected from her as a parent (these conversations primarily occurred in the car) (*Providing Support to Negotiate the Challenges of Tennis*). |
| **8**<br><br>Holly, Amelia and Josh | • Holly's (Parent) commitment to Josh (Coach) stemmed from Amelia's (Athlete) desire to be coached by Josh whom she had seen and respected at the tennis club (*Commitment to the Relationship*).<br>• Unlike some of the other triads, Amelia (Athlete) believed communication between Holly (Parent) and Josh (Coach) was only needed to ensure the triad was on the same page and understood their roles (*Parent-Coach Proximity*). | • The use of a WhatsApp group between all three members of the triad allowed each member to communicate and feel connected to each other in between training sessions. It also allowed Amelia (Athlete) to see everyone working together towards her tennis so she felt supported and encouraged. Open communication online allowed Josh (Coach) to get both Holly's (Parent) and Amelia's perspectives on tournaments which he valued equally. As English was Holly's second language, online messages allowed the triad to clarify shared goals, reflections, and feedback (*Being Open to Offering and Receiving Role-Specific Communication*). |
| **9**<br><br>Emma, Stephen and Richard | • The emotional proximity between Emma (Parent) and Richard (Coach) was still important to the functioning of this triad even when Stephen (Athlete) gained more control of his tennis, and did not feel that Emma was heavily involved in his tennis (other than as a support mechanism when needed). The trust and respect in the triad were further enhanced because Emma worked at the same tennis club as Richard and he had coached Emma's daughter before coaching Stephen. As a result, they had a long-standing 10-year relationship (*Parent-Coach Proximity*). | • This triad had a very clear set of principles that participants agreed upon and followed. This largely centred around ensuring Stephen (Athlete) was developing the life skills needed to be a positive functioning player inside tennis and a person outside of tennis. This was facilitated because Emma (Parent) and Richard (Coach) both felt they were compatible in terms of their values and beliefs in tennis, and Stephen understood and accepted the importance of these beliefs to his development (*Shared Goals for the Triad*). |

*Note.* The sub-theme that each summary relates to is specified in italics within brackets next to each point.

**Figure 1**

*Example of U10s Athlete Pre-Interview Task*