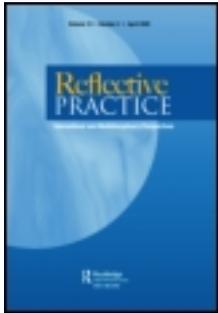


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Coaching for performance: an interview with Olympic diving coach, Andy Banks

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Scholars from the field of sports coaching have widely accepted the practice of coaching as a complex activity due to the necessity to manage performers and the dynamic environments within which they operate (Cassidy, Jones, & Potrac, 2004; Cushion, 2001; Jones, Armour, & Potrac, 2004; Knowles, Tyler, Gilbourne, & Eubank, 2006). It therefore stands to reason that the higher up the performance chain you get, the more complex the process becomes as a result of more multifaceted competitive environments. This has led to a research focus on understanding not only what coaches do, but unravelling how they think and acquire knowledge. Much of the work conducted within this discipline has been based around the underlying fact that the sports coaching industry is results driven. Certainly at elite and Olympic level a key focus when evaluating sports coaching effectiveness is based on competitive performance and attainment, placing significant expectation and responsibility on the coach. However, it remains to be seen if coaches themselves actually use an outcome focus as the key driver when designing and managing their performance programmes, and what they do in terms of process that ensures they are meeting performance targets. The experiences of practicing coaches working with elite and Olympic performers provides invaluable insights into the coaching process at this level, and what it really means to be a coach and develop athletes that have World Class potential. In order to explore these concepts further we interviewed diving coach Andy Banks, known primarily for his role as coach to World Champion and 2012 Olympic hopeful Tom Daley. Here we present a reflexive conversation with him. We hope that reading this will inspire you, the reader, to think about how you can develop the performance potential of those people you work with.

MD: Andy, just to start with, I'd like you to give us a biography about yourself and how you came to this point in your coaching career.

AB: I started diving when I was nine; I was taken to holiday courses by my parents and enjoyed those, then got involved with a club. For a number of years I was in different clubs as my parents moved from the South to North. I got to National level and thought that if you were launched into the abyss and landed the right way

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Figure 1.

up or thereabouts, and if it didn't hurt, then that was a good dive. I did wonder why I didn't do brilliantly at Nationals. Then, at the back end of my career I'd left school and gone down to London to work in the Police. I came across a coach there who basically switched the lights on and started talking to me about things like Biomechanics. I thought 'bio who?!' And psychology, physiology..., dry land training for diving. I thought you just swung your arms around a bit then got in. So it really was an eye opener for me that there was a science behind this sport which I had no concept of whatsoever. That helped me a little bit, but it was too late for me then. Whether there was enough talent there anyway I think is arguable. But it was too late. That enthused me. He got me involved in coaching some of his younger groups, seeing if I could go off and actually learn about what this sport was all about, and put that knowledge and experience together eventually to create people who did have talent to actually achieve right up to the end of their talent. I'm a big believer that you do have to have talent to succeed but also if the coaching isn't correct then you're likely to limit the ceiling of what that talent can achieve. So my goal was to find the talent and then help it to achieve its ceiling.

So I left the Police. Having run away from my A-Levels initially, I went back into college and did a degree in Human Movement which I completely biased towards diving. My majors were biomechanics and psychology and physiology. I did strength training for younger age group divers. Everything we did really by way of assignment I tried to bias towards diving and did the research around it and tried to learn as much as I could about what I was going to do. In effect I used the degree course not just to get a degree but to increase the knowledge base that I had. At the same time I set up a programme in Bradford which was just two hours a week for beginner divers. By the end of the three year college course that had two kids on the Junior National team and had grown from two hours for beginners to a fairly extensive programme. I stole, grabbed, pinched and argued for more pool time. I said to them, 'I've finished my degree course, I've done all this over the last three years, I need a job please'. They had a small pool that was shutting, and a swimming teacher who had retired so there was a salary available. I was given that under the education budget for a year's contract. That role became the first full-time

diving coach position that there was. So professionalism in diving came about through that. It of course then expanded along with other white elephants as they were, around the country in pools that had been built but hadn't really been used, with people like myself who were keen to get involved in diving professionally and work as a full-time coach.

I wanted to get into 10 metre level. Bradford was only 5 metre level and Plymouth was a 10 metre pool that was relatively new at the time. But they had no money. A few people had tried to get in and they were like 'sorry no room at the inn'. I'd seen a programme set up by a guy called Chris Snode who came back from the '84 games and set up a private company at Crystal Palace doing pre-school gymnastics, trampolining, recreational diving and elite diving and the whole thing developed as a financial base to help an elite programme. So I nicked that idea and went and spoke to the guy who had been diving mentor, and he was also a city accountant. His history was diving at the '60 Olympic Games, he'd gone off and done his professional accountancy course, although he still coached in his spare time. He said 'well, come in with me, I'll be your partner'. I knew nothing about running or setting it up or budgets or accounting or anything about business so that was kind of a godsend. He came as a partner initially in the business we set up down here. We put together a proposal presented to Plymouth Council in 1992, they approved it and we've been here ever since. So it's fundamentally been about growing that base so that there's money to make sure we're still here the following month which obviously is important. So I have had to spend some time running round the floor playing lions with the three year olds, I still do on occasion when absolutely necessary.

Through the funding that came around, particularly following the Olympic medal that we got in Athens, the sport itself has professionalised. The elite coaches from the different programmes were sent around by the performance director at the time to all the competitions all over the place, so we'd do European Cups, World Championships, Commonwealth Games and ultimately the Olympics, which meant that experience was developed, knowledge was developed and those competitions really became normal as opposed to 'wow'. There's a thing called 'kit and trips' where initially all you want is a tracksuit and a ticket to get on a plane. Well I can set up a sports shop with the amount of kit that I've got and I'm sick to death of Heathrow Bloomin' airport! So it's not about that anymore. I think it's really about the performance and the competition and setting up the programme. Fundamentally it's about the right developmental build up if you like into the major event of the year.

We put all of the top kids into one squad and they work together as a unit. Tom (Daley) at that time was the baby, so although we'd already identified the fact that he was pretty damn good, he was put into a squad where he was the worst. Well not the worst but the least experienced. He trained with a whole load of people who were already on the international scene, doing more difficult dives than he was, but he could look up to. And he still has that really in Tonia. Tonia and him have been everywhere together. At the Games he was seventh and she was eighth. He's had his world championship obviously which she hasn't achieved but they have always been there or thereabouts. They have a mutual respect I think and friendship and ability to train together which I think is fundamental. I also think as an aside it's been extremely important for Tom to come through in an environment where he isn't 'top dog'. I don't think, given his personality, that he would ever have developed into an obnoxious little whatsit, but the fact that he's been in that

environment I think has really helped to make sure that hasn't been the case. You look at other people who are big fishes in little ponds, it doesn't help. Staying at the right level of the pond on the way through I think is good because it means you are forever aspiring to achieve what the others are doing.

MD: You talked about this academic side and developing your knowledge of biomechanics and psychology, and you've got experience as a performer as well. How would you say these have developed your strengths as a coach?

AB: I think in some ways not being a good performer has helped because I didn't achieve as a performer and therefore achieving as a coach has been a big deal. If I'd been an Olympic medallist five times then maybe I wouldn't be so into pushing the talent to be great, and maybe I wouldn't understand so much when things weren't going right, why you can't do it.

SL: How do you define achievement as a coach?

AB: Well for me it's very much taking whatever kid it is to their ceiling. I mean Tom obviously as an accolade to me is what most people talk about. In terms of actually coaching him it's been relatively easy. Technique and mechanics are very interlinked, so learning how it works mechanically so you have a full understanding of exactly what it is you are trying to achieve I think is massively important. You can then mould what you see. Tom's ability to make change was really good and that's part of his talent, so given that I knew this, it was very easy to mould what I wanted into very good technique which then allowed him to progress quickly through the difficult skills and the more difficult dives.

TG: Is that why you use this notion of the putty?

AB: Absolutely. If you have quality clay then you can make a Ming Vase. If you don't then you might as well just stick with a load of coffee cups. Having said that you still need the skill to be able to mould it; you can't make a Ming Vase if you don't know what you're doing. So the two came together I think. Another one of my analogies is the racing car, in that there's a whole team of people now it's not just coach and diver. It's very much led by the coach I guess but if I want strength and conditioning done, we've got access to strength and conditioning now and I'll sit down with him and say 'this is what I want to achieve' they're the experts, they can get on with it. The nice thing about the degree course is that it does give you a jack of all trades scenario, so I can understand when they start talking in strength and conditioning speak but it is very much down to them to get on with the programme. We'll then monitor that and see if it's achieving what we're trying to achieve and if it's not we'll try and reason out why it's not and how we can tweak that programme in order to change it so that it does achieve it. Similarly with the physios and massage, we have those there and we do a lot of work now with those guys on pre-hab work. So our medics and our physios and our strength and conditioning people are involved in regular screening to identify weak areas that can then be worked on specifically with an individually tailored programme to make sure that those people are strong enough, flexible enough and able to do the workload that I'm asking them to do so injury levels are decreased as much as possible. We still obviously get injuries and it's important then I think to have the physios and medics on hand immediately. So we have a great link with the hospital.

MD: In terms of the resources you have here in Plymouth, how does that help to develop a winning culture? You've had several divers from Plymouth go on to do very well, so how have you established this winning culture within this area of the country?

AB: It's partly a British Diving thing. As an example, in the beginning of 2005 Tom was 10 moving onto 11; that's when I thought there was an outside chance that he maybe could make 2008. 2012 was always the ultimate goal, but to do an Olympics first to give him that experience, I'm really happy we managed to do that. I went to Athens as a voyeur not as an actual part of the team so Beijing was actually my first Games as part of the team as well and it is amazing how much of a culture shock it is. It's massive; the food hall is the size of two football pitches; you're sitting down and Andy Murray or someone comes in and sits next to you for breakfast; there's the games room, there's stuff going on all the time in the village and it's actually quite difficult to keep your eye on the ball. So I think having done that and seen that and having been there and done that if you like, Tom will be much more prepared to go to London and still enjoy the experience but to be able to carve the pathway that he needs to without being 'oh what's going on there' and be much more 'this is what I'm focused on'.

From 2008 we did a plan backwards, saying 'this is where he needs to be, this is where we are now, so what are we going to do now to achieve that, and the British Diving junior programme bought into that very much so. They went off and organised for him to compete in Aachen which was set up for 14 and 15 year olds, normally when the juniors first start competing. We went off to the Australian Youth Games, again before he was old enough to compete but people had heard about him so the deals were done if you like; the politics was dealt with by the management team and they got him on those planes and got him into those competitions. So it's not just a Plymouth culture. One of the nice things that our PD (Performance Director) did is send everybody all around the place. There had been a little bit of 'this is my baby and you lot can all back off' and we've very much changed that culture now into 'this kid is a bit of a wonder boy, what can we do as a unit to make sure this guy is successful for British Diving as a sport'. If we're successful as a sport then funding stays, the jobs stay, everybody wins. So we try to work very much as a team and I've had people helping me with the coaching. I've got people on the end of the phone and I can say 'I've got this problem, what do you think I should do? What could you do?' And the discussions are always there and in many cases it's a good example of 'more heads are better than one'.

TG: Would you say Andy that what you are describing now is also another strength of yours? This notion of knowing how to make the best of a team. Knowing where people's strengths are. Knowing where to put Tom and your other divers at the right place at the right time?

AB: I think it stems from the fact that I believe that the coach is the facilitator and it goes back to a philosophy that I built for myself when I was at college with a book that I'd read from a gymnastics coaching point of view, and that is, particularly when working in kids' sports; you start off as a dictator and the kids down here somewhere because they haven't got a clue about anything so you tell them what to do. Then gradually that should change and you come up to more of a par and ultimately become the advisor. I think that's very true because I'm asking someone like Tom to stand in front of thousands of people in an auditorium on his

own and perform to the best of his ability. I just need to be ‘right off you go boy’, job’s done, let’s get on with it. So everything I do is about facilitating his ability to be him and the divers that I work with. That’s what it’s all about. It’s not about ‘oh this is Andy Banks, its Tom Daley’s coach isn’t he great?’ I’m much more the sort of person who’ll sit there, love the performance and then go and have beer with the other coaches. I don’t need to be stood on the rostrum with him. Its job done then, and that’s cool and the accolade comes from within the peer group.

TG: This dictator to facilitator journey – when you say you do that it looks like a smooth process but I guess there are times when Tom doesn’t want you to facilitate, wants you to dictate?

AB: Absolutely. He said that to me once when I’d tried to push that but it’s a relationship and therefore there are times when it does and doesn’t work. In his first International he’d just split the Chinese as a young kid. Moving into the next round I thought it might be worth a try so I said to him ‘what do you want to do for your build up to your final?’ He just looked at me and said ‘I want you to tell me what to do and I’ll go and do it like you always do!’ It was fine, that wasn’t an issue I just thought I’d see what the score was and he obviously wasn’t ready at that point. Whereas now, he’s 17 now and he’s quite a mature young man and we discuss stuff a lot more. I’ve been to the school to meet with his deputy head to discuss his A-Levels and what he’s gonna do with them, when he’s gonna do his exams and how that fits into this year, how that fits into next year and how that fits into 2013 as an addendum. That’s all well and good, I can help set that up, I can help make sure the right people are there, but at the end of the day the decision is his; ‘if you want to do your a-Levels this year that’s what you’re gonna do, these are the pros and cons of doing that, this is what might happen if you do that, what do you think?’ I think it’s very much a case of yes we’ll steer and nudge and I know what I would prefer and I’ll tell him what I would prefer, but ultimately I’m not telling him what he’s doing, he will make that decision himself and if he needs help with it then we’ll get other people in, then we’ll get the psychologist to come in and talk to him, or his teachers will talk to him. So he’s getting as many inputs as possible. It’s not just about me and him, it’s about the team again to try and make sure he gets absolutely everything that he needs to make the value judgements and decisions that he needs to make, hopefully in the right way.

TG: OK, so if facilitation is a strength that we’re hearing here, what about working with somebody like Tom, initially a boy, now a young man and the kind of emotional journey he’s been on. What kinds of strengths have you had to call on to enable Tom to keep it together emotionally?

AB: Have you heard the story about what I said when I first saw him? I was asked to go over and see him and I stood there and watched him for about 15 minutes and turned round to everyone there and said ‘that boy will not make a diver whilst he’s got a hole in his arse’. Now in my defence I didn’t actually see him get in the pool. What I saw was a kid who stood at the back of the first board, the 1 metre board, refusing to get on it, crying, and he didn’t even dive in. It was just a ‘no’ and he had basically lost the plot emotionally and was very much in that downward spiral then. When I did see him in the pool it was obvious that there was talent there and the other people were right. But he needed help with that emotional journey because he would very often just lose the plot. As a child I think one thing

that's very obvious is that they don't know about emotion, they don't know why it happens, they just react to emotion as it happens. As an adult the difference is that you understand emotion a bit more and realise that you can, to a certain extent, control it. So with Tom initially, as an example, I use what I call the Peter Pan theory. If he wanted to fly, he had to think happy thoughts. Basically the first stage was realising that there was this knot and the emotional kick-in was starting, the downward spiral was on its way. So the recognition of that was important. Then we'd stop. It was a bit more difficult in competition but in training we'd stop, he'd go for a shower or a swim or whatever, coming back with a happy thought, and then we'd see if we could start to fly again. It didn't just work like magic, often he'd fall out of the air, fairy dust or not. But gradually that started to work.

TG: What did he say to you when you said 'we're going to do a Peter Pan now?' Did he look at you in that strange kind of way, or did he welcome that?

AB: He was nine years old so he kind of realised. I always spoke to him when he wasn't in 'dodgy mode'; I spoke to him in 'happy mode'. I said 'this is what happens when you lose the plot, you realise that that means the session is a waste of time, we don't get anything done in a competition, potentially you give up, there's no point carrying on the competition and you need to change that'. And he had experiences along the way, and one of the things I tried to do with Tom is what I call 'bank experiences'. So the first competition he did with me, he fell off the board on the last dive. He was winning it but he ended up not getting a medal. He screamed and ran out of the fire exit and almost knocked someone in the pool on the way out. Similarly at one of his Internationals, he was gonna get a medal and then didn't because he dropped the last dive. I sat down with him after and said 'right, you were concentrating on everything else that was going on in that competition, not focusing on your process and your dive and staying in your bubble'. So part of the psychology work we have done is about focusing on process and totally ignoring everything else that's going on.

Competition is very much performance related. I don't do outcome goals. With an outcome goal he's gonna under-perform. We only do performance goals and the reason for that is you can only control the performance. Tom is doing six dives for example; each of those with me is its own individual competition. He does it, forgets about it, and we'll analyse it later but we'll move onto the next competition, the next dive. When he won his gold medal, he went into the last round in fourth place, which is where I expected him to end. If he'd have sneaked onto the rostrum it would have been a massive bonus. And then everyone's wheels fell off; they didn't do what he'd done. They did what he'd done in yesteryear, and they were focusing on 'shit I might win this' or 'I've got to dive really well because that little whatsit has just nailed his last dive' and they all went 'miss, miss, miss' and all of a sudden, he's on top. Now the media jumped on that and said 'oh yeah well the others lost it', well maybe they did but at the end of the day, from a whole performance scenario, his performance on that day was better than the others because they messed up at the end. All the way through, the top three doing what they should have done, they had more degree of difficulty than Tom, they were doing it well and they were staying steadily one step ahead of the game. Tom was doing what our goal was which is go in there and nail the crap out of all of your dives and he just kept the pressure on the whole time. I've got another story from 2008; we went there and the media were all over him after the last World Cup because he

got a medal with his synchro partner; ‘how many medals are you gonna win here?’ Outcome, outcome, outcome. So we had three goals going into the Olympics; one was to be happy and be proud of his performance, two was to learn as much as possible, and three was to have fun. I remember coming away from that final and the media clobbered me before they did him and I just said ‘job done; those three, done’. Arguably, he dived safely, which is not surprising really in your first Olympic final I don’t think. In 2008 he’d also been to the junior worlds, which was his first ever junior competition and he dived brilliantly. Obviously he went there to win it, but that still wasn’t the goal. And this little whatsit from China came out of nowhere, who is now the World Champion from this year. They had a real punch-up, they were 70 points ahead of the field and this guy beat Tom by two points. But his performance was fantastic. So I’d reviewed what he’d done there and said OK, let’s forget about new dives and hit the 2009 senior circuit with the same aggression and confidence that you did on the junior meet. And that’s what he did throughout 2009 and ultimately ended up with that gold medal. But it’s an example I think of where good things have come from bad again with Tom.

TG: Just to go back just briefly, you said that when you first spotted him you thought ‘yeah, this boy’s got talent’, when you first saw him in the pool. What was it that kind of stood out for you?

AB: I think it’s about his awareness, that kind of sticks out. He manages to find the right way up relatively easily. He also looks aesthetic. Some kids have knobby knees and look like a twiglet flying through the air. He’s got the right body shape. He’s fast enough which means that things spin around no problem, and as I say, his ability to make and change technique was obvious. Some kids you talk to in numerous different ways and it’s head on the wall time and they just don’t make the changes. With Tom you kind of say something and it’s changed. You say something else and it’s changed and you can visually see the process of him making the changes to get that technique better. I think that’s what made him better, plus when he got it right he just looked fantastic. And he’s got this ability to rip; he’s got massive hands and yes, we taught him the technique but that rip action is pretty natural to be honest, it’s not like we spent forever and ever trying to teach him how to do that, he learnt how to do it pretty quick and he disappears and the judges love it.

MD: One of the things I think is quite fascinating about your scenario with your athletes, is that you have these athletes from a young age; with so much one to one contact over a long duration, how do you make sure things don’t go stale and stay fresh? I read for example that you have a very good coach athlete relationship with Tom for example but you don’t go for a drink with him...

AB: It’s very, very rare that I’ll do social stuff with them; I do do it because I think it would be a bit too anal not to.

MD: So you always have to manage that distance?

AB: Yeah I think so, it has to be close; there has to be a mutual trust and respect I think. At the end of the day I’m getting those guys to learn dives that they know when I say it’s ready, it’s ready, I’m not making it up as I go along. So there has to be that trust, and that’s developed over time I guess, when you get it right more often than when you get it wrong. Tom’s only 17 so that’s not really been an issue

yet. I mean it's probably made easier by the fact that I'm not really in their peer group now. You know when I was a 20 year old it was kind of difficult to not be involved in some of the older divers' social lives as we were kind of the same age.

MD: And in terms of keeping them fresh, because you're with them for such a long time.

AB: It's all about having fun for me and if they're not having fun, then they don't want to be there, and they need to want to be there. So yes I want to put together a programme that means they are competitive in the world, but we still play silly games as part of our warm-up. We often play coaches against divers, so the S & C people are on the coaches' side and the divers, whoever's there will be together. We just do games as part of the warm-up and it's a monthly competitive thing. And it's very competitive! But it's a bit of fun. That's what training should be and if it's all just come in and do this and do this and do this, it's not much kop really.

SL: Do you think you're constantly changing what you do with the athletes to keep it fresh like that?

AB: I try and mix it up but ultimately trying to achieve a six dive list that's the same six dives is there's double the learning so in terms of pushing the boat with that it's more difficult. We do awareness stuff which is slightly different and we do try and make competitions within that and they quite enjoy that. Tom particularly loves competition whatever it might be so even if they're just doing entry practices where they're falling off the board, they're trying to see who can rip the best. So it's just things like that that make it a bit more interesting, but yeah they need to want to come training and therefore the environment has to be such that it makes it more interesting and fun.

SL: Well that's your ability to hook into them I guess?

AB: Yeah well we are known as the fun programme, I think, which I don't have a problem with at all. I think that's great. But they are a bunch of nutters, and I guess I foster that because I think that's good. Ultimately, I'm asking them to go up onto the 10 metre and chuck themselves off doing fairly complex skills which are quite scary.

TG: So you want them to have fun and enjoyment and those things you talked about, but just listening to you and just looking as you are just talking to us it sounds like its got to be fun for you the coach too, because you've got this drive and energy.

AB: I wondered how many hours I've sat next to a diving pool, and it's ridiculous. It's not so bad when you're in Fort Lauderdale in the sun but when it's in the Soviet Socialist Republic of Plymouth it's a bit much. I got into diving because the whole concept excited me as I said, for the first time in my life it was like 'this is something that I really enjoy and I can really see myself doing and I really want to be good at and I really want to make a difference at'. So the fact that I kind of had that as an ultimate goal and I'm now doing that, I think is great. I made a living out of something that most people historically did as a hobby. I run it as a business which means that ultimately I've been more successful financially than most of the other people that are involved in diving. I'm hardly Alan Sugar, but then that was never the goal.

TG: And you've won many awards too; are these really important to you?

AB: No, not at all. It's a nice dinner and it's nice to stand up and say thank you to a few people, and they look good in a cabinet, but I don't do it for the awards at all to be honest. That's just a bonus of being lucky enough to have someone like Tom, and being able to do stuff with him I suppose. I still think that for a coaching accolade, a girl that I used to coach many moons ago who was a novice diver, wasn't great; ultimately got one junior international tracksuit and that's it. She'll always have that, and she should never really have got that. She wasn't good enough. But she worked hard. We worked hard and she got that achievement, and that I think is more of an accolade to the coaching not just getting an award because Tom Daly happens to be doing this, that and the other. It's quite funny, the whole celebrity thing because I've not really been entrenched in that before or experienced it before. It's not me obviously, it's him that's the celebrity, I'm just sort of along for the ride. But it's different, I've known Tom as a kid, as a young man, and as Tom. Everyone else looks at him and goes 'oh god it's Tom Daly!' And that's what they do with celebrities.

MD: Andy, we'd like to talk now about your Olympic dreams. You've talked about not being too outcome driven and focusing more on process, so what would be your Olympic dream?

AB: That obviously is how we treat the competitions, in terms of the dream, that's an easy one really. I was at the Commonwealth Games where we had one and two in the boys in Manchester beating a Canadian superstar and the roof came off there. I've been in Rome when Tom won the World Championships and experienced that. I guess you then put the two together; you've got a home Olympics in a pool which is much bigger, it's gonna be massive, it's gonna be really loud, the home support is gonna be fantastic, and if you could couple that with the euphoria of that result, or a similar one to what happened in Rome then that would just be, you know? It would be an amazing moment. So yeah that's the dream if you like. But dreams then become goals, goals then become the important factor behind that and if the dream happens, it happens.

SL: Do you talk about that a lot?

AB: No. No not at all because at the end of the day we know how tough it's gonna be. There's a number of people out there who could hit that rostrum. The Chinese; they've not done well historically on 10 metres, other than this year where they won it, and they want both of their guys on the rostrum so they are going for it. We've got a plan that's similar. We want to go there and do the absolute best that Tom possibly can do at that event. And then you've got guys from Russia, from America, from Mexico; all of whom can potentially get onto that rostrum and, as I said in Rome, there were four who moved away and it could have been about six. I'd say we're almost up to about eight or nine now, who on their day could get onto that rostrum. So it's not gonna be easy. It's gonna be real tough. But it's not only going to be tough for us, it's going to be tough for them too because they're in the same boat. There could be eight or nine that could get on that rostrum. Everyone's in that fight and someone, well three, will come out on top.

The Chinese are a nightmare because they are just so machine like. But they've cheated in a way, if cheat is the right word because they've picked up numerous

kids at the age of five, they've channelled them all into a pretty hectic training programme. The ones that break just get left by the wayside, and the other ones that are successful go through so you only ever see the cream of the cream and you don't see the discarded ones that almost made it but didn't. So if you like the word 'cheat' is more of an ethical thing because I think, what we try and do is nurture the individual and not just match up the sport. Ultimately, Tom is going to go out into the world as an ex-diver and I'd like to think that I can sit back in my rocking chair and say 'yeah he was a good lad, and I helped to be part of that production process'. Significant other is a psychological term for it. I'll never take over or be anywhere near what his dad was to him. I can give him bits of advice and I can help to set up that advice to come in to help him make the very best choice in life as well as within the sport I think.

MD: You've got the dream as this moment that could happen. What about let's say, when the Olympics has finished, what's the legacy and dream after the Olympics; for you and for the sport?

AB: Well this Life Centre is just about to open. I will no longer be running diving as a business. There is an agreement that has been made that everything will come under one banner. So I will have role up there looking after aquatics as well as the diving in an overall role really. We have the local school that Tom goes to, who are chomping at the bit to give scholarships; we've got universities that are also interested in developing the whole sport route. I just need to persuade British Diving that having Plymouth as a major hub for diving moving onwards is the way forwards. I also want to spend some time giving back some of the stuff that I've had. I know that sounds a bit cliché but we have been sent all over the world as a group as some of the top coaches and there is a bit of a gap in terms of experience and knowledge to the next level down. And if we all disappear and just sit on our beach without doing anything then it's gonna take a lot of time for that to catch up again. So I want to try and make sure there's work done before I disappear to try and make that knowledge stay so it's not just about a legacy facility, there's a legacy for knowledge and experience. So when I come back and watch the odd competition, the guys coaching at the top end are possibly even the divers now. It doesn't stop here; it'll move on. Sooner or later there will be other people that are doing this so it's an on-going thing isn't it? And I think what's nice about the London Games is that there are a number of new pools just coming up.

If it wasn't for Tom and Tonia and the programme here, there's no way the council would have spent the money on developing a brand new state of the art facility, not just for diving of course, but diving is very prevalent in there. I think that's brilliant. But there aren't that many facilities around the country. What I want to make sure now is that we use what we've got here because everyone's falling over each other to make it great and if we can get the top kids in the country to come to school here and have a seamless academic pathway, so they move from school to university and get the correct academic background alongside working in a brand new state of the art facility with potentially me and other coaches that we can bring in, maybe to have a sporting development career that is also seamless and good then it's a no brainer isn't it really? I've just got to persuade some other people of that, but I'm working on that behind the scenes. That's the next step really but what happens to funding I don't know. But whether we get a medal or not there will still be funding and I think someone like Tom is going to be looked

after because he is the pinnacle of the sport at the moment so I know Plymouth will be there still as an elite programme and Tom is not just talking about 2016, he's talking about 2020 and possibly even 2024 so he's got some longevity in the sport still potentially. Whether he wants to do that here with me again is all up for negotiation and discussion but he's not mentioned anything about moving at all. I don't think he'd move anywhere else in this country and abroad it's difficult to know what's good and what isn't. So if we can keep that legacy going I know Plymouth is going to want to keep him here. At the moment it's kind of planned, next year is obviously the focus but there's life after 2012 as well which is also gonna be quite interesting I think.

SL: You've talked about sharing your knowledge with others; what would you say has been the biggest source of your knowledge? You talked about your degree and that being eye opening.

AB: I'll refer to what I call 'head sitting'. I'm a big believer in if you want to become good at something you find someone that's better than you and sit on their head, and hopefully not be too much of a pain in the neck but ask 'why did you do that?' 'What did you do that for?' 'How do you do this?' 'How do you do that?' Until they swear at you and say 'go away'. I'll try to do that across the board but the education system in diving is pretty rubbish to be fair. It was only earlier this year that I got the next level up, which has only just come about, which is level three. Before that I was qualified to level two the same as everyone else, and that's like a somersault on the 1 metre board and I'm coaching 10 metre multiple somersaults and twists. So the education system isn't there so you have to find it from elsewhere. The degree was a fantastic foundation, and then building on that with the opportunity to go to places like China and Russia and see what they do and watch what they do and film what they do and bring that home and utilise it here and discuss it with the other coaches and discuss it with people from other countries as to what they do and how they develop and how much time they spend on things. I think that's essential.

MD: Is that where you would like to see the future of coach education go, for diving?

AB: Well they've got a system in athletics; and they've got a similar set-up to what they've now got in Canada and their former top coach is now employed by Canadian Diving to work with the coaches around Canada. He does some work with the divers as well but it's mainly with the coaches rather than the divers. I think that's a brilliant idea so whether there would be the money for that or who would do it I don't know. But it does seem to me to be fundamentally important that you have that kind of ability to build on the enthusiasm that the young kids have got to further move into coaching and help foster it. But it's got to come from them too. I do think there's a danger of spoon feeding and often I get the feeling that the people who've come through the professional programmes think it should be on a plate. I remember a guy actually shortly after I had started, he came up and I knew him, again when he was about 12 and he came into the diving pool when I wasn't working professionally at this time, I was only 20 I think. He got involved in the programme and eventually dived with us and moved down to the south and dived there and he came and knocked on my door when he was 19 and said 'I want to be a coach can I stay for a bit'? One of the things I said to him was 'go off and listen to everybody' and he said

‘why do I need to do that? You’ve already done that so I’ll just listen to you’. I sort of smacked him around the head a few times ‘stupid boy! Yes I’ve done that and yes listen to me but then go away and do it all yourself and then make your mind up about what you are going to do and how you want to do it’. That’s ultimately what he’s done and he runs the Leeds programme now. That whole concept I think is massively important because the more you can listen to different people, the more information you’re gonna get and you’re either gonna be already doing it, or you’re going to have not thought about it and you should be doing it, or you were doing it and now you’re not doing it and you should be, or it’s not really relevant so you disregard it. Either way that information is worth assimilating.

What we don’t do enough of as a sporting culture is get into each other’s bubbles and it was quite nice to go and speak to Athletics and have some time with them, talking about some of the things that they’re trying to do and their initiatives that they’ve put together and we should do it more often really because there are probably things that they are aware of but we’re not, and vice-versa. The nice thing about having the S & C people they come from the EIS (English Institute of Sport) is that they have worked in other sports so we do get a bit of an insight as to what other people are doing from the practitioners that are working multi-discipline, which is good but as coaches and athletes we really just do ‘pool home, pool home, pool home’ and competition. We don’t do the ‘get out in the big wide world’.

TG: One of the reasons why we’re associated with this journal is because it’s all about reflecting on your practice, reflecting on your experience. It seems to me, what you’ve just said there Andy is that this is what the coach does – you know reflecting on what they do and what they know but also reflecting on what other people know and do, and bringing that in. Would that be right?

AB: Absolutely, I mean we still talk and discuss and argue about technique or programming or periodisation or how to develop into competitions or tapering or psychological aspects or whatever it may be. There’s still a wealth of knowledge and experience out there and different ways of doing things to look at and to think about. Just because it works for Tom doesn’t mean it works for Tonia or for Brooke or any of the others, so it’s about finding something that works for individuals and helping them to develop that. They need to try things out themselves to see whether it works, at which point they’ll have a process that they’ll buy into. You know Tom used to stand there and look around and gaze at people diving in and this and that. Now he’s got a planned pre-prepared process for what he’s going to do throughout the whole competition and he knows it back to front and it works for him and that’s what he does and he’s completely in charge of that. I’m just a part of that at some point during the process. Then he comes up and we just talk about a couple of things to think about.

SL: When you went to the Olympics, what was the biggest eye opener for you in Beijing in terms of preparing for 2012?

AB: I think it was just how gobsmackingly overwhelmingly massive the thing was. The fact that you have to programme when you’re gonna leave the apartment, how long it takes you to get to the food hall, how long it takes you to then get food, how long it takes to get from the food hall to the transport area, what times the buses are, when you need to get on a bus and how long it’s gonna take you to get to the venue, how long it takes you to get through security at the venue and to get into the pool,

and that's before you've started the warm-up or the process. So all of that needs to be looked at and programmed in and planned. What we did the last time which I think was great is we went into the village when it very first opened so it was really quiet and we got to learn all that so we knew where we were, we knew the food hall and the transport. We knew everything. Everything was planned. Then we got out of there and did a training camp elsewhere, and came back in a bit closer to the competition. So it never got stale but we did the learning bit and the training bit and then the back end of the competition build-up. That went really well, but the villages; you've got thousands of athletes and support staff and the coaches and officials etc. It's like a small city in its own right, and of course you're in a bubble there as well, which is good in many ways; what's going on outside is immaterial.

SL: Do you have to change your approach to how you deal with the athletes because of that environment?

AB: No. The Olympics is no different to anything else. The only difference is the five rings on the wall. Inside there might be but externally it's training sessions, it's competition, it's the build-up to a competition, here we go let's get on with it. It's not 'wow it's the Olympic Games, this is really important'. At Athens the synchro final on the 3 metre went completely tits up for want of a better word. The Chinese diver blew it, the Russian boy hit the board and the American coach went into the back room where the divers were chilling out prior to their dives and said 'these guys have all blown it, we can get a medal!' And you could actually see them on the board they were like this [trembling]!' So I think that's a brilliant example of how not to do it. Everything has got to be normal, normal, normal, normal. So whether it's the Western Counties diving competition or the Olympic final, you do what you do and then you just get on with it, and I think that's really important; that the athletes see that you're just normal.

SL: What do you want your legacy to be as a coach? What do you want to be remembered for as a coach?

AB: If people were to come to my funeral and just say 'ah he was alright, he was a good lad' then that would do me to be honest. The fact that I'm pretty sure that I've been a significant other to a number of kids that are now adults, I actually prefer the adult bit. You know kids are fine and all well and good and cute and nice and whatever but it's easier when they're older. You can reason with them more, you can have a laugh with them, you can swear without worrying about it and it's just an easier scenario. But I think the fact that you have known them, often since they were kids coming through, is a nice transitional thing.

TG: Andy, you talked to us beautifully about the past and your Olympic dream. Between now and next summer, what would you say in your mind is perhaps the single biggest challenge to enable you to realise the dream that you described to us?

AB: The fact that the world is moving on, therefore the performances of everyone else are significantly improved. I think the media will be an issue because they will jump on board and they will want to know what's going on. Last time we had a media day here where they had the opportunity to come down and spend all day talking with Tom, and it is Tom that is the issue really. Then they had to back off. The agent isn't so much of an issue now, they're kind of aware of what the score is

so he's only doing stuff that is absolutely essential for his sponsors, so that's kind of under control. The programme he's gonna do is pretty much there. There is a very good tenet around what he's doing. The psychologist we've had around with us for a pretty long time now. She's fantastic and it's somebody that isn't his coach and that isn't his mother and isn't part of his direct family that he can talk to about whatever he wants to and I think that's really useful. He's opened up to her about various things that he wouldn't do to me and he wouldn't do to his family, so having that as an extra thing I think is good. But Tom's very good at compartmentalising his life and always has been; I wish I'd taught it to him but I didn't. He has his different lives; he has his diving life, his school life, his media life, his friends life and he gives time to all of it. When he's doing 'X', 'X' is important, then he moves onto 'Y' and that's important. So if he's planned a meal with his friends, and then something comes up then that's frustrating for him and he doesn't like that because it's planned so that's good, it means everyone else has to be planned too!

TG: What about managing expectations?

AB: Well that'll be part and parcel of being with the media I think and we will discuss that and he knows the media will be asking him how many medals he is going to get. He also knows where the rest of the world is, he also knows where he is and he also knows what the plan is to try and put him in a position where he can do the very best job. He's bought into that programme, we think that programme is right and we'll tweak it as necessary but I think the plan that is in place is a good one for him. It's about developing the sort of consistency and confidence that he had off the back of 2008. So what I'm trying to do with him now is to get a little bit more volume across the techniques and skills that he's doing which means that he will have a bit more water under the bridge in terms of that list moving into next year. So that's the plan, to have him moving to next year feeling pretty comfortable with that list and then going out, competing with it and showing the world that he can do it well, putting the pressure on from the word go really. In terms of goals, obviously they won't be the same as 2008 because it's a slightly different scenario but there won't be any outcome goals in there. It will be very much based on 'we're going to go and perform' and the performance is key. Then we see. Ultimately we go and compare that performance to everyone else and the final performance is that. But I can't see any point in saying 'the aim is to come first, or third'. It's certainly not, because obviously everybody wants him to be on the rostrum and so does he. So that's in the back of the mind, that's the dream, that's what we want but that's no good as a goal in its own right because that means nothing, it's just 'what we want', how are we gonna get there is the important bit and focusing on the how and the performance is key and then we'll see...

Chris Mears, diver and muscle-bound epitome of a London 2012 Olympic contender. But in January 2009 he nearly died. Mears had been competing in the Youth Olympic Festival in Sydney when, at breakfast one morning, he collapsed. At first he was diagnosed with sunstroke, then meningitis. Both were wrong. He had contracted the Epstein Barr virus and had ruptured his spleen while performing a dive the previous day. The prognosis from his surgeon at Sydney's Royal Prince Alfred Hospital was not good. Mears had lost five pints of blood and was given less than

a 5% chance of survival. Even when his spleen was removed, a series of convulsing fits left his life hanging by a thread.

Three years later, Mears, who lost three stone and most of his muscle mass in hospital, is able to reflect on his experience as not simply the moment his life was saved, but also the turning point in his diving career. 'The experience changed me, and so much for the better', he said. 'Before the Games I was still at school and had other things I was concentrating on, but when this happened I knew what I wanted to do straight away. As soon as I came back to England I said to my coach, "I want you to make me an Olympic diver". And my dream has almost come true' (Hart & Magnay, 2012).

In the paper that follows called *Coaching for Performance: Reflections of Olympic Diving Coach Andy Banks, Dixon, Lee and Ghaye (2012)* highlight some of the coaching qualities that begin to answer Mears request – 'I want you to make me an Olympic diver'.

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