

An investigation into equestrian sports coaches' engagement with performance analysis tools
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INTRODUCTION:

The horse and rider dyad in equestrian sport has been the subject of research focussing on individual components of performance (Wilkins *et al.*, 2022). Performance analysis (PA) is well-researched and utilised in non-equestrian sports, yet in equestrianism this holistic approach to coaching is limited. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in equestrian disciplines are challenging to identify and due to the paucity of research, PA has been underutilised in these sports (Hobbs *et al.*, 2020). To enhance PA research and to promote its use in equestrian sports, a tailored approach could be based on knowledge of current perceptions towards and implementation of PA within equestrian coaching. This study explored the impact of coaching education and the absence of defined KPIs on coach perceptions and use of PA tools.

METHOD:

Following institutional ethical approval, current, qualified equestrian coaches (n=7) were recruited for one-on-one interviews, stopping at data saturation. The focus was on coaches' perceptions of PA and PA tools in equestrian coaching, with questions considering identifying PA currently in use, equestrian coach perceptions, and potential influences of rider demographics on PA tool implementation in current coaching sessions, utilising a purposive sampling strategy. Microsoft Teams™ facilitated remote interviews, ensuring efficacy of transcription and a wider recruitment pool. Thematic analysis, guided by Braun and Clarke (2012), was conducted to generate codes and further lower order and higher order themes.

RESULTS:

Coaches all held appropriate equestrian coaching qualifications at a range of levels. Thematic analysis revealed five higher order themes surrounding the perception of PA (Figure 2). Concerns arose around the impact of incorrect use of PA tools and techniques on the communication and trust within the coach-athlete relationship, requiring a sensitive approach on how to present data in a manner that considers the motivational impact on the rider. Coaches sought varied further 'qualifications' and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) to expand PA knowledge and experience. All participants held more than one coaching qualification, BHS and university degrees being the most favoured providers (Table). Marketing showed high awareness but limited usage of PA tools, with video analysis as the most recognized tool. Ambitions to set up PA services and acquire the tools required faced barriers of financial investment and facility access. The study suggested 'competitive demand' could drive PA adoption in equestrian coaching, finding links between 'marketing' and 'qualifications' revealing limitations in PA tool usage.



Figure 1: Braun and Clarke (2006) 6 step thematic analysis process.

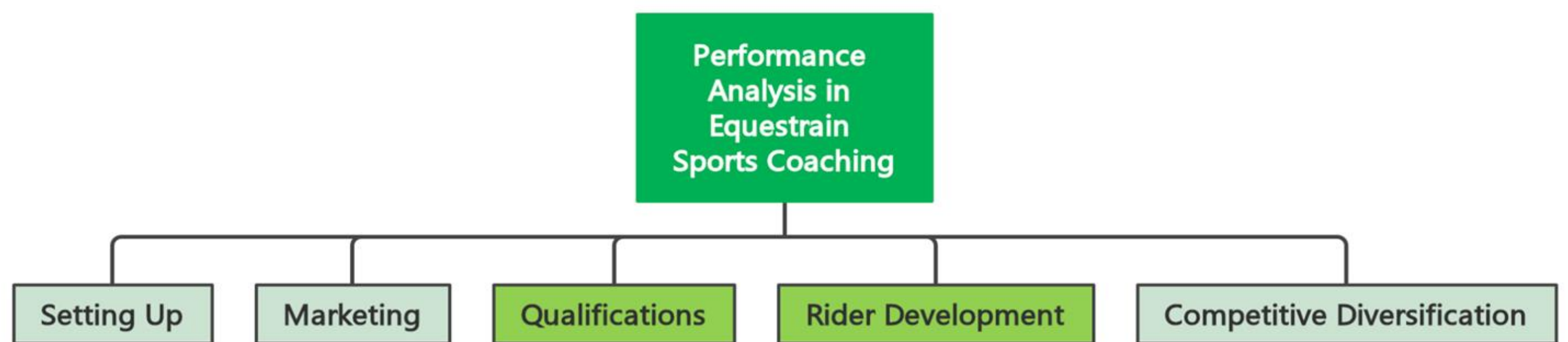


Figure 2: Dendrogram of the five higher order themes concluded from the thematic analysis.

Table 1: Coaching relevant qualifications attained by the interview participants.

Qualifications		BHS	UKCC	Pony Club	University degrees	Other	Total qualifications
Participant	First qualified						
1	2005	Stage 4	Level 1				2
2	2017	Stage 4			Coaching MSc and BSc	L3 CMI	4
3	2015	Stage 4			Coaching BSc	French teaching certificate	3
4	2021			PCCC	Coaching BSc		2
5	2017	Stage 3			Coaching BSc enrolled on MSc		2
6	2023	Stage 2			Coaching BSc		2
7	2016	Stage 3	Level 2				2
Total qualifications from each category:		6	2	1	5	2	17

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS:

Participants with university degrees sought scientific backing, highlighting posing threats to PA in equestrian coaching. Recommendations for future research include beginning to test the PA tools and techniques for the lacking scientific research on the benefits to riding performance. PA could be significant for comprehensive rider and horse assessment, aiding in injury diagnosis and career longevity for equestrian athletes, perhaps suggesting a separate analyst role within equestrian to support coaches in the adoption of PA. Alternatively, equestrian coach CPD could prioritise PA utilisation in practice to promote the benefits of PA for holistic rider development.

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