

MM: So, thank you for joining us this morning, if I can please get you to give us an insight into who you are, your coaching background, and why you're currently doing your coaching, please.

AS: Yeah. So, my name is Anna-Lena Swartz, I'm forty-eight, I live in Sweden and in my town called Norshopping. My coaching background is that I started to coach women and kids really 2006. And then I've been in and out a bit of I was still a player then, so I was a player coach in the beginning. I coached my ladies' team and I also coached a bit of under fifteens mixed boys and girls. And then I've gone to coach a men's team in the highest division in Sweden. And yeah, we just took silver medal actually. So that's, that was quite challenging period for me. So, I've been coaching this team. This men's team I've been coaching the last few years and it's been a hell of a journey.

MM: I can imagine. I can imagine. How did you how did you make that transition into the men's game with the highest, highest level in Sweden?

1:20 AS: I underestimated some some of the bits in it when you come. I also coached a men's team in their lower division and I underestimated, for instance, the power in scrums and the how you need to be technically more detailed, much more it's on a higher level, so you have to be more careful with their skills because they are quite good already. But on the other cases, on the other side of the coin, I also was happy to see that they have so much knowledge themselves. So we, we quite quickly built up a management group within the players so we could, some of the skill work and some of the faces of the play is very much player led and that has been a success factor for us.

2:26 MM: Yeah. Do you have any formal coaching qualifications of the sport of rugby?

AS: I do. I have a level two for rugby Europe's 7's coaching. And so that's my highest formal education.

MM: Yeah. So, you mentioned it briefly. You kind of player coach in that transition. But what got you into coaching in the first place, what was it that appealed to you, interested you with coaching in the first place?

AS: It was basically just that we lost, we lost a very good coach that we had at that time. And before we got that replacement on, we just decided to, to carry on and do it ourselves. So that's, that's basically how it started or of a lack of willingness to wait for a new coach, so we just. Yeah, so that's that's what, how it was. But then I quite quickly realized just how much I learned about the game by coaching it rather than playing it, so that was my drive actually, that was quite egoistic drive because I felt like I watched the game so differently as a coach, as to a player.

MM: Yeah, yeah. And then that brings on this final question really in terms of the background and I know this is what's your biggest motivation to keep coaching and what keeps you interested and driven and committed to continue coaching?

AS: I love feeling, it's a love-hate feeling and I love the game. I love rugby. I'm really, really passionate about the game. But I, I can't, I can't get away from the feeling that I love to be constantly challenged. So that's my I, I want to learn and come up with new

ideas and, and drive it forward. That's my. Sorry about that. That's, that's my real my strongest drive.

MM: Yeah.

AS: Keep, keep learning.

MM: Yeah. Which then may bring us into the second phase of questions, which is around your coaching philosophy, your coaching approaches, your coaching ethos, the want of a better word. So, if you have to sum up, your coaching philosophy what would entail?

4:57 AS: I have actually thought a lot about this with philosophy because in the more I coached, the more I realized that whatever the philosophy is, is where it water up all the ideas that you have and how you want to do it. So, and I have a few examples where I failed at that, and that made me stronger in my philosophy. So my philosophy, what I want is to create thinking players that are absolutely there to do mistakes and learn from it, so I actually praise mistakes because I think it's you could just and also for myself and the players, I, I need them to feel in a safe environment, so we, we work a lot on only and only say positive things to each other. If it's a mistake, just just don't dig down in the mistake. Just tell them next time what you want. If it's a bad kick, if it's short, just they are needed longer and then it's those other things that we practice on. But that takes time. That's a mind mindfuck. It's easier to scream and yell at them. And I do that too sometimes when I'm in a bad mood. But most of the times you have to. So that's what I mean with a philosophy. If you want to have players, then that are thinking you... I know that's that's their flavor of the month for the last 10 years and how you coach and and you use this questioning style. But it is the only way forward, I believe. But then it's also a mix between knowing what tools there is to use and how to help each other to, to become the better team.

MM: Yeah, absolutely.

AS: Does that make sense?

6:54 MM: Yeah. Where would you say, so those foundations of having thinking players and being allowed to make mistakes, where do you think the foundations for that philosophy have come from? Have they come from your experiences as a player, have they come from your experiences outside of sport? What do you think the foundations for that approach have come from?

AS: That is so hard to say because it's so many, so many parts of that. Partly it's it's how you, I think the basic thing is, is actually how I've been raised as a child and how I've been raised, I've done sports all my life. Those important coaches that I had through handball and I did athletics. And how did they treat me? What made me come back to those trainings, even if it was a rainy or hard day, why did I go there? And and what what feeling did they make me feel when I was there? Was I included? Did I feel valuable? Was I listened to? And that's where it comes from. But also just as a person, what sort of person do I want to be when I go to bed at night and think about my day? So, I think you can I think you can do results by being an ***** or being a good person, but I'd rather be the second one.

MM: Absolutely, yeah my final question in this area of your coaching approaches, and I appreciate with the current pandemic, things might look slightly differently, but if we were to come and watch one of your sessions in delivery, you running a coaching session, what would that actually look like? How would we see this philosophy and practice? And what would a session with you working with your players look like?

AS: Our framework is quite strict. So, we we always have warm up when it's player led. And then usually I have divided it into phases of play with a problem. So, I have a problem, and that could be defense from opposition, always push up on a team. How do you solve it and then come up with ideas and then we work around that. That's that's what you probably would see on my coaching session.

MM: Yeah. Because you're working at the top level. This is almost a side question that's not on my list, actually, but because you're working at the highest level, do you spend much time on technical coaching or is it much more tactical game-based coaching?

AS: No, I decided to do that just to find structure for myself and also for the players. It's that Tuesday training is, is always dominant on the technical things and Thursday is over dominant on tactical. So that's, that's and that's how we combined it. And I also like to have whoever it is. So, I ask them also to do, to come to training and just like any other coach I guess. But you know, that's in the one we want that they have their own idea what they want to work on during the year. So that's and that's predominantly view that on Tuesdays and on Thursdays, it's more patterns and the overall picture.

MM: Yeah. Yeah. Do you think your own coaching style changes between a Tuesday and a Thursday session?

AS: Definitely. Yeah, definitely. Yeah. So, Tuesday I'm, I'm that's that's more of an energy drain for me because it's much more into details and picking and telling, and my sort of I'm working so much harder. Thursdays it's almost sort of like a walk in a park because I could just stand behind and see and I can praise someone and do you know, and then that's that's the big difference. Tuesdays, I'm exhausted, Thursday I'm I'm almost almost every time only happy.

MM: Yeah. Good, good. I'm glad you got to Thursday. And today is a Thursday.

AS: Yeah, exactly. Yeah.

MM: Heading into then the third area of questions and it's quite interesting that the first thing you said about your philosophy was that you weren't thinking players and this questioning is around that player learning player development. So, what you think are the crucial components that are needed for player learning and development within the game?

AS: Crucial is to, to have a game-based coaching. We do drills, but it's we work towards taking away, but there is a there is a place for them. So it's not that I take it away completely, but the only way to be a thinking player is to play scenarios and the problem-solving and whatever, however you solve it you just discuss the outcome. That's I think that's the only way. And I have made my mistakes there because it's it's comfortable to do more drill-based coaching. And this is where I actually had to go home and have to think about what I'm

doing. So that go back to the philosophy, what am I actually creating here? And also, another thing that I this is actually the only the last couple of months and this you don't know how this works when it pops up things in your head. But and this is probably something that everyone understands. But for me now, it's getting more it's more important for me to keep as a strategy or a principle and have my principles I refuse to change and then have a clear thought about what those are. So, in defense, my principle is 15 players on the feet as quick as possible. So that makes it that's that's the principle. And then when we do things, then I can ask questions around the principles. How did that make it? If everyone goes into a ruck, what happens then? How many people are on the feet? So, I can ask the right and then they suddenly take responsibility of their own game?

MM: Yeah. Yeah absolutely.

13:22 AS: But that's what I noticed later. So I I'm going to work more with principle and and where they are, where they can change their own strategy within the game.

MM: Yeah. Yeah. So kind of embracing that play in the play of you and it's more of a partnership rather than a power relationship between coach and athlete. You work with your players much more as a partnership it sounds like.

AS: Yeah, definitely. Yeah, definitely. Yeah. Much more. And it's so much more rewarding for me.

MM: Yeah.

AS: I learned so much to get. I get so much feedback. And so, and there are stuff that I myself sort of get shocked sometimes about when the players are so much more advanced in their own knowledge. So it's it would be stupid not to use it.

MM: Yeah, absolutely. And this almost comes onto to a couple of questions around what do you view therefore your role as being in enabling that player learning. So what are you responsible for within player learning?

14:23 AS: I'm responsible to to have a plan and a rough plan through the year. So we actually go through the different scenarios of a game. I'm responsible for creating moral and values as a leader, and I'm also responsible to review my own behavior and and also encourage the players to do that. So I do a bit one to ones around those areas, and I think I'm very responsible to make sure that every player understand they have a function and role in the team.

MM: Yeah, yeah. And then final question in this area then is what do you view the players role to be? What do you expect them to bring in the learning and development of the team?

AS: Creativity and willingness to be I, I struggle if they're not open. So it's even if we don't agree, I still want us to that that's the only thing I put as a demand. Just try it out and we review it. That's that's the only thing that I feel that I expect from them. For the other parts, it's it's almost like given they enjoy to be in the game, they enjoy to have a run around on the park and stuff like that. That's not that they can do whatever, but to be open in the relationship. We're trying out things. That's the only demand I have.

MM: Yeah, absolutely. And then I've just got one more question if that's OK for you this morning?

AS: Yeah.

MM: I mean, you know, so you said you've been coaching since 2006. So what's that, Fourteen years now? What would you say your biggest lessons or learnings have been in that time about coaching?

AS: Oh wow. That was. It is going back to that make sure that you have thought through philosophy, because that determines so much how you deliver your coaching and your views on the players and then stay true to that and also realize that I have bad days and good days. And I'm just as a human as well. So sometimes I go hard on myself if I'm not happy. But that's just I learn something also in that. So, I would say philosophy, the more I coach, the more I understand how important that is.

MM: Yeah, yeah Anna-Lena that's perfect, thank you!

AS: Is it?