

MM: Recording in the top that you are not recording perfect. So, Kim, thank you for joining us this afternoon. If I can just start this conversation with getting you to confirm who you are and what other sports that you coach, please.

KM: OK, so hi everybody, thanks Shell for calling me today. My name's Kim Mortimer. My sport is swimming. I'm currently head coach of Sharks Swimming Club based in Warwickshire.

MM: Perfect. So, yeah. Can you give us a bit of an insight into what that role entails and what qualifications you have got that help you with that role?

KM: OK, so I've been gone. Obviously, when Shell you sent me these questions, I had to kind of think back that I think, wow, I've been in head coach position for probably about three years, going on for four years. And I'm currently hold a level 3 ASA swimming qualification and also an MSc in sports coaching. And basically that helps me, I guess in kind as well as the role I'm in, because it allows me to mental allows me to kind of set the program and basically run the club as a business of what it is, really. So it's kind of managing my swimmers, my members, my trustees, my volunteers. It's kind of like a big I say a big business, really. And having that expertise kind of of the level three, it kind of allows me to. Kind of help everyone to as much as I can, potentially, because it's the highest level in swimming that we currently have at the moment. But yes, that's that's kind of a little bit about me.

MM: So you've been that head coach for three years or so. You say, have you been coaching in general?

KM: I would say probably about 20. I started I know I'm old right from the start when I was 16, because you could, you could start at 16. You get your level one at 16. And then I started coaching just on pool deck with, like, our little ones. And then as it's kind of progressed and kind of the years have gone on, I've kind of gone into senior senior swimming. And that's kind of led to the position that I've got today.

MM: So what you enjoy coaching in the first place since I was quite young, kind of 15, 16. What got you into or what was your interest in coaching in the first place?

2:25 KM: And I think, to be honest, I was a swimmer myself, so I've been around the pool for a very long time and I just kind of saw other coaches. And and I was I wasn't coached particularly positively when I was younger. And I think in the in the back of my mind, I was like, wow, I like the idea of passing on knowledge and coaching people, but I wanted to do it in a positive manner. And I think because of that experience, I then thought actually this is something I want to do. And I ended up just like covering somebody in the to swim section. And then I thought, "why would you do this is such quite fun." And then it kind of progressed. And then then I got offered a bit more hours and it was done all volunteer on a voluntary basis when I first started and then the post of junior coach came up and I thought I actually quite enjoy working with the juniors. So, I ended up kind of then going into that role and then as i said it kind of progressed up to kind of seniors that follow the.

MM: I've known you now for, gosh, about 20 years, as well as going on a long time now, you know, for you. There's a lot of hours involved, a lot of early starts, a lot of late nights. So what is your biggest motivation to continue coaching 20 years later?

3:50 KM: It is a very good question because the hours are horrendous, in swimming I'm sure everybody knows the 5:30 starts the antisocial hours and do weigh heavy on you. But I think to be honest with you, I just love swimming and I love like developing a life skill. I know that is obviously competition that I'm around now, but like just kind of having that's what I like working with people and I like kind of particularly like teenagers and stuff like that. I kind of like being that support mechanism and saying like seeing them achieve and building their life skills, not just swimming, but just generally in life, because I think sport does that and sometimes it gets missed. And at the moment, obviously swimming, we have no competitions or anything at the moment. But I think, you know, it's something that does get missed when competition comes in. And I just yeah, I just really like the environment and I like seeing other people achieve and giving them the confidence to achieve actually. "You know what? You can do this." So, yeah, that's what I like doing it. And plus it's warm on poolside, you know, I don't think I could cope with standing on the field like in the rain and stuff like that. So that's kind of why I like the thought as well.

MM: Yeah. Yeah, perfect. So we're just going to move on now to take a little bit deeper into your coaching philosophy, your coaching pedagogy and coaching approaches. How to sum up your coaching philosophy?

KM: It is such a hard question. I don't know. I'm sure with all your the interviews that you've had lately, it's one that always, always kind of questions all the time. So I think for me, it's it's I think I always go with the holistic approach. So, I'm always about trying to develop the whole person, the whole athlete, rather than just thinking they're a machine. And I've got a target to make that I have to make nationals next year. It's kind of actually allowing them to do that in a safe and productive and comfortable manner. And I mean potentially it's just giving everybody the opportunity to be the best that they possibly can be whether that's county level, nationals, regionals or whatever it's just giving them the support they need in the most positive way that they can. And I think as I've kind of progressed on throughout the years I think particularly the position that I'm in now looking back to when I was junior coach I kind of have the philosophy that they actually have to be part of the process now because if they are not they are never going to buy into what you're saying. So, I think to me, it's quite well trying to make it fun as possible. But two hours in the pool, when you've got a distance, it's not particularly fun, but you try and make it as fun as you can. But I think it's just a holistic approach, trying to develop the individual and make them the best they can be, really, and achieve the best that they can as well. Whatever level that is.

MM: Yeah perfect. So where do you think the foundations of that philosophy have come from? What do you think has informed that approach? You mentioned there'd been a slight change from junior coach to head coach. Where do you think the foundations of your philosophy have come from?

KM: Well, I think as a coach, you have to have you have to have set beliefs and values. And that is a way from your sport. But just generally what you are as a human being. So me generally as you know Shell I'm quite honest, quite a kind and positive person. And that's, you know, for me, coaching the job, I don't really want my job to change me because I think that the values and beliefs that I have in general, I think as you go through coaching and experiences kind of come in, I think you'll possibly your persona, the way that you may present yourself sometimes changes. But I think your core root values should stay there. So my core root values are to be supportive, to be kind, to be encouraging. And that's what I am in general. So I think I then just move that into my coaching and Junior's junior coaching that was still there. It's just

it was done in a different way compared to the seniors that I currently coach at the moment, because they're older you can give them a bit more independence. You don't have to, like, mother them, so to speak. Obviously some you do to get them going especially up in the morning. But I think there's that slight change of role. But in terms of my philosophy, my philosophy is there, I just think it's a bit more concrete now because I now know because I've been through like the education stuff being like MSc and things. We talk about philosophies and stuff. And I think I'm now more concrete of "actually that definitely is my philosophy," whereas before it was a little bit not hazy, but a little bit kind of. I believe that if somebody said to me, "was that actually a philosophy," I can now say, "yeah, that's what that's what I'm about, really."

8:57 MM: So that kind of leads. So now you've got that clarity in your philosophy. How does it then look in practice? You've mentioned about working with your athletes a little bit, you know, being kind and honest, including them. So, yeah, philosophy. Look, if I came to watch, I'm not going to come and watch it five-thirty in the morning. If I could say you were delivering, how does your philosophy actually look when you when you decide?

KM: Yeah. And so I just take it as my current role at the moment. I work with Senior swimmers. So these are kind of regional national swimmers. So they're going to be from about age of 13 upwards. So in that squad, we have we do have national, national finalists and regional obviously not this year because it's not happened but previous year. And I think for me, it's if anyone came down and saw my coaching, I think hopefully they would see it as quite a laid-back kind of atmosphere, quite a supportive atmosphere. Obviously, as a coach, you have to you have to do the set the session plans and you've got your main objective for that particular session that you've got within your macro plans. And the other bits you've got going on, I think for me is particularly in swimming, it's like swimmers are kind of running a marathon every time they come to the pool. So injury prevention is like really high up on my list. So a lot of it is communication with the kids and giving them that chance to say, look, does that feel alright? Are you happy to start the fresh stroke section yet? Do you feel warm enough no you don't like let's do a little bit more of this on the way that do it. Well, the way I did it, obviously now slightly different with covid and all the other rules going on with that, with my planning. When I have a two-hour session, I would have probably three or four sessions going on in that one session, primarily to kind of help out the distance to make sure the sprint guys had the appropriate stuff to make sure the middle distance guys had had appropriate things as well. So what you would see is very different differentiation going on for each of the each of the swimmers as much as possible. And then that, in its sense, allows them to be encouraged to select which group is appropriate for them at that time. Sometimes I'm very much like, actually, you need to do distance starts first and then move over. But for me, it's trying to make it pessimistic as possible in terms of trying to meet their needs as best I can. And sometimes that doesn't always happen. Like sometimes I'm like, no, everyone's doing this one Saturday because we've got to get 7k done in two hours. So there's no messing around. But some sessions you can kind of mix around a little bit. And actually your planning is part of that. And like I say the swimmers are more likely to buy into it. And also they can have that communication with you as well and they feel value that you're listening to them. I think that's really important with any athlete is that you have the time to listen to them. And obviously in swimming two-hour slots, we've got very short time of communication to buy. Don't, don't, don't go. Because what's the time goes. It goes. And with the volume of the noise and obviously everything else going on, you really clear and concise and what you're saying as well. So I try and I try and plan to try and make sure everyone gets as much out as they can for the sessions.

MM: Yeah. So, you talked quite a bit about your athletes in within your coaching approach, said when your coaching philosophy. So, I was to speak to one of your athletes. Or some of your swimmers, how do you think they might describe your coaching approach? If I asked them "what's what's Kim's coaching philosophy", what do you think they might say?

KM: I well, I would I think they probably would say that I'm quite yes, that I'm quite approachable and that also that I do listen to them and that I'm not a behaviorist. So I'm a constructivist coach. So I do see it as not black and white needs to be all those different colors of the rainbow because otherwise if you're so rigid. Like, for example, if you're putting criteria in or anything like that and you're so rigid, you would then miss somebody that's amazing, that probably hasn't quite got all the tick boxes. And it's like, well, do you ignore them or do you allow them to come in and just be part of it? So I think they would like to I think they would say that I'm quite supportive. I think they would like to say that I'm quite firm, but I'm fair. So if I've got something to do, I'll do it and I'm not. But then also, I think there's times where they will say, "is there any chance we could do a little bit more speed work today?" And I can say, "yeah, that's no problem. We can optimal speed working, but we need to do this section here that we can change this bit." So I would hope that I would say as a partnership and that, you know, because they are part of that. But, you know, the power ratios and things like that as a coach to athlete and I think as soon as they feel like they're being heard then potentially, as I said, they'll do anything for you.

MM: Yeah, perfect. So that leads really nicely actually into that the next section around player learning. Player development. What do you think then are the crucial elements that are needed to enable your swimmers to learn or develop? And as you said, you're working with some elite and regional and national level. So what do you think is crucial to enable them to continue to learn and develop?

KM: So, I think a lot of it is particularly with swimming it's a lot of like feeling so so they they have to obviously realize that it's a process as well. So for them, they need to focus on certain things, such as process goals. So something really simple, like three front exits off the wall, not breathing in and out of a turn those little things where they can actually, like, learn and they learn through time as well. So I'm just focusing on the distance swimmers because sometimes it's a bit the easiest to give an example of that. So a lot of it's pacing. So so, for example, if I said to one of my swimmers I need you to swim a 1 12 in this bit, they will they will count in their heads and they will swim pretty much to a one 12. And a lot of it's more about how they feel. So using the pacer the timings just the feel the water and stuff like that. And I think being having the conversations at the start of training as well and saying "this is going to be a really hard set the heart rate that we need, the heart rates go up, we need to go down. That's going to get you quicker." Those types of conversations, even though they're quite short and at times it actually enables them to kind of understand why I need to get my heart rate up to this particular area in order to get that type of fitness. So a lot of it is through communication, questioning and just kind of having them having ownership, really, because a lot of I do have some swimmers that question me on sets, which is absolutely fine, as you do. But I kind of like that because then I can say "actually this is the reason why you doing this, because this this and this". And then "I got it now." And then they carry on and they get on with it. And I think that in itself is important that the athletes are able to ask you those questions and actually, you know, feel comfortable asking you questions as well. And in the club, we send out a lot of emails as well. So regards to like plans and things like that. Obviously, that's

gone slightly out the way with covid, but potentially it is a lot of communication. So, for example, leading up to nationals when we have nationals, not this year but last year it was a lot of a lot of conversations with with the athletes that would go into those nationals saying, look, this is why we're doing this. You've got to do this this way, this way and tell me how it feels. And and then if it didn't feel great, we change it. And it's it's allowing them to be part of the process so that they can learn basically.

17:12 MM: Yeah. To kind of talk about them being part of the process. What do you view your role as the coach being in supporting the learning and development of your athletes?

KM: So I think for me, I have to make sure that I'm obviously up to date with all the rules and all the kind of all the appropriate things that should be in place. So you know you've got that to make. Sometimes the rules change with time, and it's kind of instilling then the rules change slightly. This is the way we've got to not be aware of. And I think with me, me going to see like the programs and kind of other setups makes me realize actually I'm doing the right thing and therefore I can then explain to them. And then obviously it then kind of moves on from not really. I hope that answers your question.

18:05 MM: Yeah, absolutely. And then if you're a swimmer, so you've said you want to be part of the process, but. Yeah. What do you expect from them within that? How does how does that look? What is the part that you expect your athletes to play in the process?

KM: So for me, with the senior swimmer for me personally. I feel that if I write something on the board, for example, the warmup, I would expect them to get in and get ready and get on with the first part by themselves. I'm not walking off poolside as other problems might happen, but for me, I would expect them to be independent and organized, a positive attitude, coachable, absolutely coachable and I think just wanting to be there and actually realizing that. The importance of that, you know, the stuff on the board is done for a reason and it is the reason is to help them progress as they go. So I think the ultimate athletes, if you ever have the ultimate athlete and I have had some amazing athletes, I really have that's what I would expect and just take ownership of their learning and their kind of their effort, because I've seen. Don't get me wrong, I'm not painting all swimmers as these angels at all. Sometimes I will say the most amazing when you do one really, really good rather than two hours. It's just a bit mediocre because it's going to waste my time. It's going to waste your time. It's going to take you. You're not mentally going to be ready for the next training session. Nine times out of ten will do the two hour. But at least I give them the option to not get out clause, to say, look, this is what's happening here. Know this is what you've got to do. And the reason why it's really important to kind of set up something that mindset is because if they had to get selected for county, regional or nationals camps or international camps, that's what would be expected of them. That would be expected to be organized, independent, coachable, reliable, you know, all those tick boxes of the ultimate athlete that we all want to coach, basically.

MM: Yeah. Yeah. I'm just thinking Kim with swimming, obviously, it covers a high-risk element.

KM: Yes, it does.

MM: In terms of the opportunity for your athletes to have that trial-and-error guide to discovery approach to maybe whether it's timings or whether it's time.

KM: Yeah

20:32 MM: So how do you approach that safely within your sessions or, you know, if you work with someone that's maybe quite new. So I appreciate right now you're with some experienced swimmers, but when you working with juniors or your very first and you kind of swim, how did you approach or how do you approach safely the learning of a new skill or I guess technique that potentially carries an element of risk to it?

KM: Yeah, it's to be honest, it is quite difficult sometimes. So if I take for you the younger groups, just kind of the variation. A lot of it is. So if we if we think of like pre covid because obviously it's different, though I think for me it's things like making sure the lane is a little bit less busy, also making sure that your instructions are like really clear to whoever's new to the pool and just getting them use to kind of the like the atmosphere. So the lights, the the sounds and all those are the bits that can trigger anxiety and stuff. But just really simple instructions I find so. Ordinarily, the younger ones could be right, you going to swim 50 metres freestyle, that's two lengths freestyle, and you direct them in terms of the way the lanes are going round. And you also make everybody else aware that there's a new person in and they need to be aware of them, because the way that we try and encourage the names to be is that lanes a team. So potentially they have to work together to make the set, because if one one of them kind of falls off the wayside, then potentially that causes a bit of issues of congestion and stuff like that. We do have rules where any overtaking is normally at the end of the line rather than going throughout. Obviously, that sometimes needs to be reminded for the younger kids because goes in one ear and out the other. But I think demonstrations are really key. I think really, really clear instructions, really stupid, like taking the goggles off and putting them on the top of the head. For some reason, the kids can't hear when they've got the goggles on it's very random and I have no idea. But it is true. So it's just those little things. And also, if they don't understand something, get them out and say, look, this is what I want you to do, this, this and this. And sometimes we while most of the time we write on the boards as well. So the child would have had the communication, verbally non-verbal communication through demonstrations on pool side or by another swimmer in the water, and then as well as being able to read off a board. So potentially they're going to have three. They probably would have been told what they're doing three times and probably still get it wrong. Well, but at least it's been said you don't need to be sorted. But the ones that are like, let's say the newbies, I would ensure that that by the wall they're not in the middle of that middle of the pool, because if there is a problem, then potentially you can't get to them as easy as you would like to. But yeah, I think communication is absolutely key to make sure that the risk and safety is kept to a minimum and just making sure you've got the appropriate people on pool sides so yourself as a coach. You've got volunteers as well as the other coaches also, and just making sure that the lanes are like evenly matched. So you're not going to put a weaker swimmer with a massively quick swimmer because that would cause horrendous issues as well. But, yeah, it's just I'm also planning making sure that you are adaptable. So, you know, I'm not going to expect a junior swimmer to swim 400 IM straight away it isn't fair on them. And it's going to be very painful for me to watch as well. So it's that kind of, you know, being adaptable and saying why you can't do that at the moment. It's not a problem. You can't do that. But you just need to be aware that we're just going to change it slightly so you can do that in future.

20:37 MM: Yeah. So, yeah, that was an unscripted question. So I thought, I know I'm just heading in now just to the final few questions, if that's OK. And this now comes more into you as as the coach in your experiences. So how would you say you learn best as a coach?

KM: Yes, when you asked me this question I had a real think about. I was to think about it because I think everybody always says, oh, I, I learn by watching, I learn by watching. And the people always say that. And I was I was going to say that. Well, actually, I don't think I do you know. I think I learn more by doing so I have to say a little story, if you don't mind. So when I went to, you've probably heard this already Shell, actually. So when I went to Loughborough to do my MSc, the reason why I went there was because I wanted to work with Loughborough swimming like they were the best and I wanted to learn from the best. So I went there and I had an amazing mentor, fantastic guy, and it was the lead up to Rio the Rio Olympics. And basically I used to help him on a Wednesday with with the sessions used to have GB on the other side, like Liam Tancock from also all them kind of swimming on that side. So as you are a bit starstruck sometimes. And then I had I had this Ian a basically to be fair, we have Olympic swimmers and now we have commonwealth swimmers, we had national finalist with British champions had quite a significant amount of highly experienced swimmers is in that, obviously. Let me come in with Ian. I was like, oh, "OK, I'll be fine. I'll just I'll just be fine. No problem." No, Ian had another idea. He basically left me with them. This is the first session that I had on Wednesday with them. So he was like, "oh, Kimmie, I've got to go to a, basically I've got to go to a conference. I'm going to leave now for now and talk with these guys." He leaves and I'm like, "oh, my God. And obviously I'm having a bit of heart palpitations and stuff thinking, oh, my God, I'm coaching some of the best athletes in the world here." You know, and guys, do you mind thinking, oh, "Jesus, am I am I good enough for this?" But I learned more in that hour and a half than I ever have done because I stepped up. I did it, you know, and I think for me, coaching is such a complex, like it's like a social complex isn't it of emotions, of everything like that. So definitely learn by doing it and not necessarily being chucked in those environments, but definitely coming out of your comfort zone. You definitely learn a lot more than you would do just watching somebody on the side, you know, because you're not in a part of it. You're not necessarily going to get that first kind of interaction with those athletes. So I would say doing is how I learn and also listening as well. So listening to instructions from mentors or the coaches and stuff like that. But to be honest with you, when you do go and watch other programs, if that's because I always encourage my other coaches to do that that nine times out of ten the coaches would just shove you a stopwatch and say, "go on that line." And that's that's generally how it works. And I think that's definitely how it should work, because then the kids will just kind of get on with it and you'll be part of the process rather than sitting on the sitting on the the boundary line and actually looking into it. So you get a different approach on it.

28:00 MM: Yeah. So it's a great example that the students will be watching this. We've had quite a few discussions about as coaches do we need to know everything actually sometimes does it good for us to be challenged or working with athletes, athletic players that have higher level than we've ever been, but does that mean we can help them? So that's a really interesting insight. So then we touched upon at the very start, you've been coaching now for over over twenty years, some different role changes and qualifications and coach education along the way. What would you say is the biggest lesson you have learned within coaching to date?

28:43 KM: Well, I think to me it is definitely as head coach, I would say, and it's probably not what you expect and I wouldn't say it's about the coaching, if I'm honest. Well, it is a little bit. So I would say to be adaptable, you have to be adaptable and open minded because you don't know everything. I even I don't know everything. And actually, it's good to be able to kind of take different views on and think actually, do I agree with that? Do I agree with that? Yeah. Or do I agree that? Probably not. So I think there are the two things in terms of coaching. I think

in terms of kind of other things, I would say it's really important to write everything down and I think that's not necessarily said a lot in coach education programs, because particularly if you are in a head coach job or in a job of leadership, you do get a lot of criticism and a lot of people that aren't nice sometimes. But then you do get some people that are awesome and it obviously outweighs the negatives that you get. But I think my thing is to write absolutely everything down. So if you spoke to an athlete about something that you thought was an injury, write it down, make sure you got that date and that evidence, because potentially you may or may not need it at some point and make sure you've got people around you that you can trust. Definitely. I think you know you've got you know, whether it's as you say Shell, whether that's somebody else that's that's higher somebody. That's higher or somebody that's the same level as you that you can bounce ideas off and you know that it won't go any further, you know, and somebody that can say, "do you know what Kim, that's an awful idea. Don't do it." "OK, fine yeah." So I think always have some good support mechanism, because as I said earlier, it's such a social complex and emotions and everything like that with parents, with volunteers, with athletes. You know, it's really important that you do look after yourself as well. And so there are things that I probably would say and I think enjoy it because it's it's hard work being a coach. And, you know, there's a lot of pressure. You know, you're trying to do everything for everybody and sometimes you do forget about yourself. But I think, you know, you have to enjoy it. If you don't enjoy it, it's it's going to be a long job, like a long life, so to speak, so that the things that I would say I've learned over my time of all my different roles and things.

MM: So, yeah, Kim, that is perfect. Thank you. So, so I'm just going to stop.