



"Driving performance progress in a virtual landscape"

Author: Annie Stone

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With Lockdown 3.0 in place, our pathway coaches have had to adapt to a completely different set of circumstances to the traditional player coach relationship, and find innovative ways of driving progress in a virtual landscape.

We spoke to the England Aspire Squad coach, and 12-time Welsh champion Ryan Jenkins about how he and his players are still working hard and developing virtually.

Despite not being able to be in the hall with the players, and have a 'hands-on' approach, there are some positives, as Ryan explains: "It's positive to see the players more frequently. It's positive to see them at their home locations and it's positive to be there for them daily rather than monthly. There are challenges in information exchanging over Zoom through coaching but every obstacle can be cleared – you just need to be creative."

The use of technology has also been a positive for the Aspire Squad as it has created a new way for players to self-evaluate and learn from their training sessions.

Ryan added: "You can't coach constantly like you are able when you are in the same room. Therefore, I have decided, through trial and error, to observe more and bring the player in for a chat less often so the flow isn't disturbed too much.

"I take screen records and send them through afterwards which is great for them to see what I'm seeing with my comments in real time."

Ryan has also been running robot sessions over Zoom, which has proved to be a very noisy challenge! Early stages of trialling wireless headphones to be able to interact with the players at the same time have been positive, again illustrating how the use of technology can assist us in continuing to develop pathway players in a

difficult time.

Virtual training is not without its challenges however, and one of the biggest is actually the players not being around their friends on a daily basis at their local clubs and national camps. Players learn a lot from each other, and this is one obstacle that is hard to overcome virtually.

However, having to adapt to a more digitally focused world has inspired Ryan to take many of the things he has implemented during lockdown into the hall when permitted to do so.

He said: "There's lots of video footage players are sending me along with me sending them clips of top players which relate to something we have discussed. Although this was the case before covid to a degree, I think this will be more prevalent as we continue after lockdown as technology is so good to use with our training. Maybe the ear pods will be a revelation! I am also looking at VR goggles and how we could use that technology with our training."

The Aspire Squad has also been set virtual challenges to carry out during Lockdown, such as a 10,000 hits challenge where they have to come up with creative ways to hit the ball, and a reaction skills test which you can see below.

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