

Participant 1 Interview Transcript

Key: TB - Interviewer.

1 - Participant.

[] - Pseudonym initials in square brackets.

TB: If you could just detail your sporting progression first please? So, how did you first get into the sport, your progression of your career within the sport and into your eventual retirement.

1: Yeah, so I was involved in the game from a young age. My dad was a former player at [FB] in the 60s and 70s. Even from a very young age — he then went on to become a coach at [BU] and [FB] so, from a schoolboy I'd go and watch and get involved with training, as I say, from a young age I've always been involved. When I was 16 I joined [UM] in 1991 as an apprentice. I had 7 years there and I made my first team debut in 1996 against [TS] in the Premier League. I left in 1998 to go to [RF] because I just wasn't getting enough games at [UM] so I went to [RF] September of 1998 and on [confidential] I got injured — a double leg fracture, and issues with my ankle and my knee... And I retired in January two thousand an—d two.

TB: How old would you have been then?

1: Erm... twenty-six? Yeah.

TB: Quite young then for retirement. Did you find that the relationship between your personal and athletic life was quite smooth during your career? Or did you find that one maybe affected the other at any time?

1: I think my athletic life probably affected my personal life, there's no question about that. Everything I did, you know, I'd like to think that I was as professional as possible and obviously you've got to make sacrifices to be a professional footballer. So, socialising, and those kind of things with your friends — there were only a few times in which you could do it. Rest, recovery from games etc... But my personal life never affected my sporting life, my performances or anything like that.

TB: Is that because you simply wouldn't let it? Because, as you say, you had this professional mindset?

1: Yeah, it's your job you know. You're always working, it's a 24-hour a day job. Your sleep's as important as anything for a professional footballer, so rest obviously... I'm not saying I didn't drink in those days, but there was very little, and so socialising with my friends, what my friends were doing when I was 16-17 — going out, getting drunk and all the rest of it, you know, I couldn't do that. If I did drink, and I say I did it rarely, and it was on the real rare occasions - I wasn't used to drink — but we played [TS] in the FA Youth Cup semi final at [UG], so I was 16 at the time. We celebrated after, it was a Saturday and we beat them 3-0 and celebrated yeah. I remember it was a bit, it took me a bit by surprise... But like I said it didn't affect my performance because it was on a Saturday and I was back in training on Monday.

TB: How do you feel you handled the transitions within your career? For example, going from youth-to-senior, or more so into your retirement?

1: So, like handling pressure?

TB: Yeah, from a younger age, going into the first team and then as you got older how did the transitions affect you going into retirement?

1: I mean they're two completely different things because that's what you work towards, so... There seems to be an added pressure, well there is an added pressure the higher up the level you go - So, playing for the first team, it was live on Sky (BSkyB), so you kind of know there's going to be nearly 4 million people watching you and you're in an outstanding team so demands are really high, your manager's got high demands of you but you've got your own high demands as well. It's exciting, that's the thing about it. You get called up to the first team and it's exciting, it's what you're there for. You've trained with some unbelievable players and it's a privilege really... I would say... In some ways it's easier to play in front of big crowds, and it's easier to play in the first team, because you're playing with good players. A big part of the mental side of things is the preparation, there's nothing worse than playing in a game that doesn't mean anything, not many people there, and motivation-wise it can be quite difficult. It shouldn't be because you're getting paid for it, but it's a natural thing and it can be quite difficult. Like I say, when you're playing in front of 55,000 and it's live on Sky... The pressure builds throughout the week but you get to a stage where you're thinking; 'do you know what, you deserve to be there' and you know you're good at your job, and it kind of just goes. It's just bizarre... Leading up to it and a couple of days before, it's the worst kind of things going through your mind but then once you get to the ground and you're getting warmed up, the tension just kind of goes. Once the whistle blows you're underway, so... But then what you said about when you retire, you've got a lot of time to think about things, erm... I'm sure [PL] will say the same, that we both had people to blame for our retirements, and the fact is I got smashed to bits in a tackle that should never have happened. It wasn't my fault, but I ended up with a double leg fracture, knee ligament damage, and ankle damage in the one tackle, and someone did it to me. They meant to hurt me. I can deal with that and I think [PL] is the same and his rehabilitation from the injury was disgraceful. That's... I mean you talk to Paul Scholes about the same thing or Ryan Giggs when they got to the end of their career, and those two retired, they would've said something different. They'll have issues themselves I'm sure, but I just got to a stage where I didn't feel like I was affecting the first team, I felt like a spare part...lacked self-esteem and it was just - I just made a decision. It wasn't a build up of emotion or anything like that, it was just one Friday morning I just thought - I was training with the first team and I felt like people were talking about me behind my back and they weren't but you just get paranoid and you think; 'I'm worthless here'...

TB: Do you think that injury has potentially affected your identity as a player because you're not in the team?

1: Absolutely yeah. The problem was at that point at [RF], I had an Assistant Manager there who made you feel like that. It was disgraceful, disgraceful. He'd gone by the time I'd made the decision to retire but for about a year he was dreadful. You'd be coming into training and my leg's been snapped in half, I'm on crutches, and he made a rule that the injuries had to be in for quarter past 9, but had to be out of the building for half past 10 for first team training. Had to get away from the place and it was like I was — like you had some sort of a disease that he didn't want you to pass on. I was going to pass on my injury

to someone else. I was just at the cafe down the round and I'd sit and have a cup of tea and go to the gym around the corner and crack on with it myself.

TB: How did that make you feel then, to be put aside like that?

1: Worthless. You wouldn't treat a dog like that. You wouldn't treat anyone like that. It just makes you feel worthless...

TB: During that time when you was injured, did you receive any psychological support or therapy to help with those issues?

1: I went to see a psychologist called [AS], and it was actually a guy called [NH] I think is the technical director at [WB] and he used to be the technical director at [RF]... Anyway, he was a goalkeeping coach at the time and he'd had a lot of injuries and a lot of problems mentally as well, and he knew I was struggling and he suggested that I speak to this psychiatrist.

TB: Did you speak to him first or did he recognise something?

1: He recognised it... He said; 'look go and speak to someone', and I wish I had done myself now, but he was quick to help and he did say; 'I will have to warn you though when you see her, she's disabled and just be aware of that'. I went to see her a couple of times and basically just offloaded a load of stuff to her about how I was feeling and how I'd been treated... Did it do me any good? I'm not too sure. Then I got a phone call when I was due to see her, and I'd had a call on the Monday, I was supposed to see her on the Wednesday. I got a phone call on the Monday to tell me — she'd phoned me to say she'd been involved in a car crash and her husband was in a coma so she wouldn't be able to see me on the Wednesday... She phoned me the next day to say her husband had died... It actually put things into perspective for me. You know I've got a few problems but this lady, she'd lost the use of her legs in a horse riding accident and she's lost her husband in a car crash. How can I offload my problems on to her? So I stopped seeing her. I explained to her why and she was fine with it... When I'd tried to find professional support - ran out of professional support, I went right to the other end of the spectrum and I met a lady called [ED], if you googled a lady called [ED] she'd get some bad press, and she was — she lived in [confidential] at the time. Erm... Basically she's a spiritualist, a faith healer. She went with England in the 1998 World Cup, and they kind of threw her under the bus a little bit, kind of publicised it in the media what she was doing and obviously we didn't do very well at the World Cup and it's because of this faith healer here, blah, blah, blah. She didn't come out of it very well, but she was a really lovely person who did an awful lot for me. I used to go and chat with her and she'd like — she'd take me into a room, and she'd...cleanse your soul and I don't know whether it was just psychological whatever, but I used to come out feeling unbelievable, really, really full of it really. At the time, I mean... It's difficult to explain really, but during that time I was doing daft things and being really aggressive, and really nasty to my wife. As soon as I'd start behaving like that she'd say; 'right, go and see [ED]'.

TB: Was that whilst you were still playing, or just when you were injured?

1: During the injury yeah. It obviously had a massive effect... Like I said you start feeling sorry for yourself... You drink too much, I drank everyday.

TB: I was just about to get on to that. In terms of how you were coping during this time, was it more positive or a negative style of coping?

1: It's a negative, horrible, black, frightening place. You look back on it and think; 'what was I doing?'. Basically, like I say, I'm not a big drinker but you'd have a drink and it made you feel better, and you'd think; 'Oh, I want to feel better again', so you'd have another drink and you'd feel even better, and then you'd have another drink, and then (claps hands), before you know it you're going through the floor. You get to a stage where all this paranoia starts to kick in, and you're waking up in the morning feeling like a bag of s**t. It's like a... Like a spiral effect, and its like you can't get out of it, and you want to feel better and that makes you feel better. It gets to a stage where it is depressing, it's depressing... It is depressing in the end. Think it does perk you up for the first little bit but I kind of learned to deal with it... I had to.

TB: Did you recognise at the time that this might have been a mental health issue? Or did you think it was something else? Did you know the term 'mental health' at the time?

1: It's just a coping mechanism, just coping, you're just surviving basically... The daft thing is I never — in between finishing football, retiring... I went straight to work. I had a weekend off and then started coaching at the university in Bath, because I did some rehab there to get away from the idiot at the club. The guy who helped me... Well, it was two guys, but the main director was a guy called [JR] and [JR] basically, we used to bump into each other in the gym and he said; 'look do you want to do some coaching with us? Do you want to get into coaching?', well, I would do but at the time I was still rehabbing from my injury, so, when I finished he was the first person I spoke to. The coaching, I wanted to start doing my badges and whatever, so I went straight into doing my coaching.

TB: What would you say your perception of mental health was like throughout your career and then going into that stage with your injury? Did you know what it was or what it included?

1: No... No... It never got mentioned as a player, never once.

TB: Had you heard of any other players at the time that had?

1: (Long pause)... No... Not really. No, I cant say I did.

TB: How did that change over the time do you think? When did you first realise that you could have a mental health issue after what you'd been going through?

1: (Long pause)... See I always think mental health is — my injury caused me a lot of, well most of my issues really. I'm not too sure whether mental health problems are always there, I don't know, I don't know enough about it I've got to be honest with you. Do I still recognise I've had a problem? Probably not. I had a coping strategy. Now, a professional might've said I had a host of problems, but I don't know. I didn't see a professional to go through it at the time... Would I still need professional help for it now? No. You tell me, but if I'd had a major problem, would I still need support now? i'm not too sure...

TB: It works on a spectrum, so it can go from mild to clinically depressed, and people can fluctuate over time from mild to serious symptoms really. Everybody's different aren't they.

1: You hear a lot about it now obviously. You know, the Gary Speed thing and the German goalkeeper... Enke. Erm...

TB: I mean the German FA had a big restructure after the incident with Enke as well.

1: Yeah. Yeah. Everybody has good days and bad days don't they, someday you think; 'I'm over it here' or it's difficult to get motivation and you look back and think; is that mental health? But you actually wouldn't. To what extreme? What had Gary Speed must've been through to do what he did? Horrendous... I'd seen him the week before and I did a coaching course with him. He didn't recognise me and I didn't recognise him because he looked grey and he looked dishevelled and it wasn't like him. It wasn't like him at all. I looked at him at the time and I thought; 'Blimey'. I didn't think he had a mental health problem, I just thought it didn't look like Gary that. What happened a week later, you look back and you think what was going through his mind?... Don't take this the wrong way but I think some people jump on the bandwagon of being depressed and having mental health problems. Might be having a bad time or might be feeling a bit sorry for themselves, and it can be easy to blame depression or mental health or whatever, but people... I mean, I don't know, I might be being a bit harsh, I don't know like I say... I don't know enough about it. I've never witnessed it really. My dad said he had a bout of depression before when he was at [BU], so I would've been about 11 and I remember looking back and he wasn't the same, but it didn't last long. I don't know if he got help or whatever or not, I don't know.

TB: Do you think because your understanding and your journey through the sport, and the way you were brought up, even if someone did have a mental health issue, you're not going to recognise it? Is that because of the unity you had in your team and if anyone had any issues, was it discussed and you moved on?

1: Not really. Not in the way we were brought up. You would just deal with it really. I wouldn't suggest that's the right thing to do.

TB: Do you think it would've been seen as a weakness if someone had expressed a mental health issue?

1: Absolutely yeah (it would have been seen as a weakness). Like I say, I never had that problem, but surely out of the group of all the players that came with us, I'm sure someone would have had an issue.

TB: The reason I say that is because as you said earlier when you were injured you were 'chucked aside' as it were. Based on that if someone did come forward it sounds like they would've been dropped immediately?

1: Yeah absolutely. Absolutely. When you're in the gym like that, you don't want suffocating, you don't want pampering, you don't want to be asked every five minutes how you are because you have to keep explaining yourself and it just brings it all back. I didn't want that. What you do want is a bit of empathy. You don't want sympathy, you want a bit of empathy and a bit of understanding, and the manager to say something positive, you know something positive. 'Ey, you're looking good', that does an unbelievable amount... I think, I did a talk at [confidential] the other day and I touched on that. I hear [JM] now coming out and saying injured players are useless to him. The guy's never had an injury then clearly. He's an absolute clown. It's absolutely ridiculous. That's a person you're

talking about there, what's he going through? You know, I was going through that. If [JM] had said that to me, I would've hit him. Honestly...

TB: So that perception of injured players is still going on?

1: It's absolutely disgusting. An injured player of no use so I'm going to ignore him? Wow. Wow... He's clearly never had an injury.

TB: Do you think that's a lot to do with the sport? It's all about winning?

1: I think it's just the arrogance of them. You know look at [AF]... When you were injured — if you've got an injury, like you've got an injured hamstring and you're on the treatment bench, he'd say hello to you and he'd ask you how you are, how it's going. If you got a bad injury like a friend of mine, [BT] got, he was on the phone to them, speaking to them, go and visit them — absolutely. That's what's part of what makes a great club, it's all different kinds of people inside your club. There's your best players, your Paul Scholes, Ryan Giggs, and Eric Cantona, then your other players, maybe not quite as good but still very good players, and squad players, then your injuries, then your youth team, people like the cooks and the chefs and the cleaner; the kit man: they're all a part of the club, so how can you disregard someone? It's just pathetic, it's just ridiculous. The impact that has on people, especially a long term injury is... I experienced that and that's the worst part. That was the hardest part. Blaming someone else for the injury — you kind of, you get to a stage where you accept it, you accept it because you've done an awful lot of thinking and you blame yourself to begin with.

TB: Right. Why is that?

1: I blame myself. I blame myself for going into the tackle. Why did I tackle like that? Why didn't I go in higher than him, and do it to him? You can't accept it too easily, so there's that and you blame yourself.

TB: Is it almost like a grieving process?

1: Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. It is very similar... I lost my mum 6 years ago. You get a lot of the same kind of feelings. Anger, you get angry. My mum died on the Saturday morning and she died in her house, which she wanted to do, and it was only because I was at her house that I didn't pick up a chair and throw it through the window. If I'd have been at home I would've done it because I was absolutely raging, and I was all the way through her illness. It is, it is very similar to that. You kind of blame yourself a little bit as well... And then you look back, and I very rarely fell out with her myself, but could I have done more? Could I have seen her more? Could I have gone and had a coffee with her more? Did I make the effort? You blame yourself... And you do the same with the injury, and I think over time you start to think — you do a lot of thinking — you think; 'well, look nothing's going to change, you can't change anything that's happened and you've got to deal with it'. The way I put it is that this is the hand you were dealt. I was always going to get injured on Boxing Day 1999... Fact. I was going to end my career on that day. That's the hand that I've got to play and it's how I play it now, that's the way I put it. I could've folded my cards and thrown them away and say right I'm going to feel sorry for myself for the rest of my life and all the rest of it, or I can play my hand. That's what you do, you've got to pick up. Now, I've never seen the lad that did it to me and if he was sat there now I wouldn't even talk to him. I wouldn't have bit his head off either... I've moved on. He came to see me in the hospital apparently, my dad threw him out. (laughs). It's probably a good job he did... The

first couple of years if I saw him I don't know how I would've reacted, but over time you've got to deal with that. Through time and through...experience really, through growing up. What's it going to change? Nothing. If I hit him over the head with that chair is it going to make me feel any better? Possibly for 5 seconds and then there's nothing I can do in the end... It's not going to bring my career back.

TB: During the time you were injured and you felt like you were struggling, did you have a support network there? Were there any people you spoke to in the club, or family and friends that helped you during that time?

1: To be fair I did get close to, the fortunate thing, well, unfortunately for them, but there was 3-4 of us who had long-term injuries.

TB: So it was like you were all in the same boat then?

1: Yeah, there was myself, [AW], [NF]...Erm... And we worked hard together, we pushed each other. We used to have like, do you know the rowers? The concept 2 rowers? We used to have like 2000 metre races and things like that, so that kept us going. We used to feel sorry for each other I suppose and talk to each other about it, which was kind of a good coping mechanism. The other thing was, I mean the physios were very good. What the physio would do, is if there were other injuries, like the younger lads, he'd send them with me and kind of be their mentor or support. Do a gym session with them and things like that... I took one lad to see [ED] with me, so that was okay. I was living in a place called [confidential], which is like 50 minutes from Reading and I had a few friends around me, but they weren't close friends or anything like that and there was only me and my wife, so family and friends... My close family and friends were 3-4 hours away. Yeah a telephone call, and I was always on the phone but not actually seeing people, so that was difficult. That's why, one of the reasons I did move back because you've got to get around your family and friends.

TB: Do you think if you were closer to your family and friends that would've postponed your decision to retire?

1: Possibly yeah. I don't know...Like I say it wasn't a decision I'd spoke about with my wife, I hadn't even thought about it on my way to training. It just hit me. I was on the training ground and I remember mis-kicking the ball and thinking; 'who did that?'. Everybody mis-kicks a ball, if I'd have been fit and I'd mis-kicked a ball, I'd have gone to the next ball and made sure I kicked it properly. Some of the young kids were watching me and they didn't say anything but I thought I was lacking in self-respect, like what was you doing? Everybody does it... I mean I suppose that one thing that was a big factor was that there was still a big gap in between my shin. In effect I came back for about 7 or 8 months, but I was basically playing with a broken leg. Two main bones in your leg, your tibia is your main shin, and the fibula next to it — they call it a non-weight bearing bone, it's not actually, it is actually a weight-bearing bone. If I was ever blocking a ball or twisting...(face winces)... and for a defender that wasn't great. I mean that was the big reason as well, and when I went and saw the specialist I said; how can you fix it?, he said; 'you have to have a bone graft', okay, so how long would I be out for? He said; '10 months'... So, that was in the January, I was out of contract in the June. I would've been out of contract — so 10 months - I would've been out of contract for another 4 months, I'd been out the game for nearly four years. I don't think anybody would've touched me, I don't think anyone would've touched me... And, I think psychologically the tackle had really affected me. Really... And

especially soon after, every tackle I saw was a leg breaking tackle. It just... That was really tough to get over.

TB: Do you think because you had such a short break between retiring and going straight into coaching — having something to keep you in the sport has helped you in the long-term?

1: Yeah, I think so yeah. It focused my mind a little bit... Yeah, erm... I've always worried... But ever since I was 16 I've never been out of work really. When I got sacked at Bury, 3 days later I was working at Wigan as a scout, left Bradford and a couple of days later I was the U16's coach at Oldham, so I was part-time but I was still working, planning and whatever, so I like I say since 16 I've always been in work.

TB: Would you say that since you were involved in the sport and straight through your career, into retirement and what you do now, that football makes up a huge part of who you are? It's how you identify yourself?

1: I don't know anything else. I did all right in school and I got my GCSE's and that but if someone said to me; 'right, you're never going to work in football again', I would not have a clue what I was going to do.

TB: Do you think that is an issue for those in the sport who perhaps don't have the opportunity to stay in and work in football? Do you think that could have potentially negative effects for those who retire and leave the sport completely?

1: Absolutely, I think — we've got a thing at Salford, we've not implemented it so far but we will be doing, and it's personal development of the first team players. It's absolutely critical, absolutely critical. You can't get to the end of your career or even you can't get to the last 2 or 3 years of your career and then start thinking; 'what am I going to do now?', you've got to have a plan. Have something, that once that day comes and it comes, every single one of them, whether you're Ryan Giggs, Paul Scholes or [CC], it does come, that final day of your career, so what are you going to do? I mean, the top Premier League players earn that much money, do they need to work again? No, but what are they going to do with their lives? There's only so much time you can spend on the golf course, or on holiday or whatever. I think... I wasn't in a particularly good dressing room at Reading, I didn't particularly like it. I thought the coaching was wrong, but some players really struggle with that lack of belonging, that togetherness and the team and all the rest of it. I never bought into that (at Reading), I wasn't bothered about it. That's what some people really struggle with. Footballers like to be told what to do, when to do it, how to do it, what to wear, what to eat, what time to be there, etc, etc. They don't like thinking for themselves, so on their first day when they wake up and they've got no club to go into, they've got to think for themselves, and they've got the time to think in the day. That's when they struggle, when they really struggle.

TB: What sort of procedure do you think needs to be put in place then? Do you think the sooner the better?

1: Absolutely, absolutely. As soon as you sign as a player, whether you're 16 or 26, or whatever it is, you've got to be thinking about that final day. When that one day comes, what am I going to do with my life? There's only so much time you can train in a day... In general, you'll train on a Monday morning, have the afternoon off. Sometimes they'll train all day Tuesday, Wednesday off, Thursday ours would train and then do yoga in the

afternoon, Friday train very little and off in the afternoon to rest or whatever, and Saturday you play. In the afternoon's go and do something to improve yourself and do some personal development. Do a coaching course or do a BTEC, even if you've not got any qualifications, start the process and think about what you want to do, well what would I do? Erm...

TB: Do you think something like that would prevent potential mental health issues in the future for retirees?

1: Absolutely, no question about it. When you do hear about mental health problems the same thing keeps coming up about a lack of belonging and losing that dressing room, and being part of a team and whatever. You've got to prepare for that, and there's no point dressing it up to any of the players, I say the same to our players: 'What you gonna do?'

TB: Why do you believe there is a stigma attached to mental health in professional sport? Why is there a seemingly dark cloud over the term?

1: I think that cloud is disappearing, I think people can talk openly a lot more about it now. When I was in the dressing room, mental health — that was when there was a stigma about it. Now, the things with Gary Speed and the German goalkeeper, etc, it's become a lot more recognised and a lot more accepted. I think if you went to a coach or a manager now... who was it? Aaron Lennon, who came out not long ago and said he was struggling - nobody turned round and said he was weak, or it's crap, it was actually, well hang on there's actually a problem here. He actually gets praise now for coming out and saying it. I think it's a lot more accepted and I think people are a lot more aware of it as well. I think one of the problems is — well a big problem, and it become more and more prevalent, god forbid, but, the amount of kids in academies these days. At the minute there are 12,000 kids in professional academies, the numbers for them to get into the Premier League are 0.1 of a percent, so what are the other, you know, 11,900 going to be doing? The pressure they're under those kids, because of the money in the game, it's absolutely frightening. I could show you the text I got off a parent from today, an under 13's parent who's wanting my advice, my advice to the parent is just learn from the kid. They put that much pressure on them it's ridiculous. So, kids now from category one clubs, so there's 23-24 category one clubs, from 11-12 years old, they're in a full-time program. They train there at the club, a full-time education at the club, play full-time games as pro, everything. A kid — the expectation on that kid is huge... After 5 years, and that system's only been going 3 or 4 years, like I say god forbid, but at 16 when the decision to become a professional or a scholar, if they don't get a scholarship when they've done all that commitment and whatever, what kind of state is that kid in mentally? All kids are the same, they get it off their parents, and I think a part of your research should be to go and see some of the academies and go see how intense it is, it's ridiculous. Speak to one guy who's been in the game - I'm not rude with any of the parents, but I can say hello to them, I think the pressure they're putting their kids under is ridiculous. It's happening at the 92 of the football clubs across the country. God forbid, but sooner or later something will...(fades off).

TB: What do you think needs to change? What needs to improve?

1: Firstly, I think you take the money out of the game. I think that causes a massive issue. The parents need educating. One of the things the academies do have is psychological support, but it's part-time, and it's kind of... reactionary? It's reactionary. So if anyone's really struggling, then send them to the psychologist. What are the signs? Do the coaches

know? A parent of my — the person that has text me, I look at the kid and he looks terrified, but that's his parents. They won a tournament yesterday and the kid puts on Instagram a picture of them all jumping around and happy in the changing room, away from his parents. I think the expectation that parents put on them (kids) is ridiculous. We've got a lad in our academy, we stopped his grandad and his dad coming to games, because of the pressure they were putting on the lad — he was an absolute wreck. He played the other day, he played the other day without his granddad and his dad there, and he was outstanding. How many kids is that happening to throughout the system? My lad's in the system at [confidential], and I just think they need to try and do something to take all the pressure off, they're too serious. It's too serious. You see these kids that come in here, they're like robots, they've no character at all, and they're told what to do, when to do it, blah blah blah. They can't make a decision for themselves. They don't develop a character, they don't develop social skills... Honestly go down to [confidential] training system, their set-up now, it's unbelievable and it's better than most category one clubs. It's fantastic, but it's soulless... The academies... They're sterile. Everything's done... Our kids at Salford, I've just left them and the under 16's are cleaning the dressing rooms and hoovering up. Is that abuse? (laughs). Do us a favour. It's life skills. We're developing life skills. When they get a house, who's going to do the hoovering for them? Who's going to do the cleaning for them?

TB: Is it that players are almost bred to just focus on playing and not do anything for themselves?

1: Absolutely. It's the kids and they enjoy the training. The kids trained with Paul Scholes this morning and then they go and do the cleaning. Have they had a great day? Absolutely. Absolutely.

TB: Are you then trying to develop a holistic person? Yeah we want you to play football, but we want you to develop yourself, we want you to gain life skills and take what you learn here and transfer it into something else when you finish.

1: So, with the model that we've got, it's a dead easy model. We've got a traditional academy system that has talent in the middle of it, and then the characters on the outside. Ours is first and foremost to develop character, because talent will develop itself within the training program. Develop character and develop people who want to dig in and learn skills, who are going to struggle and show that survival instinct and get through it and be part of a team. You can't say boo to a goose to kids these days... You've got me going now about academies. Kids now 14 years old, even younger than that have got agents. That's mad. [MO] dresses it up, he's a... Sports Management Consultant, he's a flipping agent, for 11-12 year old kids. It's immoral. It's immoral...

TB: Comparing the system now to how it was when you were developing, do you think kids now are more in danger of potentially developing mental health issues when they're older?

1: Absolutely. I think I didn't have a mental health problem - Well, no, I had a big mental health problem... But because of the way I was brought up, with my mum and my dad, but Man United's system of basically... We self-regulated the dressing room. The coaches didn't, the coaches were very rarely in the dressing room. If the coach came in the dressing room in the training week, there was possibly a problem, or they might have to give some important information to you. Once they'd given you the information, they didn't hang about in the dressing room making sure everybody was okay and getting bullied or

whatever. There was a bit of a bullying culture when I first went to [UM] but we stopped all that because we've got strong characters.

TB: Do you think because the coaches have passed that responsibility on to you do you think that's affected you positively long-term to then be able to make your own decisions and recognise your own personal issues as well?

1: Absolutely. Yeah absolutely. Erm... The coach would be there is you needed them and you always knew they were there. Nobby Stiles and Eric Harrison, if you needed to talk to them you could chat to them. That's life... These kids now like I say, they have everything done for them but once they leave that environment, what are they going to do? How're they going to survive? If they've been in it that long, which some of them have... They'll struggle. I think at the older age group, like I say, your Aaron Lennon's and people like that, I think it's a lot more open.

TB: It's interesting now you've said that because the players that are coming out now and saying they do have mental health issues will have been the first players to have been in top academies when all this money would have started to get invested. So, all the money involved and the players coming forward does seem to have a correlation.

1: Well, another problem with the money in the game is the academies, the money that they spend on, they're spending hundreds of thousands on parents, buying houses — 10-11 years old, to get the best players into their academy. Then they become a scholar, on their seventeenth birthday they can sign as a pro, some of these kids in the academy are on... Well, your Chelsea and Man City, some of them are on £10,000 a week. 17 years old... If they don't get into the first team or they get released and they've got to find another club, no club in their right mind will pay them anywhere near that. They might even pay them 3 or £400 a week. Again, the expectation and all of a sudden their wages are cut in half... You know, you look at the retention rate of a 16 year old signing as a scholar, to that same person or this group of players signing a second contract, some of them or quite a few will get first year or a year's professional contract, but come on, the level that get released are amazing. Where do they go? There was a study by the Premier League, there was something like 360 kids got released last year. Was it last year? 360 kids got released after their first professional contract. 60 of them, they still don't know where they are...it's frightening honestly. As usual money's at the route of all evil...

(Participant paused to talk to his son before resuming)

TB: I've only got a couple more questions for you if that's all right?

1: Yeah, course.

TB: Whilst you were playing you weren't familiar with the term of 'mental health', but in the subsequent years since your retirement, how has your knowledge/perception of it increased?

1: I think it's through experience, through media exposure. Like I say, Gary Speed... That hit home hard because I'd done a coaching course with Gary and he was just the most charming lad and just an absolute pleasure to know. You'd never, ever think that he had a mental health problem. So, it kind of... I think I probably still don't know all that much about it.

TB: What do you think needs to improve in that area then?

1: Just education. Education, awareness, erm... It's all right being educated and being aware, but also the — what the methods or what the process is to how you can fix it, or how you can deal with it... Prevention. What's the intervention, so to speak? It's all right saying to somebody yeah he's got a mental health problem and he's been given all the advice, but now what? I think the PFA are very good, PFA are very good with it, but — if someone said to me they didn't know about mental health, or I was dealing with mental health problems, I'd tell them to speak to the PFA. Would I know who to speak to at the PFA? No. I would find out eventually, I'd be able to find them, but it's not somewhere where you'd be able to see and tell them straight away go and speak to such and such at the PFA.

TB: So it's not really signposted or made aware in clubs that if there is an issue there, that these are the people you need to speak to, who to contact, where to learn about it, etc?

1: Absolutely yeah and I think clubs possibly steer clear of it because all players are great at making excuses and I think you'd probably worry a bit that lads have come forward, they're having a bad time and they're out of form, oh it's because it could be a mental health problem. That could be the case. Do you know what 9 times out of 10 that might not be the case, but it's that extra one that, like I say, the god forbid one... Whatever he's done to himself. It is a case that it is becoming better and there is more intervention, slowly. Like I say it's that next stage now is there enough being done in clubs? No. Is there enough expertise? No. I think psychology in clubs is about improving performance, I don't think there are any experts in the game that can deal with it... A [SP] kind of a person, someone like that who can look and think they might need some help here. He doesn't need mental training, he needs mental support. Nobody in the game like that.

TB: Do you think staff should be trained on it then? Something like mental health first aid or there should be someone signposted within the clubs?

1: Absolutely, you can't become a coach without, you can't get your license if you haven't done your emergency first aid.

TB: Is mental health included within that?

1: They might touch on it... No they don't. So, really they should have someone who is signposted as the first aid or someone like that. As I say, the kids could have all kinds of problems. No one knows what goes on behind closed doors, parents might be abusing him, you never know. There's a kid at ours who's parent are quite old. When I first met them I thought they were his grandparents. I think... Actually, now I come to think of it I think he lost one of his brothers or his sisters when he was younger — they died. So what's he going through? Has he recovered from that? The grieving process and was he able to speak to a counsellor or a psychologist or whatever? I don't know.

TB: Do you think if there was a mental health prevention strategy, or an intervention strategy, it would benefit the younger players more, or do you think this is something that should be rolled out across age groups, and should be done season by season?

1: Yeah I think it should be done every year. The funding for it is there, but I don't think people know it's there. As daft as it sounds. It might get touched on in a workshop, or a parents evening, an induction or something like that, but I've been in many inductions and

I can't ever really remember anyone saying; 'look if you're struggling mentally, or have a mental health problem'... look they might not have a mental health problem, but I don't know. It could be anything I suppose. It could be a lack of performance, or could be having a couple of bad weeks — everybody has them. Their mum and dad might not be getting on and stuff might be happening at home, so that might be affecting you. Actually is that down to your mental health? So, it just being able to identify what's affecting... You know... The other major, major problem we've got within the game and I think this is a mental health problem, is gambling. It's huge, it's absolutely ridiculous.

TB: Really? Do you think players are using that as a coping strategy then?

1: I think it's an addiction. I think it's so easy now to have a bet... People do have a lot of money. If you think of an addiction, an addiction is a mental health problem. Say I'm addicted to horse racing or fruit machines, I can basically in 10 seconds put a bet on (points to phone), and spend a lot of money on my phone. Bookies aren't involved, there's no one even there. You're not even handing over - If you handed over £500, you'd think; 'god, that's a lot of money that', and it's depressing the moment it's gone, but over time and if you've stayed in the game long enough you would have earned a good amount. If you've not looked after it and you've gambled it all away... The one mental health issue in the game that hasn't been exposed are the players that have lost all their money and gambled it away, there's thousands of them. It got mentioned the other day, erm... [DY], [DY] went for £12million whilst I was at [UM], that was nearly 20 years ago, and £12million these days is probably the best part of 70-80 million. He would have got a big chunk of that, and his wages at [UM] would have been very, very generous. He might have made some bad business decisions, I'm not saying he's gambled, but there are issues with players gambling within football. Young kids as well, some of the younger kids.

TB: Do you think that's due to the pressure of the game, the way it's evolved?

1: Pressure? Possibly. I just think instant gratification, you can do anything now on your phone within five minutes. You can get anything, anything. You can have sex in five minutes, if you look on your phone you can find it. Gambling, you can do it. If you want to find out how to be a terrorist, you can go on the internet, and you can find out how to blow people up. Things like that. Whereas in the past you had to go to the bookies, or you had to find it for yourself, but now it's there. One of the big problems that I see that football's kind of got a problem... Look at how many teams have a sponsorship that goes back to gambling. It's one thing to say yeah we've got a problem, but then it's another thing to be making millions and millions of pounds from a gambling sponsor.

TB: It's almost become a part of the game hasn't it.

1: It's unbelievable. His (points to son) [confidential] shirt, what have you got on your [confidential] shirt? (Son answers with a gambling sponsor). That's on the front of his shirt, they're kids.

TB: It almost perpetuates a cycle of gambling then doesn't it.

1: Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. Well... As a footballer, addiction to drink is... I think there's not many players now — there's been a big influx of foreign players who don't have a big drinking culture, we did at [RF], and we did at [UM] really. At the right time. We'd have a big blow out at the right time, the lads at [RF] went out at the wrong time. Are you going to lose a lot of money by - I don't think there's many known cases of chronic alcoholics, some

players are drinking heavily, you know, binge drinking possibly. Throw as much down their neck as possible because they know for the next five days they can't have a drink. That might happen, but is it really going to affect your performance? Because you can get it out of your system pretty quickly and train and all these players now are built like that guy who was sat here before, they're all built like that now. Money-wise, what's it going to cost you? About 60-70 quid a night out? Someone who gambles can do £500 like that (clicks fingers). I knew a lad, look [GK], have you read [GK]'s book? He's openly admitted to losing millions on gambling. Now, we all knew at the time he was... Did we try and help him? Well, we could have probably helped him more, but we accepted him...

TB: Why do you think that?

1: We didn't think he had a problem at the time. He was a youngish lad, erm... You just thought he liked his gambling. We never thought at the time, if I'd have known now I would've pulled the manager up or pulled him and said; 'look I think you've got a problem here'. He might have turned around and told me to mind my own business, but at least you've tried. Basically, he'd bet on one thing and lost, he'd try to double up and lost, and he'd get six or seven races and he would have doubled, and doubled, and doubled up, and end up going at 50-60 grand. That was as a 19-20 year old, and he didn't have that money. That was the days before the phones when you could press a button, he'd actually got a mobile phone account, so he was just phoning somebody just to put a bet on, he wasn't actually handing the money over either. I just think it is a major problem.

TB: Still prevalent now?

1: It's worse now. Definitely worse now. It would be interesting if you did a study on 18-20 year olds in an academy system, how many of those have got a gambling account on their phones.

TB: That bad?

1: I think so. I think so.

TB: And how are they going to keep that habit up when they stop playing?

1: Absolutely. It's a major, major problem... How do you fix it? I really don't know. The other problem is they're not allowed to bet on football, they're not allowed to bet on any football but the amount of players who are still doing that are... I mean when we were playing, if you were a manager you would never, ever bet on your own game, but if you look at 5 teams, you might know a little bit about a few injuries because you knew such and such in that dressing room, and you knew such and such in this dressing room. I think it still goes on.

TB: I think that's everything, if you've got anything else to add?

1: No, no, you alright with that?

TB: Yeah, that's great, thank you. Brilliant, cheers.

1: Cheers. No Problem.

(End of Interview)

Participant 2 Interview Transcript

Key: TB - Interviewer.

2 - Participant.

[] - Pseudonyms in square brackets.

TB: First, do you want to just detail your sporting career; how you progressed? Any memorable or key moments that stick out for you?

2: Yeah, yeah. I started - I signed pro at 15 with [Rugby Team A] as it was called then. I stayed there until I was 18. Part way through the Oceana Tour, as it was called, around New Zealand I found out that [Rugby Team B] had bought me. That was kind of like, you're on your way. So, in 1998 I signed at [Rugby Team B] and stayed there for the rest of my career then. Luckily enough for me I was able to represent Great Britain at academy and under 21's, and I chose Wales as my nationality. I represented them at 2 World Cups, 3 European Cups, and got through to the semi-final in the World Cup, which was probably my greatest moment really. On an international stage anyway. Yeah, I played over 300 first-team Super League games and in 2008 I was awarded a testimonial for my services to the game. So, it was a full career. Maybe didn't quite reach the heights of Grand Finals or Challenge Cups, but it certainly gave me a great lifestyle and gave my family a great start as well, which was huge. You know, I love the sport... What I didn't want to do when I got towards the end of my career was keep playing just because it was a wage. I wanted to try and be one of the smarter ones, so I went back to Uni and did a Sports Performance - Sports Marketing degree.

TB: Did you find a lot of your fellow players and colleagues had that kind of mindset, or was it more of a 'just keep on playing for the wage'?

2: Just keep on playing. Some of the guys were getting wheeled out... It was embarrassing. Some of the guys, they knew themselves that they shouldn't be there and you saw that these guys, who were kind of like icons, if they had finished when they should've finished they would've stayed as that, but they became a kind of laughing stock really. They had gone past their prime, way past their prime and maybe should have done — if they wanted to carry on playing, drop a few divisions, but that's where everything else starts then... When your family's getting that bit older and you should be spending more time with them they were still going out partying with the boys, you know, they're out with the 21's, the 22 year olds and they are like pushing 35-36. It's kind of... They were like, kind of my benchmark that I didn't want to end up like. I said - I'm true to my word and I said when I stop enjoying it, I'll pack in. I'd hate to start resenting the sport that's give me such a fantastic lifestyle. I got the opportunity one day to either be rested for a game and do some media work or to play, and I chose the resting and media. That was kind of my big light bulb moment. If you're choosing something else over playing then its time to go. So, I played that season out and that was me...

TB: Did you have that idea of retirement in your mind for quite a long time then?

2: Err... I did. But I put it off for a while, I put it off for a while. Had I got my degree and set the business up that I'd set up, probably 2 years earlier I'd have maybe dropped down a division and maybe played part-time? Still earn some decent money but that would've been — kind of... fun money. You know what I mean? My primary focus would have been on the business and earning a wage from a 9-5 job, not playing rugby. It was, a erm... It

panned out the way I wanted to at first anyway. My transition was quite smooth in that respect. My kind of fall from grace... Came 2 years after I'd finished playing. I'd kind of took my eye off the ball a little bit, my business was doing well, bit of money in the back pocket, loads of time on my hands and that's when the head started playing then...

TB: How did you find as you were playing — because I'm just going to come back to what you said in a bit, but whilst we're on your career progression — how did you feel your personal life went along side that? Do you feel it was quite seamless, your personal and athletic life?

2: No, not at all. I went through a divorce the last 3 years of my career. Me and my long term partner, well, my wife at the time. We split... It was all very amicable, but again, breaking up the family unit and I don't come from a broken home myself, so it was kind of...(fades off).

TB: New grounds?

2: Yeah. The example I'd been set from my parents was you know, they're 45 years this year, so its err... So, that was tough. Trying to keep my focus on playing a career, keeping a career going, being at university, trying to set up a business, see my kids as often as I could and try and keep that as stable as possible. Trying to juggle these things was difficult. But because of the person I was and the standing I had within the club I always felt I had to put this mask on. To keep this persona of 'I've got it all together' you know, I was the life and soul of the dressing room and I'd give an arm round the people who I thought were struggling. But should anyone ask me if I was... It was 'Nah, I'm fine'.

TB: Do you think that's a part of the culture then, because, as you said you're almost a role model within that dressing room, you felt it was your responsibility not to show any sign of weakness?

2: Yeah. Yeah. And also, just the fact that you're a man as well. That persona that I explained then, the fact that you're a man and you know, as far as I was concerned I was still head of my family in terms of looking after my kids and giving them an example and showing no weakness at the time. I didn't want to show that this whole situation was getting on top of me.

TB: How did that make you feel? Personally, when you were doing that? You knew, people were upset and you were trying to be that arm around the shoulder as you said, but you yourself were going through an internal struggle?

2: If anything it made me forget my problems. It kind of made me feel better about myself that they were struggling in a kind of perverse way, I was able to not think about my issues because I was busy helping other people. All I was doing was putting a band aid over everything that was going on with myself. At times, it was quite ironic that I'd be sat there talking to somebody and giving them advice and this kind of out of body experience thinking; 'you should be listening to yourself here, you should be having a listen to your own words'.

TB: Do you think some of them issues started to contribute into the issues you started to face later on?

2: Yeah, I mean hindsight's a wonderful thing isn't it. As you look back now its kind of - I see these little incidents within my career, or within my personal life and the way I dealt with them wasn't to go and talk to somebody and to express what was going on, it was to train harder and put a bigger mask on. Probably, that's probably when my drinking stepped up a gear as well. Obviously, living on my own I had nobody looking over my shoulder and nobody telling me what to do and when to do it.

TB: So this was after you'd finished playing as well?

2: Towards the back end of my career to be honest with you. I was never blessed with natural fitness so I always worked as hard as I could and I think I just kind of counteracted my personal behaviours, in terms of going out drinking and sometimes just sat at home drinking, erm... by training harder. So it didn't seem a problem at the time. As you get older and you get a little bit — you don't recover from your injuries as quickly. I went through a couple of big injuries which kept me out for a while. I had 16 weeks out with this (gestures to right arm). I had to have my wrist reconstructed (gestures to left wrist), and during those periods then were when... Like real low periods where I think my behaviour's escalated really.

TB: During those long term injuries, did you find that there was a change in your mental health?

2: Yeah. I kind of withdrew a lot. The fact that I was living on my own allowed me to do that... Because once I'd done the family duties and I'd been and seen the kids and put them to bed, I was back to my own apartment and I was just in my own space. I had a lot of time, there was a lot of thinking, a lot of dwelling. There was a lot of 'what ifs' and I started worrying about the future a lot... Is the word procrastinate?... I started worrying about the future quite a bit, and you know, my career is going to finish. When I do finish is this business that I'm setting up or what I'm planning to set up, is it going to be enough to replicate financially what I've been earning? A big worry for me was that the next career that I went in to I felt — the pressure that I put on myself - I felt that I needed to be as successful and enjoy as much, if not more as my rugby career, because I'm going to be doing it for twice the length of time. That was a pressure I put on myself, rather than just accepting that your career is going to be finishing, erm... accepting that I'd had a good career and there was a lot of transferable skills I could take from that, a lot of experiences that I could use. It was kind of... There was a lot of worrying and a lot of frustration around that time, which again looking back just added to me — to the way I was starting to present and behave myself.

TB: When you were talking about the alcohol issues do you think that, for you that was just a way of coping? Like you said, it was procrastination almost, so do you think it was just something to do?

2: Yeah, it was a time filler. Alcohol really wasn't, it didn't come into play till the back end, in terms of it being an issue. A lot of the — a lot my issues were around prescription drugs as well. I had all these injuries. I came out... I probably had about 3 months where I was just having operation after operation after operation, and when I finally came home I was sent home on morphine. It just didn't agree with me, I couldn't go to the toilet, I was just falling asleep every 2 minutes, scratching to death. I went back to the hospital and I said to the doctors 'look, I cant stay on this stuff, It's having an adverse effect'. They downgraded me, in their terms, to Tramadol. That was the start of this whole kind of new secret life. I used it for everything, I used it to — rather than going out an hour earlier than all the rest of the

guys to warm up and get myself physically prepared for training, it was just easier to stay in the cafe with the guys having a coffee, take four tramadol, let that kick in and you'd just be able to train and then just the cycle started. But then as my career finished, setting up a business, I used them for — to relax me, I used them to get to sleep at night.

TB: Do you think you had started to become dependant on them?

2: Oh yeah. Absolutely yeah. I was using them to — obviously setting up the business, I was going out pitching for work and whatever, and they'd calm me down and I'd be stood in front of 20 or 30 teachers or head teachers as it was, pitching for work just as chilled out as you like. It was just... I was using them for everything that they was prescribed for and what I should have stayed on for maybe 2-3 months, I was on for 3 years. I was taking a phenomenal amount of milligrams come the end of it. Then coupling that with having a drink on top of it. I'd take these as a daily thing, as a routine to train and to relax and do everything else and then maybe have a glass of wine at night and I'd be wondering why I'm fast asleep after... I was never a great drinker, proper shandy pants. You know, half a bottle of wine and I was gone. At the time I didn't know whether I had a drink problem, I didn't know whether I had a drug problem and I didn't know whether it was depression. There was just this three-way cycle going on that I didn't know which ones to start unpicking first. It all came to a head with me, with the partner I was with after... I had about 18 months where I was on my own and met my missus where we — well we split up about 2 years ago. She was getting very close to finding out just how much prescription drugs I was taking and I got to the point where I couldn't stop, but I couldn't tell her. I was in this real catch 22 situation and I just had to move out. As any addict does, he makes an argument up and makes it out to be her fault and I moved in to a cottage in the middle of [confidential] to try and get my head sorted. Again, it just escalated again then because I was on my own. Too much time in my own company and things came to a head where I almost took my own life while I was at that place... That's where that took me. That was my rock bottom, that was like my, kind of my 'you've got to get sorted here'. It was Sporting Chance that I...

TB: I was just about to ask you, during that time did you seek out support?

2: Yeah, it was just one night. She'd been round to see me...

TB: Did you get in touch with them?

2: With Sporting Chance?

TB: Yeah.

2: Yeah. She kind of... She'd give me an olive branch a few weeks before and I'd blown that out of the water and she'd been round to talk to me about it. After she'd gone away it - I started thinking: 'I need to do something about this', and I got in touch with Sporting Chance. I sent them an email, probably about 8 o'clock on a Sunday evening and by 9 o'clock the following morning I was in Leeds in a hotel cafe talking to [BC], telling him my deepest, darkest secrets. I was getting stuff off my chest that I would have never dreamt of talking about. That initial hour just flew past, I just wanted to stay because I was in a flow.

TB: So, you'd never actually had that opportunity before where you felt comfortable enough to speak to someone?

2: Never. Looking back now and thinking if someone had of asked me. Genuinely asked me: 'look you're not right, we can tell something's going on — do you want to talk about?', I think I would have, but nobody ever offered me that platform.

TB: Do you think that's something to do with the 'culture' of professional sport? Or do you just genuinely feel that within that whilst you were playing and then subsequently after, you didn't feel that there was someone you could approach?

2: A bit of both. I think the sport itself had created that environment. Erm... I think... with rugby being such a machismo kind of sport, you're expected to put your body on the line everyday. You're expected to be aggressive. This is one thing I talk about when I do some of my talks for Sporting Chance now, I played my last game of rugby on a Sunday and I was with 30 of my best friends... I was with 30 of my best friends and then the day after I was just sat in house on my own thinking: 'is this it?'. Most of my mates are going to carry on training and playing and carrying on with careers and this is it, this is it for me. That was a scary place, a real scary place. I kind of pushed that to one side with putting my business plans in place and getting that up and running, but all I'd done was kept sweeping it under the carpet and that all came to the fore a couple of years later. I think the sport itself, it just... You don't show weakness at that time. Now, it's a far different ball game altogether, now it's encouraged. You have one-to-ones with your player welfare managers within clubs. If there's stuff you don't want to talk about with your club player welfare manager, you have a club chaplain, we have a central welfare director now at the RFL. You can call her anytime. That environment has changed dramatically, whereas... Where are we now? 7 years ago when I finished, I'd literally gave 12 years of my life to [Rugby Club B] and I got a pat on the back, a 'thanks for your efforts' and off you pop. That in itself has changed dramatically but...

TB: It's almost like a bit of a cliff dive isn't it from this is you playing, to now 'good luck'...

2: Yeah, and like I said I was told everyday of my life to be aggressive. If there's a 50/50 ball do everything you can to come up with it. If somebody's hand's hanging out of a tackle put a stud through it. You're told to be aggressive, you're taught to run as hard as you can at the biggest man and do what you can to him. You don't switch that off from one day to the next. I didn't suddenly take this head off, and put this new head back on and I'm still, then I'm like this loving partner, caring dad. I was all those things because I had to have this face on as well, but it was difficult to — the identity crisis was huge. Your loss of identity, I thought in my head that I could hear this story of; you used to be Paul the rugby player, now I'm just Paul. All my friends are from primary school, everyone in there knew me as Paul, they didn't care that I was a rugby player or not or I wasn't. I'd created this whole scenario in my head which was adding to this whole cycle as well.

TB: So, when we're talking about these 3 points that you've mentioned. The alcohol, the drugs, and the effects of the depression, when did you first realise that this was actually a mental health issue? When was that point where you thought: 'I'm genuinely unwell here and I need to go and seek help'?

2: Erm... probably a good few months before I went to see Sporting Chance. I realised I was taking far too many prescription drugs. Purely because the first time I tried to snap myself off them and basically stop I just felt awful. I can only imagine like a heroin addict and that type of person... They call it the 'rattle' — that wanting something. I tried to white knuckle it for a while and then the whole feeling of flu, being achy and my whole body was aching and I thought: 'This isn't me coming down with something, this is a dependency'.

Then when I tried to log back how long I'd been on these things... I then started to think: 'Well you know what since I've been living on my own or since a certain period of time, I don't think I'd been to bed naturally'. Whether it be having some alcohol in me, a prescription drug in me, a sleeping tablet in me or obviously being on a big night out and then fell asleep at the end of that. Going to bed naturally, like having your meal and just chilling in the house, a bath and bed... Just never happened. I couldn't pinpoint how far I had to go back with that. I'd kind of lost track and I just thought at this point that I'm using this to change the way I'm feeling, and the more I tried to deal with what was going on at the time, the more anxious I got and the more upset I used to get. Erm... It just, I realised then that there's more to this and I need to have a good chat. That's what was great about going seeing Sporting Chance. They started, basically took me back to my childhood and took me back to my relationship with my family, took me back to how I used to feel in school.

TB: How was that?

2: It was tough. It was tough, but it made a lot of sense and I think because I was at my lowest and I'd hit my rock bottom I was open to anything. Erm... The fact that I was able to talk to [BC] the way that I did, we built up a great rapport and he challenged me as well. He wasn't a — he didn't wrap me in cotton wool. He challenged me on stuff and I'd say something and he'd want to know why I'd said that. He'd give me little bits of homework and things to go away and read, and to then relay my interpretation of what I thought that piece meant and then he'd try to relate that back to me. I just started getting a real good knowledge of myself, but of life as well. I'd been in a bubble for 20 years, getting my arse wiped if the truth be known. I'd been — had everything done for me, and the only thing I had to do for myself was my evening meal. Your breakfast, your dinners, your pills, your potions, your proteins, everything was done for you. I didn't have to deal with situations, as such. At that point I'd not lost anybody in my family... I'm glad I was at the point where I was when I did start losing my grandparents and my father got cancer, and things like that because I was in a head space and I had a good level of sobriety and abstinence under my belt to be able to deal with these things. I look now, and the person I was 4-5 years ago was unrecognisable in myself and in my way of thinking, and it's been a huge overhaul, but there's turned out to be a lot of soul searching and a lot of honesty.

TB: If you don't mind me asking as well, because you just touched on your relationship with your family and growing up, could you provide a bit more detail about that please?

2: That was frustrating because it was so idyllic. I had nothing to be anxious or upset about. I had the perfect childhood, I've got a great family, a loving family and there was nothing... I wanted a reason for me to be like this, if that makes any sense? The fact that I couldn't say that I'd been dragged up and I was beaten or abused, all these kind of things. That wasn't a reason for me to be able to say... I was simply down, depressed and now (drug) dependant. That was all self inflicted, in my eyes. That weighed against... well I can't blame anybody else. I'm to blame for everything that I've done here. A lot of it was circumstantial in terms of coming towards the end of my career, but me putting pills in my body and drinking, and things like that...

TB: Do you think before that conversation you were trying to blame others?

2: Of course yeah, absolutely, I was definitely trying to play the victim. It was never my fault, and as I said before I'd get in arguments with my ex so I could get out of the place and made it her fault, just to make me feel better and justify to be doing what I was doing.

My behaviours and my mentality was warped at that point. I couldn't see that because I was either intoxicated or medicated and not dealing with the issues head on, and that's what [BC] made me face up to. Made me address those things you know - Now with this head how would you have dealt with that? Well, it wouldn't have been like that, that kind of thing, do you know what I mean? So my family life itself was... Well my Mum - my parents were distraught to be honest with you. I'd kept it from them for a long, long time and they'd slowly and surely got to know by coming around.

TB: Did you tell them?

2: I told them. Somehow, they knew... When I'd explained to them what I'd been doing and how I'd been doing it, pennies all dropped and everything fell into place. They said as well, that they could totally see that when you said you wasn't doing that, you was. I just remember saying to my partner, my ex-partner and when I came clean to her, because I felt I owed her a huge apology, she just said; 'thank you'. I said, 'well you don't need to thank me because I felt I needed to tell you and be honest with you'. She said, 'oh no I'm not bothered about you being honest with me, I'm thanking you for letting me know that I wasn't going mad'. That hit me hard that. That was tough, it was horrible... It just made me realise what I'd done. I thought I was getting away with stuff and being this smart arse and getting away with stuff, but people knew but they just didn't approach it... They were probably scared of approaching it in case I went off like a can of pop. Like I said, it's unrecognisable compared to now. That's why I do so much of what I do now with the Sporting Chance stuff, with Rugby League Cares and obviously I'm at a prison now working in a recovery unit. I can identify with a lot of these people, giving them some tips and some pointers where they don't have to get to such a dark place, but there's still so much out there, there's still so many people who have still got the same mentality that I had. No matter how much information you give them, people do just have to get to that rock bottom I think...

TB: Before that injury where you got put on the morphine and then you got put on the Tramadol, had you had a few injuries before that?

2: Yeah.

TB: As long term as the one discussed earlier?

2: No I just had little tears here and there, calf tears, hamstrings, few broken fingers and little things...

TB: So, before that injury then had you ever had an injury before you was off maybe 2-3 months, or longer?

2: No.

TB: No? So, this was your first long-term injury where you had been out of the sport for a long period of time?

2: Yeah, but again, everything had gone my way in everything. My family life had been great, my childhood had been great, my career had gone smoothly with no real major injuries that kept on top of myself. I think looking back... And you've maybe just stoked a thought in my head that maybe it did all stem from this first major injury when I was introduced to more of the painkillers... I knew what the painkillers were about with the

Diazepam, and everything else was there but I just took it as and when I was instructed and never abused it. Well, we were way past that after that point but like I said I was using them then as a coping mechanism rather than what they were prescribed for.

TB: Just on coping mechanisms then, did you find many ways of dealing with it outside of the drugs or was it simply thinking; 'this is my only way out from the all pain'? Was there much support from the club to talk to someone, anyone about this?

2: I had close friends, but again, those close friends were still presenting with a similar... Looking back, the traits to me of we all put this brave face on, nobody was showing any weakness and a very banter orientated environment. That little chink in the armour would have been exposed and it would've been laughed off, don't get me wrong, but there's always this little seed kind of ticking over in the back of your brain. There wasn't much, there certainly wasn't very much... Apart from your physio... In my environment, you always felt an outcast when you were injured, but because you wasn't a part of the team you had to train before or after the team. You got your treatment when everybody else who was playing got their treatment because the physio's primary job was to get them on the field of play. If you're not available to play well then we've got no reason to rush you at the moment and you could get treated whenever. So, you were very much an outcast.

TB: So did you still see the team regularly train? You saw them regularly, but you're a separate entity from everyone else?

2: Yeah, and there was a big thing on that if you're injured you don't drink, you don't go out with the guys, you don't socialise in that respect. So, if the guys went out and you were seen to be out with them and you were injured, you'd be getting in the firing line...

TB: Why is that? Is that like you don't deserve it or something?

2: I think with them they were saying that you have to look after yourself. If you're injured, we want you back as soon as you can and if going out is going to hinder that, with drinking and stuff. If you've got tears and bleeds it's quite detrimental to the injury, so they made it something that was frowned upon if you were judged to be out drinking, plus you've not really played to warrant one. That for me then was probably - I'd go off and do it on my own and drink with my friends from home, school friends or I'd have a drink in the house with my missus and I wouldn't say anything about it. These whole little, secretive things start then.

TB: Do you think that was just you or do you think that would've been going on quite regularly?

2: I thought it was just me at the time. Looking back now it's such common place.

TB: Do you think that's probably affected you in some way then, if at the time you did think it was just you?

2: Hmmm... Yeah, yeah... At the time if you were the only one who was a long term injury, then you kind of felt on your own anyway. Yeah, yeah I think I did... Being injured and being in that environment just created a lonely, lonely place. But also, everything else kicks in, so, who's got your position and who's got your spot. So the anxiety kicks in as well; 'am I gonna get my spot back?', 'what if the kid does a better job than me and they don't want me?', 'I've got a year left on my contract'...

TB: So all these other variables are creeping into your mindset whilst you're injured?

2: And if you've got that self-doubt in yourself, you know, I may have always been one of the first names on the team sheet, but over time the team was named I had to hold my breath thinking; 'Is he gonna say my name?'... Deep down I knew I'd be picked but I'd never taken my position in the squad for granted, I loved what I did and I respected what I did at the time. Erm... I still had this self-doubt and maybe that's just my own trait really. That itself forced a lot more anxiety on me and because I didn't have coping strategies and mechanisms back then at the time, it was how do I change the way I'm feeling? I'll do this and I'll do this.

TB: Would you say you saw the physio more so than anyone else in the club at that point?

2: Yeah, and that's where a lot of my roles since I've finished within welfare within the clubs at governing body level is, you know, you may have a player welfare manager, but that welfare manager needs to have a few kind of confidants within the club, and I've said well there's nobody better suited to that position than a physio. A physio has you on a one-to-one basis when everyone else is out training, you're in there. You do open up a little bit, you talk to these guys. I was lucky that the physio that I had was a female and she was just a nice girl who was... She had a sympathetic ear and I'd probably told her a lot more than I would've told anybody else, but I still didn't give her the full truth. I didn't tell her everything else, that just stayed completely within me, but I identified with the fact that she probably knew more about me than anybody else in that club, because of the time I spent with her. I've tried to say these physios need to be brought into the welfare side of the sport, just purely because of the nature of what they do. I think that is kind of coming forward a little bit now.

TB: Do you think there should be an element of, or some level of mental health training qualification for these types of staff?

2: I think staff across the board. I think all staff, because all staff have a part to play within that and they all spend time with the players on an individual basis, whether it be on a video session or outside doing some one-to-one kicking and tackle technique, or physio and getting treatment, or just basically sitting down and having a chat with your coach. I think all — everybody there should get some sort of training, whether it's the mental health first aid training, which is a more of a looking out for warning signs and the traits, you know the typical signs so that they can signpost... I think everybody, they've all got a part to play in that, and it's just who kind of coordinates that and who heads that up. It might be the physio who sits right up there really.

TB: What was your perception of mental health whilst you were playing? Did you understand what it was whilst you were playing?

2: No, no, certainly not.

TB: Why do you think that is?

2: It just wasn't talked about, it just wasn't...part of our DNA at the time, kind of, our vocabulary. You know, mental toughness was talked about, being resilient and being able to play through adversity. Coming back from being 10-0 down at half time to win a game. That type of mental toughness — mental health was talked about, but the other side when

somebody was struggling, people didn't take... Well, our coaches certainly didn't take into consideration. When I was going through the divorce, I was still expected to — it was leave, you leave your home life at home and then you come to work. You don't mix the two and it was very old school. Whereas now I think a lot of clubs like to see that. People who have got their off-field life sorted, then their on-field performances can flourish because they focus. You know, I use an example when I do my talks, if I left the house in a morning and I'd been up early, took the dog for a walk, we'd had breakfast as a family, I'd give my missus a kiss and a cuddle to the kids, I'd get in the car with a smile on my face, put my favourite music on and I was thinking about the game, thinking about my role within the game and what I've got to do that on that day... I'd go to training with a smile on my face, I'd get in the changing room, my preparation would go well and 9 times out of 10 I'd have an all right game. If I'd left the house in a morning under a bit of a cloud, if me and my missus have had a bit of an argument, the kids were nowhere to be seen and they were rushing to get their shoes or whatever it was, shouting... I'd be in the car thinking; 'why's she said that? I shouldn't have said this...' and before I know it I'm three quarters of the way there and I've not had my music on. I get into the stadium still wondering why, mithering about what she said and I'd be playing catch up then trying to get myself into that routine and my game would be erratic and my game would be a bit off-key. I think that routine and all that is so important. I got that sort of mentality towards the end of my career because I started getting these little techniques and stuff, but it was just a tough environment back then. Like now they realise you've got to look after the families, show your wife's in a good place and she's being looked after during the game and they're not moaning... They look at that off-field side of things now, which I think is important.

TB: Absolutely yeah. That was your perception before, how do you think this has changed over time to your understanding of mental health now? What do you think has improved in clubs and what do you think still needs to improve?

2: In my sport in general it's improved 100%. They do so much around mental health awareness now. Unfortunately, I lost a friend back in... 7 years ago — [NT], he took his own life, and that's when a mental health charity, or initiative was born called State of Mind. Erm... That was on the back of him and they realised that there was so many other people who had been struggling and they didn't want to lose anymore. We've lost quite a few since, but still the awareness has been eased and clubs really buy into this now and they're made to have mental health awareness days.

TB: So, it's a part of a pre-requisite that they've got to do these sessions?

2: They do yeah. As part of the Rugby League... The governing body give each club, before the season starts, and they get given all these stipulations as to where you've got to spend the money, and certain criteria that you've got to hit and part of that within the welfare criteria is you've got to have seminars on all these different issues and mental health is a huge part of that.

TB: Do they target all age groups? Or do they just specifically target one age group?

2: Well, at first the funding was quite low and it was just aimed straight at the first team, straight at the guys who were probably under more pressure at the club than most. But that now goes straight down to grassroots. I've done presentations for Under-12's straight the way through to [Rugby Club C] first team. So it is game wide now. It's just gathering momentum every year within our sport. I know football do a lot, I do quite a bit with Sporting Chance and I've done some stuff with State of Mind in football. You know, Clarke

Carlisle recently... Well Clarke did quite a few talks with us at Sporting Chance and when I'd saw the tweet that he'd gone missing again it made my heart sink, because we've had some good talks and some good chats about things... It just shows that, when you think somebody's got a lid on something and got it round it can happen, and if you're not in a position where you can talk to somebody at that point. I just think every sport needs, just keep on it. It's not a box you can just tick and we've done this now, it's a program and you have to keep going with it. There needs to be regular contact with everyone also when you come out of the sport because that's when you lose that network. You lose that, especially now when they've had a taste of it within clubs and you're getting looked after, you've got that one-to-one session where you go and offload to somebody and you've got to talk about your feelings. You know, a lot of clubs at rugby now they've got these apps and they're kind of mood scale apps, and they have to be filled in on a daily basis and submitted. Should your scales be falling into the worrying categories, you're called in and asked if everything is okay, you know, do you want talk about anything? You don't have to but it's flagged up and your mood and behaviours are monitored.

TB: Are players, from what you've found, generally honest about it as well?

2: Erm...Some are. Some are, and it's generally someone, a player who's been through a bit of adversity himself and he's probably had that part where he's had nobody to talk to and now they've got the opportunity to and they're thinking; 'well if I would have had it then I would've used it, so I'm going to use it now.', So I think everybody taps into it at different times. That's what I'm saying, because once they've had a taste of it (support & counselling), once you've come out of the sport and you lose that, that's where I think the sports have to do more now on the transitioning players.

TB: So you think that's probably the major area? Those players going into retirement need that greater mental health support, and that guidance?

2: Don't get me wrong not everyone that retires will suffer with mental health issues or poor mental health. Some have just got better mental health than others, so it's a service or it's a...System, something to be there that is available to everybody should they need it, and people need to be identified. If I was to leave the club having presented over the last 3 years of my contract that I had issues, I'd struggled and there'd been a few alcohol related incidents or a few long term injuries, then that shouldn't be just left there, it should then be passed on to whatever your after care is. I feel that should be monitored and that should be managed in an appropriate manner as well. That's exactly what I didn't get, that's why I've said I'm quite passionate about the transition mentor role I have with the RFL and doing the talks, it's trying to give players what I never got, which was you know, if you are struggling you do this or you speak to these or go and talk to them, or this guy's been through something you're struggling with at the moment, I think you should have a chat to him. None of that. Nothing. It's getting better, but I just think there's still so much more to go, but it's such a complex...There's no blueprint to mental health, there's so many different levels. Anybody who's got a story, anybody who's suffered, or anybody who's been there and come through the other side needs to be encouraged to voice. You won't strike a chord with everybody but you'll touch somebody, and if you can help that one person then I think it's job done, you're doing what it says. I just think that transition part it needs a lot of, a lot more care than when you're playing, I really do.

TB: Do you think players would benefit by getting that knowledge and education at a young age, looking at grassroots? Educating them on this is what mental health can look like, these are general signs, symptoms, etc. Do you think that would benefit them?

2: Yeah, I think whilst you're playing it's more of an awareness raising, it's more of a signposting; if you're presenting this condition, or these symptoms, this is where you go and this is who you talk to. Erm... As you come through the back end of it then I think it should be more around dealing with it. If you know what I mean? It's that when it'll start flagging up when I said I'd finished it was only looking back where I could see these little pinpoints in my career, I didn't deal with that well and when that happened, what did I do? Well, when I did that, this happened. If I'd have known what to do and who to speak to I could have probably cut off this back end...

TB: Have you just got an example of that, of what you mean when you're pinpointing the signs?

2: Well this... (Points to arm).

TB: Your injury yeah?

2: Yeah, my injury. If I'd have been, felt like I was more involved in the club — given a role, even if I wasn't playing on a match day and I was given a role in corporate or given a role helping out coaching or mentoring one of the young kids, that maybe would've opened my mind to 's**t, if this injury finishes me what do I do?', I was just sat there on a physio bed, but if I'm then signposted to one of the young academy players — he's your position, you've played for twenty years, mentor him, give him some tips and show him what to do. I might then have thought: 'Oh I really fancy going into coaching', or 'I really fancy going into the managerial side of things or going into sport psychology side of things'. Unless you're given opportunities to be involved or to use some of your transferable skills, you're never going to know. A lot of players it's the anxiety and the worry of finishing that stems a lot of the anxiety and the depression, which leads on to the drinking and the drugs, and it's just trying to mask everything. I think with me that was a good example. Had I expressed how concerned I was that I may never come back from this, erm... What am I going to do? Or who am I going to talk to? Rather than just saying: 'yeah I'll be back, I'll be fine', and then going home and falling to pieces...

TB: Was that straight after the injury as well you started to feel like that? The anxiety and the stress?

2: Kind of yeah because it was the first game of the year that I'd — and it was the last year of my contract. Obviously having sixteen weeks out, four months out of a seven month season as it was at the time. Erm... I was like, am I ever going to get back from this and when I realised I was getting close to coming back, the mental side of things, well - I've absolutely shattered this, the bone's come out. How can I throw this arm into another tackle? How can I put this out and let somebody land on it, and what if goes again? So I had that side of things, so I went and did sport hypnotherapy and I did a lot mind stuff to get myself into a positive mental attitude type stuff. I did a load of work on that. Erm... So, I'd done a lot of work on myself but...

TB: It's to do in the sport...

2: Yeah, it was all to do within the sport, not on how to deal with life. I think that's where we need to take the blinkers off a little bit within sport. If you get someone who's a more rounded individual on and off the field, I think you'll get a better individual on the field because... Some guys in America, I did some reading a bit back, called Miller and Kerr? I

think they were called? They did this study on athletes and sportsman in America who had business interests and they'd got their degree or their masters out of the way, who were financially secure half-way through their careers or early in their career while their careers were just taking off because the pressure and the focus wasn't just wholly on the sport, they could concentrate wholly on being the best athlete they could be, knowing that hang on if I snap my leg tomorrow I've still got earning potential, earning power and I've still got a career ahead of me because I've got this business, I've got this degree and this, this and this.

TB: I thought that was interesting what you said earlier, that if you had started your business a couple of years earlier you probably would've felt a lot more...

2: A lot more secure, a lot more secure in myself as well. You know, I felt... I probably partied hard, but trained even harder because I knew it was my bread and butter, and if I wasn't fit, I wouldn't get paid, I can't take the kids on holiday, I've got a mortgage. Whereas if I didn't have that side of — and I had the other focus and rugby would've just been my pass time, it would have been something I got paid well for, but if it goes tomorrow then there's no anxiety or worry of that. Yeah I would've been gutted that it didn't go the way I'd planned but hang on let's put your focus into this now, which is then going to continue your earning potential.

TB: Do you think there's almost a greater need within sport that in the latter half of athlete's careers to implement a strategy or procedure that put more of an emphasis on funding to enable athletes to look at doing a degree, or look at a business venture, go out and find something...?

2: I don't even think they should be waiting until the end, just start as early as, or as soon as they sign. Maybe don't get them thinking straight away about setting up a business and doing a degree but let's have a look at what you're doing. I know football do it well with the scholars and they have to be doing some sort of education, but be encouraging them. But then recognising that not everybody is academic, not everybody will be able to go and do a — have the application or the attitude to do a degree. People may be more hands on, let's have a look at them and put them on joinery course or put them into a building environment. They might want to set their own building firm up when they finish, who knows. Have that level of understanding for that individual that this is what makes him tick and what he's good at, let's put him down that route as well and let's be a supportive environment that, you know... Let's see who wants to be a builder, a master builder; who in the club is one of our sponsors to help the master builder? Why don't we pair up that player with that company and that company is getting a lot more for their 10, 20 grand they're putting in the club as a sponsorship deal and the player's benefitting as well? He's getting a first team player who's coming up into their offices once, twice a week and learning how it's going on, they get a star in their business that everybody can talk to and pick their brain on the game before, and he's getting some vital experience. He might get to 25 and think: 'maybe it's not for me, I don't want to be getting beat up everyday for the rest of my career and still be able to play with my kids when I'm 32 and not give them an excuse for this, that and the other'. They might want to play semi-pro and put all their efforts into... The club I feel have to give them that opportunity.

TB: Do you think that would be a major preventative measure of a mental health issue if they had that opportunity?

2: I do. I don't think the player themselves would feel like they were just a piece of meat then or just a number. As long as I turn up myself and perform that club will be happy with me. If I turn up and I've got a good news story off the field as well as on the field, surely I'm bringing more to the club and I'm a more rounded individual then they're not going to have me coming into the office on a Monday morning saying; 'look I got arrested on Saturday', or you know, this happened on a Saturday... For me that's probably the nth extreme, but for me if you've got a more rounded individual, they're going to be a better sportsman, they're going to be a better advocate for your club and a better role model. That's what I kind of try to say to the clubs and the guys now, that yeah rugby's what you're paid for, but you don't put as much pressure on yourself, well, let's have a look at other things that are going on. You've got to be able to take your mind off stuff, you've got to... I don't think there's enough of that going on to be honest with you.

TB: Do you think there's too much emphasis on this 'we pay you to play, all your focus and energy has to go into this' but then when you're finished with that, they don't want to know you then?

2: The clubs won't admit that and they'll pretend that they've got this big, warm, fluffy arm around the players, but ultimately that coach... he's hired and fired on results and if that player, or them players aren't performing on a week-in-week-out basis and they're losing, then he's going to lose his job. So, he might say that he's caring and he's got your best interests at heart but ultimately he wants you to turn out every week and play the best you can. I think sometimes it's narrow minded to think it can only be done by cracking the whip at training and getting people as fit as they can and as focused as they can on the game. They've got to be given time off, they've got to be given down time, they've got to be encouraged to go and spend time with families. If they need some days off, go and take some days off. They should take a few more leaves out of industry now, because it is a business, those players are your office staff and they should be treated as such I think. A sportsman has got to the level he is because he's got his own drive as well, he's got his own level of standards that he wants to attain and sometimes they don't need — that can be beaten out of you sometimes by becoming just a bit of a soldier. That's what I think...

TB: Do you think that's potentially where a lot of stigma is attached with mental health? That there is a weakness associated with it, and that's why a lot of people are possibly reluctant to come and open up and wait until they retire?

2: Yeah definitely, you know, if I thought I'd go to my coach and I said; 'listen, me and my missus are splitting up and my head's not in this at all at the minute', and he'd said; 'all right, look, take 2-3 weeks off and get your head sorted and get yourself sorted. We'll have a chat about it after that'. There's going to be 3 games in between that period. There are 3 games that I'm not going to be playing and that's 3 games that someone else is going to come in, and if that person comes in and plays to a standard that they feel they don't need me or he's a better option than I am, how am I going to get back in?

TB: There's so much more involved than just it being a weakness. You're thinking about your personal life, your place in the team, and am I going to get sold as a result of that?

2: And are my team mates going to have trust in me? If they think I'm a weak link, are they going to pin that loss or that error in play, are they going to put that down to me because I've told them I've got this issue? All these variables kick in and a lot of them start like that (gestures small with finger and thumb), but by the time they've played out, they're like this (gesture with arms apart) in your head. 9 times out of 10 none of that's true but you do jus

fabricate all these things because it's such a dog eat dog environment, and it's such a competitive environment, and your own competitiveness - you'd know yourself that if someone was to come and say this to you back in the day, you'd have seen that as a little weakness and you'd have thought you'd got the jump on them then. What we're talking about now is probably everything that I've thought as well at the time. It's just the environment it creates, but it is slowly changing. We are getting players now from my era who are now becoming head coaches, so they've had a taste of this and they know what it's like to just be a piece of meat and you just perform at all costs, I don't want to know about your family life, you leave that in the car and when you get out, you train. That's going a little bit now.

TB: Right okay, good. I was going to ask do you think there is a danger of that perpetuating a cycle or do you think actually, because the players have gained knowledge of mental health, they're now able to pass that on and processes are being developed?

2: It is getting better. It's got a long way to go but it is changing, purely because of the generation of people coming through. Like I said, my age group, a head coach of my age in Super League is very young and we've got two or three lads who I played with are head coaches and they've had their issues themselves. I know their environment when I've been into their clubs is quite caring and a lot... Don't get me wrong he'll still try and put his peacock feathers up a bit, and you get out there and you do this, but off the field it's about them guys are better managers I feel now. You know which person needs a bollocking and which player needs an arm around him, and when to do it. It's not right to give them that bollocking in front of the rest of the squad, take them to the side or ring them later on and things like that. It's all getting a lot better.

TB: You're seeing that these steps are being made. Where do you think, in your opinion, the stigma attached to mental health in sport comes from? From an outsider looking in, it seems like there is a dark cloud over the term...

2: I think as a sportsman it goes back to like I said before you know, you're seen as this... Somebody that people are looking up to. Although I think it's a societal problem, and it's a male problem. If you're a male sportsman, you've kind of got more of an ego, you're in the public eye, you're looked up to, they see you as warriors or these kind of... Some of these footballers are seen as immortals and what have you. You probably play up to that a little bit and to feel like you're showing a bit of weakness, are they going to see me as not the person that they thought I was and I think that itself adds a little bit more pressure because you're in the limelight. From someone who suffered as I did, and I look back now and I see these players who are at the top of the game and still come out and talk about it, I think it is so commendable. I just wish more would do it because they're then setting an example to the kids then. It is okay to talk, it is okay to show some emotion, it is okay to not feel good all the time, it's okay to not be okay, as they say. The more that they can do that, then the new cohort of players that come through will come through with that mentality again then. I'm not saying they're all going to be these emotional wrecks but they'll be in touch with themselves and what's right and what's wrong, when you're feeling like this, this is what happens and if I'm going to be feeling like that then I should go and speak to somebody. It kind of breaks them barriers I think.

TB: It's like you said earlier, just having that bit more self-awareness and knowing yourself better, knowing what can bring you down and what can pick you back up, etc.

2: That's one thing that I'm very glad about now is that I know my triggers. When I used to feel like this, that happened, but when I did that, this was the consequence, so I can nip that in the bud now and I have coping strategies. Whereas if I feel like this, I can take myself off and I can do this, or I'll go and speak to this person, or I'll go out with the kids... You know I get ruined off some of my mates for some of the things I use. I go to the Buddhist centre in [confidential] twice a week now. I'm not a practicing Buddhist, but I like the mediation side of it. It just calms my head down. So, when I feel like I've got a lot going on at work or I've had a busy week in terms of having to fly here, there and everywhere to do presentations and stuff going on in the prison, and I'm off to do my mental health talks. To offload and I need a few days where — and I'll just go, I'll just have the hour in there. It's just a calming environment, some nice, interesting people in there and I'll go and sit and have a coffee with them and then we'll go upstairs and it's just mindfulness. We'll do an hour of mindfulness, its guided, which I like because I can't do it at home on my own. You just sit there and you come out feeling chilled and it just sort of restarts me again. I'll do that and I'll do a lot of walking and stuff these days and it's just finding something that gives me the pleasure I had when I was playing, and it's taken me a long time to get to that. I thought it had to be something that was as fast and frenetic and physical as the rugby, and it couldn't be any different with some of the stuff I get up to.

TB: I think that's really interesting because when you were discussing earlier about when you first had your injury, you used the drugs and alcohol as your coping mechanisms and now your routine has changed in such a positive way.

2: I can see how my kids have opened up a bit more now because they can see that I'm open. I can sit there and I'm a bloody emotional wreck sometimes. Somebody gets a new kitchen on DIY SOS and I'm balling my eyes out and the kids see that. They like that and they'll take the mick out of me for it, but they know it's okay to show their emotions, and they know it's okay to have a bad day and feel a little bit emotional about something. For me that's progress and for me that's setting a good example because hopefully they're able to not bottle things up. They're teenagers now and it's a horrible time for them being teenagers. I know what it's like, you're full of hormones and what have you, but no, life is completely different from where I was... Again, it could be changing. It could change again, because I'm always looking for something else and I'm always looking to do different things and push myself mentally these days rather than physically. It's mentally that... You know physically I could switch my head off and just train and train and train, but as soon as I stopped you know that thing (points to head) kicked in. Whereas now this (points to head) is always going, but in the right way. This allows everything else to be okay. If my head's all right, but nothing else is then that's the most important thing for me these days.

TB: Would you say that's probably one of the key aspects of introducing this into grassroots level players, who are coming through this system and getting them to engage their brains, developing themselves and training them on mental health and educating them outside of the sport?

2: Yeah definitely...

TB: Are we then trying to develop holistic people as well as players then?

2: Absolutely yeah. Definitely. Rugby is great example of the different eras. Rugby used to be a beer swilling — you played hard and you partied hard. There was nothing in between and the overlap used to fall into family life and it was known that if you played rugby you went out and got pissed. You went out and you socialise, whereas now it's a far more

family orientated sport and that's kind of gone by-the-by... I know sport in general has anyway because it's gone a lot more professional, but it's completely changed on its head. The more rounded an individual they've got, the better a clubman they've got then.

TB: Just one more question for you then. What do you think, in your opinion, would be the best way to help reduce the stigma attached to mental health in sport?

2: It's education. Education and knowledge around it... And, having people who are prepared to stand up and talk and who will flick switches with other sportsman. If I stand up and talk to a room of twenty first team rugby players, I guarantee at the end I'll say; 'has anyone got any questions for me?' and they'll all give you a 'no, no, no, no, happy with everything', but then as I drive away I'll get at least 3-4 text messages or emails saying; '[PH], when you was talking about that situation, I'm doing that now', or 'when you felt like that, that's how I'm feeling, can I have a chat with you or can I meet up and have a coffee?'. You'll always flick a switch with somebody, so with more education we can put out there and the more awareness raising - I don't think the awareness raising can stop, because it's changing all the time and situations are getting more complex. People's conditions are getting more complex, so the more people who are prepared to talk about it, the better. It's across sport, you know, we had a guy in the other day, he's called One-Eyed Steve or something on Twitter and he's an ex-serviceman who got shot in the head; survived, but he's lost his sight, his pallet fell out, he's had his face reconstructed and there's an interview that he's done with a five-year old, or an eight-year old girl...

TB: Oh yeah, I've seen that...

2: Have you seen it yeah? Well, he did a talk for us the other week and just things like that put it in perspective. It couldn't be more far removed from sport the battlefield, but then he talks about how he's so grateful for his life and for what he's got, and he never gets up in a morning and feels sorry for himself anymore because two of his mates lost their lives in that same gun fight and he's still here. He puts things in to perspective and I think loads of things like that need to keep coming in to players. Not to beat them down, but to give them that little bit of...(fades off).

TB: Almost grounding them a bit?

PH: Yeah. Definitely.

TB: That's great, thank you very much for all your help - I really appreciate it.

PH: No, no, not at all. I'm glad to help.

End of Interview.

Participant 3 Interview Transcript

Key: TB - Interviewer.

3 - Participant.

[] - Pseudonyms in square brackets.

TB: First of all could you just detail your sporting career please? Starting from when you first started playing, right through to when you retired from the sport.

3: Certainly yeah. So I started playing for [MC] when I was nine years of age and I played for nursery teams because when I was playing there wasn't academies or centre of excellencies in those days. So I was played for, kind of, nursery teams, and they had these different league names, and you had to have a name to be part of a league structure. Even though everyone seemed to know you were associated with [MC], so I was with teams that were called [BS], then it was [NP], you name it [MI], all these different names but I played with players like [SR] — who went and played for the first team at [MC] — from 10 years of age. I was with [AH] from 4 years of age. The I signed schoolboy forms when I was 14 with [MC] and I signed a YTS, a one-year YTS apprenticeship when I was 16. I was in [MC]'s first team before I was 18. From playing in the A-team and the reserves on a regular basis and then I made my debut at Wimbledon and I played over 110 league games, with cup games, etc. it got to about 130 games and then I had a severe anterior cruciate ligament rupture to my right knee and I had a secession of injuries and operations. I spent nearly five years trying to get back fully fit and I retired before I was 26, so I was 25 when I retired. That was the end of my career.

TB: During your sporting career, how do you feel your personal life progressed alongside it? Do you feel one suffered more than the other, or do you feel that was quite smooth throughout?

3: Well, because I come from such a background — a family-orientated background with lots of love and support in that environment. It was quite grounded my background, so there wasn't this kind of, complete contrast in my lifestyle. When I finished playing at [MC], I used to get the bus back to my Mum's in [Confidential], so, you know, there's nothing more of a leveller than when you get back from playing in a reserve game when you've been star man and your Dad says for you to go and put the bins out. You know, that's what it was like. Two brothers and two sisters, I've got a twin sister as well and we were close and we chatted. I had friends — I always felt uncomfortable with all of that because I was quite a nervous younger man and I had a bit of a stammer. There was a nervousness in terms of speaking to people, so I was quite introverted really in terms of my personality and I did all my talking on the grass. Off the grass I was as quiet as a church mouse, didn't speak. Then there came a point where you had to stand up and be counted and you had to come out of your shell. I'd already been made captain when I was 19, which shows you that — [HK] was the manager, so he dragged it out of me kicking and screaming, because I didn't want to be that person. In terms of managing my personal life and my working life it was quite an easy transition. I suppose it was a bit awkward and uncomfortable when you're put in the limelight so to speak. Either pieces in the paper or people stopping you in the street now and again saying 'oh you're doing this' and 'you're doing that', and 'can you come and do this presentation', that — I do it, because people have asked me and you felt obliged to help people out, but I never felt comfortable with that. Even when I was in the first team and I was made captain, it still didn't sit particularly well with me, I still found it

quite difficult. My sanctuary was my personal life just to get out of it and just to get out of the way.

TB: In terms of your transition from playing, and then with your injury into retirement, how do you think this went for you? It sounds like the decision was quite clearly forced upon you?

3: It was, it was a forced decision. It was managed abysmally...

TB: Why is that?

3: You see, my frustrations are that everyone talks about things being 'of a time'. Like sexism and racism and all those things. Oh it was at that time and it was what you said in those days... People have always known that it was the right or the wrong thing to do and they were the wrong decisions to make. You treat people how you want to be treated and I was left to my own devices to be honest with you. The reason I have such an angst and an anger towards the old chairman, who has died, was because of the way he ran the club. There was one sports therapist, there wasn't a chartered sports physiotherapist at the time. There was a sports therapist who ran the club on the cheap. There was one person ahead of 40 players... That's the first team players, the reserve players and the young players, and even the injured players when you was at schoolboy you had to go and see this guy and he just wasn't qualified. No where near good enough. He could sort out your swelling, and he could sort out a bad bruise...

TB: Soft tissue injuries?

3: Anything soft tissue was a breeze for most people to be honest with you, but anything that was a little bit more intricate or more involved, he was really poor. To give you an example, when I first did my ACL everyone knew that there was a national rehabilitation centre over at Lilleshall, but it was more long-term because of the nature of football and the fact that some clubs were medically very poorly, you could send your players to Lilleshall. There was chartered physiotherapists but you could all work together in Shropshire and you could leave it to the guys — well qualified people — to look after your players, your investments. Let's put it like that shall we... Now, when I had this knee injury, they've got three physios there that are specialists and you've got other chartered physios across the country, so instead of our physiotherapist saying 'we've got this lad, who's one of our best players and he's captain, and he's been in the World Cup training squad in 1990, we could potentially as a worst case scenario lose him to a bigger club for £5million', which at that time is the equivalent to around £25-£30million now. What do I do? Do I find out who's the best person to go and see and go and see him straight away? No, you go and see a guy who's based in Manchester, who's not done a single professional sportsperson. I go and see this guy twice and because it's a new technique that this guy introduces, there's no protocol in terms of the rehabilitation, so the consultant dictates the rehabilitation. After 3 months of no real twisting or turning, no rotation, this guy says I'm ready to go on the football pitch. The physios at Lilleshall are guided by this guy, I go on the pitches, first day, first session and within 15 minutes re-rupture my knee...Back in again. So, a—ll of that hard work and all of that stresses and strains has all fallen away. Now, at the time I'm barely getting a phone call off [MC], and that's how it was. When I come back to the club for my rehabilitation...

TB: How did that make you feel?

3: Awful. Awful. I'd gone from being up there, gone from being the captain, to being on my... Robson, bless his soul had got me down as the next England captain, that's what he told our manager. I'm ten foot tall and I'm starting the season as captain and I'm excited and my career is going only one way. Within two and a half games it seemed to have ended within that moment. I would not to have known that my support after that point would have been so... despicably amateurish, and uncaring. As a person and as a man of football and as a human being to be treated that way. To be ignored, to be shunned, to be dragged in to watch games... To be erm, the go to person to do a lottery at 3 in the afternoon on a Friday when I'm back. When I'd come back from Lilleshall where I'd had structured rehabilitation to come back to a club where I would go to the physio room and I'd be told 'well you can go to the gym'. So I'd go to a gym by myself, a gym in Cheadle, which is like a local gym. I'd then go back to the club with a bag of ice on my knee and then that'd be it until the following day. There was no structure, no support mechanisms. No one sat me down and asked me 'how're you doing? How're you coping with things?' I had a mortgage to pay, I had a career that was going down the pan. My life revolved around rehabilitation. I had no social life, I didn't have a lot of money anyway because the contract I signed wasn't a great contract, but that didn't make any difference. I only wanted to play football. My dream was slowly diminishing before my very eyes and no one had anything to say to me or any kind of support, any kind of guidance or help, or even to give me 10 minutes of their time. It got to a stage where it was that bad that I wasn't sleeping, I'd come back, I'd go to Lilleshall and I'd be sleeping alright there to be fair, I had a structure there, I was working so, so hard to try and get back fit. I'd been the forgotten man at [MC], I'd come back to games on a Saturday and the players don't know what to say to me, they wouldn't know how to deal with me. I'd be asked about how my knee was about 50-60 times by fans and staff, who meant well — I mean like stewards and the restaurant staff, but it got to the stage where everything was, my life was so narrow... If I wasn't a footballer I was nothing. I was a piece of meat. That's how I was made to feel.

TB: The club made you feel like that?

3: The club made me feel like that and even the press and papers... 'Injury jinxed', 'crooked'. These are the words they put before your name, so all of a sudden you've gone from being a potential England captain to 'crooked footballer', 'crooked' or 'injury prone'. When I played at [MC] I wore every shirt number apart from the goalkeeper's. On a Friday I'd get told I'm playing left back tomorrow, and I'd play left back. Not blowing my own trumpet but I'd be as good as the left back who was there full time. If I was playing right back, centre half, centre midfield, centre forward, right wing, left wing, I would play that position and I will be as good, as impactful as the players who play there on a regular basis — I could do that, and I'm not being big-headed by saying that but I knew that I could do that. So on a Saturday all I'd get told was 'you're picking this person up and on set pieces you're marking this person on corners' and that's all they'd need to tell me and I'd go and play. I was brave where other players would crumble at the thought of doing that in front of 30-40,000 fans. I could do that, no problem. I'll pull a shirt on, I'll put my head down and I'll put my foot in. I'll do whatever you want me to do. I'll play. So I was brave but as soon as I wasn't — I was weak, I was injury prone, I was, you know, I wasn't working hard enough, I got 'why is it Alan Shearer got back fit from your injury? But yours hasn't got back fit?' Well...because those guys went to see the people that was recommended by Lilleshall and the experienced staff in the Premier League, and you didn't pick up a phone to find out who I should go and see, but you wanted to save money and send me to some guy around the corner who had no experience and when my knee went the second time, and because of all the trauma to my knee then I went to America and it was too late. That

was because [PR] who had a bad knee injury basically bullied the club into sending me there and the players' pool paid for my flights there and back. Can you believe that?

TB: So the club wouldn't even finance it?

3: That's how I was made to feel. In terms of my self worth you could imagine I was as low as the carpet, I was flat as a pancake. I even went to the states and flew there in business class with the physio, and when I came to fly back I was economy class.

TB: After an operation as well?

3: I was left on my own for five days in America on crutches, getting to and from a rehabilitation centre. Then just sat in a hotel for five days... On my own, with no support. I had some guy from the evening news who I knew had slagged me off and caned me, and used the 'crooked' and the 'injury prone' and this, that and the other, and 'you can't be relied upon'. This clown comes out to try and do an interview with me and I blanked him, I give him 15 minutes and I binned him. He went to me 'I'll meet you in the bar afterwards' and I wasn't even wanting to waste 2 seconds of my own time wasted with you. This is what they were like, they've got no self awareness these people. This is how the whole thing was dealt with. I had no self worth, my identity was — If I wasn't a professional footballer then I wasn't even worth speaking with or talking to or even you know, making time for. That's how I was made to feel, and in the end it got to a stage where I was that low I wasn't sleeping at all, I was walking all night. I was counting steps, just counting. I'd walk at 2-3 in the morning, put my hood up and I'd just walk and I'd walk in the dark by myself. Just ruminating and all this anger and frustration, all this anxiety, and all the guilt as well. What I've not said to you is my dream was that my family didn't have much and I was given more support than my brothers and sisters were to brutally honest with you and especially my sisters they got their noses pushed out just because of the nature of having to get training and having to get to games, it was a commitment to play every weekend. They didn't get a look in and I always felt guilty about that. I thought if I can make it as a professional footballer and get a better contract and do really well, I can pay off my sisters' mortgages, and my brothers' mortgages, and my family; I can look after everybody. That would give me so much pride and so much satisfaction that I was able to help them but I got injured and I didn't have anything. Not only could I not support them, but I felt guilty about that... They didn't ask that of me, they would never have dreamt of that but that was how I felt; I carried guilt around with me, frustration and a longing that I wasn't going to play again. What was I going to do next? How was I going to get a career for myself? What life would I have? How fulfilled would I be in the future? I've gone from having that adulation from playing in front of 40,000 fans, being made captain for a team I supported as a kid, it doesn't get much better than that. What's next? So, I fell off a cliff. I didn't just drop off the bed, I fell off the cliff. That's how bad it was. I had depression, I had anxiety, I went into the priory and I spent months at the priory. I was on medication for a year. I suffered badly... The thing is when you've had depression and you've spoke about your Father, you have coping mechanisms and you know when things are coming on, you know when you're struggling with things, and you have coping strategies to take yourself out of the situation to give yourself a day or a couple of days or to have some quiet time, or to find something which you know will give you that escape from life. You know, I might go for a 10-mile walk and that'll just clear the air, give me focus, give me that mindfulness and find some process where I can strategise and I can plan what I'm going to do and when I'm going to do it, how that's going to make me feel and then go and speak to the right people; my wife, my friends, and I can come back to a level where I'm fine and I can push on now. You do that quite comfortably in your head, and I've done that over the years and

I've managed that but at that time it was me literally going to see the club GP, who was part time, I'd fall into his office and I'd just basically break it down. Is there anything to be done? On the back of that I went to the priory and then the PFA supported me as well with that. I had that support from that moment onwards to a degree. I still felt embarrassed; I still felt though that I should be here, but I had to be here and yet I knew I needed it. My relationship with my wife at the time fell apart, we had a child when we were young: [confidential]. Erm, we now — our relationship is fantastic and it has been. I remarried and we've got two children with my second wife, but [confidential], he's always been a part of my life, all the way through and I've never stopped seeing him. Been a part of his life all the rest of it... School, he's at university now at [confidential], got a car sorted out for him and all the rest of it, but I feel guilty about that as well. In terms of whilst I was playing my personal life wasn't really affected, er... If anything, it impacted on me in terms of how to deal with it, and as I said to you I'm quite a nervous, quite an introverted character. When my life, and when I got injured and the pressure kicked in it impacted on my relationship and I got divorced... It's funny really because I've never really been asked that question... I'm thinking about footballers at different levels. I never had alcohol issues, and I never had gambling issues or drug issues. I had drug issues in terms of painkillers... That was an issue. I was taking anti-inflammatory as if they were bloody sweets which is not good for you. You could probably argue that I was addicted to them but it was the fact that it was just the pain that I was in with my knee, just to get through the day sometimes I had to take them to take the edge off it, so that was a frustration. When I retired as well I had to have my right leg straightened it had bowed that badly, so you can imagine a double whammy; having to retire and not having a career to fall back on really, erm, I didn't have any great deal of knowledge at the time and then having to have major surgery and being out for 3 months. That's when the club put together a testimonial for me. That gave you a little bit of self-esteem back and I remember that was the fans who drove that and the club had to get on the back of it. I was insured at the time by the club for £10,000 and that was taken off me, they wouldn't even give me that.

TB: Why?

3: I don't know. Still to this day — I'd love to ask that individual why that took place. It still baffles me that one but I couldn't have that £10,000. That little bit of a nothing really compared to you know... There was a United player who retired about, well less than 10 years ago and he never got into the first team and think he got £1.5million for being insured... You see it wasn't about the money, it was never about the money for me, it was about the career and that fulfilment and that satisfaction that I had, but I'm the kind of person that I will work hard for anybody but I need to feel valued and I wasn't feeling valued, I was made to feel worthless. I had no identity and I had no purpose. When I was retiring and I came through my depression towards the very end, I was doing a sports therapy diploma. Because I'd been around physios and injury for that long I kind of knew lots about it. The irony was, even with my depression and medication I was doing [RE] rehabilitation for him because the sports therapist at the time didn't know how to rehab an ACL. Now, I'd been doing it for 2 years so I know the exercises and I knew the timescale for the exercises and I knew the technique; I knew the purpose of the exercises; I knew the importance of the holistic approach to it. I was actually supporting one of the first team players to get him back fully fit.

TB: How did that make you feel?

3: He actually phoned me when my book came out. He said when he read my book he burst into tears because he never once thought about me during that whole time he was

being rehabilitated all he thought about was himself. Not knowing that he was like, rubbing my face in it. He had the surgeon that I didn't have; he had the surgeon that all the other players, like Alan Shearer had.

TB: None of that was his fault either...

3: No no exactly. Exactly. [NQ] also had the surgeon that I should have had. Both of those guys had a full career.

TB: You played at the same time as well didn't you?

3: Yeah. Yeah... All these things were going on there and not once did anyone say to me 'you know what, how must that make you feel?' ironically [NQ] once one morning; he took me out for an Irish breakfast and he must've seen the look on my face and thought 'you know what, this guy is as flat as a pancake and he could do with a little bit of him time'. He's the only person who ever did that. When I retired I only got two letters from two black footballers. Now I am saying that, not to be dramatic about colour of skin, but the fact of the matter was two guys I'd never met before who were just people, just footballers... So people use race when they want to in a negative light, but them two guys [RE], was one, and... The other one was [MR]... He's at [CL] isn't he as the [Confidential]. They both wrote to me, and I played against both of them and they'd seen my potential.

TB: And you never really known them?

3: Never known them at all. Didn't know them to speak to. They sent me a letter to say how sorry they were for my career and can only imagine what I'd been going through and then sent me a signed card from all the team. Those things you never forget, and those things that give you a bit of a lift and you think 'oh wow, someone's recognised that'. But it's taken me to write a book and have to retire to illuminate how I was treated for the fans to fully get on board and recognise what you go through. With my book it wasn't about this game, and I played this game and I played that game — it wasn't about that, it was about an insight. What that felt like; what that sounded like; what that tasted like. Ironically, going through the damndest road has opened up different things for me and you always think about fate and some things were meant to be, but what I do know is that I've come back into football now working with the Premier League and I do a job where I support the academies as best as I'm able to within the confines of my role, but I've always felt a kind of... avoidance or a kind of emptiness where I...

TB: Is that since the injury?

3: Ever since I retired and a longing of what might have been. That transition was forced on me and I had to do it on myself. I had to go back to college. When I retired I was doing a sports therapy diploma at Lilleshall by myself, I was also doing an A-Level at night school; an access course at Manchester college. So you imagine, you can imagine 6 months ago I was in a treatment room in [MC] — I'll be a skeleton of a football player, but all the same I was a professional footballer. Within 3 months I was in Manchester college with a bunch of kids really doing an access course around various subjects to show learning and recent learning, alongside my A-Level to get me onto a chartered degree course at Salford University. It was always like; I've got to do that; I've got to make a career for myself and I've got to find something. Did I really want to do it when I was working with injuries, injured people and injuries — giving the guys the support that I never had? Looking back, it was probably the worst thing I could do. But it was near the game, it

was football. I was institutionalised it's what I knew. I knew what the preparation was like and I knew what it had to be like. I knew what they were thinking, what they were feeling, what the expectations were, the ups, the downs, the highs, the lows. You know, the importance of how you impact in training; the feeling before games; the feeling after games; the journey back from the game and what those thoughts are in players's minds. If they have those long-term injuries, what that day-to-day might feel like. You know what, tomorrow, don't come in. Have a day off; go spend time with your family, that's fine. In one day out of 6 months that doesn't make a difference, I want you to have a few of these to help you. I've still got a full line of other injuries of long-term and short-term. It's not to fob you off, I'm doing this and I'm saying this to your face, I'm speaking to you because you're having a tough time and you've got to travel in. You're looking quite low at the moment and tomorrow give me a call and see how you're feeling, and if not we'll have a sit down and a coffee and we'll talk through things; and we'll maybe do a 3-day week for a couple weeks to see how you do with that. These are things that I would do because I recognise those things.

TB: And that's stuff you never got?

3: Exactly. So all the time I'm like reinforcing what I never had. Pardon my french but someone called it a mind fuck. They said that putting yourself through that and my reflections were to speak to who? I had no one, no one to go and speak with when I was injured. Even when I had counselling afterwards, I never really spoke about it and I still internalised it. Even now, years later I only tell my wife so much because some days I have some rubbish thoughts... Not suicidal thoughts, but still... Your life is like that, for everyone, you have highs and lows and you have good days at work and bad days at work; good days at college and bad days at college and university. We have family that are ill, traumas, relationships — all those things, it happens all the time. When you've had depression and all those things go on for a little bit longer, you get an anxiety and a fear that you're going to sink into the abyss and you have to pull yourself out of it. I find I can manage to do that but often it's our responsibility. I can't afford to let that drop, because I've got a mortgage to pay and I've got children to look after; I'm an example to my children, I can't let myself get that way. I can't let them see me like that, that's how I am... I shouldn't have to feel that way because when depression hits, that's it, it's an illness and you've got to go with your illness and get that support and for once let people support you. I was the person when I was injured; I was still the go-to person for [RE] and people like that, I was still doing interviews for the club to say the right things. They never gave me any training to do that but out of respect for them, even though they didn't show me any, I still felt like I had to do that. I thought well, if they're not going to show me any class then I've got to have class myself. I did a chartered degree course at Salford University to say to them I don't need you, two fingers to you. So it was all born out of anger, not development and what can I do next? Instead of having that growth mindset, well okay that door's closed let's open one for myself... it was always that anger. I've always carried anger with me but now you're thinking well that's strange because you do the radio for [MC], and you go to games for [MC] as a fan and you take the kids there. I am a fan because I've managed to take myself away from that. I compartmentalise things and I manage my life like that and I have done... You can understand from what I've said so far that how my life as a footballer to normal life — if you will, as you call it — has impacted years, and years, and years later. It's still very layered, ever present and I can still go to one of my clubs — I work for the Premier League and I work with Everton's academy, Newcastle's academy, Stoke's academy, Huddersfield Town's academy and Man City's academy at the moment, they're my clubs for this year. I can walk past the pitch and smell the grass and then I can get in the car and my car journey is forgotten about because I'm thinking about you know, what

if? You're almost having reoccurring dreams of you playing and playing at a high level and doing well and thinking of what that might have looked like and felt like. That never goes away for me... I still have those dreams even now. Still wake myself up striking a football and kick my missus out the bed. It does have an impact on you. Our book was written and because of the facts that are in there it has made people see football in a different light. One journalist contacted me to tell me he's never going to use the words 'crooked' or 'injury prone' ever again because it is just lazy journalism. You can write something else and you don't need to put that, it's just lazy and it stands out.

TB: You have no idea how it's affecting people do you.

3: No exactly. So he's just changed his whole outlook when it comes to reports, which is interesting. In terms of... Looking at how my life is now and how I look and support people, I still find it difficult to make time for myself. All those years of chasing — what's that expression? Is it chasing the dragon? My dragon was to get back playing football and I've always been chasing it. Trying to get a sense now of feeling truly valued; yes I love my wife, I love my children and I enjoy certain parts of my job and there's far more worse jobs out there that I could be doing. People have got some tough lives out there and you do, you should never lose sight of that. But am I truly content? No. I don't think I've ever been content within myself, for me personally, ever since I retired. I'd go as far as to say that because of how my transition wasn't managed and wasn't supported... The legacy that I have till I leave this mortal coil will be — I'd go as far to say that it has impacted on my life ever since then (retirement), and not in a positive way... Does that answer your question? (laughs).

TB: Absolutely yeah, thank you. Just going back to when you were first recognising you had depression; when did you first realise that you may have a mental health issue?

3: It was when... And this is going to sound dramatic when I tell you this... I was on one of my walks in the morning, I was walking across a motorway bridge on the way to Cheadle. I stopped to watch the cars go by and my hood was up. I was embarrassed so I would always put my hood up and tie it tight so you couldn't tell it was me. Erm... I was just walking and I was just by the motorway bridge and a police car drove past. Slowly drove past and I thought nothing of it, but there weren't many cars in the road so that's why I recognised it. Then within 5 minutes the car pulled up and two police officers just got out of the car and walked either side of me, and I soon realised that it was a suicide point on a motorway bridge and I suddenly — they said; 'Is everything okay sir? Can we help you with anything?' and obviously I'm on my own, 3-4 in the morning, I'm stood on a motorway bridge and a bit of traffic going past, not busy, but quite a bit going past. They obviously had concerns... I'd know because I used to count — I'd count the steps — I used to count the steps to certain shops and say around midnight I'd go for a walk I'd know the amount — this is how sad it was — I would count the steps to the petrol station I used to walk past.

TB: Why do you think you did that?

3: To focus on anything other than thinking about my injury. So I would just count.

TB: Almost like coping?

3: Erm, I look back at that person and I don't recognise that person. I look back at the person I was when I was trying to get back fit at that time and my thoughts and feelings even when I was married at that time, and the person I was in that relationship I don't

recognise that person, you know... I almost had a change in personality almost to try and manage my life through that. What happened as well was because I wasn't supported and I had no identity, you're always striving to try and find something that will give you that sense of worth and value. I'm not saying you have to do something where you're on the television — it wasn't about attention, it was doing something that you love and something that you're good at and doing that to the best of your ability and gain value doing it. There's lots of footballers now that have turned to alcohol, have turned to gambling after five years of retiring from football are divorced — you know, bankrupt and bankruptcy and all these things. I never had much money to gamble, so that was never really an issue for me. Think the worst for me was 50p bets and it was nonsense. People have certain vices that give them that little bit of a buzz and that little bit of a lift, and that little bit of excitement. When you go from playing in front of thousands of football fans and you do something really well, and you know in your heart of hearts that you're really good at something, and you leave that and no matter how hard you try at something else you feel mediocre at best. Are you doing things because you have to? Not because you really want to. You've not really got a career for yourself, even though you have and you're doing something else, I turned to physiotherapy, you know, probably the worst thing I could've done being around injuries and all the things that I never had. I never got any guidance from anyone to say; 'right [PL] what do you really enjoy? What do you fancy that will be good for you? Let's talk about what you've been through. How you experienced that. How does that make you feel? How is it impacting your social life? Family life? Your working life? What do you think would be the best pathway for you to pursue in life? What interests you? What do you think would be the right and wrong thing to look at? In terms of what your experiences are, do you think that's going to scratch off the scab and make you relive those memories of what you've been through? Is that going to be the right thing for you to do or do you think you might want to do something a bit different and do something which is going to support your future in terms of your self-esteem and your self-worth? Forget the career and paying the mortgage. We can look at that, but how about looking at this. What are your thoughts on looking at something like this role or this profession for instance? And let's give you some ideas or directions of what you can do'. I never had that, I fell into things. I thought well, I know about injuries a lot so I'll do that. That went into — I was a physiotherapist at [BU], I was a physiotherapist at [MT], and at [OA] then at [BW], but all the time my heart wasn't really in it. Because my heart wasn't really in it I never really pushed myself to be the best that I could be, I was always just safe and steady. I'm not great at it and there were people around me that were far better at it than I was and I knew that. Some of the friends that I trained with, it was their calling in life. Some of them guys were fantastic physiotherapists and I could only dream to be at their level. I was just safe and I was competent, but what I knew was — What I didn't know was that I would get the support from the players to go to the right people, to go to the right consultant, to have a second and third opinion about something. An example was I had a player from [MT] who had a fractured 5th metatarsal.

TB: I did that earlier this year actually.

3: So you'll know. It doesn't have a great blood supply and you can let it heal naturally or you can get it fixed. That fixation is longer but the success of the fixation is far, far better in the long-term if you're playing sport than if you try to let it heal. So I got three opinions from three consultants for this one player at [MT]. He was a reserve player as well, he wasn't even a first team player. That's what I did for him and two said the fixation and one said no. Because of the timescale and he wanted to get a contract he said no. I told him, I said it to his dad, they knew the ramifications of what might happen, and it did happen; it re-fractured and he had to retire. Even though he was angry he couldn't blame anything on my door because he knew he had the best advice and the best support, the best direction

and even when his contract expired I still got him back fit to go Non-League with this and he had it fixated the second time. That gives you an idea of those little things. It doesn't matter if you're in the first team or the reserve team at [MT], or in the first team or reserve team at [MC]. You're a human being, you've got two arms and two legs and you want to play football. I wanted to play football, so what can I do to support you? These are the things that aren't there for the players today to nth degree, you know in the Premier League it's actually the other way and there's too much. Players have got their own physiotherapists and are in an environment where there's a good physiotherapist and the players have got their own physios as well, their own sports scientist, their own this, that and the other. At that time though I learned a lot about people, so what is has given me is a real insight into caring for people in the right way and understanding what they might be going through. Putting yourself in their shoes and walking a mile in their shoes, which is difficult to do that, to have an open mind and to press the pause button on your beliefs system. 10/11ths of our mind is our subconscious mind and that's built up of our internal and external factors that have influenced what we think, and believe and feel today. You could challenge something and you can substantiate it with your conscious mind — this is the right thing to do for the right reasons and that could become a new learned skill for you. You can appreciate that. What I do now is when I'm going into clubs and speaking to people is I park my judgment because it's too easy to be judgmental and often those first experiences can be wrong and can be false. People always say that first contact you get a good idea of someone, but not always. You can misjudge things and people might be nervous in that environment, they might try to give a persona that they're confident and that they're all seeing and all knowing in that environment, when actually they're quite nervous. They might be going through a divorce behind closed doors you don't know about that. They're putting on a front. I used to do that everyday when I used to go into the club — I'd put a front on. I'm learning about people, it's had to — it's forced me to look at life in a different way and it's amazing really... I've picked up my life skills because they've been thrown on me and I've had to deal with it. I've made mistakes and some bad mistakes and learned from those mistakes in terms of the way I thought about people and the way I spoke to people, the way I've reacted to people and the way I've treated people at times for the wrong reasons, you know, these things... Because of the way I was left when I was so poorly treated in that transition from being in professional football to being an everyday guy in the street trying to make his way in this world, which we all know can be tough at times. I've always had gaps in not finding something that was for me, I never felt fulfilled, I never felt truly valued and my self-worth now still fluctuates between confident, sorry happy and content to something's missing, something's not right. Always trying to find that, always trying to understand — on reflection — what might've been, and what hasn't worked out for me. If you look back, and to use that expression which isn't particularly pleasant, but the abuser... In terms of the way I was treated has meant that I've always had that anxiety and I've always carried that around with me and I always know that I am five steps from depression coming back. When I'm having a struggle or I'm in a low mood, or we work long hours and my job's lots of travelling and lots of report writing, erm... I always use the Beatles song 'Paperback Writer'. I'm a shit writer, and I never thought I'd be having to write on a computer. So I sing that when I'm doing my work... I never thought I'd be writing reports, and reports and reports. That's part of life's rich pageant. We do what we have to do to pay the mortgage. I know that if I go through a difficult time I'm always questioning my value and I look back on what I've achieved and what have I done. We can all do that but I was never given the confidence to say right this is what you can do and achieve next. Each time you go into an academy and go from 12-13 to 13-14, that's a fantastic achievement and thousands upon thousand of boys and girls haven't been able to do that and you're able to get to the next stage, you're an academy footballer. At 16 you become a scholar, you're a scholar footballer, you're not a professional footballer and

you're not in someone's first team yet. Potential is a wonderful world but it can take you to that end of the footballing world (gestures up) or that end of the footballing world (gestures down). In one fell swoop. You don't know where you're going to be at. Try to have that aspiration of being a footballer, but become more adept at coping with life outside of football. Give yourself an education, give yourself new experiences; learn about the world around you; learn about what life can be like.

TB: Do you think that is one area that does need improving in professional sport? That players at younger ages need educating on mental health and educating outside of sport?

3: Well they do get it but they get it in workshops. They get it in drips and drabs and its tokenistic, it's... See this presentation, wow yeah that's really powerful that and one or two boys ask some good questions, and one or two boys have got that ability to focus in those sessions and to appreciate how that might impact on themselves. Then they might take something from it and years later, 2 years later, if they are struggling or they've not got a club and they're going to exit trials... Or they've got to go on loan somewhere and it's not really worked out — how's that making them feel? I didn't want to be... No disrespect, but I didn't want to be in Southport's first team, I didn't want to be in Rochdale's first team, I wanted to be in [MC]'s first team. My dream's there, that's not a dream for me. Yeah you're still in professional football and it's still a career for you, but your heart's not in it because you wanted to play there. So how do you manage that, and how do you have that conversation? When that boy's on loan somewhere, away from the club in an environment (points left) where they have all strived to be that person in that environment (points right), where they're lost, don't want to be there at all but realise they've got to try and do something to get their career back on track. They're almost going through the motions there. How are they being supported? What conversations are they having? Are Mum and Dad at 9 and 10, 10 and 11, 11 and 12 speaking like he's the next Rashford, he's the next Rooney, he's the next whoever, Solanke, the next Sterling? And Uncle and Auntie, and next door neighbour, and Grandma and Grandad, and school teacher and whoever are all saying that as well. But then 15-16, other players have caught them up now and they're better than me. 'Oh what's happened to the next Sterling? What's happened to the next Rashford?'...

TB: A lot of pressure to put on a child.

3: ...And he's not kicked a ball in anger as a schoolboy, as a scholar, as a YTS player, and yet everyone's saying these things about him. And yet how do you deal with that when it isn't working? All of a sudden you've got to go out on loan to a club, which is a million miles from the first team. First of all it tells me I'm never going to get into that first team, secondly, my god this is the level I'm going to be at and this is the level I can get and I'm going to be fighting for and competent over two years. The money's not great but this is as good as other jobs around me and I've got to be grateful for that; but I've trained all these years, for 10 years at this academy, from being at Under-7s and I'm 17 now, but I've been waiting for 10 years to get in that first team and now I'm as near as it to the guy doing the interview for this piece in the program-type thing... And that's an example, and that's how far away from it I am now. My dream has changed and altered and my goals — my goal-setting has changed... Having a conversation about it, and it's the agent that might have a conversation. It might be the coach that might have a five minute conversation that might skim the surface of that'd the agent might talk about it. If the agent's goals are to make his money on this contract then all he's bothered about is speaking with Southport, speaking with — He's not — How is this making you feel? How do you feel now? What's your value and what's your identity like? Now if you have got aspiration to do education, well actually

it's given me values to know what it means to try and be the best that I can be every single day. Because every day in football is the X factor. Especially coming through Manchester City, Liverpool and United... Every day you've got to be at it. Otherwise, you'll start to go that way (points backwards). Everyday it's got to be your attitude, work-rate, technical/ tactical ability, understanding, application, socialising, respect, commitment, good communication, good control of your emotions, being an ambassador for your club at all times — That's everyday. So when people talk about it being easy to work in football, they don't know what that's like even today. Even the old trappings of being at the CFA for instance I have wonderful pictures of lovely kits and boots and this, that and the other, and having a good wage even as a first year on my contract. It's a fantastic place. That's still the reality of it, those pressures and those responsibilities and the expectations... That's there.

TB: Do you think that could contribute to a potential mental health problem?

3: Exactly that. That's why I'm saying it, because that's it Tom, that's it in a nutshell. Those stresses, how do you manage that? The agent hasn't got the skill set to be able to have them conversations with them.

TB: Well it's unlike any other industry in the world.

3: Exactly. There's nothing like it. To go from that club where there may be a little bit of support, to go to a Southport or a Rochdale... I'm only using Southport to show you a level down, not because it's a bad club because I don't know what they're like, but as an example of there's even less support there because their staff are coping with 7, 8, 9 lads, and they won't have the time to deal with you. If that person is in digs then what's he going back to? Is he going back to a hotel, by himself say 4 in the afternoon? Say he's just ruminating and his next thing is maybe looking at his phone and speaking to his girlfriend and then speaking to his mum and dad and maybe speaking to his brother, go see his mates, looking on social media and looking to see what other players are doing, or looking at his team mate. I was with him from being 9-years of age and I was ahead of him and he is now... He might be a Phil Foden in Manchester City's first team and I'm on loan at Rochdale. I was his team mate a year ago, two years ago and we were talked about in the same breath. I'm not that person now and I don't know what I've done wrong and I'm still trying to work hard but I'm getting angry now because I'm getting frustrated and the games are passing me by and I'm not impacting on games; I'm thinking about things too much and unable to concentrate like I used to... All these can be signs of depression kicking in. What's an agent saying or what's a coach saying? You've got to work harder.

TB: Do you think there is a stigma attached to the term of mental health within the professional sport industry? People don't want to come forward to speak about it?

3: I don't think it's a stigma of not being able to come forward, I think that's changed but I think it's a recognition of what the signs are before it becomes too much.

TB: Why do you think that is?

3: I think it's because the signs are not picked up on. Players can go from week-to-week-to-week and they can say he's not working hard enough or his attitude stinks or he must have problems with his girlfriend; he's had a bad game and he's asked him to get over that game. Course you have bad games, you've got to deal with that. There might be something more than that going on. You know, if you put the fact that he's broke up from

his girlfriend or maybe his mum has just passed away or his mum's really ill... or the fact that—.

TB: He's moved away from home.

3: Yeah, or he's being played out of position and he's living away from home. All those things every individual person can deal with things in a different way and some can just brush it off and yeah bring it on, whatever's next, I'll show you, I'm determined and I'm comfortable in my own skin that I know what I'm doing. That person might still need some support with performance. Other boys might be sat crumbling inside and not know how to communicate that. Because he's got doubts doesn't mean that he might be a bit of a gobshite, saying to the coach that's crap, that's not good enough and you're better than that. You know, what's up with you get on with it. Why's he doing that now? You were that players a year ago, what's happened to you? Sort yourself out. I've been coming here for years, taking you to training and taking you to games, come on you're not wasting my time for nothing. You might have that kind of Dad's mentality who's also having a go at the coach saying his son's better than him, and he's also telling his mates at work that he's still telling them that he's still going to be the next best thing, you watch, he'll show you. So that might be going on and he might have to be managing a parent who's an absolute nightmare. Having to carry that around. Every individual situation taken in its own merits if you understand it — and I'm not saying you have to break down every single boy and say right 'how's life?', 'what's your home life like?', 'how'd you get on with Mum and Dad?', 'have you got a girlfriend? have you split up with her recently?', 'how's your travel time in? Is it too much, is it comfortable?' You're not going to go through all that but there are certain signs that can be recognised, which might be a combination of the coach and an agent, and a parent and saying okay just have a little chat with him because he's struggling a little bit. Something you might pick up, or a parent might pick up in a conversation because god forbid — and this is dramatic — but we all know as awful as some illnesses can be the end game of depression can be suicide. It's one of the biggest killers... It is the biggest killer isn't it of young people? A certain age back at this moment...

TB: I think there was a statistic last year of men between ages of 18 and I think it was right into the 40s-50s that the biggest killer of men is depression leading to suicide.

3: So... That's not being dramatic, that's a fact. In terms of managing transition and making people feel valued and saying 'okay, that's not quite worked out for you at this level, but the options are; we could also get you to college in America' and they can keep in contact with you and give you that support. You can also get support for going into this profession or going to that university and going into this college. Have a look at this, have a conversation around that. There's not enough people in the game who have got the time to manage that. That's what I think the frustrations are. The thing is, because of the way society is and people are today footballers all conduct themselves in a certain way. There's only a narrow, few players who have got the confidence to have their own identity. You watch the players and you conform. You do, it's human nature.

TB: So you think it's the culture of football?

3: You see them, they strut in and they've got simian stroll. They've got that kind of swagger and that attitude. It's how they carry themselves. I don't expect — you know when I was at [MC] and I was a captain, I don't expect people to have an ego about themselves, because I don't. That was you know, how many years ago? Nearly 30 years ago when I played football, nearly as long as that so they're not going to even know who I am. I'm not

bothered about that but when these kids — how they conduct themselves, they've got to show confidence, they've got to show that they can be in the environment, but some kids haven't played for anybody yet, haven't kind of played one game for anyone's first team, but some of the boys act like they've got a sense of entitlement. They've lost that layer of humility and roundedness of where they actually are in life. Talk about hard work, and yeah you laugh and you joke and you want to be confident and everyone's personalities are different. When they act a certain way and then they come off that level, they're not on that level anymore and they come down a little bit but they still act in certain ways that isn't going to fit into the environment...

TB: Do you think that could even cause more anxiety in individuals who are having to conform? Because you're not being true to yourself are you.

3: Yeah. Exactly, exactly. People in terms of how they conduct themselves and they're not even being educated in terms of how to be, how to fit into that environment. You've got to roll your sleeves up, you've got to communicate with people who you might have thought two years ago couldn't lace your football boots, actually they can lace your football boots and if you're not careful they're going to be in front of you. So what are you going to do? How are you going to work with that? So I think you need to up-skill agents, there needs to be far more workshops for parents. Parents need to almost have it hammered home to them but sadly they bring their own baggage into that situation and they bring their own subconscious beliefs into that situation. You know 'you've got to just man up', I hate that wording —

TB: I hate that term.

3: I'm going to punch somebody and I've got good emotional control, but I still want to knock somebody out when I hear it. Because what does that mean?

TB: It's a preconceived notion isn't that you have to behave a certain way because you're male.

3: Well I said to one of the guys, so I played in front of 45,000 fans, playing at left back with no preparation after having my appendix out 3 weeks earlier. I had a nightmare, but they asked me to go out on the pitch. So am I not brave? Well you could say it's stupid or is it foolhardy? So are you saying am I a coward, would you have done that? So I don't like when people say — I know players who were fully fit that wouldn't have done that. I'm not saying that to big myself up, what I'm saying is how do you interpret bravery? Is that not manning up? But because I'm talking about having depression and I'm struggling with day-to-day life am I suddenly weak now? I've also done that, so how do you quantify what manning up actually means? What does that mean? It means that I don't want to talk about that because I don't know how to deal with it, what you want to say to me, and I don't even know myself if I understand what my values are properly to be able to have that conversation with you to be able to support you. I would say that it's simply tokenistic and they're just words...

TB: Just picking up on what you've just said talking about weakness. Do you think if someone wants to come forward and say they had depression it would be perceived as them having a weakness?

3: Well, it's the illness of the strong which is how I interpret depression. To actually come out and speak about it actually takes such, such strength of character. We talk about

Clarke Carlisle and so much concern about where he's at in his head, but he has depression and he has tried to end his life. He was the kind of player that would be honest and speak about it and his managers couldn't deal with it. They didn't know how to or have that conversation with them. Alistair Campbell was the spin doctor if you will... He was the right hand man of Tony Blair, whether you thought Tony Blair had good values, bad values or what. It was always going to be tarnishing for him... Alistair Campbell worked to the top of his game as the right hand man to the Prime Minister of this country with depression. Having depression and managing his depression. You speak about it in football and you can't be trusted. They might have thought 'I'm not going to have you in my team'. I could have performance issues which could be anxiety, but if that isn't managed and supported it can lead to a form of condition and it can take you to that level of despair where you can't live and you can't cope with it. Footballers in the Premier League now, the first team players they don't get to them, they don't have that conversation because they're fine, everything's brilliant, everything's okay with those guys. Well is it? Is it really? Well I'm not saying Gundogan has any issues, because I'm sure he doesn't and he's fine, but he's just had a long-term injury, he's got to come back and play in the Premier League and he was Pep Guardiola's first signing, that's how highly he rates him. So, how is he? What's he like? How has he been coping with that? Have you had those conversations with the psychologist and the psychological support? I'm sure Man City have got that, but some first teams, not even the workshops, you don't even get to see the workshops, they're not seen.

TB: I read an article yesterday actually about Danny Rose when he had his first long-term injury when he was on loan at Sunderland. He wasn't offered psychological support and had sought it out himself. He says if he hadn't have got that then his mental health would have deteriorated, because it wasn't offered.

3: Even to present in front of the first team players there's never enough time. There's never enough time to do a workshop and it is a glimpse once a year. How do you manage that time to get to people? It's difficult. If players can recognise it and it's signposted...

TB: I was just about to ask you how would you improve it?

3: Well, I'd have a definitive protocol in terms of every player who has got a short-term injury, a long-term injury, got any issues or concerns that people are able to have that conversation with — if it came from an owner, and from a chairman, and from a CEO, and from a first team manager, the importance of that, it could be commonplace. I work in academies where there is an academy approach, but there isn't a club-wide approach. So the first team is so separate and everything's performance, and everything's brilliant and everything's healthy and fine, and no issues and no concerns. That manager's two-four games away from the sack; what's that like? What if your next job might not be for another two years? Your daughter's just going to school and your son's at university and in this environment. But you've just been offered a job on the other end of the country. So how does that affect on your family life and on your wife now? That's there, that could happen tomorrow. These people yet... The first team environment and the academy is completely separate on lots of occasions. I'm not saying there isn't in terms of the right people but they aren't aware of it and clubs do provide it. There is a disconnect, it's got to come from the top-down. It can't be an academy manager who's saying 'this is what we've got to do', it can't be an academy part-time psychologist who says 'we should do more work on mental health' just in case. It's not soft soap and pampering people, it's just providing a framework of support to ensure that that boy doesn't take his own life in three years time. Where's it tracked back to? Your doorstep because you didn't look after him. You can't be

to blame for everything and maybe a myriad of things have taken that boy, it could be an issue with his personal life, or his family life, with his social interactions alongside his football career. He may have that susceptibility to anxiety, that might be part of his personality, part of his DNA, but if the framework's in place and everyone is fully aware that; 'listen, just watch this, and then on the back of it let's have a conversation next week about it' and on an app there's a collection of information where a player can just tap into it in his own time, in the comforts of his own home or his own car out the way from anybody else, where he can watch it, he can observe it and he can take the message and then there's a follow-up conversation with somebody and that might be once a week, once a fortnight, once a month, it can be a mentor, it might be the sports scientist who has that time. It might be the head of operations, it might be the head of recruitment, it might be the club's psychologist. It might be the club has spoken with the agent and the agent is having the conversation with that player in his own time, away from it every couple of weeks. Someone is having that conversation with them so that we're all happy in the knowledge that if any player has got any issues — and it's never going to be the complete answer, because people will still struggle in four or five year from now and other things might tip them over the edge, but at least we know that in terms of football and professional sport, that we have given that individual every possible support at that time to ensure they understand what's coming in terms of transition, in terms of what's available to them, what support is in place. You know, who they can speak to at any time to tell them about these issues and concerns. To educate the wider family about what might happen and they've got to understand, they've got to make time. I put the onus on families as much as with the clubs. It's too often — I go to the academies and I see the people, I see the conversations and they're too concerned with wearing their North Face jacket and having the right jeans on, having the fanciest pair of boots, in the nicest car to drive to the academy car park and to see the other parents to see what they're doing. Do you know what I mean? That's where they're at... Hang on what about your son? What's he thinking? What's he feeling? How's he dealing with it? In the years to come it's going to be your daughter, because that sport's going to go through the roof as well. The same support, the women's football is that supporting place. I see the women now in football and just like the guys they all have to have the smart little Audi or the smart little BMW, they won't turn up in a Fiesta or a Skoda Octavia. They have to come in in something that looks the part, but young people, that's how young people are and I'm not judging them negatively there, but that' show they are. I wanted to have a nice car when I was a young player, that's what I sought and I conformed with it, to that, do you know what I mean? So, the women are thinking on the same lines as the men and they might be ultra professional in the way that they prepare, because the women tend to be very, very focused, and more so than men at times and certainly at a certain age. Everyone is on a similar approach, a similar mindset, so everyone should be entitled to that same network of support. What I can say is; if that transition isn't managed in the right way there will be an impact on someone's life, which means they will never have that contentment, and they will always have some form of resentment, or regret about that experience that they had. Whereas, if you're in the academy system and you've got a wonderful environment that you work and train in, you're playing with great footballers, great people, you've got great coaching, mentorship and support, players and coaches that know what it takes, ex-players who are coaches and know what that feels like, they've got a wonderful games program where they're playing teams across the country, playing teams across Europe, you're travelling overseas and seeing different things and having education as well as the same time. We've got a tournament called the Truce Tournament in Ibra where the boys have education on the First World War, what that was like for the soldiers and how awful it was, but how fascinating our world has been shaped by wars and by religion and all these things to come to stand where society is today. They've got those experiences... They might earn a good wage, and some boys

have got education through the schools that they academies have in. So they're being given this wonderful start in life where they learn about values, about respect, learning about how to have fun and enjoyment and being a part of something really exciting. That takes you to this point and this is giving you the foundations to say; 'Do you know what? I can achieve anything'. It might not be related to playing football but they might be the next Prime Minister, could be the next Mayor, could be the next IT whizz, I could be the next best coach or sports scientist in this environment. I could be the next Olympic sprinter, I could be whatever I want to be and thankfully with the support I have had to get where I've got to is going to give me opportunity to achieve whatever I want to achieve, or it can narrow my identity to be; 'I'm a footballer or I am nothing'. That's the challenge that football still has. It's all about identity because if you're feeling like that, and that's your outlook on life, that's your self-worth, then the impact that will have on your opportunity, on your thought processes, on your ambition, is going to be so narrow you're never going to be truly fulfilled and that has an impact on your life, on your husband, if you're a homosexual and you've had to hide that in football. If you have children, and then their aspiration... The knock-on effect to Mum and Dad — 'have I done something wrong, what have I done, why's my son turned out this way?' Can you see the impact it has? The fallout can be massive. All because of a learning environment created and the conversations being had. That can allow someone to flower or it can allow someone to fail. That is how important I would say managing transition can be. Whether you are under-9s or under-10s, you are under-16 and you're not going to under-17 to get a scholarship, or you get your first pro contract and that doesn't work out. Because 73% of players that sign their first pro contract are out of the game by the time they're 21. Who's supporting those boys and what conversations are being had? What's your club exit strategy like? I know some Premier League clubs and category one academies it's quite good, it could still be better. But what's it like in Cat 2's and Cat 3's? What's it like in Division 2 and Division 3? What's it like at the Conference (National League)? What's that feel like...?

TB: ...You could go from training and being a part of a unit one day and then the next day... What do you do then? Your routine's gone...

3: Exactly... Exactly... And even these parents who go to academies for 10 years, even their routine's gone. Then it has an impact on them. They might have loved going to Everton's training ground every week with their son... Or Liverpool's, or Arsenal's, or Chelsea's, or you know, Sheffield Wednesday, Sheffield United, Leeds United, might be in the club for 10 years — you could be. But that 10 years should give you the foundations to flourish because the skill sets you've picked up and the discipline, attention to details, listening skills, communication, the ability to learn and develop, to have that attitude and that confidence to stand up and cross that white line and wear that shirt with pride, and be that player. Those are the skills that can take you to do anything, they can, they can. They've just got to recognise it. Educating the players and giving them the signposting to be able to understand what they need and when they need it, and understanding what support is available. In all those different levels and all those tiers of life and I'll say to you again — if Pep Guardiola was to say it, if Mourinho was to say it, if Klopp was to say it...

TB: It would catch on wouldn't it.

3: Why aren't they doing it? That's what makes me angry because they must do it and they're not.

TB: Correct me if I'm wrong but it seems like there needs to be support, education and awareness, and that doesn't seem to be getting all three at the moment?

3: Not enough. Some clubs do it well and some clubs don't, so it's inconsistent support.

TB: From what you're saying it sounds like it's needed at the very beginning and needs to be present right through your career and into retirement. At the moment it's not?

3: No and again it's... allocation of responsibility. Who oversees that? Who manages that? How consistent is that? Who's accountable for that? Do parents come to session and some don't come to others — can't be bothered; 'I won't listen to that, I'm too busy'. The message has got to come from someone where it's that powerful then people will listen. If Guardiola was to do a piece to camera for all the players at every age group, and have that message sent to every player, every parent — might take them 15 minutes to talk through that; this is where your son could be at and this is how exciting it is, this is the potential, this is how we expect him to behave, this is how we expect you to understand. He could go over how if things don't work out, and what if you don't get a contract, it's not the end of the world, but this is what we expect and this is what you should be expecting of yourself as a parent. If you love your child, to support them, to help them, encourage them, if it's not for them, it's not for them. Look what they can appreciate, look where else they can go in life. This is not the be all and end all, it's wonderful if they can. Every player might go and find each year a bit more of a challenge and some cope, but some don't. Even the boys that get the scholarship, even the boys that get to be a professional, they might not make it. Some boys might get injured, some might fall out love with the game and that's fine. It's what your son can achieve in life and we want you to be fans of our club, whether you end up playing for us or not. We respect you for giving up your son or your daughter to come and play for us and they're being given all the support that we can — but look at what they can pick up whilst they're in this environment to give them the skills to do whatever they want to do. Those kind of conversations that Guardiola could come up with, that Klopp could come up with, the England manager could come up with, it can be a message across the whole game and everyone can hear it and everyone can see it. It should be on News at 10, it should be on the BBC News, it should be on bloody World service, it should be on the radio. You should have players having those conversations. It could be there and it could move on and be consistent. You could have one day a year where that weekend is just talking about that.

TB: It could be a major preventive measure as well really.

3: But no one wants to do it. Everyone's too busy, and everyone's got more important things that they want to do. We're talking about saving people's lives. It sounds dramatic, but that's the end game. I've spoken at events where I've talked about my depression and how I feel. Although I never got to the stage where I wanted to take my own life, I've had some really dark moments, some really low moments in my life. You're still dealing with it on a day-to-day. I've spoken to you today and on the back of this conversation today I'll have... I know I'll have anxiety today, because I've spoken about it, and that's what it does. But I know how to cope with that. I'll chat to my mates, and I'll chat to my wife and we'll talk about it and I'll be fine tomorrow because I know. You see what I mean? I'm talking to you now and I've got a sick feeling my stomach because of all those thoughts and feelings and what that felt like... I can taste it and I know it's there. That's the impact, but if I was to speak to Guardiola about that then it's be like me speaking to Alan Partridge about it... Because what does that mean to him? There needs to be something that comes from the top-down. Until that happens there's an aloof attitude of football where the top, top people do their things — listen, Guardiola's football is incredible, it's fantastic, but what would it really take, what would it mean to these people for a Sheik Mansour, or whatever his name

is at Liverpool, or Jose Mourinho, Sean Dyche... Every club to have their own video that's a part of every player's contract. They have to sit there and watch this. They have to show it to the parents, they have to come in to the induction where they watch it again. Then the following year they watch it again, and then before Christmas before they go they watch it again, and it's there, and it's there, and it's there, and it's not 'oooh woe is me', it's not that. That's the attitude people have because they're too frightened to address it because they don't know they've got that ignorance is bliss attitude. What if that's your son? You need to know about it, because deep down it may have happened to you, you may have been that person, and you know what it feels like. Hang on, if you know what that feels like you don't want your son or your daughter to ever be in that position. So, come on we're the adults here and we need to take control of this. This is where the Premier League are working now on player care and we're looking to get player care ambassadors in at every club. That's not for human consumption yet, because it might not happen yet but that's what we're looking at. How can we make that better? Can we get current footballers talking about? Can we get Kompany, or Mertesacker talking about it and what they say is there's not enough. But you've got all the adults, all the professional footballers now, you're not 17 or a kid... You're grown men now with families yourselves and you know if you don't manage the situation this will impact on your life. This will impact on your children. You can also provide that guidance and support for so many people in the game, and outside of the game millions more people. Hundreds of millions of people. That's the influence they have with Sky Sports... The reach of football is breathtaking. At the same time how many people could you inspire to not go down that road. It's incredible. That's the reach we can have but it's got to come from the top, top people. You've got to want to do it. The onus is on them. Yeah you've got a new manager but so what? This is people's livelihoods we're talking about here. Yeah some clubs support charities and do things really, really well. I'm not saying they don't but in terms of mental health, this is what we've got to get to because the endgame is someone takes their own life. That's how bad it can be. It can't get any worse than that... Robert Enke was a case in Germany. people who are on the cusp as we speak and could speak to someone that's literally struggling who are on the cusp and yet we might not even know about it. But how could we help them? We all talk about it because mental health charities are doing things really well and have done so far, but that's the piece that's missing for me. It comes from the top, top people down and they all do it. Every first team manager in the Premier League, and the Spanish League, and the Bundesliga... Everyone does it and everyone makes it club specific.

TB: I think the German FA implemented a strategy of mental health education when Robert Enke died. I think that was done almost immediately afterwards.

3: Well we've got a 24-hour hotline through the PFA, but if you was to quiz 20 first team players and ask them if they were feeling like this, what would you do? What's in place for you as a means of support? Ask David Silva, he wouldn't have a clue and the PFA have got a 24-hour hotline. You've got counsellor support within 48 hours to your door and they wouldn't know. Why?

TB: Just a lack of signposting isn't it.

3: Thank you, and where's it not come from? The chairman. They're not saying this is what's available to you. This player's been saying; 'Do you know what I've been struggling with that and I've had that'... That identity thing as well. They're all the wrong marketing tools aren't they and they're like an individual company themselves aren't they the PFA. So do they want to talk about depression because actually it might impact on somebody's contract. Well, no it shouldn't get in the way of signing that contract because far more

people can connect with you because you're playing football. You're still playing but you're managing with that and coping with. How are you coping with that? Say I'm sat at a desk in Manchester and I've had depression for a few years and I'm struggling with it, but I've seen like Salah has had that and he's come out and spoke about it, wow really? I can speak about that, I can cope with that.

TB: Well, they are perceived as role models now aren't they.

3: So, why not? Why not? That for me is what can be done, but to come back to your original question. It might have been a bit long winded and gone around the houses but it literally is... it's a life long impact, a life long impact if the transition isn't managed well.

TB: Just to go back to a point you said earlier when you said you'd been to see a counsellor. Was that after you'd retired or whilst you were still—

3: —After I retired. Do you want me to tell you why? It was my final year really of injury so I went to the priory and then on the back of the priory I was put in touch with a counsellor who I saw, who's based in Blackburn. It did help and I saw him on a couple of occasions. Twice in Blackburn and once in... Erm... Once in Stockport actually when he was based there, so I saw him (a counsellor) on three occasions and he did help, he did give me a strategy to be able to cope. But I found my own strategy really, I managed my emotions at that time myself, so I managed to deal with it in a certain way. It was a definite help for me at that time because it made me properly think about what I was doing and how I was — my day-to-day routine and trying to put together time to understand why I felt that way, and why I was behaving in a certain way. Over a 6 month period I probably would have gained from some signposting...

TB: Okay. Then once you had retired did you then refer to yourself to go and see a counsellor?

3: Once I retired erm... Again, I carried on with counselling on several occasions but then I had the strategies to speak about them and then I realised the importance of coping speaking with him. It's my best mate that we knew that had depression and he was heartbroken that I'd never spoken to him. I knew I could've spoken to him as well but I just couldn't. There are things that I learned by going to counselling to really give me the coping mechanisms to go and deal with — and how to find that part of me to fill that gap, the void, and to get what life is all about and then find some self-worth and some value, and some purpose. My identity was all about football and without that I was nothing, and that's literally how I saw myself. So, it was that realisation that I am a Dad, I'm a husband, I'm a friend, I'm a charity patron, you know, I'm a professional person now working in the game and these are all things that I've got.

TB: So instead of having this single, narrow identity of being a footballer and this is my whole life, you're trying to broaden that now and become more than that?

3: Yeah, so I am having a positive impact on that person's life, and that person is having a great impact on my life, and you're letting people to come into your life, but when you have depression you shun people. You just pull the blinds down and you don't want to know... They can have a real, positive impact and sense of fulfilment because you're able to be a part of their enjoyment, their excitement, you can influence it, and inspire and support. By doing that you're getting some satisfaction from that too, so you're starting to revise that, that sense of worth is changing. You do feel value, and you do feel loved. These are all the

things that you shut out, and you can't see it when you have depression and you see things in a different way. It's like having a... How can you describe it... I spoke about it in the book, you know when you have a fancy packet of biscuits and you see in that red foil when you're a kid and you see things in a different veneer, it's like looking through a viewfinder and it's all mottled and speckly, you just can't see things and you just see things differently, and you interpret things differently. You interpret things in the wrong way. You don't see the value in things... You don't see the purpose and you've got no empathy in anybody else, so the only... It literally sucks the light and everything becomes a clear dark. To be able to find what normal is, what normal looks like, and what normal should be for you. It takes a lot of unpicking and as I say, these are the mechanisms and the strategies that you can develop all the time. You start to realise what works for you but you also recognise the signs of; 'I'm struggling and I need to do something'. That might be a conversation, it might be exercise, it might be a combination of three-four-five things. But you've got to take control of it, or you can waste away before you know where you are, you're in that horrible place, then who knows which way you're going to go. It is a worry, because some people won't have the coping mechanisms, they won't find that strategy, they won't have the confidence and the competence to understand what they want to do next. That's where lots of sportspeople are because when they're elite and they're playing at a certain level they can deal with that, until that drops off and then who's giving them the skills to cope in the next tier, and then the next tier and the next tier... Identity has just been completely altered and then what's next? As I say, it's tough, it's tough and often people are given — I hear too many times, like, Jamie Carragher saying; 'it's too nice for the players' what on earth are you talking about? It's just different. You didn't have social media, you didn't have 1.3 million people saying you were shit on Saturday. You might have had the Liverpool Echo and the fans who were at the game, you've not got a 100,000 people absolutely caning you because of that pass, that missed tackle or that own goal. You've not got that to deal with, so where's that in your conversation? That's how I feel. How ill-informed is that statement and that's what we're dealing with, and that's an ex-player that's on Sky TV all the time. Give your head a shake and learn about these things and understand the impact of these things that you're saying.

TB: It's a global audience.

3: There you go mate. It's frustrating. It really is frustrating. Is that your last question sorry? Sorry if I've gone off on a tangent there but that's how I feel about it. Is that everything?

TB: Yeah, that's everything thank you very much, honestly I really appreciate it.

3: No, no it's a pleasure and I just hope there's something in there which — I'm sure [CC]'s story will be different to mine, and it is, and everyone's is different.

TB: That's what I think is needed though, because then we can build a much clearer picture of the issues in sport.

3: Well, going back to the book and the title of the book comes from that moment when I was with that photographer, you know, 'are you with us?', and that's how I was made to feel. Having the team picture every year for four seasons... My number went from being number 2, I was like number 33 towards the end. I think it was only the kit man or the groundsman who were probably after me in terms of numbers if they had a kit number. So again, how was I made to feel about that? That's another thing, it's something else. So many situations that arose on the back of it which I could spend a conference talking about, never mind... It's just the fact that it impacts on you, different moments in your life,

and you do want to look back — everyone may look back in life with a sense of regret but if you're able to grasp the opportunity and use what you've had and the experiences, and the learning and the enjoyment, and use that to give you that lift with what's next for you with an open mind and an exciting mind, then you can get in touch with a great place and you wouldn't have as much mental health problems, and you'd certainly be able to signpost, but there's not enough people at the top that are talking about it and that's what I'm going to push for. I am, I am. We can get to that situation.

TB: I mean that's why I am doing the research because I'd like this to have more attention, to hopefully push that.

3: Certainly in terms of the impact it can have and this kind of research we can show to our mental health lead and then on the back of it because we're looking to support players from the ages of Under-8 to 88. That's the mission statement, but how you going to manage that number? One last thing before I go mate, there's too many ex-players that hate football and never go back to it. My brother has never had mental health issues or any problems but he's never turned back to the game and that's his personality and that's his own personal reasons. Some because of their experiences now have a hatred for football, you know. That's something that really is a sad indictment of how they've — that's their interpretation, they've not enjoyed it...

TB: That's one thing I found interesting reading your book, is that considering what you went through and the way you were treated, you were still a big fan of the club and that came across as a part of your identity.

3: Yeah, but I think also I want my children to enjoy being fans and not to grow up to — they need to grow up and enjoy it in their own way. But yeah, once you've done this by all means I'd be interested to read it... You've got my email?

TB: Yeah, yeah that would be great thank you. Thank you very much again, it's been really interesting.

End of Interview

Participant 4 Interview Transcript

Key: TB - Interviewer.

4 - Participant.

[] - Pseudonyms in square brackets.

TB: First of all, if you wouldn't mind detailing your sporting career progression? Starting from how you first got into it and then right up until your retirement.

4: Okay, so... I turned a professional cricketer when I was 17 at [Club1], that was back in 1980 — I think I signed my contract in 1988? But my actual first season was in '89 as a professional cricketer, sort of signed the end of summer '88 and played the following year in '89. I retired in 2007. So, I signed for [Club1] in 1989, and I left [Club1] in 1993, and I joined [Club2] in the season of '94. Erm, I got offered a 2-year deal at [Club1], but I just felt opportunities lay elsewhere and I moved down to [Club2] in 1993 for the season starting in 1994. Things worked out extremely well for me, and I'd got offered a contract at [Club1] - I didn't really want to leave home but I joined [Club2] and well and truly an [Club2] boy now, as you can probably tell by my accent (laughs). I love the county of [Club2], and I love the people of [Club2], they've been amazing towards me. Very similar to northerners are [Club2] people, they tell you straight, they tell you as it is to your face and not behind your back. They're like typical northerners in the south and I love them and they've been brilliant towards me and I retired at [Club2] in 2007. I made my Debut for England in 1996, and my last game for England was in the World Cup in 2003... You'd have to double check. Was it 2003 the World Cup? In South Africa my last game for England. I had an amazing career being a cricketer for — well you can do the maths — nearly 20 years, I suppose.

TB: So during the time of your career, how do you feel your personal life progressed alongside that?

4: Personal life, what do you mean? Like family life?

TB: Yeah so, growing up, friendships, family life and how that coincided with your sporting career as well.

4: There's no doubts about it, that whether it was an era thing for me I don't know. I'm sure other guy's experiences are like this as well. If you want to make it in professional sport, I don't care what sport it is, you have to be a bit of a loner, you have to sacrifice many things. That's your personal life, your family life... It's all been sacrificed for what you want to achieve. Listen, that's not just in sport as we know. That's in all walks of life if you want to be successful. There is much sacrifice. Me being away from home, I was the only child, do you know what I mean?

TB: How did you find that initially?

4: It was okay. It was a challenge... I... had one thing in my mind and that was to try and succeed and be a professional cricketer for as long as possible. That's what I wanted to do, that was the job and that's what I chose. I chose to be a professional cricketer. I knew then from the very beginning because of my Father's upbringing that professional cricket, but professional sport... Considering what you're doing, without just categorising it as cricket, I knew that professional sport, and cricket was going to be a stepping stone for what I was going to do for the rest of my life. There was never — I had it right in my head

from the first day of my contract, the moment you sign your first contract at 17, at 21, whatever you are. One of the first questions you should be asked is 'what are you going to do when you finish playing cricket?'. It sounds like a ridiculous question to ask from there, but I think fundamentally for better support concerning mental health issues, that should be one of the first questions you should be asked. Before the ink is even dried on your first professional contract, you should be asked 'what are you going to do when you're finished playing cricket then?'; and you'll get some people looking at you like 'what's that supposed to mean? I've just signed a new deal, I've just signed a contract, I've just become a professional cricketer'. Absolutely, you turn that into an opportunity and you enjoy that as much as you can, but what are you going to do? Have you any idea? And most of them will say they have no idea, because all they want to do is play cricket, but it just sews the seed, it just sews the seed for them.

TB: Do you think that's a major problem within sport especially, that people don't have a 'Plan B' in professional sport?

4: In professional sport definitely.

TB: Why do you think that is?

4: Because, you know, you're living the dream. It's a dream isn't it. That's what you go in for, it's a dream ticket, to be a professional sportsman. When you're dreaming, all you can think about is what's around you.

TB: Throughout your career then, did you ever suffer from any long-term injuries?

4: Erm... Suffered from many injuries... For example, my first knee surgery I was only 18. So, from 18 years old I was always battling to keep myself on the field. You know, you have to find means and ways of doing that, because at the end of the day if you're injured you are replaceable. I was obviously looked after, you know, your physio's are brilliant, your podiatrists, physios, masseurs, erm... I also sought some counselling from people on the mental health side, which I'll come on to in a minute. I saw a fantastic doctor in Germany by the name of [confidential], you'll be able to google him. Doctor of [FC1] and [NT1]. Homeopathic medicine and I've been a very close friend, and that guy prolonged my career probably by about 15 years, when I probably should've been out the game. Homeopathic medicine, all homeopathic injections — the guy's an absolute, you know, he's a whizz. His door is open, anyone and everyone can see what he does. Unfortunately there are still medical experts who prefer not to have a look because he doesn't believe in your steroids, your cortisone injections, and your drugs side of things, he doesn't believe in that. He knows there is a place for it, there certainly is, but fundamentally first and foremost it's homeopathic medicine... he saved my career, there's no doubt about that. he's a personal friend of mine and I love him to death.

TB: Do you think that was a huge psychological positive for you during that time?

4: Yeah. He also introduced me to something called Actovegin, and if you google Actovegin... Actovegin helped me massively with my mental health issues as well. Actovegin is an amazing solution. Originally it was invented to help older people with issues, who were suffering with getting out of bed in a morning and depression. [Confidential] discovered Actovegin, you know, present this to professional sportsman and it was a life-saver for me and my career, it was a life-saver for my mental health and I currently still recommend to people go — and I've just spoke to a guy currently now who

has serious headaches since he was 15, who was cured of them because of [confidential]. I don't think it's licensed in the UK because... I don't think they understand it, but anyway it's homeopathic. It's an amazing, amazing product but it is what it is and it's worked for everyone who's ever seen him. That's what's helped me with my stability within the game and through certain individuals I saw who I found counselling with as well... By the way, Some of the biggest names in global sport have been treated by Actovegin and they've been on it most of their professional lives, I'm talking global names. You're dealing with the highest level here.

TB: When you first got injured then, did you find yourself presenting with any mental health issues and if so, what issues did you face at the time?

4: After my first injuries, and I grew up in an era of — if you suffered from mental health, you were just having a down day, because it was a different era. In professional sport you get good days and bad days, you know, you can't win every game, you can't get every result... Very different between having depression or having mental health issues compared to being down, being upset because you've had a bad day or being down because you're disappointed. Being disappointed because you've had a bad run of scores or you've had a bad run of results... For me, there is a big difference between that and having mental health issues. Disappointment and depression there's a massive — there's a huge gap between the two. You can be disappointed, you can bounce back but when you're depressed and down you are in a different place all together. There is no doubt about that, there is a huge gape between the two. But there can be a very fine path between the two, so you have got to monitor it and you know, you have got to have the support mechanism around you and you have got to get a belief and a mindset to be able to combat the depression from disappointment, because the two can overlap if you're not careful. That's why you need a great support team, you need a... your go to person if you need advice or help. It could be your senior players, it could be professional medical experts to supplements, medicines, whatever, you know, there's a whole range of aspects you could cover for people who suffer with a mental health issue in professional sport.

TB: When did you personally first become aware of any mental health issues?

4: I would say the first time really that I suffered being down, I wouldn't say I suffered badly with mental health issues, I would say I was...disenchanted from the game, was when I first came back from my first England tour in 1996-97. I'm a people person and I went on that tour, and I picked up a soft fracture in my back whilst on tour. While on tour I did have a stress fracture on my back in 1996, but I recovered from that stress fracture and it wasn't accepted by the management of that team and the captain of that team and I was ostracised from the rest of team, the rest of the squad. That mentally, was a test for me. Think that was the lowest point of my life, not just in the game but the lowest point of my life. Because my dream, my aim was to represent my country and to represent my country was a real honour, but the people who were in charge of that group of individuals, the people in charge let me down. They let me down. Their attitude towards me, and what I'd been through, they didn't understand and they weren't particularly bothered about me either. That — Yeah I love to play for my country, it's a wonderful thing, but I don't want to be involved with the people that are up there. It was just a case of a massive let down, and I just focused on doing well and being accepted by [Club2] and being a professional for them. Then I got back into the England side further down the line. Certain players would come up to me, England cricketers would come up to me and ask 'what have you done to upset them?' and I'd just say 'I've no idea, it is what it is', and you just move on. That was... the lowest point of my life. It was the people there. It wasn't the sport, it was sort of

the injuries, it was the individuals. So highly regarded playing for the badge on your shirt, but you do still play for the manager and the boss at whatever level you're at, that's what you do it for.

TB: How do you feel you coped with that, being away from home and feeling ostracised?

4: I found it hard. I suffered... Badly. But I was lucky enough to have some good team mates around me, people like [GT], people like [PT], people like [DR], probably saved me from walking away from the game...

TB: So, would you go and speak to them about it as well?

4: Not really, because you were going through it but you didn't know how to voice it. You kept yourself with it, and it was a different era. When I go back to it I think of the likes of [KF] — former England captain, [KF] and [GN], were inspirational towards me and getting through these barriers. Then I was lucky to have enough time with the guru himself [FD], who was a motivational guru and former athletics coach. He was amazing to me...[FD] was superb.

TB: In what way?

4: Just his attitude — I spoke to him about the head coach and the captain of [ED] at the time, and he knew them as individuals and he knew me as an individual and he advised and guided me to get through. He was at the end of the phone and I could go and see him anytime I wanted to. He was superb mate, just a top bloke — superb. Anybody, you know, just look up [FD], he's a quality guy. He's a motivational guru, so he just knows what life's all about with a professional athlete or a businessman. He is the man. So really I surrounded myself with good people... That's what you've got to do. Surround yourself with good people.

TB: I was just about to ask you as well how that support work affected you...

4: I've named you about three different people there (Laughter).

TB: Yeah so you've beat me to it there... During your career though, what was your perception and knowledge of mental health like at the time? How did that change as well over the course of your career and in to retirement?

4: So, during my career you just basically relate it to having any problem with mental health issues... I never got through a stage... I saw it in others... But I never got through a stage where I was feeling really depressed. I felt down, and I was down... But I think when you're down you've still got the fight in you, and I always had the fight in me and I never, ever lost the fight in me to succeed or do well. I was kind of like — I always strived to be a success junkie in whatever I do. I never lost the will to fight out of the place that I was, so I would say I had down days and having seen others, and seeing others go through it I don't believe I got to a stage of being (clinically) depressed. I think if you're depressed and it's a dark place I absolutely can relate to it, and I may have touched on it within my own self, but I've never been in a place where I have seen others like that and I've really felt for them. I have seen others in that place and I thought 'wow', and I've really, really felt for them. You know they need more help than I did and I totally respected their position... It's a disease, it's a disease and I do and I think I maybe touched on the disease but I don't think I ever had it like I have seen others have mental health issues. It is a horrible,

horrible disease, and it's very difficult to come back from it. I think you can, having seen others but it's always going to be there in your background. So once you scar from it, the scarring can heal but it heals with a scar tissue and you can drop back into it... Not everybody does, but some people can naturally... You know, the scars can heal, but it heals with scar tissue, which I just said, erm... I think everybody is going to cope with it differently. There really are.

TB: I mean it's interesting when you said that, that you saw it in others. Because you're aware of the signs and symptoms to look out for, which is rare.

4: Yeah, absolutely. You have to respect people's mental health issues because when I was growing up nobody respected it. It was like 'yeah he's a bit of a weirdo, he's a bit of a weirdo him, he's a bit of a saddo'. You know what I mean? That's what people used to come out with. People never really knew what it was and I didn't really subscribe to that. I thought people who used to make comments like that were disgusting and they were senior players to me. There was nothing I could do about it because they were senior players and this was all going on around me. Seeing all that happening around you and listening to what people said doesn't make it right. I used to say to myself when I'm in a position of seniority I'm not going to have that, no way. I'm not — Just because I was maybe a junior player as a cricketer, I was sort of mentally... bullied in a way. That's how it was, that's how the game was. It doesn't make it right.

TB: So is it seen as a weakness?

4: Only the strong who could challenge that and be aggressive would survive. It wasn't the right thing so I absolutely made sure that eventually when I became a position of seniority or even having a position of authority or something like that... hey listen I believe in tough love and I do think you can be too soft, but I think everybody's different and I think you have to treat different people differently and get the right result from everyone in different ways. That's the value of life and being a life coach. Even if you're a top player, and you can be the best player in the team, you still have to coach as well. Coach people how to do well when you come to schools, but you also coach and mentor your teammates and from a mental perspective as well as part of your duty as a professional sportsman. That's part of your duty, you're fortunate enough to earn a living from playing sport and if you can't give that back, then really you're not worth the contract you sign.

TB: Just coming back to your retirement then, did you know for a while that you was going to retire or was there anything in particular that forced that decision upon you?

4: Yeah, I had a lot of knee surgeries from when I was 18-years of age and I had a stress fracture and I suffered from that, and it was constant for many years but I always found a way of — I think as a professional sportsman you've always got niggles and it's just the injuries that keep you out. As long as you're not injured where you literally can't walk then you can get through them, but I had niggles and small injuries where I've performed to a certain level... Well the last three seasons I played I think were probably the best three seasons I ever had in my career but sadly my knee paid dividend in the end and I twisted my knee in my final game and flew out to [confidential] to see [RS] and he said 'look you're done mate, you can't do any more' and that was it 2007 I knew it was it. Life goes on after cricket as they say.

TB: How did you handle that transition going into retirement then?

4: Basically when I did my knee, it's funny how I came across former rugby league creator at [WN] and obviously Great Britain and now coach, [SE]. I was with [SE] at Lords and he's a great guy, a wonderful bloke. I was with [SE], and I was looking at him in his eyes and he said to me 'listen, good luck with the retirement' and I said thank you and I asked him how do you cope? He said 'Oh it's tough mate, retiring's tough and one bit of advice for you... Be busy! Keep yourself as busy as possible' I asked what he meant and he said 'Look you need to to just be busy, busy, busy or you will go mad, you will go crazy. Let me tell you, it's not a good mad and it's not a good crazy, so keep yourself as busy as possible'. That's what I've done, I've tried to keep myself as busy as possible.

TB: Did you find that your sporting career has then helped you in that transition to life outside of sport?

4: Yeah definitely. The dedication of almost a military style attitude towards work so I would say yeah, yeah definitely instilled something that I want to do for the rest of my life. There's no doubt about it with regards to my work and my work ethic. I've got my own business and I've thrown everything into what I've got. I developed a product, and there's no point boring to you death but that's why I'm heading for a flight to Dusseldorf. I invented an innersole and because of the injuries I had I had orthotics made for me in Germany, so I've invented an innersole, an orthotic with a German podiatrist and a biomechanist in America. I've spent 14 years developing this, I've spent around about \$2million of my own money and I've got global patents, and I've thrown everything I possibly can into it because I've been sucked in to purchase orders and as I'm sat here now I don't own my own house and I don't own my own — I own nothing, but I've got my own business and I've got my life and it's the best job I've ever had. I've just got make some money out of it now. I've just got to make a living and I'm happy (laughs).

TB: Just to swing back around to a point you made earlier regarding your teammates with regards to mental health; do you think there is a stigma attached to the term within professional sport? Do you think it is regarded as a weakness?

4: Yeah it is terrible. When I was in my younger days, the attitude towards it was shocking and it was like you were 'a bit weird, or he's lost the plot' it was like that was how it was regarded. There was no real support as there is now. It is brilliant now, but it can always be better, it can always improve. At least it gives guys the chance to succeed whilst they're still in professional sport and even succeed once they leave professional sport, and help them along the way once they are retired from the game. It is still not easy because the guys still have to reach out and we're talking big and tough and strong individuals. A lot of them find it hard to reach out because it is... Men, sadly you know you may have heard the term it's not weak to speak, and the guys who are up there, it's fantastic organisation up in Liverpool who are fantastic and do a lot of work with them. They have built that in the cricketing world where it is not wear to speak, and it is difficult because blokes do struggle with that and sadly it's kind of in our make up, but we're breaking it down bit by bit. Women do tend chat a lot better than guys don't they, that's a fact, but guys are getting better and better at it. Just because you are suffering with mental health issues doesn't mean to say you're a weirdo anymore, but you never were a weirdo in the first place, it's that stigma of what people used to say where they would say that you've lost the plot. Well, you've not lost the plot, you're not weird, you're not a strange bloke you're just suffering from a disease, and if someone is suffering from a disease they're still decent human beings and they need help like any other disease. Care and that's what it's all about mate...

TB: Do you think within sport there is a greater need for education, awareness, who to contact, where to signpost? Those sorts of things?

4: Yeah absolutely, yeah. You can always give as much as possible and you can always put it out there as much as you can and communicate. You can never over-communicate the signs of it, you must overkill it if you can. Over-communicate it, why not? You know, it might just get that one person at the right time and erm, I'm all for that, I'm all for that. You can never over-communicate the message of mental health, no way. The more the better.

TB: Considering your career, your retirement and what you yourself have been through, what do you think is the thing that needs to improve the most with mental health in sport?

4: Keep as busy as possible. Erm... (Paused Interview)...You there? Got you, carry on.

TB: Yeah, no problem. I've just got one last question for you, if you wouldn't mind please? Considering your career, your retirement and what you yourself have been through, what do you think is the thing that needs to improve the most with mental health in sport?

4: I think that the acceptance is better. It's still got to improve and I think with all the money that is in professional sport now, I do believe that professional clubs, stakeholders of professional outfits. I don't care what you've got, you don't have to be the richest club in the world, I think there should be financial monies and support as sadly not everything is for free and you always got to find monies to help people. Not all the time, but I just think certain governing bodies need to find certain resources to support people as much as they can. There is a certain issue with mental health because these guys do give everything they've got to achieve, to be successful, to dedicate themselves to the cause of that team, that environment and that sport. I believe that we need to try and find the resources as much as you can to try and help these guys wherever they are and it's sad that it does come down to money, but for me the money is irrelevant once you get the right person and the right professional to help and support them. Support that individual and see them through, certain things and support it does cost money, of course it does, but we need to find budgets and certainly find reserves to help people who want to dedicate their lives to entertaining people. Because that's what they're doing fundamentally. They're not just there to be successful, so take runs, score goals, whatever sport you're in you're actually there to — for the fans, for them to enjoy what's on the pitch, to entertain us. You're in the entertainment industry, when you're in professional sport you are in the entertainment industry and you will be brought down by the fans and you will be picked up by the fans. From that you will either drop like a stone or you will rise like a cake mate. I just think we need to look towards planning and financial resources to help any individual. It's not just someone with a mental health issue, but the injury side of it as well where you can get a really bad injury and you bust your knee, your ankle, your hip, your back, but fundamentally, whatever your game is you've always got to suffer mentally because of it. It's all related. It's all related.

TB: Do you think there is a greater need to introduce some sort of education program or something like this to younger athletes then?

4: Yeah I do, I do. When you're young and you sign your first contract you're in a bubble mate. You're dreaming about your career. It's difficult to get that message across without sounding negative — very difficult. You need real experts to drive it, but yeah 100%. Potentially from the first moment you sign that first contract it should be part and parcel of it because it will help you bridge from a professional sportsman to being in the real world

and real life. This should be a tipping stone for what you want to do for the rest of your life. I think counselling should start from the moment you sign your first professional contract.

TB: That's everything. thank you very much for all your help. I really appreciate it.

4: Not a problem mate. When you've got this together let's get it out there. The more the merrier.

End of Interview