

**MM: So hopefully it's come up on your screen that we are recording some recording, amazing. Yes. Melissa, thank you for joining us on a Monday afternoon after a busy weekend. If I can just please get you to confirm who you are and the sport that you coach, please?**

MB: Sure. My name is Melissa Bessell and I am the head coach for Severn Stars, who play in the Vitality Netball Superleague, which I have great pleasure in saying is the most prestigious netball competition on this side of the world.

**00:32 MM: Thank you very much. So, can you just give us a little bit of insight into maybe how you came to this role, a bit of your background for those that aren't familiar with netball, your experiences of netball so far?**

MB: Yeah, well, obviously, my accent says that I'm not from this side of the world. I'm a Kiwi. I have been playing netball for, oh, quite a few years, been coaching for 30, was coaching netball while I was still playing, got into netball through obviously that was it's my number one sport. My mother is also an international coach. So, it was ingrained in us from a very young age sport in general, but just took to netball, love it. Have all my coaching levels coaching one, two and three. Have also got my Bachelor of Sport and Recreation, which I decided I wanted to become a much better coach, had played it, had got my coaching levels, but I wanted to have that just a little bit extra edge, so to



pray. After training, we had to pray. So, when you go in and you're learning as a coach different cultures, that also makes you understand more about people. And then from what? From there, I went to Wales, so living on an island of palm trees and sand and hot all the time, I went from there to Wales, which was totally different again, culture. But, you know, having again, the Welsh are very similar, I feel to New Zealand. Snowdonia looks like parts of New Zealand. So, I was very lucky. I lived there for five years. My second international coaching job and my most prestigious, I think because I took them from 19<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> in the world, you know, took them to Superleague to a grand final, and they were at the bottom of, you know, of that sort of pile, so to speak, created a pathway. So, again, learning different culture. And now I've been over this side of the world now for 11 years. And I've coached with Northumbria, I've coached Celtic Dragons, I've coached London Pulse, as assistant with Northumbria and London Pulse. And now I have the head coach roll at Seven Stars. So, it's certainly been you know, when you look at it, when you plot it around the world. I have I've been very lucky and very blessed. So, I can't remember what your question was.

**MM: Which is what was your biggest motivation to continue coaching so well?**

11:00 MB: You know, I've been very lucky. Very lucky.

**MM: Yeah, perfect. Thank you, Melissa, for that really insightful introduction, because it has really set the scene in context. I mean, I've been involved in netball for as long as I can remember, but there are already aspects that I'm learning about you as well, which is things you're into, you know, you mentioned there about culture and family. But how would you sum up your coaching philosophy, your coaching ethos or your. Yeah, realistically, what is your coaching philosophy ?**

MB: And my coaching philosophy is it's all about motivation, inspiration, you know, trust, honesty and all those sort of principles and beliefs that that, you know, I inspire to teach it to my players to be the best that they can be. At the end of the day, it's not just about playing whatever sport that is at that particular time, however long if it's an hour, hour and a half or whatever, it's about what they do before they get to the sport. And for me, obviously, coaching woman, I expect my athletes to understand that they are role models for young up and coming young girls. I want them to aspire to be as good, if not better than them. So, to be that it's you know, I don't like arrogant people at all. I'm very much about respectful of each other, of who we play, of who umpires us. So, it's just it's just those true, true beliefs for me as a coach. That's, you know, and that's changed because my first when I first started, I was quite probably a bit naive. It was all about for me, it was about winning. You know, I got that from my mother. And so, my first philosophy, which has changed over the years, was all about when you first spoke to me. It was to win and to be the best. And it's been over the years that I've gone. Actually, there's more to it than just that.

**13:10 MM: So, yeah. And you alluded to that, you know, that change in transition in your coaching philosophy, but your current philosophy and where you are right now, what do you think of some of the key foundations as to where that philosophy has come from? Is it your own experience as a player? Is it those early lessons as a coach? Where do you fit in? The foundations of your current philosophy were formed?**

13:30 MB: I think as a player. It was when you you speak to any Kiwi that plays any sport back home. We all want to win. It's about being. But I suppose at the end of the day, it's

understanding that you can still play a fantastic game, but if you're beaten by a better team, as long as you have performed well, then you have won. There's also an art over the years that I have found of losing gracefully. But it's not like I think so many kids over the years I've seen and watched from sidelines where they have lost. And they just think they are useless, they are dumb, that's it. And it's actually, you know, it's not it's and for us as coaches, it's important to teach them what is the learning outcomes of that loss, but also what are the learning outcomes of winning?

in me, every week and one day of training at the very start, we all stand up and we have to sing. I put a song up and everyone has to stand up, obviously, it's changed with covid. But we are in a big auditorium and everyone is a safe distance with their masks on and they sing and I patrol around and I make sure because I've known from Maori netball, that when you sing, you're seeing that real person. And if someone and we all love to sing in the shower because no one sees us, people might hear us, but they can't see us. I'm a true believer that I like to get my players out of their comfort box. And if I can do that and they can be themselves, be their authentic selves and amongst their peers, then when we go out on the court, they're not scared. They're not scared to let anything, you know, that they won't keep anything hidden. So we do that. And the girls are often they don't even know what we're going to sing. So, that just sends them, that's usually on a Tuesday. So that just sets the tone. And it also singing is great because if you're feeling down, there's nothing better than a good song. So that's how we start our trainings. It's very hard. If you speak to any of my athletes, I'm very, fitness is very important to me because if we, I've always said, it's the top two inches of making decisions. So we I wouldn't say I based my athletes at training. They do that away from training themselves. But we do have an element. There's always a high intensity of, you know, really pushing their heart rate and getting their blood pumping, but then also decision making. Yeah. So it's a full two hours. We start on the dot and then we finish dead on. I'm a definite believer in training, so I hate coaches that go, well, just try this just straight and then before you know it, you carry on two more minutes. So no. And if we get if we end on a bad note, I say that's it. We know what to fix next time. So, yeah, I do put a lot of effort and majority of my players. I also give them the opportunity to feedback. So at the end of each training, they have to come back to me and they have to tell me out of ten, mentally and physically how every situation is. And that gauges me. If it's only a five, you know, like, well, something's wrong here, but yeah. So, lately they've been finishing on a ten. So, I then have to look at that and go, OK, am I killing them or you know, I like it to about an eight nine, then I know from myself that my trainings are heading in the right spot.

**21:26 MM: Yeah. So you mentioned some slightly different, you know, with the singing and stuff. But how do you think your players, if I went to some of your players, how would you sum up Melissa and Melissa as a coach? What do you think they might say?**

MB: Umm. I think they'd probably say that she's very open and she's very honest. You know, I've said it before, I don't mind losing, but I also don't mind dropping athletes. A lot of coaches feel that it's the hardest job. I actually think it's the best job because for me, if I've had to drop an athlete, I would never just drop in without giving them feedback and getting them to come back. Now, if I've dropped an athlete, it's because I know that they can do better. I will send them away and if I see them back again, it makes me even prouder. So from that reason, because no one's ever perfect and I've said this to all my athletes, and so they'll probably say that she's very, very open, very direct and very honest, I call it. It's very black and white with me. There's no gray. If you give anyone, you know, I mean, I've got seven children, I've got four daughters and three sons. If I don't say it how it is, then they will take me for a mile. So I have learnt very early on with boys and girls. Doesn't matter. You have to you have to be direct, not killing. But just direct in my approach and being honest, if they are lacking somewhere, I will tell them. But then I will always say, and this is what we're going to do to make it better.

**23:04 MM: Yeah. Yeah. Which leads us perfectly into this third section around the question, which is that player learning, player development. So what do you think are**

**the crucial elements that are required to help facilitate or support your athletes learning and development?**

MB: Yeah, I think I see that and I know I wrote down a few things because sometimes I think I can go off on this, but ultimately it's about creating a challenging environment, you know, like. When you're coaching athletes, if you're not challenging on them and putting pressure on them to see. You know, when they're in a situation in whatever sport, if they're not doing something right, if they can't get themselves out of it, then they fail. So for me, it's about creating that environment. It's a training. And I've always said Ruth

MB: Ultimately, building confidence, I have to, you have to build confidence with athletes and some athletes probably have too much confidence, so it's actually monitoring that and teaching them how to be a little bit more humble. I am very, very humble. Everyone knows that if you step out of line or you are rude or arrogant, you don't want to be in my team because you'll get told. It's building confidence, it's building self-esteem, self belief, because all of that creates stronger athletes. It's understanding when and how to make the right decisions at the heat of the moment. Look like I spoke about before, within the game. But it's also, you know, if you create that environment where it cultivates positivity, to challenge themselves, the the other teammates, you know, then you're creating great athletes. And for me, it's about making them the best that they possibly can be.

**28:43**

Like, you know, like I like to be again, I was saying I want to be authentic and I like to learn from my mistakes. I'm not scared to make an error and I'm very, very good again through Maori netball and probably from my mother, when I've made a mistake in a game, I will own it and I will say to my players, I made the wrong decision and I should have done this earlier or I wish I'd done this, but I've learned from it and I won't make that mistake again. And I think it's learning and it's important to tell your athletes and take them on that journey with you as well.

**MM: Yeah. Yeah. So so what would you say then, are the biggest triggers for you in that learning? Is it things that you when you are you self reflecting? Is it going on education courses or talking to these other coaches? What you think the biggest triggers for your own learning?**

MB: I think the biggest one for me has always been I learned very early on, I always thought I had a very, very good memory. So after trainings or after games or tournaments, I would reflect and think, I could have done that better, good, I'll remember that for next week and got to next week, you know, think what the hell was I thinking? What did I what was I going to do? So now I've got into the habit of my phone. I will actually use my phone. And when I'm in the car, travelling home where I'm where I know I can be my absolute open, honest self and I will actually voice notes and put exactly what I thought. And because I know no one else is going to be listening to it, it could be some naughty words in there. But sometimes I know that if I've been that direct with myself, it means that it's an area that I need to reflect on and go and learn more about. Or I will say I think I should try this. So, I will put stuff down on the air and then I will go home and I won't listen to it straight away. But the next day I'll listen to and I'll go, hmm. OK, I'll take bits and pieces out of that. I'm also known to have, no matter where I live, no matter what room I'm in, I have a notepad and a pen and I have to have a light, a lamp next to my bed because it can be two, three, twelve in the morning and something will come to me and I think that would make a really great drill. So I would draw it up and I will look at the next morning and go, what was that? But then I'll get an idea and then I will create something out of it. And from that, I'm not scared to then go to training and the girls often go, oh God, here she goes again. I'll say I can't



learned so much from that. When I was able to be the assistant coach, whenever the physio, the manager, anybody needed something, I would help. And it gave me an insight into what the job did and how and all of these things. I created a mini little book for myself of when I become this is what I will do and this is what I will have, because I've seen this in X, Y and Z. So, I think for me that that's you know, I have met some absolutely amazing people of every every walk of life, of every age, from different cultures. I think I pretty much met just about every netball person from every every walk of life that plays netball on the whole planet. I have also been privileged to meet other people and sporting different sports and with friends I have made and I have created for me. When I look back on some of the players that I've helped over the years, they're either. Amazing mothers that have children and beautiful people, people that are now doctors, lawyers, teachers, and are doing everything that I've I've I've dreamt about of being why I've become a coach, they are now doing that in their life, you know. So, I think for me, I can't ask for anything if anything happens to me tomorrow. And I couldn't coach again. I'm pretty happy. I'm very satisfied with what I've done. But if there was one thing that I would say it would be do not wait because life is too short to ask, ask for anything, even if it's to be, you know, be pushy in the fact that you might, for instance, you know, if you are a netball coach and you live within the Gloucester/Worcester area, as soon as COVID is out, drop me an email and say, can I come and watch one of your trainings ? Because I'm going to say yes. You know, like I truly believe that this is not just coaches as people, we need to if people are asking, they want to learn. And why would we say, no, I'm not scared of sharing. I think it's something that us as humans we need to do more of. You know, we need to, if people want to learn and do it, don't be scared.

**MM: Melissa, that is perfect. Thank you so much. It's going to stop.**