

Micropolitical Workings in Semi-Professional Football

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This paper seeks to illuminate the micropolitical strategies that Gavin (a pseudonym) used in an attempt to persuade the players, the assistant coach, and the chairman at Erewhon City Football (soccer) Club to “buy into” his coaching program and methods. Data for the study were collected through in-depth, semistructured interviews, and a reflective log relating to those interviews. The interviews were transcribed verbatim with the subsequent transcripts being subject to a process of inductive analysis. Ball’s (1987) micropolitical perspective, Kelchtermans’ and Ballet’s (2002a, 2002b) work on micropolitical literacy, and Goffman’s (1959) writings on the presentation of the self, are used to make theoretical sense of the specific strategies used by Gavin in an attempt to persuade the players to see the merits of his coaching.

Cet article tente d’illuminer les stratégies micro-politiques utilisées par Gavin (un pseudonyme) pour tenter de persuader les joueurs, l’assistant-entraîneur et le président du club de soccer d’Erewhon City d’adopter son programme d’entraînement et ses méthodes. Les données de l’étude ont été colligées par le biais d’entrevues semi-structurées et d’un journal réflexif associé à ces entrevues. Les entrevues ont été retranscrites verbatim puis analysées par le biais d’un processus inductif. La perspective micro-politique de Ball (1987), les écrits sur la micro-politique de Kelchtermans et Ballet (2002a, 2002b) et les écrits de Goffman (1959) sur la présentation du soi sont utilisés pour donner un sens théorique aux stratégies de Gavin pour convaincre les joueurs du mérite de ses méthodes d’entraînement.

Recent investigations (e.g., Cushion & Jones, 2006; Denison, 2007; Purdy, Potrac & Jones, 2008) have depicted sports coaching as a contested and negotiated activity located within particular situational constraints. Such work reflects a conceptualization of coaching as primarily being an everyday, power-ridden, social endeavor where coaches use many and varied strategies to manipulate the context and those around them to reach desired goals (Jones, Armour & Potrac, 2004).

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Instead of viewing power as part of a binary relationship or located in a single person or place, this evolving body of literature has highlighted the existence of a “play of powers” between coaches and athletes (Purdy et al.; cf. Westwood, 2002). Indeed, rather than having an unfettered transformative capacity, the emerging picture suggests that coaches can only exert variable and limited control over both athletes and context (e.g., Jones, Glimtmeier, & McKenzie, 2005; Jones & Wallace, 2005; Purdy et al.).

Building on this portrayal, Potrac and Jones (in press) recently made the case for the adoption of a micropolitical perspective to further our understanding of the social complexity inherent within coaches’ actions as they attempt to tease, cajole, flatter and bully best performances from those with whom they work. They argue that the use of such an approach can lead to the development of textured and nuanced accounts of coaching that are more true to the social and problematic nature of the activity than have been achieved to date (cf. Jones, et al., 2004; Potrac & Jones). Micropolitics in this context refer to the formal and informal use of “power by individuals and groups to achieve their goals” (Blase, 1991, p. 11). Jones and Wallace (2005) and Potrac and Jones have argued for the need to pay better attention to the “logic in use” within coaching practice, in relation to how coaches manage the microrelations innate in the context, be they with other coaches, managers or athletes.

The premise of this paper is based on tentative empirical findings, where coaches, in giving credence to the political aspect of their work, claimed to often manipulate impressions of themselves to generate the necessary support and space to carry out their coaching agendas (Potrac, Jones, & Cushion, 2006). For example, the elite coaches interviewed by Jones et al. (2004) consciously engineered circumstances and others’ perceptions to their advantage. These included the telling of “white lies”, the presentation of friendly personas and constant “face work” to make athletes believe in them and their actions. Similarly, the work of d’Arripe-Longueville, Fournier and Dubois (1998) and Potrac et al. (2002) point to the contrived actions of coaches to protect carefully built up self-images when challenged by contextual difficulties. This is not to say such coaches behaved immorally in promoting false “fronts”, but that their actions reflected an understanding of the particular means through which social power is exercised (cf. Schempp, Sparkes & Templin, 1993). Such behavior echoes the belief of Ball (1987) and Buchanan and Badham (2004, p. 2) about pedagogical organizations as places, not where linear progression is found, but where “self-interest, subterfuge and cunning” coexist with “the pursuit of moral ideals and high aspirations”. Consequently, the aim of this article is to further explore the complex, power dominated nature of sports coaching through a case study that focuses on the micropolitical strategies used by a newly appointed head coach (Gavin) to persuade the players at a soccer club (Erewhon City Football Club) to “buy into” his coaching program and methods following his appointment as head coach. All names, both individual and organizational, used within the article are fictitious.

The significance of the work lies in uncovering the contested character of coaching practice, thus problematizing the often presented picture of it as a cohesive social network as represented through functional models and constructs (e.g., Lyle, 2002). In doing so, the study builds on the lead of others (e.g., Jones, 2007) in highlighting the complexity of coaches’ actions, particularly with regards to issues

of power and politics. The value of the paper then, rests in illuminating some of the everyday aspects of sports coaching as related to the strategic and manipulatory actions of coaches that have remained largely clandestine and taken for granted (cf. Gardiner, 2000); what Hoyle (1982) has referred to as “the dark side of organizational [social] life” (p. 87). Such an examination of apparently ordinary yet significant practices offers the potential to stimulate an informed dialogue leading to a critical knowledge of the disputed “connective tissue” that comprises coaching (cf. Gardiner; Jones & Wallace, 2005).

Theoretical Framework: Micropolitics, Micropolitical Literacy, and Impression Management

The theoretical frameworks used to guide the analysis for this paper were provided by the work of Ball (1987), Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002a, 2002b), and Goffman (1959). Ball’s micropolitical work consists of the interrelated categories of power, goal diversity, ideological disputation, conflict, political activity and control, and was the product of his examination of the “behind the scenes” nature of day-to-day life in schools. Ball argued that the different ideologies that people hold about the purposes of schools and their structures influences how people operate. In this respect, disagreement can lead individuals to engage in skilled strategic action, which he termed political activity, as different interest groups contest for control of the emerging situation. He believed that the quest for situational jurisdiction frequently leads to conflict, as one group or individual tries to gain advantage over another. Ball’s writings then are inherently concerned with issues of power; specifically related to strategies of control and influence. Rather than viewing conflict as pathological, however, Ball argued that it could be a sign that change was pending. Indeed, he argued that conflict was often considered a precursor for change; a condition which he believed should be connected with more explicitly and imaginatively by researchers. Ball’s work then can be viewed as a critique of the “performance” and “effectiveness” agenda. Indeed, it reveals the contested nature of the pedagogical workplace and, hence, what it really “means ‘to be a teacher’” (Ball, 1999, p. 2).

The second analytical framework employed stems from the work of Kelchtermans and colleagues. They focused on how new teachers develop “micropolitical literacy”; the process by which teachers learn to “read” the micropolitical reality of the school landscape, and subsequently “write” themselves into it (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a, 2002b). Kelchtermans’ and Ballet (2002a) suggested that micropolitics are often linked to the concept of “working conditions”, in that all teachers hold beliefs about what conditions are necessary or desirable for them to undertake their professional activities properly. Here, the term “properly” referred to both “effectively”, in terms of achieving specified or desired outcomes, and “satisfying” in a personal sense. The micropolitics engaged in by teachers to reach these goals encompassed both struggle and conflict, and collaboration and coalition building (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b). Kelchtermans’ work, therefore, focuses on the individual in context and how he or she is, or behaves, in the immediate working environment. This does not mean that reflections are carried out in isolation, as they are always considered “communal” or “participatory” in nature. Instead, this work

emphasizes the contested or negotiated character of teachers' practice (Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe, 1994). Similar to Ball, Kelchtermans and Ballet concluded that micropolitics are always a natural part of the functioning of organizations and are therefore not necessarily dysfunctional.

The final analytical framework used to situate the study was the dramaturgical theory outlined in Goffman's (1959) classic text, *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life*. Here, Goffman's attention focused on how an individual is required to present a compelling "front" to fulfill the duties of a particular role in a way that meets the expectations that others have of them in that role. Goffman's thinking then, allows a researcher to explore how people not only produce recognizable performances for others, but also how they strategically manipulate others' perceptions of themselves and social situations to reach their goals. (Williams, 1998). The intention of such social performances is to create a certain impression to the people present which, in turn, dictates future interaction. In this respect, Goffman's work examines the political process by which rules of social engagement are established, enforced, challenged and broken (Dennis & Martin, 2005).

While Goffman's work has been traditionally criticized for under-theorizing power and its workings, we argue that, in conjunction with the micropolitical frameworks provided by Ball (1987) and Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002a), it is capable of highlighting the social processes through which power is enacted. Indeed, Dennis and Martin have argued that the micro focus adopted by Goffman shows a fundamental concern with power phenomena. This is particularly so with regard to questions of "who can force others to accept their rules and how they do it" (Becker, 1963). Furthermore, Goffman's own conceptualization of his work was as an "analysis of the social arrangements enjoyed by those with institutional authority" (1983, p. 17), and how classified people, as individuals and groups, interact with each other and why they do so in the ways that they do (Hacking, 2004).

We subsequently contend that this combination of theoretical perspectives, as it relates to "professional interests", "working conditions" and "social interaction", can contribute much in the quest to dig beneath the unproblematic, functionalist and "innocent" portrayal of coaching that has been typical of much previous writing. Indeed, this theoretical framework can not only provide useful insights into how coaches come to understand and develop their knowledge in relation to the struggles of interests and the processes of power in their work (cf. Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b), but also the proactive and reactive strategies that coaches use to achieve desirable working conditions. It is also a perspective which, by going beyond simply providing a list of micropolitical actions, focuses on the meaningful interactions between coach and context to examine whether, and in what sense, a particular behavior or action achieves micropolitical importance (Potrac & Jones, in press).

We acknowledge that, for some, drawing upon theories from complex change in education to inform sports coaching can be construed as a "forced fit". The analysis, however, has considerable applicability to both educational and sporting settings, as both are inherently characterized by dynamism and complexity in that each entails continuous decision making, dilemmas and ambiguity requiring iterative planning, observation, evaluation, and reactions to "goings on" (Jones & Wallace, 2005). Both also rely on actors establishing and maintaining power and sway over others' actions and learning. Similarly, as coaching is about influencing others toward a perceived greater good, a social analysis of the microinteractions

within coaching would also seem applicable (see Jones et al. among others for a fuller discussion here). Applying such theoretical perspectives to coaching then, may not be such a big step, while holding considerable promise for fruitful inquiry.

Method

Interpretive interview techniques were used as the primary means of data collection. The interpretive perspective is fundamentally concerned with understanding how people construct and continue to construct social reality, given their interests and purposes (Andrews, Mason, & Silk, 2005; Sparkes, 1992). Several researchers (Cushion & Jones, 2006; Jones et al., 2004; Jones et al., 2005; Jones, 2006) have thus suggested that this perspective is able to capture the often chaotic, complex, ambiguous and negotiated working lives of coaches and athletes. As such, interpretive interviews represent a mode of inquiry that readily lends itself to questions about which relatively little is known, such as the power plays embedded in sports coaching (Denison, 2007; Denzin, 1989; Streat, 1998). Indeed, highlighting the dynamic, awkward and often cluttered nature of social interaction within coaching holds the potential for yielding a greater understanding of the subjective sensibilities of those who comprise it (Denison; Jones et al.). However, it is acknowledged that, while interpretive inquiry may be able to tease out the uniqueness of the individual through allowing them greater voice than is the case in other research genres, the process of selecting excerpts from interview transcripts before converting them into researcher-written stories is fraught with opportunities for the researcher's voice to dominate (Jones, Armour, & Potrac, 2003; Jones et al., 2004; Sparkes, 1993). Consequently, in an attempt to avoid a sanitized portrayal, and to develop a greater feel for the issues that Gavin deemed important, we kept a brief reflective log and updated it at the end of each interview. Such journal entries served both as a means of concept clarification and as a reflexive vehicle through which Gavin's unfolding story was constantly revisited and progressively structured. Stake (1995) called this a process of pulling text apart and putting it back together more meaningfully. These reflections enhanced the reservoir of data which contributed to the larger narrative.

The Participant

We met Gavin approximately two years ago at a coach education forum. Following a presentation by one of us on the power dominated nature of coaching, Gavin was keen to discuss more about it. While he was enthusiastic about the talk in that it had provided some much needed focus on the "gritty realities" of coaching, he believed that the analysis of power in coaching should not be restricted to that between coach and athlete. Instead, he argued that such work should also include an examination of coaches' interactions with a wide variety of significant others, including assistant coaches, administrators, parents and sponsors. Managing and developing these working relationships was as important to Gavin as the technical and tactical information imparted to players. After several cups of coffee, Gavin agreed to participate in a study that focused on the micropolitical aspects of his coaching. Following that original meeting, the lead author regularly came into contact with Gavin through involvement in a soccer coaching program; an arrangement that lasted for two seasons. During this time, they often spent time

discussing topics to be coached, the effectiveness of certain sessions, the progress of particular players, and the resultant “political” issues encountered. This collaborative, mutually enjoyable arrangement was considered to be beneficial to the research process and led to a genuine rapport being developed. While Gavin had many stories to tell, we decided that this paper would focus on the political challenges Gavin faced following his appointment as head coach at Erewhon City F.C., a semiprofessional club located in a small urban town. The team trained three times a week and played its competitive matches on a Saturday afternoon. The coaching, management and playing staff all received financial remuneration for the roles they undertook at the club. In methodological terms, Gavin was selected through purposive sampling, where a sample or single participant is primarily chosen due to their relevance for the study at hand (Morse, 1994). Gavin thus met Patton’s (1990) criteria of a purposive subject as being an information-rich case that manifests the phenomenon to be studied intensely, as one who would allow elaboration and deepening of previous findings while remaining, to all intents and purposes, a typical case in point.

In terms of his coaching career to date, Gavin has various credentials and experiences. Following a failed attempt to become a professional player during his teenage years, Gavin took a keen interest in coaching. He holds the highest level of soccer coaching certification offered by the English Football (soccer) Association and has coached in professional and semiprofessional soccer for 10 years. He has a strong pedagogical focus to his coaching, believing that a key feature of his role is to provide a supportive environment for players to develop a strong tactical understanding of how the team should play. The ethical implications of involvement were discussed with Gavin at a preliminary meeting, where the interview structure was also described (cf. Jones et al., 2005). At this meeting, Gavin agreed to the interviews being audio-taped, was assured that his identity would only remain known to the authors, that access to the tapes and transcripts would be restricted to him and the research team, and that he could withdraw at any time from the project.

Procedure

Gavin’s initial experiences at Erewhon City F.C. were explored in three interviews that lasted for approximately 90 minutes each. The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim to ensure an accurate and complete record of the data obtained. The interviews were conducted at 4–6 weekly intervals and were undertaken by the principal author in Gavin’s home. The first interview began with information about the purpose of the project, Gavin’s background, and then shifted to open ended questioning of Gavin’s thoughts, experiences and behaviors related to the coaching landscape at Erewhon City F.C. The subsequent interviews focused on his relationships and interactions with the players, staff and supporters at the club. The interview process was cyclical with each interview being transcribed and analyzed before the next interview took place. In this way, it was possible to identify themes and issues to explore with Gavin in the next interview (Sparkes & Smith, 2002). While a list of topics for discussion was prepared in advance, any new ones that emerged during the course of the interviews were probed and explored. Such an approach allowed greater freedom in terms of the sequencing of questions and the

amount of time given to each topic (cf. Potrac et al., 2002). The interviews were also reflexive in nature, ensuring Gavin's perceptions and perspectives remained at the heart of the interview process (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983; Sparkes, 2000a).

A methodological question concerned the right moment to draw the interviews to a close. Certainly Gavin had many stories and experiences to tell which added cumulative layers onto initial sketches. Here we adhered to the notion of data saturation, where, as a consequence of constantly comparing and revisiting the data as they were gathered, very little new information became evident (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Data Analysis

Following the transcription of the interviews, the authors adopted what Maykut and Morehouse (1994) have described as a process of "indwelling". This involved immersing ourselves in the data to understand the participant's point of view from an empathetic perspective (Jones et al., 2005; Sparkes, 2000a). We read the interview transcripts thoroughly to identify and cross-check narrative segments and thematic categories within them. The process also involved dividing the transcripts into appropriate pieces of information or meaning units related to Gavin's perceptions and understandings of his behavior in the coaching environment. The meaning units were then sorted into distinct groupings known as properties according to the common features that were apparent between them. Finally, the analysis proceeded to a higher level of abstraction, which involved comparing properties to organize them into larger and more embracing categories (Côté, Salmela, Trudel, Baria, & Russell, 1995; Jones et al.). The process of interpretation also involved transcending the factual data to develop a theoretical explanation of the social phenomena in question (Wolcott, 1995). This entailed reconstructing Gavin's story and identifying the factors that shaped, influenced and impacted upon his coaching behavior. Here, "analytical memos" were used to make preliminary connections to various theoretical concepts that might explain the key issues evident within the data (Sparkes). As stated, this was a procedure principally informed by the related concepts of micropolitics (Ball, 1987), micropolitical literacy (Kelchtermans, 2005), and the presentation of the self in everyday life (Goffman, 1959). During the analytical process, the second author acted as a "critical friend", encouraging "reflection on and exploration of alternative explanations and interpretations" of the data (Sparkes & Smith, 2002, p. 266).

During the process of analysis and writing, we provided Gavin with numerous drafts of this article and he was invited to comment on them in terms of the accuracy of the data presented and the interpretations that were subsequently offered (Sparkes, 1998). In line with Sparkes (1989), this taking of findings back to the field was considered as an opportunity for reflexive elaboration rather than a test of truth. It should be noted that Gavin approved of the final narrative and analysis offered in terms of its ability to capture the everyday realities of his coaching endeavors.

The Narrative Representation of the Data

A narrative approach was adopted to express the data, as it remains rich in "potential for performance-related description" (Stearn, 1998, p. 337). Without

wishing to engage in a lengthy discussion of the value of narratives, it is perhaps sufficient to say that they have the ability to generate insightful and previously unasked questions about the nature of practice and why people behave as they do (Denison & Markula, 2003; Denison & Reinhart, 2000; Sparkes, 2002). In this respect, narratives can be termed realist tales, characterized by the “typicality” of the persons interviewed or situations observed, with scenes and events being described “as they are” (Van Maanen, 1988). Although this somewhat presupposes an author evacuated text, it is recognized that the given realist frame need not be impermeable (Purdy, Jones & Cassidy, in press; Sparkes, 2002). This is because realist tales can be adapted to include different narrative styles and conventions. This, of course, raises the issue of whose story is really being told (Richardson, 1999). While we do not wish to diminish this problematic issue, we agree with Richardson (1990) that we as researchers have the ultimate responsibility for the text and therefore must engage in rigorous interpretation (cf. Purdy et al., in press). No doubt, when subject to such rigor, realist narrative tales hold the potential to delve into our “insider’s knowledge” of particular social processes and actions, thus providing a valuable tool for exploring how humans understand their lives and subsequently go about living them (Richardson 2000).

In the context of coaching research, several authors (e.g., Denison, 2007; Purdy, Potrac, & Jones, 2008) have argued that the utilization of narrative approaches allows researchers to explore the nuances, mysteries, and complexities of human interaction inherent in coaching and, as such, to develop a more detailed understanding of the activity than has been achieved to date. Adopting such an approach allowed us, to some extent, to “see” and “feel” how Gavin dealt with the dilemmas he faced, as well as the motivations that underpinned his behavior (Jones, 2006). Narratives then, cannot only provide detailed and rich accounts of the indeterminacy of individual coaches’ experiences, but they can also enhance the complexity of our understanding about what coaching is more generally (Carter, 1993; Denison; Jones 2006). In this respect, Jones (in press) believes that such stories hold the capability to examine in considerable depth the frequently misunderstood or overlooked every-day aspects of coaching.

Judging This Study

Several authors (e.g., Denison, 2007; Jones, 2006; Jones et al., 2004) have argued that coaching research should not only acknowledge the multitude of dynamic variables that comprise coaching practice, but that it should also allow coaches and athletes to recognize themselves in the findings. As such, and in keeping with recent discourse in the evaluation of qualitative inquiry, we invite readers to judge the “goodness” (Stearn, 1998) of this paper against the nonfoundational criteria proposed by Sparkes (1995, 1998, 2000b). For example, does it provide enough “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) to justify the interpretations subsequently offered (Holt & Sparkes, 2001)? Does it enable readers “to experience, however briefly, moments from the life” of the respondent, and come away with a better understanding of Gavin and his social world (Holt & Sparkes, p. 246)? Finally, has the paper enhanced our understanding of the politically laden nature of sports coaching (Holt & Sparkes; Jones et al.)?

Results and Discussion

“There Are No Friends in Football”: The Political Climate of Coaching

From the outset, it became apparent that Gavin had a clearly developed sense of “micropolitical literacy” (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a). At the initial meeting to explore his experiences at Erewon City F.C., he immediately shared his belief that soccer clubs comprise of power relationships between groups with different interests. Consequently, the quest to establish effective and satisfying working conditions was far from a straightforward process (Kelchtermans & Ballett). Indeed, Gavin described the culture in soccer as usually selfish and ruthless, with trust between individuals being at a premium. On this point, he joked about the accuracy of an old cliché, that “there are no friends in football” (“Dead right that is!”). He elaborated:

You’re always working with a number of different people who are often out to look after their own interests. You’ve got players who don’t really care (about anything) as long as they’re ok. If they’re playing then they’ll probably work with you. However, if they’re not, they can be more than capable of making life very difficult.

At times, I’ve found that you can be in competition with other coaches at the same club. You’d think we’d all be working together to give boys the best chance of making the grade. The reality is different: some coaches always complain and criticize, while others are deliberately unhelpful so that they make other coaches look bad. I quickly learnt that I had to keep my wits about me and think carefully about who I spoke to, how I spoke to them and what I spoke about. You always need to have one eye over your shoulder.

Gavin considered it illustrative to even compare the coach to a politician, who having been elected to office, now faced the challenge of staying there. In his own words:

It was great getting the job. A bit like a politician getting elected. Now I was in the position, I wanted to keep it. I also wanted to do what I thought was good for the club and the players. The only way to do that was to get the support of the “big hitters” [most influential people] at the club. I had to do that if I was going to survive. I had to convince them, the electorate you might say, that what I had to offer was good for them. I had to persuade the players, board, and fans at the club. Not an easy task, and not something you coach education people often talk about on your courses!

Gavin was thus very keen to emphasize the extent of the political machinations he had witnessed. It was an experience which had obviously left a deep impression. He also considered it strange or alien territory where there were no guide books to assist him. Far from viewing the coaching environment as one characterized by harmony and cooperation, Gavin considered it an “arena for struggle”; a poorly coordinated, ideologically diverse place “riven with actual or potential conflict between members” (Ball, 1987, p. 19). Consequently, he continually expressed dissatisfaction with the functionalistic and unproblematic view of coaching fre-

quently presented by coach educators (“where were you when I needed you?” Jones et al., 2004). Indeed, in keeping with recent research addressing the social complexity of coaching (e.g., Chesterfield, Potrac & Jones, in press; Jones & Wallace, 2005), the social world that he inhabited seemed a long way from the simple and straightforward portrayal of coaching often espoused on professional preparation programs.

Instead, Gavin painted a picture of coaches who must work with a diverse range of individuals (such as athletes, assistants, administrators), who may not only bring different goals, motivations and traditions to the working context, but who would also not hesitate to act on their beliefs if the opportunity arose to do so (Jones & Wallace, 2005). This picture is similar to the findings from the literature on micropolitics (e.g., Ball, 1987; Blase, 1991; Fry, 1997; Kelchtermans and Ballett, 2002a), which suggest that individuals and groups often tend to pursue interests that serve to maintain and advance their own positions and thus often ignore official organizational consensus goals. No doubt Gavin considered coaching to be as much, if not more, about careful negotiation, orchestration and manipulation toward desired ends as about improving the performance of individuals or the team (Ball; Jones & Wallace).

The “Uninvited Assistant”: A Lesson in Strategy

Shortly after Gavin started work at Erewhon City F.C., an assistant coach, Wayne, was also appointed. This decision was taken by the chairman, without Gavin’s knowledge. Naturally, Gavin was more than a little annoyed, a dissatisfaction which fed his developing view of coaching as problematic and contested. As he shared his thoughts, his belief about the necessity of “working with people you trust” came to the fore. Here, Gavin noted that:

You’ve got to be careful in terms of the staff that you bring in. Obviously, they’ve got to have the skills to do the job, but you’ve also got to make sure that they will support you ... I’ve seen coaches who are supposed to be working together but are really only out to make themselves look good and make the other person look bad. I’ve known assistants to “backstab” [criticizing] the coach to players and officials ... I’m not saying that you should go out and appoint your friends, but people that you can trust to do a good job and who will genuinely back you, especially when times get tough! That’s why when a new coach gets a job in the Premier League, he’ll usually bring in his own staff. It’s because he trusts them.

As Gavin explained his micropolitical reading of Wayne’s appointment, it became apparent that his concerns were not only related to Wayne’s “loyalty” and “agenda”, but also to his own position as lacking necessary “allies” and “power” to confront the chairman on the issue. In many ways, he felt that at this early stage of his tenure, he had no option but “to make the best out of a bad situation”. In his own words:

It really wasn’t great that Wayne was appointed without my say so. At the time, I was just happy to get the job and didn’t think I had the stature to go to the chairman and say “I don’t want him working here”. So I just got on with

it. I felt a bit two-faced though about the whole thing coz when I spoke to the chairman and Wayne I was always highlighting how we could work together, but when I left the room all I could think about were the things that could go wrong here ... Would he stab me in the back? In the end, I just had to get on with it and see how things went but to say I was uncomfortable with it was an understatement.

Having considered several options, Gavin allowed Wayne to lead the majority of the initial coaching sessions. When questioned on what seemed an odd course of action in light of Wayne's perceived potential threat, Gavin replied:

I'd spent a lot of time thinking about how I was going to handle things. I wasn't too sure whether to go in there and take the bull by the horns and lead everything or to stand back for a couple of weeks and take a look at Wayne and the players first. In the end that's what I did. Once I'd seen how he (Wayne) did things in training I could decide how to act next. I mean, if Wayne was an excellent coach, I'd take some credit for allowing him to take some sessions. If he wasn't good, that would allow me to exploit the players' perceptions by doing better sessions myself. Whatever happened, I knew I had to win the players over.

Rather than exploring the possibility of immediately developing a harmonious working relationship, Gavin wanted to manipulate the situation to win the "trust" and "respect" of the players. If this meant exposing Wayne's coaching limitations, so be it. The players obviously represented a significant source of political support for Gavin.

Gavin's dealings with Wayne are in keeping with the work of Hargreaves (1991, 1994) on contrived collegiality in education. Hargreaves suggests that collegiality that results from the exercise of power by control-conscious administrators can often be viewed as an unwanted imposition. This is especially so when the individuals required to collaborate have significantly different views and values regarding appropriate pedagogical practice. This certainly seemed to be the case in Gavin's story, as he saw his requirement to work with Wayne as somewhat akin to co-optation rather than genuine co-operation. Given Gavin's reading of his working context, where he believed "few friends" existed and that people can be "pretty selfish", it is perhaps understandable why he opted to try and "outmaneuver" Wayne. While contrived collegiality is designed to have relatively high predictability in terms of its outcomes, the real outcomes can sometimes be perverse. In the context of this study, it appeared that rather than promoting collaboration, such collegiality laid the ground for manipulative opposition (Hargreaves, 1994).

Gavin's thinking and actions here also reflect Goffman's (1959) work on the presentation of the self in everyday life. Specifically, Gavin engaged in "face-work" to provide the Chairman and Wayne with a convincing impression of cooperative, appropriate action. Gavin was thus acutely aware of the powerful "hierarchical observation" or surveillance from above, and the subsequent need to appear to conform to expectations (Foucault, 1979). Such behavior also reflects Goffman's suggestion that, to uphold the standards of conduct and appearance expected of someone in a particular position, a "certain bureaucratization of the spirit is expected" (p. 56). Gavin, therefore, put on a show for the benefit of his audience

to manage their impressions of him irrespective of its sincerity, to achieve the goal of maintaining the Chairman's support.

Wining Over the Players: Gaining Support and Dealing With Resistance

Gavin considered that winning the "trust" and "respect" of the players at Erewhon City F.C. was "a real must, if you're going to have a chance of being successful". Rather than viewing the players as a group who simply followed and complied with the wishes of the coach, he regarded them as people capable of providing significant support for, or resistance against, a coach's philosophy and methods. He stated:

You've really got to win them over. It's vital. If they don't rate or respect you, then you won't get their best effort. That affects you, because you're responsible for the quality of their performances. I've seen how players can undermine a coach. They can moan about you, or complain to the chairman and the like. It's ok for one or two players to be like this, but you can't afford to have the majority of the players like that. If you do, you really are in trouble.

Gavin's outlook in this regard is in keeping with the recent literature addressing the coach-athlete relationship, which suggests that athletes' perceptions of their coaches' qualities and behaviors can have a significant impact upon how they subsequently respond to a coach's program (e.g., Cushion & Jones, 2006; Purdy, Potrac, & Jones, 2008). Indeed, the need to obtain the "trust" and "respect" of the athletes has been shown to be tantamount to effective coaching (e.g., Jones et al., 2004; Potrac et al., 2002). This evolving body of work has also suggested that far from being powerless, athletes are, at times, capable of exerting considerable power over the working climate of the coaching environment. For example, Cushion and Jones, and Purdy et al. have highlighted how, through the use of a variety of strategies (e.g., absenteeism, the use of derogatory humor, withdrawing best effort, protests, and confrontation), athletes might actively resist the will of the coach. It was a situation Gavin was desperate to avoid.

Although Gavin was very concerned with gaining the support of the players, he also wanted them to compare him favorably against Wayne. Hence, having observed Wayne coaching, he went to work.

I'd watched Wayne and knew I could do better. So I prepared a video presentation and produced some booklets containing key points with diagrams and so on for the players to take away. I then took them (the players) onto the grass, where I had set everything up in advance so I could get a good flow to my session. The key thing was to get the players to see that I was better than Wayne. I did things not just to help their learning but to make them see that my way was much better than what they were used to.

The strategy proved successful as a delegation of players soon approached Gavin to ask if he would lead all the subsequent training sessions because they were impressed with what he was exposing them to. He noted:

It was a great feeling when the players came to see me. I knew I'd won them over. The players had explained to Wayne what they wanted before coming to see me, so that was another huge plus. He was still the assistant, but he started to really take a back seat from then on. His standing in the environment and potential threat to me was hugely decreased. I drove home happy that night. I started to feel like I was really in control of the situation.

Gavin's comments show how his coaching pedagogy and the learning materials produced (i.e., video presentations and player booklets) served a political as much as an educational purpose. Such resources were used not only to promote player learning, but also to further Gavin's credibility in the players' eyes. This is in line with the work of Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002a, 2002b), who suggested that most beginning teachers spend much time on careful lesson planning, inventing imaginative activities and developing attractive learning materials not just to please their pupils "but also for strategic reasons of becoming visible as competent, creative, and hardworking professionals" (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b, p. 105). Similarly, Gavin used various props as a political strategy to "advertise" his professional know-how (Kelchtermans & Ballet).

While he was understandably pleased that the majority of the players had "bought into" his program, Gavin insisted that this was not a resistance free process. Indeed, David, one of the senior players, was initially particularly vociferous in his criticism of Gavin's methods and decisions. Gavin considered such disparagement problematic, as it created a strained atmosphere on the training ground while holding real potential to damage his reputation within the club. Rather than engaging in punitive action, however, Gavin again presented a cooperative "front" entering into dialogue with David to explore the reasons for the latter's dissatisfaction.

He [David] used to moan his way through all the training. He was one of the senior players and had quite a lot of sway in the dressing room. In the beginning, I tried to see if I could work with him. I'd have a chat with him before and after training to say how much I valued his contribution and what an important role he could play. But things didn't really improve, in fact they got worse. I had to really bite my tongue and keep my cool. I knew David was pretty close to the chairman, so I had to be careful in terms of how I dealt with him.

When questioned about why he thought David had acted in the way that he did, Gavin responded:

Well, I can't say for certain as he really wouldn't tell me. But the players aren't stupid, they're always looking to see if they're going to prosper under a certain coach or not. I think he could see the changes that I was bringing in didn't play to his strengths. He was one of the "top-dogs" at the club and enjoyed the benefits of that; so he was happy with the way things were. He didn't want change. I can't blame him for thinking that way really. While he frustrated me at the time, I didn't particularly wish him any harm: but he was just in the way. Players come and go, coaches come and go, and everybody is looking out for themselves at the end of the day.

Gavin's comments here reflect the literature addressing organizational change (e.g., Ball, 1987; Buchanan & Badham, 2004; Kramer & Neale, 1998). Such work has highlighted how the introduction of changes in working practices can produce dissonance within an organization. Ball suggested that changes are rarely neutral, as they tend to enhance or disadvantage the position of certain individuals or groups. He further argued that the introduction of new ways of working can not only undermine self-concepts by replacing established and cherished ways of working, but can also threaten actors' vested interests; that is, innovations, through redistributing resources and restructuring jobs frequently affect "the career prospects of individuals or groups [which] may [in turn] be curtailed or fundamentally diverted" (Ball, p. 32). Given this situation, it is not uncommon for people to defend their interests (Ball), which was very much Gavin's interpretation of David's behavior.

Even though he was somewhat understanding of David's feelings, Gavin still faced the problem of how to deal with David's continuing dissenting behavior. Gaining the general support and acceptance of the other players was crucial, as it enabled Gavin to take action to ensure that David was not in a position to "damage" the positive work already done. Although maintaining the outward collaborative "front", Gavin outlined how he used training sessions engineered to publicly expose David's technical and physical weaknesses, which he ultimately hoped would lead to David's marginalization within the squad. In Gavin's own words:

Once I had most of the players on my side, I didn't have to worry about him so much. I started setting things up in training so that he'd fail. He just didn't have the technical ability or the speed to play in the position that he wanted, so I decided to exploit that. We'd set up some patterns of play and the players would be working hard and every time he'd be in the wrong place, make a bad pass or have a crap touch. After a couple of sessions, I began to hear complaints from the players about him. His status within the group changed and he became more and more isolated. In the end, he asked for a transfer and I didn't have to get my hands dirty. I was pleased when he left, very pleased.

To further buttress his position Gavin recruited three new players, who he knew and trusted. These players were brought in not just to improve the team but also to reinforce Gavin's philosophy and methods. He expressed it thus:

I'd spoken to Steve, Alex and Simon about what I wanted when I signed them. They were not only quality players, but would also have a good effect in the dressing room. They trained hard, they encouraged the others, and they liked a laugh and a joke. They were good for the environment and I thought they'd be a good source of info for me. They'd be batting for me.

Gavin outlined how these players had immediately proved their worth as useful allies in his dealings with David,

Regarding the problems with David, I spoke to the three new boys about what was happening. I suggested that maybe the players should get together and tell David they weren't happy with his attitude and performance, which might be more meaningful than if I did it. So, they started letting David know they weren't happy with him and soon the other players began to join in. In the

end, I think that played a large part in why David left the club... It also looked better for me because I wasn't seen as the person who was throwing out an established player. When I think about things, it amazes me just how much stuff you need to do as a coach. It's more than just knowing about techniques and tactics and how to deliver them to players. It's about getting people onside and keeping them there!

Gavin's relationship with Steve, Alex, and Simon can be understood in terms of Goffman's notion of a "performance team". According to Goffman (1959), a performance team is "a set of individuals who cooperate in staging a single routine" (p. 79). For a performance team to succeed, all members must demonstrate "dramaturgical discipline" and "dramaturgical loyalty". Dramaturgical discipline relates to the need for the individuals within the team to discipline themselves in such a way that they play their roles fully while maintaining an ability to recognize and react to unexpected and possibly detrimental occurrences. Dramaturgical loyalty meanwhile refers to the moral obligation of protecting the secrets of the team (Goffman; Smith, 2006). In the context of this study, Gavin trusted Steve, Alex, and Simon not only in terms of presenting his methods and philosophies in a particular light to the rest of the players, but also that they would not reveal that they had been brought into the club to act as Gavin's "eyes and ears in the dressing room". Similarly, his maneuverings against David reflected a subtle appreciation of the benefits of using *influence* as opposed to *authority*. Although the distinction is difficult to evidence due to authority's latent potential, the difference is important as using influence without recourse to sanction tends to circumvent the possibility of open resistance (which brings new and more acute challenges) (Hoyle, 2004).

While Gavin was pleased at his apparent success in achieving desired outcomes, he remarked upon the uncertainty of the strategies he had engaged in and the continuing fragility of the players' "buy in" to his coaching agenda. Hence, he believed that the respect and trust afforded to him was both fluid and dynamic. This made the players' compliance an on-going area of contestation and negotiation. Gavin considered this struggle so fundamental to his success as a coach that it formed the core of his coaching thoughts and actions. He stated:

I have to think about how people might react to me and my coaching every time I'm in the club. Just because I got off to a good start, it doesn't mean that I'm no longer under the microscope. My actions and decisions are always being scrutinized as far as I'm concerned, so it's like a game of chess, you've always got to be thinking about what are the best moves to make with people ... If I start getting that wrong, then I reckon things could change very quickly for me.

Gavin's outlook here serves to highlight how the introduction and development of his methods and agenda were not only carefully planned, but also subject to his continuous readings of the contextual evidence that presented itself (cf. Fry 1997). Such an analysis carries Foucauldian echoes with two parties engaged in a manipulative struggle for position and advantage within a field of power that is, in itself, inclusive of opportunities and constraints. Indeed, Gavin's story highlighted how rather than being something that is possessed or owned by an individual or groups of individuals, power "is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another" (Foucault, 1979, p.

93). Indeed, it appeared that Gavin had some appreciation of how the flow of power at Erewhon City F.C. was very much influenced by how different groups, individuals, and discourses negotiated, related to and competed with one another (Danaher, Schirato, & Webb, 2003). As such, rather than passively sliding into the existing context at Erewhon City F.C., Gavin was engaged in an interpretive and interactive process whereby he was influenced by the existing club structures while simultaneously attempting to affect those structures (Zeichner & Gore, 1990; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b).

Epilogue: Learning From Gavin's Story

Since the interviews were conducted for this study, Gavin has experienced considerable success as coach of Erewhon City F.C. He remains the head coach at the club and our work with him continues. In a recent meeting, Gavin remarked:

Sometimes I'm worried that I'm guilty of portraying an overly political view of what goes on here. I mean it's not all politics. There are the day-to-day jobs to be getting on with; y'know, the planning of sessions, ordering kit and equipment, arranging transfers, making travel arrangements and the like. And it's a lot of fun. But then the more I think about it, the more I see the politics of it as an everyday part of what goes on too. In order to do well at this level I think you've got to be ready and willing to play the political games. You've also got to try to enjoy playing them and not take things too personally. Mind you, that's easier said than done!

Gavin's comments concur with Ball's (1987) sentiment that it should not be assumed that only conflict exists within organizations. Ball argued that much consensus also goes on and that, on a day-to-day basis, organizational life is not frequently marked by dispute or strife, and that not everybody will be politically active all of the time. However, he believes that it is equally important to not paint an overly functionalistic picture of organizational life by passing and obscuring its realities. Similarly, we certainly believe that the adoption of a micropolitical perspective can help provide a better understanding of some of the "gritty" and peculiar realities of coaching than has been achieved to date (cf. Ball, 1987). We are sure that Gavin would agree.

Gavin's story provides further evidence to support the growing contention (e.g., Jones et al., 2002; Jones & Wallace, 2005; Potrac et al., 2002; Purdy et al., 2008) that coaching requires a performance in terms of on-field personal enactment. Given the ambiguity and pathos that characterized the coaching environment at Erewhon City F.C., Gavin's interactions were a production upon which his power and influence depended. It became clear that, while Gavin's role entitled him to a degree of authority within the social milieu at Erewhon, he attributed his success as a coach to his ability to persuade significant others to consent to his coaching methods and to him as a person. In this regard, Gavin recognized that his capacity to transform the social circumstances at the football club was not unfettered, with others capable of resisting and obstructing his efforts to achieve desired working conditions (cf. Purdy et al.). His progress then was always contingent on negotiated and contested practice.

Conclusion

In concluding this paper, we firstly consider it important to recognize the limitations of single case study design. Consequently, although this is a story told by Gavin, being constructed from data he approved, we acknowledge that it is, ultimately, a story crafted by us, the authors. As such, there are places where our own experiences and perspectives have led us to emphasize some aspects rather than others (cf. Jones et al., 2003). Although allowing Gavin's voice to be heard was a central concern, we took solace in Geertz' (1973) declaration that all research stories are fictions "in the sense they are 'something made', 'something fashioned'" (p. 15). What concerned us here, as stated previously, was the authenticity of the portrayal in helping develop a better understanding of Gavin and his social world (cf. Holt & Sparkes, 2001).

Drawing general conclusions from a single case is also problematic. However, Yin (1984) argued that, although a single design can be considered "microscopic", increasing the sample size to does not transform a project into being macroscopic. On the other hand, if Gavin's thoughts and experiences are taken as the subject of wider critical reflection, then we believe the study provides some valuable insights into the knowledges that coaches require to survive in highly competitive environments (cf. Jones et al., 2003). In this respect, it could be suggested that while it may appear that coaches have a legitimate right to be seen as "knowledgeable" and "deserving of respect", this entitlement is instead "negotiable" and "has to be worked up" if an individual coach is to be successful (Potter, 1996). Indeed, Gavin was acutely aware that being head coach at Erehwon City F.C. did not bring with it a ready-made set of rights to be respected by the players, administrators, and fans at the club. Instead, these were entitlements that could be built up or undermined through his interactions, behaviors, and others' subsequent responses to them (Potter). In keeping with the work of Jones et al. (2003), we hope that sharing Gavin's experiences will achieve wider goals in terms how we think about, and subsequently examine, the social complexity of coaching.

Much of traditional coaching research has adopted a functional interpretation to coaching, where conflict or disagreement are viewed as being a deviation from the main task. Alternatively, the purpose of this article was to highlight coaching as an arena for struggle. Certainly, the findings here and those of recent research (e.g., Cushion & Jones, 2006; Jones et al., 2004; Potrac et al., 2002) suggest that coaches, as people in positions of influence, need to engage in strategic micropolitical actions, constantly forging and re forging alliances with relevant contextual stakeholders, to secure their objectives. This is not to say that Gavin's actions were totally Machiavellian, but that such behavior reflected his understanding of the need to engage with certain power practices for the greater good of the collective (cf. Branaman, 1997). To ignore such empirical clues could lead to the dangerous adherence to a distorted utopian view of complex social processes, thus denying the constraining and liberating effects of conflict (Sparkes & Mackay, 1996). While Ball and Kelchtermans' and colleagues work can help explain and deconstruct such practices, greater empirical evidence from everyday coaching contexts is required to add detail and nuance to the current picture. Of particular importance is an understanding of how coaches and various contextual others initiate conflict and change before managing the consequences. The knowledge gained from such

analyses relates to uncovering the contextual social rules that underpin action, in addition to the norms that bound such actions and how they can be overcome (Schempp et al., 1993). Our hope is that positioning coaching as a micropolitical activity can lead to a more detailed picture of coaches' practice; about how they get to do what they want to do.

Finally, we would also argue that highlighting how coaches manage and negotiate constraints and opportunities also holds the potential for insightful reflection by both coaches and coach educators. Indeed, coaches should be encouraged to critically consider and ruminate on what it means to coach, and to challenge the constraining influences in the quest for innovative, personal practice. We believe that examining the micropolitics of coaching is not just relevant for appropriate theory building, but that it deserves explicit attention in coach education provision if coaches are to be more adequately prepared for the complex, social realities of their work (cf. Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a). Finally, and more broadly, it is hoped that this paper has also provided an example of how Goffman's work on the "presentation of the self in everyday life" could be fruitfully combined with existing micropolitical frameworks (e.g., Ball, 1987; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a, 2002b) to provide a critical perspective on the issues of social interaction, collaboration, and conflict within sporting clubs, teams, and organizations (cf. Birrell & Donnelly, 2004).

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