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Charles L. T. Corsby, Robyn L. Jones

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Observation, evaluation and coaching: The local orderliness of 'seeing' performance

Charles L.T. Corsby

ccorsby@cardiffmet.ac.uk

&

Robyn L. Jones

rljones@cardiffmet.ac.uk

Cardiff School of Sport and Health Sciences

Cardiff Metropolitan University

Cardiff

CF23 6XD

UK

Abstract:

Inspired by ethnomethodological attention to social order, the aim of this paper was to examine the visible, tangible and contextual details of how coaches' observations, or what coaches actually see, are accomplished in practice. Drawing upon examples from a season long ethnomethodologically informed ethnographic investigation of a semi-professional football club, the paper positions coach observation, not as a visual perception, but as a locally organised achievement of the individuals involved. In doing so, attention is paid to the details of observations constructed in, through and by coaches, assistants and players. The paper concludes with some tentative recommendations for related progressive practice.

Keywords: *Coaching, competence, ethnomethodology, seeing, observation*

Introduction

In 2013, Jones and colleagues introduced the work of John Mason ('The discipline of noticing' [2002]) to sports coaching, as a precursor to the developing notion of (coaching as) orchestration. Mason's thesis was founded on the premise that 'at the heart of [pedagogical] practice lies noticing; noticing an opportunity to act appropriately' (Mason, 2002, p.1). It was subsequently argued that greater attention or sensitivity to the 'needs of the moment' can and should be a powerful developmental tool for coaches (Jones, Bailey & Thompson, 2013). In many ways, Mason's work marked an attempt to bring into the light the intuitive 'feel' that coaches base their decisions to act (or not) upon, with what is noticed becoming intake for learning.

Similarly, Ronglan and Havang (2011) drew upon the work of the sociologist Niklas Luhmann, to position coaches' observations as acts of 'distinction'; that is, through bringing something to the foreground against a subsequent background that thing is made observable. According to Luhmann, the creation of such distinctions is necessary to make context, and the events within it, noticeable or discernible. Yet, despite these initial inroads, the social structures which allow for such 'seeing' within sports coaching, rather ironically, remain 'unseen' (Keiding, 2010). In this respect, being so embedded within the practices and situations of coaching has allowed coaches' observations to remain hidden in plain sight. This would appear an unjustifiable and significant exclusion, as a central practice of coaches' actual work with athletes involves the observation (and subsequent evaluation) of the latter's performances and actions (Jones et al., 2013; Ronglan & Havang, 2011). Such noticing is, according to Mason (2002), integral to the practice of the pedagogue; that is, to discern and be sensitive to the learning experiences of others as they happen. This is because, if coaching is essentially built upon the intention of progressing or improving others in context, it must be premised on being able to see or notice opportunities to act towards such a goal in the first place (Jones et al., 2013). Whilst Mason and Luhmann's work has begun to shed light on what coaches visually perceive, a focus on the observational act as a part of a complex sense-making process has not been forthcoming.

In attempting to deconstruct the general act of observation, Jayyusi (1993, p.5) claimed that 'there are many things we may look at but not "see", things that we "see" but whose details we do not "notice", and things we see or even take minute note of but do not engage with'. It is

precisely these ‘non-visible’ rings that surround, shape and help create our interactions that Liberman termed ‘the ghost that rules the house’ (2013, p.140). In doing so, Liberman advocated a quality of investigation that returns to the roots of people’s mundane everyday worlds as found through ethnomethodology; that is, paying the utmost attention to how commonplace activities are seen, made (or unmade) coherent, and maintained by individuals (Garfinkel, 1967).

In giving greater credence to coaches’ observations as a crucial part of practice, the principal aim of this paper is to present an ethnomethodological respecification of coaches’ observations. Doing so, positions such observations as local matters that actors must manage and accomplish in situ (Davidson, 2012). The paper thus is concerned with better appreciating coaches’ everyday methodologies of ‘seeing’. This not only brings into sharper focus the importance of observing or noticing within coaching, but asks us to consider alternative means towards a better understanding of the social life and dynamics of what coaches see and why they see it (Ronglan & Havang, 2011). A principal purpose here is to make the implicit explicit; a process which not only ‘sensitizes us to the mediatedness of things [and] their complex interconnections’ (Gardiner, 2000, p.18), but also to the ‘practical accomplishments of skilled social actors in the course of their day-to-day lives’ (p.5). Coaches’ seeing thus is relocated not only as a visual and interpretive act (i.e., what one sees and what it means), but also as one that is socially organised and managed thus being inherently linked to context.

The originality of the study also lies in further understanding the ‘taken-for-granted’ social competencies of coaches, particularly in relation to what coaches ‘see’ as a part of their ongoing work. Its purpose then, is not only to reveal the everyday actions and awareness that allow coaches to understand when, how and what to act upon, but what informs such decisions and actions. In borrowing from Gardiner (2000, p.2), it is to ‘uncover and explicate a subterranean tradition’, thus engaging with a ‘take’ on coaching and coaches’ work rarely mentioned. The subsequent value of the paper rests in revealing the ‘seen-but-unnoticed’ in coaching; in teasing out the hidden potentialities of practice, thus bringing the ‘non-logical logics’ of the activity to light (Gardiner, 2000). In this respect, the work builds on the critical ‘turn’ within coaching, an agenda that has taken issue with the self-centric (e.g., Duda, 2013) and more functional, unproblematic portrayal of the activity (see Jones, Edwards & Viotto Filho [2016] for a fuller critique here).

Visual perception, therefore, is positioned as a social phenomenon that must be collectively organised and made recognisable or understandable within routine everyday practices (Lynch, 2013). Such attention to the ‘here and now’ reveals the ‘interpersonal manipulations’ of coaches (Garfinkel, 1967); that is, how they present themselves and their perceptions to others. In doing so, elements of the embedded ‘hidden work’ of practical action in terms of how (and what) coaches ‘see’ is brought to light. However, following Garfinkel’s (1986) studies of work in the sciences, the aim is not merely to use description to strengthen the case for observation as central to coaching, but rather, it is to invite an effort to exhibit practices in a way that coaches can work through themselves. Consequently, the paper holds the possibility to further develop knowledge of particular social processes within coaching; knowledge which can give coaches a heightened awareness of their understandings as the basis for conscious action (Gardiner, 2000).

The article begins with an ethnomethodological explanation of observation as a socially organised competence of coaches. Here, specific attention is paid to how coaches’ observations are constructed and accomplished in practice. Following this, a discussion of how coaches contextually manipulate observations to interpret their everyday coaching affairs is embarked upon, before a final section concludes with suggestions for how coaches can progressively ‘make-sense’ of such ‘seeing’. The examples presented throughout have been extracted from a wider ethnomethodological ethnography of a semi-professional football club, Bayside Rovers F.C., spanning the course of a full season¹. During the study, I (the first author) attended the weekly training sessions, matches and additional activities (e.g., Club meetings, presentations, social gatherings) at the research site. Consequently, and adhering to Garfinkel’s ‘unique adequacy’ and ‘vulgar competency’, I was a complete member within the setting (Rawls, 2002). Data were primarily collected through observations, and informal and formal interviews, which, in turn, were recorded through hand-written notes and audio-recordings. The Club itself consisted of over 40 participants spread predominantly throughout two teams, including two coaches (Steve and Joe), players and administrative staff².

We acknowledge that the work of others could have been used as a sense-making framework. For example, that of Goodwin (1994), who examined the discursive practices used by members of a profession to shape events. Here, seeing was also considered a ‘socially situated, historically constituted’ practice, where knowledge was constructed and shaped through

discourse (Goodwin, 1994, p. 606). Similarly, conversation analysts (Atkinson & Heritage, 1984) could lay claim to comparable territory, with the inductive development of intersubjective agreements relating to various events and phenomena being of primary concern. It has thus been argued that any serious interest in the common-sense practices of a social setting must attend to the features of conversation. Indeed, for Rawls (2002), conversation analysis in this sense is not 'separate' from ethnomethodology, but intertwined with everyday practice to create social order (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974). However, despite a shared interest in the use of language, accusations of overemphasis on the technical method required to understand precise workings of 'talk-in-interaction', including that of turn taking and sequential organisation, has left conversation analysis open to accusations of rather linear empiricist analysis (Atkinson, 1988; Maynard & Clayman, 1991). Consequently, taking into consideration that the precise purpose of the current study was the context of coaches' seeing, ethnomethodology's attention to mundane reasoning and practical action deemed it the most appropriate as a theoretical (and methodological) framework.

Lessons in 'seeing' performance

The apparent instinctive nature of coaching has led many to conclude that good coaches 'just know what to do, and when to do it', as if they possess some implicit uncanny knack or 'natural' unconscious knowledge. Ronglan and Havang (2011), however, alternatively concluded that success within coaching stemmed not from innate ability 'to do the right thing when needed' but from the quality of observations made, which in turn fed action. Such a position gives credence to Garfinkel's claim that to be 'seen', any action has to be made accountable (i.e., understandable) and intelligible (i.e., recognisable) to and by others (Lieberman, 2013). Consequently, observation, far from being biological, is conceptualised as a social act.

In the case of Bayside F.C. to 'play well' and thus be deemed a 'good player' was an omnipresent concern for the players. This was because to 'play well' was an interpretive procedure used by the coaches to evaluate the players. However, because to 'play well' was contextually detailed and found in every part of the related diagnosis, to form their evaluations, the coaches identified a range of specific features from a performance to which they could attach the term. These included 'winning second balls', 'checking shoulders' and 'playing forward'³.

Although anyone could watch and evaluate any match (or training) at Bayside, an act of ‘seeing’ (that was aligned with that of the coaches) might not be possible to the untrained ‘eye’. Hence, to be defined as ‘playing well’ was to act in accordance with the coaches’ wishes. Here, the coaches engaged in a reflexive collective discussion to ‘make-sense-of’ the performances witnessed. The following extract from a post-game team-talk indicates what the coaches had ‘seen’, in contradiction to what was expected during the game:

Field note extract [November 1st]

[2-1. Bayside F.C. lost. Their opponents were a notoriously unpopular team. The players fill the cramped dressing room. Rain shatters down on the tin roof. Stale red paint curls away from the walls, Steve and Joe, the coaches, begin their team-talk.]

Seb scratches mud from his boots. Rain drips from his brow; steam radiates from his head like smoke. “*Fuck,*” Callum shouts. He slams his boots on the cold concrete floor. The noise bounces around the cramped room... [BANG!] Steve, the head coach, crashes the door open. He shuffles from left to right, rubbing his head “*Some of you have really let yourselves down today! What I don’t understand is why we seemed so surprised when they shelled it forward; we knew they were going to do that. The messages were there before the game; we had to roll up our sleeves and get our hands dirty... [Short pause] But some of you don’t want to do that. When you come to a place like this you must do the basics; you have to win second balls, don’t let men run off you, mark correct side and keep the ball, simple passes. You don’t get given anything, you have to take it. I tell you now, that is why none of you will make it [professional] ... [Short pause] Seb, awful today, you were going on about how shit their 5 is before the game. Better than you today because you were fucking shit, at least he took two touches... [Short pause] Callum, we asked you to tuck in to help Tom out, but you couldn’t do that, why couldn’t you do that? You played in straight lines; an absolute disgrace. Joe*”. The players gawk at the floor. Joe steps forward, his movements are slow and deliberate; disappointment fills his face. “*If you are going to give a team 45 minutes and a 2-0 lead then you’re always going to struggle... [Long pause] Now this isn’t an ability thing we are talking about. We have ability and talent in abundance. You know how we scored?... [Long pause] We applied a bit of pressure to the dopey 4, but in the 89th minute it’s too late. Steve is right, if you don’t want to get your hands dirty, do the graft, win the second balls and have some arsehole to actually get the ball down, move it quickly and play. If*

not, that is fine. That is fine by me. That is fine by Steve. I have no problem with that. If that is the case, you just have to come up to me face-to-face and say 'nope, not for me anymore, can't do it'. I won't think any less of you. I'll just go and find someone who will do it," Joe turns back to leave with Steve.

The extract above highlighted the ways the coaches 'actualised' and organised what they had 'seen'. Although the actuality and outcome of each performance (e.g., a poor result) was contingent on the players' form, tactics, opposition and more, the coaches' work entailed 'making-sense-of' such performance(s) through given evaluations. In turn, the evaluations assumed a practical objectivity or official neutrality in order to achieve the status of being 'interchangeable with that of any man or woman' (Jones & Corsby, 2015, p.444). However, the coaches were not disengaged in their judgements. Rather, they actively constructed their observation(s) from their previously agreed upon evaluative criteria (e.g., the need to 'win second balls', to 'check shoulders', and to apply pressure on the opposition). In this respect, the action preceded the interaction, meaning the subsequent discussion work between the coaches, and the coaches and players, (re)constructed a considered account of what had occurred on the field. In short, what has been 'seen' had to be explained before it was brought into consciousness and made sense of (e.g., as in the team talk extract above; Garfinkel, 1967). In this way, 'seeing' a performance was not an individual act, but a social collaboration, be it the coaches deconstructing a performance post-game, providing a half-time team talk, or explaining what had occurred within a training exercise. It was a process of ensuring or attempting to make contextual information coherent (Lieberman, 2013). From this perspective, observation per se shifts from a visual act, to one that relies on the interactional procedures of social actors.

The features used to make-sense-of the game by the coaches, known by Livingston (2008) as 'descriptors', were not only grounded in expectation but also a response to the actions witnessed, while additionally forming the basis of future observation and instruction. Although more 'objective' descriptors could have been highlighted (e.g., the final score, the goal scorers, or even metres ran in each game), the coaches' diagnosis was led by the instructions (i.e., the descriptors) provided prior to the game. In essence, the coaches' pre-game talk guided the players regarding '*how to play*', or more appropriately '*how Bayside wanted to play*'. That information formed the criteria for what the coaches would 'see'. Despite each performance being unique, the pre-game information and lay-advice provided by the coaches indicated what

was expected of the players and, consequently, informed what would be 'seen' and how the players would be judged. The importance of coherent instructions (i.e., able to be understood by all) then, was 'not only for describing the "performance" but also for finding the "performance"' (Lieberman, 2013, p. 238). In this way, the interactional 'work' done by the coaches to form the 'descriptors' guided the infinite number of decisions required within and about each player's actions (Lieberman, 2013). A reflective, on-going cycle was thus created in relation to instruction and evaluation, which was encapsulated by the term 'seeing'.

More specifically, although common descriptors were used and discussed in the evaluation of players' performances, each coach's interpretation of what was seen or perceived was indexical; that is, specific to the context (Rawls, 2006). Consequently, acknowledging the necessity to achieve an intersubjective understanding, according to Lieberman (2013), each individual has then to negotiate and makes sense of their own and others' descriptors regarding any 'performance' observed. This positions understanding as only being possible through extensive joint interactional and reconstructive work by actors; that is, in terms of getting at what each other meant by what they said. Such an analysis points towards a new appreciation of coaching and coaches' competence; of the requirement to make themselves coherent, whilst also 'learning off each other where to search' for that coherence (Lieberman, 2013, p. 218). What is seen, or will be seen, therefore, is only given sense through the course of interaction. The extract below illustrates this process, in relation to how the coaches of Bayside F.C. deliberated over making team selection choices:

Field note extract [January 9th]

Both coaches simultaneously slide back in their seats, legs crossed. Steve waits a moment and grows more unsettled, fidgeting in his seat, "*We have a real decision to make Joe.*" He begins, waiting for Joe's full attention, "*Should we go with Callum up front? He's scored some crucial goals recently but fuck me; he is a lazy bastard at times. When he plays, he is a goal threat, but he just doesn't want to stretch the game. He waits and waits; it means others around him have to do all his running. And then when he does get it he doesn't want to take a bump and hold it [the ball] up*". Joe looks calmer; he sips his coffee before replying, "*Perhaps he doesn't have to stretch the game to be effective. We use Alex and Floyd to move the game up the pitch. He just has to get onto things. I still think he can stretch the game. When he is firing he is deadly*". Steve replies, "*I do agree... but when he isn't, it breaks down on him. I think we should*

consider going with Lewys. At least you know he will take a bump for you and hold the ball up, you know? I think he asks questions of the defenders, he can occupy two at once which helps isolate Alex and Floyd”.

From this perspective, precisely how the coaches generated their shared interpretation of events led to knowledge itself; that is, a case of being understood by, and securing agreement with, the other. The construction of the observation, however, was not a case of each coach placing a segment of the interaction on top of the last (Lieberman, 2013). Rather, they were engaged in a careful ‘stitching together’ of their accounts, often resulting from an alternative version or account jolting the initial speaker out of his or her original thought. Additionally, the consequent sense-making was not ‘just for [the] other, but also [for the individual] to know himself [sic.] what he intends’ (Landes, 2013, p.134). The alluded to stitching together of these accounts requires a competent practice of ‘synchrony’ (Lieberman, 2013), where, each actor is ‘led on by what he [sic.] said and the response he received, led by his own thought of which he is no longer the sole thinker’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p.119). Therefore, the seemingly ‘concrete version’ of what was ‘seen’ by Steve and Joe was not only subjective but also developed by collective action and procedures – an intersubjective and collaborative compromise.

What allows a further understanding of observations is that the account given by any individual is what enables a retrospective reinterpretation of some related scene or event which, in turn, permits a modifying of judgment about that event (Coulon, 1995). In terms of the current study, each coach’s account not only highlighted what he thought he knew, but also illustrated the extensive, often background, ‘work’ needed to coherently ‘see’ the players’ performances from the other’s viewpoint. Hence, perception was comprised of an ‘intermediary operation’ (Quééré, 2012); that is, the coaches did not visually perceive something as an ordered whole and then recognise it as such. Rather, an understanding of action was only grasped through meaningful interaction (McHoul, 1998). Consequently, ‘seeing’ was more than merely what the coaches observed (e.g., a pass, a tackle, a movement), but was qualified and created through particular, negotiated and comprised exchanges (e.g., post-game analysis, coaching intervention, feedback).

Despite the importance placed on its consensual construction, ‘seeing’ was nevertheless often contested and encumbered with conflict when different descriptors were valued. Here, each ‘descriptor’ (or evaluative criteria) was itself challenged and debated for mutual agreement of

meaning. This negotiation meant that each coach's account of events was constructed not only from a personal problematisation, but amalgamated with a similar collective deconstruction of the other's (Lieberman, 2013). The following dialogue highlighted this contested nature of each coach's account when recalling a match:

Field note extract [September 13th]

[The bar after the game is busy but all the players have left. I sit with Joe and Steve whilst they enjoy a beer and discuss the performance.]

Joe: *"It's a good result but to think we went 1-0 down. We can't have that!"*

Steve: *"That dopey 6 picked up the second ball and played a diag' over Will's head."*

Joe: *"I think Richard should have been off his line."*

Steve: *"You can't ask him to be that far off his line, don't you think there should have been more pressure on the ball. We lost the second ball remember. Jamie should be doing more to stop that switch as well."*

Joe: *"No Richard needs to start off his line, read it a bit earlier. Then he can come and take that ball and take the pressure off. It is no different from Zach last year, we expected him to do the same."*

Steve: *"Yeah but Jamie has to do everything he can to stop the long switch. Full backs are in the team to stop crosses. That is what he is there for, don't worry about getting forward. You have to stop it at source."*

Joe: *"Richard should have a better starting position; he should have smelt the danger"*

Steve: *"You can't blame Richard. Rhys and Will, along with Jamie, could have dealt with the ball better."*

The continuous work required in the act of 'seeing' performances resonates with Garfinkel's (1967) work on Agnes, an inter-sexed person able to carefully and successfully negotiate situations and interactions leaving others unaware of her change of gender. In doing so, Garfinkel presented Agnes as 'passing' gender, rather than someone who had passed. Such a perspective positions coaches' observation as continuously engaged in 'seeing' performances. Thus, what coaches' think they have 'seen' is irrelevant until the work of achieving and making secure the observation has been socially structured; the observations are made 'knowable' and 'observable'. This conception of 'seeing' builds upon the intricate ambiguities and uncertainties that exist within coaching, and highlights the on-going fundamental competency of coaches as seeing the unnoticed. For example, Jones' (2006) auto-ethnographical expression

of frustration and anxiety was not a question of knowledge or understanding, but a procedural incongruity. Within Jones' account, the ability to address the players pre-match and provide good reasoning was 'not only dependent upon, but contributed to, the maintenance of stable routines of everyday life' (Garfinkel, 1967, p.185). This points towards the importance of 'management devices' that must be mastered for practical accomplishments to be realised (Garfinkel, 1967). Attention to this continuous negotiation of 'seeing' is 'not a matter of using pre-established skills and "methods" to outwit others' (Maynard, 1991, p.279). Rather, any wit must be accomplished 'in-course' to ensure other members do not read a hesitating actor as incompetent (Jones, 2006). We now focus attention towards such 'in-course' accomplishments.

The compliance of 'seeing': 'Seeing' what you want

The reflexive practices described above provided the grounds for Steve and Joe to have faith in their observations. Seeing was dependent upon using their understanding of the game through coherent interaction. In a wider sense, this work is often so successful that neither party in an interaction notices the process or the role of the other in such action. For instance, when an unexpected response is received, such as being ignored following the greeting of a work colleague, we often treat the utterance as not 'real'. Subsequent reflexive work then allows a secondary reading of the situation to make-sense-of it; that is, "they must not have heard me" or "they are having a bad day". Doing so, allows the possibility of more desired fruitful future interpretations to take place. At Bayside, the coaches' ability to construct an evaluation not only referred to a player's physical performance but also incorporated his compliance and acceptance of instructions (Purdy, Potrac & Jones, 2008).

Positioning observation as an interactional accomplishment situates the instructions and feedback from coaches as providing '*structure*' to team performance and, hence, what the coaches wanted to see in action. The 'descriptors' identified earlier (e.g., 'winning second balls' etc.) were examples of the corpus of knowledge used by the coaches' enabling the team to 'play well' (Mehan & Wood, 1975; Livingston, 2008). Such descriptors allowed a retrospective 'reading' of the game permitting both coaches and players to make-sense-of the unfolding events. Thus, pre-match team-talks were used as opportunities for coaches to revisit and reiterate their 'theory' of the game, which was based upon previous 'readings'. Here, the players were recipients of 'detailed' instruction; those precise to the team, the individuals and

context (i.e., the specific match). The following segment provided an example of a typical team-talk:

Field note extract [December 12th]

[Joe stands to address the players. He has placed markers denoting the team's formation on the whiteboard on the nearside of the room.]

Joe: "So we will set up with a usual four at the back, two holders, three across the middle and Cal you up top on your own, but never on your own, OK!? H you are in for Alex today, and Woody, I want you to sit and protect the back four, but not here [grabs and slides the marker which denotes Woody's position] up here, pressing the ball and winning every second ball. Anything on the half volley you must meet it. If we don't press high up the pitch, then it gives absolutely no chance for Rhys and Will to squeeze us up. So, if we are squeezing high I need you to organise that. Phil, in here [moves a different marker] while Clive you tuck round on the other side. If I remember them correctly from the last game they go short and then hit the big switch. So Rhys, if that happens, make sure you and Clive have your spaces correct, nothing drops in between. Callum, where are you son?" Callum raises his hand, "Right, you are up here, you must stretch the game for us, those little sharp runs inside the full backs and centre halves [slides the marker several times across the board]. Keep away from the game so that there is space for the three behind you. If you do that, they can have a good game. I'll be watching for it. Keep the spaces small and we all stick to our principles!"

The communicative work of the coaches to structure performance was geared toward a particular 'reading' of the game. However, it also required the players to be sufficiently competent in understanding intentions so that they could execute what was asked of them. What the team-talk achieved then, was not certainty about rules and such like, but expectations regarding what to 'do' and 'in just what' manner. The subsequent 'theory' became a reflexive feature of reality, as if it was a form of reasoning thus allowing for a 'reading' of the game; that is, the details provided 'not only delivered some particular information' but also created 'a world in which [that] information can appear' (Mehan & Wood, 1975, p. 12). In this way, whilst the observation affected the instruction, the instruction also affected the observation. Consequently, for Bayside's coaches, the active 'watching' for Callum to 'stretch' the game could well have taken place at the expense of 'seeing' something else of equal importance in his performance. The significance of this shift in 'seeing' could have resulted in Callum being

considered as ‘not compliant’ or incompetent rather than as a ‘good player’. From this perspective, Rawls (2006) warns that we merely see what we expect to see (i.e., the descriptors) thus failing to learn about or ‘see’ other aspects of the action.

Of interest here is the influence of the assumption the observer makes in perceiving what he or she knows; as if the performance was projected upon them. Here, the coaches’ ‘theory’ could become ‘self-fulfilling prophecies’ for their later ‘reading’ (Garfinkel, 1963); that is, ‘beliefs that become true as a result of taking action based on the belief’ (Garfinkel, 1963, p. 381). Within the current study, the coaches manipulated the performance by projecting their expectations or ‘reading of the game’ onto the players. Returning to the earlier example of ‘*stretching the game*’, it was information made ‘seeable’ and accessible to the player. For struggling players then, the coaches were able to provide more specific theorising (i.e., providing them with definitive indicators) to help them perform; to be compliant towards. Through providing contextual markers (descriptors) to the players, the coaches’ criteria of judgement were made clear. In spite of the complexity of the game, the ‘markers’ assured the players that if they were compliant in carrying out the instruction, they would be deemed as ‘playing well’, which resulted in selection. The following extract illustrates the coaches’ management of Tom’s performance criteria:

Field note extract [December 8th]

[Joe and Steve discuss the weekend’s result.]

Joe: “*That was a massive win on Saturday! 3-1 against last year’s champions. I must say, winning the midfield battle made the difference.*”

Steve: “*To think we gave them so much respect at their place. Tom didn’t play down there but I thought he was good Saturday. He pressed hard and won the second balls all over*”

Joe: “*He has really bought into that... ‘The shark’,*” both coaches laugh. “*Seriously, he runs so much and now we have put some structure on what he needs to do and it makes a huge difference. Managing that space means he eats up those second balls and we are instantly on the front foot. We can get Alex and Callum into the game earlier and it makes such a difference. Just making sure he knows what he is in the team for. It is important he builds on that now.*”

Steve: “*I completely agree. I actually think he showed a little bit more on the ball than I expected. I didn’t think he had that, but it was good to see.*”

The coaches' instruction had a definite, very peculiar property for Tom; it was intended to allow the player to 'play well' and, more importantly, contribute to the team's winning performance. Everybody knew the instructions provided and the 'game' itself were two different things: the instructions were but instructions, whereas the players had to play the (albeit restricted) game. The players receiving the instruction(s) were expected to listen for, and orient to, the features mentioned. In Tom's case, his criteria for success was reduced to winning "*second balls*" and being seen to do this on the pitch equated to the coaches' being pleased with his performance; a specific 'reading' of the game.

Although directive and determinist in nature, it is important not to paint an overly simplistic picture here by denying the role of the players in co-constructing what was 'seen'. Indeed, contentious discussions were not refined to the 'work' of coaches, but also required the competence of players. In the example above, Joe referred to 'managing spaces' as a requirement for the players; an 'instruction' which could be termed conceptual or abstract. Although it provided criteria for judgment, the players were required to compensate for, and adapt to, the uncertainty of the game and what the concept of 'managing spaces' actually meant (whilst avoiding any 'unwanted' features in their performance). Consequently, even when the coaches' instructions were not readily 'seeable' or explicitly understandable, the players were required to orient their actions towards it. Such ambiguous instruction then (often provided deliberately by the coaches at Bayside) invited and required interpretation from the players (Lieberman, 2013); actions which, in turn, came to better define the concepts. The immediate and on-going nature of the Steve and Joe's practice meant that such 'ad hoc' practices were pivotal to maintaining order. The point here is to recognise that not every detail can or could be accounted for, requiring players to interpret and manage their respective performances. Garfinkel (1967) described such practices as employing the 'et cetera' principle; that is, where participants accept the incomplete and vague instruction by 'filling-in' meaning to proceed for practical purposes without being perceived as 'incompetent'; that is, it allowed the players to demonstrate and construct their own competencies in terms of 'playing well'. Whilst this may include either questioning or waiting for further clarifying events at a later date (Mehan & Wood, 1975), the sense making required of both coach and athlete was dependent on the practical contingencies that allowed for the incompleteness of the instructions to be realised in the subsequent 'seeing'.

Concluding thoughts: Practical suggestions for coaches

The work of coaches has been recognised as both negotiated and contested. Relatedly, Jones *et al.* (2013) claimed that in order to secure desired outcomes in this contestation, the opportunity to act appropriately must be ‘noticed’. The aim of this paper was to build upon our understanding of coaches’ everyday accomplishments through an ethnomethodologically inspired examination of how coaches accomplish observations. The argument positions observation as being socially constructed; as a phenomenon organised and made accountable within routine practice and interaction (Lynch, 2013). Therefore, while appearing to be visual, observations must alternatively be locally organised so that they are socially ‘accomplished’ (Lynch, 2013). The significance of this becomes apparent when considering that much of coaches’ time spent during practice (and naturally during games) is ‘non-interventional’ in character. The importance relates not to grasping the cognitive processes of where, why and what coaches are engaging with at this time, but to highlight the ‘visible-and-observable’ procedures employed by coaches when making an observation ‘accountable’ (Garfinkel, 1967); that is, how they make what they ‘see’ intelligible to others – ‘seeing’.

If ‘seeing’ performance positions coach observations as a social competence that must be ‘done’, and, accepting that observation is fundamental to the work of coaches (e.g., Ronglan & Havang, 2011), the findings provide an informative platform to explore and challenge coaches’ current considerations about how they see (and subsequently evaluate) things. For example, a detailed (re)examination of a ‘pre/post-game team-talk’ along the lines explicated enables coaches to examine their reflexive practices in terms of how instruction and suggestions are understood, in addition to how upcoming athletic performance is seen. Rather than concentrate on concrete technical instruction, attention is thus turned to the orderliness of the team-talk created, including issues of compliance and ‘buy-in’ from players (Potrac & Jones, 2009).

Such awareness could be facilitated by Garfinkel’s (2002) ‘purposeful misreading’ of ‘concrete’ settings. In this instance, similar to a student tutorial in which Garfinkel (2002) encouraged actors (students) to ‘misread’ a text, a coach can attempt to provide an ‘alternative reading’ of what was ‘seen’. Here, Garfinkel’s purpose was not for his students to make erroneous readings beyond others’ recognition, nor that the reading be synonymous with the text point for point, line by line. Rather, he suggested that the two readings should be ‘incommensurable’. In doing so, he advocated that ‘alternative’ readings should ‘go together’

to complement any analysis. In this way, a coach's misreading of a text (e.g., a post-game team-talk) could be a strategy for developing insight to find the 'what's more' in a performance (Lieberman, 2013). The argument made here places a greater emphasis on reflexively constructing evaluations and the influence (or not) of others. For example, coaches could and should endeavour to challenge their mundane taken-for-granted 'descriptors' as in 'misreading' a football formation as being vertical as opposed to the traditional horizontal. This would change the original formation played, such as 4-4-2, to 2-3-3-2. Whilst the formations still 'go together', the subsequent interpretation is challenged, leading the coach to question what is 'seen' and the players to ensure what is 'seen' is enacted. A further example of how coaches could challenge the negotiation of what is 'seen' would be for coaches to examine performance completely in relation to the opponent in a post-game deconstruction. Focusing on the subsequent negotiation between coaches, the intended breach would be to produce a coherent account of performance in response to the unfolding context, as opposed to projecting previous instruction and performances onto the players; a form of 'bracketing' to reveal the details of that which made the performance recognisable in the first place (Rawls, 2002).

We propose the insights offered in this paper as means to inject new life into 'sluggish imaginations' (von Lehn, 2013, p.77). The consequent recommendation is for coaches to engage with and harness the offered respecification of 'seeing' as an opportunity for creativity. This is not to suggest every observation must be 'new', but rather, to consider how what is 'seen' is collaboratively constructed. The implications of the study stretch further than mere coach evaluations to include better understanding the influence of 'others' when forming observations, in addition to providing an empirical starting point to widen the base of what is 'noticed' in and when coaching. Through analysing the visible, tangible and contextual details of how 'noticing' is accomplished, it is hoped this work has provided a new and unfolding focus for innovative sport coaching and pedagogical practice.

Notes

1. The ethnomethodological project which gave life to this study marks an attempt to develop empirical work into the sociology of social order (see. Garfinkel, 1967; Turner, 1974; Livingston, 2008; Lieberman, 2013). To honour ethnomethodology's uncompromising commitment to study the observable detail of ordinary society, participant observation was adopted as the principal data gathering strategy. An effort

was thus made to capture interpersonal behaviours, interaction, language, material productions, and beliefs over the course of a nine-month sporting season (Angrosino, 2007). In doing so, I, as the researcher, was positioned as a competent practitioner in the social phenomena under study (Rawls, 2002). I claim such standing as a player and youth team coach within the club in question, an involvement that spanned 4 years (in addition to a much longer history in other football clubs). This gave me a reflexive relationship between competency and setting, and a facility to make sense of contextual formulations and activities (Lynch, 1993). In being able to focus on the particular, the specific and the ordinary in the context, I, therefore, somewhat claim a ‘unique adequacy requirement’ (Lynch, 1993). Despite the assertion of ‘being there’, in line with the work’s interpretivist grounding, I do not, however, assert a privileged right to unproblematically speak for those under study. Thus, I accept that only a fragment of the story is represented here, as filtered through my (our) interpretations and sense making lenses (Sparkes, 2002). In arriving at decisions of what I saw and what it meant, a thorough engagement with reflexive practice was undertaken; a process defined as a “thoughtful, self-aware analysis of the intersubjective dynamics between researcher and researched” (Finlay & Gough, 2003, p.xi).

2. The examples presented in the paper are taken from a wider study that adhered to an ethnomethodologically informed ethnographic research design. The intention was to study and analyse the witnessable production and maintenance of social order within a semi professional football club. In doing so, what is presented are the ‘doings’ of social practice (most noticeable the coaching that took place) within the context. Rather than recite developments and promulgate the use of disciplinary research methods, the examples in this paper are a return to the phenomenal grounds on which ethnomethodology was originally directed and based. In the semi-professional football context under study, Steve and Joe, as the principal coaches stood at the top of the social strata. More specifically, as the head coach, Steve made the final decisions on club structures, training times and team selection. Joe’s role, meanwhile, predominantly concerned supporting the everyday running of the club and the delivery of sessions. Both coaches had highly respectable playing and coaching careers that afforded them a claim to ‘know the game’ in the given context. For a fuller report of the methodological detail see Corsby (2016).
3. A host of features relevant to performance could be extracted, but the notions provided here were recurrent throughout the dataset. Whilst descriptions such as ‘second balls’

are relatively specific to the football context (i.e., for players to secure contested possession), the examples provided are illustrative of how the coaches constructed what they deemed important to and for performance. Reflective of contextual knowledge, in addition to ‘winning second balls’, as defined above, ‘checking shoulders’ referred to the need for greater spatial awareness ahead of the play, while ‘playing forward’ denoted the requirement to pass in a forward direction as a desired first option when in possession of the ball.

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