

Complicity, performance, and the 'doing' of sports coaching: An ethnomethodological study of work

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Abstract:

Recent attempts to ‘decode’ the everyday actions of coaches have furthered the case for sports coaching as a detailed site of ‘work’. Adhering to Harold Garfinkel’s ethnomethodological project, the aim of this article was to deconstruct contextual actors’ interactions, paying specific attention to the conditions under which such behaviours occur. The paper thus, explores the dominant taken-for-granted social rules evident at Bayside Rovers Football F.C. (pseudonym), a semi-professional football club. A 10-month ethnomethodologically informed ethnography was used to observe, participate and describe the Club’s everyday practices. The findings comprise two principal ‘codes’ through which the work of the Club was manifest; ‘to play well’ and ‘fitting-in’. In turn, Garfinkel’s writings are used as a ‘respecification’ of some fundamental aspects of coaches’ ‘unnoticed’ work and the social rules that guided them (Garfinkel, 1967). The broader value of this paper not only lies in its detailed presentation of a relatively underappreciated work context, but that the fine-grain analysis offered allows insightful abstraction to other more conventional forms of work, thus contributing to the broader interpretive project.

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Introduction: Coaching as social ‘work’

Workplace insecurity and precarity have become central topics in social science inquiry (Schilling, Blokland, & Simone, 2019) particularly within emerging labour markets such as ‘life’ or ‘business coaching’ (Mäkinen, 2014). Here, traditional securities have been disrupted by an increase in zero-hour contracts, performance related rewards, and output based assessments (Schilling et al., 2019). Similar employment conditions have (long) been claimed for sports coaches, with such work being reinterpreted as orchestration (Jones & Wallace, 2005), performed labour (Roderick, 2006; Purdy & Potrac, 2016) and that of ‘repair’ (Jones, 2019). Indeed, the constant ambiguity and incessant social evaluation inherent in coaching, which involves a unique heightened negotiation between the immediate and the planned, appears increasingly characteristic of other occupations under the influence of ‘late capitalism’. In turn, as a consequence of such theorising, sports coaching has come to be viewed as a bone fide work setting, possessing a particular intentionality and performance structure encased within a complex social process (Puddifoot, 2000). This was recently illustrated in Edwards and Jones’s (2018) investigation of humour which portrayed coaching as a context where “power, interaction, and work-related ‘social things’ are both embodied and embedded” (p.759). Similarly, Roderick and Schumacker’s (2017) tale of role occupancy and Potrac, Mellett, Greenough, and Nelson’s (2017) expose of emotional labour within professional football among others, have reaffirmed the work necessary to make coaching happen.

The picture of coaching that emerges, is of work characterised by uncertainty and ambiguity being locally accomplished and enacted often by members caught up in various personal and embedded networks that both enable and limit their autonomy. For example, drawing upon Garfinkel’s (1967) work on juror’s decision making, Jones and Corsby (2015) made the case that coaches’ decision making was an act of consensus. Indeed, if such work is marked by a distinct pressure for progression (as coaching certainly is), Garfinkel’s (2006)

treatment of ‘conduct’, which refers to meaningful or intentional action, can provide clarity on the social structuring and agreement accomplished by coaches’ sense-making actions. Doing so, increasingly positions coaching as situated employment, whilst allowing an investigation of its doing as “local, intelligible practice” (Ten Have, 2002, p. 5).

Drawing upon ethnomethodological attention to social order (Garfinkel, 2006), the aim of this article was to deconstruct contextual actors’ (i.e., sports coaches) interactions, paying specific attention to the rational properties of conduct, as well as to the conditions under which such behaviours occur. The paper thus, explores the dominant taken-for-granted social rules evident at Bayside Rovers Football Club (all names used are pseudonym) and how, in turn, they were acted out by those who comprised the context. Subsequently, the driving research issues related to; how the work of coaching was enacted or ‘done’ at Bayside, in addition to how that ‘doing’ was perceived and participated in by those subject to it.

From Garfinkel’s writings, which coalesced into the sociological sub-discipline of ethnomethodology, the article contributes to examining members’ knowledge of their ordinary work-place affairs, of their organised enterprises, and how such actions are made orderable. The significance, therefore, stretches beyond a particular analysis to approximate a ‘model’ of coaching order, to unearth the distinct activities that constitute the work itself; that is, the unique “concerted doings”, or ‘haecceity’, embedded in the activity (Garfinkel, 2002, p. 99).

The identity of such detailed actions are more than often taken for granted in favour of ‘social’, ‘political’, ‘economic’ and ‘psychological’ analysis of work (Lynch, 2015); a concern which has led to interest ‘about’ professions or occupations, rather than ‘what’ makes up their constitutive fabric (Garfinkel, 1986; Sharrock & Button, 2016). Alternatively, ethnomethodology attempts to ‘respecify’ the problems of how competent individuals carry out their work to ensure both alignment with, and agential progression of, the general labour undertaken. A principal value of the current study then, lies in explaining the everyday

construction and deployments of meaning related to the relatively underappreciated living, breathing (coaching) world in question (Blumer, 1969); one, like others, shot through with implicit institutional power-full workings. Having said that, despite the belief in local orderliness taking precedence over given rules, the work has relevance beyond its specific locality. This is because through drawing inference from particular cases something about a culture can be learned (Williams, 2000); what Berger (1963) termed seeing the general in the particular. Indeed, following Garfinkel (1967), if social interaction itself can be defined as ‘work’, an understanding of how such actions are carried out in one context, hold myriad possibilities for how they can be done in others. Consequently, despite its idiosyncrasies, which every employment setting possesses, it is hoped that the fine-grain analysis of coaching offered allows insightful abstraction to other more conventional forms of work, thus contributing to the broader interpretive project.

Key Garfinkel concepts

In challenging the Parsonian notion that members adhere to an underlying normative schemes that are internalised, Garfinkel’s treatment of social activity – its ‘structure’ – is regarded as deriving in the members’ practices (i.e., those who are seen as members in the context). Within it, practical activity, circumstances and sociological reasoning are treated as phenomena in their own right, and thus, topics for empirical study (Garfinkel, 1967). This means that successful intersubjective practices of individuals reside in the constant processes of constructing mundane life (Lemert, 2002). Indeed, this is where ethnomethodology’s prime concern lies; in the sense making of members achieved through competent social practices (Holstein & Gubrium, 2011). That is, rather than being concerned with ‘what’ people do, ethnomethodology investigates the practical understanding of the immensely varied ‘how’s’ that people use to produce and recognise what they do (Fox, 2006).

Garfinkel (1967) asserted that individuals were able to produce and manage settings in such a way as to make them recognisable for others. Social interaction (as mentioned earlier) was thus ascribed as ‘work’, with members following social norms and rules to make their actions credible, or ‘accountable’. The sense that an activity has, therefore, is exhibited in the course of the activity through ‘accountability’. The grounding for this analysis was based upon ‘observable-and-reportable’ interactions between parties, whose skills, knowledge and taken-for-granted competency allow for the practical accomplishment of such interactions (Garfinkel, 1967). The subsequent action requires ‘intelligibility’ to both make the action observable and subsequently understand it (Ten Have, 2004). Garfinkel (1967) suggested this was an instance of how actions and shared understandings are commonly assigned residual status; the ‘seen but unnoticed’.

Garfinkel was not only concerned with the details of any action, but with following the practices that described and constituted such action (Garfinkel, 2002). He believed that the rules that structure interaction can only be discovered over the course of following that interaction. In this regard, Rawls (2005) suggested that the intentions of an actor must be negotiated and coordinated within him/herself and with others as the means for bestowing thoughts onto others; a primary condition of communication. This is where Garfinkel’s use of reflexivity comes to the fore, where individuals attempt to recognise others’ and their own actions through (reflexively) turning back on the interaction to see if the ‘other’ has understood. Consequently, what was meant at the end of any interaction is often not what was intended before it, but rather emerged from the collaborative efforts of the interaction (Rawls, 2005).

Similarly, Garfinkel’s treatment of ‘rational’ social action paid specific attention to the reflexivity of practice. The ‘rational’ in this regard, however, merely refers to members’ or actors’ powers of ‘agreement’ in relation to perceived rules of conduct. Thus, what appears as certainty of ‘rules’, which permeate members’ daily accomplishments, are only the principles

on which these 'rules' are founded. The subsequent 'acted out' is not a universal or normative truth, but the known structures and processes of what members create in that very setting. It is here that the value in Garfinkel's infamous 'breach of the background' can be witnessed; that is, in modifying "the *objective* structure of the familiar" (Garfinkel, 1967: 54). Consequently, by tracing members' actions, descriptions and definitions, ethnomethodology seeks to show the 'something hidden' in terms of 'how' the shared knowledge of social 'rules' is made continually possible.

Methodology

Ethnomethodologically informed ethnography

Although sometimes considered as difficult to define, ethnographic work shares a number of key commitments; the careful observations of behaviours and communities; an emphasis on the research process and how researchers may enter the field; and direct, sustained contact with individuals in the context of their lives (Angrosino, 2007). Despite similarities in terms of having a 'bottom-up' emphasis to the examination of social order, ethnomethodology's project is not so much to do with methods as in articulating participants' sense-making practices for accomplishing coherent social life (Rawls, 2002). Consequently, Garfinkel described the procedural means of ethnomethodology as 'incarnate', requiring direct and immediate observation of group members at 'work'. Borrowing from the founding principles of both, Weider (1999) suggested that ethnographically based ethnomethodological investigations can be 'sufficiently synchronized' to yield an insightful interrogation of underlying assumptions and new conceptual grounds.

The design of this study was that of an ethnomethodological ethnography. Whilst ethnographic studies allow for better documentation of social structure, order and interactions, a central concern remains the micro related question of 'what do participants see?' This is particularly in terms of how they make sense of and report their world. Such an issue can

somewhat be addressed by, or complemented with, ethnomethodologically discovered features which ‘allow’ for the participants’ worlds ‘to be’ seen (Pollner & Emerson, 2001). Consequently, through methodological dialogue, ethnomethodology can develop ethnography’s appreciation of depth, limits and complexity (Pollner & Emerson, 2001; Jimerson & Oware, 2006). Such a combination of ethnography and ethnomethodology has been described by Holstein and Gubrium (2011) as a hybridized analysis of reality construction. In an effort to better discover sensibilities at the crossroads of institution, culture and social interaction, we utilised an ethnomethodologically informed ethnography not only to generate an understanding of how contextual actors ‘saw’ the world, but also how they ‘did’ the world (Garfinkel, 1967).

Context (and main actors)

The study took place at Bayside Rovers Football Club, one of many ambitious semi-professional football clubs striving for promotion and full-time professional status. The primary focus of the Club was the success of the first team. The principal coaches, Steve and Joe, oversaw the development and performance of the first team and the daily running of the Club. More specifically, Steve, as head coach, made the final decisions on training times and team selection. The first team trained two to three times a week, with one or more matches a week depending on the unfolding schedule.

In terms of their careers, Steve and Joe, had a range of credentials and experiences. Both had highly respectable playing careers and a claim to ‘know the game’. Steve pursued his passions for coaching following an illustrious career as a professional footballer, playing in the highest tier of English football. His résumé included a few assistant roles before taking over at Bayside Rovers F.C. Steve was an UEFA ‘A’ licence qualified coach; the second highest level of coaching qualification available in football. Although having not played professionally, Joe

had enjoyed a prestigious non-league playing career, while his résumé was additionally scattered with numerous high calibre coaching positions.

The Club itself consisted of over 40 participants spread throughout the two top teams (the first and reserve teams), including coaches, players and administrative staff. Selection for these teams was based upon form, injury and status.

Procedure

The fieldwork was conducted over the course of a 10-month football season. An effort was thus made to record the interactions, behaviours and language over the period under study. This comprised attendance at a minimum of two sessions (two hours per session) per week, and competitive fixtures and additional activities (e.g., Club meetings, presentations etc.) as they occurred. The claim to ‘being there’ also included various social times surrounding both training and matches (i.e., in the build up and time immediately following both games and training). In doing so, I (the first author), occupied a dual role as a player and researcher within Bayside (in addition to a much longer history in other clubs). The subsequent observations were conducted both whilst participating in the sessions as a player, as well as from the side-lines. Such a position reflected Garfinkel’s ‘unique adequacy requirement’; that is, the individual must be a competent participant in the specialised practices under study (Rawls, 2002). It is what Lynch (2015) recently defined as the ethnomethodology’s need to be ‘hybridized’ with practical action.

Participation in the sessions (as a player) allowed for a greater sense of integration and invitation to any social gatherings away from the training ground (and coaches). Through adopting the dual role of a player and researcher, full access to all meetings between coaches and players was granted. That said, in arriving at the decision to study a context I was already a member of required a thorough engagement with the reflexive relationship between the

competency of members and the setting studied. This included the continuous struggle between power differences, position and participation within the study.

The subsequent events observed, including the associated informal interviews undertaken, were primarily recorded through a combination of detailed hand written and audio-recorded notes, which were then transcribed verbatim. As stated, actors within the text were given pseudonyms and compromising features were omitted to protect their anonymity within the project's context (Adler & Adler, 1993). The consent of participants was not assumed as a once-and-for-all event, but as a process subject to constant re-negotiation as the project unfolded (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). In this regard, the first author's status as both a researcher and player was made explicit to all the participants within the study.

Data analysis

The analysis employed within the study moved between data already gathered and on-going collection; a form of 'sequential' (Becker, 1976) or 'interim' sense-making scrutiny (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Here, following an initial idea phase, systematic 'coding' was used to move the raw data set into constructed themes. The process involved primary-cycle coding followed by the creation of secondary-level codes (Tracy, 2013). Whilst overlap and repetition inevitably occurred, the findings were not privileged by the quantity of times an event occurred. Rather, the 'larger' units of analysis were compared and contrasted in the primary-cycle from the transcribed fieldnotes. Here, the enquiry involved developing the richness of the notes, the initial codes, and beginning to see their 'fit' with previous data. These primary codes were critically examined for nuances before categorisation into more concrete interpretive concepts. In keeping with Tracy (2013), the purpose of the secondary coding was to explain, theorize, and synthesize interpretations and patterns of data.

Rejecting the notion that data analysis occurs in isolation, the adopted coding strategy meant that the themes and concepts generated could be compared with those previously

established. The flexibility to move backwards and forwards within the data set aligned with what Charmaz (2003) labelled a constant comparative method; a process which allowed for ‘sense-making’ and the constructing of underlying patterns of interactions. Additionally, Garfinkel’s key concepts (accountability, intelligibility, reflexivity) were employed to make sense of the recorded instances; that is, to analyse actual appearances as “pointing to” an underlying pattern (Garfinkel, 1967: 78). Attention was thus paid to how such patterns or ‘codes’ were represented and enacted through an examination of the actions that coaches and athletes engaged in when dealing with each other.

The remainder of this article is dedicated to reporting and examining the accomplishment of two principal codes (‘play well’ and ‘fitting-in’), in addition to how these codes were continually obeyed, challenged and manipulated by actors as features of their situated competencies (Rawls, 2006).

Results

The ‘play well’ code

The ‘play well’ code related to the social evaluation of an individual’s performance ‘on-the-field’. To ‘play well’ was fundamental to any individual who strived for longevity at Bayside; that is, it was an on-going accomplishment exhibited through team selection. The importance of ‘good’ performances was critical given that the number of available players at Bayside surpassed the places possible within any match day squad (16) and any starting team (11). A perceived high level of performance (both in training and games) was, therefore, rewarded with time on the field. For example – *“Jake isn’t playing well... I need to take Jake off”* – was reflective of an interpretation that he (Jake) must ‘play well’ (or play ‘better’) to justify playing time. Taking this into consideration, the weekly flow of matches displayed a recognition of those players who were deemed to be ‘playing well’ at that time and, accordingly, warranted selection.

For Bayside, a game of *'keep-ball'* was often played during training session warm-ups. The game involved players forming a circle around two defenders who tried to win the ball back. An intercepted pass from one of the surrounding players initiated a change with one in the middle. This circle was an exhibition of skill for players, where successful tricks, flicks and passes received praise. The game, in play, was a local manifestation of the need to 'play well':

"Last pair mounted," Steve barks. The players rush to find partners. Rhys and Callum spin frantically, but all their team-mates are taken; they start in the middle. The players immediately intercept a pass from Ceri. Steve interrupts, *"No, no, no...that isn't a good enough start. Think about where you are playing the pass, suck them in, little short ones then play it out. Next two in the middle,"* he looks incensed at the mistake.

Play resumes. Ceri leaps towards Floyd, but the ball is stabbed between Ceri's outstretched leg. *"MEGS!"* is the cry from the crowd. The players jump for joy. The ball continues, *"30...31...32"* Steve counts, his tone changes; he becomes more and more excited as the ball exchanges from player to player. *"Work hard in the middle!"* a smug call from the side. Ceri surges to the other side. The ball flies through his legs, again. *"MEGS!"* the surrounding players howl. Woody stands in disbelief, *"What the fuck are you doing? Why did I get stuck with him?"* he mutters.

Ceri begins a last charge towards Steve. Steve glances to his right and rolls the ball to his left. *"MEGS!!"* he shouts, *"MEGS!!"* the surrounding players fall to the floor with laughter. Woody rubs his face and throws his arms in the air, *"What are you doing, you mug?"* he groans. *"That will do,"* Steve calls. He turns to Ceri as the others leave, *"Don't worry Ceri, I've done it to better players"*. (Fieldnote extract, February)

Although team selection was not directly linked to this game, the example highlighted an on-going judgement and social evaluation of performance (i.e., not to 'lose' the ball) which, if not achieved, would lead to an individual being tarnished with a lack of competency and risk de-selection. The code was, therefore, ubiquitous in the players and coaches' production of order. Such levels of expectation were co-constructed by the coaching staff and players. Rhys illustrated the point in the following quote:

“The team really is cut-throat when you think about what players will say to each other. The other day we watched the rezzies (reserve team) play and Woody goes, ‘Hey Will, if we go far in the cup you better start looking for your touch otherwise thousands are going to see how shit you are’. Everyone laughed but that is ruthless really, considering they are team mates. It gets passed off as banter, but you have to be pretty thick skinned; especially when it comes to playing; you can’t let it affect you! You have to be good enough to play.”
(Fieldnote extract, February)

Despite agreement that players had to adhere to performance standards, the variation evident meant that a precise constant definition of ‘playing well’ was not always available. This was because to ‘play well’ was contextually detailed, and found in, of and as every part of that diagnosis. Thus, to form their evaluations, the coaches identified specific features of a good performance which required an act of ‘seeing’ in-action. ‘Seeing’, in turn, referred to the socially constructed evaluation of what was considered to be a good performance through making public or justifying the observable features of that performance. The ‘play well’ code, therefore, was specific to the on-going evaluations made of players’ performances. Although anyone could watch and evaluate any match (or training), an act of ‘seeing’ (aligned with the coaches of Bayside) might not be possible to the untrained eye. Hence, to be defined as ‘playing well’ at Bayside, was to act in accordance with the coaches’ wishes (for further discussion on ‘seeing’ see Corsby and Jones, 2019).

The ‘fitting-in’ code

Maintaining the perception of ‘playing well’ was of paramount importance for team selection. To add to the complexity of what was ‘seen’, the players were required to ‘fit’ within a structure (i.e., a tactical formation). Here, each player’s performance was relational, and formed a part of the whole. This emphasis from the coaching staff meant a second primary code was evident; that of ‘fitting-in’. The maxim, however, referred not solely to playing performance, but also to off-field actions, something that involved both compliance and application.

In this respect, players were required to comply with the schedule and ‘attitude’ organised and proclaimed by the staff. Uncooperative players, demanding unnecessary time and maintenance were considered disruptive. Phil, for example, a player who arrived at Bayside towards the end of pre-season (August) with an exciting reputation proved problematic in terms of his attendance and punctuality. The staff and players quickly marked Phil with having an ‘attitude’, thus questioning his commitment to the team. Phil’s inability to read the social landscape and integrate (i.e., to ‘fit-in’) was referred to as not “*buying into the programme*” by Steve. The coaches consistently tried to make Phil aware of his obligation in terms of “*what we do, and how we do it*” (Joe), thus positioning playing for Bayside as more than just an explicit affiliation. Rather, it was rooted in an implicit shared ethos that included; (1) a high degree of commitment; (2) a good work ethic; (3) and a maintenance of respect and humility. The players were required to ‘fit’ in terms of their performance, but also to socially ‘fit’ through being a compliant member of the ‘team’. The Club ethos was located in the relationship between players’ performances, their history and the current context (i.e., result, form, opposition).

The dyad identified here was also illustrated in Will’s story. Will and Jamie joined Bayside together having previously been labelled as exceptional young talents. Will was the more unorthodox with his technique deemed considerably less fluid and advanced than Jaime’s. However, soon after he arrived, Will was quickly labelled as having the right ‘attitude’. The following discussion, related to performance, highlights the role of compliance in this context:

Steve: “*Did you see Will’s feet in the square today? He has come so far since we got him.*”

Rhys (a senior player): “*Yup, he’s done well.*”

Steve: “*Who would have thought ‘Tank’ could keep the ball like that?*” ‘Tank’ was a whimsical name Steve used to describe Will.

Rhys: “*I have to say, I love playing with Will, he has come on a lot. No shit with him, just gets on with it, and is a real competitor. Won’t let anyone get past him.*”

Steve: *“I agree, I don’t think he is as dominant as Anthony used to be in air, we all know what he could do, he could head it almost as far as me... But Will is a better defender; at actually defending. He listens to the instructions given, tries to take them on and is starting to show how far he has come.”*

Rhys: *“Yeah considering he is so young, he really has slotted in. I don’t think he has missed a training session actually, and he always pays his fines; you can’t argue with that!”* (Fieldnote extract, December)

The above discussion centred both on Will’s playing ability and his degree of compliance. However, beneath this compliance lay a paradox; that is, although performance and personal attributes were individual requisites, to ‘play well’ could only be achieved through the other players. Consequently, individuals had to ‘fit’ with those around them. The two codes then were interlocking and mutually supportive. If strained, the codes entangled to create a tension in and for the coaches’ selection decisions. For example, in contrast to Will, Jamie struggled to achieve the perception of ‘fitting-in’. In spite of being considered a ‘good player’ (initially better than Will), Jamie’s patchy engagement within training meant he was perceived as not making the required effort to be a part of the Club. The following extract indicates the relationship between the two primary codes in Jamie’s case:

The players arrive in the dressing room at half-time; some red-faced. The players sniff and gulp water waiting for Steve to speak, *“Look at you, some of you aren’t even sweating. If you think that was good enough, you’ve got no chance. Especially you Jamie. I don’t care who you have played for, you’re playing for Bayside now and that means playing the Bayside way. Two touches; move the ball fast. You can’t keep losing the ball when you dribble with it... you want to look great. If you can’t do what we want, I’ll replace you with someone who will”*. Jamie stares at the floor. Silent.

At the end of the game, the players meet in the bar and begin discussing the match, *“Oi Will! What’s wrong with Jamie? Where is he now? Gone home again?”* Richard smirks. Will shrugs his shoulders, pushing the food around his plate. *“He hasn’t been training much, needs to enjoy his life a bit more I reckon,”* Richard probes. Will hesitates, then replies, *“hmm... I’ve never bothered with him. He is big-time. Thinks he is better than the*

team". The players around the table pause; they look frustrated. (Fieldnote extract, September)

The extract above not only illustrates the power differential between coach and athletes, as reflected in team selection, but also highlights the role of 'who' became a member within the group. Membership, therefore, was a collective decision manifest in the interactions concerning compliance. The recognition of such compliance was an on-going negotiation between the actors' in (co)constructing the codes. In this respect, the coaches recognised and accepted the importance of the players' involvement in creating, and adhering to, the 'fitting-in' code, meaning the engagement with Jamie was temporally bound. His failure to balance the tension of 'playing well' and 'fitting-in' resulted in a declining trajectory. Jamie's aloofness and disengagement from the team (and the coaches) led to his eventual resignation.

Telling and manipulating the codes

Although no doubt those deemed 'good players' were competent in 'doing' the codes, they were not necessarily considered the 'best' performers. Rather, they were able to negotiate all facets of the environment. The previous description alluded to a tension between 'playing well' and 'fitting-in'. Both codes had to be satisfied to ensure regular selection; that is, individual execution was required in relation to others. Consequently, the coaches regulated the players through justifying selection decisions through the two codes. For instance, Floyd was a quick, energetic attacking player but was deemed erratic. Such inconsistency meant that Floyd was not able to hold down a regular starting position. Instead, he was largely used towards the latter stages of games ("off the bench") to produce "an impact" (Steve). The extract below highlights Floyd's sense-making of the coaches' narrative:

"Yeah, I feel like I have been playing well, but I know it's only been off the bench. I started that game after Christmas and for whatever reason I just didn't have a good game at all. A week later I was back on the bench. I only got given one chance to prove that what I was

doing in 20 minutes I could do for 90. It's tough but I know what I've got to do... Just gotta keep my head down for now" (Fieldnote extract, Floyd, January)

Floyd's passivity was an example of how he 'read' the relationship between 'playing well' and 'fitting-in'. His willingness to continue to work hard, subsequently 'fitting-in' and contributing from *'the bench'* ('playing well'), ensured his (partial) selection, and consolidated his place in the contextual hierarchy. Viewing 'playing well' and 'fitting-in' as mutually supportive, Floyd's adherence allowed for the development of a new strengthened collective sentiment from the coaches: *"Floyd is pushing for a starting position, so you must make sure you are playing so well you can't be dropped"* (Steve).

The value of performance was entrenched and continually reaffirmed in the everyday work of the coaches seeking the perceived necessary compliance to develop the team. This relationship became problematic when dealing with un-compliant players. For example, Alex was an exceptionally talented attacking player who struggled with an injury after returning from an unscheduled holiday. The player's disengagement during this period strained the 'fitting-in' code and coincided with a drop in results:

Joe's usual calm demeanour evades him as we walk to the dressing room, *"He [Alex] wants to play a bit, then he doesn't. It is hurting the team. You wouldn't believe it, back in my day blokes would jump through walls to play. But Alex wants to be perfect to play. You gotta put everything into it even if you are not quite right, go over the pain barrier. I did a few times. It's about the pride to stand up and go and play, stop others from playing."* (Fieldnote extract, February).

Joe's message was one of obligation to the team and to 'get back' playing elaborated the dyad between 'fitting-in' and 'playing well'. In this case, Joe's emphasis on 'fitting-in' meant a required sacrifice and a further compliance from Alex to play. Such statements and discussions were not un-typical of the on-going search by the coaches to secure best efforts and alignment from (needed) players.

However, the on-going manipulation of the codes was not confined to the coaching staff. Co-construction of the codes meant the players also influenced the workings of the Club. Here, despite breaching the ‘fitting-in’ code, Alex was a crucial player on the pitch (he often ‘played well’). Consequently, combining his eccentric character and quick wit, Alex was able to negotiate his re-entry to the team through awareness of and engagement with the intersecting codes;

“Well Char, I was definitely a bit tentative about coming back. I didn’t know how the players would react. Same for the coaches really. I just knew I had to look sharp and prove I hadn’t lost any fitness. Put myself back in the picture straight away, otherwise I knew they [the coaching staff] would be more pissed off. There was a definite... err well like... an elephant in the room. I knew they weren’t ‘appy. I know I won’t go straight back in [starting eleven]. I need to prove myself again and start playing well to get picked” (Fieldnote extract, Alex, January).

Alex’s return illustrated the tension between the construction of the codes. The coaches disapproved of his (lack of) commitment, as did many of the players, yet his ability to perform allowed his return. In this regard, the context (e.g., form, previous results, opposition) dictated the power and emphasis given to the codes in any given situation. Thus, Alex’s account included both his awareness of, and ability to, construct the codes through his actions.

Through careful preparation, the coaching staff managed and directed the individuality and compliance of players, most often through team-talks. Such talks were a constant feature before and following training sessions and matches. When team performances did not reach expected levels, regardless of result, the coaches engaged in a constant re-evaluation and reinterpretation of the codes to justify their decisions. For example, following a series of questionable performances, the coaches initiated a change in ‘message’. Here, Steve and Joe shifted their emphasis from “*sticking together*”, in favour of individual performances. In doing so, the coaches were able to frame their selection choices accordingly:

“Today is the day we win the league. We lost, so you may think I am being ridiculous, and I hope I don’t eat my words, but I truly believe that. We [Joe and Steve] now don’t have to worry so much about keeping people happy. I tried that today, we have been true to our word of people keeping their places but today hasn’t worked so now I will pick my best 11 at all times...I will pick the team that will win the game”. Joe’s speech follows, *“I have to say I don’t think there is anything wrong with this side, I’m adamant about that. This just goes to show, if you don’t prepare right, if your head isn’t in the right place, teams like that will come out punching, scratching and snarling and they will beat you. We are not a bad side overnight, but we didn’t work hard enough today. I said before the game if we don’t match them for all their enthusiasm and endeavour we won’t win and that is exactly what happened”*. The players are silent, the coaches’ leave. (Fieldnote extract, January)

The team’s unsatisfactory performance resulted in the coaches placing greater value on picking the ‘best’ individuals. Whilst such a sentiment gave the players the impression of their places being under threat and that they must play better, the desired reaction was to increase their compliance towards the instructions provided. A further example came in the latter part of the season when, striving for promotion, Bayside had to play numerous games in quick succession. Despite the high workload, several individuals were nevertheless inevitably disappointed with selection choices. Emphasising the importance of ‘everyone’ (a switch back from the above emphasis on the individual), the following example highlighted a shift towards the collective and ‘unity’ from the coaches:

The opposition leave the pitch. The noise soon fades, and Joe begins, *“On Saturday I questioned how much you really wanted to be in this title race. Tonight, you proved exactly how much you want it, I hoped, I knew you would, but I needed to see it. The sign of a good man is not their ability to avoid adversity, that isn’t going to happen; it is how they deal with it; how they bounce back. We could have laid down tonight and said we will do it next season and build from there. But that isn’t good enough for me, and you have showed that is not good enough for you tonight. I applaud every one of you tonight, even those who didn’t get on the pitch; we need you every bit as much, this effort is for all of you. Without those of you on the bench the players out there have nothing to drive them forward. There are plenty of minutes left.”* Steve continues, *“In my recent years at this Club I have to say*

that is the most satisfying win we have ever had. For a young team like us to go out there and press, hassle and do the right things in the right areas like we did tonight is a great performance, for everyone. We have some huge games left and without every single one of you pulling together, including you Danny, Woody, Floyd even Allan to act in the way you have tonight, it is a credit to your attitude, the Club and this team. Well done lads.”
(Fieldnote extract, April)

Discussion:

The results indicated the coaching ‘work’ done at Bayside; what Garfinkel (1967) would consider the on-going contested accomplishments crafted from ‘observable-and-reportable’ actions. The competence of staff and players to continually work together reflected the artfully organised practices through which Club affairs were managed. Here then, coaches and players were engaged in producing the codes in and through ‘accountable’ performances. Such findings are illustrative of the reflexive exploits that constituted ‘how’ the work of coaching was ‘done’; that is, the accomplishing of competitiveness and compliance in the day-to-day practices. Yet, such sense-making was indexical (that is, tied to the specific situation), in that the meaning derived from the codes relied on specifics such as, who was telling the code, who was listening, where the codes were being told, and the circumstances in which the codes were told (Jimerson & Oware, 2006). In this manner, the codes were not explicit rules, but procedurally fitted Bayside’s context allowing for “further (practical) inference and inquiry” (Garfinkel, 1967, p.103).

The codes typically encountered and constructed at Bayside F.C. were an explanation for behaviour. Without awareness of the codes, the actors would need to learn anew how to act and deal with their respective counterparts (for example, Alex’s re-negotiation to training). To this end, the codes were necessary to recognise what another person was talking about (Garfinkel, 1967); comprehensive appreciation of the codes was crucial for longevity and survival at the Club. According to Liberman (2013), such competence involves the

continuously emerging and constructed procedures of actors based on ‘situational reading’, as opposed to the possession of a given grammar (Horn, 2008). Thus, the meaning generated from the coaches’ and players’ actions was not merely or unproblematically obtained, but rather reflected their considerations of “presupposed knowledge of social structures” (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 77). Such reflexivity allowed the coaches and players to recognise, demonstrate, and make accountable the adequacy of what they did. In short, they used such considerations to ‘know’ the setting, and bring particular features to the fore (e.g., performance and compliance). In this way, the ‘context’ of performance or compliance was reliant on the actors’ abilities to ‘see’ what was going on (Garfinkel, 1967). Alex, for example, was able to discern the need to ‘play well’ and ‘fit in’ to secure re-entry into the environment, whereas Jamie’s failure to make ‘accountable’ his conformity resulted in him being labelled as lacking comprehension or commitment. The ‘doing’ of such contextual literacy formed an integral part of the members’ ability to construct, manage and make orderly the environment.

Although aspects of this study allude to the dominant ‘legitimised’ authority within competitive sport (e.g., Cushion & Jones, 2006), they also point to an alternative horizon for practitioners and scholars of coaching; i.e., the constructed ‘codes’ were always a “text to be read, understood and interpreted on [their] own merits” (Atkinson, 2001, p. 131). In this respect, the codes (i.e., ‘play well’ and ‘fitting in’) served as structures through which interactions were understood and further produced by the members of Bayside Rovers F.C. The findings also exhibited the work of coaches as constantly subject to myriad tensions, made sense of through linguistic agreements, and a demand that such agreements be ‘seen’ and ‘produced’ in practice (Garfinkel, 1967; Jones & Corsby, 2015). Consequently, the codes provide examples of the practical logic members were required to use in order to ‘work’ at Bayside.

Although explicating the particular shared sense of order the codes allowed those at Bayside to render their actions ‘accountable’, the work also contributes to a wider sociology of work through highlighting that, irrespective of the activity, such arrangements are always ‘done’. Drawing from Garfinkel’s (1967) unavoidable reflexivity of interaction, the study thus provides an insight to the inextricable link between workers (in this instance, coaches) and their contexts as both structured and structuring. For, as Lynch (1993) identified, ethnomethodological insight does not lie in connecting variable ‘factors’ to a corresponding context. Rather, it rests on bringing to attention the ways in which the reflexive “‘identities of persons, actions, things and ‘contexts’ become relevantly and recognisably part of an unfolding ‘text’” (p.30). To draw implications for (and from) such analysis is to return to the ‘work’ of members’ local and practical undertakings, whatever the context; it is an attention to practice-in-action, to the actual accomplishments of sense and settings.

Conclusion

This article has offered an ethnomethodologically informed reading of ‘lived coaching work’, to ‘discover’ the features of setting (Lieberman, 2013). The findings comprised two principal codes used to describe and explain the behavioural patterns observed; ‘to play well’ and ‘fitting-in’. The codes, however, were not exclusive, but often intersected, thus demonstrating local actors’ competencies in relation to how they were displayed, adjusted and justified to get the coaching evident at Bayside ‘done’. Despite their relative indeterminacy, the codes simultaneously illustrated a perspicuous setting, one which involved an incessant evaluation of performances and a need for compliance. Accepting that such continuous evaluation did not pre-exist the setting, the analysis highlighted how contextual inferences contributed to legible working practice; in particular, how such inferences guided the ‘observable-and-reportable’ knowledge which informed the actions of the coaches and players at Bayside. Casting such a gaze enabled the practice(s) of the coaching (and coaches) evident to be somewhat revealed,

particularly in terms of ‘how’ the working patterns, structures and processes were continually (co)produced.

Finally, the value of the study can be considered two-fold. Firstly, through engaging with Garfinkel’s ethnomethods, it further sheds light on the ‘haecceity’ or ‘just what-ness’ of coaching; that is, more critical engagement with the work-related practice itself. In doing so, it develops the case for coaching to better decide its particular ‘occupational value and logic’ (Evetts, 2011), thus being evaluated from its ‘own frame of reference’ (Jones, 2019). Consequently, the ‘theoretical poverty’ currently attributed to sports coaching is somewhat addressed (Jones, 2019).

Secondly, we believe the findings have applicability beyond the immediate sphere of investigation. This is particularly in respect of the increasing precarity evident in several workplaces (Schilling et al., 2019); an uncertainty that has to a greater degree always been present in coaching. In this respect, Garfinkel’s productive framework not only allows us to see how the work is ‘done’ in a previously under explored area but, in doing so, infers how it can be alternatively done (or not) in others. Thus, against an ethnomethodological backdrop, we can become clearer, and perhaps more critical, towards the particularities of the social ‘orderliness’ we are attempting to understand.

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