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## Planning for distance running: coaching with Foucault

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Coaching and sport scholars working from a Foucauldian perspective (e.g. Barker-Ruchti & Tinning, 2010; Denison, 2007; Heikkala, 1993; Johns & Johns, 2000) have demonstrated how overly controlling and disciplining training practices can objectify athletes' bodies and, as a result, limit and constrain their development. In this paper, we draw on Michel Foucault's (1995) analysis of anatomo-political power, or disciplinary power, to illustrate how distance running coaches could begin to problematize the effects that the use of various disciplinary techniques and instruments can have on athletes' bodies through their everyday planning practices.

**Keywords:** coaching; planning; Foucault; discipline; docility

### Introduction

'Discipline' may be identified neither with an institution nor with an apparatus; it is a type of power, a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets; it is a 'physics' or an 'anatomy' of power, a technology. (Foucault, 1995, p. 215)

Central to the formation of any coaching knowledge and the subsequent development of any coaching practice are always relations of power. Accordingly, how power 'works' to influence coaches' knowledge is critical to examine, in order to understand why coaches might coach the way they do (e.g. Denison & Avner, 2011; Pringle & Crockett, 2013). As one perspective on power, Michel Foucault (1995) outlined in his seminal text, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, how a number of practices, or techniques, employed in modern institutions were used to regulate and control the body in order to transform individuals into useful/productive members of society. Foucault referred to this form of power as anatomo-politics, and its techniques and instruments as 'disciplines'.

Given our interest in the formation of coaches' practices through relations of power, and recognizing how the use of a range of disciplinary techniques has infiltrated practically every aspect of the coaching act (e.g. Barker-Ruchti & Tinning, 2010; Denison, Mills, & Jones, 2013; Gearity & Mills, 2013; Halas & Hanson, 2001; Heikkala, 1993; Johns & Johns, 2000; Jones, Glintmeyer, & McKenzie, 2005; Shogan, 1999), we believe it is worth considering how anatomo-political power 'reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives' (Foucault, 1980, p. 39). More specifically, we believe an understanding of the effects of anatomo-politics on the body could help coaches rethink many commonly held coaching assumptions and taken-for-granted practices that may be problematic. For example, by recognizing how 'a body made useful' through the

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application of various disciplinary techniques can at the same time become docile, a coach might begin to appreciate how practices that appear to be effective in obtaining one's desired results – the transformation of athletes into winning bodies – could simultaneously restrict athletes' potential by limiting their ability to think and act for themselves (McMahon, Penney, & Dinan-Thompson, 2012). Acknowledging this possible consequence, and benefitting from Foucault's precise analysis of anatomo-politics, a coach could then modify his or her practices to be less reliant on the constraints of discipline's techniques. Towards this end, in this paper, which we are framing as a position paper for advancing a Foucauldian-inspired coaching sensibility for distance running coaches, we explore through Foucault's framework of anatomo-politics how distance running coaches could begin to 'think with Foucault' in order to understand how power influences and informs their everyday practices.

As Foucauldians we, of course, recognise that while power might be omnipresent, it is not always unidirectional: 'there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy; they can, on the contrary, circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy' (Foucault, 1981, p. 101). For this reason, we are not advocating that distance running coaches begin to think with Foucault as a way to develop so-called 'best practices'. However, we do believe that thinking with Foucault could offer distance running coaches an original and greatly needed perspective to be able to move beyond long-held and entrenched rational and instrumental understandings of the sporting body as a machine; a discursive strategy that has been shown to do far more harm than good (e.g. Hoberman, 1992; Howe, 2004; Kirk, 2002; Miller, 1995; Pronger, 1995; Shilling, 2003). Accordingly, by thinking with Foucault, we would argue that distance running coaches could make their existing practices more effective. In fact, we have heard this exact comment from dozens of distance running coaches already who have attended one of our 'Coaching with Foucault' workshops (e.g. Denison & Mills, 2012, 2013). Therefore, in what follows, we provide a number of examples of Foucauldian-inspired distance running workouts that coaches could incorporate into their training plans. But before we discuss these workouts, we would like to outline briefly the relationship between anatomo-political power and the formation of distance running coaches' planning practices.

### **The formation of the distance running body**

A well-designed training plan is considered essential to develop track and field athletes (Bondarchuk, 2007; Matveyev, 1981; Verkhoshansky, 1994; Viru, 2008). More specifically, according to Bompa and Haff (2009), the various components, or workouts, that comprise a track and field athlete's training plan need to be appropriately sequenced and combined across a set period of time to maximize his or her performance. Accordingly, effective coaching in track and field is largely understood to be a quest for order and control, as coaches continually strive to develop more detailed and predictable ways to manage and organize their athletes' training (Kiely, 2012). Therefore, in contrast to team sports, where coaches tend to focus on their players' tactical and technical development, of primary concern for a track and field coach is knowing how to stimulate specific adaptations in the body to build an athlete's fitness (Denison, 2010a).

However, a track and field coach's training plan will always do more than just make athletes fit. For example, as Foucault (1995) might have asked, what is a training plan for an athlete if not a form of disciplinary power to 'regulate relations of time, bodies and forces in order to ensure the efficient capitalization of effort, energy and resources'?

(p. 157)? Foucault, of course, through his analysis of anatomo-politics, was extremely critical of regulation and capitalization and the effects that disciplinary power could have on individuals' bodies. Put another way, Foucault was concerned when the idea of 'passing to another activity is only possible when the first has been completely mastered' (p. 158), or when 'an endpoint to be reached' (p. 158) dominated the formation of any type of plan or set of procedures or prescriptions. For Foucault, 'discipline is a political anatomy of detail ... and for the disciplined man, no detail is unimportant, but not so much for the meaning that it conceals within it as for the hold it provides for the power that wishes to seize it' (pp. 139–140).

Therefore, like Denison et al. (2013), what concerns us with the way that distance running coaches currently design and implement their training plans is how easily their plans can become a 'polyphony of exercises [workouts] analytical and meticulous in its detail' (Foucault, 1995, p. 159). This is not to suggest that attention to detail is unimportant when developing a training plan. Rather, we are suggesting that coaches need to consider carefully the broader effects and consequences of those details – 'all' that those details do – if they want to be as effective as their efforts deserve. For, as Mills and Denison (2013) clearly demonstrated in their Foucauldian analysis of 15 high-performance male distance running coaches' planning practices, when training plans are broken down into segmented elements the athletic body can too easily become docile. As a result, coaching can easily become, albeit perhaps unintentionally, a technocratic procedure invested less with a coach's understanding of all that training does, and more with his or her power to control, monitor, intervene, regulate, differentiate and correct his or her athletes. Yet, paradoxically, there is nothing structured and certain about a race. What happens over the course of a distance running race is open to constant change; athletes have to make untold decisions that relate to their many bodily states. What concerns us, therefore, is how effective a training plan can ever be if the body in the stands – the coach – not the body on the track – the athlete – is in total control of the training process?

Naturally, we recognize that coaches have a great deal of knowledge about training and racing that can be useful and productive, it can have great utility. However, we believe the relationship between conformity and control, the making of a docile body, and awareness and independence, the making of a thinking athlete, that currently defines coaches' practices is totally out of balance: an imbalance formed through a range of complex relations of power and maintained by the continued use and reliance on a number of disciplinary techniques and instruments. Therefore, our challenge, as we see it, is to help coaches address this imbalance by recognizing how many of their everyday practices might be reinforcing problematic relations of power. Fortunately, we feel quite optimistic about meeting this challenge given how precise Foucault (1995) was in detailing the effects that anatomo-political power can have on the body. More importantly, in what follows, we explore through Foucault's conception of anatomo-politics how distance running coaches could begin to design and implement workouts that are not so bound by the clearly-defined, rational, structured, systematic and constantly repeated marking and control of space, time and movement.

### **The art of distributions: the spatial 'effects' of training**

According to Foucault (1995), 'discipline proceeds from the distribution of individuals in space' (p. 141). Therefore, our first set of suggestions to help distance running coaches understand how to destabilize the disciplinary nature of their training plans involves workouts designed to reduce the monotony of the spaces where runners train: spaces that

become protected, confined and so begin to close in on themselves. To start, we would like to discuss how monotony, and by association excessive coach control, can arise from the primary space distance running coaches use to train their runners: the track.

All athletes train in fixed spaces. A football field, a basketball court, a swimming pool all have boundaries that restrict and limit play. But a running track is particularly bounded. Its lanes, lines and measurements mark more than specific distances or what is 'in bounds' and what is 'out of bounds'; they determine down to the centimetre exactly what an athlete is doing; they 'establish presences and absences, to know where and how to locate individuals, to set up useful communications, to interrupt others' (Foucault, 1995, p. 143). For example, consider some typical workouts a distance running coach might have his or her athletes complete on a track throughout the year:  $10 \times 400$  metres,  $8 \times 800$  metres or  $5 \times 1600$  metres. While these workouts can produce many positive physiological adaptations, their fixed starting and finishing points also make them a device for 'enclosing' and 'partitioning' bodies so that disruptions are less likely to occur. A football player can zig zag across the field; he or she can run backwards, jump, slide and roll. A runner on a track, however, mostly only moves forward in a counter clockwise direction in between sets of lines for a distance almost always divisible by 10: a protocol that might not be the best way to prepare a runner for the constantly changing nature of distance running races. However, and we cannot emphasize this point enough, Foucault (1995) noted that the modern prison was not born with new codes. Similarly there are no 'laws' that state endurance athletes must run such fixed repetitions.

As some alternatives to the typical track workouts mentioned above, a distance running coach could design sessions over a range of distances such as  $11 \times 370$  metres,  $7 \times 931$  metres or  $4 \times 1755$  metres. Or, by extension, a coach could design a session of eight repetitions where each distance changed, such as 378 metres, 432 metres, 412 metres, 396 metres, 454 metres, 356 metres, 323 metres 478 metres. Or, instead of running to and from specific 'coach-defined markers', athletes could be given a 'zone' within which they could choose to begin and end a repetition. For example, a coach could advise his or her athletes to start running at any point on the track or stop running anywhere in between 350 metres and 380 metres, or 1620 metres and 1700 metres or any other range depending on the general purpose of the session. Used by a coach with the specific intention of problematizing how a space – the track – can function to control bodies, employing these 'odd' distances could serve to upset taken-for-granted routines, rhythms and rituals that often form in fixed spaces. As a result, these workouts, and just as importantly the conversations they would likely engender between a coach and an athlete, could encourage athletes to begin to think more for themselves about effort, pace and their bodies' relationship to the space around them. In short, the use of constantly varying distances could enable athletes to develop not only physiologically but as thinking athletes engaged with their bodies' many different and varied responses to the spaces in which they train.

Naturally we recognize that 'new practices' such as training over odd distances and different spaces can quickly become routine and, hence, begin to regulate and control athletes' bodies just as much as the practices they replaced. However, we do not see this as a limitation to our suggestions. Rather, as Foucauldians, we acknowledge that all practices exist within relations of power and come with the potential to create new 'normal' or taken-for-granted ways of being. This is what makes a coach's job from a Foucauldian perspective never ending: it is a job that requires the constant consideration of power's effects. In other words, instead of just considering whether a specific training session will work – will it make my athlete fitter – a coach who is thinking with Foucault would also

need to consider the work that a session does: does it categorize, exclude and regulate athletes? And if so, what are the effects of that categorization? What are the effects of that exclusion? And what are the effects of that regulation? In many cases these effects could be problematic as they are very likely to transform an athlete into a docile body (Barker-Ruchti & Tinning, 2010). In which case we would advocate that that session needs rethinking as a docile athlete might very well be underperforming (Denison, 2007).

Another way for a distance running coach to upset the strict distribution of individuals in a training space could be to design workouts that involve no specific distances at all. Instead, an athlete could run at a particular intensity until he or she became exhausted, or his or her concentration lapsed or his or her form deteriorated. The distance covered and where the workout occurred would be irrelevant. In this way, as opposed to expecting when fatigue should set-in based on the prescriptions of a workout established by their coach – the distances, times and recoveries – by running until they were exhausted, athletes would have to figure out for themselves how to manage their fatigue – Was I really tired? What did that actually feel like? Did I need to stop where I did or could I have run longer? What made me tired and why? And without the opportunity to consider such questions and discuss them with their coach how will athletes ever develop an understanding of their limits? This is because spaces that are monitored and controlled by another (the coach) can easily begin to function like a machine set up to ‘eliminate the effects of imprecise distributions, the uncontrolled disappearance of individuals’ (Foucault, 1995, p. 143). And we would argue that with a better understanding of one’s limits and capabilities, a runner might be less likely to give-up in a race after hearing split times slower than the projected pace he or she hoped to run – a common occurrence in distance running races. In other words, distance runners are often so disciplined to complete the sets and reps established for them by their coaches that their training becomes more to do with executing a plan – ‘getting through it’ – than fully engaging with their bodies during training. In contrast, a Foucauldian-thinking coach might produce athletes who are stimulated by the challenge of overcoming a slower than expected split time in a race.

To further reduce the monotony of training spaces and the control that coaches typically exert over their athletes’ bodies, coaches could consider using a greater range of spaces besides a track. This may not seem like such a novel suggestion as coaches frequently use multiple places to train. However, as Phillips and Hicks (2000) warned, any training space, even a picturesque beach, can become disciplinary when its primary intention remains ‘to derive the maximum advantages and to neutralize the inconveniences as the forces of production become more concentrated’ (Foucault, 1995, p. 142). Therefore, a change of setting in and of itself, similar to the use of simplistic coaching clichés such as, ‘have fun’ or ‘focus on the process’, will not disrupt in any significant way the effects of power that can result from the control of space. Rather, what needs to change is how coaches exercise their authority and judgement in those spaces. For, as Foucault (1995) argued, spaces that function to reinforce assessment, comparison, quality and classification can easily turn people into nothing more than units to supervise. In response, therefore, a coach could regularly remove him or herself from the training space and have the athletes administer practice. Or, he or she could decide not to assess a workout’s ‘usefulness’ by asking his or her athletes, how did that feel? Was it too easy? Was it too hard? Could you have run faster? Could you have run further? While such probing questions might indicate a coach’s concern for his or her athletes’ development, they can also serve as a way for a coach – more so than the athlete – to try to determine a workout’s ‘true’ impact. However, as Denison (2010b) illustrated in his critique of



evidence-based decision-making practices used by coaches, a workout's total effects, its 'true' impact, can never be wholly evidenced. In this way, the so-called pursuit of evidence by coaches is often used more as a means of control than as a way to learn or better understand a situation.

Importantly, we are not suggesting that coaches should forgo all thought and intention when designing and evaluating their training plans and only implement open-ended or undefined workouts or ignore their athletes' progress in training. Quite the opposite, actually: we are suggesting that coaches think even more about the effects of their training plans – the work their workouts do. But, and this might appear contradictory, doing so does not mean we want coaches to employ additional or tighter measures to evaluate their athletes' progress and development. Rather, we would like coaches to consider how many of their taken-for-granted practices, such as constantly asserting their judgement by asking their athletes how they feel during or at the end of a workout, can contribute to the making of docile, disengaged athletes.

Our final suggestion related to destabilizing the disciplinary power of training spaces concerns the effects that can arise when athletes are ranked by their coaches. As Foucault (1995) argued, 'discipline is an art of rank, a technique for the transformation of arrangements. It individualizes bodies by a location that does not give them a fixed position, but distributes them and circulates them in a network of relations' (p. 146). And these relations, Foucault continued, can make bodies (athletes) docile by imposing a system of homogeneity 'no longer made up of individual elements' (p. 146). For example, it can be very difficult for the third ranked athlete in a training group who has become accustomed to occupying that position to pass the first ranked athlete in his or her group in a race even if he or she is feeling great. Moreover, an athlete who has been disciplined to hold a particular rank in training – the back of the second group of 1500 metre runners – might have fewer breakthrough performances throughout his or her career given how difficult it can be to know how to reach for a new level of performance if every day in practice one occupies the same place. Accordingly, coaches must consider how their training spaces can become a means 'for supervising, hierarchizing and rewarding' (Foucault, 1995, p. 147).

To put the idea of upsetting ranks into practice, a coach could ask a 'mid-ranked' athlete in a particular training group to jump to the front of the pack and run the third 400 metres in a series of eight 400 metres repetitions in 60 seconds instead of the pre-ordained 65 seconds. The coach could then observe how the others in the group react to this dramatic change in the ranking system. Do they see it as a violation, a severe disruption to the plan, and become angry and complain that the workout has been ruined? Or, do they roll with the change and run 60 seconds themselves or hold back and keep to their 65? As another suggestion, athletes could complete their workouts on their own or in different spaces to prevent them from continually comparing every result from every repetition to everyone else. While such workouts will not eliminate entirely the power of ranking given that distance running races are ultimately about establishing rankings, they could help athletes learn how to respond more effectively to changing situations in races. Further, by designing workouts that trouble the spatial distribution and circulation of athletes' bodies, coaching distance runners might become less about disciplining athletes and more about supporting athletes to think for themselves – an outcome that coaches repeatedly claim they value. After all, a great performance can only be manufactured and controlled by a coach to a certain degree. From the moment a distance runner steps up to the starting line in a race he or she needs to be prepared to manage the demands and challenges that

competition presents (Mills & Denison, 2013). And to do this well, like learning to do anything well, requires continual practice.

Certainly we acknowledge that many coaches believe they encourage their athletes to think for themselves and take control of their performances. Our research has clearly shown that coaches think they coach every one of their athletes as an individual (Mills & Denison, 2013). But can true ‘thinking for oneself’ really occur within a training framework designed around the repetitive constraints of constant control? As an athlete, how can knowing that you have to run all eight 400 metre repetitions under 60 seconds for a workout to be deemed successful by your coach encourage independent thinking? A coach will never develop flexible or open-minded athletes without first problematizing the effects produced by a rigid and disciplinary training framework. To believe otherwise is to completely ignore the workings of anatomo-political power and its effects on the body – a folly we would certainly not recommend. Therefore, if a coach truly values developing thinking athletes, then his or her specific practices – the workouts he or she designs – need to reflect this aim. Words, slogans, truisms and other types of behavioural interventions intended to foster thinking athletes will largely be ineffective if they are not supported by training practices designed to achieve a similar outcome. More to the point, through Foucault (1995), we are trying to disrupt specific relations of power produced by coaches’ everyday practices – their actual workouts – because of the unseen effects they can have on an athlete’s body that can so easily strip him or her of any sense of his or her ability and potential: a body made docile.

Granted, stripping athletes of any sense of their bodies’ potential is unlikely to be intentional on a coach’s part. But to believe that one can develop thinking athletes just by adopting more ‘empowering’ or ‘athlete-centred’ coaching behaviours is to fail to consider how such practices are actually more likely to ‘dis-empower’ athletes given that in regimes [training groups] where individuals [athletes] believe they need to be ‘empowered’ by another [their coach] to learn and know more about themselves, they are actually becoming ‘dis-empowered’ in the very process of ‘self-empowerment’ (Foucault, 1995). In other words, ‘as individual subjects, there is no transcendental position from which we can become “empowered”, but only particular discursive positions within power-knowledge formations’ (Edwards & Usher, 1994, p. 3). In this way, the very power of learning about oneself can also be a condition for self-regulation and reinforce not disrupt discipline’s controlling effects. Accordingly, it is getting coaches to think more critically about what they do – the training practices they follow – more so than what they say – the tired coaching mantras they repeat – that is to coach with Foucault.

### **The control of activity: the temporal ‘effects’ of training**

To more fully understand the workings of anatomo-political power and what happens to the body in distance running training spaces, one also needs to consider the effects of various temporal features of training. After all, what is a training plan for a distance runner if not a timetable ‘to establish rhythms, impose particular occupations and regulate the cycle of repetitions’ (Foucault, 1995, p. 149)? Such prescribed timetables, Foucault argued, ‘assure the quality of the time used ... the elimination of anything that might disturb or distract; it is a question of constituting a totally useful time [in order to reduce] impurities or defects; a time of good quality, throughout which the body is constantly applied to its exercise’ (p. 151).

One adjustment a coach could make to how he or she sets athletes’ workouts that could effectively challenge the workings of anatomo-political power and a coach’s use of time to



control his or her athletes' bodies, could be to come to practice with a menu instead of a fixed schedule. In this way, the athletes could select, rather than being told, what to do for their workout. Importantly, we are not just suggesting that coaches use a menu to provide their athletes with greater choice as a way to increase their perception of control. This is to employ a motivational intervention based on the illusion of giving one's athletes greater autonomy that is unlikely – on its own – to transform the relations of power that concern us. Rather, in asking a coach to use a menu instead of a schedule to get the day's training going, we would expect that coach to be capable of problematizing as many of the temporal forces as possible operating in and around his or her training context that can so easily contribute to athlete docility. In other words, to coach with Foucault, a coach needs to think beyond 'changing the athlete', e.g. his or her perception of control, and instead develop new practices that disrupt how athletes are positioned by continually being seen as the target of their coaches' interventions.

Another way for a coach to destabilize the workings of anatomo-politics through the use of various disciplinary techniques designed to control time could be to have athletes run for atypical times in training such as 53 seconds and not 60 seconds. Or, they could run for 77 seconds followed by 48 seconds. Or, when completing a set of 400 metre repetitions the recovery between each repetition could vary from 10 seconds to two minutes. Or, the athletes could choose the recovery times for their repetitions with the coach refraining from casting any judgement. Or, perhaps most obviously, a coach could rethink how he or she uses the stopwatch. For, according to Foucault (1995), with the control of activity through the use of time, e.g. a stopwatch, 'a new set of restraints had been brought into play, another degree of precision in the breakdown of gestures and movements, another way of adjusting the body to temporal imperatives' (p. 151).

We are not suggesting that coaches stop using time entirely to inform their training practices. After all, like any measurement, time can be very useful for understanding how an athlete is progressing. But we do wonder what the impact would be, for example, if a coach announced to his or her training group that there would be no use of the stopwatch for a month. Would the athletes secretly time themselves? Would they lose respect for their coach because to make such a suggestion is crazy? Or, would they see it as an opportunity to learn something new about their response to work and recovery? In any event, and in line with Foucault's (1978) understanding of power as relational, it is clear to see that even a very simple change to one's practices through a greater appreciation of the effects of anatomo-political power will always come with multiple effects given that authority – announcing a ban on stopwatches – is never immune to resistance.

Another way for a coach to subvert the restraints imposed on athletes' bodies through the regulation of time could be to specify to an athlete a particular effort he or she would like him or her to achieve, not a time. This would enable the athlete to determine the intensity of the run as opposed to always having to adjust his or her body to a pre-determined and externally imposed understanding of effort – a time set by the coach. Relatedly, instead of coaches always asking their athletes to run a particular distance in a specific time, e.g. 400 metres in 60 seconds, athletes could run to fill time. For example, a coach could ask an athlete to cover as much ground as she or he can in 51 seconds, or 88 seconds, or three minutes and 23 seconds, or 12 minutes and 33 seconds, or 95 minutes. Training sessions could also be organized so that time is continuously disrupted. A long run, for instance, could be broken up with series of downhill strides, uphill surges or a prolonged period of tempo running.

Granted, in the move away from a reliance on time, an athlete might not know in the first instance how to set an appropriate intensity or rhythm for him or herself. But this is

exactly our point: the personal search for a rhythm, rather than an imposed (by the watch) rhythm, is an outstanding opportunity for athletes to explore their relationship with their bodies. Similarly, a coach's likely discomfort with designing less temporally controlled workouts could provide him or her with an excellent opportunity to reflect on his or her coaching philosophy: does he or she view coaching as the imposition on athletes' bodies of a ridged 'anatomy-chronological schema of behaviour' (Foucault, 1995, p. 152)?

Foucault's (1995) critique of the control of time as a disciplinary technique also included how movements were taught so that time would never be wasted: 'impose the best relation between a gesture and the overall position of the body, which is its condition of efficiency and speed' (p. 152). Accordingly, every 'act is always broken down into its elements ... and assigned a direction, an aptitude, a duration ... [so that] ... time penetrates the body and with it all the meticulous controls of power' (p. 152). Following this prescription, the drills and strength training activities coaches develop for their athletes tend to be incredibly strict and precise. How else could they be overseen and validated as effective? 'In the correct use of the body, which makes possible a correct use of time, nothing must remain idle or useless ... everything must be called upon to form the support of the act required' (p. 152). In this way, a well-disciplined distance running body forms the practical context of how a coach's training plan becomes operational: the disciplined body is normalized by a set of prescribed features and behaviours.

However, the implementation of 'valid' drills, gestures, exercises or movements with an emphasis on control could be limited by the fact that precision can only be known and understood when it is acted out within fixed or observable planes and patterns of movement: movements that are generally prescribed based on what is perceived to be correct by scientific knowledges that offer only *partial* truths based on a *partial* understanding of the body in an *ever-changing* socio-cultural context. Does this make movements that are less prone to observation useless because coaches lack a rigorous code or means of surveillance to oversee them? Coaches who make absolute precision a prerequisite for any movements they ask their athletes to complete might believe this to be the case. In contrast, coaches could relinquish some of the control they believe they must maintain by having their athletes work with different movement practitioners such as a yoga or Pilates instructor. Similarly, athletes could work on their strength by engaging in practical tasks such as shovelling snow, hauling gravel or moving boxes. In this way, doing yoga or Pilates or various everyday activities can become a way for an athlete to 'strengthen' his or her body outside the strict mechanisms of observation – the daily training environment panopticon – that coaches typically arrange.

Finally, as Foucault (1995) emphasized with respect to various temporal mechanisms of control, a timetable should be maximally efficient: everything that is possible must be squeezed from every moment of time. Moreover, because time is seen as inexhaustible, so too are people. As a result, coaches tend to create ever more detailed arrangements and regulations where time, and, as a consequence, athletes' bodies, are reduced into smaller and smaller elements. In this way, a training plan can become far more than an outline of exercises; it can become a schedule to intensify the use of time: athletes know precisely what they should be doing not only every second of practice but every second of their lives – live like a clock, become a 24-hour athlete. As former United States 5000 metre record holder, Marty Liquori stated, 'I must live regularly if I'm going to progress. ... I fit my life into a groove. ... It's like being a zombie' (Bale, 2003, p. 89).

Because attaining speed and efficiency throughout one's day, including practice, can be reflected so strongly in distance running coaches' training plans, the goals of coaching distance runners – and the mind-set of distance runners themselves – can easily be

subsumed by a focus on production, more running, or work, e.g. overtraining (Meeusen et al., 2013), as opposed to doing what is necessary to win. As a result, coaches tend to prefer athletes who are ‘coachable’ – read obedient, normal and disciplined – because non-conformity or abnormality of any kind and repeated often is seen as too costly, a waste of time. Therefore, athletes become very competent (read disciplined) at performing the ‘good athlete’ role: they must check continually that they have drunk the ‘correct’ liquids, eaten the ‘correct’ foods, taken the ‘correct’ amount of rest and done the ‘correct’ flexibility work. Thus, there is a danger that the athlete on the starting line is overwhelmed with checking that he or she did the ‘correct’ everything, otherwise how else could he or she be prepared to race?

Related to the good athlete role is, of course, the ‘good coach’ role. A good coach must have a rigorous system in place to assess his or her athletes’ competence to complete all the expectations of being a good athlete. As a result, a coach’s competence is determined by the amount of control he or she has over his or her athletes. A training plan that allows athletes the opportunity to explore and make mistakes is likely to be seen as ‘a moral offense and economic dishonesty’ (Foucault, 1995, p. 154). Consequently, there is almost no space for real independence of thought or action for a coach if he or she wishes to achieve competence and have the opportunity to coach. And coaches know this very well: they have a clear understanding of the competencies they need to demonstrate to be regarded as effective, useful or correct. For example, the governing body for track and field in Canada, Athletics Canada, must approve a coach’s training plan for an athlete before agreeing to fund him or her. In this way, coaches become the subjects of their own surveillance: the daily training environment panopticon they arranged to observe their athletes also normalizes them.

Accordingly, the discourse of coach competence, with discipline so tightly inscribed within it, needs to be problematized if coaches are indeed to be ‘free’ to coach in less disciplinary and controlling ways. And, as we have been arguing throughout this paper, we think it is possible for a coach to begin this process and, as a result, change his or her practices to be less disciplinary, with some very small modifications to his or her training plans. For example, instead of athletes having to carry out specific practices in specific places at specific times according to a fixed schedule, many of an athlete’s daily exercises could be done anywhere or at any time: a hamstring stretch done in a shopping queue, or foot drills done while walking to work, or pelvic floor and transversus abdominus contractions done while sitting at a desk (e.g. the constant exploration of the body’s capacity to move). Or, coaches could hold practices at different times of the day or meet their athletes one-on-one. However, as with all the suggestions we have made thus far in this paper, we cannot emphasize enough how important intention is here. In other words, our suggestions are not just meant to add variety to coaches’ weekly workout schedules, but to help coaches understand how anatomo-political power influences and informs their everyday practices – what they regularly say and do – so that they might begin to create training environments that actually do accept difference instead of only making empty promises to that effect (Nelson, Cushion, Potrac, & Groom, 2014). Put differently, by modifying their practices to be less reliant on the constraints of time, athletes might begin to think more on their own instead of only in expected ways or within the realm of what their coaches have deemed acceptable or allowable. As a result, athletes might be able to enjoy more of a life that includes their commitment to sport, not a life restricted by their commitment to sport. And when considering how to overcome the rampant culture of underperformance and inconsistency that effects almost every distance runner across his

or her career, perhaps a bit less structure now and then could go a long way towards reversing this trend?

### **The organization of geneses: the bodily ‘effects’ of training**

To understand how their workouts should produce the outcomes they have planned, coaches often refer to their training plans as ‘maps’. This might seem like an innocent enough analogy except that in general maps, tables, blueprints or other similar terms, are designed to be stable; they are an administrative tool to produce the largest economic benefit. They are a technique of power by which all action and behaviour can be made useful by ‘segmentation, serration, synthesis and totalization. A macro- and a micro-physics of power ... the integration of a temporal, unitary, continuous, cumulative dimension in the exercise of controls and the practice of dominations’ (Foucault, 1995, p. 160). As a result, discipline is further reinforced and the daily training environment becomes more fixed and rigid in the organization and communication of exercises and the shaping of bodies. In this way, as Kiely (2012), a noted sport physiologist, also argued, a coach’s planning methodology can easily be based around various norms or generalities instead of how a particular workout might actually transfer to performance. And ironically, when coaches follow general approaches to training, the body’s biology becomes marginalized – how individuals’ bodies respond to exercises, ‘to specified operations, which have their order, their stages, their internal condition, their constituent elements’ (p. 155) – and disciplinary control becomes the priority. In other words, by strictly adhering to a training methodology, a coach’s training plan can become primarily a behavioural instrument with an emphasis on creating within athletes a specific conscience.

As an alternative to the rigid measures of control that can be enacted through the strict application of a particular set of training principles, we would like to see distance running coaches remove their expectations of their athletes to be in a specific condition at any one point in time so that ‘anything’ is possible. For, if all the talk about an athlete – and the maps and tables this talk produces – is aimed at him or her running four minutes for 1500 metres, it can become very difficult for that athlete to believe he or she is capable of running faster. This could be one reason why we see so many distance runners clustered around heavily talked about and mapped standards such as two minutes for 800 metres, the four-minute mile or an Olympic qualifying time.

To illustrate further why we think coaches should question the utility of training plans that tend to prescribe only certain types of movements that must be completed in particular ways, most coaches have worked with at least one athlete who could easily pass every ‘exam’ set for him or her in training – time trials and field tests – but who underperformed in competition. Clearly the plan the coach developed for this athlete was designed for the wrong exam – progressing in training not in competition. But because distance running coaches so often believe that planning, and ‘the plan’, should work to produce the athletes they want, they can be hesitant to change their plans and how they examine their athletes. For example, consider what many distance running coaches do the year after one of their athletes has had a disappointing season – a far too commonplace situation unfortunately: they go back to the plan they just used and try to make it even more precise, accurate and foolproof (Mills & Denison, 2013). Yes they might tweak existing workouts, add a new strength component, introduce more technical work, move Wednesday’s tempo run to Thursday or switch from mile repeats to 2000 metre repeats on Mondays. However, has their intent, philosophy or assumptions regarding the function of a training plan as an instrument of power ‘to impose on the body tasks that are both repetitive and different’ (Foucault, 1995, p. 161) changed? Not likely, as long as their understanding of planning as

a ‘disciplined’ process remains intact. As a result, our so-called wiser coach ends up changing nothing significant at all: the same disciplinary logic, and all the work that logic does to make athletes docile, still dominates.

Alternatively, we would like to see distance running coaches consistently challenge, critique and problematize their framework for planning, and in particular how anatomo-political power works to exert its effects through the operation of the plan. We believe this would have a more meaningful impact on coaches’ practices and their athletes’ performances than simply re-arranging various training elements year to year. In this way, a training plan could become less about the exercise of control by a coach and more about developing engaged and connected athletes: an open and flexible approach to planning that would enable coaches to challenge many of the manifestations of anatomo-political power and athletes to explore their bodies and their abilities more fully. Again, we are not simply suggesting that coaches become more considerate or perform more benevolent acts towards their athletes. As we previously explained, this is to make interpersonal changes to one’s coaching style that will never address the issues related to anatomo-political power that we have raised here. Instead, we would advocate that coaches spend more time problematizing their conduct as ethical beings in an extreme position of responsibility: the making of individuals’ bodies through what they have their athletes do on the track, in the park or in the weight room.

One specific way we believe coaches could begin to problematize the effects of anatomo-political power and the work their training plans typically do to assess their athletes’ and test ‘where they are at’, could be to limit the use of time trials and other ‘objective’ measures of fitness. Instead, coaches could search for more open-ended and flexible ways to help their athletes evaluate how well they are progressing, or more specifically how well they are learning to compete. For example, coaches could emphasize developing their athletes’ capacities to push themselves through the pain and discomfort that accompanies training. In this way, the athlete would focus on feeling the inevitable ‘bite’ in his or her hill repetitions at progressively later stages (i.e. closer to the top), or managing the ‘sting’ felt in track repetitions in better ways. Alternatively, to know where their athletes might be at (the object of a time trial), coaches could schedule more competitions and define the importance of those competitions in different ways. Coaches could also place value on athletes completing workouts with novel challenges attached to them. For example, running with ease, running certain parts of the workout slower and other parts faster, running as fast as possible while maintaining a perfect posture, or running at maximum intensity for the first repetition in a workout and then attempting to ‘finish’ the remaining repetitions without breaking down.

Currently across the global context of distance running there exists a general series of predictable and disciplinary sequences or cycles of training that distance running coaches plan for their athletes to complete (Mills & Denison, 2013). However, along with Kiely (2012), we would argue that these general prescriptions should be continually and constantly disrupted. More specifically, an endless variety of running experiences and activities – workouts with different challenges – are possible that could help athletes expand their understanding of themselves as competitors outside the many limitations of strict planning and periodization protocols typically used by distance running coaches. For example, an eight-week training block could easily become seven weeks. A seven-day (weekly) training block could easily become 10 days, or 12, or six, or four. One day’s training could easily be disrupted so that the hard workout is completed early in the morning and the easy workout in the evening; or the easy workout completed 30 minutes after the hard workout or two hours before the hard workout. Rather than layout training in a predictable series – alternating hard and easy training days with one day off in the week



– coaches could weight all the hard training to be done in two or three days, followed by a prolonged period of easy running. As an extension, athletes could be encouraged to train hard on the days they feel very fatigued and tired, and run easy on days they are bursting with energy. In other words, distance running coaches could continually problematize and regularly disrupt the disciplinary mechanisms at the centre of their training, so that their athletes experience a series of novel routines that they must continually adjust and adapt to in order to learn how to assume more control over their development as an actively engaged running body not a docile body.

From a biological understanding of training theory, we realize that it is not so novel to advise coaches to mix up their training. This is exactly what one of the ‘gurus’ of training theory, Anatolyi Bondarchuk (2007), advised: constant experimentation and change to the training programme to continually stimulate athletes’ adaptive qualities. But too often, without a deeper Foucauldian understanding, coaches’ conception of constant experimentation and change still occurs within a strict disciplinary framework. Once again, this is where intention becomes so important when thinking with Foucault as a coach. Just because a coach varies his or her training programme or professes to leave no stone unturned does not mean he or she is destabilizing any problematic power relations; just because a coach is flexible in his or her thinking does not mean he or she is coaching with less domination, and just because a coach listens to her or his athletes does not mean he or she is athlete-centred. To coach with Foucault, and truly consider the effects of various disciplinary techniques used to construct a training plan, a coach needs to understand how a schedule, even a flexible and changing schedule, can still serve as an instrument of control that can normalize behaviour and stifle athletes’ pleasure, exploration and creativity (McMahon et al., 2012).

A further example of how strict control, ‘a whole analytical pedagogy . . . meticulous in its detail’ (Foucault, 1995, p. 159), can run through a coach’s training plans that could be easily destabilized is the reliance on ‘benchmark workouts’ to indicate a plan’s effectiveness – the athletes’ readiness – and, by extension, his or her ability as a coach. Such workouts are typically spread out across different phases of the training year and might look different but they all have the same purpose: to measure progress and evaluate not just the athlete but the organization of the plan as an efficient system of combined forces and tactics intended to produce a peak performance on schedule. Through the use of benchmark workouts, coaches try to ‘know’ their athletes’ fitness and, as a result, predict their results. However, given that a true baseline measure of an athlete’s fitness is impossible to attain, it is unclear how reliable these predictions can really be. Moreover, it is impossible to ensure standardized conditions from one benchmark workout to another, thereby making the entire aim of the experiment flawed from the outset. In addition, a completed benchmark workout that falls short of the expected outcome is more likely to erode rather than boost an athlete’s confidence. Furthermore, even athletes who ‘pass’ the benchmark workout test may be disappointed with later race outcomes because, quite simply, the benchmark workout is precisely this, a benchmark workout and not a race. Therefore, to destabilize the general logic of the benchmark workout as a tool to predict an athlete’s performance capabilities, a coach could come to practice with some dice and have the athletes roll them to select what their ‘benchmark workout’ will be. While this might sound like a gimmick, done with intention, an exercise like this can help athletes see the fallibility in planning and help them realize they need to take more responsibility for their performances instead of expecting the workouts their coaches write, and that they complete to the letter, to produce a good performance. Likewise, a coach could inject some chaos every now and then into his or her training environment. This could be as simple as showing up late for practice, or standing in a different spot on the track, or not providing an answer to every question an athlete asks, or refusing to prescribe the session. Again, as with all the suggestions we have provided in



this paper, consistently done over time as a deliberate coaching strategy, such practices have the potential to disrupt the strict disciplinary nature of distance running coaches' everyday practices and, as a result, create more ethical training environments where coach domination is minimized and athlete engagement is enhanced.

## Conclusion

Without question, a distance running coach's job is complex and comprised of multiple moving parts: it involves numerous relations of power that all intersect in one way or another. In contrast, effectiveness as a distance running coach has typically been viewed as having the ability to configure these moving parts 'correctly' in order to obtain a desired result. With all its 'correct' stages, segments, parts and phases, the training plan has become the means for a coach to impose control over athletes' bodies (Mills & Denison, 2013). As a result, coaching distance runners has become a product of the social power of labour, where coaches believe they face a clear demand to which they must respond: 'construct a machine [a plan] whose effect will be maximized by the concerted articulation of the elementary parts of which it is composed' (Foucault, 1995, p. 164). Phrased differently, the practice of coaching is not an art and a science as many coaches like to think. Rather, it is about 'composing forces in order to obtain an efficient machine [body]' (p. 164). As a consequence, the distance running body is above all 'a fragment of mobile space, before he is courage and honour' (p. 164).

For us such a consequence, a body made docile through the workings of anatomo-political power, is highly problematic. Yes, planning a training programme with sound and sensible workouts is important. However, we believe that it is important for coaches to realize how their frameworks for planning are based on sport's modernist philosophy of efficient management, discipline and control (Andrews, 2008; Denison et al., 2013), and that this may not be an effective coaching philosophy to follow in order to develop an athlete's specific qualities. But by beginning to think with Foucault, we believe it is possible for coaches to disrupt this logic and coach differently.

Naturally, we recognize that for distance running coaches to destabilize the disciplinary nature of their training plans it is not enough just to provide them with a number of new workouts. To truly problematize all that planning does to runners' bodies from a Foucauldian perspective, coaches will need to be able to challenge the dominance that certain sport sciences, such as exercise physiology and biomechanics, have in shaping their understanding of the body and performance. For it is understanding how to problematize both the formation of knowledge – the articulable form – and the specific practices this knowledge produces – the visible form – that truly constitutes thinking with Foucault (Markula, 2011). In this paper, we have concentrated on illustrating what new practices coaches could employ to coach in less disciplinary ways in order to demonstrate how thinking with Foucault can be grounded in the everydayness of coaching: what coaches actually do with the bodies in front of them. Moving forward, we intend to compliment our suggestions and analysis here with an equally practical discussion of the articulable form in order to help coaches understand more completely the discursive formation of their practices and how to coach with a minimal use of domination.

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