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FROM TRACKSUIT TO TRENCH COAT: THE CHANGING POSITION OF THE SWEDISH MALE ELITE SOCCER COACH BETWEEN THE 1960S AND THE 2010S

Introduction

The position of the coach in elite sports has changed radically over the last 50 years from being a somewhat peripheral figure limited to technique and fitness to a central position of managing players, training staff and representing the club for fans, the media and sponsors (Phillips 2000; Day & Carpenter 2016). Using the Swedish male elite soccer coach as an example, the aim of this thesis is to acquire a deeper understanding of this change. The purpose is to examine the changing position of the Swedish male elite soccer coach in relation to the changing conditions of elite soccer between the 1960s and the 2010s.

Theory and method

The history of the Swedish soccer coach is analysed through the lens of the Foucauldian perspective of governmentality (Foucault & Faubion 2002; Rose 1999; Walters 2012). Focusing on the constitution of subject positions, the thesis identifies the power/knowledge relationships formulated within the governmentalities of Swedish elite football clubs and the Swedish Football Association (SvFF). A text analysis of board minutes and annual reports from the Swedish elite soccer club IFK Norrköping, education material from coaching courses organised by SvFF and the transcripts of semi-structured qualitative interviews with former and still active Swedish elite soccer coaches has been conducted.

Result and discussion

The analysis shows that at the beginning of the 1960s the established power/knowledge relationship implied that, kitted out in a whole and clean tracksuit, the coach was expected to govern the players' techniques and fitness training twice a week. However, in order to be internationally competitive, in 1967 SvFF overturned the amateur regulations and instead allowed Swedish clubs to sign professional contracts with the players. From then on the coach was given more time to "conduct the conduct" of the players. In parallel, the clubs and SvFF turned to scientific knowledge and expertise in the areas of physiology and tactics and later sport psychology, leadership and communication. As a consequence, new power/knowledge relationships were formulated which meant that the coach was not only expected to govern new and more dimensions of the players, but also a growing staff of assistant coaches. In addition, dressed in tailor-made trench coat, the coach became the club's outward face for attracting sponsors and communicating with the media and fans.

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