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FROM TRACKSUIT TO TRENCH COAT: THE CHANGING POSITION OF THE

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.

References
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