

March 2023

## The Production of Docility in Professional Ice Hockey

Andre Michael Andrijw

University of Alberta, aandrijw@hotmail.com

Luke Jones

University of Bath, ljj36@bath.ac.uk

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/jade>



Part of the [Sports Management Commons](#), and the [Sports Studies Commons](#)

**How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!**

---

### Recommended Citation

Andrijw, Andre Michael and Jones, Luke (2023) "The Production of Docility in Professional Ice Hockey," *Journal of Athlete Development and Experience*: Vol. 5: Iss. 1, Article 1.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25035/jade.05.01.01>

Available at: <https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/jade/vol5/iss1/1>



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#)

This Research Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at ScholarWorks@BGSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Athlete Development and Experience by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks@BGSU.

## The Production of Docility in Professional Ice Hockey

Andre Michael Andrijiw  
University of Alberta

Luke Jones  
University of Bath

---

### ABSTRACT

*The social relations and practices that imbue the sport of ice hockey have prompted several limiting and problematic outcomes for athletes. Concerned by such outcomes, and informed by the anatomo-politics of French poststructuralist philosopher Michel Foucault (1991), an examination into the relations of power that govern North American professional ice hockey was undertaken. The examination revealed that athletes were routinely subject to disciplinary power and a commonplace set of practices that closely resemble Foucault's (1991) 'means of correct training': managers, in partnership with coaches under their remit, choreographed and engaged in constant supervision (e.g., scouting and monitoring), organized highly ritualized examinations (e.g., combines, training camps), rewarded conformity (e.g., contractual benefits), and punished deviance (e.g., inter- and intra-team reassignments). These practices were additionally undergirded by clearly identifiable panoptic arrangements that stretched across the athletic lifespan. Ultimately, the observed workings of disciplinary power served not the development of a whole individual, but rather the production of docility.*

---

*Keywords:* development, Foucault, management, sport, surveillance

---

Given concerns regarding the outcomes of various athletic arrangements (cf., Johns & Johns, 2000; McMahon et al., 2012), scholars have problematized (e.g., Markula & Pringle, 2006; Rail & Harvey, 1995) and advocated for further research (e.g., Jones & Denison, 2017) on the disciplinary frameworks that reinforce high-performance sport. Relatedly, within sport sociology, researchers have embraced the anatomo-politics of French poststructuralist philosopher Michel Foucault (1991) to analyze the relations of power that govern various spaces and outline how discipline and the engenderment of docility may limit the development of athletes (e.g., Jones & Denison, 2017; Robidoux, 2001). Inspired by such works, as well as a need to better understand a space that has continually limited the holistic development of (i.e., the psychological, psychosocial, academic/vocational and athletic maturation of an individual; Stambulova et al., 2020; e.g., Andrijiw, 2020; Robidoux, 2001) and engendered problematic outcomes for athletes (e.g., depressive symptoms; difficulty with sport career cessation; Aston et al., 2020; Chambers, 2002), the authors were moved to complete an appraisal of the relations of power that govern North American professional ice hockey (a setting composed of the National Hockey League, a 32-team venture that spans the United States of America and Canada; two lower-level affiliates, the American Hockey League and ECHL [formerly the East Coast Hockey League]; two collective bargaining units, the National Hockey League Players' and Professional Hockey Players' Associations; and one advocacy group, the National Hockey League Alumni Association). As architectural arrangements and coach-athlete interactions ultimately are under the purview of senior administrators, the appraisal sought to address a single, related research question: How are bodies in the setting of North American professional ice hockey transformed and made useful by league and team managers? To attend to this question, the authors, as others before them, turned to the work of Foucault (1991) and his ideas regarding anatomo-politics and disciplinary power.

### **Anatomo-Politics and Disciplinary Power**

Moved by a “desire to understand how people throughout history have created knowledge about humans, and how such knowledge has shaped the experience of being human” (Markula & Pringle, 2006, p. 24), Foucault (1991) undertook and completed an extensive socio-historical excavation of the relationship between power, knowledge, and truth, and conceived of the concept of anatomo-political power. Central to the concept is the notion that, in modernity, the human body is the object and target of control, and that power is productive, relational, and flows through all interactions and practices (Foucault, 1991). As Foucault (1991) wrote, with the modern age, the “human body was entering into a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it” (p. 138). Framing power in this manner, Foucault (1991) outlined how a cohesive system of control (i.e., disciplinary coercion) may be imposed upon the body through four techniques: the art of distributions (i.e., the organization and use of bodies in constructed spaces), the regulation of activity (i.e., the use of time in shaping bodies in these spaces), the organization of genesis (i.e., the categorization and graduation of bodily practices), and the composition of forces (i.e., the congregation of bodies to act as a fluid machine). These techniques were additionally theorized to exert influence over the body via three instruments of discipline (i.e., ‘means of correct training’): hierarchical observation, judgement normalization, and ritualized examination (Foucault, 1991). Foucault’s (1991) analysis of the making of the docile body, finally, was informed by his understanding of panopticism: “the panoptic mechanism arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately . . . assuring the efficient and automatic functioning of power” (p. 201). Foucault (1991) observed that the collective power of the aforementioned techniques and instruments assured the body’s subjection, or its docility. Taken altogether, Foucault (1991) illustrated how bodies can be aligned as components in a system whereby interaction, learning, and personal growth are made subservient to large-scale production.

### **The Production of Docile Bodies in Sport**

Recognizing the analytic potential of Foucault’s (1991) work, scholars have appropriated the concept of anatomo-politics to explore, map, and problematize many aspects of organized sport. Related endeavours have, for example, engendered detailed mappings of how athletes may not only be rendered docile as a result of their sporting experiences (e.g., Heikkala, 1993; Manley & Williams, 2019; Rail & Harvey, 1995), but also “classified, disciplined and normalised by social processes that they have little direct control over” (Markula & Pringle, 2006, p. 24). Scholars, moreover, have identified how the socio-historical practices and arrangements of modern sport, including commonly employed training techniques, are tied to a ‘disciplinary logic’ (Denison et al., 2017), one that has been legitimized and reinforced by the integration of sports science within coaching, and prompted an ever-increasing reliance upon an exclusive bio-scientific articulation and framing of the human body (e.g., Manley & Williams, 2019; i.e., the body as ‘machine,’ Mills & Denison, 2013). Foucault’s (1991) work, as such, has been exploited to critique a historical adherence to and acceptance of a certain logic, one that posits that the imposition of a docility-procuring disciplinary arrangement is a necessity for the cultivation, development, and ‘improvement’ of individual athletes (Denison et al., 2017). Indeed, amongst coaches in sport, contemporary notions of ‘effective’ athlete development almost exclusively rely upon and promote, above all else, the control and objectification of the human body (Mills & Denison, 2013).

Productive effects notwithstanding (e.g., the ability of athletes to perform precise movements and procedures; e.g., Heikkala, 1993), the imposition of a disciplinary logic in sport is problematic in that a docile body may act unquestioningly and unthinkingly (Foucault, 1991); engage in and be subject to harmful practice (Clark & Markula, 2017); and experience any number of adverse consequences (cf., Denison, 2007; Gerdin et al., 2019; Giulianotti, 1999; Johns & Johns, 2000; Jones & Denison, 2017; McMahan et al., 2012). As a result, scholars have called for the problematization of the disciplinary logic (Denison, 2019; Mills & Denison, 2018), the introduction of an ethic of reflection in coaching (Denison & Avner, 2011), and a re-imagining of extant and embedded traditions (Jones & Denison, 2019). Moreover, scholars have developed a

myriad of practical suggestions and worked to disrupt, dilute, and remold traditional disciplinary practices (e.g., Konoval et al., 2019; Kuklick & Garity, 2019).

What remains generally absent from the efforts of scholars, however, is consideration for how managers and broader institutions in sport reinforce adherence to a disciplinary logic. Thus, diverging from others' research on architectural arrangements and coach-athlete interactions (e.g., Gerdin et al., 2019; Konoval et al., 2019; Ojala, 2020; Robidoux, 2001), the authors were moved to embrace the work of Foucault (1991); map, highlight, and critique the relations of power that govern the setting of North American professional ice hockey; and explicate how the actions, choices, and prescribed expectations of managers (i.e., executives) therein procure the docility and (narrowly) shape the experiences of athletes.

### Method

To supply just such an explication, the authors analyzed data that were derived from a study that was initially framed by a relativist ontology (Guba & Lincoln, 2004), a constructionist epistemology (Crotty, 1998), and a case design (Yin, 1993); and that sought to explore how organizations and managers in men's professional ice hockey regulated individual development and affected preparation for athletic career retirement (for further information, see Andrijew, 2020). Despite any potential merits that may be associated with the initial study, the work's constructionist foundations posed two significant limitations: firstly, the analysis did not consider for relations of power relative to the creation of the subjective experience; and, secondly, the employed framework lacked the ontological alacrity that was necessary to comprehensively map and consider for the effects and relations of power that were at work at the site of investigation. The constructionist foundations of the initial study notwithstanding, the content of the collected data pointed to the potential to resolve these limitations and the merit of an alternative reading. As a result, the authors undertook such a reading, one framed by a post-structural ontology (Markula & Silk, 2011) and the work of Foucault (1991).

As part of this reading (i.e., analysis), the authors returned to data that were gleaned from interviews (n = 10) and documents (n = 3902) that were part of the initial study. With regard to the former, interviews were conducted with personnel managers (e.g., Assistant General Managers, Directors of Player Personnel) from seven teams of the National and American Hockey Leagues (n = 7), as well as one development and one veteran status American Hockey League player (see American Hockey League, n.d.; n = 2), and one recently retired National Hockey League alumnus (n = 1), all from the same nested case organization (i.e., a team and its affiliate). The interviews involved slightly varied, preconstructed guides relating to athletic and individual development; were conducted between June 26, 2017, and February 20, 2018 (over the phone); and ranged from 36 to 112 minutes in length (with an average length of 65 minutes). Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed verbatim, and the resultant texts offered 178 single-spaced pages of data for analysis.

Given limited accessibility to managers and athletes in the setting of interest, data were also drawn from texts that offered insights into the development practices and social relations of ice hockey organizations. In this regard, data were drawn from Starkey's (2016) *Chasing the Dream: Life in the American Hockey League*, a text that featured excerpts from interviews with minor professional managers and personnel (n = 1), and six websites' news articles, press releases, and posts from a single year (June 15, 2016 to June 15, 2017; n = 3901). The particular websites (the number of works from each source may be found in parentheses) were those of the National Hockey League (n = 1144), the American Hockey League (n = 1047), the National Hockey League Players' Association (n = 378), the Professional Hockey Players' Association (n = 250), the nested case team (n = 801), and the nested case affiliate (n = 281).

As previously intimated, the initial study revealed that several data were demonstrative of Foucault's (1991) theoretical analysis (e.g., 'scouting,' 'monitoring,' 'evaluation,' and 'enforcement'). Consequently, all of the collected data were re-analyzed through the lens of Foucault (1991). Following a template provided by Markula and Silk (2011), data were clustered into themes, analyzed, and then examined relative to relations of power, extant theory, and past literature. The analysis, finally, was interpreted with regard to the matter of holistic development to draw related implications.

### Results – The Production of Docility in Professional Ice Hockey

The analysis revealed that, as a result of managers' normalized attitudes, behaviours, and approaches to relationships, professional ice hockey personnel (i.e., athletes) were subjected to workings of disciplinary power that served to induce docility. For Foucault (1991), modern power branched out and penetrated every aspect of society by becoming inseparably related to knowledge (Mills & Denison, 2018) and its resultant practices. Within the observed context, data were demonstrative of the deployment of a commonplace set of practices that reflected just such a branching out of power: managers, seemingly driven by the productive effects of discipline (Heikkala, 1993), and in concert with coaches under their remit, choreographed and engaged in constant supervision (e.g., scouting and monitoring), organized highly ritualized examinations (e.g., combines, training camps), rewarded conformity (e.g., athletic and contractual benefits), and punished deviance (e.g., inter- and intra-team reassignments). These practices, moreover, were undergirded by clearly identifiable panoptic arrangements that, as Foucault (1991) might have predicted, seldom occurred apart from one another or at only a single point in time. What follows is a detailed mapping of how, through scouting, combines, entry drafts, development and training camps, and various in-season arrangements, workings of disciplinary power furthered the production of docility amongst athletes in professional ice hockey.

#### Scouting

Within the setting of note, the working of disciplinary power occurs through, among other means, a process commonly referred to as scouting. That is, prior to most any youth becoming a member of a team, they are repeatedly assessed with regard to their athletic prowess and potential to perform the role of a professional. This, as Participant 02, the Assistant General Manager of a National Hockey League team, noted, is “the easiest way” for organizations to ensure that personnel possess a desired set of characteristics (e.g., competitiveness, industriousness, selflessness, toughness; proficiencies with technical maneuvers, situational play, and match systems; Andrijiw, 2020). To this end, professional ice hockey organizations employ multiple personnel to scour the globe and investigate the natures of prospective recruits.

These investigations, as Smith (2017) detailed, may span several years, and entail both regular observation and reporting:

The [Carolina] Hurricanes were diligent in their scouting process, tracking and analyzing [Sebastian] Aho from when he was a 16-year-old underage player through his draft-eligible season [(i.e., two years later)]. . . . [Carolina Hurricanes Director of Scouting, Tony] MacDonald tracked Aho quite a bit . . . . So did [Amateur Scout] Sheldon Ferguson. . . . [and] [Robert] Kron [(Director of European Scouting)]. (paras. 3, 5, 12)

The process of evaluating an individual as a prospective professional is not, however, limited to in-game observations. As Participant 05, a personnel manager with a National Hockey League team, explained, to appreciate the intangible qualities that a prospective recruit might possess, managers may speak to one or more persons who are familiar with the observed individual:

All teams have scouts in certain (geographical) areas. Part of the responsibility of that scout is to talk to the coaches and/or teachers, and people like that, to find out what the kid is like. And if you consistently get back that he works, and does it with diligence, those kinds of things give you an indicator. . . . Now, I recommend that people don't just take anything that is said. I would say you're going to have to do a lot of due diligence, and your area person has to do a lot of, a lot of research, and it can be tough sometimes, in places like Russia, or Europe in general, but you can find out a lot about a player.

Scouting may thus be articulated as a form of hierarchical observation, a means by which teams and managers take “into account the activity of men, their skill, the way they set about their tasks, their promptness, their zeal, [and] their behaviour” (Foucault, 1991, p. 174). In addition, the practice may act as a mechanism for the coercion of all others who may be rendered visible within a particular space, as it is not only the scouted who are conscious of the evaluation at hand and thus are subject to the workings of a normalizing gaze, but all who are present.

Notably, however, the ‘hockey body’ is already subjected to various techniques of coercion and discipline: pre-determined activities are intentionally choreographed (control of activity) within power-laden spaces (arts of distributions), and the progression thereof are meticulously scheduled and monitored (organisation of geneses) for the betterment of a unit (composition of forces). Yet, as Foucault (1991) described, in the process of being rendered more visible, disciplinary power can take an even greater hold upon the body and engender docility. In this way, the athlete’s enhanced visibility assures the hold of the power that is exercised over them. Scouts and their related networks might therefore be read as Foucault’s (1991, p. 174) indispensable “specialized personnel,” responsible for the sustenance of constant surveillance and acting as key mechanisms for workings of disciplinary power.

### The Combine and Entry Draft

Scouting, despite being imprecise (e.g., it’s “no perfect science,” Participant 05), also forms the base for future disciplinary arrangements and the procurement and promotion of a manipulable, docile body, namely by acting as a prelude to two annual events: the National Hockey League Scouting Combine, and Entry Draft. The former, organized by Central Scouting Services, a department within the office of the National Hockey League that is tasked with observing and ranking draft-eligible recruits, is a week-long event that brings together team managers and approximately 100 youths. As part of the annual event, prospective recruits are interviewed by team managers and staff, and tasked with undergoing a battery of physical and medical tests.

The interviews vary in content and scope, but most all involve personnel managers and scouting and hockey operations staff. Robenhymer (2017a) profiled a member of one interview team and described the related process so:

When a prospect enters the New Jersey Devils’ suite at KeyBank Center during the NHL Scouting Combine, he is introduced to Dr. Aimee Kimball, director of team and player development. Kimball poses most of the questions during each 20-minute interview. . . . Questions like, “Would you rather be a good player or a good person?” and “Would you rather be good in practice or good in games?” All the information gathered will be added to each player’s prospect profile right along with how well they skate and perform on the power play, and it’s all part of the process to pick the right players – and right people. (paras. 1-2, 10)

In addition to interviews, team managers and staff collect information at the combine by way of physical and medical tests. In an interview with Robenhymer (2017b), Joe Lorincz, a strength and conditioning coach, relatedly described how such tests inform scouts and managers:

We evaluate all the data including their power scores, vertical jumps and pro-agility and the broad jump. . . . We record all this information to pass along to our scouts. . . . They just tell me the information they want to get out of these tests, which is always the same thing. They want to know who is explosive and who has potential for growth, who’s going to be a good skater, who’s going to be able to put on some weight and add some strength. Not only do I compare the prospects this year, but I also take the past two years of data to make even more comparisons and hopefully provide a little more clarity. (paras. 15, 17)

Suggestively, then, the combine inflicts upon attending youth a discernable sense of surveillance and judgement. For Foucault (1991), repeated examination was central to the objectification of the physical body and the procurement of compliance. Repeated and normalized examination, such as that experienced at the annual combine, holds the individual in a “mechanism of objectification” and acts as a “space of domination” whereby bodies can be arranged and made useful without dissent (Foucault, 1991, p. 187).

The combine, moreover, acts a panoptic mechanism (Foucault, 1991) wherein the omnipresent gaze of multiple stakeholders prompts attendees to adhere to certain behaviors that are expected relative to their ‘rank’ within the institutionalised hierarchy of the sport. As an example, Reid Duke (2017), a past participant of the combine, offered the following first-hand account of the event and advice for future attendees:

When you get to your hotel, the first thing you’ll be handed is your schedule for the week. On your schedule, it will list the teams that you’re scheduled to meet with. . . . I don’t say this to scare you, but you are being watched. Right now, you’re being watched. From the second you get to your hotel, you’ll be surrounded by hockey guys. This is the combine, so there are

hockey people everywhere. And they all know who you are . . . Just understand that some of your most important times will be before your interviews even start. You might be ready for your interviews, but say you just have to go to the washroom. There might be five hockey guys in the washroom. If this happens, they're going to notice how you react to them. . . . You'll be ready for your interviews, but you just got your second interview in the washroom. It didn't take long. It was maybe only a few seconds. But they noticed how you acted. From my experience, teams will pay as much attention to how you'd interact with them in the washroom as they will to your interview. . . . You have to be prepared that anytime can be an interview. (paras. 41-60)

As Duke's (2017) account demonstrates, the combine, as both a critical focal point of the disciplinary regime of elite hockey and an arrangement that features countless instances of observation, acts as a panoptic mechanism. For Foucault (1991), such an arrangement, typified by an omnipresent gaze, disciplines individuals to survey their own behaviours, making them their own supervisors. Although Foucault (1991) argued that individuals were not agentless 'dupes' unable to resist conformity, organizations and managers in professional ice hockey readily employ observational tactics to ensure that young athletes' behaviours and interactions are as they 'should be,' as 'obedient hockey bodies.' Indeed, interviewed managers readily acknowledged that they attempted to ensure that youth replicated the norms, ethics, and standards that are inherent to the sport. Such surveillance, however, left uninterrupted, and despite any productive effects, may yield docility akin to that which has been repeatedly problematized across a variety of high-performance sport contexts (Markula & Pringle, 2006).

Following the conclusion of most every combine, managers and scouts review the data they previously have collected, and determine the relative merits of hundreds of youths in anticipation of the annual National Hockey League Entry Draft. As part of the draft itself, the National Hockey League invites teams to attain 18–21-year-olds' exclusive signing rights, and, in effect, accord rewards for conformity and performance: those youths judged to be most likely to rise to the expectations of teams attain higher draft positions, and, in turn, richer contract and bonus offers; those perceived as being less likely to achieve the same may go without draft selection or any work offer at all. The highly publicized nature of the event turned spectacle also serves to signal to future generations of athletes and the public at large the expected constitution of personnel. The annual National Hockey League Entry Draft thus affirms previous observations and judgements, and, as a "constantly repeated ritual of power" (Foucault, 1991, p. 186), further secures individual obedience.

Taken together, the combine and draft afford managers and personnel opportunities to conduct constant surveillance, classify and qualify individuals, and both reward conformity and punish deviance. The "ceremony of power" and "deployment of force and the establishment of truth" (Foucault, 1991, p. 184) that occur therein also exposes the principal function and effect of disciplinary power, 'to train' the body toward obedience (Shogan, 1999). The combine and draft, moreover, serve as panoptic mechanisms wherein each of Foucault's (1991) instruments of discipline, his 'means of correct training,' are simultaneously evident as youths are ushered toward performing as 'docile hockey bodies' in 'sacred spaces.'

### **Development and Training Camps**

It is not only within the combine and draft, however, that youth are exposed to mechanisms that are choreographed to cultivate docility; as much also is evident in the development and training camps that are common to the sport. Immediately following each draft, as youths are allocated to their respective teams, the imposition of discipline upon individual bodies escalates. With each new stock of prospects, teams focus their developmental efforts, communicate related plans, invite potential personnel to training camps, and assign coaches to refine various skills. As Participant 01, an Assistant General Manager of a National Hockey League team, outlined:

It (i.e., 'development') starts when we draft the player. When we draft the player, we describe the player from head to toe, in terms of his hockey skills and talent, or lack thereof, and what needs improvement, and then we have a foundation that basically says, 'Maybe he's a step slow right now, but we feel he can get it.' But then once we draft a player, we know what we're getting into. We watch video. We talk with our other scouts. We talk with our developmental coaches. And then we make sure everybody – again, communication is critical

and key, and a high priority – and this way then we can focus in, and make sure, when we're doing our drills, and when individuals come in for more help, that we're focusing in on the things he needs to get better on.

Betterment, or rather the intentional design of timings, observations, activities, and allocation of bodies to spaces, then, is amplified in particular at team development camps. There, the 'training' of athletes intensifies, and the procurement of docility is not simply sought, but anticipated.

These camps, which occur shortly after each draft and typically run seven days in length, serve to inform recent draftees, young signees, and free agent invitees about team systems and the demands of professional sport (i.e., "what our language is and what our habits are, how we want to play the game and more specifically, the skill-set that's needed to play the game within our system," Todd McLellan, Head Coach of a National Hockey League team; Tilley, 2016, para. 3). The camps also afford team managers a convenient means to induce lateral surveillance (Andrejevic, 2005) and continue their observation over, and instill desired behaviour in, prospective employees. As Participant 01, an Assistant General Manager of a National Hockey League team remarked:

We get to watch them (i.e., camp invitees) interact with their potential, future teammates, and how they act as people. . . . It's constant observation that is going on, from the player perspective, from the management perspective, from the training staff perspective, and, of course, from the coaches' perspective.

Such observation informs future decision-making and development processes, and sustains the threat that those who "do not measure up to the rule, depart from it" (Foucault, 1991, p. 178).

Observation and judgement then are coupled prior to the start of each season with highly ritualized training camps. With these camps, teams invite unsigned draftees, free agents, and contracted employees to vie for roster positions for the coming season. Typically lasting several weeks in length, these camps allow teams to continue to monitor and shape the behaviors of participants. In addition, the camps inform distributions of rewards and punishment: daily observations and judgements are employed to winnow dozens of athletes from a final roster; and those deemed unfit for play in the National Hockey League are assigned either to a minor league camp to undergo further examination, or a junior league to continue development from afar.

Within the normalized and routine physical and social arrangements of these camps, then, the decisions and practices of managers lead to the manifestation of disciplinary power at the location of the individual athlete. This occurs most notably through an instrument of discipline Foucault (1991) described as "hierarchical observation." That is, within the concentrated and purposefully designated environments of camps, managers facilitate "internal, articulated and detailed control – to render visible those who are inside," using

an architecture that would operate to transform individuals: to act on those it shelters, to provide a hold on their conduct, to carry the effects of power right to them, to make it possible to know them, to alter them. (Foucault, 1991, p. 172)

The presence of discipline also allows for the operation of a relational power that is harder (given its less corporal nature) to identify, and, therefore, alter or disrupt (Foucault, 1991). Disciplinary power, as such, is made "absolutely indiscreet" (Foucault, 1991, p. 177). Development and training camps, moreover, act as "short lived, artificial cities," and mimic, in both design and efficacy, the military sites Foucault (1991, p. 171) identified as the ideal observatories that facilitate the distribution of disciplinary power upon a group of bodies. While managers may not perceive their camps as akin to those of a military ("it's not a boot camp," Participant 04, a personnel manager with a National Hockey League team), extant practices belie this notion: the choreographed organization of space, time, and activity, and intense observation of the individual body, function as a remarkably efficient "piece of machinery" (Foucault, 1991, p. 177) that makes the integration of and the effects of discipline automatic.

### **In-Season Arrangements**

Those who eventually attain (i.e., are rewarded with) professional contracts and positions are not, however, liberated from managerial observation and judgement. Quite the contrary. As each "individual becomes caught up in a temporal series which specifically defines his level or his rank" (Foucault, 1991, p. 156), the possibility to ensure detailed control and regular intervention emerges



and becomes more minutely manageable. Put another way, once on the roster of a professional team, the hockey body graduates and becomes the target of an increasingly intense arrangement of disciplinary power choreographed to procure and sustain docility: surveillance and judgement, once sporadic, or perhaps merely less evident, become daily occurrences, and are enabled not only by practices and games, but also the strategic employment of considerable physical, technological, and human resources.

In fact, surveillance and judgement are routine to the operations of most every professional ice hockey team. As Participant 06, the personnel manager for an American Hockey League team, expressed, rarely does a practice, game, or day go by without a watchful eye: “I would say at every game there’s always a representative from (‘Parent’ Team Name), and for most of the practices we get guys down here too.” Relatedly, Participant 06 also said personnel evaluations are conducted and shared after most every game:

I talk to (‘Parent’ Team Name) after every 48 hours of games, just to stay on that same page.

We let them know how players are doing. Our coaching staff does reports after every game.

They evaluate the players after every game, and all that stuff goes up to (City Name), and their management, scouting staff, and coaches up there. We send video to them. We have great communication between (City Name) and here.

Extant evaluation systems, finally, no longer rely solely on subjective, perceptual accounts; they now employ objective data and advanced statistical programs. As an example, the evaluative depth of one such program was described by Cotsonika (2016) as follows:

The [Florida] Panthers’ analysis starts with traditional statistics and continues with the first level of so-called advanced stats, such as possession percentages and teammates’ production with and without them on the ice. But it goes much deeper. The Panthers have their own algorithms, which, of course, are secret, and evaluate players’ entire bodies of work, from junior to the minors to the NHL. (para. 18)

Teams thus expend significant effort and resources to observe and judge personnel and, in turn, correct behaviour and punish non-observance of an expected norm (Foucault, 1991). Using a multitude of surveillance mechanisms as disciplinary apparatuses also allows for personnel to be hierarchized in relation to one another. As Foucault (1991) observed:

Through this micro-economy of a perpetual penalty operates a differentiation that is not one of acts, but of individuals themselves, of their nature, their potentialities, their level or their value.

By assessing acts with precision, discipline judges individuals ‘in truth.’ (p. 181)

Accordingly, deviation from accepted performance norms is swiftly identified and regulated, homogenizing player output in order to replicate established patterns.

The observational capabilities of teams also recently have been heightened by changes to physical and human resource allocation strategies. As an example of one such change, National Hockey League teams have worked to reduce the physical distances that exist between themselves and their minor league affiliates (Starkey, 2016). Since 2005, 18 National Hockey League teams have undertaken such a relocation. In addition, teams have increased their investments in various human resources. Hockey operations and development staffs, in particular, have continued to grow in size and funding. When asked to comment on changes that were witnessed with regard to these staffs over the course of approximately a decade of time, Participant 02, the Assistant General Manager of a National Hockey League team, remarked:

It has changed a lot. When I first took over (redacted) team . . . we had two coaches: a head coach and an assistant coach. We had no strength coach, no (position) coaches, no video coaches. It was a two-man crew. Now it’s evolved to one head coach, two full-time assistant coaches, plus a (position)/video coach, a full-time strength coach, a full-time player development coach, a sport psychologist that comes in and is available pretty much 24/7. . . . And we’re not the only ones; I think every organization is the same. A lot more thought goes into our development program. A lot more resources go into it, whether it is time, money, or people. It’s come a long way; it really has.

Changes to physical and human resource allocation strategies have thus amplified potentialities for hierarchical observation and, in turn, the normalization of judgement, the imposition of discipline, and the potential for the construction of docile bodies (Foucault, 1991).

Such observation and judgement, given ceaseless implementation, perhaps not surprisingly, engenders a perceptible effect. Eric Neilson, an American Hockey League veteran and alumnus, for example, noted that “scouting and evaluations . . . [can be] mentally taxing”:

It’s a toll on the body and the mind . . . . Every time the guys get on the ice, they’re getting judged, they’re getting watched and there are scouts. At the NHL level, those guys making millions can take a night off. Guys here (i.e., in the American Hockey League), they’re trying to get there, so every time the guys get on the ice, they’re being watched and judged and trying hard all the time. (Starkey, 2016, p. 17)

Personnel are thus aware that nearly every performance is monitored and that evaluations derived therefrom determine subsequent rewards and punishments (i.e., “it is possible to obtain the punitive balance sheet of each individual,” Foucault, 1991, p. 180). The former may include beneficial intra- or inter-team reassignments and/or contractual considerations; and the latter may entail a variety of penalties, including benchings. With regard to the latter in particular, and in the words of Foucault (1991), the individual who has not carried out his tasks as required “must be placed, well in evidence, on the bench of the ignorant” (p. 179). With further deviation, more punitive measures (e.g., trades, releases, buyouts) are imposed:

Even with our best efforts, it happens, probably, on a yearly basis, that someone is just not fit to succeed in our organization, and they’re not willing to live the values that we believe in. And how do you address that? . . . . You give everyone the benefit of the doubt, and you try to work with them, and educate them, push them, pull them, cajole them, use every tactic you can to help them improve, and hopefully be able to fit in, and start performing at a higher level. But eventually, you may come to the realization that it’s not going to happen, or you may no longer be willing to invest the time and all the other resources you’re going to have to invest in order to help this player be what you want him to be . . . and you will either trade him, or send him home – or, if you’re at the major league level, you’ll put him on waivers, and send him to the minors, so that a new set of coaches can try working with them, or . . . you’re not going to renew their contract. (Participant 02, an Assistant General Manager of a National Hockey League team)

Organizations and managers, as such, levy rewards and punishments to yield desired bodies and compositions of forces (Foucault, 1991).

Taken altogether, operations central to the North American setting of men’s professional ice hockey closely resemble Foucault’s (1991) ‘means of correct training’: team practices occur on a nearly daily basis and are supervised by one or more coaches, supplemented by video reviews of past games, and utilized toward the production of performance reports; individual games are likewise observed, assessed, and reported on to the public, and serve to form the basis for the meting out of rewards and punishments; and organizations, finally, strategically employ physical and human resources to produce desired outcomes and individuals. The intents of organizations, moreover, and as one Assistant General Manager of a National Hockey League team (Participant 03) explained, are rather narrow:

Ultimately, anything you do in professional sports is to win. How do you plan to develop players that are going to play for your organization and help you win? How are you going to develop, find, sign, and draft players that are going to maybe be assets for you to move to another organization, and get another asset that might fill either a pressing need or an organizational need? From that, that’s your end goal; your end goal is about winning.

For organizations and managers in the observed setting, then, ‘development’ was and is not in service of a whole individual, but rather the production of a docile, manipulable body meant to achieve a singular end.

### **Discussion – The Effects of Discipline**

There are, however, significant and powerful implications for the athletic bodies that operate within such cohesive systems of control (e.g., Mills & Denison, 2018; Jones & Denison, 2017, 2019), as well as those who are charged with their development. As previously noted, those who are rendered docile may engage in and be subject to harmful practice (Clark & Markula, 2017), and experience any number of adverse consequences (cf., Denison, 2007; Gerdin et al., 2019; Giulianotti, 1999; Johns & Johns, 2000; McMahon et al., 2012). Notably, as Robidoux (2001)

argued, the docile professional may experience difficulty in transitioning to a life outside of sport. Assimilated into a narrow path of development and excluded from “alternative ways of knowing themselves or using their bodies” (Jones & Denison, 2017, p. 936), the docile professional, when exposed to settings that lack a comparative level of supervision and discipline, may be susceptible to “disorientation” (p. 933). Although remediable, such disorientation may engender any number of additional and negative consequences, including, but not limited to, identity disruption, emotional distress, depressive symptoms, and diminished subjective well-being (Aston et al., 2020; Chambers, 2002).

The means to producing the docile professional also are such that they restrict any alternative consideration of approach to the development of athletes. In seeking to engender docility amongst personnel, managers, by intentionally encouraging coaches and staff to endorse and deploy a disciplinary logic, subject more than the athlete alone to the effects of control. Managers instead may render coaches and staff docile, unable to question the normalized culture of production that defines modern sport. Diminished, in turn, are the abilities of coaches to use space and time to advance more appropriate forms of development, and provide athletes opportunities to express difference, creativity, critical thinking, learning, independence, and imagination (Jones & Denison, 2019). Regardless of intention, then, coaches and staff may become complicit in the production of docility, as innovative thinking and the creation of new knowledge, detached from coercive, watchful practices, are restricted (Mills & Denison, 2013). The potential efficacy of any intervention that may otherwise serve the holistic development of athletes also is limited (Andrijiw, 2020).

The setting of North American professional ice hockey, as such, is one wherein organizations and managers routinely and intentionally choreograph spaces and exercise relations of disciplinary power. The efforts of organizations and managers in this regard inhere in practices that stretch across the athletic lifespan, and are reflective of and reinforce a related disciplinary logic (Denison et al., 2017). Within this logic, managers heavily rely upon mechanisms of surveillance to individualize, normalize, and hold athletes in a social, panoptic context, such that power may be ceaselessly exerted and render bodies docile.

### Research Implications

The observed imposition of power should be concerning, for, if organizations and managers continue as they have, the ceaseless promulgation of a problematic, disciplinary logic in sport will be all but guaranteed (its disruption nullified by the constraints of institutional and sporting norms). When comparing the observed context with that which Robidoux (2001) explicated, it is clear, for example, that the exertion of power within professional ice hockey simply has not continued unabated, but grown in both complexity and strength. Indeed, the itemization of the individual body has spurred an entire industry, replete with novel staff and events, and measures that continue to extend into other, lower levels of the sport (e.g., Ojala, 2020). Researchers, focused on the workings of disciplinary power undertaken by coaches (e.g., Avner et al., 2021; Kuklick & Gearity, 2019), however, have given scant consideration to the components and implications of such a cohesive system of control.

What is suggested here, then, is that the attention of researchers be recast toward the anatomopolitical power that proceeds from the actions of managers, as it is that which pervades sporting spaces and shapes the experiences of all who are involved therein, athletes and coaches alike. In this vein, and stemming from the practices and actions that were observed within the setting of note, researchers may yet attend to various questions: where do managers learn to organize teams as they have; what ‘management knowledges’ surrounding how to govern sport organizations preside and exert influence; how does the power associated with these knowledges legitimize and justify current approaches to the control of athletic bodies; and what is it about the nature of modern sport that allows, sustains, and promulgates these approaches. Short of addressing these questions, and, likewise, the practices of organizations and managers, understandings of workings of disciplinary power within sport will remain limited.

## Practical Implications

Given warnings regarding the consequences of the imposition of disciplinary power within sport (e.g., Johns & Johns, 2000; McMahon et al., 2012), it also is clear that practices common to the setting of professional ice hockey, held in place by managers, must further be scrutinized, problematized, and disrupted. Just as with coaching, where education and interventions have challenged and disrupted a predominant disciplinary logic (e.g., Avner et al., 2021; Kuklick & Gearity, 2019), so too must organizational and managerial practices be confronted with the prospect of change. In this regard, several opportunities exist.

Foucault's (1991) insights on the implications (i.e., dangers) of rendering the body visible highlight, for one, that the practice of scouting amateur youth might be limited some so as to not be overly intrusive and cast too broad and intense an eye on the actions of prospective employees. Although due diligence is warranted, particularly to protect organizations and others against antisocial or problematic behavior, youth must not be encumbered by concerns related to athletic performance, and be given further allowance to develop interests and abilities outside of and unrelated to sport (Stambulova et al., 2020). Suggestively, then, to limit the omnipresence of scouts, leagues may mandate that teams be allowed to gather character references only from representatives selected by youth (e.g., a coach, teacher, or employer).

Relatedly, league and team managers may reconsider the utility and necessity of annual combines. Given that scouts dedicate years to evaluating the athletic abilities of attending youth, and that various circumstances (e.g., league schedules, school responsibilities, injury, interview coaching) may mediate physical and psychological preparation for the annual event, insights gathered from the short-lived space may be artificial and/or misleading in nature. More broadly, reformation of the annual combine may stunt an ever-increasing and exclusively bio-scientific articulation of the human body (Manley & Williams, 2019; Mills & Denison, 2013).

Team managers and coaches, moreover, may further explore and implement training procedures that serve to do more than merely enhance athletes' abilities to perform and repeat precise movements (e.g., Avner et al., 2021; Kuklick & Gearity, 2019). Drawing upon the work of Foucault (1991), Avner et al. (2021), for example, illustrated how problem-based learning and game- and athlete-centred approaches to coaching yielded outcomes unlike those that have been associated with traditional, skill-based, leader-centered alternatives. Kuklick and Gearity (2019), similarly, outlined how more diverse uses of time, space, and flows of bodies could enhance athletic performance and yield positive psychosocial outcomes. Team managers and coaches in professional ice hockey may thus be well served by re-examining long-standing training techniques, and implementing novel strategies that may engender greater creativity, critical thinking, learning, independence, and imagination (Jones & Denison, 2019).

Finally, to provide further space and time for development, particularly as those in the sport continue to demand more from athletes, leagues and players' associations may negotiate for seasons with fewer games (akin to those seen in professional ice hockey leagues in Europe). Although sure to engender financially-driven opposition from league and team managers alike, schedule changes may yield considerable benefits for all involved: athletes would be afforded more time to engage in alternate pursuits, involve themselves in community endeavours, and devise broader understandings of themselves; clubs could construct closer bonds with local residents and fans, and stimulate support that transcends athletic performance; and leagues, providing employees longer periods for rest, recuperation, and training, could supply more genuine displays of abilities. Taken together with the other suggestions previously noted, league and team managers may yet further the development of the sport and its participants.

## Conclusion

To reiterate, then, the undertaken examination revealed that athletes were routinely subject to disciplinary power and a commonplace set of practices that closely resemble Foucault's (1991) 'means of correct training': managers, in partnership with coaches under their remit, choreographed and engaged in constant supervision, organized highly ritualized examinations, rewarded conformity, and punished deviance. These practices were additionally undergirded by clearly identifiable panoptic arrangements that stretched across the athletic lifespan. Ultimately,

the observed workings of disciplinary power served not the development of whole individuals, but rather the production of docile bodies. Nevertheless, the opportunity for change, that may yet serve the holistic development and overall well-being of athletes, remains.

## References

- American Hockey League. (n.d.). *FAQ*. <http://theahl.com/faq>
- Andrejevic, M. (2005). The work of watching one another: Lateral surveillance, risk and governance. *Surveillance and Society*, 2(1), 479–497.  
<https://doi.org/10.24908/ss.v2i4.3359>
- Andrijiw, A. M. (2020). Identity regulation in the North American field of men’s professional ice hockey: An examination of organizational control and preparation for athletic career retirement. *Sport Management Review*, 23(5), 898–912.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2020.04.002>
- Aston P., Filippou-Frye M., Blasey C., van Roessel, P. J., & Rodriguez, C. I. (2020). Self-reported depressive symptoms in active and retired professional hockey players. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science*, 52(2), 97–106. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/cbs0000169>
- Avner Z., Denison J., Jones L., Boocock, E., & Hall, E. T. (2021). Beat the game: a Foucauldian exploration of coaching differently in an elite rugby academy. *Sport, Education and Society*, 26(6), 676–691. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2020.1782881>
- Chambers, B. J. (2002). *Adjustment to career termination in professional hockey players* (Doctoral dissertation, Simon Fraser University).  
<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/obj/s4/f2/dsk4/etd/NQ81635.PDF>
- Clark, M. I., & Markula, P. (2017). Foucault at the *barre* and other surprises: a case study of discipline and docility in the ballet studio. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 9(4), 435–452. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2017.1309451>
- Cotsonika, N. J. (2016, October 31). *Colton Sceviour paying off for Panthers*. NHL.com.  
<https://www.nhl.com/news/colton-sceviour-paying-off-for-florida/c-283271806>
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. SAGE.
- Denison, J. (2007). Social theory for coaches: A Foucauldian reading of one athlete’s poor performance. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, 2(4), 369–383.  
<https://doi.org/10.1260/174795407783359777>
- Denison, J. (2019). What it really means to ‘think outside the box’: Why Foucault matters for coach development. *International Sport Coaching Journal*, 6(3), 354–358.  
<https://doi.org/10.1123/iscj.2018-0068>
- Denison, J., & Avner, Z. (2011). Positive coaching: Ethical practices for athlete development. *Quest*, 63(2), 209–227. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00336297.2011.10483677>
- Denison, J., Mills, J., & Konoval, T. (2017) Sports’ disciplinary legacy and the challenge of ‘coaching differently.’ *Sport, Education and Society*, 22(6), 772–783.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2015.1061986>
- Duke, R. (2017, June 1). *Reid Duke: Letter to prospects attending the NHL Combine*. VegasGoldenKnights.com. <https://www.nhl.com/goldenknights/news/reid-duke-letter-to-prospects-attending-the-nhl-combine/c-289732472>
- Foucault, M. (1991). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. Penguin Books.

- Gerdin, G., Pringle, R., & Crocket, H. (2019). Coaching and ethical self-creation: Problematizing the "efficient tennis machine." *Sports Coaching Review*, 8(1), 25–42. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21640629.2018.1429114>
- Giulianotti, R. (1999). *Football: A sociology of the global game*. Polity Press.
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2004). Competing paradigms in qualitative research: Theories and issues. In S. Nagy Hesse-Biber & P. Leavy (Eds.) *Approaches to qualitative research: A reader on theory and practice* (pp. 17–38). Oxford University Press.
- Heikkala, J. (1993). Discipline and excel: Technologies of self and body and the logic of competing. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 10(4), 397–412. <https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.10.4.397>
- Johns, D., & Johns, J. (2000). Surveillance, subjectivism and technologies of power: An analysis of the discursive practice of high performance sport. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 35(2), 219–234. <https://doi.org/10.1177/101269000035002006>
- Jones, L., & Denison, J. (2017). Challenge and relief: A Foucauldian disciplinary analysis of retirement from professional association football in the United Kingdom. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 52(8), 924–939. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690215625348>
- Jones, L., & Denison, J. (2019). Jogging not running: A narrative approach to exploring ‘exercise as leisure’ after a life in elite football. *Leisure Studies*, 38(6), 831–844. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2019.1662831>
- Jones, R. L., Glintmeyer, N., & McKenzie, A. (2005). Slim bodies, eating disorders and the coach-athlete relationship: A tale of identity creation and disruption. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 40, 377–391. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690205060231>
- Konoval, T., Denison, J., & Mills, J. (2019). The cyclical relationship between physiology and discipline: One endurance running coach’s experiences problematizing disciplinary practices. *Sports Coaching Review*, 8(2), 124–148. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21640629.2018.1487632>
- Kuklick, C. R., & Gearity, B. T. (2019). New movement practices: A Foucauldian learning community to disrupt technologies of discipline. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 36(4), 289–299. <https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.2018-0158>
- Manley, A., & Williams, S. (2022). ‘We’re not run on numbers, we’re people, we’re emotional people’: Exploring the experiences and lived consequences of emerging technologies, organizational surveillance and control among elite professionals. *Organization*, 29(4), 692–713. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508419890078>
- Markula, P., & Pringle, R. (2006). *Foucault, sport, and exercise: Power, knowledge, and transforming the self*. Routledge.
- Markula, P., & Silk, M. (2011). *Qualitative research for physical culture*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- McMahon, J., Penney, D., & Dinan-Thompson, M. (2012). ‘Body practices – exposure and effect of a sporting culture?’ Stories from three Australian swimmers. *Sport, Education and Society*, 17(2), 181–206. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2011.607949>
- Mills, J. P., & Denison, J. (2013). Coach Foucault: problematizing endurance running coaches’ practices. *Sports Coaching Review*, 2(2), 136–150. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21640629.2014.913871>

- Mills, J. P., & Denison, J. (2018). How power moves: A Foucauldian analysis of (in)effective coaching. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 53(3), 296–312. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690216654719>
- Ojala, A. (2020). Being an athlete and being a young person: Technologies of the self in managing an athletic career in youth ice hockey in Finland. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 55(3), 310–326. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690218801303>
- Rail, G., & Harvey, J. (1995). Body at work: Michel Foucault and the sociology of sport. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 12(2), 164–179. <https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.12.2.164>
- Robenhymer, J. (2017a, June 1). *Get to know Dr. Aimee Kimball*. NewJerseyDevils.com. <https://www.nhl.com/devils/news/get-to-know-dr-aimee-kimball/c-289710562>
- Robenhymer, J. (2017b, June 9). *Ten questions with strength and conditioning coach Joe Lorincz*. NewJerseyDevils.com. <https://www.nhl.com/devils/news/ten-questions-with-strength-and-conditioning-coach-joe-lorincz/c-289856820>
- Robidoux, M. A. (2001). *Men at play: A working understanding of professional hockey*. McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Smith, M. (2017, June 15). *Scouting Sebastian Aho*. CarolinaHurricanes.com. <https://www.nhl.com/hurricanes/news/scouting-sebastian-aho/c-289937252>
- Stambulova, N. B., Ryba, T. V., & Henriksen, K. (2020). Career development and transitions of athletes: The International Society of Sport Psychology Position Stand revisited. *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 19(4), 524–550. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1612197X.2020.1737836>
- Starkey, T. (2016). *Chasing the dream: Life in the American Hockey League*. ECW Press.
- Tilley, M. (2016, July 5). *McLellan pleased with orientation camp*. EdmontonOilers.com. <https://www.nhl.com/oilers/news/blog-mclellan-pleased-with-orientation-camp/c-47124>
- Yin, R. K. (1993). *Applications of case study research*. SAGE.