Ethnologies

ethnologies

Are We Having Fun Yet?
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Volume 32, Number 1, 2010

Jouer
Play

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/045216ar
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7202/045216ar

See table of contents

Publisher(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

ISSN

1481-5974 (print)
1708-0401 (digital)

Explore this journal

Cite this article

Gracey, B. (2010). Are We Having Fun Yet? Children's Adult-Organized Recreational Basketball as a Site of Discipline. *Ethnologies*, *32*(1), 133–156. https://doi.org/10.7202/045216ar

Article abstract

This paper examines children's adult-organized recreational sport through the lens of Foucauldian disciplinary technologies. Despite decades of effort and changes to children's sport, there is still difficulty in meeting the needs of many of the participants. This article argues that it is time to seriously reconsider the dominating role that adults occupy in children's sport and that we need to find ways to give more of the control of sport to the participants.

Are We Having Fun Yet?

Children's Adult-Organized Recreational Basketball as a Site of Discipline

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> "I wish to proclaim, to extol, to champion, and to celebrate the cause of frivolity, uselessness, unproductivity, inconsequentiality, nonachievement, gratuitousness, irrelevance, and irreverence. In short, I wish to offer an apology for, and an appreciation of, play" (Meier 1980: 24).

Children's recreational[1] sport is never just a game. Noel Dyck (2003) has described the venues of children's sport as "decidedly purposeful spaces within which significant matters related to child development are expected to transpire" (58). Children's sport is often burdened with larger purposes or expectations for example, teaching values and social skills (Elley and Kirk 2002; Wright and Côté 2003), building character (Brown 2003; Martens et al. 1981; Thompson 2003; Griffin 1998), keeping children out of trouble (Eccles and Barber 1999; Fraser-Thomas, Côté, and Deakin 2005), health benefits (Pate et al. 2000), or providing future elite athletes (Green 2005). Hill and Green (2008) argue that it is the role of sport organizers to make such societal ambitions possible and that the key to this is fostering participation by making sport appealing to children. These types of goals inspire two concerns: first, they may not be what children want from sport; and second, such goals will have a clear impact on the very nature of children's sport—dictating the very form it takes. Adults take children's playful activities and burden them with their own purposes while at the same time discursively packaging them as being about fun, socializing, exercise, and learning new skills. Certainly participants can have fun, make friends, and try

1. The term recreational is meant to discern it from select or elite sports. Recreational sport is open to all children in terms of participation whereas with select sport, children must try out for teams and generally need to be more skilled and more invested in sport. Recreational sport is generally presented as being about fun and all children that join are able to participate.

new activities but apparently not at the expense of learning, practicing, and developing, or as Foucault might suggest, becoming normalized. Using several aspects of Foucault's disciplinary power—docile bodies, panoptic surveillance, and correct training, I will demonstrate what can be the disciplinary nature of children's recreational sport. I draw from my own quasi-ethnographic research to provide examples that show the impact of discipline on children's sport and the resulting experiences for some children.

Background

For several decades there has been an acknowledgement that adult-organized children's sport can be problematic. In the late 1960s critics started recognizing that a significant problem with organized children's sport was that it was being run like professional sport (Donnelly 2000). Children's sport was dominated by several key beliefs: it was entertainment for adults; adults were needed to organize it; children were simply small adults; being a winner was most important (Smith 1975 as cited in Donnelly 2000). Adults were perceived as the main problem because they were preventing children from enjoying sport and were often the reason children gave for quitting (Donnelly 2000). Organizers and researchers searched for solutions, for example, *The Conference on Children in Sport and Physical Activity* held in Kingston, Ontario in 1973, urged many changes including: de-emphasize competition, focus on fun, make sport more inclusive and active for all children, and keep adults from intruding too much on the children's sport experience (Orlick and Botterill 1975). Researchers also questioned the value of sports organized by adults versus those improvised by children. In particular, there was concern that children were losing out on fun and valuable opportunities to develop their organizing and negotiating skills (Devereux 1976). Ultimately, two solutions were proposed to fix children's sport: eliminate the adults or change the adults (Donnelly 2000). Sport organizers have clearly chosen the latter, leaving children's sport with a large number of adults to change: parents, officials, organizers, spectators, and, in particular, coaches. Such a choice also indicates that many adults have decided that children do not, or should not, have the capacity organize and negotiate their own sporting experiences.

As many as 70% of children may quit sport by the age of 15 (Steelman 1995) and such a drop out rate is seen as problematic (Hedstrom and Gould 2004; Wells et al 2005; Green and Hill 2008). Thus, there has been a genuine effort on the part of many adults to improve sport and make it more appealing to children. Researchers have suggested and tried new ways to organize children's sport (e.g. Haywood 1984; Orlick 1984; Pooley 1984; Fenton et al 2000; Green 2001; Hill and Green 2008). Leagues frequently adjust the size of the playing field and equipment, shorten games, and create more flexible rules to better match children's physical capabilities. Many leagues offer trophies or medals to all players with the idea that each child is a winner just for participating.

Many training programs for coaches[2] have been developed because the coach is seen as the best point of influence based on their interaction with the children. Coaches can have a strong impact on children's experience of sport (Smith, Smoll, and Curtis 1979). Training for coaches has been shown to have a positive impact on children's experience of sport (Smith and Smoll 1997) and children that have more good experiences with their coaches are more likely to stay in sport (Lesyk and Kornspan 2000). Still, coach training has clearly not been a panacea. It is estimated that most coaches receive little or no formal training[3] (Wiersma and Sherman 2005; Seefeldt and Ewing 1997; Siegenthaler and Gonzalez 1997). Coaching at the recreational level is voluntary with many parents only coaching because no one else was willing to do so. The vast majority of volunteer coaches are there simply

2. Examples of these include, National Coaching Certification Program, American Sport Education Program, Positive Coaching Alliance, and Coach Effectiveness Training.

3. Actual percentages are difficult to find. *Estimates* from the United States range from below 10% to possibly as high as 20%. By 2005 there were 1.8 million amateur coaches in Canada (Ifedi, 2005) and according to the Coaching Association of Canada (CAC) (www.coach.ca) it trains 60,000 coaches (at all levels) every year through the National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP). However, many coaches take more than one course and are counted each time. Along with the constant turnover I describe, it is becomes very difficult to make a reliable estimate of how many current coaches might have received any training. Some sports have high numbers of trained coaches (e.g., hockey or gymnastics) because there is greater interest in coaching in those sports and therefore leagues can demand such training (CAC, January 7, 2010, personal communication). Most sports may not have the luxury of such a high level of interest in coaching and take what help they can find.

to coach their own children (Seefeldt and Ewing 1997) which means that if they only coach as long as their children play, then the high drop-out rate for children would also mean a high attrition rate for coaches, including those that are trained. As well, training does not necessarily lead to competence as a coach, nor does it ensure that the coaches will always agree with and use what they have learned.

Play, Sport, and Fun

Play can be considered a non-utilitarian and autotelic activity that can be either physical or intellectual and when such play becomes more organized we call it games, some contested others not; sport simply builds on contested games (Guttmann 1978). For Feezell (2004) the connection between sport and play is complicated and contentious; however, what is clear, he suggests, is that adult athletes often express a desire for the lost elements of play that Huizinga (1964) describes. For Huizinga play is a joyous and free activity that stands outside ordinary life, that is "at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly" (13). The connection to play is significant, for as Hargreaves (1987) points out, even in elite sport, "Play is the *raison d'être* of sport". This would seem particularly true for children's sport because though children offer various reasons for participation the first one given is usually fun[4] (Gilbert 2001; Hedstrom and Gould 2004). In fact, children, parents, and coaches all state that fun is the main reason why children should participate in sport (Lesyk and Kornspan 2000). This suggests that the emphasis on play or a playful attitude (Meier 1980) could be a helpful to children's sport today particularly with the apparent diminishment of unstructured play opportunities that exist outside of adult supervision or direction (Coakley 1993; Schultz 1999; Siegenthaler and Gonzalez 1997).

Performance versus participation

Coakley (2001) describes two main types of sport models: power/performance and pleasure/participation. The first version of sport focuses

4. I acknowledge that fun is a complicated concept as each child will have a different idea of what fun is for example, for some learning and honing their skills and working hard in practice might be fun, whereas for others, moving their bodies and laughing with their friends while playing sport might be their idea of fun. My ultimate point is that we should invite children to decide for themselves what form their fun and sport might take.

on strength, speed, and power. It emphasizes excellence through competition, and that success comes from hard work, sacrifice, and risk. Records, technology, and hierarchical authority are important; it is seen as being meritocratic; opponents are considered enemies. In contrast, the pleasure/participation model emphasizes active participation for everyone. Relationships and connections between participants are important. It is built around fun, health, and individual expression. It also reflects democratic decision-making, cooperation, and power sharing; participants compete with rather than against each other. My argument is that the power/performance model is much over-represented in many children's leagues and because of this, much of adult-organized children's sport has become a site of discipline rather than simply a site of play.

The point here is not to show that nothing good comes from most leagues as they exist today, nor is it to suggest that traditional leagues are so oppressive that children have no fun. In fact, some children like the discipline as they are able to hone their skills and become highly productive athletes. Professional and elite sport are replete with athletes that started out in these types of leagues. As well, some participants go on to use what they learn in sport or with the help of such sport, to resist the status quo and have a positive impact on their own reality and/or the world. The problem is that discipline also leaves many participants disappointed, even disillusioned with sport and its possibilities. Because recreational sport has a clear lean toward the power/performance model, many opportunities for creativity, experimentation, and positive self-discovery may be lost for many of the children in favour of "correct training". As well, many children simply cannot measure up to normal—with normal in power/performance sport being skilled athletes and winning teams. Too often children are left knowing more about what they cannot do rather than what they might be able to do.

To be clear, the problem is not that coaches teach children specific skills or a particular way to play a game, many children rather appreciate that in a coach (Smith, Smoll, and Curtis 1978). The problem is that these skills are taught as part of a larger disciplinary process where "bodies are never simply trained but are subjected to normative judgments" (Cole et al. 2004 : 212). The main purpose of disciplinary power is to create skilled and productive docile bodies. The point of this effort is to show how children's sport *can be* a disciplinary site and that

disciplinary strategies are at odds with the alleged goal of recreational sport. Instead of being about fun, creativity, being with friends, and testing one's physical capacities, sport becomes just another site of discipline.

A Children's League

Recently I studied a YMCA recreational basketball league in southern Ontario. The literature for the basketball league promised that there would be "no benchwarmers" and indicated the focus was on fun, respect, and fair play. According to the league organizer each coach received a *Coaches Manual* in CD format that was meant to help them with their coaching. But he also indicated that he had not discussed the content with the coaches and did not know if they had actually read it.[5] Ultimately, it was still very much a competitive league, with many highly-skilled players. The officials kept score and called fouls; there were league standings and at the end of the season there was a double elimination playoff tournament in which all the teams participated. I did find the tenor of the league more respectful and flexible than other leagues that I have casually observed or coached in. For example, officials sometimes explained to beginner players why they called fouls and parents tended not to openly criticize the officials as much or rudely. But generally the league seemed much like other leagues.

There were approximately 90 players in the league in this age division (10 – 13 years) and ten teams. I worked with participants from six different teams, five girls and five boys. I observed the participants during 36 games and 12 practices, watching for repeated occurrences and trends, as well as unusual and unique occurrences. As part of my observations, I kept track of who played and when and also made note of when the participants had contact with the ball and what happened as a result. From my observations I developed questions for individual interviews and focus groups; some of the questions were common to all the children, while others were crafted based on their individual experiences. I interviewed each participant briefly at the beginning of the season to establish their demographic and sport background

5. The league was part of a pilot program for *Steve Nash Youth Basketball* (SNYB). For this particular league it meant that each coach was given the *Coaches Manual* and the children wore jerseys bearing the SNYB logo. The manual emphasized making basketball child-centred and creating a fun, respectful environment; however, its main focus was teaching specific skills.

information as well as what they wanted from their basketball experience. At the end of the season I interviewed each child in-depth and followed that with two focus groups where I invited the children to expand on some of the themes raised in my observations and the individual interviews. My objective was to better understand how this league operated—what was expected of the children and how they dealt with these expectations. I wanted to observe children's experience of adult-organized basketball and then ask them what they thought of it all. To that end, I examined the various discourses that the children used to describe, explain, and at times rationalize their experiences. I also sought ways in which the children resisted in an effort to make their participation more reflective of their own desires and interests. Using discourse and deconstruction analysis I examined the data through a Foucauldian framework. What follows is my connecting the disciplinary framework to this particular league through my description of particular events and the children's comments on and assessments of what they experienced.

Win-Lose

There were several significant findings in my research, but one that stood out the most was the relationship between size, skill, and involvement in the action. It became abundantly clear early in the season that children's height and skill had a significant impact on their experience of basketball as they greatly affected the children's involvement in the action. Taller or more skilled players tended to receive more playing time, particularly at crucial times like the final period in close games, and more importantly, they were simply much more likely to handle the ball. Tallness could often compensate for less skill as they could reach beyond the other children, meaning they were more likely to get passes and chances at shooting—coaches would actively position them under the basket to await passes. I found that less skilled/smaller players would sometimes play entire games without even touching the ball. The children noticed and they indicated that it bothered them. "*There were one or two games I didn't get* [the ball] *at all*" MJ sighed. Bob, who almost never received passes stated, "*I wish my team members coulda passed me the ball a bit more*". Betty also rarely received passes and though it did not bother her that her teammates were more skilled than her, she did say with annoyance, "*I didn't get to be a part of it* [the action]. *It kinda bugged me*". In fact, some of the

participants preferred practices because there they were able to actually handle the ball. "*At the practices I got more of a chance to have the ball. Because there was like no one there*" stated Chris.

Discipline

Disciplinary power has altered the nature of society in the past few centuries. For Foucault (1995) disciplinary techniques were meant to solve a technical problem but has lead to a new type of society (216) and sport has become one of many sites of discipline. As Cole (1993) explains, "Following from Foucault's notion of technologies of bodily production, sport can be understood as an institution whose central feature is one of bodily discipline and surveillance" (86). Disciplinary power manages bodies and controls and contains individual's actions. Several authors have delineated how Foucault's theory of discipline may be relevant to an analysis of sport and physical activity (Andrews 1993; Cole 1993; Heikkala 1993; Rail and Harvey 1995; Cole et al 2004). Other authors have taken up Foucault's disciplinary concepts to analyze particular sports and physical activities (e.g., Shogan 1999; Markula and Pringle 2006; Chapman 1997; Foster 2003; King 1993; Markula 1995). With its regimented training and aim of producing fit bodies, highly skilled athletes, and winning teams, the relevance of the technologies of discipline to elite sport is readily evident. As Shogan (1999) has remarked, Foucault's descriptions of disciplinary techniques used in the 18th and 19th centuries, in his book *Discipline and Punish*, "reads like a 'how to' manual for coaches two hundred years later" (9). Discipline and its various techniques have also found a home in physical activity in children's environments, particularly physical education classes (Hargreaves 1986; Wright 2000). In this context the teacher is established as expert and the physical setting allows for constant surveillance and correction in the pursuit of disciplined bodies (Wright 2000). While initially it might seem a stretch to bring Foucault's concepts of discipline to recreational sport but I believe that they are quite applicable. Certainly, they do not dictate every aspect of children's sport and do not control their experience to the same extent as in elite sport but they do have an impact.

Creating Docile Bodies

Discipline creates docile bodies through two main techniques: panopticism and correct training. "A body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved" (Foucault 1995: 136); it is disciplined as well as obedient. Markula and Pringle (2006) explain how docility works in the sport context as "a well-disciplined body conforms to instructions and rules, works in unison with other trained bodies, performs with minimal error, displays appropriate skills, tolerates discomfort, follows prescribed tactics and exhorts maximum efficiency in the performance of its duties" (100). The point of discipline is both to individualize and homogenize. Normal and abnormal are established, measured, and then used to hierarchize the various individuals. Obedience is a very important aspect of discipline because while normalization does produce sameness, it also produces resistive power; as individuals become more skilled, they also become more capable of resistance. "Homogenising them against the background of the norm attempts to neutralize this danger, while at the same time it establishes a space from which any deviation from the norm can be quickly identified and corrected" (Barker 1998: 58). So while the young athlete becomes normalized, doing as the coach says and as her or his teammates expect, she or he may also become highly skilled and strong and therefore, very capable and productive. They are also not without agency or the capacity to resist those that attempt control their actions.

Allen was one of the more skilled players on his team; however, the coach's son was the offensive star of the team. While Allen occasionally scored baskets, his coach wanted him to focus more on defence. For example, when Allen would try to steal the ball from an opponent in order to make an offensive play, his coach would shout to him to "just play good defence". Allen generally listened to his coach and played good defence. However, in his final playoff game he chose otherwise. With ten minutes remaining his team was down by 14 points and their top scorer had given up so Allen took over. He stole the ball numerous times, made athletic jumps and dives so his team could maintain possession of the ball, and scored some beautiful baskets to pull his team closer; though it was not quite enough. In performing the way did, he broke his coach's rules, he took chances and was successful in spite of his coach's demands. He played the game on his terms, using the skills that he had developed through many hours of practicing and playing with friends, away from the adult coaching and control.

Unfortunately, not all examples of resistance lead to positive ends. Teresa did not like her coach because he favoured the more skilled players; they had more playing time, were given the important roles, and usually tended to pass the ball to each other. Teresa infrequently touched the ball during games. Her coach only taught her how to play just one position and never asked her to play a bigger role in the action. No longer willing to listen to her coach, Teresa quit the league just before the playoffs commenced.

Surveillance Through Panopticism

For Foucault (1995) panoptic surveillance is a powerful tool used to assist the creation of discipline and docile bodies. The concept derives from a prison design that makes prisoners highly visible allowing them to be watched at anytime by an unseen observer. This possibility of being watched elicits self-surveillance by the prisoner. For Foucault (1995) the panopticon is a *social diagram*, meaning that it and the resulting discipline are generalizable and can be applied to a wide variety of contexts. It is the underlying principles that are the constants—the internalization of the gaze and the normalizing judgment are what matter (Foucault 1980a). The goal of the panopticism is permanent visibility of the subjects and this is created through architecture and geometry (Barker 1998).

Basketball courts have a very specific geometry that creates a highly visible stage, rather like the backlit prison cells that Foucault (1995) describes as "discipline observatories". Games are surrounded by spectators just outside the perimeter of the court. Panopticism is not just about being watched but also the judgment that accompanies it. In this context, adults have an implicit invitation to watch children playing and pass judgment on any of their performances. Penalty and discipline are normalized through their constancy (Foucault 1995) and the children are reminded of the adult eyes through the near-constant commentary and applause from the sidelines. From the stands I heard: *Get your arms up! Get in there for the rebound! Who are you covering? She's gonna pass it. Look for the pass. There's the pass! Out of the key! Where's your man? Who are you covering? Pass the ball! Get back on defence! Plant yourself! Get the ball! You're reaching around.* The children could do little to stop the commentary, though on occasion, when parents went too far, the children told them to "shut up", either with words or glares. There were no

private spaces for the children on the court away from the adult gaze and judgment; "Visibility is a trap" (Foucault 1995: 200).

Coaches also watched the players during games to make sure the players were doing as they were taught and if not they were corrected. Some[6] coaches shouted continuously during games, correcting children even in the middle of shots or passes, sometimes causing players to make mistakes and lose possession of the ball. As Rinehart (1998) suggests, "discipline devours spontaneity" (43).

> *Sometimes I'll be trying to do something and then he'll tell me to do something else and I'll have this little thing mapped out in my mind, "If he goes here then I can go here and I can get a basket" and he [the coach] tells me to go stand somewhere else and then that goes all kaplooey.* (Teresa)

The way the children performed the activity was as important as the outcome, so if the ball is caught incorrectly or moved in a less optimal way, the coach often said so. By watching the players, the coaches could decide how to make them more productive, even if this sometimes meant working to keep the ball out of their hands as much as possible—those players tended to be asked to focus more on their defensive play.

Correct Training

Not everyone who plays sport is capable of performing the required skills well and the differences in capabilities are even more glaring in age groups like this where there is much disparity in pubescent maturation. Some of the children were simply physically and mentally more mature than others and were therefore more capable of manipulating a basketball than others. As well, some children were neophytes to basketball while others had been playing for several years. This is why the attitude of recreational sport can be so important—it can be challenging to make everyone feel welcome and allow all to be full participants. Teaching children skills that enable participation can be a good thing; however, *correct training* can be problematic.

With disciplinary training the process is as important as the outcome. That is, one must achieve *specific* results through *specific* procedures. For example, many repetitions of specific tasks, moving in specific ways,

6. Not all coaches took a disciplinary approach though most did, at least to some extent.

working in specific ways with objects, and using particular gestures, all with the goal of maximizing efficiency and docility. There are three main elements to correct training: hierarchical observation, normalizing judgement and the examination (Foucault 1995: 170). These techniques are used to shape and improve the subject. They compare, differentiate, hierarchize, homogenize, exclude and ultimately, they normalize (Foucault 1995: 183). Through correct training, normal and abnormal are established, measured, and separated. The players that learned to play correctly were normal, the rest were not—and they were made to understand it in various ways, for example, they were given less playing time and less opportunity to handle the ball. These young players learned to play as a team, often sacrificing their own desires and interests to be able to work as part of a unit. "Through this technique of subjection a new object was being formed" (Foucault 1995: 155); the basketball player was created. And just as importantly, winning teams were made—at least that was the goal. But what do the children lose in the process?

Hierarchical Observation is based on the possibility of controlling people simply by observing them. Through their surveillance, coaches ranked the players and meted out positions and privileges based on these rankings. Players tended to always play the same positions, with the most skilled players in the most valued positions. Occasionally others were allowed to try the more pivotal positions but if they did not do it well, it was usually their only chance to try it—unless, of course, there was no other choice due to a shortage of players.

Practices are a productive place for coaches to test and rank the players, especially early in the season. Here the coaches could develop a sense of each players' strength and weaknesses. These sessions not only determine what they will have to work on in practice, but what can be expected of them during games. As players practiced, going through the drills prescribed by the coach, he[7] often walked among the players and watched. The players were keenly aware of it because he constantly reminded them through comments and correction. "*Hold the ball this way; bend your knees when you shoot; keep your arms up*". The coaches are expert, regardless of their background, and therefore establish how a sport should be done. They also expect players to follow this way of doing.

7. Only one coach in the league was female and she did not coach any of the participants, therefore I never observed her.

The corrections may have sometimes hindered the players' imagination and even their ability to play, but the children were learning how to play basketball correctly. One of the most common complaints from the participants was that coaches had a tendency to limit what the players could try during games. For example, because they were taller they had to focus on defence or some coaches insisted they only play one position, meaning they did not have the chance to learn how to play the full game and had less opportunity for experimentation. Reba was one of the taller players in the league and was unhappy that her coach pushed her to focus almost solely on defence. "*At practice he always says, 'Let's do a defensive play with Reba' and he always has a play that's just me and he doesn't really work on anything else and he's always criticizing me*."

With *Normalizing Judgment* subjects must not only do what they are told, but as they are told. Non-conformity is punishable though such punishment tends to be corrective as the objective is to bring subjects up to normal (Foucault 1995). Normalization is a great instrument of power, but as Markula and Pringle (2006) suggest, it does not produce "clones or dupes" (42), instead it creates homogeneity while at the same time making distinctions or creating gaps between individuals. Judgment can come from various sources, not just the coach.

Chris was infrequently involved in the play, apparently because his teammates did not think he was good enough. However, he was occasionally allowed to do throw-ins. On one occasion he forgot about doing it and his teammate yelled at him, turning a moment of opportunity for involvement to one where he wondered if he even belonged on the team, "*It felt discouraging, like they didn't want me on the team*". Another boy on a different team also rarely became involved in the play because he was quite short. His coach gave him one opportunity to make a throw-in during a game. After the boy threw it to an opposing player, he was never given such an opportunity again during the season.

Even small mistakes can result in punishment. Speaking of a school Foucault (1995) described how "a whole series of subtle procedures was used, from light physical punishment to minor deprivations and petty humiliations" (178). Observing even more light-hearted practices in children's sport can provide examples of this. For instance, having to do unpleasant drills during for finishing last in a little competition or for not listening; during a game a more skilled shooter is given a free-

throw that a less skilled shooter has earned[8]; being taken out of the game; receiving less playing time than others—all because the individual does not perform as well as someone more skilled (normal). Comments like, "*Why did you throw the ball there? What were you thinking? Pick up your feet. Get in the game!*" and other less subtle insults.

The Examination is basically a combination of hierarchical observation and normalizing judgment (Foucault 1995); "Discipline rewards simply by the play of awards, thus making it possible to attain higher ranks and places" (181). Visibility is essential to discipline; the subjects' visibility and the ensuing judgment maintain the power exercised over them. Records are kept of the subjects, helping establish individuality and individual differences. Those that have the greatest success—winning the championship receive even more reward.

After the championship game, shiny awards were ubiquitous. Perhaps everyone receives one, everyone will be happy and winning and losing become less relevant. Perhaps they were meant to indicate that the children were winners just for participating, but certainly the trophies were important and there were clear differences among the various trophies. The first place trophy was largest and after second place, players received small participation medals. The awards were given out in reverse order so that the children were reminded exactly where their team finished[9] in the competition and the winning team was honoured last and loudest. Despite the apparent attempt to de-emphasize winning, the importance of the winning hierarchy could not be clearer.

Games are the ultimate test for a player. Players play specific positions. With the more valued positions, they likely only continue there if they do the job well and correctly. If they fail, they may be clearly and noticeably put side (Foucault 1995). For example, they may never have the chance to try the position or action again. Not only will that particular player be aware of this, but so will teammates. "Discipline rewards simply by the play of awards, thus making it possible to attain higher ranks and places; it punishes by reversing this process" (Foucault 1995: 181). It should be noted that Foucault argues that the emphasis is on rewarding the correct behaviour, and punishing the wrong

8. This can occur when the offending team has surpassed its allowable number of team fouls, in this circumstance the foul shot can be taken by any team member on the floor.
9. I never had to tell any of the children where they finished in the standings, they all knew.

behaviour is only used when rewarding the correct behaviour does not work. As well, punishment must be corrective in order to provide more training. If the children did a drill too slowly or incorrectly they were told to do it again until it is done correctly, or until the children simply refuse to do it again. Discipline is ultimately about motivating subjects to do what is best, as defined by those in charge because self-surveillance is a much more efficient mode of discipline.

It was important for the coaches to know all the players level of skill and abilities when it comes time to make the players work as a team, in order to create what Foucault (1995) calls the *composition of forces*. This is a way of combining the individual forces to create a larger, efficient machine that maximizes productivity. The coach combined the abilities of the individual players to make as efficient and effective team as possible to increase the likelihood of winning games. The coach manipulated and manoeuvred players into positions were they can do the most good or least damage. Thus the best dribbler became the point guard and near the end of the game, if the score is close, the better players were put in the game. Finally, all the players knew they were supposed to be in the right position and when they heard the oft-repeated command, such as "*rebound*" or "*get back*" they knew what they are expected to do and the response eventually becomes a reflex action they rarely question.

Why Discipline in Children's Sport Matters

Disciplinary power can be productive. It creates skilled players and winning teams, but at what cost? Most children walk away from organized sport around the time of puberty (Seefeldt and Ewing 1997). I do not believe that these or any other coaches and organizers set out to impinge on the fun of children's sport or cause children frustration or disappointment on the playing field; however, it certainly happens. My study was small and certainly does not warrant generalizations about all adult-organized children's sport. Based on my various experiences as a coach and an observer of a variety of children's sports, this league was not particularly atypical. As well, my finding that winning takes priority over fairness of participation for all children in recreational sport does find support in several previous studies (McCallister, Blinde, and Weiss 2000; Hill and Green 2008; Coakley 1983). McCallister and colleagues (2000) found that even when coaches think that fairness is important,

winning still tends to takes priority. They found that in close games where winning was a possibility, coaches were willing to give the more skilled children greater playing time, especially near the end of the game. In their analysis of an alternative children's soccer league, Hill and Green (2008) had similar findings. Even though winning was not supposed to matter, the less skilled players regularly started games on the bench and overall had less playing time. And very importantly, coaches justified their unfairness with their desire to create winning teams.

Children are quite capable or organizing their own sport and in ways that satisfy their interests and desires. In fact, Coakley (1983) found significant differences between child-organized (informal) and adult-organized (formal) children's sport. In the former, children have control of what happens; it is competitive and has flexible rules that maximize action and involvement for everyone; skill and size matter less. Such sport depends heavily on friendship, interpersonal relations, decision-making, and organizational skills. In sharp contrast, in adult-organized sport, action and involvement are largely under adult control. As well, player positions become very important and playing time is often related to skill, so smaller, timid, and less skilled players were more likely to sit on sidelines. The rules were about standardizing the competition, controlling behaviour, and maintaining the organization. Rule enforcement was based on universal criteria and never considered the child's skill level or other factors. For most children, *lack of opportunity to play was their main source of disappointment with this type of sport*. Twenty-five years the problem remains.

Without the assistance of adults children are fully capable of making organizational and strategic decisions; therefore why must adults do all of the organizing while children are limited to simply playing? Why are children not perceived as capable of deciding and organizing their own sport experiences? Theirs is a subjugated knowledge. "A whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naïve knowledges located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity" (Foucault 1980b: 82). It is not just adult knowledge that was more valued, but also that of sport science and as Tinning (1997) points out, the knowledges of sport sciences are key components of the discourse of power/performance sport. This league reflected basketball that was valued by adults. "What athletes do may be more important than what

coaches do but what coaches and sport scientists say is much more important than what athletes say" (Shogan 1999: 41). This is especially true in children's sport. Pitchford and collaborators (2004) found that children's influence on policies and practice is minimal, despite claims of greater sensitivity to their needs. "The voice of the child in the amateur sport is repeatedly marginalized or overlooked" (44). Does a children's league that has "player representatives" that help decide what their sport opportunity will look; how it will operate; how it will be governed?

Win-win

With adult-organized sport, children tend to take on the norms of adult world and some authors question if this is the best thing, suggesting that children might learn better through spontaneous play, away from adult influence (Coakley 1993; Devereux 1976; Siegenthaler and Gonzalez 1997). However, it must also be recognized that child-organized sport is also susceptible to reflecting some of the worst aspects the adult-organized version. In many ways it can discriminate and exclude—also privileging certain bodies over others, certain skills and attitudes over others, and still being very much about winning and losing, but without adults there to notice and perhaps temper the worst moments. For example, Coakley (2001) points out that girls may not be welcome in games with boys and bigger children may bully smaller ones; thus he suggests that a better solution may rest in a hybrid of child and adult-organized sport, where children have much more control and adults are there as subtle guides.

Hill and Green (2008) offer an intriguing solution to problem of genuine participation by many of the children by suggesting that sport organizers should "give the bench the boot". They encourage this because their research showed that when soccer teams had just enough or too few players at games all the children were able to play and be more fully engaged in the action. They found that though the coaches were not necessarily happy with losing outcomes, the children were very happy because not only did they have more playing time, they often played more positions and were more directly involved in the play. However, their proposal is potentially problematic, for example, in some sports this might work but not in all because the bench is meant, in part, to provide a cushion in case of players' absence. A team

missing one or two players in soccer is less significant than a basketball team missing one or two players. What happens if many players are absent, do the teams still play? Does the game count in the season standings? Such problems could be overcome if organizers went beyond eliminating just the bench. They could also eliminate teams, coaches (at least in their current role), officials, rigid rules, and perhaps even the spectators. For example, each week the children could evenly divide themselves up into teams and no children need sit on the bench unless they want to rest. Final scores and standings become irrelevant because every week children could be on different teams. Officials could be unnecessary and spectators might only be allowed if they agree not to intrude on the game. Ultimately, it could be left to the children to decide how they would play and coaches could simply offer instruction or advice when asked to do so. Or as Hanold (2007) has argued, the role of a coach might be more profound. Drawing from Foucault's concepts of ethics and technologies of the self, she suggests that coaches can develop a critical awareness and understanding of children's involvement in sport, particularly in terms of the normalizing aspect of organized sport. Though she is referring to the more traditional version of children's organized sport, this attitude could also be helpful and relevant in a more child-centred version. That is, coaches can use their critical awareness to help children reframe complex or difficult sport experiences so that the emphasis is on the joy of play, movement, and discovery rather than perceived failure or inability to do what other children can do.

Unfortunately, it could be difficult to create such a league. Alternatives to traditional sport can inspire much resistance (Green 2001) and many parents are no longer willing to let their children play under their own direction. Coakley (2007) attributes this, in part, to people's desire to be *good parents*, always being there and being responsible for everything the child does. This mentality contributes to parents' willingness to subject their children to a disciplinary version of sport because in such a league, children will become more productive and will learn more and learn *better*.

I should emphasize that my point is not that we must eliminate traditional sport leagues. I do think they are flawed, but many children enjoy participating in them and it should be their choice to make. My point is that if we want to keep children interested in playing sport, we need to create a genuine options for those that tend to spend too much

time watching as others play. Playing basketball or any other sport should involve some actual play.

Play is a voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy and the consciousness that it is 'different' from 'ordinary' life (Huizinga 1964: 28).

The problem with children's sport is that it often looks very much like *ordinary life*—hardly a frivolous, useless, unproductive, inconsequential, non-achieving, gratuitous, irrelevant, and irreverent activity. Interestingly, I did observe such moments—during practices when the coaches finally allowed the children to scrimmage. In these moments the coach did not bother the children with corrections and comments on their play and instead simply joined the children in their fun. If we went into sport with a playful attitude and no ulterior motives other than fun, the pleasure/participation model could become a genuine possibility and such a model would likely have no patience for correct training and panopticism. It is time for adults to step back from children's sport and give children more room to decide what they want to do and how they want to do it. If we argue that racism, sexism, ableism, or various other types of discrimination or repression are not acceptable in sport, why is it acceptable for children's sport to be organized and operated almost exclusively by adults?

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