Urban physical activity has received considerable attention within the Sociology of Sport and Physical Cultural Studies. This scholarship has been extremely useful in staking out, and advancing understanding of the unique challenges that exist around the idea of the active city. Yet we believe an alternative framework through which to conceptualize urban physical activity practices, cultures, and communities is now needed. Pushing beyond the potentially bifurcating and immaterially focused nature of current scholarship, we are reconsidering the city as a complex assemblage of material actants and a multiplicity of relationships in constant movement. By flattening the city, refusing to assign a priori positions of power and hierarchies of agency, this approach allows for a greater recognition of informal relationships and the often-overlooked gritty minutiae of urban life. Certainly it is an approach that challenges scholars to engage with a new ontological framework and epistemological stance, that demands abandoning many previously entrenched conceptions. However, what is gained is a mode of analysis that can better address a contemporary context in which “cities are distributed, sociomaterial and often incoherent” (McFarlane, 2011, p. 732), and facilitate a new fundamentally grounded politics of the active city.

As Foucault (1980) argued, to do serious work that has “political meaning, utility and effectiveness…one [must] have some kind of involvement with the struggles taking place in the area in question” (p. 64). Otherwise, one cannot understand the “combats, the lines of force, tensions and points of collision which exist there” (p. 64). Accordingly, drawing on my 40 years in middle-distance running as a competitor, coach, researcher, and coach educator, I will discuss in this paper, based on my ongoing fieldwork with a male middle-distance running coach, how various relations of power traverse the following staple middle-distance running workout: 10 x 400m. Specifically, I will explore this workout’s history and problematize what it does based on Foucault’s (1995) analysis of disciplinary power—its effects on middle-distance running coaches' knowledge and practice and middle-distance runners’ bodies. The promise of this analysis lies in enhancing coaches’ effectiveness by considering “a layer of material which had hitherto had no pertinence for history and which had not been recognized as having a moral, aesthetic, political, or historical value” (p. 51): the details of what middle-distance running coaches actually do with the bodies in front of them—the technologies of coaching—and what this means.

A basic tenant of new materialism is that social structures and everyday practices won’t change simply by changing the way people think or the way they see the world. New materialist scholars of race, like Sharon Sullivan (2006), Charles Mills (2014), and Maria Alcoff (2014), recognize that race is not simply epidermal. We don’t just “wear” or “read” race. Race and racial systems inhabit us physically (Sullivan, 2006). White privilege is recalcitrantly embodied (Sullivan, 2006) and is not challenged solely by making whiteness visible (Alcoff, 2014). Changes in perception requires shifts in how the body is lived in the world (Sullivan 2006).
In this paper I rely on Mills’ insight (2014) that person-hood (the denial of full person-hood) is the material basis of racism; the very foundation of historical socio-political system of colonial capitalism, to explore the both the recalcitrance of racism (i.e. re-segregation of American youth sport and spectators) in sport and sporting bodies, the necessity movement in anti-racism efforts and the critical potentiality of sport in racial justice movements.

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“Exploring the Political Economy of Concussions”

Concussions due to sporting competitions have drawn great interest in recent academic discussions (Howe, 2004). The injuries of athletes however must be understood as complexly entrenched in the market system of sport. On one hand, the dominant perception of masculinity often coerces athletes into risking their bodies to harm (Howe, 2001). On the other hand, the intensive commercialization of sporting contests into big business often means that making “invisible” concussions “visible” can potentially reduce team revenues as well as hamper salaries and marketability for individual players (Howe, 2004). Against this backdrop, our study seeks to introduce an economic theory - the two-team model (Fort & Quirk, 1995; Quirk & El-Hodiri, 1974) - to examine the political economy of concussions. The purpose is to explore how teams choose to make decisions based on the value they derive from talent, thus subjecting physical bodies to harm to create financial gains for others.