

PASSING BUT FAILING

Many people in Zimbabwe like to support an English Premier League soccer team (even a World Cup team) but how do we choose who we should support? Is it the team with the Best Passing Rate? Statistics show that in the 2016-2017 season the team that passed the most throughout the season was Manchester City, followed by Liverpool, Arsenal, Manchester United, Tottenham Hotspur and Chelsea. However, none of those teams won the League that season. Chelsea, who did win the league title, passed the ball only the sixth most. The previous season, Leicester won title but they came eighteenth in the table of teams who passed the ball most. We might wonder why we should pass, in that case! Passing does not really mean a lot when it comes to final positions.

Of course, such statistics do not really mean much at all; they are actually meaningless. After all, the passes might nearly all go backwards or sideways – what good is that? They might all be very short passes, not really going anywhere, or they might all be in our own half, causing no threat to the opposition. Furthermore, we might wonder if ten short passes are better than one long pass? Do ten passes in our own half mean anything? Do difficult passes (crosses) count more than easy ones (on the ground)? If we are so concerned about making lots of passes, we will not try long ones. So, actually, less passes may be better!

Teams are meant to pass, though, no question; passing is better than dribbling, which after all is just selfish and slower. However, there are also lots of other important components in a game of soccer. Players need to tackle, intercept, run off the ball, shoot, control, clear and support. The winning team, then, is the one that makes the most of whatever opportunities they have, who achieves their goal. Passes will not make a team win on their own, important though they may appear to be.

What then has this to do with education? It is interesting that at school, when her work is handed back after being marked, all a child wants to know is if she passed. In a similar way, parents often ask a school Head, when enquiring about the school, what the school Pass Rate is. When we ask them why they want to know, curiously they do not seem to have an answer! That is because there is no real point in a Pass rate, as it shows nothing about the parent's child.

One child gained thirteen O levels (even though none of them were above a 3 symbol) – that is like putting together loads of short passes, all in a team's own half. He is not necessarily achieving much by gaining so many. The same pupil gained three A levels but only with the grades B, C, D – that is perhaps like passes in the area around the halfway line, being no real danger to anyone. What came from those passes? One thing is for sure: such people's futures are not determined by their O or A level passes for those were the grades this writer achieved. The passes do not really count for much.

As with soccer, so in education there are many other crucial components making up the 'game'; passes are only a small part of the game and of education. Lots of other components are important for winning beyond passing at a school. As with soccer, so in education, pupils need to learn to tackle (to deal with problems themselves), to intercept (that is, avoid situations arising), to run off the ball (serve in the community), to shoot (try, try, try again with perseverance), to control (not the ball but emotions), to clear (the mind of dangerous thoughts) and to support (by encouraging others).

We need to understand that actually the Pass Rate means very little in sport and education. Passes are only there to get pupils into a position to achieve their goal. Education is also about cultural, sporting, social, spiritual lessons; it is much more about all the five Cs of 21st Century learning (Critical Thinking, Creativity, Communication, Collaboration, Character). Five Cs will actually be a brilliant result (even if parents are desperate for straight As)! Schools need to aim to deliver a broad, balanced education that will bring the desired results in the end. As the writer, Louis L'Amour, said, "Too often I would hear men boast of the miles covered that day, rarely of what they had seen." So, all too often we hear schools boast of the passes gained that year, rarely of how pupils have grown.

Maybe we need to change the team we support! Maybe we need to change the way we think of education. That way we will all win!