



'Feet-Drain' or 'Feet-Exchange'?: The Effects of Foreign Players in the Premier Academy League

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The Study

- Intention is to examine the effects of foreign players in the Premier Academy League
- Still in pilot stage at present
- Currently data is based on interviews conducted with the Premier League, and the management/coaching staff of a highly successful Premier Academy League club

'Feet-Drain'

- Derived from the term 'brain-drain':

- The process whereby highly skilled workers migrate from developing countries to more developed nations (Iredale & Appleyard, 2001), often to take advantage of positive wage disparities (Stalker, 2000)

- Was a developing concept in the 1960's. However, has become potentially less significant when considering how the global migrations of highly skilled workers have changed over time

'Feet-Exchange'

■ Derived from the term 'brain-exchange' (or 'brain-circulation'):

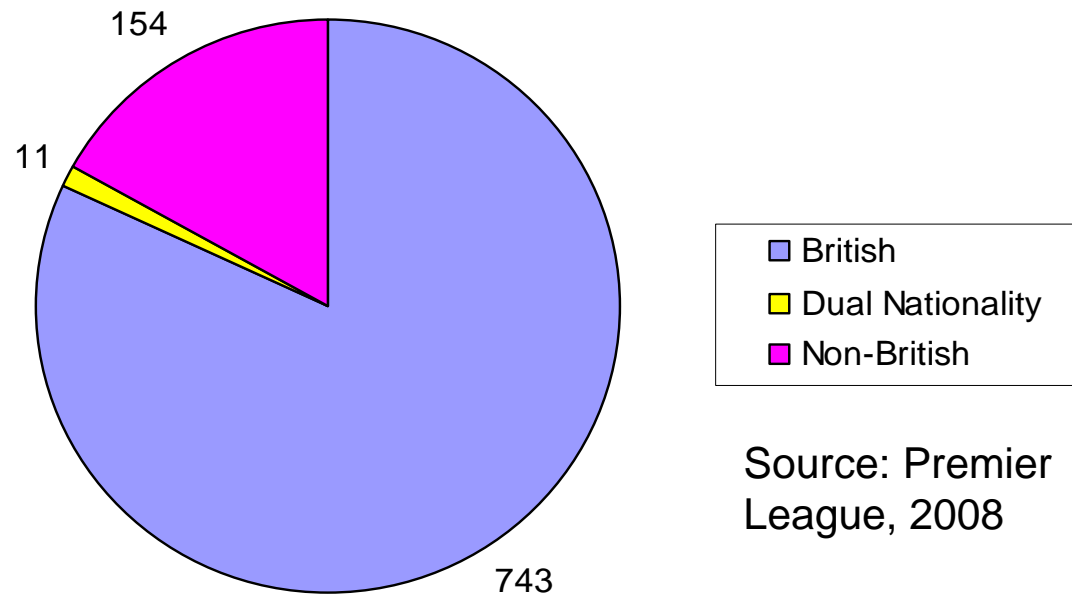
■ The process whereby highly skilled workers migrate from nation to nation to develop a global awareness of their industry by exchanging skills/knowledge with the indigenous work-force (Khadria, 2001; Beaverstock, 2004)

■ These migrations are based on a shift from traditional 'settler' migration to more transient forms of temporary migration which results in an increasingly flexible global labour market (Castells, 2000)

The Premier Academy League

- Currently made up of 41 academies which are affiliated to clubs representing the Premier League and Football League
- The academies represent the highest ranking youth development scheme for male footballers in England
- The most senior competition in the academy league exists at the under-18 age group
- From this age group players can (and do) graduate to 1st team football with Premier League and Football League clubs

Foreign Players in the Premier Academy League

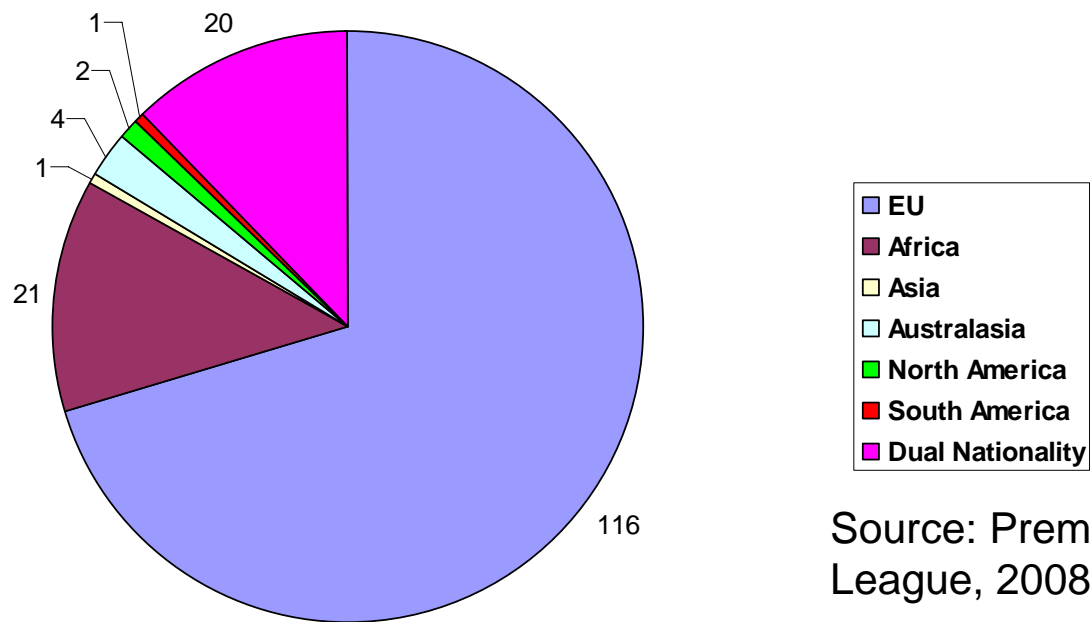


Source: Premier League, 2008

*Fig. 1. Nationality breakdown of players at U-18 Level**

* Nationality data not returned or illegible for 359 players

Foreign Players in the Premier Academy League



Source: Premier League, 2008

Fig. 2. Nationality breakdown of foreign players at U-18 level

'Feet-Exchange' in the Premier Academy League

- Arguably, processes of 'feet-exchange' can be identified when examining the effects of foreign players at a Premier Academy League club at U-18 level
- These processes are manifested in two primary ways:
 - A raising of the overall standards of performance at the academy through a contested work ethic
 - An exchange of skills/knowledge between foreign and indigenous players at the academy

Foreign Players: 'Ethic and Skill'

- When interviewed, all of the respondents argued that the involvement of foreign players raised the overall standard of competition at the club
- Through the involvement of foreign players, who bring a different work ethic, indigenous players are forced to compete at a higher level
- Indigenous players are also exposed to players who are often technically superior. On this basis, indigenous players develop the technical sides of their game whilst working with foreign players
- Thus, a potential transfer of skills/knowledge may be occurring from the foreign players to the indigenous players

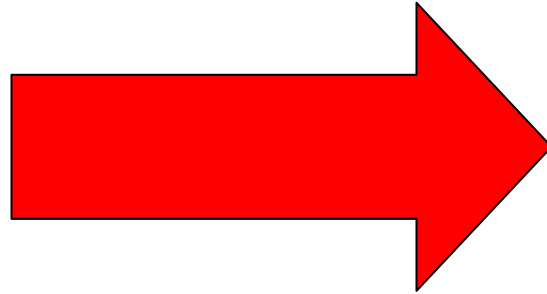
Indigenous Players: 'Pace and Power'

■ Respondents also argued that whilst working with indigenous players, foreign players learnt how to cope with the defining elements of the English game; its pace and physical nature

■ Therefore, whilst the foreign players may be technically superior, their technical skills have to develop to cope with the pace and power of the English game. Coaches argued that this development occurred whilst working with the indigenous players

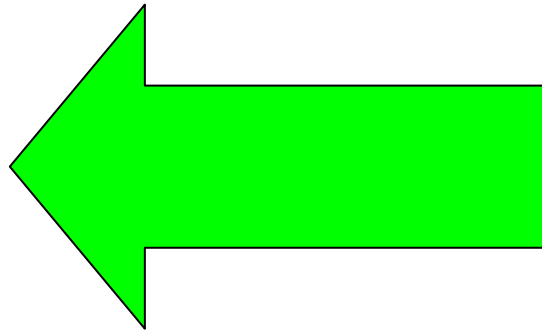
■ Thus, as the transfer of knowledge occurs from the foreign players to the indigenous players, it also flows from the indigenous players to the foreign players

Work ethic / Technical ability



Foreign
Players

Indigenous
Players



Pace and Power

'Feet-Exchange': Some Observations

- It has not been possible, yet, to establish whether the foreign players in the Premier Academy League represent a transient workforce
- However, discussions with the Premier League and the academy club suggest that very few foreign players graduate from the Premier Academy League to the 1st team. If this is the case, further research will be required to establish exactly where these players do go
- Premier League data does show, however, that the average age of an indigenous player making their debut in a 1st team is approximately 18.5 years, compared to foreign players who do not make 1st team debuts until approximately 25 years

'Feet-Exchange': Some Observations

- Based on the findings of the pilot study, early indications suggest that processes of 'feet-exchange' may be in evidence
- The exchange of skills/knowledge can be identified as flowing from the foreign players to the indigenous players and vice versa
- The exchange of knowledge in this manner would seem to act similarly to the exchange of knowledge in other highly skilled employment spheres
- Further research now needs to establish if the findings from the preliminary study are reflected across the Premier Academy League

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