



Dreams on Football Pitch

---Dilemma and hope of China's basic football education

Inspired by Recent Russia World Cup

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The 2018 Russia World Cup dropped its curtain in the cheers of the soccer fans from all over the world a few days ago. After an interval of 4 years, this greatest tournament again became the biggest hit this summer. During the matches, many teams brought surprises to all soccer fans and came to prominence over one night. For instance, a country with quite a small popularity, Iceland gave every soccer fans a dramatic surprise. In contrast, as a “superpower” in popularity today, China again let her soccer fans down. “The Russian World Cup has everything from China,” says the news presenter of CCTV, Bai Yansong, “except her football team.” Similar comments are spread over the country every four years. As the National Football Team of China has become a kind of irony, people keep asking what’s wrong with Chinese football. Some believe that it’s due to the physical condition of Chinese people. However, in Hainan, a teenage women football team use their own example to refute this pretext.

Hainan and Latin America: Campus football culture

The team mentioned is called Qiongzong Women’s Football Team. Since the team’s first appearance in the international competitions in 2015, it has won three gold trophies in the World Youth Cup. “We had only read about football until our coach lead us to the football field.” said Chen Qiaochun, a member of the team. Although started from zero, these girls finally became skillful at football after three years’ tough and tiring training. Their coach, Xiaoshan, said: “Their physical qualities are extremely good, , the only thing they need is training and guidance.”

Now turn our sight to the other hemisphere, Latin America. Coming from the most prestigious football kingdom in the world, Latin Americans have extended their football mania to their children as well as their education. “Children should start playing football before they could walk.” This belief is held by almost every parent and governor. The most notable thing is that, football fields are free to the public nearly everywhere on this continent. In Brazil, football clubs, no matter how famous they are, never shut their doors to the kids kicking an empty Coco-Cola can on the streets, and every village has “a church and a football field” in Costa Rica, whose football federation has recently

suggested that China should do the same thing to improve her National Football Team: “What China lacks is not the ability to play football, but the opportunity to do so,” they said. The same thing happens in Chile, where approximate 5 thousand football clubs and schools, with their funds from their benefactors and lands from the government, are established for children from the age 3 to 15. Holding competitions over 40 times per year on average, the children are trained just like professional athletes. Moreover, campus football culture is extremely popular in those countries. Although most schools in Latin America do not specialize on football, they ensure the basic education for their students, and their teachers are usually former players and willing to offer students standardized education. The key to Qiongzong’s and Latin’s triumphs is no more a secret: if you want to stimulate the development of football, education and ambience are the two inevitable factors. However, according to our observation, that’s what Chinese teenagers are deprived of.



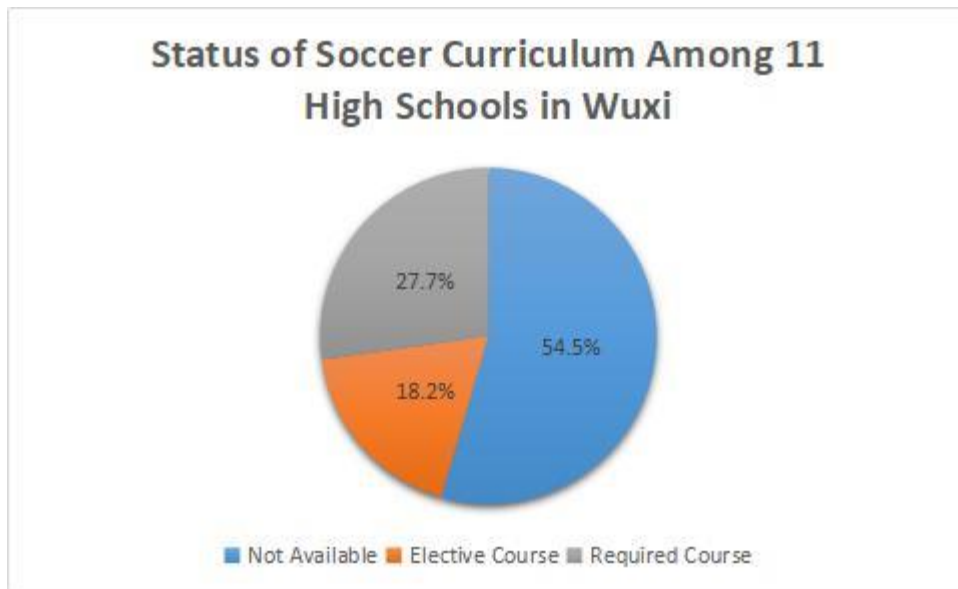
Football Lover in Latin America, From Google Imagine

The lack of basic football education and knowledge

140 students aged from 15 to 18 are investigated for their knowledge, interest and grasp of football. The result shows that most students (60%) like football and more than

half of the whole population possess basic knowledge about football rules, stars and even tactics. Unfortunately, this outcome remains “theoretically speaking”. When asked regarding to their football grasp, 40% of the students report themselves as having little skills in playing football, 25% only having the most basic technique, and only about 30% having participated in a match. With respect to the football guidance at school, 33% of them don’t play football at school, 50% hold an indifferent attitude and 15% are unsatisfied with this situation, only 3% give a positive answer. Furthermore, 60% of the participants hardly play football in their spare time and 35% play football under a “sudden impulse”, and only 5% regard playing football as a daily habit. Thus, we can easily infer that most students have little chance to learn about or keep in touch with football, though a large number of them may be genuinely interested in it.

In order to find out whether this curious situation stems from the individuals taking the survey or the education of their schools, we further our research into schools. We target on 4 junior and 7 senior high schools, including both public and private schools, in our city, Wuxi, Jiangsu, which provide us with the following data.



Source: Investigation

It is shown that none of the junior high schools has either standard football fields or basic football instructions. While all of the senior highs have their independent football fields and 3 out of the 7 enforce required football lessons, 2 provide elective courses and 2 have no available classes associated with football.

Apparently, junior students have even less access to football, when compared with senior students. It can be reasonably inferred from the investigation that the main cause is the absence of available space for playing football. In Wuxi, senior high campuses are often located in the suburb, which provides area for bigger campuses with football fields. On the other hand, junior high campuses usually located in the downtown area in the consideration of convenience. So junior high campuses are usually rather small, thus making it difficult to spare any space for football fields. This explains why the junior highs are unable to offer football courses.

However, this phenomenon is preposterous in some ways --- junior students have more time for hobbies and thus are more likely to learn and develop their interest in football, but with no field and guidance, many of them inevitably lose the opportunity to be familiar with this sport. As a result, they often turn to basketball or badminton --- which are less demanding towards fields and implements --- instead. Senior students, though with access to fields and instructions, are confronted by so much more pressure from studying that they often have hardly any time to be devoted into learning a new sport --- football. This phenomenon may be one reason leading to the various problems of Chinese basic football education.

What's more, the guidance itself maybe the shortcoming. During our investigation, several students, obviously football lovers, betrayed a number of problems. "I think many PE teacher are incapable," A high school student reports during our survey, "they themselves are amateurs and can't play football very well, so their guidance is often superfluous and perfunctory. I think school should hire professional players or coaches instead. Also, sometimes school will close the field for various reasons, which is troublesome for our training. What's more, teachers of other academic subjects take up soccer classes from time to time. This is so unfair."

All the phenomena mentioned show that Chinese basic football education at school is both scarce and immature, rendering it inadequate. It's also important to add that, according to a professional football coach, "Football is too hard to be taught at school."



Teenagers in the Match, Shot by BBA Photographing Club

Why football is hard to be taught

First, football has many characters that make it attractive, but sometimes these features will make this sport unfriendly to beginners. With these disadvantages, teenagers, after consideration, tend to choose other sports instead of football.

As one of the natures of football nature, football games last longer, require faster running, and sometimes contain more violent body contacts than other ball games such as basketball and badminton, where flexibility and reaction are of more importance. When talking about football injury, parents always look worried. “I think football is uncivilized, even barbarous,” A mother of a 16-year-old boy said, “Football matches contain too much violent physical contact, so children get hurt easier in football games than in most other ball games.” Some parents who don’t know football well hold such opinions because they occasionally saw professional football players getting injured in the fields on TV. But this is not unreasonable: the famous Portuguese football player Cristiano Ronaldo was once kicked on one side of his face by another player earlier this year, and even from TV it was rather startling and horrifying to see. And such examples are not rare on the football field.

Also, because of its difficulty to score, football is rather hostile to beginners, in a way that does not give them a sense of achievement, before they have mastered the skill. So, football beginners tended to get disappointed and give up much more easily.

Moreover, football is a collaborative sport, where individual prominence cannot always dissemble team disadvantage, as does in other sports. Therefore, even when beginners get to learn the skills themselves, it is still not certain whether the team would win the match. This factor is more dominant in countries that advocate the pursuit of individualism.

As for China's policy, it has been rather nonchalant through the years. There encourages football, but there are no mandatory rules to have football in the curriculum. Government always allows schools to choose which sports they think are suitable for students and the conditions of the school. Therefore, Chinese schools, usually incapable of the high expenses necessary for football field without governmental supply, often turn to other sports which are less demanding in fields and equipment instead.

Improvement is on the way

Although Chinese basic football education has obvious disadvantages which have hindered the improvement of Chinese football, government and schools have already realized the dilemma and put efforts for solutions.

Take our city, Wuxi, for example, the municipal government enacted a set of school teenager football evaluation criteria to help enforce school football. What's more, they have also set up a website, making advertisements of school football stars and matches to further promote football in school. According to the data publicized, the municipal government has spent 0.45 million to 1.2 million RMB on 24 football-focused schools and 0.56 million to 0.784 million RMB on school football matches in 2015 and 2016. What's more, it spent 1.35 million in 2016 on teenager football summer camps. Besides domestic improvement, there was student delegation which visited Slovenia and high

schools which competed with foreign students for international football communication. Wuxi now has over 2000 students registered as football athletes.

Moreover, many standardized football fields have been established recently: 110 football fields have been constructed, rebuilt, and extended, and by the year 2017, there are already 39 state-level football-featured schools and 28 provincial football-featured schools in Wuxi. These facilities have encouraged many schools to include football into their curriculum, some schools have even chosen to collaborate with private football clubs for a regular training system. Since over 600 professional coaches and referees have been trained and the sports injury insurance system developed, concerns on qualification of the tutors and safety of students have been largely reduced. To stimulate the interest of students, the government set up a complete football league mechanism. 150 teams (around 3 thousand players) have participated in the league matches, which have held 384 games.



Dream on the Field, From Goggle Imagine

All these attempts above, though tough and incomplete, have begun to show their effects recently. Through observation and investigation, we can easily find out that, up till now, the knowledge and grasp about football of teenagers have developed a lot compared to those of teenagers of the same age ten or even five years ago. We hold the

belief that the football education system will become more and more mature and will finally make a generation of excellent players, who will bring China an unprecedented reputation in the world.