

5 Resourceful Speakers

A Double Failure to Pass

I turn sharply to my left, my running shoes squeaking on the polished wooden floor, and sprint down the side of the hall. Frantz sees the run, and flicks the ball across the gym. The pass is beautifully weighted and with one touch, I accelerate away from the other player, the ball at my feet. Frantz has run into the gap to my left, as the defender moves across to cut me off. ‘No a moy. No a moy!’ he shouts urgently. I slow down as the defender approaches. ‘No a moy?’ I ask myself, trying to link something on an indoor soccer pitch to this series of sounds. ‘No a moy?’ I ask myself as I push the ball further down the wing. What on earth is ‘No a moy’ supposed to mean? The defender has closed my angles down and pushed me into the corner. Frantz gesticulates, hands held wide. I switch the ball to my left foot, feint a cross, cut back to my right and try to get past the defender. He sticks out a foot, and the ball slides off to the back wall. We retreat, Frantz muttering under his breath. What was I to do with this unexpected language in this unexpected place?

Later, Frantz remonstrates with me (in Bavarian German), criticizing my English football style, my inability to pass, my lack of control. No wonder the English soccer team is so bad and never wins anything: no skills, no teamwork, it is all just about individuals, long balls and hard tackling. Not like the German way, the European way, with quick passing, an emphasis on skill. ‘Didn’t you hear me?’ he asks. ‘I was yelling at you to pass the ball back, but, no, you wanted to try to beat the defender on your own, play the English style.’ Yes, yes, I know. But I’m puzzled. When did you tell me to pass the ball back? ‘Are you deaf too? I was shouting – No a moy, no a moy.’ He looks at me, exasperated. ‘No a moy. Noch Ein Mal.’ Ah, things finally start to fall into place: no a moy = Noch einmal = Once