



GOOD NEWS, ROY: POSSESSION IS OVERRATED

That's according to boffins, who found that players cover the same distance whether they have the ball or not. So forget trying to emulate Barcelona – just sit, chase and hoof away!

For years we've been told maintaining possession is the best way of tiring out the opposition. But now University of Sunderland bods have found a clash with West Ham should be no more knacker than spending 90 minutes chasing shadows against Barcelona.

Their study involved 810 Premier League players in 54 matches and found that they covered the same distances whether they had the ball or not.

Paul Bradley, a senior lecturer in sport and exercise science at the university, tells *FFT* that teams with higher percentage possession stats still ran as far as those who spent the majority of their Saturday afternoons breathlessly closing down the opposition.

So is Greg Dyke's claim that England won't be troubling the trophy engravers at the World Cup in Brazil off the pace?

"We had hypothesised that low ball possession would be linked to players covering more distance, particularly at high intensity, so we were surprised by the findings," Bradley tells us.

"In terms of success in football, technical aspects are usually the ones that really differentiate the best from the rest, rather than the physicality of the team."

That may be true, but let's not forget that Celtic still managed to send Barcelona home with their tails between their legs in last season's Champions League despite the Spanish side enjoying 84 per cent of possession.

All of which suggests that tiredness can be as much mental as physical. "Can tiredness come about through mindsets? Very much so," says Dan Abrahams, a sports psychologist who has worked with some of the country's top

clubs. "When you're nervous you release cortisol and adrenaline. Cortisol is your stress hormone and it depletes your system of energy. If your perception is that your opponents are going to keep the ball and that you haven't got a chance, you're going to get tired quicker."

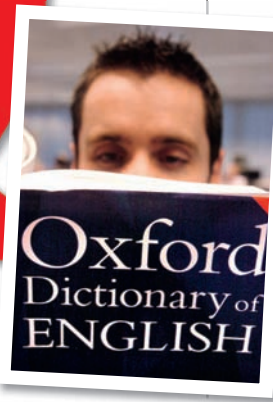
What does this mean for Gerrard & Co. should we reach Brazil? First, accept they might not have as much of the ball and realise this doesn't mean they'll cover more ground during the game. Then they won't be blowing midway through the second period. That's half of it – the other half is to do something when they have the sphere.

Now, where are those findings that show you can score without the ball...



Do you speak FourFourTwo?

According to the *OED*, we've humbly helped to shape the English language. Here's how...



It's not often we talk about ourselves. But you'll have to forgive us this self-indulgence, after we discovered that we've been cited no fewer than 63 times by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as a source for new words or meanings.

The citations go all the way back to 1995, when *FFT* was just a year old and we described West Ham's Dale Gordon as a "nearly man" (defined by the *OED* as "a man who narrowly fails to achieve success"). Many of the words and phrases are football terms, like "passing game" and "free transfer": we didn't coin the terms, but *OED* citations show we helped them into popular use.

Quotes from *FFT* are used to define "right-back", "want-away striker" and "libero" (describing Dutch sweeper Danny Blind, below, in 2001). Football's developments have led us to use "sports psychologist", "safety officer" and the dreaded "administration" (from 2001 about Chester City). We're also cited for some rather more unusual terms, such as "murderously", "apocalyptic" and "pillock". And you thought we were just a fun read...

For a full feature on football idioms, go to p70

