




Player development:

DO I REALLY HAVE WHAT IT TAKES?



Go to any bar or pub in any footballing country and you'll come across some of the greatest football players on this planet - that never actually played! How many of the same conversations are spoken again and again, simultaneously around the world, amongst friends or whoever will stand there and listen – 'I was a great player you know, I could have played in the Premier League, I could have played in the MLS, I was a better player than him when I was his age!'

By: Anthony Hudson

Having been brought up in a footballing environment, and like many footballing fans, I have spent so much time in the company of the game. And what saddens me most, is when I look back and remember all the people that have spoken words similar to these. 'I could have been this or I could have been that'. What absolute nonsense! And what's worse is seeing the signs in young players today, who will one day be standing in those same bars, saying the same thing. It's so very clear to see. For me when someone says they were 'good enough to make it', I whole heartedly disagree. What people think; is because they have ability and can play on a given day, then they are good enough. For me, to be good enough to make it as a top professional, you have to have the whole package. Being able to play the game, well, is only just a start. For there are millions and millions of young kids out there with the same ability, same dreams who think they are unstoppable. It's the whole package that makes it. Attitude - for me is the most important, if you can play game - then it becomes your attitude toward it. Hard work, living a good lifestyle, being disciplined, willing to learn and develop, making sacrifices - these are all part of that package that make a player 'good enough'.

So when someone says 'I was good enough to make it', I disagree, because if they were, they would be. So that's the past, people looking back and regretting what they should or shouldn't have done. But, even more critical, is how to help the some of the young players of today, from falling down that same path? With every player comes the very best intentions and dreams, but how many players actually understand how very hard they have to work and what they have to do? I don't think too many - which is why so few make it.

Agents, money, parties, friends and the thousand others distractions we have all around us, do nothing but one thing – distract! Everyone is searching for an easier option, an agent who knows this person, a friend who can get me here, my Dad that will pay for me to do this, and on and on they go. While all these can be extremely supportive – they cannot interfere with what's important – and that's a player's development. What are you doing on the pitch? I wonder how many players ask the following types of questions:

1. What am I doing to improve my game?
2. What do I need to work on?
3. How can get better?
4. Am I doing everything to help me become a professional player?
5. Is my lifestyle right for being a professional?
6. Am I influenced by my friends?
7. Do I give everything, everyday in training?
8. Is my attitude right? Is my diet right?
9. Am I mentally tough enough?
10. Am I brave enough to really look at my weaknesses and willing to work on them?

I hear players say they want to become top professionals, but in the next couple of hours they also really want to go out and have a good time. I'm sure they really believe themselves when they say they want to be a player, but then they also have other things that mean just as much – it seems. What do I want? Am I prepared to make sacrifices for what I want? So here are a just couple of suggestions that I feel can really help a young player's development:

Learn From Others

I have always believed that it's so important to have good role models. As a young player, I used to watch Frank Lampard at West Ham do extra training everyday after the rest of the team had gone home. He worked harder than everyone. And this has always stuck in my mind – especially when I keep seeing him scoring goals and putting in top performances at the highest level for club and country. I have had the privilege of watching and learning from some top people, but I know it's not so easy for all young players to get that first hand. I would suggest reading about players, reading players biographies. If you're a midfielder for example, go and buy Frank

Lampard's book. It's as good as sitting down and talking to him yourself – if not better. In those books, players open up, they tell you what they did, how hard they worked, what sacrifices they made, the struggles they overcame. What more could you want? We all hear young players breaking into the first team at top clubs, and almost all of them say, 'it helped me so much training with the first team. I learnt so much and some of the older players really helped me, giving me advice.' Well, if your creative enough and look hard enough - that advice is everywhere. What you can pick out of a Lampard or a Steven Gerrard book can be so very powerful I and can give all the advice and passion you need.

David Beckham is another great role model for young players. For what he has gone through during his career and how he has carried himself, kept his professionalism, worked so very hard and continues to do so, is an example that cannot help but become such a positive influence on a young player looking for a little direction. Go and seek these out – and learn from the best.



Hard Work

This may sound extremely simple and very much like stating the obvious, but it's a quality that I think is very much amiss today. The words are thrown around often, but I don't know if young players (and coaches for that matter) really know what it means to 'work hard'? The game itself, played at the highest level is not easy. You have to work hard. As soon as a lot of young promising players are confronted with challenges which demands them to move from comfort to working really hard for there position, a whole host of what seems to be 'excuses' start to surface in a number different ways. What's the excuse today? 'Well, the coach played me here and I didn't get the ball,' or 'I didn't feel too good today' or 'I need to move to a different club where the coach knows what he's doing and they play the football that suits me'....they go on and on and can be heard in the back seat of so many cars pulling away from games at the weekend. All of them nothing but excuses! Players have to understand and become willing to meet the demands if they want to progress. And those demands mean – in the good old fashioned way - 'getting your head down and working hard.'



Anthony Hudson

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Anthony Hudson became one of the youngest head coaches in professional soccer, after being appointed Head Coach at the age of 27 years of age. He took over the club that finished bottom of the table in 2008 and lead them to the Play Offs in his first full season, getting nominated for Coach of the Year along the way.

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There's no escaping it – with so many distractions and so many players looking for an easier way to move up. There is no easy way. You get every single bit out of it - that you put in. When the game starts to become challenging, you have to become willing to meet those challenges. Working hard is a lost quality in so many young players today, but if the passion for the game and willingness to do the work that is required is there, then players will get what they deserve.

Growing up in a footballing family and around so many 'could-have-been' players, I have come to the conclusion that every single person is exactly where they are supposed to be. Everyone! If your in a bar, entertaining a group 'none-the-wiser', and impressing upon them about how good a

player you were and how much better you are than the person your all watching live on T.V., then your exactly where your supposed to be – in a bar, drink in hand, talking about it, whilst watching others do it! You are in exactly the right place. No mistakes about it. And the same for the opposite - there's no mistake. If you're at a top club, doing well, playing well, enjoying your game, doing what you need to do, your there for a reason, because you've worked for it. There's no magic.

So as a young player, which one do I want to be? How would I feel if I ended up like so many do, wishing and wanting to do have done it differently? Am I willing to do everything within my power to fulfill my dream to become a professional footballer?