

10 THINGS THAT ALL GREAT SOCCER PLAYERS DO:

There is never anything wrong with striving to be your best at anything you choose to do. Below are 10 aspects that I believe you will find within all great soccer players, athletes and people in general, striving to be their best at what they do.

1. WORK HARDER THAN ANYONE ELSE

I believe this is the fundamental quality of all top players in any sport. You simply have to put the work in if you are to progress and get better. This is not to be confused with working hard during a team training session, because that is a given. Instead, the top players spend hours on their own perfecting the touch and the feel of the ball. I suspect the very best players are also the ones who have a 'first in – last to leave' mentality when it comes to practice. The best players also approach practice as a proving ground every day and this cannot be compromised. There are no shortcuts to become a great player.

2. COMMIT YOURSELF 24/7

Personally, I feel fitness levels are a sign of commitment and actions speak louder than words. The top players usually cover the most distances. Pat Riley famously said: "There are only two options regarding commitment. You're either in or you're out. There's no such thing as life in-between." The same applies for elite performers. Every coach who has worked with David Beckham has praised his commitment towards his fitness and training above his talent and skill. I would suspect that is why he has played for the world's greatest teams. It takes an enormous self-discipline to commit yourself to doing the right things at the right time – every time.

3. MANAGE THEMSELVES

Great players do not rely on people to determine their performance. Yes, coaches and teammates can help them from time to time. But to become a great player, you must take responsibility for your own performance. Top players prepare for games in the right way and because of this, 'stay' in the game at all times. They never catch themselves looking back at a mistake or looking too far forward. Always focused on the task at hand, no matter how small

4. DEAL WITH SETBACKS

To be successful, you will inevitably come across setbacks. The top players make sure that they can deal with these setbacks and recover from them. The key, however, is that these players can put it behind them and move on to the next game or even the next play. Winston Churchill believed the key to success was going from failure to failure without losing enthusiasm. Unless you lead a charmed life, it all goes wrong from time to time. The difference between the top performers and the rest, is how they deal with it. It takes courage but can be learnt through having the right attitude and 'owning' your performance and then getting back at it again with a positive approach.

5. DEAL WITH SUCCESS

This often goes under the radar but is vital if a player is going to reach the top level and more importantly, stay there. Success will be part of the journey but also has its downfalls. Complacency, lack of drive, and dropping standards can all be potential by-products of winning. There is a line on every mutual fund prospectus that reads: "Past performance is no guarantee for future success." When a player does achieve success, individually or with the team, they must stay grounded and keep working on their game. It takes a special player to stay grounded during a successful period of their career – but it is a necessity to reach the top.

6. CONSTANTLY EVOLVE THEIR GAME

When you reach a top level, people are always looking to catch up and, sooner or later, they do. It is important that you keep looking to bring your game a step further and add another string to your bow. This is done on the practice field and involves a purposeful type of practice that is both mentally and physically challenging. Coachability is also a key factor, where top players have a willingness to learn, grow and adapt.

7. DELIVER WHEN EXPECTED TO

When the stage is set and expectations are highest, the great players typically step up and perform. Maradona, Pele, Cruyff and Messi and many others have defined themselves by producing. Courage is a key factor in this. It takes a special player to want the ball and express themselves in an important match or when a game is on the line.

8. SELF BELIEF

Self-belief is a belief in your ability to deal with the challenge of any situation. It can sometimes be carried in your body language but it does not spring from nowhere. It arrives from hard work, and knowing that the things you are doing to your game will take you to another level. It is probably the most important factor in success on the field. When players have similar skill and physical qualities, the one difference maker is the confidence in yourself to perform and make a difference. The really great players carry this belief to such effect that it impacts their teammates in a positive way as well.

9. SACRIFICE

You just have to be willing to put in the time and work. Sometimes that means not choosing an easier path but truly deciding to take the less traveled road. Putting the time in will pay off. If you want something bad enough in life, believing that you will achieve through dedication and work is a great start, putting in the work will get you there.

10. DO THE SIMPLE THINGS WELL

Our 'YouTube culture' has programmed us to think that the great players are full of flicks and tricks that set them apart from the rest. However, in reality, the exact opposite is actually true. Players like Ronaldo, Henry, Rooney, and Messi are masters of the basics first and foremost. They all have a fantastic knack of doing the simple things well and making the right decision nine times out of ten. Barcelona players symbolize this best because of the way they play. Their style of play and team structure revolves around quick, one and two touch passing and players are not free to simply do what they want. There is a time and place for the spectacular – the great players know exactly where and when this is.

Great players have a number of things that separate themselves from the majority. How many of ten factors I have identified are innate or natural? Not many. Talent is certainly needed to be a great player, but there are so many more factors to go alongside it. Each quality above can be worked on either by working on it physically or mentally. The goal here is not to become a professional player, that may occur, but it is about fulfilling your potential in every area. A player who takes responsibility, prepares well, commits themselves to doing the right things every day, never takes shortcuts, and focuses on getting the best out of today and tomorrow has a great chance of becoming the best player that they can be. That is what is important and the path that this level of commitment will take you will most likely be one of great enjoyment, confidence and success.