

## **Tuck in your shirt, pull up your socks**

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I remember when I was a kid I thought that polishing your boots was just something your Mum and Dad made you do because they wanted the boots to last longer. Tucking your shirt in and pulling your socks up was totally unimportant - the only thing that mattered was how well you played. I've changed my mind completely and it's not because now I'm the one paying for the boots for my own children. It's because I now see other benefits.

I first started looking at things differently when Harry Kewell made the Leeds United first team. It was big news in Australia and so they interviewed one of his old coaches. Now I thought the coach was going to talk about Harry dribbling around players galore and scoring fabulous goals but instead he said "Harry was always the first to training with his shirt tucked in and his boots polished. It was obvious he wanted to go far in the game." At the time I thought it was a strange thing for a coach to say. Basically I thought the coach mustn't have known him that well and just said anything to get on the television. I remembered it though and now I understand what he meant.

A few years later I was talking to a coach who had been asked by an agent to watch a player in a training session to see if he was good enough to go to England for a trial with an EPL club. I asked him what the player was like and he said "Well, this player was told the session started at ten and he got there right at ten. Then he took twenty minutes to put his boots on and get ready. He was one of those types of players." Again I thought, this coach has not mentioned anything about the player's ability.

As a coach I did something similar this year. I was working with an under fourteen team and I always saw the under fifteens walk past to train on the other half of the pitch. One of the players always stood out and caught my eye. I thought it was odd that one player should stand out so much and then I realized it is because he looked like a player with that something extra. The next session I checked out all the players and he was the only one with his shirt tucked in, his boots polished and basically who looked like he really wanted to train.

In all three cases the attitude and appearance has told the coach something about the player. I think the key word here is attitude. The boots polished, shirt tucked in and arriving early showed that Harry Kewell had the right attitude. The same way that arriving barely on time and then taking a long time to get ready showed that the other player was not really interested and had a poor attitude.

I suppose what I am saying is a coach looks at more than how well the player plays on the pitch when they form their opinion.