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English Premier League players facing teething problems

**Lack of oral hygiene could be one of the reasons why some footballers playing in the top flight lack bite as studies suggest**

Does your team lack bite? Do the players look toothless in the face of opposition?

A new medical report has concluded a dire level of dental health among topflight footballers is affecting their on-pitch performance.

Manchester United's lack of attacking football, Liverpool's penchant for draws, Chelsea's slump, Newcastle's and Sunderland's woes, Bournemouth's top-flight failings and Aston Villa's implosion could all be partly blamed on players neglecting their pearly whites, according to findings published by the British Journal of Sports Medicine.

Qualified dentists from the International Centre for Evidence-Based Oral Health at the University College London found four out of 10 professional footballers have dental cavities, while one in 20 has irreversible gum disease. Others suffer infections while many experience regular toothache.

They examined 187 players' sets of teeth and found 53 per cent had dental erosion, 45 per cent were "bothered" by the discomfort caused by the state of their teeth, and seven per cent said it affected their ability to train or play.

"If your favourite soccer team isn't doing well, you might want to ask them if they are they looking after their teeth," British Dental Association scientific adviser Professor Damien Walmsley advised fans.

Why the dental health of footballers appears to be worse than for the general population, of which 30 per cent suffer tooth decay, is unknown. But the aversion to fluoride and flossing baffles because not many demographics spend more time and more money grooming themselves than English Premier League footballers.

An obvious culprit is the copious swigs of sugar-laced, glucose-induced high energy sports drinks.

Yet the researchers (perhaps mindful of where their next grant might come from) were reluctant to say as such, claiming the evidence is "unclear" on whether such high-performance beverages are to blame.

Could it be the food they eat? Unlikely, given that our pampered footballers are surrounded by dieticians.

A flick through old football albums reveals bad teeth and footballers have long lived cheek by jowl.

Stars past and present have suffered a boot-teeth polishing deficit.

Joe Jordan, Paul Merson, Aly Cissokho, Carlos Tevez, Luis Suarez, Ronaldinho and Ronaldo are among those players who possess a set of ivories to beat a great white shark to first place in a smiling contest, though the state of their molars has never appeared to hinder their on-pitch performance.

Former Arsenal striker Robin van Persie and ex-Chelsea winger Florent Malouda claimed having their wisdom teeth pulled improved their health and "football acumen".

And who can forget the sport's infamous dental check-up, which saw the Euro 1996 England team give pre-match drilling a new definition when they took it in turns to gurgle Tequila mouthwash at the long-defunct China Jump bar in Wan Chai just a week before the biggest tournament of their lives … they reached the semi finals.

Joking aside, who'd have thought in this vain, advanced-orthodontic day and age of capped teeth and whitening pastes, that poor dental health still hinders the game.

The report found some teams had worse teeth than others - especially West Ham, who might want to consider putting security guards on their tuck shop door.

The researchers said they were "surprised" to find that despite the huge investment clubs make in players, very few have staff dentists.

Can it really be that too many wealthy, vain stars put the quality of our expensive entertainment at stake because they don't know how to maintain their oral health and therefore must be minded to do so? Or is it they just can't be bothered to brush their teeth?

Let's hope it's the former because it would be a tragic indictment on those athletes, who spend tens of thousands of pounds on looking good yet are perfectly happy to own a set of teeth like a witchdoctor's neckless, and play worse for it.

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