# Footballers’ rotten play blamed on bad teeth

**Cristiano Ronaldo tackled his dental problems**

John Peters/Getty Images

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Published at 12:01AM, November 3 2015

Fans have become wearily used to losing football managers blaming the incompetence of the referee, or the thickness of a goalpost. Now it seems they may have a new excuse: the left back needed a filling.

Professional footballers have terrible teeth and it seems to be affecting their performance, a study of leading British clubs has found. Too many sugary energy drinks and snacks have been blamed for the finding that almost four out of ten players have cavities and almost eight in ten have gum disease.

While many supporters might assume that Luis Suárez’s teeth are the only set to have caused major problems on the pitch, the research found that 7 per cent of players felt that tooth problems were affecting their performance. The findings have persuaded several clubs to introduce stricter dental hygiene rules in the hope of extra points.

Ian Needleman of University College London, who led the research, had previously found that Olympic athletes had poor teeth and said it was not surprising that this put elite sportsmen off their game. “Some of these conditions are painful and that can have an impact,” he said. “The pain can be catastrophic, like an abscess, so you can’t play, or it can distract when you’re playing or disturb your sleep. If it’s distracting it can also affect your confidence and in elite athletics these small differences can have a big impact.”

He found that levels of decay were about 10 per cent higher than the average British man of the same age.

Winston Reid, the £60,000-a-week West Ham centre back, was among the players told they needed to brush up on their oral hygiene. He said: “The dentist screened my teeth and explained to me in detail the dental problems that needed to be tackled to prevent painful teeth resulting in missing training. The club doctor organised a few dentist appointments and now a few months later I am smiling without worries, really top job from our medical boys.”

Professor Needleman’s team inspected 187 players for the research published in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine*.