



Non-negotiables with Steven Gerrard - "You want to create the best possible culture you can"

We sat down with the Aston Villa manager to discuss the key coaching values and philosophies he won't compromise on and how they influence his management style.

By **James Descombes** Published: 20 October 2022 - 9.31am



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During his playing career, Steven Gerrard cemented his legacy as a Liverpool legend – driving the Reds on when it mattered most with passion and unforgettable Roy of the Rovers moments.

His drive and desire made him the perfect candidate for management – a great player that might be able to instil his attributes into his players.

And it wasn't long before Gerrard became a legend at another club. This time as manager of Rangers.

He closed the gap to Celtic during his first couple of seasons north of the border before clinching the league title and stopping Celtic from winning 10 titles in a row.



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Now at Aston Villa, success looks different. This is Gerrard's first full season at the helm and with his profile and the backing of the board, the club has brought in sought after players such as Philippe Coutinho, Lucas Digne and Diego Carlos to help build a competitive squad.

We sat down with Stevie G to discuss his coaching philosophies and the non-negotiables that shape the way he manages Aston Villa.



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What are your key non-negotiables?

It is a buzzword and there certainly isn't a list in terms of non-negotiables. I think it's a standards thing. You want to see your players and also your staff live everyday by a certain level of standards because you want to have an elite environment. You want to have your culture the best possible way it can be.

Your players need to be happy with that and live by these behaviours every single day to get the best version of that individual. Then you'll also get an environment that is a high-performance environment.

Did you develop your non-negotiables as a player or were they embedded even before that?

I think your parents, then obviously your journey as a player and as a coach you develop certain behaviours. You analyse them and see if they work, you see other players live by them and you see other players breaking them and you can see the effect, good and bad.

You know, coming into coaching or management you want to create the best possible culture you can. You want it to be enjoyable, of course you do, but at the same time you want it to be effective, and you know you can sleep at night knowing that you set the highest possible level you can for the football club and that's what you're trying to do.

It doesn't guarantee results but what it does is make sure that everyone pulls in the right direction and does everything they can possible to try and help the club be consistent.



As a player you were very passionate and always looking to drive your Liverpool teammates on, is that something you try to bring into your coaching career?

I think you've got to get to balance right. I'm certainly very passionate and motivated from a personal point of view to do the best I can do. But for that to happen, you've got to give the players the support they need.

I try and support them, I try and respect them in every possible way I can to try and get the best out of them individually and collectively.

It's very much different from playing. I think there's obviously more responsibility on the players to be in the best possible form they can be in.

My job's to keep them together, give them an identity and a way of playing that they believe in and that they can carry out on the pitch.

How important is it to have a captain or players that represent your values and ethos?

Yeah, I don't think it just boils down to one person. The captain obviously has an important role, but you're very much as a coach looking for your senior players to really drive your standards, drive your behaviour and drive your non-negotiables because a lot of the young lads and inexperienced players follow.

They follow, they look up and they have a lot of respect for the senior players in the group. It's a collective responsibility rather than just on one person.

Were your values and non-negotiables influenced by your past managers?

I think so. I think they were certainly shaped and influenced from senior players as well, you know the captains I played for and the type of professionals I played under. Certainly all the top coaches I've worked with have shaped me as a person and in the coach I am today.

I always try to be like a sponge around good senior players in the England dressing room – Alan Shearer, Tony Adams, Martin Keown... and later on Beckham, Redknapp – all your top players. And that's certainly the case from a manager's point of view – Benitez, Roy Hodgson – all the top coaches you work with, you try and steal some of their behaviours that you think can be a success for you.



How do you deal with players that don't buy into your non-negotiables?

I certainly lean on my senior players, in terms of we have rules that they've influenced and they've shaped themselves that they believe in. I treat all the players the same and try and treat them with respect. I try and be honest and I always deal with players face to face.

If rules are in place and they're broken, then we deal with it as and when, but I'll always try and do that with dignity.

We're very diligent (with transfers) and there's a lot of people and a lot of resources at Aston Villa, who look at every detail – character, mentality, personality. It is something that could potentially put you off, because we want to create a culture full of good people.

We want to create a culture that people coming into, we believe are the right people to take the club forward. If we think someone will be detrimental towards that and is not prepared to change then it could influence whether that's a yes or a no.

Are there any specific players who've impressed you with the way they've embodied your values or a club's values?




In recent times, you look at the back end of my career with Liverpool and England and Jordan Henderson optimises your modern-day elite professional. And James Milner.

There's a great sense that someone's well aware of what's the day-to-day standards alongside the

They're recent names that everyone's well aware of. Back in the day, playing alongside the likes of Sami Hyypia and Jamie Carragher, they were very professional and very diligent in terms of the work.

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