



Non-negotiables with Ralph Hasenhüttl - "When you want to play in my team you have to work hard"

We sat down with the Southampton 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: 6 October 2022 - 5.46pm



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Building a managerial legacy in the Premier League is a tough ask these days. A few defeats, a few unwise words in a post-match interview or a underwhelming brand of football can see you caught up in the Premier League's managerial merry-go-round.

But Southampton manager Ralph Hasenhüttl currently finds himself as the fourth longest-serving manager in England's top flight (behind Jurgen Klopp, Pep Guardiola and Thomas Frank) after taking over from Mark Hughes in December 2018.



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During his time in charge, the Austrian has achieved 16th, 11th and two 15th place finishes.

Big wins against 'top 6' opposition have been countered with painful defeats, including two 9-0 humiliations against Leicester and Manchester United.

But Hasenhüttl has ensured Southampton's Premier League status and built a young team that are capable of beating anyone on their day.

We sat down with Ralph Hasenhüttl to talk about the non-negotiables that guide his coaching philosophies at Southampton.

What are your key non-negotiables and how do you put them into practice at Southampton?

I mean this is for every manager, the most important ones are the basic fundamentals – the discipline on the pitch and outside the pitch.



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Without this nothing works and everybody does what he wants.

So discipline in every part, this is what we're demanding. If it is being on time... this is the basic, the fundamental for everything.

The second part is being here with social intelligence.

That means that you have to be committed to what we are doing. Everybody has to know the role they play here. That means that even if I am sometimes frustrated, I have to take care about how I react, how I act, how I behave.

And this is something of a of development. Sometimes it's naturally given – something that you should have been given from home. In every job you need to have this social intelligence to know how to behave.

The third thing is that you should be able to work hard. On the pitch, off the pitch, being interested in all we are doing and invest a lot.

These are the non-negotiable facts.

Everything else, you can make a mistake with the ball, you can sometimes make a wrong decision on the pitch, this is not a problem. But these other things, when they are not working then you have a problem.



Why do you think these values are ingrained in you?

I think otherwise success is not possible. In every business, not only in football. This should be in every company, the same thing, because you cannot create quality work if these things are not there and without quality work success is very difficult.

We are always competing against teams and clubs in this league that maybe have more money or more potential or better players or whatever, but we still manage to win against them in some moments and we still manage to compete against them.

If we don't do something better then we would have no chance. You have to be better in some parts.

How important you think it is to have a representation of your key values on the pitch, maybe from the captain?

Sure, and not only the captain. There should be more than only one player that represents this. But ideally the captain should be the role model.

Have your non-negotiables changed from club to club?

No, not really. As long as I've been working as a manager, you know when you want to play in my team you have to work hard, this has never changed.

**“We're always a hard-running team and a team that invests a lot, and players that can deliver this have always had a good life when they're working with me.”
- Ralph Hasenhuttl**

We're always a hard-running team and a team that invests a lot, and players that can deliver this have always had a good life when they're working with me.

Would you allow a special player – say someone who doesn't always train as hard but scores lots of goals – to get away with a little bit more? Is there any wiggle room?

It shouldn't be like this and normally it isn't like this. In some moments, if you perform on a high level and score goals all the time it can be that you can do maybe one sprint less than the other ones, but in general not.

To make too many excuses and too many exemptions for players is not good, so you have to be careful because in the end you will take the responsibility for everything.



How much work goes into looking at a player's attitude and if they're going to fit in with your values and the ethos of the club before signing them?

This is always the ideal constellation, that we have a character assessment too. I think it is very tough with transfers, because you have maybe two or three conversations with the player before you buy him or not, so there's always in the end a little bit of a black box when he's coming in.

You don't know everything about him, but then you see how he behaves how he fits the team and everything.

Let me answer in a different way, football is a big family and you can be sure that bad behaviour from players is well known in all these clubs. And this is the message I always give to the players.

You can be sure that your image is well known not only in the club you are working in, it's most of the time known at all the other clubs, because everybody knows somebody, everybody's asking somebody about you. How you behave will, in the end, also be known by everybody else.

You've got a pretty young squad at Southampton. Is it easier to put your points and values across to a young group of players?

Easier? I don't know. It's different because maybe the hard disc is a little bit more empty and there's more new stuff he's able to store.

In the end, they sometimes struggle to deliver it more immediately when you tell them something, because they have to learn to handle their nerves and everything, so the training session is sometimes easier than the games.

But I like to work with them because all the energy you invest in making them better, you have the benefits for longer. Maybe when they are starting as a very young talented player, you know that he'll stay with you for a few years and then you can definitely benefit from this. He's on the way up, not on the way down.



After suffering a big defeat, do you ever think that the players aren't buying into your ethos and non-negotiables? How do you convince them to fully invest themselves?

We look for solutions for ways to do things better, taking them on a point and lifting them up. Very often they are also very frustrated about the same points. It's up to us to give him the answers for things that didn't work and then make it better next time, and also be critical in some moments when things are not working. But in the end it's always the way that we don't go alone, we always go together.

You've said that you don't want to manage into old age, does that make it more important that you leave a legacy at Southampton? Not necessarily with results or trophies, but in terms of leaving an imprint on the club?



For sure, for every manager it should be a goal to leave something at the club that is more than only a trophy or a good time.

I think what we invested here with the playbook, with the philosophy we have put in this club, with all the knowledge I had in football, to bring it in here and to develop it in all the all the teams down there, in the academy, is something of a life's work.

When you look back at it, in the end, you can say okay, it worked, it went well and it would be great to see that the club keeps on going in this direction.

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