

How Harry got Spurs hot again

Sam Wallace reveals the tricks of the trade that have inspired Tottenham's unlikely renaissance under Redknapp

When Harry Redknapp first arrived as Tottenham manager he discovered that some players in the first team were so hungry after training ground meals that they were driving straight to a local Italian restaurant in Chigwell to top up. Since Redknapp arrived, Juande Ramos's restrictions on food portions have been lifted as well as a few other rules from the Spaniard's regime that alienated his underperforming players.

Redknapp's Carling Cup victory over Liverpool on Wednesday night was his fifth win in six games in all competitions and left Spurs fans wondering just what the 61-year-old has done to transform a group of players who had only two points in the Premier League before he arrived. The answer is that many of the changes have been subtle adjustments geared towards building the "confidence" that Redknapp habitually mentions in press conferences.

The Spurs manager was shocked at some of the severer aspects of Ramos's regime and rules that had been adhered to doggedly by the former Seville coach even as his team's season collapsed. First among them was the diet imposed on the players which, after early successes with Tom Huddlestone and Paul Robinson, had become so unpopular that players were secretly supplementing their diet at a local Italian restaurant.

Ramos, along with the fitness coach Marcos Alvarez, had imposed tight limits on how much, and what, the players could eat. Since arriving, Redknapp has kept the popular chef Kevin Marshall, who predated Ramos, but there are no limits on the size of the portions that the players are served. Redknapp's philosophy is that he wants his players to eat well and the relaxation of the rules has meant that there is usually a full canteen for breakfast these days.

Another principle of Ramos's pre-match regime was that the players should stay together at the Radisson Hotel in Canary Wharf before home games, despite the fact that the vast majority of the squad live close to the training ground in Chigwell, Essex. Jonathan Woodgate, who lives in Canary Wharf, was told by Ramos he had to drive to the training ground to meet the team coach and then travel with the squad back to the hotel, which was just around the corner from his apartment.

Redknapp has told the players that they can stay at home before matches at White Hart Lane. He has tried to lighten the mood with a group of players that he describes himself as "quiet lads" by bringing in Les Ferdinand, who started yesterday, and Tim Sherwood as part-time coaches. Sherwood has already proved himself an outspoken character capable of a sharp reading of the game in his television punditry work on Setanta. Redknapp hopes he can build the same kind of tough, old-school dressing-room camaraderie that distinguished the Premier League-winning Blackburn Rovers team that Sherwood captained in 1994-95.

Of all his players it is Ledley King with whom Redknapp has had the most in-depth conversations. He has told his captain that he does not want him to play in any cup games and just to concentrate on getting himself fit for league matches. King had already played three Uefa Cup games and one Carling Cup match under Ramos this season. Redknapp has told him he will play in those competitions again only if Spurs reach the final.

The Spurs manager is fixated on survival in the Premier League and his team have reached 16th position from bottom when Redknapp took over on 26 October. Curiously, Redknapp's contract is not as highly incentivised as the deal he had at Portsmouth and he is almost certain to earn less this season than he did when he won the FA Cup with Pompey last season. "We still need points to get up that table," Redknapp said. "I know how tight it's going to be this year. You're going to need 40 points to stay up, and there are 14 teams scrapping. There's nothing in it. You've got to keep going because anyone can slip into it. It's that tight."

Reuniting the squad has been another way in which Redknapp has changed the mood. This season Kevin-Prince Boateng, Paul Stalteri, Ricardo Rocha, Adel Taarabt, the goalkeeper Ben Alwick (now on loan at Carlisle United) and Hossam Ghaly were all banished by Ramos to change in the reserve-team dressing room and were not given squad numbers. To add insult to injury, they were informed of Ramos's decision, in September, via a text message from his first-team coach Gus Poyet.

Redknapp has brought all those players back into the side and Boateng even featured as a late

substitute against Liverpool. One piece of showboating late in Wednesday's game caused Redknapp to raise an eyebrow, but the Spurs manager believes that he might yet get something out of a man who was voted the best young player in Germany in 2006 but has since lost his way.

Boateng was given his first-team chance after impressing for the Tottenham reserves on 3 November against West Ham. Redknapp has made a point of watching his reserve team to demonstrate to his players that he is open-minded about new faces breaking into the first team.

As might be expected, Redknapp has doubts about certain individuals but he is keeping them to himself for now – he does not want to endanger the spirit that has developed at the club. Glen Johnson remains the No 1 priority in the transfer window, although Redknapp knows that he might have to sell first to get the England international from Portsmouth. Trading players is what Redknapp has long been known for, but the last three weeks at Spurs have demonstrated there are more tricks up his sleeve than just that.

Right Hart Lane: How Redknapp worked his magic

Spurs rules under Ramos:

- * Restrictions on food served at the training ground, resulting in players sneaking off to a local Italian restaurant.
- * Had to stay in hotel at Canary Wharf before all home games.
- * On evenings before match days, all players had to go first to training ground to leave their car even if they live in Canary Wharf. Then coach takes them back to hotel in Canary Wharf.
- * Ledley King played in the Uefa Cup.

Spurs rules under Redknapp:

- * Healthy food at training ground, but no limits on portions.
- * Stay at home the night before home games.
- * King playing only in Premier League matches.



Redknapp



Lennon