

Friday, 20 July, 2007, 17:00 EDT, US
SOCCER

BY HILLARY RHODES

David Beckham's voice

That pearly white smile, those bending kicks, that ... puny voice? asap's HILLARY RHODES examines the soccer star's vocal chops.



David Beckham: What a stud. But as soon as he opens his mouth ... (AP Photo/Nick Ut)

It's been called "high-pitched," "squeaky," "whiny" and "fey." Vanity Fair once compared it to "the wind chimes that tinkle constantly in the background."

David Beckham's voice just doesn't match his otherwise kickin' image.

It seems our studliest new soccer player, our hunkiest new Hollywood athlete, our Britishest new heartthrob ... could be less than satisfactory in the speech department.

But does it even matter?

Certainly, there are lots of serious fans who would probably rather see Beckham's bum left ankle heal than hear his voice drop a few notes.

But Americans tend to be hyper-critical of their celebrities. There's a determined arm of the media and the blogosphere religiously dedicated to picking apart the rich and famous.

"We want our sports figures to be big and manly," says pop culture and trends expert Rachel C. Weingarten, author of "Career and Corporate Cool (TM)."

And even if a star's main attraction doesn't require a single word, it's hard to get by this harsh audience. Mike Tyson will be ridiculed forever for his high-pitched, lisping way of speaking (<http://asap.ap.org/stories/1255412.s>) that stood in direct contrast to his otherwise commanding presence as a prize boxer.

"(Beckham is) fortunate that he's not an actor, where it would be his bread and butter to speak," Weingarten says. "He is beautiful and he is talented, but he will never be known for his voiceovers."

She advises the Los Angeles Galaxy's freshest player to "keep his mouth shut and appear mysterious."

Others are less convinced that a chirp here and there from the beloved Beckham could really do him any harm. After all, we yokels can't even readily identify his working-class accent the way they can across the pond. To us, all things British tend to charm, and Beckham is no exception.

"In the U.S., we're more forgiving about those types of things," says Michelle T. Sterling, image consultant and founder of New York-based Global Image Group.

Sterling says character features can often be categorized by the yin -- feminine, approachable -- and the yang -- masculine and authoritative.

Beckham has pale skin (yin), a lean body (yin) and an effete voice (yin again). He projects a rather harmonious image, therefore, and won't necessarily be derided for it, Sterling says.

Plus, at least compared to "our" football -- isn't soccer kind of a yin sport anyways?

—

Copyright 2007 Associated Press. All rights reserved.