

"You're not half as good as you think you are."

Bernie Mandic, the man behind the career moves of Harry Kewell, has given Australian football's generation next a stark warning, telling them: "You're not half as good as you think you are."

In the wake of the Olyroos' dire showing at the Olympic Games, Mandic - who has masterminded seven of the top 10 transfers of Australian players moving overseas - pulled no punches when he said: "A lot of the young players in Australia strut around with the attitude that they're as good as Mark Viduka and Harry Kewell, when in reality they might only have played a handful of A-League games.

"Confidence is a good thing but it has to be founded on something tangible. "You can have all the potential in the world but what's the point if you're not prepared to put in the hard work.

"Many Australian boys think they are the complete package when they can't even duplicate what Damian Mori managed with a goal every other game in the national competition. And, remember, Mori wasn't good enough to make it overseas.

"Newcastle's Joel Griffiths is a great player for the A-League but he couldn't play as a striker for either Neuchatel or Leeds - people have to appreciate the differences between here and Europe.

"Our youngsters need to take on the board the saying: 'the harder I work, the luckier I get' because a lot of them don't know what hard work is."

Paris-based Mandic, whose lengthy list of clients also includes sometime Socceroos Nathan Burns, Michael Thwaite and Nathan Burns, enlists former Socceroos coach Frank Farina to support his withering assessment of why Australia has yet to unearth the next Kewell, Viduka or Cahill.

"Before the 2004 Olympics Frank Farina said to me in one of the most accurate statements I've heard from anybody: 'Bern, the biggest problem with the young boys coming through is they act like they've won the World Cup, Champions League and Premier League and they have done nothing'."

Mandic, who also boasted Mark Viduka as a client, says agents are largely to blame for the 'distorted expectations' of Australia's next crop of would-be stars.

"Agents top the list with parents a close second," he added. "They give kids the impression they are superstars in the making and everything is inevitable for them."

Mandic also hit out a Football Federation Australia's mooted player advisory committee - a body that would point teenager players towards various agents at the expense of others, with former Olyroos coach Graham Arnold tipped to be at its helm.

"The idea of having a dismal failure like Arnold in charge is a nonsense especially when he and other ex-players have self-interest at heart," he added.

"The whole concept is flawed. You have to remember, Arnold and others told players not to accept any overseas offers before the Games because 'the whole world would be watching', well I can tell you no

Australian player has ever won an overseas contract as a result of playing for the Joeys, Young Socceroos or Olyroos at a world championship.

"It's a myth ... so why would you tell a Nathan Byrnes or a Bruce Djite that. Thank God neither listened and instead got themselves decent deals in Greece and Turkey."

On Australia's performance at the Olympics where they took just a point from games against Serbia, Argentina and Cote d'Ivoire, Mandic added: "Players' performances are sometimes as good as the team selections of the coach. If he screws up then the team is unbalanced and players can be made to look far less good than what they are. But you have to say they were very disappointing - some of them seemed to go backwards."

But Manic is not all doom and gloom. He believes there is a wealth of potential in Australia and was impressed by Perth Glory's Nikita Rukavytsya at the Games, and is also a fan of Brisbane trio Tahj Minniecon (whom he manages), teenage winger Tommy Oar and defender Luke DeVere, Sutherland shire youngster Blake Powell and young Newcastle Jets ace Ben Kantarovski.

And he offers this nugget of advice to aspiring whiz-kids.

"They should look not so much at Mark Viduka and Harry Kewell but at somebody like Tim Cahill who basically wasn't wanted here but wouldn't take 'no' for an answer. He worked hard and ignored what people said - and look where he is now."