

‘Thinking outside the box to be better inside the box’

GKbyKG

The goalkeeper’s job gives him a unique position in the team. He therefore needs a special training programme to prepare him for his specific role. However, this must be more than the usual individual training and ‘busy’ activities endured by most goalkeepers today. They are part of a team, so they need a lot of game-orientated exercises, where there is contact with their own teammates. One of the biggest criticisms of most goalkeeping training is that it isn’t game-orientated enough. If goalkeepers don’t face realistic situations in practice, how are they going to develop the required skills when dealing with these situations in a game? It is vital that goalkeepers are part of a team and not apart from a team! There will be many occasions when goalkeepers practise on their own, with their GK coach, but they must also be integrated into the majority of most sessions. By reacting to the movements of the ball and opponents in match situations, the goalkeeper will get a better understanding of the game. Not only will this improve his field skills, it will also help team solidarity and team spirit.

‘Inches to Development’

As a goalkeeper coach I have worked with all different standards/levels of goalkeepers. These range from the new goalkeepers within the grassroots up to the professional GKs. You have to wear a different hat for the different levels of ability.

It is vital that you understand the learning requirements of the group or GK you are working with. For example, if you are with a young development group, you must be able to connect and engage with that group. This allows them to be relaxed, creative and free to develop their natural talent, as well as learn and improve the basic skills/techniques required to become a goalkeeper.

I call this section ‘Inches to Development’. The more I study the art of goalkeeping, the more I believe in the importance of movement and movement patterns. I feel that GKs need to work on their agility and movement, even at a young age, as the better the movement the more chance of improving skill acquisition, cognitive learning and physical development/conditioning. If you can get the GK to move into position with his/her feet and head in the correct position, then his/her hands have got to be there! It is common knowledge that youngsters are encouraged to work on the ABCs (Agility, Balance, Co-ordination). Well, I see the programme as Balance (dynamic), Co-ordination, then Agility, as without the other two, Agility becomes less effective. We shouldn’t be afraid to work outside the curriculum and take part in other sports that are related and can benefit goalkeepers, such as basketball, badminton, gymnastics to name a few.

It is therefore essential to identify the GK’s movements within a match and apply them within your sessions. I have seen many GK sessions starting off with a 180° turn before facing the ball, but I cannot recall ever seeing a GK having to perform this movement within a match. I often see a GK turn 90° into the ball in games. For every session you put on, whether it is for professionals or a development group, there must be a reason for the session - never just to

fill up time! I always ask myself: what do I want to develop or work on? Why do I? What are the benefits for the GKs?

Like most GK coaches, I always get approached for ideas, drills and sessions. I always encourage people to study the GK within the game, try to identify performance and the requirements needed. I then challenge them to come up with their own session to help development or performance.

My belief is 'Give a coach a session and he will coach for just a day; challenge the coach to be innovative and he can coach for a lifetime'.

As much as talent is natural and skill takes hours to learn/develop, I believe that technique with no movement is just a drill. When technique and movement are combined, it allows the individual to be better prepared and equipped to cope with any random match-like situation. If you look at the GK decision-making process, you should see why sessions must be as true to the game as possible:

1. Where is the ball coming from?
2. Is it a shot/cross/through ball?
3. Is my position correct and in relation to the ball?
4. What are the trajectory and pace of the ball?
5. Do I need to SET/Do I need to step into the save/Am I coming for the cross?
6. What technique to use?
7. Can I hold the ball?
8. Shall I parry or deflect?
9. Can I set the tempo?
10. Can I counter-attack?
11. Where to, who to?

The first four parts of the decision-making take place in tenths of a second and can also be called **The Perceiving Phase**. This is where the GK attempts to establish what is happening and then decides what information is valid. With experience, GKs are able to sort out key information quickly and separate it from other stimuli.

The next two parts (5 & 6) of the decision-making process decide the most appropriate action to take. This is also known as **The Deciding Phase** and, again, the more experienced the goalkeeper, the quicker and more effective are the decisions taken.

The following parts of the process can be described as **The Acting Phase**. It is here where the GK carries out the desired task, whether it's a save, a cross taken or clearing a through ball, he/she still has to keep the game flowing or slow it down if the team is under pressure.

When planning training sessions, it is important that all three sections - The Perceiving Phase, The Deciding Phase and The Acting Phase - are understood. Although the Acting Phase is vital for the end product of making great saves, the two preceding phases set up the final stage, are co-dependent and take place in a rapid sequential manner.

So, when dealing with young goalkeepers, we must put them in realistic match situations to help them learn and gain experience of the cues of the game, awareness of the game, starting positions, supporting distance and dealing with decision-making within the game.

While gaining experience, mistakes will be made and it is vital that we GK coaches understand the process so as to offer support to young developing GKs. Remember - up to 90% of a mistake could have been the correct thing to do! e.g. The GK took up a good starting position, the ball was crossed in and the GK made the decision to come for the ball. Unfortunately, he elected to catch rather than punch and was unsuccessful in collecting the cross. In theory, the decision to come could have been correct, with the angle and timing of approach good (90%), but the choice of technique was wrong (10%).

So we need to understand how to support our young developing goalkeepers if they are going to have a chance of reaching their full potential.

'Inches to Performance'

'Every day you must strive to be the best you can, work for a reason never for the sake of it, and then you can perform at a high consistent level on autopilot, week in, week out'. That is my own belief. But, more importantly, how do you work towards peak performance? As a GK coach I like to study and learn every day from all sessions, whether it is a team session held by the manager or my own sessions, learning something new about a goalkeeper within the session. It is so important that you don't allow GKs to become stale and sessions predictable. If peak performance is to be achieved, the GK must be emotionally connected and understand the reasons why you are asking him to train in a certain way or on a certain technique. He must be involved in his training programme.

When working as a First Team GK coach, I would set a series of questions about the opposition for the scouts to report back to me on. Having received the information, I would then go about planning my weekly Goalkeeping Management Programme, working towards the peak performance for the match day.

Below I have given a very brief outline of three components of goalkeeping that are within my Goalkeeping Management Programme

Crosses

Crosses are a vital part of the performance programme, as if a goalkeeper's timing and success at crossing are good, he will be full of confidence which affects all of his game. I make sure that I start unopposed, then opposed, before working with the back four and in SSGs. The emphasis is on realism and therefore the programme must cover movement of the ball, movement of players and challenges from players. If the scouts report that our next opponents mainly delivered crosses from the left, I would then double up the reps from that side. All techniques of crosses are to be covered.

Shot stopping

One of my pet hates is seeing goalkeepers being used as cannon fodder within shooting sessions. I like to get a dozen players and put on shooting sessions that benefit the GK whilst being realistic to the game. This gives me an opportunity to manage the inches of performance. I like to cover six different elements of shot stopping and, of course, take into account the answers from the scouts' report to add into the shot stopping programme.

Distribution

Distribution is a massive part of today's game and therefore must not be neglected. Although it is possible to include distribution in daily sessions, I like to put on a session which is just for distribution when the GK's legs are not heavy and his focus is fresh. All different types of technique are work on and put into match situations to build relationships and understanding with team mates.

Without giving away my personal programme, there of course are many different areas to work on towards peak performance. These include:

Fitness, Strength, Speed, Psychological, New, Back Pass, Team Strategy, Vision Training, Own Space, Relaxation and Research.

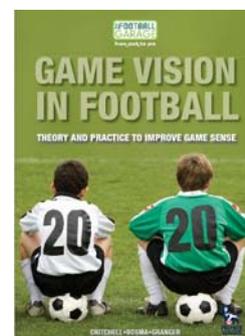
The time with the GK coach must be to prepare for peak performance or development rather than a quick warm-up for the manager's session. So when I sit in the dug out or in the stand, level with the 18 yard box, I know I have prepared for every eventuality that may happen within a match during the week. As all GK coaches would agree, you are never surprised to see your GK make a great save or take a good cross, as you have seen it all building up from the inches into the performance throughout the week.

As an apprentice/professional at Southampton I worked daily with great characters of the game: these included Peter Shilton, John Burridge and Tim Flowers. They were not only top quality goalkeepers but fantastic people too, who took ownership of their training and standards. This taught me from a young age that it is all about standards so, when I work with professional goalkeepers, the benchmark I have is a combination of all three of those top professionals. With this in mind, I never settle for second best, especially in training, and treat every day as an opportunity to be better than yesterday.

References: Game Vision in Football

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Keith is also delivering his 'Inches to Performance' Motivation and Peak Performance programme to companies and businesses

If you require any further information regarding the above please contact Keith directly emailing keith@thefootballgarage.com

Keith Granger on First team Duty







Working a younger GK

