

# INTRODUCTION

*"A good goalkeeper makes the first save, a great goalkeeper makes the second and sometimes the third save and a top-class goalkeeper doesn't have to make the save at all."* (See page 26 "Positioning")

I am often asked by parents of junior goalkeepers to provide specialised goalkeeper training for their sons or daughters.

To be given the responsibility to help mould a child's career at such an early age and to see all the hours of work come to fruition is why we keep coaching. Not many if any junior coaches get paid to coach, so why do we continue doing it?

Sitting back on game day and watching your young charge continually repelling the opposition under what seems like overwhelming odds and occasionally pulling off a spectacular save brings such joy and sense of achievement to a coach, knowing that your tuition no matter how insignificant has helped put the young goalkeeper on the path of mastering the art (and trust me goalkeeping is an art) is the sole reason we continue coaching.

However goalkeeping is not for everyone: most goalkeepers end up as net custodians by default. Usually in modified rule games i.e. under 7's to under 10's all players take turns in goals, this isn't done without reason or foresight. We rotate all players as goalkeepers to hopefully identify any player possessing the natural flair, ability and skills needed for this most important and difficult position.

## **So what are these intangibles I look for?**

At such a young age the last thing I am looking for is the technical ability, skills can always be taught, what I look for are the natural abilities that can't be taught, abilities such as: Agility, Courage, Anticipation, Confidence, Reflexes, Intuition and Temperament.

A simple way to differentiate between a skill and a natural ability is to try to schedule a training session, if you can it is a taught skill; otherwise it must be a natural ability.

You can't say to your goalkeeper "*Tonight we are going to work on your courage and anticipation*", either they have those qualities, (in which case you can work on the accompanying skills) or they don't. Goalkeepers that don't possess the fundamental qualities should not be pushed further into this position as they will become a danger to themselves and to their team as the tempo and intensity of the game increases as they progress through the age divisions.

One of the hardest things to tell a young goalkeeper (and their parents) is that "*In My opinion your child doesn't have the necessary natural ability to progress further as a goalkeeper*", I would stress that this is only "***in my opinion***". This may seem as quite an insensitive course of action to take but in the long term what I am looking at is safety, not only the safety of the net but also more importantly the physical safety of the goalkeeper.

A timid goalkeeper without the necessary natural ability is more likely to get badly injured than a courageous, self confident one. Not to mention the mental scarring that occurs through continually letting in 'soft goals'.

I have included a Goalkeeper Assessment chart in Appendix 1. I have been using this chart for quite a few years, it is a ready reference to help assess the goalkeeper's natural ability as well as their skills. The assessment should be done by the coaching panel, and should include a qualified goalkeeper coach or at least a goalkeeper with senior experience. Any prospective goalkeeper should come out with a score higher than 60%, if your goalkeeper scores lower than this please monitor them carefully, they would need to improve their score within half a season if they are to progress any further.

The most often asked question by the goalkeepers themselves would have to be, "*How can I become a better goalkeeper?*" THIS IS WHAT I WANT TO HEAR. If your goalkeeper is not continually asking this question, I as a coach would start questioning how seriously does this child want to be a goalkeeper?

There is no magic formula, once you have the basic natural ability the rest comes with a lot of hard work.

The following is how I would answer that goalkeeper.

## **PRACTICE, PRACTIC, PRACTICE the basics.**

Continual repetitive catching, footwork and distribution exercises may seem boring and meaningless to a young goalkeeper who is thinking “I already knows this, when do we move on to the more exciting stuff like diving.” What I am trying to do by continual repetition is to get the goalkeeper into automatic mode during a game, a goalkeeper should always react to a situation as it develops rather than act straight away or worse still not act at all, if a goalkeeper has to think about what he is about to do it is usually too late by the time he has done it.

A goalkeeper shouldn't ponder, “How am I going to attack this ball” or “When should I come out to shut down a breakaway” during the course of the game, the reaction and timing of the move should be instinctive

## **LOOK, LISTEN AND LEARN**

A young goalkeeper should always look and listen to what their coach is trying to teach them, most good coaches will demonstrate the techniques he wants the goalkeeper to practice, the best thing a goalkeeper can do is soak up as much information a possible.

Some of the best advice you can give your young goalkeeper is to *“Watch high quality football games on TV, go out and watch your senior team in action, but unlike your team mates don't sit there and just look at the strikers, keep an eye on what the goalkeeper is doing, how he communicates with his defence, even when the ball is up the other end of the park”.*

## **TAKE IT PERSONALLY**

This was told to me at a very early age. *“Every time an opponent is about to shoot, pass the ball or just run into your penalty area is a personal attack on your space, the space that you as a goalkeeper must dominate, you should treat it as a personal confrontation”.*

A goalkeeper's mentality under such attack should be *"Do your best, but I **WILL** save this shot or I **WILL** take the ball off you"*; it becomes a one on one confrontation. One of the goalkeeper's main priorities as early as possible in the game is to intimidate the opposition before they can intimidate you.

By intimidation I do not mean going out and deliberately trying to hurt them but intimidation by physical presence, confidence, courage, strength and verbal communication.

### **DONT ACCEPT SECOND BEST**

Make sure your goalkeeper is never satisfied with second best; they should be their own worst critics. At the end of the day every goal whether it is the goalkeepers fault or not should be treated as if it were, *"What could I have done to stop that goal"*, never just say *"it was the defences fault, or the sun was in my eyes"*. Your goalkeeper should try and anticipate any defensive mistake and act before or just as that mistake has occurred.

The following is a quote from the Great Russian Goalkeeper Lev Yashin Recognised as probably the best ever goalkeeper and world goalkeeper of the 20th century (see page 96).

Yashin is credited with 326 1st grade games, 78 international games including 13 world cup final appearances, 270 career clean sheets and 150 saved penalties.

*"What kind of a goalkeeper is the one who is not tormented by the goal he has allowed? He must be tormented! And if he is calm, that means the end. No matter what he had in the past, he has no future."* - Lev Yashin.

If such a great player as Yashin continually took some portion of blame for every goal that was scored against him there must be some merit in that line of thinking!

## **STUDY SOME OF THE GREAT GOALKEEPERS**

We all have child hood idols or heroes, players we admire and try to model ourselves on. But why should you as a young goalkeeper idolise the strikers and midfielders? They are the enemy! Pick a goalkeeper you may see regularly on TV, record as many of his games as possible, look at everything he does, analyse his every move, not only look at the saves but also look at the goals, can you spot the mistake if any? If you do spot a mistake think how he could have improved his chances of saving the goal!

As I was growing up and learning the Art of Goalkeeping I had my share of goalkeeper idols: these ranged from the senior club goalkeeper to some of the best goalkeepers in the world. Some goalkeepers I admired over my early playing years were:

- Karl Jaeger
- Lev Yashin
- Gordon Banks
- Dino Zoff
- Peter Schmeichel

A summary of their career and some images can be found in Appendix 2 commencing on page 94.

I have also included Peter Schmeichel in this list, not so much as an influence on my game, as I had finished playing before he reached his peak, but as a goalkeeper that I admired from the very first time I saw him play.

## **BYLINE**

One of my greatest pleasures was in 1978, I found myself in Argentina for the 1978 World Cup Finals, luckily for me Italy defeated Argentina 1-0 in the preliminary round so Italy, not Argentina progressed as pool leaders into the next round, earning the right to play the next four games in Buenos Aires.

By relegating the host country to play in the rural city of Rosario, the massive River Plate Stadium in the Buenos Aires was never completely sold out, I managed to get tickets to the final four games Italy played, against; The Netherlands (1-2), Austria (1-0), West Germany (1-2), and Brazil (1-2).

There I was, watching one of my idols, the Great Italian Goalkeeper DINO ZOFF live, Italy won only one of those four games, but it mattered little to me. I had seen my idol live, back then I thought, *“Life doesn’t get any better than this.”*

In 1982 Dino Zoff at 40 years of age captained Italy in the World Cup Finals in Spain. Revenge was sweet as he guided Italy to World Cup Champions with an awesome display of Goalkeeping.

Italy won their last 4 games against reigning World Champions, (Argentina 2-1), South American Champions, (Brazil 3-2), (Poland 2-1) and European Champions (West Germany 3-1 in the final.)