



International Goalkeepers Academy

Technical Tip

Courage Under Fire

The text of this book contains no explanation of the technical aspects of the goalkeeping position, rather it covers the very important aspects of dealing with the psychological areas that keepers of all ages and playing at all levels must contend with.

The contents has been derived not only from my own playing experience but dealing with the problems faced by young developing keepers that I have coached in my academy and also keepers playing at National League level competing at the Olympic Games and representing Australia in World Cup Elimination matches.

The problems faced each day by keepers throughout their career is as real at any level be it the highest professional level or in a local park competition. My aim in writing this book is to explain the goalkeeping position in its entirety excluding the technical elements. It is important that keepers understand that we have many common problems that we share, and that you are not alone, and that if you do understand the position you play that we can eliminate many of the frustration's and self doubts you may feel.

We have a common bond, the goalmouth is the same size for us all and it is our home, it is where we live on the field.

We guard an area twenty-four feet wide and eight feet high, when we are playing well and things are going our way we feel our shoulders are rubbing against the uprights and we are unbeatable. On these days we have the ability to soar to great heights and tip a rocketing shot over the bar or deflect a fierce drive that appears to be goalbound bringing the crowd to its feet in appreciation of our brilliant athletic ability and incredible sense of timing. On an off day when the keeper god is not watching over us we often stand forlorn in a very big and lonely area that seems to swallow us and envelopes us in our own abject misery.

Keepers of all ages and playing from the minor divisions to the top leagues know that the goalkeeping position can fluctuate between the most satisfying and the most soul destroying sporting job that we can undertake.

Glorified one minute and victimised the next, often by people who often have no idea of the pressures a keeper faces. The toll on our body alone in training we undertake, the day to day pain of playing with niggling injuries as we traumatise our body by the hundreds of impacts as we dive to save shots and put our bodies on the line colliding with strikers, competing for crosses and corners or diving courageously at the feet of a runaway striker in a one on one situation.

Surely of all the positions available in a sporting team the goalkeeping position is the most underestimated in many ways but also one of the most important.

The goalkeeping position is unique, we play by our own set of rules, in our own area, and we wear different clothing and train by different methods than our teammates. We must have all the field skills and tactical knowledge of a field player and excel in our own skills while directing play from the goalmouth.

We are then judged by different criteria than the field players and this judgement is often passed by people who do not understand the position or the psychological strength coupled with all the other aspects that are required to make a good goalkeeper.

The text of this book is also aimed at giving coaches and parents a realistic insight into the trials and tribulations that keepers face, in trials, training and game situations.

Hopefully the information provided will enable parents and coaches to support keepers through many of the pressure situations they face throughout their careers.

Even the so-called experts in the print and electronic media as well as our coaches often get it all very wrong when they analyse and give a critique of the goalkeeper's performance.

The bottom line is if you haven't played the goalkeeping position and suffered all the highs and lows that playing the position carries you will never really understand all of the pressures that are faced by keepers playing at all levels week in and week out throughout the season.

You do not have to be playing internationals at world cup level to feel the pressure of being the last man in the defensive line up, carrying the responsibility of the team on your shoulders throughout each game. Goalkeepers playing in amateur competitions at all ages and standards feel the same pressures as their more illustrious counterparts playing at the top as they are playing at the best standard for their ability and want to be as competitive.

Having goals scored against you at any level is always taken as a personal insult and rightly so, a goalkeeper's pride dictates that they should keep a clean sheet every week but of course this is not possible.

Goals scored against us are an unfortunate part of our playing life as even the top goalkeepers in the world can only cover about eighty percent of their goal at any one time.

We as goalkeepers must accept that goals against us are inevitable! That does not mean that we have to like that fact, and of course we should do everything we can to minimise the goals against us and strive to improve our allround ability in every aspect of the game to keep our goals against percentage as low as possible.

While it is a fact that we are going to concede goals against us many keepers undermine their own confidence and self-destruct as they continually worry about every goal and any mistake they make.

Get it right from the start, you are not infallible, and yes you will make mistakes, yes you will from time to time cost your team goals, and no you will never get used to the fact that this will happen, but you are human. The outstanding goalkeepers minimize their mistakes and play consistently week in and week out.

It is also a fact that there are some things in life we cannot change, some things over which we have no control, and we have to come to terms with dealing with these things. We cannot for instance change the weather! We cannot change the referee who has been appointed to officiate at our grand final and there are plenty of other examples that I could quote. It is important that we do not waste time and stress over things of which we have no control, learn to deal with uncontrollable influences and work harder at dealing with the aspects that affect us that we do have some control over.

Goalkeepers form an unusual fraternity or brotherhood as we are the only ones who really understand the pressures, trials and tribulations in our day to day training and playing matches.

The bond we have with other keepers is forged by sharing our jubilation and disappointments when we are playing or training.

We can identify with a goalkeeper at any level who lets in an absolute howler for no apparent reason, or on the other hand one who had pulled off an incredible match winning save.

The misery and loneliness felt by the keeper in the first example and the wonderful feeling of the second are

familiar to all of us who ply our trade between the sticks.

For young goalkeepers new to the position, the disappointments may far outweigh the elation we feel when things are going well and you are making the big saves at critical times throughout the matches, the saves that make playing the position so worthwhile.

The fact that so many young goalkeepers stick to the position while subjected to so much stress at a young age is testament to the fact that we are a different and rare breed.

To me as a player and a coach I fell privileged to be a very small part of a group of very unique players who despite all the pressure we face are still determined to complete our job to the best of our ability at all times despite the varied situations we face.

I am lucky as I come into contact with many young keepers and because of my experience as a player and coach I can often help young keepers through this difficult development stage. At this time they are learning their trade as a keeper while trying to come to terms with all the pressures they must face not an easy task especially for a very young keeper.

As a coach of both young developing keepers and coaching keepers at the elite senior level I can explain the position and help them to adjust to the experiences that they inevitably will face.

We have all seen the mistakes made by keepers in televised matches which leave the keeper embarrassed the coach angry and the fans of the opposition team laughing at the keeper's misfortune! Whole tapes have been collected and released for sale to the public to add to the keeper's misery of these poor unfortunate keepers who have made a vital mistake while the world was watching and the suffering and indignity of it is recorded to be repeated over and over again.

The pain we feel from the bumps, bruises and other injuries pale into comparison to the mental anguish we all feel at some time in our career when things don't go right for you in matches.

Despite all the unfair criticism we may have leveled against us and the unfair expectations we are expected to meet we persist and push on towards achieving our goals.

An important part of our self-development as goalkeepers must be that we develop the mental strength to deal with all the stressful situations that we face. To do this we must be able to quickly assess situations whether they be at training, in our preparation or in a match situation and deal with the situation in the most appropriate way.

For instance an injury in training should be treated on the spot, analyzed by the physio, then treated by a doctor if necessary and the medication prescribed and recovery directions strictly adhered to. The initial problem may still be there but we have taken every step to minimise any time off eliminate any pain, and we know precisely what our options are at the time.

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