

The Importance of Your Goalkeeper

Players in outfield positions share similar characteristics and core skills to others in the team however the goalkeeper on the other hand requires a completely unique skill set and it is essential that you, as the coach, provide specific training for this. This will allow your goalkeeper to develop and be effective in each game.

As ladies gaelic football grows and systems, tactics and coaching constantly change it is important that you include the role of the goalkeeper in each of these as it is one of the most specialist positions on the pitch.

Some clubs have the luxury of having goalkeeping coaches but this is rarely the case and therefore training for your goalkeeper must become part of the training you have for your full team. Gone are the days when your goalkeeper only gains experience during your shooting drills with footballs being kicked at them every few seconds, and from close range, and therefore decreasing confidence levels rather than building self-esteem in the player involved. This player must feel their importance and this should be communicated throughout your sessions. The goalkeeper's involvement should be more than just the game at the end. Stressing the speciality of the position will also encourage more young players to want to try out this role.

Many studies stress that practice must be deliberate, meaningful and focused. A kick passing drill that has a large number of repetitions, variance and challenges is a deliberate activity aimed at improving this skill. The coach is allowing dedicated time for skill repetition to improve competency levels. Now think about the goalkeeper, how many times do coaches repeat their specific drills? Is it the same number of times? The answer simply is 'no' and yet we expect our goalkeepers to increase their competency levels at the same rate. With this in mind can you now understand why your goalkeeper does not catch every high ball or dive low to the corner to save a shot?

The importance of thorough preparation cannot be overstated. Mastery of goalkeeping skills and understanding the game will be achieved through dedicated practice and providing a training environment that prepares these players for the physical and psychological challenges of competitive games. The coach must allow sufficient time for purposeful repetition and also game-like scenarios. This can be difficult for you as a coach particularly if you train the team on your own. The most important thing you can do is gain an understanding of the core skills required and utilise this to create situations in your sessions to develop these. By altering your games you can manufacture an increased number of situations to involve your goalkeeper. An example of this is reducing the pitch length to ensure your goalkeeper is repeatedly involved. It is possible to provide this player with the necessary attention without separate training sessions.

Remember that the goalkeeper's primary function is to keep the ball out of the net. To meet the challenge of this the player needs to demonstrate:

1. Knowledge and mastery of the basic skills
 - a. Handling
 - b. Footwork

- c. Reactions
 - d. Agility
 - e. Positioning
 - f. Distribution
2. Mental sharpness as this is a demanding position and they may be out of play for time periods
 3. Excellent communications skills

As a coach you need to develop these core skills as goalkeepers need goalkeeping fitness and prowess the same as your outfield players require. Remember your goalkeeper will bring their talent, your job as a coach is to nourish this!

The Ladies Gaelic Football Association organise a highly recommended 'Coach The Keeper' Workshop that will enable you to develop your skills as a coach and in turn utilise these to improve your goalkeeper. The feedback on the workshop is extremely positive and aims to improve the competencies of all participants. This workshop can be booked by your club or county to run in your area. Further information is available on our website www.ladiesgaelic.ie.

Remember the goalkeeper is one of the most important positions on the pitch so treat them that way. Give your player the time, dedication and support that they require to become the best they can be.