

# **ATTACK, ATTACK, ATTACK!!**

Steven Pressfield's 2004 novel, *The Virtue of War*, follows the life of Alexander the Great and his story is told through the eyes of a Hellenic-Persian scribe who was serving under him during his campaigns into India. In the novel there is a quote from Alexander himself which states:

*“Always attack. Even in defence, attack. The attacking arm possesses the initiative and thus commands the action. To attack makes men brave; to defend makes them timorous.”*

Alexander was of course referring to war but so much of sport mirrors conflict and struggle. The notion of being proactive can be applied to every sport imaginable as gaining the upper hand and being on the front foot are always seen as a more favourable position to be in.

During 2017 and much of 2018, my father had been working on a new descriptive concept about the evolution of Gaelic football. The game had long since developed into a possession-based game whereby retaining the ball and minimising the risk of turnovers and maximising attacking opportunities has become paramount to success.

We would regularly discuss his new concept. Daddy theorised there was no longer any defending in Gaelic football. Instead, teams were always attacking both when in possession and when not in possession of the football. The concept he had created came in two parts:

## **1) IN POSSESSION OUT OF POSITION, ATTACKING THE GOAL**

When a team is in possession of the ball, they are constantly moving out of position to create space, receive the ball and attack the opposition goal looking for a score.

## **2) OUT OF POSSESSION INTO POSITION, ATTACKING THE BALL**

When a team is not in possession of the ball, instead of defending their own goal, they move into a counter attacking position as they attack the ball attempting to turn the ball over back into their possession.

For the past few months, I have been revisiting this concept and focusing on the role the goalkeeper plays within this new modernised concept of Gaelic football. Goalkeepers are now seen as one of the most, if not the most important position on the field as they are year on year becoming more specialised in the duties they are being expected to perform.

One of the main roles that they will perform in this concept will involve being the eyes, ears and part of the decision-making process for all players in front of them. The goalkeeper is gifted in that the position that they play affords them a favourable vantage point that allows to see and foresee patterns of play evolve in front of them.

With this advantage and by using effective communication skills they can essentially increase the rate at which their team can get into position once they lose possession of the ball. It is also possible for the 'keeper to anticipate a turnover and have the counter attacking structure in place before their team actually loses possession of the ball.

Once the counter attacking structure is in place and by using effective communication, the goalkeeper becomes the command centre for the players when they are attacking the ball trying to force a turnover. It is essential for the team to have an agreed set of terminology or language which allows them to communicate using the 3C's: Clear; Concise & Constant. Like a commander in Alexander's Great army, the goalkeeper must project their vocal commands to their soldiers so they can put them into action.

If the goalkeeper's team loses the ball and find themselves out of the counter attacking structure, the goalkeeper can become a 'Sweeper Keeper' positioning themselves in front of the forward line until such times as the counter attacking structure is in place or it becomes more risky to stay there due to the opposition's field position. By taking up this sweeper role in front of the forward line it delays the speed at which the opposition can transition forward when attacking.

As Gaelic football has evolved into a possession based, tactical attacking game teams are now more methodical and structured in their play. Now players have various roles, targets and expectations to meet in every game. Although outfield players may need to know their own specific roles/expectations, the goalkeeper must know every position's role and expectations, especially those of the defenders. This is because of the vantage point they have from their position, the more in depth the 'keeper knows every role and every structure, the better equipped they are to command teammates into their positions. This is very much like how a toboggan driver must know every inch of the track they are racing on. The driver must know every turn, every gradient as well as what parts of the track are best for gaining/losing speed.

When the goalkeeper's team is in possession of the football, they are moving out of their counter attacking position with the purpose of attacking the goal looking for scores. Depending of the position of both the ball and the goalkeeper, they can become an outlet ball for their teammates if caught possession. As discussed in a previous article, I predict that we will eventually see more and more goalkeepers regularly venturing from the safety of their crease to join their team's attack and ultimately seeing more and more goalkeepers scoring from play, goals included.

In terms of restarts, the goalkeeper is the first line of attack when in possession and then the last line of attack whenever their team is out of possession. With restarts of a consistent good quality the goalkeeper can regularly be the springboard for many attacks and with any possession-based game the more attacks a team has the more scoring opportunities will increase also. This is why restarts in Gaelic football have been and are becoming even more important to the success of teams and their importance is only set to increase exponentially going forward.

With all of the above traits required for this new concept of Gaelic football, the goalkeeper will need an innate confidence in their ability. Becoming a fearless leader who leads by performance will become more and more important as this kind of confidence is highly contagious and will quickly spread to those players positioned around you. As the actions of the goalkeeper are extremely amplified during games, it is clear to see the confidence of a team grow in conjunction with the growing confidence of the goalkeeper. Alexander was 'Great' because he didn't defend, so in that sense 'ATTACK, ATTACK, ATTACK!!'