

## YOUR NUMBER TWO IS YOUR NUMBER ONE

On Monday 27<sup>th</sup> July 2015, Manchester United completed the deal for Argentinian goalkeeper Sergio Romero. The then twenty-eight-year-old custodian was signed by former United boss, Louis Van Gaal, who had also managed Romero at Dutch club AZ Alkmaar. In fact, it was Van Gaal that took a chance on him as an unproven twenty-year-old to make him his first-choice keeper for Alkmaar Culminating in winning the Eredivisie in 2009.

From 2015 Romero has consistently battled regular first choice United goalkeeper, David DeGea for the number one spot. A task that has been traditionally thankless in terms of regular starts for the Argentine. But it has been his professionalism and his consistency that has earned him plenty of first team starts. Out of fifty-one appearances he has kept thirty-two clean sheets, a modest record for a regular number two.

Since his arrival at Old Trafford, Romero's attitude and understanding of his role at the club has been nothing short of exemplary as he has conducted himself in the most virtuous of manners. He trains hard to improve his ability, keeps himself primed for whenever his chance arises and when it does, he performs to the best of his ability. This being no more evident than when he stepped in for the injured DeGea right before kick-off in a Europa League match against Midtjylland making a string of stunning saves ensuring that United got the win.

In a recent interview before Manchester United's Carabao Cup game versus Colchester United, Romero explained:

*"When I received the call from Van Gaal in 2015, for me it was (finally) the possibility to come to United and defend these colours. I accepted being in this circumstance (2<sup>nd</sup> choice) to fulfil my dream (coming to United). I have not come to a club but to a family."*

In this statement you can see he has adapted his mindset and in his own words 'accepted' he will not be the regular first-choice 'keeper at United but that is irrelevant to him as he has achieved a major goal he has had since childhood.

In the same interview he was asked how easy it is, for him to be on the bench and then to come in for the odd game. His answer was honest and gave us a fantastic insight into the mindset of the man:

*"It is not easy... but I work hard every day for this, for my possibility (chance). When I have my chance in the squad, I am ready for this moment. For the past four years it has been difficult as I've played for the National squad, but I am ready. I have worked every day for this chance and when I have my chance, I try to do my best."*

For any goalkeeper it is vital for them to fully understand what their exact role is going to be for the team that they are playing for. Whether it be to be as the first/second choice or to compete head-to-head for the starting job, the management team must be honest and upfront with what the goalkeeper's role is to be as well as outlining what exactly is expected from the goalkeeper for the season.

Whenever you find yourself in the position of regular number two, it is very important that you first accept your circumstances just as Romero did. Not as it being a permanent fixture, but as the current situation you are in while also accepting that you have to work on certain areas of your game to become first choice. This can be done by self or peer appraisal and by also speaking with the management to find out what they would like you to improve on.

As a coach, your role is to regularly provide feedback for your goalkeepers in regard to their current status within the team. Do not be afraid to be honest in your feedback as over time this will provide a strong trustful bond especially when your 'keepers come to you looking for advice. This regular feedback can be through organised meetings, informal chats or even just during training sessions.

Having had the personal experience of being second choice goalkeeper for both club and county I always found it best to have a good team orientated attitude. Whatever was needed for the team to succeed is what is ultimately best, especially for team harmony. Of course, there are times when you will need to be selfish and ask or even demand your shot as first choice. Whenever that shot comes you must give everything you have into your preparation as well as your performance on the day of the game.

The goalkeeping group is like a specialised team within the team. It is important to have a good cohesive group that have a healthy level of competition pushing one another for the number one spot. It is this healthy competition that will provide the motivation for improvement for all your goalkeepers.

From a goalkeeper's perspective I always pushed my fellow goalkeeper and helped him to improve to be the best that they could be because in turn it meant that I had to also improve to keep up. Thus, by improving my competition I was ultimately improving myself. No matter who starts any game it is important for the goalkeepers to remember that although only one 'keeper can play, that one 'keeper is representing the group of goalkeepers within the team as it is the goalkeepers that aren't playing that got the first choice keeper to be exactly that.

With this in mind it now becomes more clear that to guarantee first choice goalkeeper is in the best possible shape they can be in, it is vital to focus your time on the second or even third choice goalkeepers to ensure they push the first choice goalkeeper every game/session both on and off the field. When a first-choice goalkeeper has no competition for their place or they know they are in no danger of being replaced, it breeds complacency and a lowering of standards which is very unhealthy for the team dynamic as a whole.