

## SWEET SIXTEENS

With the culmination of the Super Eights Series, we now have our All-Ireland Senior Football Championship Semi-Final pairings. In an exact repeat of the 2006 pairings Kerry play Tyrone and Dublin will play Mayo. No doubt 'Beefe' will be smiling down at the possibility of another 'Hill-gate' this weekend.

With qualification already secured both Dublin and Tyrone took the opportunity to utilise their team's depth. Both teams made changes at goalkeeper for the game and both men, Evan Comerford (Dublin) and Benny Gallen (Tyrone), performed very well considering the limited action they have had during the summer.

Gallen was Tyrone's best player taking his chance to show Mickey Harte his capabilities. His restarts were excellent having a sweet striking action and a level-headed approach when under pressure. He also showed his situational abilities collecting balls and making an brave one-on-one stop at the feet of Cormac Costello.

Comerford was also excellent with his fast restarts keeping Dublin's intensity high. He also showed his goalkeeping abilities especially midway through the second half when he made a great stop one-on-one to deny Tyrone a momentum stealing, game levelling goal.

In MacHale Park, Castlebar, the Mayo/Donegal game had a far greater importance than the Dublin/Tyrone game. Mayo also made a change a goalkeeper with Robbie Hennelly coming in for David Clarke (making light of my article last week). Hennelly had a very strong performance especially considering that the game was basically a knockout game. He was obviously chosen for his longer kicking range which he used to great effect in order for Mayo to benefit from their midfield advantage.

All three 'keepers have had limited action this summer but have come in and in one game have proven themselves to be worthy of any start they are afforded. This will have obviously pleased their management teams and given them a sense of security that good cover is there if ever it is needed. As a number sixteen sub-keeper that is exactly what any manager wants to see.

The best advice I can offer any goalkeeper who finds themselves as a regular second choice 'keeper is to play, train and act like you are the first choice 'keeper. For a goalkeeper body language and mannerisms are crucial. If you feel second rate and have that body language, then this will always show out on the field of play. This makes you look less confident, impairs your judgement and decision making as confidence dips. Remember to '*be Mr/Mrs Confident*' in everything that you do.

Push yourself to the best goalkeeper that you can be, accept the fact that only one 'keeper gets to start any game and that decision is made by the manager. Use different avenues to improve your ability using the acronym "C.A.N.I. –Constant And Never-ending Improvement" as your mantra. Whether it be video analysis, self or peer appraisal,

recordable goals or simply a re-think of your Goalkeeping Principles always strive to better your abilities every day.

Dealing with the psychological side of not being selected can be difficult for some players to understand. They may be performing well and may think that an upturn in their performances deserves an automatic reward but to this I would suggest changing their thinking. The role of the sub-keeper is to be as prepared or if not, better prepared than the first choice 'keeper no matter if it is for one minute or seventy minutes. The sub-keeper needs to have themselves in their best possible shape physically and especially mentally as they have the added mental strains of dealing with either having to come on during a game or start a game with limited game time.

Another vital necessity for all of the goalkeepers in any team to flourish is for them to form a strong cohesive bond with each other, eventually forming a team within a team so to speak. I typically call any goalkeeping unit I play/work with the 'G-Unit' as this gives a sense of comradeship akin to the commando units used in warfare. When this friendship grows and you build that trust between each other you can then concentrate on making your rival better and vice versa as by making them better it will ultimately make you and the team better.

By helping your rival improve their ability it ensures that you stay focused and committed to improving your own ability and as a consequence the entire team benefits from this as they will have two goalkeeper's that are at the height of the powers. Inevitably only one can start but it is important to remember that the 'keeper that is chosen to play is representing all the goalkeepers as it is the combined efforts in training from all the 'keepers that have put them there.

The most important habit I would advise any goalkeeper serious about their development to undertake is keeping a training diary where you can record everything about their goalkeeping. From training to matches, drills to injuries everything should be recorded for referring back to whenever required. It also gives a platform for any inner thoughts to be penned allowing the goalkeeper a vessel to express any negative thoughts they may be feeling. It also allows the 'keeper to record any goals and when they come to re-test these goals, they then have the previous recordings to use as a comparison ensuring that any progression and regression can be sensibly measured.

As players all we want from our goalkeeping careers is the strength to become the best goalkeepers that we can be. As well as that we ask to be afforded the chance to showcase that ability on the field of play. Alas, for many these opportunities can be few in number but when they do come it is our responsibility to be physically and mentally ready just like any '**Sweet Sixteen**' should.