

TRAIN TO PLAY

Goalkeeping is a very specialised position. A goalkeeper must have a good basic skill set just like every other position on the team, but they also need to develop specific goalkeeping traits, skills and movements to be able to play the position competently. Like any sports person that is truly serious about improving at what they have chosen to do, goalkeepers must become students of their craft in order to excel to the optimum. Whenever they do this it allows the 'keeper to have a better understanding and greater input into their own training needs.

Becoming adept within this specialised area and being actively involved, with the guidance of your coach, in creating a periodized training schedule gives a sense of purpose and direction for the goalkeeper to follow throughout the year. Combine this with regular self and peer appraisal and furthering one's goalkeeping ability becomes more of a habit as opposed to a hobby.

It is important for all 'keepers and their coaches to tailor specific training plans to their own specific needs. Not all goalkeepers will be trained in the same way. Yes, they may complete the same drill but its purpose and how it is to be completed will differ from 'keeper to 'keeper. It is the role of the coach to understand their goalkeepers and adjust the purpose and execution accordingly per goalkeeper.

For me, goalkeeping in Gaelic football has 6 main areas in terms of on-field training:

1. Activation
2. Reaction
3. Recover
4. Footwork
5. Situations
6. Restarts

Activation

Before any training has even begun a goalkeeper needs to focus their body on the exercises they are about to perform. This area is far more important than merely warming up the muscles of the body as simply moving about would complete this. What Activation includes that a regular warm up does not is attention to specific detail such as hand/eye co-ordination, diving technique, footwork, foot speed, ground contact, eye activation/reaction, peripheral vision, hand/wrist activation. Incorporating such drills like eye exercises, pendulum rolls, short ladders, visualisation and finger/hand/wrist exercises into your prehab routine allows these areas to be activated before continuing onto your physical activation whereby you activate your body's muscles for exertion.

React & Recover

Whenever I am training or coaching, I always combine both of these areas as they can be closely linked during games. How fast a goalkeeper can react to certain stimulus both mentally and physically goes hand in hand with being able to recover from making a save or being caught out of position. Training reactions with drills that force the goalkeeper to make decisions in split second speed sharpens reaction overtime. Adding in a second ball or balls of different colours and sizes all aid with bettering reactions. Having multiple reps in quick succession works the goalkeeper's recovery both back to the set position and also recovering from being out of position.

Footwork

Everything that a goalkeeper does begins with their feet. Good footwork is essential and should be worked on in every session whether it be with speed ladders/hurdles, rushing out to close attackers, working the techniques, set position, last step towards the ball or positional awareness training this one area vastly improves every other goalkeeping area as a bonus effect. Always ensure to train footwork in awkward positions or when caught out of position. It is just as important to know how to reposition oneself, when caught out of position, rather than to just try and get into the best position every time.

Situations

Shot stopping is a phrase that has been borrowed from our soccer counterparts to give definition to the action of a goalkeeper making a save. Realistically, there is virtually no shot stopping in Gaelic football for a goalkeeper. In soccer the goalkeeper can expect a shot purposely aimed at goal from anywhere inside 35 metres. This is not the case in Gaelic as the vast majority of shots on goal come from inside the 14m box (penalty area). It is because of this fact that it is better to say the goalkeeper is in a 'Situation,' one that requires decisive thought or an action to be taken and can be dealt with comfortably with some anticipatory decision making. Other situations that must be trained by a goalkeeper include closing attackers (1v1, 2v1, 1v2, 2v2 etc.), high balls, rebounds, penalties, being in possession, taking sideline passes all of which must be practiced at game intensity and under game type pressure.

Restarts

Probably the biggest area involved with Gaelic football goalkeeping at present but for me it is on a par each other area. Goalkeepers need to do more than just kick the ball out from restarts although having 25-30 restarts a game means a good portion of training needs to be assigned to this area. When training it is vital to constantly remind yourself of your kicking routine/style and FEEL your kicking. Once your body becomes akin to your kicking style it will become easy to feel whenever something has gone wrong. Working on your own to improve kicking technique can include various methods such as using targets to aim at (hula hoops, player dummies), coned areas on the field, visualising runners, repeating the previous kick or using slalom poles as gates to kick through. Every team should have a couple of restart routines for during games and these should be practiced at least once a week with as close to 15v15, as possible.

With the game constantly evolving into a high octane, faster paced sport with lessening decision-making time, it is vital for goalkeepers to keep up with this trend by ensuring that when they train it is well above game pace and intensity. This ensures the goalkeeper's readiness for the game as they have prepared well because they **'Train to Play.'**

