

LEVEL FOUR: PERFORM UNDER PRESSURE

Now into our fourth week of my Levelled Progression model, we have already covered learning/performing skills, performing them at speed and performing them under fatigue. Again, once the goalkeeper has mastered the skill under these conditions and is comfortable on both sides, they are now then ready to be introduced onto the next stage of progression, which is:

LEVEL 4: PERFORM THE SKILL VERY WELL, AT SPEED, UNDER FATIGUE AND UNDER PRESSURE [15-16yrs]

In the previous three stages we focused on improving the goalkeeper's ability through improving their Speed of Thought and their Speed of Play. Now in Level Four completing the skills under pressure will be introduced by performing the skills into game related situations and scenarios. Pressure in a sporting context is whenever the importance of performing well in a given scenario increases. It is also usually accompanied by a negative consequence or 'failure' if performance is under par. This means that there is a decrease in the number of mistakes deemed as acceptable.

To introduce 'pressure' into the goalkeeper's training sessions an adjustment in the 'keeper's training brain, specifically a reduction in the number of mistakes the goalkeeper will be allowed to make will create a more pressurised environment. To intensify this further a consequence or forfeit can be introduced for when errors are made.

With these measures in place, training starts to mirror the same pressures as faced in an actual game. It is then important to create training sessions that directly mimic game situations that the goalkeeper will regularly find themselves in. recreating scenarios like high balls, one on ones, two on ones, penalties, reaction saves etc. will all be vital to train the goalkeeper under game related pressures.

This means that the skills the goalkeeper is performing need to be performed well, at speed, under fatigue and under pressure. For this to occur the drills/exercises completed in training must incorporate attackers/defenders which can act as both distractions and threats on the ball. The skills need to be performed in real time and not broken down into micro-skills. Another option for the coach/goalkeeper is to include game management situations i.e. – game in the balance and the 'keeper's team is up by two points with this the last attack, a goal means the team loses. Play out the attack and the goalkeeper must keep the ball out of the goal to win and with an additional forfeit for the loser it increases the levels of pressure the goalkeeper experiences.

At this age group the goalkeeper will begin to take more responsibility in regard to training their skills, strength and conditioning, speedwork/footwork and recovery. By allowing the goalkeeper more control over their own personal training regimes it breeds character as well as producing a more responsible adult. It is important for the goalkeeper to plan out their own personal training plans for the days/weeks/months/year ahead giving them a solid periodised plan which provides a sense of direction in terms of their development.

The goalkeeper learns how to control the array of emotions that can compromise their performance. Surprisingly it's not always the emotions we deem as negative that have the most effect on our performance. An over stimulation of positive emotions will also have a negative effect on the goalkeeper's performance because emotions arouse the mind's eye causing concentration and focus to wander into daydreams or distraction.

With an increase in responsibility comes an increase in accountability as the goalkeeper will be expected to complete the tasks they have pledged to do and if they are not completed an appropriate explanation and plan of action will be required. The goalkeeper should be encouraged to keep a training diary and shown how to use it effectively so they can record their training activities, training/match day goals, personal/team goals, gym sessions, measurable goals as well as conduct regular performance reviews throughout the year to ensure they are meeting or resetting their goals. The goalkeeper can also record any team meetings etc. into their diary as well as recording any thoughts or discussions they may have throughout the year, providing them with an excellent point of reference to call back on if needed. Remember "INK IT, DON'T THINK IT."

Keeping a well maintain teaches the goalkeeper to be self-aware and also to self-evaluate on a regular basis. What this provides the goalkeeper with is a firm sense of reality because whether the goalkeeper's performance progresses or regresses, their training diary will help them highlight what exactly has caused their performance to get better or worse. Once they have pinpointed their target areas then they can formulate a training plan to either maintain or correct any good/bad performances.

It will be important for the coach to be vigilant in when observing their goalkeeper's and be on the constant look out for any flaws in skill technique or ways in which techniques can be perfected. Yes, it can be argued that this should be done continuously throughout the 'keeper's development but at this age group it is more important to correct imperfect technique because after this age group it can take longer and need more work to break any bad habits the goalkeeper may have. If imperfect techniques are allowed to continue it can have disastrous consequences on performance when its vital, they are performed effectively. The balance of success and failure depends upon how effective these critical movements are performed within these critical moments. Poorly performed critical movements in critical moments will always results in failure of performance.

Although describing pressure as an increase in the effective performance of a certain skill in a given situation, it is also important to remember that pressure does not actually exist. Pressure is something that is created by the goalkeeper within their mind, as they overthink or overhype the importance of a certain situation. Performing a certain skill on your own on a training field is the exact same as performing the same skill in the last minutes of an All-Ireland final. The components are the same, the only difference being the importance associated to it by the goalkeeper. But this is an article for another time. For now, though, the important thing is to train the goalkeeper under pressure so that they can learn how to deal with it effectively.

