

Lockdown Loaded



Last week the GAA released their 'COVID-19 Guidelines on Safe Return to Gaelic Games' which outlines how the association plans to allow us to resume our games. It has been proposed by the GAA top brass that club activity will return first which will then be followed by the inter-county championships. At present, only walking tracks around pitches have been reopened with all GAA pitches remaining closed until 29th June. Any training up until that date has been advised to be individual and at home.

From 29th June all pitches will be reopened but indoor facilities including changing rooms, gyms and meeting rooms will still remain closed. Training will be allowed to resume but in restricted groups of ten players and no more than two coaches. This training will also be non-contact and contact tracing measures will need to be in place.

Youth and Adult club games will return from 31st July and will run until mid-October. The inter-county scene will take place no sooner than 17th October and a full revised calendar is still to be agreed and will be published once the GAA proceeds to Phase Three. This gives players a full seven weeks of training, in some form, to prepare for their club championships.

For the goalkeeper, a well-prepared periodised training plan will be essential for them to return for their championship in optimal condition. Over the next seven weeks the goalkeeper will go through a type of mini season in preparation for their condensed season. There will be a period of conditioning (pre-season), a period of skill mastery (league) and a period of optimisation (championship) all so the goalkeeper can perform at their highest possible levels for their club championships. The following is a rough guide for goalkeepers to follow when they are designing their own periodised training plans.

In weeks 1 to 3 (pre-season phase) the goalkeeper should focus their energies into the various goalkeeping techniques they will use throughout the year. Technique acquisition and correction is vital for both performance as well as injury reduction as using the correct technique not only allows you to perform at your best but it also ensure that you do not injure yourself in the process.

In this initial period, it will also be vital that the goalkeeper works on their goalkeeping conditioning. What this means in terms of training for the goalkeeper is they will have specific drills that will physically tax their energy systems with high intensity movements working to a high level of repetitions. Working to a high intensity, high rep ratio depletes the body of oxygen stores, giving you that burning sensation in the muscles as well as decreasing the brains ability to function meaning it is required to work more efficiently with the reduced levels of oxygen. What this inevitably creates is an ability for your brain and muscles to function in those high intensity environments for prolonged periods of time.

In weeks 4 and 5 (league phase), the goalkeeper's focus will turn towards preparing themselves for competitive games. This period can be overlapped with week 3 and the drills completed can be used as conditioning drills as long as the high intensity/high rep rule is applied. The training the goalkeeper will use in this phase will become more game based and will be far more relative to the actual gameplay the 'keeper will encounter during competition.

Completing drills that focus on the various situations that the goalkeeper will find themselves in is important. Situations such as one v ones, two v ones, two v twos, high balls, through balls, rebounds, penalties, restarts, reaction saves and more will be the types of areas that the goalkeeper will need to cover. Although not as intense as the first three weeks, they will need to be completed at the very least at game speed. They can be slowed down whenever discussing or focusing on the technical side of the drills but whenever working the drill it is carried out at game speed with a medium number of reps.

The final phase, weeks 6 and 7 (championship phase), will continue on with the game-based training only it will be completed at maximal output with low reps (2-3reps per set). This will fine tune their skills for championship paced football, giving the goalkeeper optimal cognitive function as well as maximal explosive output.

Also, in this phase the training will focus heavily on the distribution side of the goalkeeper's game. Working on their kicking technique and correcting any imperfections will be key especially so close to a return to competition. It will be necessary for the goalkeeper to work out what their maximum kicking range is as well as finding out what their comfortable kicking range is before returning to competition. The difference between the two being that in the comfortable kicking range an accuracy of 90% or above is required.

Working on team restart routines and rehearsing them regularly with the team will also be an important factor that will require managerial input. These routines must take into consideration the individual kicking abilities of each goalkeeper and not require them to perform a kicking action that they cannot perform. Always remember that a good restart routine can take up to 3-6 weeks to implement fully.

By the time the goalkeeper executes their periodised training plan they should be performing as close to their optimal performance levels as they possibly can. Other features the goalkeeper will need to consider will be surrounding planning and preparation of sessions, reconnecting with their teammates especially the defensive unit, communication both on and off the field, defensive systems of play, offensive systems of play and of course brushing up on their knowledge of confirmed and potential opponents. These next seven weeks in many cases will define their season so ensure you approach them correctly. Ensure you are 'Lockdown Loaded.'