

Goalkeeper Mental Preparedness

The following is from a seminar given by Dan Gaspar at the NSCAA convention and is courtesy of Gary Rue and Jim Turpin.

Dan Gaspar runs Star Goalkeeper Academy, trained Portuguese National Team keepers, was the MetroStars keeper coach, coached last year in Japanese J - League, holds an NSCAA advanced national license, and is a technical consultant for US Soccer Project 2010.

Gaspar started the session by asking the coaches to cite reasons for keeper mental failure. Some of the responses were:

1. Poor concentration.
2. Fear
3. Anxiety
4. Poor preparation
5. Lack of team work
6. Poor decision making
7. Lack of specialized training
8. Poor communication
9. Leadership problems
10. Technical deficiency
11. Negative self talk
12. Not getting to position
13. Lack of ability to forgive

What the Pros Say

Dan then gave the responses from some of the top level goalkeepers on what sets them apart from the rest – their responses were:

1. Leave all outside life in the locker room
2. Try to stay in line with the ball throughout the game
3. Focus on the present, don't worry about past mistakes
4. Staying in the game through communication
5. The ability to rebound after a mistake;

Tony Meola, former Metro Stars and US National Team Keeper) told about how he responded after one of his worst mistakes (occurred in the Romania WC game, he gave up a near post goal, of course); but he went on to play the best game of his career.

Vision

The visual functions are very important to goalkeeping - what the goalkeeper sees and how he processes what he sees is important.

Visual acuity - Write letters on goal post 10 feet above eye level and ten feet below; jump up and down and stay focused on a certain letter

Ocular mobility – the ability to track; it's important to keep the eyes moving and the head stationary; train by watching a mini-ball move in a circle.

Speed of recognition – one goalkeeper in goal with two goalkeepers seated near the penalty spot; a server take shots from out side the area; the seated keepers save what they can and deflect what they can't save to create problems or the keeper in goal

Peripheral vision - focus on one object, yet be aware of details around them; two players passing, but looking each other in the eye, not ball watching. Players can also practice by walking down the hall or street, being aware of surrounding things, without looking at them.

The Gift Of Failure

1. It is the BIG fear, but it is really a gift;
2. Teach players how to fail
3. Taking risks (winners take more risks but fail more often);
4. Mistakes are the perfect stepping stones;
5. There is absolutely nothing you can do about mistakes except learn from them and then forget them;
6. Post competition analysis is very important
7. One must fail to succeed

Why do most players fail to develop mental toughness – they don't pay the mental dues; it all starts with training; you must train with emotion in order to cope with emotion during prime time. The Japanese cultural history makes it difficult for them to recover from failure. They tend to dwell on the failures. It is not uncommon to see a team win many matches in a row and start a long losing skid after one bad outing.

98% and 2% - 98% of a group will just show up day in and day out. The other 2% are emotionally involved in what they do, they are mentally plugged in everything they can to learn.

The body mind connection - Your mind thinks and your body follows. The birth of excellence is the understanding that you have the choice of how you feel. You don't HAVE to feel bad if you don't want to.

Inner Coach – Self-fulfilling Prophecy; it ensures all cylinders are working.
Be persistent and motivated

GIGO factor - garbage in, garbage out; you are what you tell yourself. You wouldn't let someone dump garbage in your room, so why put garbage in your brain?

Recognize negative thoughts and delete them - self-suggestions have an impact on the entire body.

GOYA factor - get off your backside; go for it; fantasize in as complete as possible detail; no matter what, act as if everything is okay. Be in control and stay positive; always stay cool and calm, in control of the emotions.

- Have A Game Plan
- Create A Big Enough **WHY**;-
- Have An Impassioned Focus;
- Paint Clear And Positive Pictures;
- Positive Pressure –
- Know Where You Want To Go;
- Link Pleasure With Achieving –
- Know What Pleasure You Will Get When You Achieve
- Link Pain With Not Achieving Which Is Just As Important;
- Develop A Hunger And Desire To Achieve

Coping - the power of questions

- Avoid endless loop questions because they put you in a negative rut.
- ..

The power of questioning, what makes you:

- happy;
- proud;
- grateful;
- excited;
- enjoy;
- feel commitment

Concentration - fully connected to what you are doing, you are aware of nothing else; it is a paradoxical skill; when anxiety increases, performance decreases; on recognition, you should quickly bring yourself back to the positive forces; whose side is your brain on? is it your friend?

Broom demo – two different volunteers tried to balance a broom; one was told to look at top; the other was told to look at bottom; one performed the other didn't; what you concentrate on is most important; it better be the right thing.

Ball stare – train concentration by staring at ball for 5 minutes; this is difficult to do without losing focus; raise the ante by adding the TV on in the background; then add moving people.

Here and now rule - this is where you mentally crumble; mental time and place violations;

- the NOW is all you have control over;
- you can't change the PAST;
- TOMORROW has no guarantees;
- what are you telling yourself in that 200 words per minute self talk;
- the most important self conversation you can have will link pleasure with achieving.

Uncontrollable - other players, field conditions, weather, referees, etc.

Controllable - you can control your eyes and ears; i.e. you can only control your individual performance.

- watch out for goals that depend on others.
- create an image before the game of the best you can do.
- have focal points. For instance, go out early before the game and sit in stands and visualize the game, mentally create waste baskets that you can crinkle up a mistake and quickly throw it in, after game go to waste basket and review to learn, then discard.

Stress and performance – the greater the stress, the more performance suffers.

Forgive yourself - switch away from mistake and replace it with positive talk,

Don't Hang Onto It - breathe slower, let it go, develop a ritual to handle this (for example, after a bad play pick a blade of grass, refocus, breathe slower acknowledge that you can't change the mistake, relax and throw away the grass). Do what works for you.

When Is World Cup ? – it is now! - Play and practice as if now is the most important moment in your life.

Avoid The Words Can't/Never/Impossible - at least add the word YET behind them.

Success - doing the best with what you have.

The Line – once you cross the line onto the pitch, you are a player, nothing else. When you cross the line going back, you become a student, son/daughter, etc.

The Power Of Choice - you choose how you feel about yourself - hit cancel button - takes training and time to get good at this

When Is The World Cup? Your World Cup Is Right NOW !