

A Basic Guide to Goalkeeper Psychology





CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION
2. WHY SHOULD WE FOCUSE MORE ON MENTALITY
3. WHAT DOES A GK WANT FROM A GK COACH
4. RETURNING TO TRAINING
5. WHY GOALKEEPERS MAKE MISTAKES
6. HOW DO PROFESSIONALS DEAL WITH MISTAKES
7. PLAYING FOOTBALL DURING PERSONAL DIFFICULTIES
8. HOW TO STOP BAD PERFORMANCES RUINING YOUR LIFE
9. DEALING WITH REGRETS IN FOOTBALL
10. ARE WE OVERANALYSING OUR GOALKEEPERS? IS IT HARMING THE POSITION? WHO WOULD WANT TO BE A GK?
11. GOOD OR BAD PARENT: WHICH ARE YOU?

*“A comment here, a remark there can change mentality....
for better or for worse.*

*A mindset can be that fragile... This applies to what we say to
ourselves just as much as what others say to us.*

*How we speak to ourselves has an enormous impact on how
we feel about ourselves”*

Dan Abrahams



I thought that was one of the best ways to start this ebook. If you only take one thing away after reading it all, then surely it will be that.

Do we really think about **WHAT** we say to ourselves / others? **HOW** we say it? **WHEN** we say it? **WHY** we say it?

What we say?

We've all heard about the power of words. If we say we "I can't do that, its too difficult' then surely this sends a signal to say we will never be able to do it. But if we add the word "yet" it means that we are committing to working towards it.

How we say it?

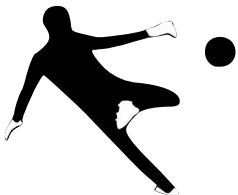
The words and tone we choose will dictate the effectiveness of the message. You could be given the secret to life, but if the person delivering the message is laughing and smirking, are you going to believe it?

WHEN we say it?

Is it the right time? Are they in a good place?

WHY we say it?

What are we hoping to achieve by saying this? Is it just for the sake of saying something?



2. Why Should We Focus More on Mentality?

“To be successful you need to face your hardest opponent... yourself”

Dillon Boucher



Dr Andy Hill of Blackburn Rovers made a brilliant point about sports psychology in football, “When we receive any attention in the press, it tends to be because it has been “revealed” that a player has been “seeing” us. When was the last time you read about a player “seeing” a strength and conditioning coach?”

The words the media use can create a stigma that will prevent players from reaching out in the future. That is a big problem. This is one of the reasons we wanted to get this ebook out, to hopefully help break the stigma by creating an environment where its “normal” to work on your mental state.

Your job as a goalkeeper is to deal with pressure. Those who handle it best will probably be the ones that perform better and go further. But we aren’t always able to do this alone. We need to seek help from professionals and there’s absolutely nothing wrong with that.

Goalkeeping is all about making the correct decision in the shortest amount of time possible. In order to do this keepers must stay in the present, focusing exclusively on “the next ball”. Doing this will prevent unhelpful distracting thoughts which can often result in “rash” or “hesitant” decisions. By consistently working on your mental game, your ability to stay in the present and therefore make better decisions will improve.

Why do we leave things to chance?

“You can’t control the weather, but you can control your mentality.”

I was guilty of this when I played, no matter what level. I always remember saying before matches “I hope I have a good game today! As long as I start well, I’ll be fine”. I was relying on a good start to the game, putting huge pressure on my first touch/pass. If that went well then I could relax and play, which is madness. Being terrified of making mistakes probably caused more errors because I rarely played with conviction. I’m not saying I didn’t ever have a good game because you still do. It wasn’t until I got a trial at a pro club when I was 26 that I started to read

more about sports psychology. I even went to see a hypnotherapist, but because the trial came around so soon, I didn't have enough time to condition my mentality. Like your physical state, your mental state needs training. You wouldn't run a marathon if you only started training the week before?

I realised that the things I was worrying about were probably things I didn't have much control of. I started to understand what I should be thinking of prior to games and in game. Not that I don't have bad games now but I definitely have more good games than bad... I think!

The Pressures of a Goalkeeper

“Your job as a goalkeeper is to deal with pressure”

This is something Lee has always said. And he's right. I'm sure you'll agree too. Some survive the game and some don't. Which is just seen as the norm. But we strongly believe that with the right guidance and support, no player should ever feel like they need to walk away, no matter what level they play.

In case you don't know who Lee is, Lee is my older brother and the goalkeeper from all of our videos. He played professionally for 16 years up in Scotland and recently just finished playing to concentrate on our business.

He was released by Sunderland at 13 for being too small, which made him almost fall out of the game completely at such a delicate age. He did continue to play but just locally until he went to college to play and absolutely loved it. This was the most he ever enjoyed football he said. Absolutely no pressure, just freedom to play. He then played semi pro at 16 and went on a few trials at Mansfield, West Brom, Sheffield Utd and finally Glasgow Rangers where he signed at 17. He played for the youths and reserves and went onto make his debut at 19. But that's where he felt it all started to go downhill.



A lot of people who worked with him commented on how he was one of the most naturally gifted goalkeepers they had seen. You could be the most technically sound goalkeeper a super fit athlete, but if you're unable to connect to the two on match day, what good is that? Talent isn't the most important attribute in being a footballer. Your mentality is.

This was definitely something that was missing from Lee's game. He always remembers one of his coaches saying to him when he was at Rangers, "The only thing that will stop you playing at the highest level is yourself" and Lee is the first to admit that he was right.

Lee had no idea about sports psychology then. It wasn't something that was encouraged. You just get thick skinned players and lads who were classed as being "soft". He just cared a lot. That can be the problem at times, caring too much.

All he knew was football. He was living in this bubble. No education. No backup plan. He was playing for his livelihood every week. This is something that fans don't realise. They see footballers and think they're on great money, what do they have to worry about?

Lee's a big advocate for making sure players don't neglect education. Or if you aren't the education type, get a trade. And also have other things away from football, learn a new skill. Learn an instrument. The clubs want everything from young players. They want players to be obsessed with

football. It is literally all or nothing for them. Surely this isn't healthy? How many kids do you know who are a shadow of themselves after being released. They'll lose all their confidence. They lose all their friends they knew in football. You're not "Jack the Footballer" anymore. Your identity is pretty much gone. Judgements are made on players without a real thought of the repercussions they'll experience mentally.

"People say give EVERYTHING to football. I think the WORST thing you can do is give everything to football"

By this we aren't saying, don't give everything when you're training and playing. What we are saying is that you shouldn't dedicate your whole life to football because it only adds a ton of pressure on you to "making it". Given the extremely low % of players that actually make it, there's absolutely nothing wrong with having a back up plan. It doesn't mean that you have to choose at all. But it CAN take pressure from you by allowing your mind to stop thinking about football. It's a dark place when things aren't going well. It's a dark place when things aren't going well, causing disruption in your home life, relationships, etc.

"Play football because you want to, not because you have to"

Obviously this is aimed at guys who are playing for their living just as Lee did. The reason for it, he had nothing away from football, no education, no other real hobbies / work so he had to play to pay his bills. But having that plan B allows you to play because you want to play. Mentality is the difference between consistently performing poor or performing well. It's something we are in total control of too. We can work on it anytime and anywhere with no equipment needed. I think that should be stressed by coaches at clubs. They should have the players mental health at their best interest.

3. What Do We Want From Our GK Coach?

“Coaching is unlocking a person’s potential to maximise their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them”

Sir John Whitmore



What is the main thing you want from your GK coach was the question we asked our followers.

The most “wanted” things were all emotional. There were obviously some goalkeepers who mentioned just technical advice. But the majority of answers were these to the right.

I personally think if you concentrate on the person first, build an relationship, your player will be far more open to any technical advice you give because they’ll trust you more and know that you really care and have their best interests at heart.

Goalkeepers cannot expect to perform well without consistent work on the physical and technical aspects of the position.

However, football is such a competitive and emotional sport that goalkeepers also need coaches to support and care about them, as players and as individuals. Studies have shown that when coaches adopt this approach it usually leads to athletes responding to a coach’s instructions more readily.

To have your back

To be a friend

To be trustworthy

To be approachable

To be honest

To communicate openly

To be motivating

To be supportive



How to Foster a Player - Coach Relationship by The Goalkeeper Psychology Consultant:

1. **Greet** each player with a smile and a quick conversation
2. **Ask** players open-ended questions
3. **Share** personal stories about triumphs and errors
4. **Maintain** an *“open door policy”* for players and parents
5. **Always** stick to the mantra - *“shout praise and whisper criticism”*
6. **Be totally honest** with your players, especially when having tough conversations

4. Returning to Training

“Have patience - all things are difficult before they are easy”

Thomas Fuller



The Goalkeeper Psychology Consultant: The thought of returning to the field and diving around to save balls on rock hard ground is something which may cause anxiety for a lot of keepers. The fear of injury is completely understandable and is something that even pros are secretly worried about.

So what can we do? Here's a couple of sports psychology tips that might be worth a go:

1) Rebuild Trust

While many people believe the way to get rid of fear is through courage, studies indicate that trust is actually far more powerful. Being able to trust yourself to dive for that first ball safely as a result of smaller “trust building” exercises (e.g. shorter dives from your knees) is far more effective than hesitantly forcing yourself to complete a dive through fear.

Confidence 

Anxiety 

2) Do your research

Another great way to alleviate fear is by getting a greater understanding of what you're actually doing. Notice how the guys at The Modern Day Gk encourage the roll upon landing to dissipate force (spread force over a greater area)

Technical Awareness 

Uncertainty 

3) Mindfulness

A final tip to overcome fear is the practice of mindfulness. Mindfulness techniques help to ground yourself in the present moment which in turn frees us from fearful thoughts and feelings. The easiest way to do this during a session is through the STOP technique:

S - STAND up and breathe

T - TUNE into your body

O - OBSERVE your surroundings

P - Focus on the best POSSIBLE outcome

Stress & Anxiety ↓

Heart Rate & Blood Pressure ↓

The key when dealing with fear is to be honest and confront its existence.

5. Why Goalkeepers make Mistakes

“The biggest mistake you can make is being too afraid to make one”

Elbert Hubbard



The Goalkeeper Psychology Consultant: A lot of keepers are returning to play over the coming days and will likely be making far more errors than they're used to. Most keepers will be very quick to blame the mistakes on flaws in their technique

However, in my experience of playing and working within professional sports, it's rarely technique that lets the professionals down because you don't just lose your technique

Instead, mistakes usually happen for one of two reasons: CONCENTRATION or CONFIDENCE

1. CONCENTRATION

For goalkeepers this usually involves:

Recognising patterns of play (reading the game)

Communicating information with outfield players (organising)

Adjusting your positioning (linked to reading the game)

Reacting to the ball (picking up the flight and choosing the save)

2. CONFIDENCE

Loosely defined as how much trust you have in your ability to be successful in a situation, is largely informed by:

Recent performance accomplishments (MOTM etc)

Verbal persuasion (manager's team talk)

Experiences (previous exposure to similar situations)

Physical state (fitness/sharpness)

Mental state (feelings/attitudes)

With that in mind, next time you make a mistake in training don't worry about it. Your mental game needs conditioning to let your body produce it's best technique.

Trust the process and it'll all click into place.

6. How do Professionals Deal with Mistakes?

“While we cant change what’s already happened, you can choose to positively influence the rest of the game”

The Goalkeeper Psychology Consultant



The Goalkeeper Psychology Consultant: Imagine you were given the opportunity to play in front of scouts from all the biggest clubs in your country. You've been without a club since the end of last season, you've kept yourself fit and worked hard on your game to be ready for this opportunity.

5 minutes in a routine back pass goes under your foot and into the net. 10 minutes later you concede directly from a corner. Every single thing you do after that seems to go wrong and you're substituted off at half time. That was exactly what happened to me 18 months ago. I made a costly mistake early in a game and didn't have the tools to cope with it. It snowballed into the most embarrassing game of my life and left me without a club for the foreseeable future.

Fast forward 6 months and I was on trial at a professional club in England. My first action in that game was to make a bad decision and concede a penalty. The opposition scored and I was left feeling like a clown again. This time I was able to recover and pull off some brilliant saves and my distribution was crisp. I played well enough to convince the club to offer me a deal and signed my first pro contract.

What was different about the second game?

The awful experience of the first game forced me to learn about the psychology of coping with errors. I now practice a few coping mechanisms that I'd like to share:

1. Smiling - even if it's forced, your brain doesn't know the difference!

 Dopamine & Serotonin (endorphins)

 Cortisol (stress)

2. Laughing - best not to let the coaches see you do it, but laughing immediately relieves tension and enable healthy coping!

 Oxygen intake

 Blood pressure

3. Diaphragmatic Breathing - deep & slow breaths enables your body to slow down and process what's happened more rationally!

 Heart rate

 Cortisol

4. Power Postures - standing in a power pose (e.g. chest puffed out and chin up) tricks your brain into feeling more confident!

↑ Testosterone (physiological arousal)

↓ Cortisol

5) Ask “What did I learn?” - I’m not suggesting a full post-mortem of the error, but giving yourself a quick learning point (e.g. cover my near post a little more) can be beneficial!

↑ Mood

↓ Anxiety

Next time a mistake happens give a few of these a go and see how it works. Remember that while you can’t change what’s already happened, you can choose to positively influence the rest of the game

“If you make a mistake, be thankful you’ve done it at a young age. Remember it. Work on it. And make sure you don’t make it again when you’re playing first team football”

Lee Robinson

7. Playing Football During Personal Difficulties

“Remember football is only a ninety-minute game that starts and ends with a whistle, win or lose, nobody dies”

The Goalkeeper Psychology Consultant



The Goalkeeper Psychology Consultant: From my own experiences I can confirm that personal issues are an inevitable part of every athletes career. Problems with work, school, relationships, friends, family or even yourself are unfortunately just part of life.

HOWEVER, studies have shown that when these issues are not dealt with properly there is usually a major negative impact on a players on-field performance

↓ Focus & Attention

↑ Errors & Injury Risk

Unfortunately football is still a bit behind other sports in terms of how it handles players personal life difficulties

Thankfully my work with athletes from other sports helped me to discover the following top tips:

1.TALK

It might sound clichéd but sharing your problems with a trusted coach or teammate can have massive impact on your mental and physical well-being

↓ Physical & Emotional Stress

↑ Immune System Function & Mood

2. DON'T OVERSHARE

As I mentioned earlier, football in general is still a bit behind in this area and some managers might mistake the strength to speak as vulnerability

When speaking to “old-school” management about personal problems be sure to keep it short and sweet where possible

 Trust & Perceived Confidence

 Psychological Strain

3. SET PHYSICAL BOUNDARIES

One way to ensure that personal problems don't spill over into your football is to create physical boundaries around your footballing activities

Turn off your phone on the morning of every game

Only wear your club kit on training/match days as your brain unconsciously attaches psychological states to certain clothes (enclothed cognition)

Create a pre-match ritual that is only completed on match days (e.g. Vaporub on chest) as your brain connects the physical routine with a certain emotional states

4. TAKE A BREAK

For obvious reasons this is a last resort, however taking time out from football to deal with personal issues isn't actually that uncommon 😬 Many professionals take mini-breaks from the game to focus on their personal lives and often times come back better than before 🙌

↓ Burnout & Fatigue

↑ Enthusiasm & Perspective

8. How to Stop Bad Performance from Ruining your Life

“A bad game doesn’t make you a bad person”

Lee Robinson



The Goalkeeper Psychology Consultant: Have you ever had a below par training session and found yourself in bad humour when you get home? Did you ever make a mistake that impacted your self-esteem? What about losing sleep over your place on the team?

If the answer to any of the above is yes, then you're among 99% of goalkeepers whose playing life impacts their personal life

Recently we've seen a massive increase in awareness of the toll goalkeeping can have on our mental health. Poor on-field performances have been central themes of upsetting events ranging from goalkeepers retiring early from the game to the tragic loss of life. I'm categorically NOT stating that conceding goals caused these events to happen

However, studies have shown that bad days on the pitch can cause bad days off of it

So what do the professionals do to cope?

1. Explore interests other than football

As Lee brilliantly explained in a recent podcast interview, having something else to focus on away from the game (e.g. college course, apprenticeship, part time job, etc) is the best way to prevent football from dictating your personal life 🙌

↑ Perspective & Purpose

↓ Mood Sensitivity & Dependency

2. Create a “THIRD SPACE”

Invented by Dr Adam Fraser, a “third space” is a mental exercise which helps people to transition from one mental state to another

It involves spending around 15 minutes alone in a physical space (e.g. the shower) and allowing yourself that time to positively reflect on what you just did before moving onto what you’re about to do

↑ Focus & Energy

↓ Negative Mood & “Presenteeism”

3. Journaling

A strategy that’s used by a lot of elite performance athletes, the simple act of writing down what happened and how you feel about it is therapeutic.

Journaling can also help identify patterns which may solve the on-field issues.

All you need to do is keep a paper and pen beside your bed and you’re ready to go

↑ Emotion Regulation & Immune System

↓ Anxiety & Depressive Symptoms

9. Dealing with Regrets in Football

“You cant go back and change the beginning, but you can start where you are and change the ending”

The Goalkeeper Psychology Consultant



The Goalkeeper Psychology Consultant: Regret is one of the most difficult emotional processes to deal with, both in football and in life. When not dealt with, it can lead to significant mental health problems down the line. Whether it's a bad decision in a game, leaving a club, turning down an opportunity or even saying the wrong thing at the wrong time, regret is common among goalkeepers

So what can we do about it? Here's a couple of performance psychology strategies I've used to deal with regret throughout my career:

1. WHAT WAS LEARNED?

Did you know regret is a survival function? Regret forces us to reconsider our past choices and learn from their negative consequences. By figuring out what exactly about the situation we regret we are able to use that information to make positive choices going forward.

↑ Coping & Self-Awareness

↓ Anger & Helplessness

2. PUT IT INTO CONTEXT

Always look at the circumstances surrounding the situation you regret. Were you under pressure? Was anybody advising you? Did you know all the facts? Had you experienced anything like this before? By asking these questions alternative reasons for the negative outcome can be uncovered which can ease the pain of regret.

↑ Perspective & Acceptance

↓ Guilt & Self-Blame

3. GROWTH MINDSET

Carol Dweck's Growth Mindset concept is all about development and involves viewing past failures as minor setbacks in the overall journey. One way I like to use this is to remind myself that "setbacks only happen to make the story that bit better when things finally do go right."

↑ Motivation & Brain Development

↓ Anxiety & Depression

4. ALLOW MISTAKES

Allowing yourself to make the occasional mistake can help to deal with and prevent regret. The fear of making a mistake often prevents people from reaching their potential which is the most common source of regret for professional footballers. By giving yourself permission to get it wrong, you can not only forgive past mistakes, but also allow yourself to act in a more positive way going forward.

↑ Self-Confidence & Positive Emotions

↓ Anxiety & Resentment

Next time you're feeling down about a negative experience give one of these a go. Remember you can't go back and change the beginning, but you can start where you are and change the ending!

10. The Over-Analysis of the GK

“Avoid the perils of perfectionism and paralysis-by-analysis syndrome which is really the number one roadblock for people not performing”

Jim Afremow



Are we overanalysing our Goalkeepers? We're harshly judged not only by people who have no clue of the position but also by our peers. Every single goal becomes "saveable". We judge players from the comfort of our seat with a view of the whole pitch. Its a little different when you're in that scenario. Is it harming the position? Who would want to be a GK? Are we creating more stress on ourselves by analysing every single thing we do?

Why is it that when a striker goes through a goal drought it's always low confidence yet when a goalkeeper goes through a poor spell, his technique can become the issue?

Or if a striker misses a few chances nobody seems to comment on things like height, running style, stance width, body angles, etc.

Likewise when a GK makes an error, we rarely hear pundits blame things like low confidence, personal life struggles, tactical suitability, etc.

When a 5ft7 striker chooses not to attack a cross and hold his run for a cut back he's playing to his strengths. When a shorter goalkeeper chooses not to come for a cross and stays on his line to make a save he's seen as too small.

When a 6ft5 striker doesn't chase down a ball played in behind it's the wrong type of service for him. When a 6ft5 goalkeeper doesn't sweep up a ball played in behind he's immobile.

Maybe it's time we start analysing our goalkeepers a bit differently?

11. The Good / Bad Sports Parent: What are you?

“Nothing in life has a stronger influence psychologically on their environment and especially on their children than the un-lived life of a parent”

Carl Jung



Good Sports Parent	Bad Sports Parent
Supports the coach	Argues with the coach
Lets their child make decisions	Constantly Shouts
Encourages child	Criticises their child
Lets their child have fun	Over pressures their child
Praises child and cheers for everyone	Compares their child to other players
Is a role model	Demonstrates negative behaviours
Respects officials	Is abusive towards officials
Respects the opposition	Argues with opposition parents/players
Supports the coaches decisions	Disagrees with the coaches decisions
Gives their child autonomy	Tells their child how to play
Wants their child to learn lessons from sport	Wants their child to win at all costs

Credit: <https://believeperform.com/product/good-sport-parent-vs-bad-sport-parent/>

The Goalkeeper Psychology Consultant's Top Tips to be a Good Sports Parent

1. Understand your role

Just like the coaches and players, sports parents have a role in every game. When attending your children's training sessions and matches, your job is to be the best parent you can be. This involves offering encouragement and support to your child and their team, while also setting a positive example of respect for the coach, opposition and referee. Remember every bad tackle, poor refereeing decision or omission from the starting lineup is an opportunity for your child to overcome adversity - don't deny them that opportunity.

2. The car journey home

While it might be tempting, the car journey home is NOT the place for post match analysis. Emotions will likely be high and your child will feel trapped, even praise may be misinterpreted as an attack. Experts suggest that you use the car as a chance to talk about anything OTHER than the game. Furthermore, explain to your child that you'll discuss the game later that day, when everyone is calm and collected.

Thank you!

I just wanted to say a massive thank you for taking the time to read this ebook. This is something I'm extremely passionate about as I know fine well this is what was missed from Lee's career and my own career. We don't want to see others go through the same.

A huge appreciation to The Goalkeeper Psychology Consultant who helped write this. He provided some brilliantly honest experiences and hugely important techniques to dealing with some of the biggest challenges we face in our career. Some people just don't know how to handle them but we hope after reading this, there'll be more than one thing for you to try.

Kindest Regards,

Mark Robinson

Co-Owner of The Modern - Day GK

