

INDIVIDUALISATION OF GOALKEEPER TRAINING

Mats Olsson / SWE
Goalkeeper Coach in Portugal



GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Being a goalkeeper in handball is a privilege in many ways, but a lot of times when we start to talk about individual training or knowledge from the coaches in how to prepare the goalkeeper for the future the privilege will turn into a problem for the goalkeepers and their coaches.

When I say that being a goalkeeper is a privilege, I really mean it, and I will hereby give one out of various arguments of why I look at it in this way: In my opinion the most important privilege is that the goalkeeper could be - and should be - seen as an

INDIVIDUAL ATHLETE IN A TEAM SPORT.

Of course all the handball players are individual athletes with their special character but the goalkeeper position is very different compared to the court players and the goalkeepers' contribution to the game is so special that we can consider him/her as an individual athlete in a team sport with the benefits and obligations that the position brings with it.

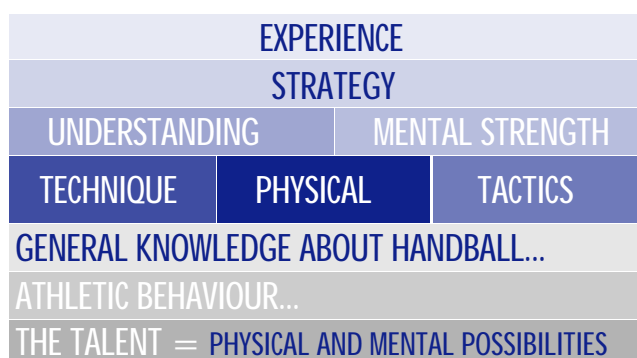
I think this argument is enough to explain why we need to individualise goalkeeper training.

INTRODUCTION TO GOALKEEPER TRAINING

In this part I would like to begin by briefly explaining a little about my philosophy of how to "construct" or develop a goalkeeper, which also means - my concept about how to train goalkeepers.

To start I want to quickly introduce my "goalkeeper wall" (*figure 1*) and later on in the main part of the article go deeper into three of the bricks - the technical, the physical and the tactical - in the "construction" of the goalkeeper.

Figure 1: The Goalkeeperwall



In my mind these are the bricks we have to try to develop to achieve the maximum amount of talent of a goalkeeper and what the individual brings with him/her into the "construction".

As you can see in the figure above we have got three basic foundation stones in the construction of a goalkeeper, first we have **THE TALENT** - physical and mental possibilities - with good talent (genetic) we are off to a good start, it will be much easier to create a good goalkeeper from a tall person because they have a wider stretching range - but of course it is also possible with shorter goalkeepers. The important thing is to look at the goalkeeper as an individual and prepare the training according to the possibilities (physical and mental) the individual gives you as a coach. Here I also want to comment that the most complicated and important talent to discover for the coach is the future tactical possibilities the goalkeeper will have, that is to know how to read the shots and anticipate with the positioning in the goal.

Secondly we have **THE ATHLETIC BEHAVIOUR**, which means that the talented goalkeeper must also know how to take care of himself in the concept of nutrition, sleeping hours etc.

periodical

The third fundamental thing in "the construction" of the goalkeeper is **KNOWING HANDBALL**, which means that the goalkeeper should not just be put in goal to stop balls without any knowledge about the tactical and technical work the court players are doing. The more a goalkeeper knows about handball in general the better the possibilities he/she will have to be in the right position in the right moment to stop the ball.

After the three foundation stones we pass through to the three parts (**TECHNICAL, PHYSICAL AND TACTICAL**) that I will comment on later in the main part of this article where we as coaches can really work daily with the goalkeepers.

The following bricks on the top of the three in the main part are the bricks that will make the difference between a "normal", a "good" and a "very good" goalkeeper and I will hereby make a short commentary on each one.

- **UNDERSTANDING** the game, means more than to just have knowledge about handball. When the goalkeeper has enough tactical knowledge, he/she can read the movements from the opponent and put himself/herself in the right position at the right moment for the shot so that the goalkeeper has the advantage.
- **MENTAL STRENGTH**, as I said in the introduction, the position of the goalkeeper is very special and you need a special mental strength to withstand it.
- **STRATEGY**, if the goalkeeper and the coach have a strategy, which means that they have worked out techniques and individual tactical dispositions for the different kind of shots, it is easier to develop or find the right line after a bad moment.
- **EXPERIENCE**, the goalkeeper position is the position in the handball game where the experience is one of the most important ingredients and sometimes you also can compensate missing physical form with good experience.

MAIN PART

All the training we are doing with the goalkeepers is done to try to prepare him/her for the next game/tournament/season or for his/hers future

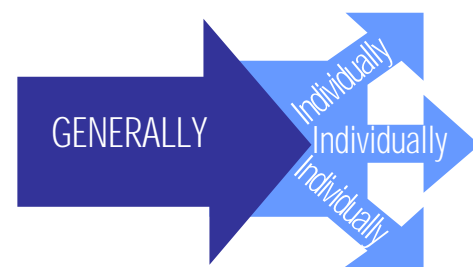
development. This may sound very obvious but in some cases I see training of goalkeepers without any regard to the objectives - **TO HELP THE INDIVIDUAL REACH HIS/HERS MAXIMUM POTENTIAL AS A GOALKEEPER** - so when we prepare our training for the goalkeepers we always have to try to think if the exercise really will help **THIS** goalkeeper to be better in his/hers position, **each goalkeeper is an individual and has different demand on the training.**

In the individualisation of the goalkeeper I want to start to say that in my opinion up to 30% of the training of the goalkeeper can and should be kept with the group of court players as a court player. The physical, technical and tactical work that is done (individually and collectively) helps the development of the goalkeeper as a **handballplayer** and as I have shown in the goalkeeper wall it is very important that the goalkeeper have knowledge of handball if we want to create/have a really good goalkeeper.

The rest - the main time- should be used to prepare the goalkeeper in his position as a goalkeeper in individual exercises as I will give examples of further on or with situations as similar as possible to the game we play (shooting exercises with defence).

I will however not give shooting exercises in this article without exercises the goalkeeper can work with individually or with his/hers goalkeeper partner or personal coach.

Figure 2



In figure 2 I want to demonstrate that in all goalkeeper training (technical, physical and tactical) we have one common part and then we have one individual part depending on the characteristic of each goalkeeper.

In the common part we should have exercises that are common for all goalkeepers and most of the time this means the physical training part and level 1 and sometimes level 2 in the technical and tactical part.

When analysing the three fundamental bricks -

technical, physical and tactical - I also want to add three different levels of work with the goalkeepers, always depending of the level of the player - not the age.

The three levels are very important to keep in mind because it's important to exercise with the goalkeeper at his/hers level and not make the exercises too easy or too complicated.

As I said in the beginning - being a goalkeeper is like being an individual sportsman in a team sport and that also means that we have to look at the goalkeeper training individually. There are not two goalkeepers who need exactly the same kind of training.

Level 1

- Learning - At this level the goalkeeper should learn new movements for example, new positions or new tactical (individual or collective) dispositions. At this level a lot of time is spent on working directly with the goalkeepers - and almost all the time without defenders or shooters.

Level 2

- Developing - this is the part when the goalkeeper has to develop what he/she had learned in level 1 and put it into reality. At this stage also I work with defenders and/or shooters.

Level 3

- Refining- at this level the goalkeeper has the knowledge and the skill he/she need. At this level I work on small corrections and the goalkeepers is using the knowledge in the game naturally.

It is important to bear in mind that a goalkeeper can be working at different levels at the same time, for example:

I have goalkeepers where I am working with the wing shots at level 1 and back shots at level 3.

The optimum training for a goalkeeper is playing- we can never as a coach exactly simulate the situations you are living in a game. That is why in level three there must be a lot of communications between the goalkeeper and the coach because we are talking about small corrections about what we are training.

I also want to say that I do not normally differentiate between females and males in goalkeeper training,

in my point of view we should not think about which sex we are training without looking at the physical and mental talent/possibilities each goalkeeper has, and my experience says that the best female goalkeeper are using a technique better acquainted to the masculine goalkeepers.

For me, the physical condition of the goalkeeper is very important, if the keeper does not have the appropriate physical level it is very difficult to develop, especially the technical part but also the tactical part will be left behind.

This is like a chain - if the keeper does not have appropriate trained physical qualities he/she can't develop the adequate technique and with improper technique he/she cannot develop the appropriate tactical level to play well.

From now on I will go into the three different bricks and give some examples of exercises that can be useful, but at the same time I want to say that a lot of the exercises are multifunctional, useful by two or more categories.

THE PHYSICAL PART of individual goalkeeper training

A physically well prepared goalkeeper has strong and explosive legs, a strong trunk (abdominals, obloquies and lower back), is resistant and has a large flexible capacity.

To prepare the goalkeeper physically for the game we need one part that is built on the explosive movements used in the goal to make a save and in the pre movements before the save - to get to the correct position at the correct moment.

Another part that is built on the aerobic capacity - the goalkeeper needs a good aerobic capacity to withstand the physical and psychological pressure during a game and also to have enough capacity to train at a high level.

In this part I will propose some fundamental and some additional exercises.

Weightlifting exercises (fundamental):

here it is very important for each coach to find the appropriate weight and reps/sets for each goalkeeper. (The objective is that the goalkeeper should be explosive.)

The weightlifting exercises should dominate the

periodical

preseason but should also be executed at least once a week during the season to maintain the level the goalkeeper reached during the preseason.

Hereby I give some examples of exercises that are fundamental to the goalkeeper.

- The squat, Number one exercise for goalkeepers
- Leg press, also important for developing the quadriceps
- The side lunge,
- The hamstrings, compensation to the quadriceps
- Calves
- Biceps and triceps to prevent injuries in the elbows

Medicine ball exercises (additional):

All these exercises could be used at any moment in the training plan and also be used in all three kinds of levels.



High arms and one ball in each hand passing straight forward to the partner.

The objective with the exercise is to strength the shoulders and also make sure that the goalkeeper is working individually with the arms.



Standing on one leg and receiving the ball at middle height, turning with the ball and returning it to the

partner without moving the feet or put the other down.

The objective is to strength the obloquies.



Standing with the medicine ball between the feet, jumping upwards and at the same time lifting the medicine ball upwards as high as possible with the feet and catch it with the hands.

Objective: to strengthen the Iliopsoas muscle. A very important muscle and frequently used by the goalkeepers.



The partner rolls the medicine ball forward to the foot which is at a 45 degree angle and let the ball roll up the foot where the goalkeeper has to lift it up as high as possible backward to the partner.

Objective: to strength the Iliopsoas muscle. A very important muscle and frequently used by the goalkeepers.



The goalkeeper is standing on a thin surface (approx.. 10 cm) trying to keep balance and at the same time receiving balls that he/she has to throw back to the partner. Level 1 is without balls and level 2 and 3 is with normal handballs.

Objective: to strength the trunk and let the goalkeeper find the feeling in standing up in complicated situations, without losing his equilibrium.

This last exercise has not been done with medicine balls but I also want to show that there is a lot to do with normal handballs. Normally I work with two or more balls to speed up the movements in the arms/hands and trying to use multifunctional exercises.

Jumping and/or movement exercises:

The objective is to transform the power that is built-up by the weightlifting exercises and using it by speeding up the movements in the goal.

In this part there are a lot of exercises to be done starting with rope jumping (excellent training for the goalkeeper - look at the boxers who use this a lot - a goalkeeper uses similar footwork) ending up with the plyometric jumps. I want to show more than one movement exercise and one multifunctional exercise but as I said there are a lot of these kinds of exercises.

However In all jumping exercises it is important that the energy in the jumps is used vertically/laterally and not so much horizontally although the movements for the goalkeeper most of the time will be lateral and/or vertical.

Bench exercises - in this case the goalkeeper has to move himself laterally back and forward over the benches, this could also be used while passing a ball while he/she moves over the benches.

Objective: to increase the movements in the feet and strengthen up the legs.



In this multifunctional exercise we can see the goalkeeper attacking first and preparing himself to receive a lob, if the lob does not come he runs backward to his original position and from there, once again, attacks the six metre shot.

Objective: movements in the goalkeeper area while making a tactical and technically correct save.

This kind of multifunctional exercises where we combine physical work with a technical and/or tactical works very often form the optimisation individual goalkeeper training. These situations can be performed with rules about the shot - level 1, 2 - or free shooting - level 3.

periodical

THE TECHNICAL PART

of the individual goalkeeper training

My philosophy on how to train goalkeepers in the technical part will result in divergent opinions from some other "schools" because in MY opinion we shall NEVER mechanise the movements in the goal. I like to work on different techniques for the keepers but I do not like to automate the goalkeeper work. I try to teach the keepers to "go for the ball" and not the opposite, which will be like "make an automotive movement" and hope that the ball hits you.

For example: I will always try to have a shot at saving the ball (more or less complicated, depending on the level of the keeper) when we practise saving techniques, in other "schools" sometimes you can see goalkeepers working with a repetition of movements without any ball nearby.

In my philosophy the goalkeeper has to learn techniques that simplify the movements in the goal and at the moment of making a decision uses an adequate technique to make a save but always without losing eye contact with the ball and the possibility to change technique at any moment.

If a goalkeeper is learning a particular movement and waits for the ball to hit him it could also be very easy for the opponent (the shooter) to learn the movements of the goalkeeper and this gives an advantage to the shooter.

During training I would like to split the technical part in two, the first part is the coordination training of the goalkeeper and the second part is the pure technical practise.

The coordination training is very important for the goalkeepers because the keepers have to use both their hands and their feet equally at the moment of making saves so it is important that the keeper can use both his hands and feet individually and as I like to define it - uncoordinated but controlled which means that the goalkeeper can use both his hands and feet equally and move for example his /hers right arm without moving the left arm from its position.

This sounds very easy but it is not so because some goalkeepers move their arms as if they were a mirror of each other and others move their arms as if a rope is connecting them.

Similar problems can occur with the feet.

Exercises that I use to help the keepers to become more coordinated are for example:



Playing with a Indiaka using hand and/or feet. Up and up to the left. Playing "handball" with rackets directly on their hands and using a tennis ball to speed up the game to the left.

Objective: *to increase the coordination and also optimize the control over the "bad" hand or feet.*

In the technical part I want to say that if I could create a super goalkeeper I think the best mix would be, with all respect, a mix between a Swedish and Balkan style. This is at least my objective when I'm working with my goalkeepers, trying to combine the best of the "Swedish school" - the shots from distance- and the best of the "Balkan school" - the six metre shot-.

The Swedish style with the distance shots represents a technical way of trying to have as much body behind the ball as possible, it is an aggressive and physical mode of making saves.



Making a typical "Swedish" save on a low shot from distance using the slide technique. Level 1 - 2. To the left. Multifunctional exercise for leg strength and at the same time working the technique for making a save from a distance in the upper part of the goal. Level 1 - 2. Down to the left and down.

Objective: *to learn a good and useful technique and at the same time "going for the ball".*

The Balkan style in six metres shots represents for me almost a total control over time and space, which means that the goalkeeper is situated in the right position at the right moment and also with control over where he/she has left space open for the shooter to try to score.

The big problem in mixing the two techniques is that in the Swedish school you are working with big movements - a lot of amplitude in the movements - but in the Balkan school you work with small movements - very small amplitude in the movements. This difference between the two schools is that it makes it so difficult to combine them.

That is also why I am very interested in the coordination training of the goalkeeper, if the keeper

can reach a high level in the control over his/hers appropriate body there are high possibilities to create a goalkeeper that can combine these two strategies

THE TACTICAL PART of the individual goalkeeper training

I would like to distinguish the tactical part of two kinds of tactics, the individual and the collective.

In the individual part the objective is to win the battle man to man, which is when the goalkeeper CANNOT count on any help from the defenders, normally six metre or seven metre shots and the collective part is when the goalkeeper CAN count on some kind of help from the defenders and he/she can read the situation and try to take advantage of the help that the defender gives him/her.

Almost every handball team has some kind of collective blocking system to help the goalkeeper with the shots from distance, but not all goalkeepers have a strategy for the individual tactical part. A lot of keepers just try to make themselves as big as possible in the shooting moment without any tactical thinking behind it.

A high quality keeper tries to take the initiative in these man to man situations with either obliging the shooter to shoot where he/she wants or with great knowledge/experience tries to foresee what will come out of the situation.

So what we can practise individually with the goalkeeper is the moments where the keeper has to take the initiative and oblige the partner/coach to shoot where the keeper offers.

FINAL REMARKS

This has been a short introduction on the individualisation of goalkeeper training - and is far from being complete.

I have tried to give my point of view about a lot of aspects in goalkeeper preparation but there is still a lot more to tell.

The exercises shown in the article are just examples, and there is a lot more to show.
Special thanks to Ricardo Candeias, Carlos Ferreira and Sergio Morgado.