

**BILL BESWICK PRESENTATION
NSCAA CONVENTION, PHILADELPHIA, JANUARY 2006**

**GOALKEEPERS AND STRIKERS
– A SUITABLE CASE FOR TREATMENT**

My job as Consultant Sports Psychologist at Middlesbrough Football club is to help the team win by getting the best out of both players and coaches.

Apart from mentoring the Head Coach – the most difficult job in any football club - a key role is taking care of those highly talented and very important players – goalkeepers and strikers.

These players are special because they more often than not define the game and so carry the burden of extra responsibility. They also carry the expectations of the coaches, their teammates, the fans, and the media, and either succeed or fail – with not much in-between. Every coach in the world is looking to recruit the talented ones.

For a sports psychologist helping coaches deal with performance issues goalkeepers and strikers offer interesting challenges.

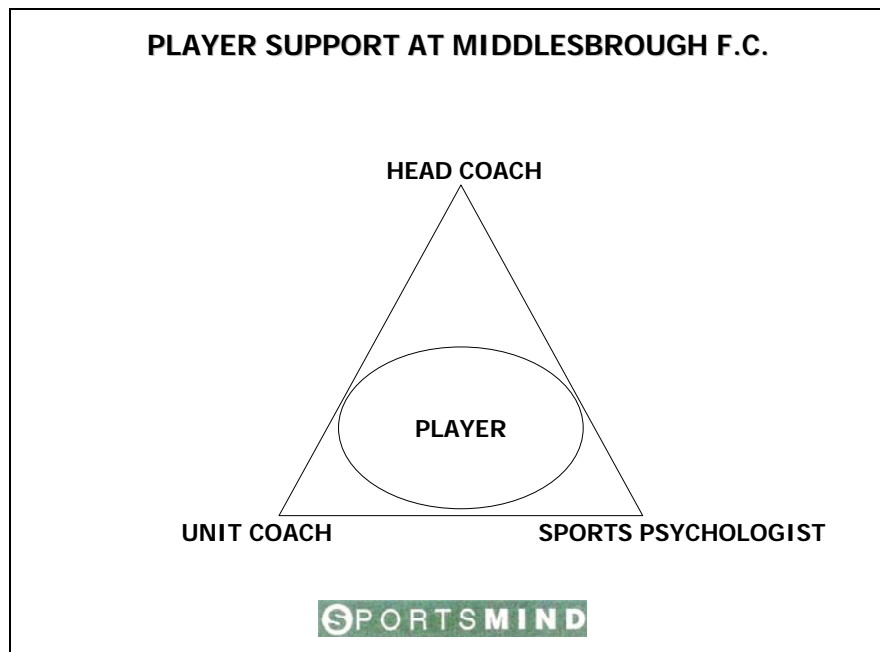
**GOALKEEPERS AND STRIKERS
– KEY PSYCHOLOGICAL ISSUES:**

They Are Special To The Coach
They Define The Game – Win Or Lose
They Are Always Under Pressure
They Emotionally Crave Success
Their Mistakes Are Easily Observed
They Are An Easy Target For Criticism
Their Life Is Highs And Lows
They Suffer Constantly Changing Self-Esteem



The video clip shown now illustrates the agony of failure with a bad mistake by Peter Enckleman, goalkeeper of Aston Villa, leading to him being abused by a member of the crowd who has run on the pitch to confront him. Peter's response demonstrates high emotional intelligence – or pure shock!

So the agenda for our club in a 55 game, 40 week season will clearly feature offering as much support as possible to our strikers and goalkeepers.



This presentation is about sharing some of the issues these players face and some of the ways I help the Head Coach and coaching staff resolve them positively. It's worth mentioning that my style is very much to educate the coaches so they may educate the players – for me the player-coach relationship is at the heart of successful soccer.

Much of our work with players begins with agreeing a clear job description. At the start of each season I sit with the player and his unit coach and we share the process of defining what exact performance we expect from that player – and therefore what preparation he should concentrate on.

Once this job description is agreed it acts as a very clear objective target for performance and ensures relevant feedback and accountability. This format is clearly explained in my book 'Focused For Soccer' available from Human Kinetics.

THE COMPLETE PLAYER – GOALKEEPER

PERFORMANCE AREAS	KEY QUALITIES
Physical	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strength 2. Athleticism – Agility 3. Presence – Stature 4. Fitness – Endurance 5. Diet – Wellbeing
Technical	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Handling 2. Distribution – Feet/Hands 3. Dealing With Crosses 4. Starting Position/General Positioning 5. Quick Feet – Dealing With Back Passes
Tactical	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Knowing/Reading The Game 2. Decision Making/Speed Of Thought 3. Communication/Staying Alert 4. Control Of Your Teammates/Penalty Area 5. Distribution/Setting The Tempo
Mental	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Positive Attitude 2. Confidence – Good Self-Image 3. Toughness – Determination 4. Focused – Concentration (94 Minutes) 5. Bravery – Enjoy The Challenge
Emotional	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Control – Positive Self-Talk 2. Clear Mind – Relaxed – Composure 3. Handling Mistakes – Recovery Skills 4. Enduring Self-Belief 5. Peace Of Mind – Home/Family/Work/Self
Lifestyle	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Being Professional In All Things 2. Stable Home Life 3. Disciplined Care Of The Body 4. Avoiding Celebrity Temptations 5. Switching On/Switching Off – Leaving Football At Work

This is the job description agreed on by all the goalkeepers and their coaches at Middlesbrough F.C. We very much believe in involving our players wherever possible and building 'shared ownership'.

The same exercise is completed by the strikers and below is the poster that each striker has attached to their locker.

STRIKERS – A JOB DESCRIPTION

1. Attitude
 - Pressure The Ball
 - Take The Ball
 - Take The Hits
 - Take The Shot
2. Hold The Ball
 - Buy Time For Runners
3. Get Into The Box
 - Skill
 - Movement
 - Freedom
4. Create A Goal
5. Score A Goal

'If I Miss – I only Think- I Will Get The Next One!'



We could of course have just written 'score goals' but there is much more to a modern strikers role and by emphasising other tasks it helps us keep strikers fairly positive when they are not scoring goals.

Building the job description helps us all understand the special needs of these players and will influence our treatment of them – both on and off the field.

Our coaching philosophy at Middlesbrough emphasises that the daily practise is the cornerstone of our work. So I try to integrate my work on building positive attitudes and mental toughness into the work of coaches and players in practise – whilst I observe from the sideline.

Well planned and disciplined practise is the key to our player development programme – supported by video analysis and classroom sessions with coaches and the sports psychologist involved.

So I have chosen 6 elements vital to mentally strong goalkeepers and strikers that we would mainly develop via practise.

DEVELOPING MENTAL STRENGTH IN GOALKEEPERS AND STRIKERS

- Competition
- Mastery
- Focus
- Mistake Management
- Feedback and Accountability
- Relationships



Competition – goalkeepers and strikers define games and so must be highly competitive. They need competition as a way to test themselves each day and assess their state of readiness. So they come to practise needing to be challenged and wanting each drill or game to be competitive – with a winner (them) or a loser (anybody else). Try refereeing a game and getting the score wrong – see who corrects you!

Mastery – the importance attached to what they do will tend to make these players technical perfectionists. They will want to execute each play as precisely as possible and expect their coach both to know and help them understand the finer points of their game.

This includes the use of statistical feedback both for learning and motivation and we use the PROZONE match analysis system to give us the objective data to base our teaching on. For example if we know average physical and technical response for a striker in Premier League matches we can set targets and standards.

'PROZONE' ANALYSIS OF A PREMIERSHIP STRIKER – SEASON AVERAGE PER GAME (90 MINUTES)

• Physical	- Distance Covered	10.54km
	- High Intensity	950m
	- No. of Sprints	34
	- Recovery Time	52 seconds
• Technical	- Passes	26
	- Success	69%
	- Shots	2
	- Crosses	2
	- Passes Received	36
	- Tackles	2
	- Headers	7
	- Interceptions	5



Ole-Gunnar Solskjaer, Manchester United's fine Norwegian striker, has only one ambition in the game – to master his role as striker and it is this motivation that drives his practise every day.

If you are going to coach talented goalkeepers and strikers then really the first question you should ask is:

“am I good enough?”

Focus – for both goalkeepers and strikers the saying '99% concentration equals 100% failure' is absolutely true. These players define themselves in key moments within a 90 minute game – and they never know when these moments might occur!

My first soccer Cup Final was with Carlisle United and we had two great chances to win the game and both fell to Rod Thomas in the first minute of the game – while we were still adjusting to the environment Rod missed and we lost!

Eight years later I was back with Middlesbrough and made sure we focused on:

- beating the environment
- switching on and being fully in 'go' mode from the kick off

The video shows our first goal in the 2nd minute of the game – our second was in the 7th minute and we went on to win the Cup.

Practise must replicate focus conditions in matches – short sharp bursts of intense focus followed by recovery. But if we practise too long focus goes and quality drops.

A clever coach I once watched had a ball at the side of the pitch for each player – when focus tired and mistakes increased he stopped the practise and each player took a ball from the sideline and dribbled across the pitch and back. Recovered they resumed practise and quality returned.

Allowing a practise to continue when focus has gone clearly means practising badly. Each coach must check whether:

- they practise far too long
- they overcoach with too much information

Each destroys focus.

Mental Toughness – ‘Failure is part of the Dance’ according to sports psychologist Ken Ravizza and for our goalkeepers and strikers mistakes and setbacks are everpresent and easily observed by everyone at the game – and in our case national television.

If these players are not mentally tough and thrive on pressure they will clearly be found wanting. Alan Shearer has provided an example to our strikers by his attitude when he misses a chance, because he only allows himself to think – “I’ll get the next one”.

Paul Barron, goalkeeping coach at Middlesbrough, is an exponent of Bobby Knights ‘crucible of fire’ theory. Paul’s keepers face an intensity of practice every day that is equal to match pressure – therefore making match day easier to deal with.

Mistakes are made of course but recovery is constantly emphasised and Paul and I always study the tape of the period immediately after an error – did our goalkeeper recover?

This video shows Mark Schwarzer making a terrible error in the Carling Cup final to allow Bolton to come back to 2-1. But his recovery, and mental toughness, kicks in and he makes 3 significant saves in the next 8 minutes.

Steve Round, the attacking coach at Middlesbrough builds mental toughness by setting high targets but also by having a strong and consistent mistakes policy.

- he forgives no mistakes in the defending third
- he forgives any mistake in the middle third if the player is trying to be positive (ie. go forward)
- he forgives all mistakes in the attacking third – he has the courage to give his strikers the freedom to play

Bolo Zenden who scored 10 goals for us last season was asked what he wanted from a coach:

1. care for me as a person
2. work to understand my game
3. prepare me well to play each game
4. trust me to play
5. live with my mistakes
6. celebrate my successes with me

Steve Round trusts his players and will only criticise them if they stop wanting the ball and playing positively and aggressively to score and create goals.

He also constantly shows his strikers goal highlight films so that they always remain excited by the prospect of scoring.

This video is an example.

Feedback and Accountability – using the job description as a basis the coach should, with the additional help of PROZONE analysis, be able to give his players very specific feedback. Goalkeeper and strikers are information hungry to feed their desire to be the best and welcome regular informed feedback.

Following the appraisal of a game video by the whole staff, the unit specialist will select significant teaching clips. Armed with these and the overall game statistics the coaches will hold individual or unit meetings each week. I will sit in on these because where they are performance errors we need to ask whether the problem is:

- physical
- technical
- tactical
- or mental

Coaches will recognise that within this process players are made accountable but in a non-threatening way. The process also highlights what our practise priorities may be for the following week.

Relationships – one of the reasons we introduced unit coaches at Middlesbrough was to ensure specialised support for our key players. The goalkeeping specialist coach is common but the attacking coach is fairly unique.

For all players psychologically the key battle is fought within – you versus you – and the danger is of players wearing themselves down by continually beating themselves up. Our unit coaches try to prevent that by ensuring shared responsibility, constant communication and a very quick appraisal and closedown of failure. We try to rebuild mental strength every day.

Of course goalkeepers and strikers have different personalities and the unit coaches and I work very hard on adjusting our approach to each player's needs. Below Paul Barron our goalkeeping coach highlights the key factors in his relationship with his goalkeepers.

**GOALKEEPER-COACH RELATIONSHIP
- PAUL BARRON'S 5 KEYS:**

1. Constant Unwavering Support
2. Everyday Communication
3. Honesty – Good News/Bad News
4. Caring For Them As Human Beings
5. Being Strong For Them In The Bad Times



Steve Round the attacking coach is far more likely to face issues of ego when building relationships with his strikers. Strikers yearn for superiority, strive to be the best, and define themselves as significant people. They will be independent, demanding, achievement orientated and need a good deal of recognition. They will often be discontented because their production will not equal their expectations.

Steve handles these relationships in five key ways

**STRIKER-COACH RELATIONSHIP
- STEVE ROUND'S 5 KEYS:**

1. Being Positive And Available
2. Forgiving Mistakes And Moving On Quickly
3. Understanding Ego And Managing Moods
4. Showing Respect And Being A Good Listener
5. Celebrating And Reinforcing Success



I have tried to share with you our attempts to get the best performances from two key players – the goalkeeper and the striker. These players must be talented but can often be difficult and offer an exciting challenge to the modern coach and the sports psychologist. Working with these players will be a roller-coaster ride for coaches as success and failure are part of the same package.

I finish with an example that places both the goalkeeper of Middlesbrough and the striker of Manchester City in one such defining moment. With a place in Europe awaiting, Manchester City are awarded a penalty against Middlesbrough in the final seconds of time added on at the end of the game. If the striker scores Manchester City have qualified for Europe – if the goalkeeper saves Middlesbrough qualify for Europe. In a commercial sense the actions of these players can earn their clubs a £20 million bonus. No pressure then! Schwarzer saves and Middlesbrough go through but both players know on another day either one could be the hero and the other the bum.

Thank you and enjoy the Convention.